IDENTITY AND EXPERIENCE
Frontispiece: the demon of Dukkha
For Ma, with love and thanks
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Foreword

“What are little boys made off?”, asks the nursery rhyme, and religious traditions ask the same question. Though the Buddha apparently denied that the human being contains something called a soul, what he meant by the denial, or by the word in his language which we translate “soul”, has rarely been scrutinised.

In ancient India the Buddha’s teaching was commonly summed up in a verse which says that he taught “the cause of things which arise from a cause, and their cessation too.” He explained life as a causal process which normally leads to suffering; salvation can only come from reversing that process.

The Buddhist texts assert that a human being – indeed, any being living in our world – has five constituents, one physical and four mental: feelings, apperceptions, volitions, consciousness. The word for these constituents is “bundles”, to show that they are plural. So it looks at first glance as if the Buddha was offering two analyses: the static, synchronic analysis of a person into “bundles”, and the dynamic, diachronic analysis into a causal chain of events.

Sue Hamilton began by asking the nursery rhyme question and analysed what the texts have to say about the “bundles”. She has found an exciting answer: they are bundles of experiences. On close scrutiny it turns out that the Buddha did not ask “What is a man?” but “How is man?”. For objects he substituted processes. And his analysis of the human condition was an integrated whole.

This book is a breakthrough in our understanding of the earliest Buddhism and offers a firm foundation for future research.

Richard Gombrich
Oxford, March 1995
Acknowledgements

This book is a slightly revised version of my Oxford D.Phil thesis. Though I hope it will be of interest to as wide a readership as possible given its specialised topic (a brief glossary is given for the assistance of the more general reader), it is primarily intended to be a contribution to Buddhist studies. To this end, I hope it will not only answer some questions and clarify some areas of ambiguity but also stimulate further questions and on-going research, for myself and for others. As my work on this subject proceeded, I became only too aware of the size of the task I had undertaken, and there is considerable scope for adding to the material gathered together here. This reflects not just the extent of textual references to this topic but also the centrality of it in the context of the teachings of the Buddha.

I would add that this book was already tied into publishing schedules by the time I recently became acquainted with certain relevant issues in the Western philosophical tradition. An earlier acquaintance with these might well have clarified my mind and/or prompted me to write (sometimes very) differently on certain points. But the fact that I was not familiar with them does mean that what is contained herein has not had any Western philosophical thought projected onto the Buddhist material: I was not 'looking for parallels'. (That might happen later.) So while any reader with knowledge of Western philosophy will therefore have to bear with my ignorance, the parallels that there are can the more eloquently speak for themselves.

It is a happy custom that writers of books have an opportunity to thank those who have made a notable contribution, in one way or another, to its production. In my case, thanks are owed to many. Alexis Sanderson was an inspiring teacher in the early part of my graduate studies at Oxford. Richard Gombrich, who supervised my D.Phil, was an invaluable source of advice, thought-provoking comments and constructive criticism. The examiners of the thesis, Lance Cousins and Paul Williams, made useful criticisms and suggestions, some of which have been incorporated in this book: any omissions or errors that remain are entirely my own. During the years of my graduate studies I was fortunate enough to be a member of
Wolfson College, Oxford, which provided an incomparable environment for such an intellectual undertaking, for which I am most grateful. Whilst there I had the benefit of so many useful and stimulating discussions and suggestions that the people concerned are too numerous to mention, but I nevertheless acknowledge my indebtedness.

To two people I owe more than words can say. My daughter, Tanya, learned a great deal about dukkha when she was uprooted in her early teens to move to Oxford. She subsequently lived with me not only through the demands and preoccupations of preparing the thesis in a limited amount of time but also a further move to London. She has my deepest love and thanks. My mother, Muriel Anderson, supported me financially, emotionally and intellectually with generosity, understanding and selflessness. For me, this has exemplified the beauty and profundity of the Buddha’s teachings and she has my gratitude and respect.

Sue Hamilton  
London, 30 March 1995
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<td>Šat. Br.</td>
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<td>SBB</td>
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Introduction

Buddhism has often been said to complicate the attempts of scholars of religious traditions to find common defining characteristics of 'religion'. One of the difficulties is that unlike all the other major religious traditions Buddhism does not accept the existence of a creator God. Nor, as is frequently pointed out, does it accept the existence of an individual self or soul. Because Buddhism is sometimes described more in terms of a way of life, some have even asked whether it is simply a philosophy or an ideology. It is, however, defined as a religion because its central concern is to offer to human beings salvation from the cycle of earthly existences (samsāra), which is characterised by suffering (dukkha). The non-acceptance of a creator God in a system which offers salvation to human beings is not too problematic: it can readily be accepted that salvation is achieved through one's own efforts. The apparent denial of the existence of an individual self or soul has, however, been found less easy to reconcile with such a notion of salvation. If there is no self, what is it that is saved?

The apparent denial of the existence of an individual self or soul is contained in what is known as the doctrine of anattā (Sanskrit: anātman), a teaching which appears, if in somewhat different guises, in all forms of Buddhism (save perhaps for a few modern hybrid forms). The focus of this book is a collection of texts known as the Pali canon, the textual basis of Theravāda Buddhism, the only surviving school of the early forms of Buddhism. The importance and traditional meaning of the doctrine of anattā for this school is indicated by Malalasekera, a distinguished modern Theravāda Buddhist, as follows:

This is the one doctrine which separates Buddhism from all other religions, creeds, and systems of philosophy and which makes it unique in the world's history. All its other teachings … are found, more or less in similar forms, in one or other of the schools of thought or religions which have attempted to guide men through life and explain to them the unsatisfactoriness of the world. But in its denial of any real permanent Soul or Self, Buddhism stands alone. This teaching presents the utmost difficulty to many people and often provokes even violent antagonism towards the whole religion. Yet this doctrine of No-soul or Anattā is the bedrock of Buddhism and all the other Teachings of the Buddha are intimately connected with it … Now, what is this 'Soul' the existence of which the Buddha denies? Briefly stated, the soul
is the abiding, separate, constantly existing and indestructable entity which is
generally believed to be found in man … it is the thinker of all his thoughts,
the doer of his deeds and the director of the organism generally. It is the lord
not only of the body but also of the mind; it gathers its knowledge through
the gateways of the senses … Buddhism denies all this and asserts that this
belief in a permanent and a divine soul is the most dangerous and pernicious
of all errors, the most deceitful of illusions, that it will inevitably mislead its
victim into the deepest pit of sorrow and suffering.¹

This description of the doctrine of anattā reflects the way it is consist-
tently propounded by Theravāda Buddhists, and also the fact that it is tra-
ditionally considered to be the central doctrine taught by the Buddha.
Such a description, however, might prompt one to add two other ques-
tions to that posed above: if there is no thinker of thoughts or doer of
deeds, how does a human being experience suffering? What, indeed, is a
human being according to the Buddha’s teaching? The latter of these is
the central question with which this book is concerned. And it is limited to
the human being because it is with the human being that the texts are
concerned: though other living beings such as animals and devas are some-
times mentioned, they are never discussed.

Perhaps because, as Malalasekera points out, it presents the utmost
difficulty to many people, other scholars writing about the human being
in early Buddhism have approached the texts with the aim of understand-
ing the doctrine of anattā. In his much-acclaimed book Selfless Persons,
Collins, for example, writes that it is his aim:

… to elucidate how it [the anattā doctrine] appears in the texts, what it
asserts, what it denies, and what it fails to assert or deny; and, perhaps most
importantly, I shall wish to study what role or roles it plays in the varieties
of Buddhist thought and practice, what function or functions it might have
for those who profess allegiance to it and whose religious activity is pat-
terned on it.²

In his “The Mind-body relationship in Pali Buddhism: a philosophical
investigation”, Harvey states that his intention is to attempt to “under-
stand the full meaning and actual implications of the teaching that ‘all
dhammas are anattā’”.³ Harvey’s thesis is that consciousness (viññāṇa) is in
effect a conventional self. Both these scholars write about the Theravāda
Buddhist tradition as a whole, using as their primary sources not only the
early part of the Pali canon, the Sutta Pitaka, but also the later, scholastic
Abhidhamma Pitaka, the commentarial tradition and the Visuddhimagga
of Buddhaghosa, a highly influential Theravāda Buddhist who lived in the
fifth century CE, and many other traditionally Theravāda texts. Other
scholars have sought to establish that the early texts implicitly teach that
there is an absolutely transcendent non-empirical Self. A recent example
of such work is Pérez Remón’s book *Self and Non-self in Early Buddhism*, in which he seeks to make “a systematic and complete study of the anattā doctrine in the five Nikāyas”.

Another approach in modern scholarship is exemplified by those who have concentrated on establishing that the early Pali texts teach an elaborate psychology. For example, this is the aim of Johansson, in his book *The Dynamic Psychology of Early Buddhism*. He states his work is “a psychologist’s attempt to understand what the Buddha meant by ‘dependent origination’”. Similarly Reat, in his *The Origins of Indian Psychology*, attempts to understand the human being in terms of a “theoretical psychology”. For such scholars, it is the content of the mind that as it were explains the individual human being, and, incidentally, the external world. I will be returning to the subject of the status of the external world shortly.

In attempting to answer the question “what is the human being according to the Buddha’s teachings?”, I decided, unlike the authors referred to above, to focus on the *Sutta Piṭaka* of the Pali canon, principally the four main Nikāyas. These represent the key doctrinal treatises of the earliest Buddhist material we have. A comprehensive comparison between the earlier Sutta material and the elaborated and systematised material of the *Abhidhamma* and commentaries would undoubtedly be most interesting and would be a fruitful area for further research, but as a single work it would necessitate an extremely lengthy book. Perhaps more importantly, I also wanted to see what the earliest Pali material had to say on the subject before it was significantly adapted or elaborated as the Theravāda tradition developed. This approach is not so much intended to suggest that there is a pre-Theravāda form of Buddhism as to look at the primary texts without reference to how the tradition has interpreted them in later material. In some circumstances, particularly in chapter 1, I have also drawn on the later *Abhidhamma* and commentarial material, and on Buddhaghosa’s *Visuddhimagga*, but this is the exception rather than the rule. Such references to the later texts are usually by way of confirmation or contrast in interpreting an ambiguous point. In chapter 1, however, it was the notable shortage in the *Sutta Piṭaka* of references to the subject matter of the chapter, the khandha of the body, that prompted my consulting the later material. Chapter VIII draws on later material, particularly that represented by Buddhaghosa’s *Visuddhimagga*, specifically to illustrate a divergence of interpretation as the tradition developed.

My approach to the subject was prompted by the Buddha’s own concern with the human condition or the human being itself, an orientation which suggests that understanding the human constitution is important in the context of following his teachings. Three of the key teachings contained in the early Suttas illustrate this orientation. The first is perhaps the most well-known of the Buddha’s teachings, the Four Noble Truths. These are given in terms of understanding the human condition in samsāra. In them
the human condition is diagnosed (the first Noble Truth states that \textit{samsāric} existence is unsatisfactory (or suffering) – \textit{dukkha}⁹); the cause of the condition is identified (the second Noble Truth states that the arising of \textit{dukkha} is because of desire or craving – \textit{tanhi}); a prognosis is given (the third Noble Truth states that the condition is not terminal – the cessation of unsatisfactoriness (\textit{dukkhaniruddha}) is possible); and finally a prescription for achieving \textit{dukkhaniruddha} is given (the fourth Noble Truth teaches the Eightfold Path which leads to Nirvana,¹⁰ a synonym for \textit{dukkhaniruddha}).

The second key teaching is known as the formula of dependent origination, \textit{pāṭiccasamuppāda}. This states that an individual is dependently originated, the most common version of the formula being given as follows:

\begin{align*}
\text{Ignorance is the condition for [the arising of]} & \text{ the samkhāras}^{¹¹} \\
\text{The samkhāras are the condition for [the arising of]} & \text{ consciousness} \\
\text{Consciousness is the condition for [the arising of]} & \text{ nāmarūpa}^{¹²} \\
\text{Nāmarūpa is the condition for [the arising of]} & \text{ the six senses} \\
\text{The six senses are the condition for [the arising of]} & \text{ contact}^{¹³} \\
\text{Contact is the condition for [the arising of]} & \text{ feeling} \\
\text{Feeling is the condition for [the arising of]} & \text{ craving} \\
\text{Craving is the condition for [the arising of]} & \text{ attachment} \\
\text{Attachment is the condition for [the arising of]} & \text{ becoming} \\
\text{Becoming is the condition for [the arising of]} & \text{(re)birth} \\
\text{(Re)birth is the condition for [the arising of]} & \text{ old age and death}.^{¹⁴}
\end{align*}

This formula gives us a synthetical explanation of how a human being comes to be born in \textit{samsāra}. Describing how the human being is dependently originated, one might call it a formula of existential mechanics.¹⁵

The third key teaching is given by the Buddha in contexts when he is asked about individual identity: when people want to know 'what am I?', 'what is my \textit{real} self?'. The Buddha says that individuality should be understood in terms of a combination of phenomena which appear to form the physical and mental continuum of an individual life. In such contexts, the human being is analysed into five constituents – the \textit{pāṭicakkhandha}. The five \textit{khandha} are body (\textit{rūpa}), feelings (\textit{vedanā}), apperception and conception (\textit{sāññā}), volitional activities (\textit{samkhāra}) and awareness (\textit{viññāna}).¹⁶

The importance of the first two of these three key teachings is emphasised by their formulaic form: formulas were often used as a mnemonic device in the oral tradition in which the Buddhist teachings took root. The third teaching is the standard analysis of the human being in a large number of \textit{Suttas}. And though the \textit{khandha} doctrine has usually been associated with the doctrine of \textit{anattā} in the specific sense that human beings have no self but only five constituent parts (an interpretation to which I will return in the conclusion), its importance is more positively emphasised by the Buddha's identification of the five \textit{khandha} together – in effect the earthly life of an individual – with \textit{dukkha}.¹⁷ Thus the fundamental characteristic of the
human condition as stated in the first Noble Truth is given not just in descriptive terms but is intrinsic to being human, indicating that the need to understand the constitution of the human being is crucial to achieving the goal of Nirvana, given as the cessation of dukkha. Above all, these teachings indicate that however central the doctrine of anattā is, the Buddha’s concern is most undeniably with the human condition as a whole, and though consciousness is mentioned in two of them it is given no more elevated a place than the other parts of the respective teachings. I therefore chose to approach a study of the human being by looking at the way the texts describe the khandha analysis, with frequent cross-references to the paticcasamuppāda formula.

In all cultures there is some kind of common sense view of what a human being consists of. In the West, for example, we tend to treat the human being dualistically, as consisting of body and mind. There is no consensus, however, about how these relate: major branches of philosophy, psychology and medicine consist of discussing and investigating how body and mind interact, and even physicists and mathematicians have joined the general debate. The situation becomes more complex because Christianity and other Western religions traditionally believe that in addition to body and mind, individual human beings have souls, thus making the question of how each part of the human being relates and interacts more problematic. Furthermore, many cultures, including popular British culture, allow for the existence of ghosts, which have human form but do not obey the laws of matter as they are normally understood.

In view of such diversity just in the contemporary Western understanding of the human being, one cannot assume a priori that any culture will have a consistent or coherent view of what constitutes a human being. And it would be particularly inadvisable to make such an a priori assumption of the Pali canon since it is a body of oral literature which is generally thought to have come together over time. Accurate oral preservation of literature had been crucial in the pre-Buddhist Brahmanical tradition in India for many centuries, and it is not uncommon the world over for the essential parts of important teachings to have been incorporated into stories, songs, chants, and so on, in order to preserve them accurately. There is clear evidence in the Pali canon of such a process of preservation, and we can thus be fairly sure that much of the Sutta Piṭaka is of a very early origin. Nevertheless, it would have been impossible for any one person, or even one close-knit group of people, to have preserved all the extant material, and there is textual evidence that different groups were given the task of preserving certain sections of the teachings. The Theravāda tradition records that there were periodic councils at which the teachings as a whole were recited. It was at these councils (sangītis) that the teachings were, over time, codified. But it is also probable that the teachings were more widely disseminated in this way: after hearing a complete recitation, a group of
bhikkhus might have spread topics which it was not strictly their duty to preserve. So there was much opportunity for variations to be included in the material. Though the Pali canon as compiled from all its different sources was written down in approximately 25 BCE, scholars accept that even after that date changes are likely to have taken place. This process of preservation applies to the Vinaya, in which the bhikkhus' code of discipline is recorded, and the Sutta Pitaka, which contains the doctrinal teachings. The Abhidhamma Pitaka is a later scholastic compilation which deals systematically and minutely with a wide range of issues in the Buddha's teachings. It aims to give definitive views on points which might not have been clear in the earlier material.

My study of the Sutta Pitaka was undertaken with the initial view that where various interpretations of apparently inconsistent passages are equally possible, it would be faulty methodology not to attribute to the texts the strongest interpretation, that is the most coherent and intellectually powerful one, given their common doctrinal background. In view of the way the canonical material was compiled, I nevertheless had little or no expectation of finding a coherent understanding of the human being and anticipated that a large part of this work would consist in relating its inconsistencies. But I found that in the main the inconsistencies lie in relatively minor matters such as the use of terms. In many instances a term is used in different contexts with different meanings. Sometimes the difference in meaning is only subtle and not easy to detect, and sometimes there is a wide variation in meaning. In his History of Indian Philosophy, Dasgupta makes the following comment on the fact that terms are used with different meanings in different contexts:

The Buddha was one of the first few earliest thinkers to introduce proper philosophical terms and phraseology with a distinct philosophical method and he had often to use the same word in more or less different senses. Some of the philosophical terms at least are therefore somewhat elastic ...

In discussing this point, I. B. Horner has suggested that this indicates a certain insufficiency of terms rather than an unsettled state of philosophical and psychological terminology by the time the Nikayas came into being. But philosophy and psychology were in a far from settled state at the time of the Buddha's teaching. The philosophical enquiry in the Brahmanical religion, as recorded in the Brāhmaṇas and the early Upaniṣads, was a relatively recent phenomenon, seen as merely supplementary to the ritualistic sacrificial system. The development took place gradually, and this is reflected in the early Upaniṣads which were perhaps extant at the time of the Buddha. In them we find both the ritual of the Vedas and the speculative beginnings of a psychology based upon the new idea of salvation as a special kind of knowledge. The systematic use of philosophical and psychological terminology is far from established, and terms are
used to mean different things in different contexts in much the same way as they are in the Pali canon.

Another reason for the different use of terms in different contexts is the fact that the texts are a compilation, as mentioned above. And it is not unlikely that as the years went by and the Buddha's teachings were given to an ever wider range of people with different backgrounds, so they had to be explained slightly differently in order for them to be understood by those people.\textsuperscript{22} We know, for example, that there were many different speculative teachings being propounded in the milieu in which the Buddha lived.\textsuperscript{23} In particular the Ājivikas and Jains are referred to in the canonical texts, and others are mentioned in relevant Jain texts. When teaching such people, the Buddha might well have adopted their terms in order to communicate with them. And in so doing, it is possible that the terminology was on some occasions used in what appear to be different ways but in fact with the same meaning.

So the contexts in which terms are found have to be taken into consideration when attempting to ascertain whether or not their meanings are different. I have accordingly tried not to explain a term in one context by taking out of context what is said about it elsewhere and thus arriving at an inappropriate definition. In order to understand what a given term means when it is being used in connection with one of the khandhas it is sometimes necessary also to understand what it means in other contexts. In these cases I have not hesitated to discuss the other contexts in detail. In spite of this, I found that in the majority of cases the contexts differ only superficially, and terms are used with a considerable degree of coherence.

The Buddha's understanding of the constitution of the human being is best introduced in the light of a brief description of the way the doctrines and concepts he taught fit into the background in which he was teaching. I have stated above that the religious milieu in which the Buddha was teaching was a complex one and that the terminology he used was sometimes varied to take this into account. But the dominant religion was that of the Brahmans, including both the older Vedic sacrificial religion and the relatively new Upaniṣadic teachings, at least some of which were known to the Buddha. Others have written about the emergence of Buddhism from its Brahmanical background in considerable detail,\textsuperscript{24} and in several places in this book I too will discuss at some length the background to a particular subject in order to gain a better perspective of the way it is understood in Buddhism. Here, I will suggest in more general terms how those aspects of the Buddha's teachings that are most crucial to the human condition in \textit{samsāra} correspond to or are different from the Brahmanical religion.

In this respect, the most central doctrine of the Buddha's teaching is based on his interpretation of the law of karma, a word which literally means 'action'.\textsuperscript{25} The notion that karma, or action, brings results was deeply embedded in Indian religion by the time of the Buddha. In the
classical Vedic sacrificial religion, karma is the sine qua non for individual well-being, for the well-being of society and for the maintenance of the universe as a whole. The rationale of the entire sacrificial system is the efficacy of (correctly performed) actions bringing about desired, and desirable, results. Sacrifices are performed for specific personal benefit in the short, medium or long term. Such sacrifices can have as their desired results things such as good health, the birth of a son, good fortune both in this world and in the next, or the benefit of one’s ancestors already in the next world. Personal ritual duties are also, and more commonly, performed simply for general wellbeing, again both in this world and the next. Sacrifices are also performed for the prosperity of the community as a whole: the performing of the sacrifices serves to please the gods, who not only grant individual desires but also maintain the universe.

According to the Vedic tradition, sacrificial, or enjoined, actions are completely self-validating, whether or not a given action has any prima facie purpose or expected result. Furthermore, the sacrificial rationale works automatically: the correct performance of ritual actions is as it were a mechanical device. Though it is said that if the gods are ‘pleased’ they will maintain the universe and grant one’s desires, in fact their reciprocal contribution is as enjoined upon them by the performance of the sacrifice as the performing of the sacrifice is enjoined upon the individuals in the community. The ritual actions of the sacrifice can, therefore, be regarded as a mechanical and automatic device for bringing about desired results.

In the early Upanishads karma is also of central relevance in the doctrine of transmigration they espouse. In the earlier Vedic material, life after death could be in one of several different lokas or worlds, the most important of which are the pitrloka, the ‘world of the ancestors’, and the devaloka, the ‘world of the gods’. Which of these is attained depends on whether or not sacrifices have been correctly performed, though attainment of the pitrloka also requires a man to have performed public services and almsgiving. Gradually this belief developed into a system whereby individual existence was seen in terms of a series of lives. And in the Brhadāranyaka and Chāndogya Upanishads we read that the kind of deeds performed in one earthly life will determine the nature of the next earthly life: good deeds are rewarded with rebirth in a high status and bad deeds result in a correspondingly unattractive rebirth. Though in these passages there is the suggestion of a difference between the ritual and ethical dimensions of actions, this differentiation was never developed in the Brahmanical religion; good and bad deeds are ritual actions which are correctly or incorrectly performed.

The Buddha took for granted the concept of rebirth in a series of lives, but revolutionised the concept of karma by teaching that karmic consequences accruing to any particular individual are entirely dependent on his or her mental volition. He defined karma as follows: “O bhikkhus, I say that volition (cetanā) is kamma. Having willed, one acts through body, speech
and thought". The ethical implications of such a radical interpretation of a well-established principle condition the Buddha's teaching about how salvation is attained: spiritual progress is frequently described in terms of moral development, for example, and anything which helps or hinders progress is described as wholesome and unwholesome (kusala/akusala) respectively. The Buddha’s reinterpretation of the law of karma was also unlike the ideology of the sacrifice in that it involved the body, or corporeal faculty of the human being, with the mind, or mental faculties, in an unprecedented way: having willed, one acts through body, speech and thought. Though the ritual actions of the Brahmanical religion are said to bring about desired results, ‘will’ and ‘mind’ nevertheless have little or nothing to do with the efficacy or quality of the action, which depend entirely on the accuracy with which it is performed. The Buddha’s version of the law of karma also had the profound effect of making the individual human being responsible for his or her own spiritual progress. Priests, gods and scriptural injunctions were bypassed by the Buddha and his teaching was centred on the moral condition (in its broadest sense) of individuals themselves and how they could bring about their own liberation. Once again this teaching suggests the importance of understanding how the human being works.

The contemporary developments in the Brahmanical religion, as recorded in the Brāhmaṇas and early Upaniṣads, include the new teaching that the soteriological path is epistemological. It arose from speculations about the sacrifice which posited a correspondence between microcosm (man) and macrocosm (the universe). According to the Upaniṣads, the culmination of the path, mokṣa, is achieved when one knows experientially that the essence of one’s self is identical with the essence of the universe: ātman is Brahman. In the Buddha’s teaching, the goal of the path to liberation, known either as Nirvana or as Enlightenment, is also an epistemic condition. But in spite of certain similarities, the two traditions are inherently and crucially different in a way which fundamentally affects the way they respectively understand the human being.

In stating that liberating knowledge is the realisation that the transcendent Reality, Brahman, is identical with the individual self, ātman, the Upaniṣads are ultimately concerned with being, sat. One can see, therefore, that the question they are thus concerned with is “what is man?” This would no doubt be the common sense approach to understanding the constitution of the human being; it was, indeed, the question I myself formed when I started my research. But though the Buddha’s teachings also stress the need to ‘know thyself’, in contrast to the transcendent self of the Upaniṣads he taught liberating knowledge in terms of insight into ‘things as they are’, yathābhūtān. Most importantly, the macrocosmic/microcosmic correspondence was expressed by the Buddha not in terms of an ontological identity, but in the fact that all things are dependently
originated. By extension, this is applied to his teaching on the law of karma: one has to understand how one's existence is conditioned by dependently originated events in one's volitions. For the Buddha, the important thing is to understand the nature of the human condition and we see that he emphasises not what things are but how they operate. Given that all things are dependently originated, he states that it is not fitting to think in the separative (independent) terms of “This is mine, this am I, this is my self.” So he does not give us a different answer to the same question “what is man?” but asks an altogether more sophisticated question: “how is man?”

And he sustains this approach systematically throughout his teachings. The Buddha thus substitutes processes for objects. Primarily, he teaches the process of attaining Enlightenment as a goal which is achievable if one understands, and thus is able to overcome or reverse, the mechanics of that which is preventing it. Descriptions in the Sutta Pitaka of the Buddha’s own Enlightenment describe it precisely in such terms: and there is no mention of his experiencing what he is. And just as this ultimate experience involves understanding the nature of the human being and how he or she exists in samsāra, so, my research has found, the Buddha also teaches that the analysis of the human being into five khandhas is not an analysis of what the human being consists of, but of those processes or events with which one is constituted that one needs to understand in order to achieve Enlightenment. Knowing what the body is, for example, is of relevance only insofar as such knowledge contributes to an understanding of how it operates in the overall process of human existence. And we shall see in chapter I that contrary to what one might expect given that we have 'sense organs', the senses are not explicitly included in descriptions of the khandha of the body, an omission which serves to highlight the importance of understanding them in terms of the process in which they are involved rather than as organs of the body in the physical sense. Perhaps because our everyday commonsense world consists very much of what we think of as objects, and our tendency to want to know what things are, this important point has frequently been missed even within the Buddhist tradition itself.

One might suggest that the consistency of the Buddha's concern with processes rather than substance is reinforced by his dismissal of questions concerning ontological issues. He states that he is only concerned to give whatever information will assist the individual in attaining liberating insight, the process whereby one becomes free from the cycle of lives in samsāra, and that ontological questions are irrelevant and/or misleading.

When asked questions which he did not think would be conducive to the attaining of insight, he refused to answer them. Classically, there are four 'unanswered questions': whether or not the universe is eternal, whether or not the universe is finite, whether or not that which is the vital principle (jīva) is different from the body, and whether after death a tathāgata (an epithet of the Buddha and the implication is that it means any liberated
being) exists or not, whether s/he exists and does not exist, or whether s/he
neither exists nor does not exist. In similar vein, a long list of all sorts of
ontological views are refuted by the Buddha in the well-known Brahmagāla
Sutta. Here the implication is that all such views are not just erroneous in
the sense of holding to the wrong ontological view, but erroneous in the
sense that holding to an ontological view is simply the wrong approach to
the solution of the problem of bondage to samsāra. This point is further
supported by the fact that the having of 'views' (diṭṭhi) is sometimes stated
to be one of the āsāvas, the most binding and deeply entrenched of all mis-
placed tendencies needing to be 'rooted out'.

All of this suggests that questions about what cannot be experienced as
part of the empirical human condition are considered to be speculative. In
refusing to answer such questions the Buddha has left the way open for
what one might call the nihilists and eternalists of all times and places,
Buddhists and scholars alike, to continue to speculate about whether or
not there really is a soul, and whether it is extinguished at death or persists
on some transcendent, non-empirical, level. But in the context of the early
Buddhist texts such speculations are pointless. First, they are destined to
remain speculative. In common with most religious texts, there is much in
the Sutta Piṭaka that is open to subjective interpretation. Thus both nihilists
and eternalists of every persuasion can find what they believe to be sup-
port for their theories. Second, and more importantly, in running directly
counter to the Buddha’s teaching that it is not conducive to insight, onto-
logical speculation does not assist in one’s attempt to understand the
teaching he gave, which was intended to be conducive to insight.

However, the question of ontology continues to arise in the scholarship
of early Buddhism. In particular, several ambiguous passages in the Pali
material have been interpreted as suggesting an idealistic ontology, like the
one formulated by the much later Buddhist school of Vījñānavāda. This
development perhaps corresponds to the fact that there are passages which
suggest idealism in the Upaniṣads and this ontology was later attributed to
them wholesale by Śaṅkara and other Advaita Vedāntins. The debate
about canonical passages which are ambiguous in this way recurs several
times in this book, and we shall see that in every case much depends on
how a passage is interpreted. An example of how differently a passage can
be interpreted can here be drawn from the Dīgha Nikāya. In translating the
Pali ajjhātaṃ rūpa-saṅkāti eko bahiddhā rūpāni passati, Johansson gives: “When
somebody experiences forms inside himself, he will see forms outside...”
and writes of it: “The objective world, according to Buddhism, is no
different from the experienced world: it simply consists of the subjective
world projected by our mind...”. But the passage can be translated
interpreted differently, as follows: “One who apperceives a visible feature of
himself [likewise] sees visible features of others”. This translation follows
the convention found in some contexts in the Sutta Piṭaka, usually those
concerned with meditation, of using the terms *ajhattam* and *bahiddha*, 'internal' and 'external', to refer to oneself in contrast to others. In the *Satipatthana Sutta*, for example, which contain descriptions of key meditation exercises to be practised by *bhikkhus*, these terms are used to indicate that the meditation exercises are to be practised both on one's own physical and mental faculties and also on those of others. The purpose is to realise that one's nature is the same as the nature of anyone else. Even if in the *Digha Nikaya* passage the term *bahiddha* is interpreted simply as 'external', so far as I am aware there is no convention in the *Sutta Pitaka* of *ajhattam* being used as part of a psychological term to indicate an 'internal picture'. So in my opinion it is unlikely that this passage was intended to have the implications which Johansson reads into it. Rather, it suggests to me that one sees that both one's own and external (be they of other individuals or not) visible parts are of like nature. This is the more likely because the context of the passage is one in which the various insights which come with meditation are described. One of the most important insights for a *bhikkhu* to achieve is that all things are of like nature, not whether or not the external world is a projection of his mind.

Another frequently found term, *loka*, which literally means 'world', is similarly ambiguous. This is a very important term and its use warrants careful consideration. The nature of the human being is so fundamental to the Buddha's teaching that a common metaphor for the life of an individual is 'the world', *loka*. Failure to understand this metaphor has led some to conclude that 'the world is not real', 'the world only exists in our minds', and so on. But what appear to be ontological statements in fact metaphorically relate to the subjective experience of the individual, and it is invalid to extend the metaphor into a statement that the world is that subjective experience.

The metaphorical use of the term *loka* pre-dates the Buddha's teaching. Though in both Sanskrit and Pali the term *loka* does have the conventional meaning 'world', even in the earlier sacrificial religion of the Brahmans its meaning was not limited to the external world. According to Gonda, the Sanskrit word *loka* has an "inherent vagueness". It does not necessarily indicate a spacial location but often means a state of happiness or stability. Gonda traces the changing meaning of the term, and states that its earliest meaning is a "free, open space" or a "safe, sacred space". This concept was of particular importance to the early Aryan settlers in India because of the religious significance in early Indo-European culture of clearings, forest glades and so on. Thus in the sacrifice a sacred space is constructed to represent the desired *loka* in this world and the next. In this way the term also became associated with cosmological planes (desired *lokas*), which tend to be interpreted spacially. But the association of security and happiness with the sacred space becomes extended metaphorically so that in fact the desire to 'gain a *loka*' in this world (through sacrifice) and/or the next does
not just refer to the spacial location but to the individual’s state of security and happiness. So there are two principal meanings of loka, the one spacial and the other psychological.

The way the term loka is used in the Sutta Pitaka is perhaps an extension of this meaning of loka in the Brahmanical religion. Here, too, it is used to indicate cosmological levels. But metaphorically it is intended to indicate the individual’s subjective experience in samsāra. This is most clearly indicated in the Khandha Samyutta, which is primarily concerned with the analysis of the individual in terms of the five khandhas. Here we read that the five khandhas together comprise a “phenomenon which is a world in the world.”40 The context is one in which the Buddha states that he has no quarrel with the world (nāham lokena vivādāmi) or with some of the teachings of other teachers in the world (loke paññitā). But he wants to establish a teaching which is not given by those other teachers, that of the five khandhas, which he has thoroughly penetrated and realised (abhिसम्बुज्जहति abhisamettī). There is no suggestion in this passage that in associating the term loka with the khandhas the Buddha wishes to deny the existence of the external world. Rather, he is unconcerned with its status and concentrates on passing on his understanding of the khandhas.

This metaphorical sense of loka is also suggested by the fact that it is used in similar contexts to the term dukkha. As we have seen, the Buddha taught that samsāric existence is characterised by dukkha, unsatisfactoriness. And that dukkha refers to the individual’s samsāric experience is confirmed by the Buddha’s definition of dukkha as being the five khandhas of which the individual is comprised, as we have also seen. Frequently, teachings are said to lead to the “ceasing of this entire mass of unsatisfactoriness”.41 This means to the point where the individual, who persists with five khandhas being reborn in samsāra, achieves liberation. And that loka is being used in the same way is illustrated in the Nidāna Samyutta of the Samyutta Nikāya, where two consecutive Suttas are the same save for the fact that in the second Sutta loka is substituted for dukkha.42 In the Suttas, the Buddha states:

I will teach you, bhikkhus, how dukkha/loka arises and how it ceases... Visual consciousness arises because of sight and (visible) objects (and so on through all the senses); contact is the combination of the three; feeling is conditioned by contact; craving is conditioned by feeling. This, bhikkhus, is the arising of dukkha/loka.

The cessation of dukkha/loka comes about when the craving which is normally conditioned by feeling no longer occurs: when craving utterly fades away and ceases, then grasping, becoming, birth, and cyclic existence in samsāra cease.43

If one takes the first part of these passages out of context they can be construed to be stating that both dukkha and the world arise as part of one’s psychological experience of perception. In other words, an idealist
might conclude from this that the world has no external reality, that it only exists in our perception. But if one considers the context in full, the terms dukkha and loka are in fact associated with the life of an individual and the Suttas are describing the process by which craving (tanha) brings about continued becoming, rebirth, and so on, and it is through the cessation of craving that continued rebirth ceases. It is this individual ‘world’ (loka) of the individual, sometimes called dukkha, that is the subject of these passages, not the arising of the ‘world’ in general terms.

A similar passage in the Anguttara Nikaya states: “It is these five types of sensual desire that are called the world in the discipline of the noble one”.44 The five types of sensual desire are identified with five corresponding senses, and the passage continues by stating that a bhikkhu is to become detached from sensual desire and practise appropriate meditation. When he eventually sees that his ãsavas are completely destroyed, he “is said to have come to the end of the world, he lives at the end of the world, he has overcome attachment in the world”.45 In stating that the five types of sensual desire are called the ‘world’ of the noble one, this passage indicates that loka is a verbal convention to indicate samsaric existence which is fuelled by desire. When the bhikkhu has achieved the destruction of the ãsavas, this, for him, is the end of the cycle of rebirth, the end of ‘his world’.

As a final example of this meaning of loka, I will draw on a passage in the Saliyatana Samyutta, where we read:

*Bhikkhus, I declare that the end of the world is not to be learned, seen, or attained by going to the end of the world. Nor do I declare, bhikkhus, that the end of dukkha can be made without attaining the end of the world.*

Here one does not ‘go to’ the end of the world, but ‘attains’ the end of the world. Loka has no spacial connotation, as it would if it referred to the ‘external’ world, but is a designation for the ending of the individual’s samsaric existence, dukkha. Later in the same Sutta, the individual’s ‘world’ is again defined in terms of the senses. It is because of the craving that we have for sensual experience that our ‘world’ has continued existence: this is how the individual continues, not what the external world is.

Two points arise from the foregoing discussion. The first point is that these passages and the possible interpretations I have shown illustrate the need for ambiguous passages to be interpreted in the light of the material as a whole. Those of us whose work lies primarily in attempting to understand questions of a philosophical or doctrinal nature have to ask ourselves which of the possible translations is the more likely given the doctrinal background of the Buddhist teachings. With regard to ambiguous passages which have potentially ontological implications, we have to ask ourselves the *prima facie* question of whether it is likely that the Buddha would have made such ontological statements. If we answer no to this question, then we have to consider both whether a passage has an alternative meaning
and whether the ontological statements of others are incompatible with his teachings. The second point is that I am in no way attempting to refute an ontological position that other scholars have adopted because I wish to adopt another one. I merely think that in view of the fact that the Buddha clearly dissociates his teachings from anything to do with ontology, it is a mistake to project any ontological significance onto the text.

I would like to make one further comment here about the fact that my research has shown that the Buddha’s teaching on what comprises the human being is consistently focussed not on the substance of the constituent parts but rather with what their function is and how they contribute to the complex of human functions. In considering what are usually called ‘body’ and ‘mind’, this important point has to be borne in mind. The words body and mind have substantialistic connotations in English. Though corresponding terms are used in the early Buddhist material we will be considering, I shall suggest that such terms are a convenient verbal convention and that they carry no substantialistic or ontological implications. Returning to a brief example given above, this point is particularly important when considering the *ripakkhandha*, which refers to the living body. It is analysed in terms of four ‘elements’, earth (*pāthava*), water (*āpō*), fire (*tejō*) and air or wind (*vāyu*). Though in the West one might tend to think of the human body as what we would call ‘matter’, according to the Buddha’s teaching these elements are, rather, intended to signify that it is analysed according to certain abstract qualities which characterise how the body manifests. The characteristics of solidity and extension (the primary characteristics of ‘matter’) are signified by the element earth. Fluidity is signified by water, heat by fire, and mobility by wind. We shall see more comprehensive descriptions of the elements in chapter 1, but my purpose in commenting on this subject here is to alert the reader to the implications of an analysis of the human being which is given not in terms of what he or she consists of but in terms of how he or she operates.

A large part of the third volume of the *Samyutta Nikāya*, itself entitled the *Khandha-Vagga*, consists of the *Khandha Samyutta*, which exhaustively discusses the five khandhas. Used in this way, the term khandha is distinctively Buddhist, not being found in the earlier *Vedic* literature except in the sense of ‘trunk’. Most frequently, the khandhas are referred to by name without giving any explanation as to what the name means or implies; where descriptions are given, these are sometimes so brief that it is difficult definitively to ascertain the precise characteristics and functions of each one. Nevertheless it is possible to extract from the material as a whole a coherent picture of each of the khandhas. No reason is given for the order of the khandhas, which is virtually always in the order in which I will discuss them below: *rūpa, vedanā, saññā, sampkhaṇa* and *viññāyā*. With regard to the first of these, the *ripakkhandha*, this presents certain organisational complications in that cross-references between material relevant to understanding it and
material relating to the other four *khandhas* are not necessarily self-explanatory until the later chapters have been read. For this reason, some readers may find it helpful to delay reading the first chapter until they have read chapters two to five.

Having discussed the five *khandhas*, I will then go on to discuss two other key concepts with regard to the constitution of the human being, *nāmarūpa* and *manomaya*. The former frequently occurs in association with *viññāna* and is one of the links in the *paticcasañcuppāda* formula. The latter is one of the most obscure terms found in the *Sutta Pitaka*, but consideration of what it means throws light on the manner in which the human being exists as he or she progresses on the spiritual path to liberation. It also illustrates the power of the mind according to Buddhist teachings. In the light of this, in my final chapter I shall show that there is no justification for holding the body to account for originating the volitions which bind one to the cycle of rebirth.

### Notes

6. Ibid., p.7.
8. Though I am aware this approach is somewhat controversial (cf., for example, Collins, 1990; and it is also an unwelcome approach in other religious traditions), it can nevertheless produce interesting, and in my opinion valuable, results.
9. *Dukkha* is notoriously difficult to translate literally into English. 'Suffering' is often used, but can be misleading if understood in a narrow sense. 'Unsatisfactoriness' is more appropriate in that it conveys that all things are ultimately unsatisfactory because they are impermanent — and therefore if one is seeking the permanence of ultimate bliss (or the ultimate bliss of permanence) then the human condition is, by contrast, suffering. cf. the Glossary entry and Rahula, 1985, chapter 2.
10. The Sanskrit word *Nirvana* has been integrated into the English language so I shall not italicise it. When translating direct from Pali, I will use *nibbāna*.
11. The meaning of *samkhāra* is discussed in chapter iv.
12. The term *nāmarūpa* is discussed in detail in chapter vi.
13. This means contact between the sense organ and its corresponding external sense object, together with consciousness. It is discussed further in chapter ii.
15. I will discuss this purpose, and the varieties, of the formula more fully in chapter iv.
16. These translations are all discussed in following chapters.
17. *Samkhīṣṭena pañc’ upādānakkhandha’ dukkhaḥ*: e.g. SN.V.421; MN.I.48; AN.I.177. cf. also SN.III.158: *Katame ca bhikkhave dukkham? Pañc’ upādānakkhandha ti ‘sac ca tic’.* This question and answer in SN.III.158 is referred to again in chapter viii below, cf. also Gethin, 1986, p.41.
On the subject of the compilation of the Pali canon see Frauwallner, 1956; Lamotte, 1958; Zürcher, 1962, and Cousins, 1983.

The precise chronology of all parts of the three Pitakas is unknown, and there appear to be small areas of possible correspondence of style in late sections of the Sutta Pitaka and early sections of the Abhidhamma Pitaka. But in general terms the Abhidhamma is later.


Mannt (1990) has analysed much of the material in the Jvihyus and shown that different passages have a different, usually didactic, purpose. See, for example, the Po~?hpGda Sutta, the Brahmajila Sutta (both DN, Vol I), etc.

For example, Gombrich, 1988, chapters 2 and 3; Collins, 1982, Part I; Reat, 1990, passim.

Again, the Sanskrit word karma has been integrated into the English language so I will not italicise it. When translating from the Pali, I will use kamma.


Ch. Up. V.10.3.

Br. Up. IV.4.5; Ch. Up. 5.10.7. This teaching is repeated in later Upanisads such as K. Up. 1.2; Kaṭha 5.7; Śvet. Up. 5. 11-12.

Gombrich (1988, p.67fl) places the Buddha's ethicising of the law of karma in its historical context.

AN.111.415: Cetiyan' ham bhikkhave kammam vadimi. Cetayitvi kammam karoti hyena vdti mana.si.

For example, MN.I.2321. Etam mama, eso 'ham asmi, eso me attā ī ti.

cf: for example, SN.II.223, V.437; MN.I.395; DN.III.134ff.

MN.I.157. cf. also the Cūḷa-Māl ukyasutta (MN.I.426ff), the Aṣṭakato Samyutta (SN.IV.37ff) and the Aggi-Vacchagottasutta (MN.I.48ff) (much of the last two are phrased as a series of questions and answers).

DN.III.260.

Johansson, 1979, p.83.

MN.I.55ff; DN.II.290 ff.


Gonda, 1966, pp.1-41.

Collins (1982, p.45 ff) discusses the three principal lokas: the pīṭh.loka, the devaloka and the suktām loka.

SN.III.139: Loke lokadhammo.

Esam etassa kevalassa dakkha/khandhassa nirodho kotiti.

SN.II.71 ff.

Dukkha/sa/lokassa bhikkhave samudayaśca atthanga/naśca deśissāmī ... Cakkhuṁ ca paccā rūpe ca upphajjati cakkhuṁ/tādham tām suñgha phasso phassaṭacayā vedanā vedanāpaccayā taṇhā. Ayam kho bhikkhave dakkha/sa/lokassa samudayo. Taṇhāy apannāyānirodhā upādinanirodhā ...

AN.IV.430: Pañca 'ime ... kāmagupa āriyassa vāsīye loka ti vuccati.

AN.IV.431: Bhikkha ... poññāya e' assa divā āsavo paribhānā konti. Ayam vuccati ... bhikkhu lokassa antam āgamena lokassa anta viharati tayo loka visattikān ti.

SN.IV.93: Nāham bhikkhave samudena lokassa antam hātyāyaṁ dattāyeva samkhārayyaṁ viññāyaṁ ti vuccāmi. Na ca punāham bhikkhe āpattā lokassa antam dakkha/a anikāyamo vedāmi ti.

They are found with samkhāra and vīthāna having changed places at SN.I.112: Rūpaṁ vedayitaṁ sanāṇaṁ vīthānaṁ yucca samkhārayyaṁ ... This is, however, the first two lines of a verse, and the change in order (and the use of samkhāra rather than samkhāra) is in order to conform to the śloka metre. The interchangeability of samkhāra and samkhāra is discussed in chapter iv.
CHAPTER I

The Rūpakkhandha

Introduction

In this chapter, my concern is with the body of the human being, referred to as the rūpakkhandha. Having selected the earliest part of the Pali canon, the four main Nikāyas of the Sutta Piṭaka, as my source material for this study of the khandhas, however, an immediate problem presents itself which needs to be dealt with at the outset. In this early stratum of the texts there is a notable lacuna in the information we are given about the human being, a lacuna that at first sight appears to lie in the descriptions of the rūpakkhandha. From the two types of definitions of the rūpakkhandha that we are given one can draw out an overall view of how the khandha is meant to be understood. Though relatively brief, this overall view is in some crucial respects very informative, as we shall see. But as one proceeds to reading canonical descriptions of the four arūpakkhandhas (arūpa refers to the four that are not rūpa) one sees with hindsight that an important and frequently mentioned feature of the human being has not anywhere been explained. This feature is the senses. All the arūpakkhandhas are subdivided according to the senses, thus stressing their important role, but they are neither considered actually to be part of the arūpakkhandhas nor are they mentioned at all in descriptions of the rūpakkhandha. When later Theravāda Buddhists realised the importance of the senses, and attempted to redress the lacuna in the descriptions of the khandhas, they included the senses in the rūpakkhandha. In view of this, it seems appropriate to discuss the senses in this chapter, and where necessary I have drawn quite extensively on commentarial texts and parts of the Abhidhamma, notably the Dhammasangani and its commentary the Ajṭhasālini, and the Vibhaṅga. In so doing, I have been guided (perhaps limited) by a desire not to arrive at a definitive view of the rūpakkhandha as understood by the (later) Abhidhamma tradition, but to suggest an overall picture of how the rūpakkhandha and the senses might be understood that is compatible both with the brief definitions found in the Sutta Piṭaka and with other aspects of the human being described in later chapters.
To this end, my discussion of this khandha will be structured as follows. In the first part of the chapter, the definitions of rūpa as given in the Sutta Pitaka will be discussed, including a consideration of the terms 'primary' (no-upādā) and 'secondary' (upādā) as used in this context. The discussion will also cover the so-called ‘elements’, the mahābhūta, as briefly referred to in the Sutta Pitaka and more elaborately in later material. The second part of the chapter will concentrate on a specific discussion concerning the senses. Recognising their importance, the Theravāda tradition as a whole (that is the Abhidhamma, commentaries, Buddhaghosa’s Visuddhimagga and the writing of modern Theravāda Buddhists) singles out the senses and their corresponding objects (collectively referred to as āyatana) in defining the ‘secondary’ level of the rūpakkhandha (which itself is not defined in the Sutta Pitaka). In spite of this, the attempt here to gain a meaningful understanding of the senses has not been an easy one. As we shall see, even the Abhidhamma is inconsistent in its descriptions. Though it defines them at times as rūpa, at other times it describes them in a way which suggests they are not rūpa. In the light of such ambiguity, I shall question just what it is that is being referred to when the senses are mentioned in the Sutta Pitaka. Not only do descriptions of each of the four arūpakkhandhas state that the senses (or their objects) determine the different kinds of activity the khandha represents, as I have said, but the senses are also one of the links in the chain of the paticcamañña formula which describes how the functioning of a human being is dependently originated. I also referred in the Introduction to passages which state that the ongoing existence of the individual, his or her loka, is caused by desire based on the senses. The Theravāda Buddhist tradition, and many scholars of Buddhism, have understood that where the senses are said to determine the different kinds of activity of the arūpakkhandhas, they are the physical bases of the corresponding mental activities. But I find this unsatisfactory: if the physical sense organs are meant, one might expect them to be included in a description of the rūpakkhandha in the Sutta Pitaka, particularly in view of the fact that they are subsequently mentioned, but not classified, in the descriptions of each of the arūpakkhandhas. I shall suggest a way they might be understood to be neither rūpa nor arūpa, thus explaining why they are not included in the khandha analysis in the Sutta Pitaka.

In Buddhism, and in other Indian religions also, it is common that the senses include the five which are common to us in Western culture and also a sixth sense, manas, the corresponding object of which is dhammā. The term manas literally means ‘mind’, and as such appears qualitatively different from the other senses. Perhaps because of this, it remains uniquely ambiguous as a sense, throughout the Pali material. Nor is it immediately obvious what dhammā refers to. Neither is explained in the Sutta Pitaka, but in the Abhidhamma and commentaries they are classified as āyatana, a term which covers all the senses and their objects (thus giving a total of twelve āyatana).
But in spite of the fact that the other (five) senses and their corresponding objects (that is, those ten of the āyatanas) are clearly defined as 'secondary' rūpa, neither manas nor dhammā is defined as being rūpa, or at least not consistently so. The lack of clarity is compounded because the Aṭṭhasālinī, the commentary on the Dhammasaṅgani, contains what one might call a 'theory of sense' (if an imperfect one) in the context of a description of rūpa, but it omits manas and dhammā from this theory. In fact both terms have a multitude of meanings in the Pali material and, in my opinion, they have never been adequately understood in the context of sense and corresponding object, either by the Buddhist tradition or by modern expositors. In view of the role of all six of the senses as determining the sixfold classification of each of the arūpakkkhandhas, it is important to establish how manas and dhammā might best be understood and what the function of manas is before we go on to consider those arūpakkkhandhas. The concluding part of this chapter will therefore be a discussion of these two terms.

The rūpakkkhandha

Apart from the specific context of the rūpakkkhandha, the term rūpa is found in two other contexts in the Pali canon which are relevant and need brief mentioning here. First, it is the term which refers to the sense object (rūpāyatanā) which corresponds to the sense organ 'eye'. Here the criterion of visibility dominates and it has the general meaning of 'visible object'. In such contexts the literal meaning of the Pali word rūpa, 'form', which in common usage usually means shape or appearance, is most relevant. Second, it is also frequently found in the compound nāmarūpa. This literally means 'name and form', but has also been interpreted as 'mind and body'. The meaning of nāmarūpa is discussed separately in chapter vi. When used in the expression rūpakkkhandha, rūpa is often understood through its literal meaning (form) to refer to the shape or appearance of the human being, that is the physical body. In this way the terms rūpa and arūpa have usually been understood to imply a distinction between 'body' and 'mind' respectively. We shall see, however, that though rūpa refers to the body, this is not just in physical terms, and its shape or appearance, while clearly relevant as visible object, rūpāyatanā, is not an important factor in understanding the rūpakkkhandha.

In the Sutta Pitaka there are two main kinds of description of the rūpakkkhandha: the simple and general description, which gives us minimal information, and the detailed and specific description, from which we get a more comprehensive account of what the khandha comprises. The simple descriptions are just two, both being found in the Khandha Samyutta of the Sutta Pitaka. The first occurs, so far as I am aware, only once. But it is picked up repeatedly by the later commentarial tradition. The second
constitutes a common formula used throughout the Pali material to define rūpa, and is of considerably more interest to us here. We shall see in the comprehensive descriptions of it that the term rūpa also refers to a general category, described as ‘external’, suggesting an overlap between the ‘form’ characteristics of the body (rūpakkhandha) and those of visible objects in general (rūpāyatana). But both types of analysis of rūpa indicate that the term primarily refers to the body, in accord with the Buddha’s central concern with the human being.

The context in which the first simple analysis is given in the Khandha Samyutta is when the Buddha is teaching that none of the five khandhas constitutes anything that should be thought of as a permanent, unchanging ‘self’, in this life or in any previous life. Each of the khandhas in turn is briefly defined, and then each is discussed in a way which illustrates their impermanence. The rūpakkhandha is defined as follows:

And why, bhikkhus, is it called body? It suffers, bhikkhus. That is why the word ‘body’ is used. Suffers from what? Suffers from cold and heat, from hunger and thirst, from contact with gnats, mosquitoes, wind and sun and snakes. It suffers, bhikkhus. That is why it is called body.²

The verb I have translated here as ‘suffers’, in order to draw out the meaning of this passage, is ruppati. It is because of the use of this verb here that this description is repeatedly referred to by the commentarial tradition, and by Buddhaghosa in his Visuddhimagga. Ruppati is taken by the traditional interpretation, and by Buddhaghosa in his Visuddhimagga, as a pun on rūpa, though etymologically ruppati has absolutely no connection with rūpa. And in spite of a similar lack of etymological link the punning is also extended to nāma, which, as mentioned above, is frequently found twinned with rūpa in the compound nāmarūpa.³ So in Pali the play on words reads as follows: Namanalakkhanam nāmad ..., ruppanalakkhanam rūpaṃ.⁴ Discussing ruppati, Woodward, the translator of the Khandha Samyutta for the Pali Text Society, suggests that ruppati as a pun on rūpa could be taken to mean that body is embodied, form is in-formed, shape is shaped.⁵ Literally, however, ruppati means ‘to be destroyed’, ‘to be vexed’ or ‘to be oppressed’. In Sanskrit, rupyate means ‘to suffer violent pain’, and by the r/₁/alternation it is closely related to lupyate, ‘to be broken’ or ‘to be destroyed’.⁶ By extension one can understand ruppati simply as ‘suffers’, being analogous with dukkha (so the definition might better read: “It is characterised by unsatisfactoriness (dukkha)”). This, surely, is the point that is being made by the use of the verb: such etymologising was, typically, for didactic reasons. This point has been completely missed by Mrs Rhys Davids, who suggests translating ruppati as ‘affected’. Woodward follows this, though he points out in a footnote that he prefers ‘afflicted’.⁷ The latter is surely more appropriate, being in accord with the fact that rūpa is associated with dukkha, which in turn is in accord with the Buddha’s definition of dukkha, representing the individual’s existence in saṃsāra, as the khandhas. And
though it is the rūpakkhandha which is defined in terms of affliction, the Sutta goes on to state that one identifies mistakenly with each of the khandhas as part of samsāric existence and that one is to become detached from each and every one of them. The explicit association of rūpa alone with affliction is primarily because rūpa lends itself to this pun. But an individual’s life in samsāra also tends to be predominantly associated with the body. Not only is it the physical presence of an individual, but as such it is the vehicle, so to speak, of his or her experience in a given life. It is therefore disproportionately associated with samsāric existence to the point where it is seen to be ‘responsible’ for the affliction of dukkha. This point is more comprehensively discussed in chapter viii.

The second and perhaps the simplest analysis of rūpa is frequently found in the Pali material and represents the standard simple analysis not only of the rūpakkhandha but also, as we shall see, of rūpa in general (that is, whether the body of the human being or of any other visible object). The context in the Khandha Samyutta from which I am quoting is another in which the Buddha is teaching that the human being should be understood in terms of five khandhas, and that none of these constitutes a permanent, unchanging self: one is to become detached from each of them. Here rūpa is analysed into the four great elements and whatever is derived from them: “And what, bhikkhus, is the body (rūpa)? It is the four great elements and whatever physical thing is derived from the great elements: this, bhikkhus, is called the body”.

The four great elements (collectively known as the cattāro mahābhūtāni, or less specifically as dhātus) are: earth (pathavi-dhātu), water (āpo-dhātu), fire (tejo-dhātu) and wind (vāyo-dhātu). In some contexts a fifth element, ‘space’ (iśvara), is mentioned, but in contexts where rūpa is specifically being defined only the cattāro mahābhūtā are mentioned. In the commentarial tradition, these are explicitly understood to have the abstract meanings solidity, fluidity, heat and motion. In the Sutta Piṭaka, such abstract meanings are only implicit, though in the more detailed descriptions of each of the elements the implication is quite clear. It is the abstract meanings of the elements which suggest how they are applicable both to the rūpakkhandha of the human being and also to anything else that has form, explicitly described as the ‘internal’ and ‘external’ dimensions of rūpa in canonical passages which explain each of the four elements in turn.

The abstract meanings of the four elements also serve to indicate that the notion of ‘matter’ is purely conventional here. Rather, rūpa refers to the occurrence of various states or processes, collectively referred to as the ‘body’ (or visible object), which are characterised in a certain way. It is only by virtue of a state or process having the characteristics of solidity or extension that it can be described as ‘matter’, and the rūpakkhandha is not limited to this single characteristic.

In the Sutta Piṭaka, the four elements are said to be ‘primary’. The term used for this is no-upādā, which has two literal meanings: ‘underived’ and
'not clinging or grasping'. The former does not in any way compromise the teaching that there is nothing in *samsāra* that is unconditioned. Indeed, we read in a passage about Nirvana, which is referred to as the unconditioned, that it is *without* the four elements, a confirmation of the conditioned nature of the four elements themselves: "Monks, there exists that condition [Nirvana] wherein is not earth nor water nor fire nor air...". Anything to which analysis in terms of the four elements is applicable, therefore, is part of conditioned existence. The meaning 'underived' refers, rather, to the fact that these four elements cannot be further broken down or analysed in the way that, for example, a foot or a hand, both of which are complex organs with more than one function, can be broken down or analysed to the point where it is seen that they consist of an aggregate of elements. Put abstractly, a complex organ is an aggregate which has characteristics that are signified by more than one type of element. In this unaggregated sense *no-upādā* means 'underived'. The latter meaning, 'not clinging or grasping', suggests that *rūpa* has an underived state that is not the product of grasping. In the context of the *rūpakkhandha*, this is not explained any further, but the similar term *anupādā* is regularly found in other contexts in the *Nikāyas* in the sense of not having any more of the fuel (grasping) necessary for rebirth, not clinging to the world. It is grasping, more usually called volition, which leads to continued rebirth, continued human existence. In the light of this, *no-upādā rūpa* means 'primary' in that it has not (yet) been further conditioned by intention. In the *Atthasālinī*, the commentary on the *Dhammasaṅgāṇī* of the Abhidhamma Pitaka, this point is made explicitly: "Upādā means 'it grasps'; this means grasping the [four] great elements; not letting (them) go, such (secondary/derived forms) exist depending on them". This all suggests that the *cattāro mahābhūtā* are as it were the potential states from which the body, conditioned by one's karma (intention), is derived; or, put differently, they represent the potential characteristics of the body. As well as *no-upādā*, *rūpa* is also described in the *Sutta Pitaka* as 'derived' or 'secondary' (*upādā*). In the simple analyses of the *rūpakkhandha* there is no mention of what *upādā rūpa* comprises, and we shall see that the situation is not clear in the comprehensive description of the *rūpakkhandha* either. Though the commentary on the particular canonical passage we are discussing makes no comment on what *upādā rūpa* means, the Theravāda Buddhist tradition has generally understood the term *upādā rūpa* specifically to refer to the senses (usually taken to be the physical sense organs) and their corresponding sense objects, collectively called *āyatanas*. A typical definition of *upādā rūpa* is given in the *Dhammasaṅgāṇī* of the Abhidhamma, where it is stated to refer to ten of the *āyatanas* (that is excluding the sixth sense, *manas*, and its corresponding object, *dhammā*). In the *Vibhaṅga* the same ten *āyatanas* are in turn described as the four great elements which are derived, which amounts to the same thing put differently. In the *Atthasālinī*,
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upādā rūpa is discussed at length in terms of the āyatanas, so much so that the translator of the text for the Pali Text Society has entitled an entire chapter “Derived Material Qualities”. In addition to such definitions, where the Abhidhamma categorises upādā rūpa more extensively, so that it is said to comprise twenty-three different phenomena, the āyatanas are included. Likewise, in the section on the rūpakkhandha in his Visuddhimagga, where Buddhaghosa lists twenty-four kinds of upādā rūpa, he includes the āyatanas in the same way as the Abhidhamma and the commentaries. Modern Theravāda Buddhist writers also define upādā rūpa as the senses.

That upādā rūpa, undefined in the Sutta Piṭaka, eventually came to be defined in this way might be because of the fact, mentioned above, that in contexts in the Sutta Piṭaka where the five khandhas in turn are being defined, and where the rūpakkhandha has been defined according to the simple analysis of the four elements and their derivatives, the different ārūpakkhandhas are each said to be of six types according to the six senses or their objects. This repeated reference to the āyatanas in such classifications might account for the fact that they became singled out for mention as upādā rūpa.

Given such prominent mention of the senses in the Sutta Piṭaka, and given that it is obvious to us that there are physical organs corresponding to at least five of the senses (so one might equally obviously assume that they are part of the rūpakkhandha), it is also conversely notable that nowhere in the Sutta Piṭaka are the senses, or their corresponding sense objects, explicitly stated to be part of the rūpakkhandha, and none of the passages which is specifically describing the rūpakkhandha includes any of them as upādā rūpa. It is this omission that prompts me to question whether the consistent references in the Sutta Piṭaka to the senses or their objects determining the types of mental activity necessarily implies that it was intended that either the senses or their objects, or all of them, should be classified as part of upādā rūpa within the rūpakkhandha, as later defined in the Abhidhamma and understood within the Buddhist tradition.

The question is prompted not just by the omission but also by the fact that compared with what is found in the Sutta Piṭaka, the later tradition’s understanding of the senses becomes, on the one hand, more complex, and, on the other hand, more ‘physical’. Dealing with the first of these first, the Abhidhamma gives a more comprehensive classification of the twelve āyatanas collectively than is found in the four main Nikāyas of the Sutta Piṭaka. In the Sutta Piṭaka, there is more of a distinction between the senses and the sense objects, and the term āyata is more frequently said to be sixfold. Where salāyata appears in the paṭiccasamuppāda formula given in the Sutta Piṭaka, for example, only the senses are included in the definition, not the sense objects. And though the senses and objects are at times referred to as separate groups in the same classification, that is as āyatanas, the point is that the senses and objects are more clearly delineated from
each other, each as separate ‘sixes’, than in the Abhidhamma where the senses and their objects are all referred to individually and equally as āyatanas, giving twelve in all, and are grouped together in definitions or descriptions of upādā rūpa.\textsuperscript{25} This inclusion of the objects of sense in a definition of something that is subject to ‘grasping’ is not, as might at first be thought, in itself problematic. These objects are not necessarily external to the human being: eyes and visibility, nose and smell, tongue and taste (and so on) are all aspects of the human body. But this development represents a more complex way of attempting to understand the senses than is found in the Sutta Piṭaka, a complexity that is compounded by lack of consistency.

By way of example, in the Dhammasaṅgāṇī we read that whatever rūpa is ‘internal’ (that is personal to the individual) is upādā, but whatever rūpa is ‘external’ is sometimes upādā and sometimes no-upādā.\textsuperscript{26} External (bāhirām) rūpa seems here to refer specifically to aspects of rūpa which are experienced subjectively oneself.\textsuperscript{27} What is external in the sense of being part of other beings is referred to in this text as bahiddhā, and is also referred to as dhammā.\textsuperscript{28} Though the āyatanas, whether internal or external (bāhirām), are usually collectively classified as upādā rūpa, potthabba,\textsuperscript{29} manas and dhammā are often excluded from the classification, though no reason is given for this.

With regard to the increasingly ‘physical’ understanding of the senses, not only does the later tradition explicitly classify the senses as rūpa, but the later texts also give long and elaborate physical descriptions of the sense organs. The Pali terms used to refer to the senses are cakkhu, sota, ghāna, jīvha, kāya and manas, and following a physical interpretation of their meaning, these are usually translated eye, ear, nose, tongue, body and mind. But none of the meanings of the term āyatana suggests that a physical organ is meant.\textsuperscript{30} In the Sutta Piṭaka, the senses are also sometimes referred to as indriyas, ‘powers’ or ‘faculties’.\textsuperscript{31} Though in such contexts they are also usually translated as sense organs, the term indriya does not suggest that physical organs are implied any more than does āyatana. Similarly, they are also called dhātus, elements, which again need not imply physicality.\textsuperscript{32} This suggests that the later attempts to classify the senses as upādā rūpa might be placing an inappropriate emphasis on their physical aspects. And as a further complication, we shall see in the next part of this chapter that even in this respect the later material appears inconsistent.

The nearest the Sutta Piṭaka comes to associating the senses with upādā is in a passage in the Sutta Nīpāta where there is a reference to the fact that the five sensual pleasures plus manas are the grasping (upādāna) which afflicts the world.\textsuperscript{33} This does not, however, refer specifically to rūpa, nor to the senses themselves, but to the fact that sensual desire, the arising of which is based on the senses, represents the fuel of continued samsāric existence: loka here meaning the ‘world’ of the subjective individual rather than the external world as a whole, as discussed above.
In the Sutta Pitaka, all five khandhas are sometimes referred to as the upādānakkhandhā, and they too are upādāna in both senses of the word: they are both derivatives and conditioned by grasping. Another passage in the Khandha Samyutta describes both the pañcakkhandhā and the pañcupādānakkhandhā. The term pañcakkhandhā, it explains, refers to the five khandhas; pañcupādānakkhandhā means that each and every one of the five khandhas is subject to āsanas. I referred to the term āsava in the Introduction. It is a notoriously difficult word to translate into English, but it refers to the strongest and most deep-seated of the factors ('graspings') which cause bondage to samsāric experience. There are said to be either three or four āsavas: the three are the āsava of sense desire (kāmāsava), the āsava of desire for continued becoming (bhavāsava), and the āsava of ignorance (avijjāsava), and the less common fourth is the āsava of holding views (dīttāsava). The āsavas are to be eradicated; but so profoundly are they rooted in the human psyche that such eradication represents the very experience of Enlightenment, the goal of the path to liberation. Thus any reference to the āsavas being present indicates an association with the samsāric, pre-Enlightenment life of an individual, when he or she is conditioned by grasping. Nānavira, a modern Theravāda bhikkhu, suggests that this passage distinguishes between an arahant, in whom the āsavas have been eradicated, who comprises the pañcakkhandhā, and an unenlightened individual, who comprises the pañcupādānakkhandhā. The point Nānavira is making is that an individual only arises as a result of continued grasping (the mechanics of which will become clearer in chapter IV), and after Enlightenment the individual will not arise (be reborn) again.

If the senses were to be classified as part of the rūpakkhandha, then of course it follows from the foregoing that they would be upādā rūpa, requiring further discussion here. But in view of the ambiguity about precisely what the terms used for the senses (āyatana, indriya and dhātu) are referring to, and the fact that in the Sutta Pitaka the āyatanas are neither defined as upādā rūpa nor included in any of the definitions of the rūpakkhandha, it seems more appropriate to defer such a discussion. Accordingly, I will return to them in the second part of this chapter after discussing the detailed analyses of the nipakkhandha found in the Sutta Pitaka. At that stage more attention can be directed towards their important role.

The more detailed and specific analysis of the rūpakkhandha is found in three places in the Sutta Pitaka where the cattāro mahābhūtā are being explained. This analysis gives us much more information about rūpa as the body of the human being, though it is here that the term rūpa is explicitly stated also to refer to rūpa that is 'external'. In each of the contexts in which the comprehensive analysis is found, it is given for the purpose of teaching that the individual's body is merely an aggregate of the elements and that it should not be thought of in terms of selfhood or identity. In one place, descriptions of the impermanent nature of the 'external' manifestation
of the elements are given in order to emphasise that the internal elements are equally impermanent. For example, the external element of motion, wind, is at times too strong and can blow down whole villages and at other times there is no wind at all and people have to fan a spark in order to make a fire burn.38

The descriptions of the elements of pathavī and āpo, solidity and fluidity respectively, with regard to their ‘internal’ manifestation as the body of a human being, consist of various parts of the body. We read of the ‘internal’ aspect of the element of solidity:

And what is the ‘internal’ element of solidity? Whatever is internal to the individual and is hard and solid, and the product of grasping; that is to say hair of the head, hair of the body, nails, teeth, skin, flesh, sinews, bones, bone-marrow, kidney, heart, liver, membranes, spleen, lungs, intestines, mesentery, stomach, excrement, and whatever other thing is internal to the individual and is hard and solid [and which is] the product of grasping: this is called the ‘internal’ element of solidity.39

Similarly, the ‘internal’ element of fluidity is described as follows:

And what is the ‘internal’ element of fluidity? Whatever is internal to the individual, is liquid or fluid, and the product of grasping; that is to say bile, phlegm, pus, blood, sweat, fat, tears, serum, saliva, mucus, synovic fluid, urine, and whatever other thing is internal to the individual, is liquid or fluid, [and which is] the product of grasping: this is called the ‘internal’ element of fluidity.40

Though both these passages include actual parts of the body, I suggest that the point they are intended to make is to establish that the body includes elements which are characterised either by hardness/solidity or by liquidity/fluidity. In neither case are the literal meanings of the elements, earth and water, directly applicable: it is their abstract meanings which are of central relevance. Similarly, the fact that the list is manifestly not comprehensive suggests that such descriptions are not intended to be understood as definitive lists of what the body is made of; rather they indicate examples of the characteristics being described.

The passage continues with a description of the ‘internal’ element of heat:

And what is the ‘internal’ heat element? Whatever is internal to the individual and is heat, heated, and the product of grasping; that is to say that by which one is warmed, by which one ages, by which one is exhausted [lit: burned], that by which one properly digests [lit: transforms] what one has eaten, drunk, consumed or chewed, and whatever other thing internal to the individual which is heated or warm [and which is] the product of grasping: this is the ‘internal’ element of heat.41
I. B. Horner states that tejo includes cold as well as heat since both vitalising energy and decay are due to this element.\(^42\) Though it may be appropriate to refer to it as the element of temperature rather than just of being hot, it unclear whether this extends literally as far as being cold. In a passage elsewhere in the canon, we read that it is heat, life and consciousness that vitalise the human being (though the Pali word for heat in these contexts is *usmā*) and without them there is only a dead body, thus dissociating heat and the processes associated with it from a dead body.\(^43\) But the concern of this passage is to establish the impermanence of the vitalising factors, not the extent of the activity of heat: *usmā* and *āyu* are said to be mutually dependent,\(^44\) and *vīññāṇa* is associated with the senses.\(^45\) The three are also described as *samkhāras*,\(^46\) which both indicates their constructed nature and implies that they are the result of past karma.\(^47\) I. B. Horner's suggestion is supported by the description of the 'external' aspect of tejo, which refers to fire:\(^48\) it might be that it is in its external aspect that this element is involved in the decay of a dead body. But this concern is an unimportant one: as we shall see, the analysis of the body according to the four elements is that of a live body rather than a dead one, which, though leaving questions such as this unanswered, serves to emphasise the consistency of the Buddha's concern with human experience.

For the 'internal' element of motion the *Sutta* states:

And what is the 'internal' element of motion? Whatever is internal to the individual and is movement [literally, 'wind'] or motion and the product of grasping; that is to say upward movements, downward movements, movement in the abdomen, movement in the belly, movements of any of the limbs, in-breathing and out-breathing, and whatever other thing is internal to the individual and is movement or motion [and which is] the product of grasping: this is called the 'internal' element of motion.\(^49\)

I have translated the Pali word *vātā* as 'movements' in order to give this passage some meaning in English. Its literal meaning is 'wind', and this comprehensive description of wind passing all round the body, and along every limb, recalls the Upaniṣadic five *ānas*: *prāṇa* (the in-breath), *apāṇa* (the out-breath), *nīāṇa* (the circulatory or diffused breath), *udāṇa* (the up-breath) and *sāmāṇa* (the middle or equalising breath).\(^50\) These were regarded as the vital faculties responsible for respiration, digestion and the distribution of food through the body.\(^51\) Breath (*prāṇa*) was also considered to be the vitalising principle in the early Upaniṣads, frequently used as a synonym for Brahman.\(^52\) The functions of the Upaniṣadic *prāṇas* do not correspond directly to those of the *vāyodhātu* according to the *Majjhima Nikāya*, since digestion, for example, is the province of the *tejodhātu*. Nor is there any understanding of *vāyu* as a vitalising principle in the Pali canon as there is in the case of heat: breathing is merely a bodily function. The Pali expression *āngamāngānusārino vātā* is not explained in the canon, but is understood
by Buddhaghosa to refer to the winds (or forces) that produce flexing and extending and so on. This would be congruent with the abstract meaning of vāyu, motion.\textsuperscript{53} There is evidence in the canon, however, (which is picked up in the commentarial literature) that wind acts as a ‘humour’.\textsuperscript{54} Normal wind conditions normal health, whereas winds which become strong (vātā baliyantā), or deranged winds (umāda vātā), cause pains and/or uncontrolled movements of the body, eventually causing psychological derangement.\textsuperscript{55} The similarity between the Pali description of vāyu and the Upaniṣadic description of the prānas is enough for it to be possible that the former was influenced by the latter.\textsuperscript{56}

In two texts a description of the element ‘space’ (akāsa) is also given:

And what is the internal element of space? Whatever is internal to the individual, and is space or spacious, and the product of grasping; that is to say the nose and ear orifices, the mouth opening, the passages by which one swallows, retains and expels below what one has eaten, drunk, consumed or chewed, and whatever other thing is internal to the individual and is space or spacious [and which is] the product of grasping; this is called the ‘internal’ element of space.\textsuperscript{57}

Though akāsa is said to be both ‘internal’ and ‘external’, no description of ‘external’ akāsa is given in either of the texts in which this description is found. Akāsa does have an ‘external’ dimension in descriptions of the meditative states known as the jhānas. In such a context it is not, however, the equivalent of external spaces between things paralleling the description of the ‘internal’ space element as internal orifices and openings. It is, rather, a formless level where the apperception of visible shapes is transcended.\textsuperscript{58}

Here we have a comprehensive analysis of the rūpakkhandha according to the catuṭṭha mahābhūtā. The term upādinnam (‘the product of grasping’) indicates that all the factors included within the analysis of internal rūpa are upādā. We shall see in chapter iv, and again in chapter vii, that this is compatible with the way volitions, which correspond to grasping, condition every aspect of the arising of the individual in future lives.

The descriptions of each of the elements contain bodily parts or functions which might logically be expected to be found there: solid things are found in the analysis of the element of solidity, liquid things within the element of fluidity, and so on. In other words, the analysis is commonsensical. But the tejo and vāyo dhātus, and the ākāsadhātus when it appears, comprise parts and functions which we might not immediately describe as corporeal. Temperature, ageing and digestion, breathing and various bodily movements, and orifices or internal spaces, are defined as being part of the rūpakkhandha. Taken as a whole, this description of the catuṭṭha mahābhūtā (plus akāsa) gives us the human body as a whole in full working order. The analysis emphasises the characteristics and processes which
enable the living body of a human being to function: this is not a description of a dead human body. It follows, then, that the term rūpa is not as strictly limited as one might in the first instance expect from the usual association of body with matter or from the common understanding that the word ‘form’ (the literal meaning of rūpa) means shape or appearance. From the comprehensive description we have here, rūpa does not refer to the physical body qua physical body; it is not concerned with what the body is but with its living characteristics understood in terms of the four elements.

We recall that the ‘object’ which corresponds to the sense (organ) eye (cakkhu) is form (rūpa), and that its main criterion is visibility. Rūpa as a khandha does not so clearly imply visibility. One might say that processes such as breathing, movement, and decay are visible, and if other processes such as digestion and temperature control were not operating one would be able to see that. This would correspond to the fact that in the ‘external’ dimension fire and wind are also visible (at least through their effects). But such suggestions do not seem to me to be in accord with the overall impression one gets from the description of the rūpakkhandha, and the internal organs are normally visible only potentially. Certainly visibility does not seem to be a primary characteristic of the rūpakkhandha.

The parts of the body referred to in the descriptions of the paṭhamiddātu and the āpodhātu above are also found in the canonical material as a standard list of bodily parts to be used in a meditation exercise.59 The standard list incorporates exactly the same parts as do the descriptions of the dhātus and is as follows: hair of the head, body hair, nails, teeth, skin, flesh, sinews, bones, bone-marrows, kidneys, heart, liver, membranes, spleen, lungs, intestines, mesentery, stomach, excrement, bile, phlegm, pus, blood, sweat, fat, tears, serum, saliva, mucus, synovic fluid and urine.60 During meditation, a bhikkhu should realise that his body includes a collection of these physical items, none of which is to be identified as or with any sort of abiding self. Other bodily processes are referred to in these meditation exercises, such as breathing and movement, posture and decay.61 None of these passages states that it is offering a description either of the rūpakkhandha as such or of the cattāro mahābhūtā. The meditation on the body in the Satipaṭṭhāna Suttas, however, is clearly intended to be comprehensive, including as it does a wide range of bodily activities, processes, postures and states of decay, in the sense that such meditations should bring the bhikkhu to realise that all such aspects of the body are similarly conditioned. It also includes a meditation on the fact that the body is composed of the four dhātus as follows:

And again, bhikkhus, a bhikkhu contemplates this body as it is placed or disposed in respect of the elements, thinking ‘There are in this body the elements of extension, fluidity, heat and motion’.62
No further analysis of the body according to dhātu is given, which again emphasises the lack of concern in the texts to understand the human body in terms of what its substance is.

The rūpakkhandha, then, is the living body of a human being. This is analysed according to the four (occasionally five) dhātu. ‘Body’ is an appropriate translation of rūpa when it refers to the rūpakkhandha, since even those phenomena included in this khanda which are not corporeal are nevertheless parts of or associated with the body. And rūpa which is external to the human body is not part of the khanda analysis as such. One might conclude this part of this chapter by suggesting that the emphasis on the characteristics of the human body which relate to how it functions, rather than what it is in terms of substance, is highlighted both by what is omitted from the descriptions discussed and by the style of the descriptions of what is included. It is in this respect that what appears to be merely an overview of this khanda is in fact singularly informative.

The Senses

According to the evidence in the Sutta Piṭaka the senses are central to the psychological/cognitive functioning of the human being. We shall see below that even consciousness, the sine qua non of human life, is classified according to the senses. And we shall also see in more detail in following chapters that all discursive thoughts, ideas and knowledge arise because of the simultaneous presence of a sense, its corresponding sense object and consciousness: from this threefold event, known as ‘contact’ (phassa), all cognitive activity, of whatever nature, arises; and, conversely, without such an event no cognitive activity takes place. From this we see that the senses are not only the means by which the individual interacts with the ‘external’ world in which he or she exists, but are also the means by which cognitive experience subsequently leads either to progressing along the path to liberation or to remaining in bondage within saṃsāra. And yet in spite of their importance in the individual’s psychological functioning, in the Sutta Piṭaka they are neither included in the analysis of the rūpakkhandha, as we have already seen, nor are they included in the analysis of any of the arūpakkhandhas. I have suggested above that though the Abhidhamma discusses the āyatana at length, its understanding of them appears to be inconsistent. I have also explained that the terms commonly associated with the senses, āyatana, indriya and dhātu, need not immediately suggest that it is the physical sense organs that are being referred to in the terms cakkhu, sota, ghāna and so on. In looking at these points in more detail here, we shall, I think, indeed see that what is meant by the senses is not their physical organs but that they have a unique role which is as it were neither rūpa nor arūpa, and that this is why they are not included in the khanda analysis.
The Rūpakkhandha

I have stated in the first part of this chapter that in common with other Indian religions, Buddhism recognises six senses. Be that as it may, casual reference to different passages in the Pali material can cause confusion concerning the number of senses there are. The standard canonical list of sense pleasures (kāmaguṇā) includes only five senses: eye (cakkhu), ear (sota), nose (ghāna), tongue (jīvā) and body (kāya). We saw the same five, together with their corresponding objects (ten āyatanas as in all), referred to in the Dhammasaṅgāṇi definition of upādā rūpa mentioned above. But this and similar passages in the Abhidhamma are not suggesting that there are only five senses: the reason the Dhammasaṅgāṇi definition in question only includes five senses is because the author of this passage is defining upādā rūpa, in which he does not include manas and dhammā. Generally in Pali texts (including the Abhidhamma) the senses are sixfold. In the pāṭiccasamuppāda formula, for example, when nāmarūpa is said to be the condition for the arising of the senses, the senses are stated to be sixfold. The six senses are the five mentioned above as the kāmaguṇā plus manas. Their corresponding objects are (in Pali) rūpa, sadda, gandha, rasa, phoṭṭhabba and dhammā, usually translated (visible) form, sound, odour, taste, tangible things and mental objects. They are discussed repeatedly, though not in detail, both in the Chachakkasutta and in the Mahāsājāyataniṭṭhasutta, and an entire volume of the Saṁyutta Nikāya is entitled the Saḷāyatanas Vagga. The sensory events (phassa), which are discussed in chapter 11, are sixfold according to the six senses. We also read that in order to establish the moral basis from which a bhikkhu can proceed as an ariyasāvaka, all six senses have to be brought under control, (a discipline which perhaps reflects one of the meanings of āyatana, which is ‘exertion’, ‘effort’, ‘practice’).

Where each of the arūpakkhandhas is described according to a sixfold sub-classification, the terms mentioned above which are often associated with the senses, āyatana, indriya and dhātu, are not used, just the names of the senses or sense objects themselves. We read of vedanā, for example, that it is of six types. These arise from contact, and are classified according to the six senses. Similarly the viññānakkhandha is of six types according to each of the six senses. Both the saññākkhandha and the sañkhārakkhandha are again of six types, but these are classified not according to the six senses but to their objects. The texts do not explain why two of the arūpakkhandhas are classified according to the senses and the other two according to the sense objects. The Pali word I have translated as ‘types’ is kāya (literally ‘bodies’). Though this is sometimes translated in this context as ‘bases’ or ‘seats’, such translations act as red herrings, making it more difficult to understand why the classification differs. If one assumes, as has been done, that the senses refer to the physical sense organs, one might accept that an internal sense might be a ‘seat’ of a mental activity; but it is hard to see that an external object could be such a seat. If kāya is translated as ‘types’, however, then neither the senses nor the objects need be considered
as the actual ‘bases’ of the mental activities. Rather, the difference between *vedanā* and *viññāṇa* on the one hand and *saññā* and *samkhāra* on the other hand might be explained as follows: *saññā* and *samkhāra* are more developed and discursive levels of the cognitive process than are either *vedanā* or *viññāṇa* and as such they are externally focussed. So with regard to *saññā* one would apperceive a smell or a sound rather than the nose or ear. Likewise with *samkhāra*, one’s volitions would be directed towards the smell or the sound and not the sense itself. Moreover, both are able to focus on a specific smell or sound rather than being limited to the general olfactory and auditory senses. Thus the six types of *saññā* and *samkhāra* are classified according to the external objects. Neither *vedanā* nor *viññāṇa* is so clearly defined, both functioning more generally in the cognitive process when the activity of the senses is more relevant. So with regard to *vedanā*, one has visual or auditory feeling rather than visible object or sound feeling. *Viññāṇa* too is visual or auditory. Both of them function at the general level of the visual or auditory sense, for the focussing on a specific external object is the function of the *saññā* or *samkhāra* khandhas.

The English words usually used in translations of the senses (eye, ear, nose, tongue, body and mind) suggest that in each case (with the exception of mind) it is the physical sense organ that is being referred to, which probably accounts for the tendency to describe them as ‘seats’ or ‘bases’, as mentioned above. And there is no doubt that (again with the exception of *manas*, which is discussed in the third part of this chapter), these are physical organs which are part of the human body. The terms most commonly associated with them, *āyatana*, *indriya* and *dhātu*, suggest, however, that they might also refer to something other than the physical organs themselves. Though all three of these terms have been translated as if they do refer to the physical organs, a consideration of their other meanings, together with some contexts in which the senses are referred to in the *Sutta Piṭaka*, suggests an interesting alternative.

In the *Sālāyatana Vagga* of the *Samyutta Nikāya*, the six senses are defined as being *ajjhattam*, personal or internal, and the six corresponding objects are defined as being *bāhiram*, external, thus giving two ‘sets’ of six *āyatanas*. In the *Niddāna Samyutta*, however, which is concerned with explaining *paṭiccasamuppāda*, only the personal *āyatanas* are referred to by the term *āyatana*. This difference in usage in itself makes the term *āyatana* an ambiguous one, and it is unsurprising that the *Pali English Dictionary* does little to clarify the term when it states that *āyatana* means “sphere of perception or sense in general, object of thought, sense-organ and object”. The dictionary goes on to state “*āyatana* cannot be rendered by a single English word to cover both sense-organs ... and sense objects”. Other meanings of *āyatana* given in the *Pali-English Dictionary* are: “stretch, extent, reach, compass, region; sphere, locus, place, spot; position, occasion ... relation, order.” It also means “exertion, doing, working, practice,
performance”, as mentioned above. If one considers āyatana in perhaps its most crucial context, that of the patteccasamutpāda formula, it is unlikely that it refers to the sense organs themselves. Though the definition of saḷāyatana in the Nīdāna Samyutta is given in terms of cakkhu, sota, ghāna, jīvā, kāya and manas, it seems improbable that the physical sense organs would warrant their own stage in the description of the arising of an individual human being when no other physical organs are mentioned in the formula. Nāmarūpa, which precedes saḷāyatana in the common twelvefold version of the formula, is discussed in chapter vi. I suggest there that it does not mean ‘mind and body’ as commonly supposed, but that it means the ‘name and form’ of the individual in an abstract sense, according to which the psychological and eventually (at birth) the physical faculties of the individual develop. The saḷāyatana precede birth by several stages in the formula and thus represent part of the development of the psychological faculties of the individual: in this context it is virtually inconceivable that it is the physical sense organs in a literal sense that are being referred to. Rather, the context suggests that what is meant is the sphere or extent of vision, hearing, taste, and so on, the locus (in a non-physical sense) of the senses, which establishes the foundation (again in a non-physical sense) of the psychological life of the individual. Sphere, extent and locus are all meanings of āyatana. The ‘external’ āyatanas correspond to the ‘internal’ āyatanas because the interaction between the individual and the objective world is the ‘occasion’ when the spheres of vision, hearing, etc., are associated with their corresponding objects; it is the relation between, or the relating of, the internal and external aspects of the sensory event. Thus in the commentary to the Dīgha Nikāya, Buddhaghosa (to whom the commentary is attributed) defines āyatana as samosaraṇa, coming together or meeting. The Pali English Dictionary definition of āyatana, when it refers to the senses and their objects, would do better to confine itself to “sphere of perception or sense in general” and omit “sense-organ and object”, and there need be no concern with the lack of a single English word for both sense organs and sense objects.

The terms indriya and dhātu support such an interpretation of āyatana. Indriya means ‘power’ or ‘faculty’ in the sense of controlling principle or directive force. In connection with the senses, it thus means the power or potential of the individual to have sensory experience: cakkhindaṇya, for example, means the personal potentiality for seeing. Other indriyas mentioned in the Sutta Pitaka, which in the Abhidhamma came to be systematised with many others, include, for example, pleasure and pain, joy and grief, and equanimity, none of which is physical but which refer respectively to the personal potentiality for pleasure and pain, joy, grief and equanimity. Dhātu literally means ‘element’, and is often associated with the four elements which define rūpa, the mahābhūta. Another of its meanings is ‘phenomenon’ similar to the meaning of dhamma in some contexts. We
have seen above, however, that the four mahābhūtā can also have the abstract meanings of extension, fluidity, heat and motion. In the same way, the meaning of dhātu can be abstract. In the Dhātu Samyutta, where it is associated with the senses, we also find it used in connection with abstract characteristics such as radiance and beauty, and ignorance.

From all these meanings of āyatana, indriya and dhātu, as well as from the position of āyatana in the paṭiccasamuppāda formula, one might suggest that what is referred to by the terms cakkhu, sota, ghāna and so on is not primarily the sense organs eye, ear, nose, etc., but that the terms are to be interpreted figuratively as the faculties of vision, hearing, smell and so on. In English the word ‘vision’ has a quite different meaning from that of the word ‘eye’. The latter only means the physical organ (unless it is being used as a verb, which would have a different context). The former involves the physical organ, but means more than that: it means the ability to see, or sight itself. Each sense faculty is a sphere or locus (in an abstract sense) for a potentiality: the potential to see or hear. What is particularly interesting about this interpretation of the senses is how it relates to their objects. Though the sense objects are not necessarily part of the human being, they too can be thought of as representing the potentiality for a sensory event. A sound is a sound whether anyone hears it or not, but it is also potentially part of an auditory experience for a human being. Thus the sense objects can also be referred to as āyatana, indriya and dhātu.

A figurative interpretation of the senses is also suggested by a metaphor associated with them in the Sutta Pitaka, which is later picked up and used more frequently (and again systematically) by the Abhidhamma and commentarial traditions. In the Sutta Pitaka we find several references to the senses as ‘doors’ or ‘gates’ (dvāra) which need to be guarded. Such a metaphor suggests that they are both physical organs and openings at the same time. The description of the senses as ‘guarded’ or ‘unguarded’ gives the same metaphor a qualitative colouring, even where the word dvāra is not mentioned. This metaphor is doubly appropriate to what we have been discussing here. On the one hand, it implies that there is an abstract meaning to the senses which goes beyond the physical sense organs. On the other hand, it indicates that the senses are a ‘way in’ or ‘entrance’, and in this sense they are of fundamental importance in the psychological processes of the human being. That they have to be guarded suggests that what one experiences through the senses can be interpreted or reacted to in a way which can be detrimental to one’s progress on the path to liberation. This is explained in the Sāmaññaphala Sutta, where the Buddha tells King Ajātasattu how a bhikkhu guards the doors which correspond to his senses. When the bhikkhu sees a visible object with his visual faculty, the Buddha states, he is not entranced with views about its various characteristics. He is intent on restraining those things which give rise to unwholesomeness, evil, covetousness or dejection which flow over him for as long as he lives with
his sense of sight unrestrained; he guards the visual sense, and attains restraint over it.\textsuperscript{92}

The notion that the senses are doors which need guarding has to be understood in the context of the whole of the cognitive process or psychological life of the individual. It is significant that in the passage quoted in the last paragraph the bhikkhu is said not to be entranced with views about what he sees. It is not that the visual faculty itself has to see differently. As we shall see below in chapters \textbf{II} and \textbf{IV}, it is the involvement of the \textit{samkhārakkhandha} in the cognitive process that gives rise to unwholesomeness, evil, covetousness or dejection. Though it is from the senses that feelings arise, and such feelings can in themselves be agreeable, disagreeable or neutral, the arising of any unwholesomeness (in its broadest sense, which means anything that is binding) is associated with volitions directed towards the feelings by the \textit{samkhārakkhandha}. What has to be guarded is in fact one's reaction to what one experiences by means of the senses. It is precisely this that constitutes the struggle on the path to liberation: and just as it is not the fault of a door or an opening that an enemy enters and has to be fought inside the building, so it is not the fault of the senses themselves that one reacts unwholesomely to one's sensory experience. Both an arahant and a puthujjana might see exactly the same potentially desirable object; it is their reaction to that sight that is different. Illustrating its connection with the \textit{samkhāras}, in the \textit{Jātaka} the door imagery is associated with the ethical triad of thought, word, and deed (in the Pali this is \textit{kāya, vacī, manas}).\textsuperscript{93} Body, speech and mind are said to be the three doors which are to be guarded so that no evil is done in act, word or thought.\textsuperscript{94}

Another metaphor associated with the senses in the \textit{Sutta Pīṭaka} confirms that it is not the senses themselves that give rise to binding volitions which have to be guarded against. This metaphor is of an empty village. We read in the \textit{Saḷāyatana Sānyutta} that 'empty village' is a name for the six personal, or internal, senses.\textsuperscript{95} The emptiness of the village, that it is unoccupied, implies that it is not to be thought of in terms of an abiding self. It also implies that it is the locus of activity which is generated by something other than the physical infrastructure of the village itself. In the same passage we read that the corresponding external objects are referred to as 'village plunderers'.\textsuperscript{96} This is because shapes, sounds, odours, tastes etc. are what we find entrancing. When the sphere of such an object comes into the sphere of the corresponding sense, our reaction might be to become entranced by it: to have ‘views about its various characteristics’ (to refer back to the \textit{Sāmaññañaphala Sutta}).

It is obvious that the physical sense organs themselves, being part of the body of the human being, are part of the \textit{rūpakkhandha} whether they are singled out for mention in a classification or not. Indeed the major part of what is contained in the later texts about the senses concentrates on describing the physical sense organs in minute and extensive detail and
classifies them clearly as rūpa. But from the foregoing it also seems likely that in contexts where the senses are referred to in the Sutta Pitaka, the terms cakkhu, sota, ghāna and so on are to be understood figuratively as the potential for vision, hearing, smelling and so on, rather than being merely the physical sense organs. This accords with contrasting references in later texts to the āyatana being invisible, as mentioned above, thus implying the importance of their function and not their (visible) physicality. So the question remains whether the senses as āyatana should also be considered part of the rūpakkhandha. We have seen above that comprehensive descriptions of the rūpakkhandha are not restricted to physical organs. Indeed, we saw that the khandha includes processes such as breathing and movement.

In the Atthasālisti, however, one passage suggests why classifying the senses as rūpa may not be as straightforward as with some other processes. We read:

The physical eye does not see because it is not conscious. Nor does consciousness see, because it is not an eye. But, when an object comes together with a sense door, one sees with one’s consciousness together with the sense organ as the physical base.

Though the descriptions of the rūpakkhandha refer to a live body, the relevant non-corporeal processes which life involves (such as breathing and temperature) do not specifically involve consciousness in the same way as a sensory experience does, according to the Atthasālisti: one does not have to be conscious of breathing or temperature regulation in order for them to function. Nor can consciousness be said to be part of the rūpakkhandha. What is suggested by the fact that in order to function there has to be the coming together of sense organ and consciousness, is that vision, hearing and so on are potential processes, bringing us back to the meaning we arrived at above in discussing the terms āyatana, indriya and dhātu. As such it would be inappropriate to attempt to classify them in terms of rūpa or arūpa: just as phassa (which is discussed in chapter II) is not classified in such terms, so the senses should remain unclassified, as they do in the Sutta Pitaka.

Supporting this conclusion, and in striking contrast with the quantity of material on the physical characteristics of the sense organs, in the Atthasālisti there is also to be found one short paragraph which gives what I have referred to above as a ‘theory of sense’. The theory is incomplete in that it does not make any mention of manas and dhamma. But this is probably because the theory is (oddly) included in the passage which discusses upādā rūpa, and manas and dhamma are not so defined. Maung Tin’s translation of the passage states:

For the eye has the characteristic of sentience for phenomena worthy of directly impinging on the object, or of sentience sprung from action caused
by a desire to see the object. It has the function of drawing consciousness towards the objects; it has the localizing of visual cognition as its manifestation; it has the being produced by action caused by a desire to see as proximate cause. The ear has the characteristic of sentience for phenomena worthy of directly impinging on sounds, or of sentience sprung from action caused by a desire to hear sounds; it has the function of drawing consciousness towards sounds; it has the localizing of auditory cognition as its manifestation; and it has a proximate cause as above. The nose and the tongue (or smell and taste), and lastly the body or tactile sense may be analogously defined.\textsuperscript{100}

There is a clear indication in this paragraph of cakkhu and sota (and so on) as potentialities. First is the use of the term \textit{pasāda}, which Maung Tin translates as 'sentience'. Earlier in the same chapter, the \textit{Aṭṭhasālinī} states that though the sense organs are corporeal (\textit{mamsa}), they comprise two aspects, \textit{pasāda} and \textit{sasambhāra}.\textsuperscript{101} Sasambhāra means merely that it is a compound of physical parts. \textit{Pasāda} literally means clearness or brightness, but in this context means something like 'sensitive surface'.\textsuperscript{102} The introduction of the concept of \textit{pasāda} clearly indicates that the eye is psychophysical. And we have an indication of how the physical sense organs (eyes) contribute to vision: they provide the physical sensitive surface on which objects might impinge. Second, desire to see is instrumental in as it were activating the sentience. Again the potentiality of vision is indicated: mere possession of a physical eye does not constitute seeing. Third, this passage confirms that vision is a conscious process.

An analogy to bring these things together and illustrate that sense is an epiphenomenon of all of them can be suggested in terms of music. The musical instrument represents the physical sense organ. On the one hand the instrument is comprised of minute physical parts, \textit{sasambhāra}, and on the other hand it is also a sensitive surface, \textit{pasāda}. The hands of a player represent the sense object. Neither of these (the instrument and the hands) constitutes music. Just as sense objects are āyatanas by virtue of representing the potential for an individual's seeing or hearing (and so on) but they are not limited to being part of such sensory processes, so the player's hands are not limited to being part of the creating of music. For there to be music, the musical instrument and the hands of a player have to be combined with conscious intention, or 'action caused by a desire to create music', to echo Maung Tin's translation above. On the one hand the musical instrument and the hands of the player are musical instrument \textit{qua} musical instrument and hands \textit{qua} hands respectively. On the other hand, they are potentialities for music. In the same way the physical sense organs and their corresponding objects are literally those things and also potentialities for the relevant senses, the āyatanas. Neither the musical instrument nor the hands of the player would be classified as music; and
music would not be defined as physical merely because the instrument and the hands are physical. In the same way, neither the physical sense organs nor their corresponding objects are the senses, and the senses are not definable as physical.

In the text, cakkhu, the eye, is also referred to figuratively in that there is said to be an ‘eye of wisdom’ (paññācakkhu) which is of five kinds: the eye of awakening, the all-seeing eye, the eye of knowledge, the divine eye and the eye of dhamma. This treatment of cakkhu is no doubt because of the role of insight in the path of liberation in Buddhism: such insight can be described in terms of seeing. But paññācakkhu refers to a qualitatively different kind of seeing which is more akin to cognition than to the level of the senses. Paññā is discussed in chapter v.

In sum, then, there is nothing in the Sutta Piṭaka to suggest that the āyatanas are classified as part of the rūpakkhandha, and no direct evidence of a theory of sense. Though the Abhidhamma and other later Pali material define upādā rūpa in terms of the āyatanas, it seems clear that if one considers the evidence as a whole, one can come to an understanding of the senses as neither rūpa nor arūpa. They are, rather, potentialities which determine the nature of each of the types of an individual’s psychological processes. In order to be effected, the potentialities make use of a physical sense organ and also involve consciousness. So, one can metaphorically understand them as doors through which the individual subjectively interacts with the objective world.

**Manas and dhammā: the sixth sense and its object**

I have been arguing that the senses are not limited to the physical sense organs, and that even the external sense objects have a potentiality for sensory experience by a human being as well as their objectivity. In five cases out of six the corresponding physical location of the senses is nevertheless obvious to us, and such physical sense organs are part of the body of the human being, part of the rūpakkhandha. In five cases out of six it is also obvious to us what is meant by their corresponding external sense object. But the physical location of manas, the sixth sense, is never mentioned in the Sutta Piṭaka and neither the function of manas nor the identity of dhammā is clearly defined. I will first discuss the question of the physical location of manas in the light of the later Pali material. I will then go on to suggest that from references to manas in the Sutta Piṭaka, one can extract an understanding of its function, and the identity of dhammā. Again, reference to the way it is understood in the later material helps to clarify such an understanding.

According to Buddhist tradition, the physical basis of the mental faculties is the heart (hadayavatthu), and in Indian religion as a whole the Sanskrit
The word for ‘heart’ (ḥṛdaya) is often used to refer to cognitive acts, rather than just to an affective centre. But in spite of the fact that its literal meaning is ‘mind’, nowhere in the Pali canon, not even in the Abhidhamma Pitaka, do we read that the heart is the physical base of manas. There is one oblique reference in the Abhidhamma to hadaya being synonymous with manas in a passage which is defining citta, but in the context it does not have the specific meaning of hadayavatthu. One might in any case expect the Abhidhamma not to state that the heart (or anything else) is the physical location of manas since we have seen that manas is specifically defined in the Abhidhamma as arūpa. There is, however, an apparent inconsistency on this point, and in one passage there is the suggestion that manas does have a physical base. The somewhat obscure Pali is translated by Aung as follows:

That material thing on the basis of which apprehension and comprehension take place — that thing is related to both of them, as well as to their concomitants by way of the relation of Base.

The grammatical structure yam rūpam... tam rūpam could not be less informative about the location of the physical base for manas. Not until the commentaries do we find the term hadayavatthu being used, and it is identified as the location of manas by Buddhaghosa in his Visuddhimagga. And Buddhaghosa accordingly includes hadayavatthu (amongst the other āyatana) in his analysis of upādā rūpa.

Aung suggests that the omission of the term hadayavatthu from the canonical material is not accidental, proving simply that the compilers of the early material and founders of the Abhidhamma doctrine did not believe the heart to be the location of manas. Manas is a sense, and as such it might not have been considered by the Abhidhamma tradition to have had sufficient cognitive function to be identified with the common pan-Indian understanding that hadayavatthu is the seat of the cognitive faculties. It is significant in this respect that in the Sutta Pitaka it is citta and not manas that is associated with the heart, both explicitly and implicitly.

Two writers within the (modern) Theravāda tradition assume the brain to be the physical location of manas. Ēṇanavīra Thera refers to a passage in the Sālāyatanam Samyutta which states that the senses are that by which, in the world, one is a perceiver and concever of the world. Ēṇanavīra takes this passage as substantialistic (though it need not be taken in such a way) and states that just as the eye is a physical thing, so manas is the “mass of grey matter contained in my head”. Jayasuriya, writing about the psychology of the Abhidhamma, states that the “Heart or Mind-base element... [is] in the brain”. It is notable that in passages in the Sutta Pitaka which refer to the sense organs in general, and manas in particular, the brain is never mentioned. And in only two occurrences of the standard list of parts of the body (discussed above) is the brain (matthalungā) mentioned. Both are in books in the Khuddaka Nikāya: the Paṭisambhidāmagga, and the
The list is identical to the standard list of thirty-one parts found elsewhere in the *Sutta Piṭaka* save for the fact that it includes the brain (*matthalunga*) as the thirty-second part. The commentary does not acknowledge how unusual it is in including the brain, and no explanation for its inclusion here, or its exclusion elsewhere, is given. The *Khuddaka Nikāya* is comprised of a variety of books, some of which are considered to be considerably later than other parts of the *Sutta Piṭaka*. It is possible, therefore, that these two passages are late, and that *matthalunga* might have been added to the extant standard list as a part of the body which had become more widely known about. Alternatively, this list might have been one which circulated among different people from those who recorded the list which survives in other places in the *Sutta Piṭaka*.

The brain is also mentioned both in the *Vinaya* and in the *Sutta Nipāta*. The context in which it is found in the *Vinaya* is a discussion of a brain-destroying disease from which a householder is suffering. No other parts of the body are mentioned, and the passage does not offer an analysis of the body. The *Sutta Nipāta* passage, on the other hand, is more comprehensive:

> Joined together with bones and sinews, having a plastering of skin and flesh, covered with hide, the body is not seen as it really is – full of intestines, full of stomach, (full) of the lump of the liver, of bladder, of heart, of lungs, of kidneys and of spleen, of mucus, of saliva, of sweat, and of lymph, of blood, of synovial fluid, of bile, and of fat... and its hollow head is filled with brain.

Many of the parts mentioned are also included in the standard list. Probably because the *Sutta Nipāta* is in verse rather than prose, the order of those parts that are common to both is different; and several of the standard parts are omitted in the *Sutta Nipāta* passage. It is acknowledged by scholars that much but not all of the *Sutta Nipāta* is very early. The inclusion of *matthalunga* here may be an indication that this particular passage is late. But it may only be that the brain was not an organ which was known to those early Buddhists who were concerned to give an analysis of the body, whether for classification or for meditational purposes. Certainly, there is no suggestion in the canonical material, early or late, that it is *manas* or the physical base of *manas*.

There are three possibilities concerning the location of *manas*. First, we have seen above that in the *Sutta Piṭaka* the senses are not explicitly stated to be *upādā rūpa*. I have suggested that this might be because they principally represent the potential processes of seeing, hearing and so on. Their corresponding physical organs might have been excluded from the classification partly because they are readily identified (in all but one case) and partly because the physical organs as such, though necessary, are of minor significance in the psychological implications of seeing. If the terms used to list the first five senses (*cakkhu*, *sota*, *ghāna*, *jīvha* and *kāya*) are actually
intended to mean the psychological elements of vision, hearing, smell, taste and touch rather than the physical organs of eye, ear, nose, tongue and body, then in the Sutta Pitaka those senses are not explicitly located: we know their locations because they are familiar to us. One is at a loss to locate manas only because its location is not obvious to us any more than it was obvious to the writers of the Abhidhamma.

Second, it is possible that though manas is part of the rūpakkhandha, it has no gross physical organ. We find in the Dhātukathā, another book in the Abhidhamma Pitaka, a classification of rūpa which includes an analysis of it according to whether it is subtle or gross. This would account for the non-corporeal aspects of the rūpakkhandha we have already discussed, and might explain the elusiveness of manas in being physically located. Third, from the evidence (or lack of it) in the Sutta Pitaka, it remains a possibility that manas has no corresponding physical organ, whether gross or subtle. This might be another reason why the six senses as a whole are not classified within the rūpakkhandha in the Sutta Pitaka. And it is clearly the implicit understanding in sections of the Abhidhamma where manas is omitted from descriptions of upādā rūpa.

There is insufficient evidence in the Sutta Pitaka, or in the Abhidhamma, for us to know which of these three is correct. Nor do our general knowledge and observation help. We may know from observation, for example, that even if references to the senses in the texts are to be understood figuratively as referring to psychological processes rather than physical organs, a corpse will nevertheless still have the physical organs eye, ear, nose, tongue and body. But we do not know whether it also has a manas.

I turn now to the function of manas and the identity of its object, dhamma. Manas is one of the most ambiguous and confusing terms in Pali material. Western scholars and those working within the Theravāda Buddhist tradition usually translate it literally, as ‘mind’. Given that manas is an āyatana, however, such a translation is perhaps questionable, since the word ‘mind’ tends to suggest that it undertakes processes that would be classified in one of the arūpakkhandhas. Though there have been some twentieth century Western philosophers (notably Wittgenstein and Ryle) for whom ‘mental’ processes such as thinking are not incorporeal processes, most Westerners are still very much influenced by the Cartesian dualism between mind and body, whereby thinking is a non-corporeal process. And in the Buddhist analysis of the person into khandhas, thinking is definitely not a process which is associated with any of the elements by which the body is characterised. The extent to which the Buddhist tradition’s understanding of the sense manas attributes cognitive processes to it is no clearer than whether or not it has a physical location. The lack of clarity in this respect may well be because cognitive, thinking processes are clearly stated to be the function of certain mental faculties, as we shall see. The ambiguity of the situation is exacerbated by the fact that the term manas is
also frequently used in the Nīkāyas in a generic sense (as opposed to the specific sense of manas as sense organ) in contexts where it does have a mental, cognitive meaning. And etymologically the word comes from the same root as the verb maṇṇati, to think. Ascertaining in what sense manas is being used requires consideration of the contexts in which it is found, some of which are more ambiguous than others. In many passages it is contextually clear that it is as a generic term for the mind in its cognitive capacity that manas is being used. In a well-known passage, for example, it is used in sequence with citta and viññāṇa, which are definitely associated with cognitive activities. Here the term manas clearly does not refer to the sense. Elsewhere, in contexts which one might loosely call ‘formulaic’, the formula appears sometimes with manas and sometimes with citta or cetas, which again are definitely mental or cognitive terms. Such contexts are discussed further in chapter v.

Ambiguity about the meaning of manas is compounded because the Abhidhamma tradition systematised the term, using various suffixes to give it different technical meanings in different contexts. Though these later technical usages of manas are occasionally mentioned in this chapter, their later technical meanings are far from obvious in the Sutta Piṭaka, the material with which I am primarily concerned. And the ambiguity is yet further exacerbated by the fact that dhamma, the object corresponding to manas, also has a multiplicity of meanings. When manas is translated as ‘mind’, dhamma tends to be translated accordingly as ‘thoughts’, ‘ideas’, ‘mental images’. Yet the term can refer to phenomena of any kind as well as to teachings and doctrines. In order to distinguish manas as sense from manas as ‘mind’ in general I will henceforth call the sense manodhātu. In the Abhidhamma, manodhātu has a technical meaning which distinguishes it from manāyatana and manoviññānadhātu. There, manāyatana is a collective term referring to the whole of consciousness, but it is not clear to me whether either manodhātu or manoviññānadhātu means manas as sense as discussed here. My use of the term manodhātu in a completely non-technical way just to refer to the sense is similar to its use in the Sutta Piṭaka in contexts where all the senses are referred to as dhātus.

As I have stated above, nowhere in the Pali material is the precise meaning or function of the sense manodhātu explicitly made clear. But from a consideration of the contexts in which it is found in the Sutta Piṭaka one can suggest that it is understood in two different ways, both of which have been adopted by the later Abhidhamma and commentarial traditions: as a unique quasi sense, and as an ‘ordinary’ sense.

The first meaning of manodhātu is suggested from passages in which it is referred to differently, as a unique sense rather than as the sixth in a series of senses each having a similar level of functioning. A passage in the Khandha Samyutta refers first to the first five senses and then to
The passage states that the first five senses (that is, not including manodhātu) manifest because of an erroneous belief in selfhood. The next sentence makes most sense if translated: “there are [also], bhikkhus, manas and dhammā, which are the basis for knowledge/ignorance.” The Sutta goes on to state that it is through contact with ignorance that various (false) views regarding selfhood arise in ordinary people, and a paraphrase of its conclusion, in order to draw out its meaning, might be:

It is in the holding of such views that one persists as an individual in samsāra, that is, one who has the five senses. In the well-taught advanced disciple ignorance comes to an end and insight arises, there are no more (false) views concerning selfhood.

A consideration of the main implication of this passage, though it is not precisely present in the Pali, serves to highlight the meaning of the passage itself. The implication is that for the advanced disciple who gains insight there will be no more persistence as an individual in samsāra; he or she will therefore no longer be reborn as someone with five senses, the manifestation of which is accompanied by the manifestation of a further so-called sense which is associated with the cognitive process. So the significance of the passage is that the arising of senses indicates that one is still ignorant and bound in the cycle of samsāra.

The use of avijñā (ignorance) in one reading of this passage can be explained because the cognitive process is that which takes place prior to liberating insight: it is samsāric cognition, which from the point of view of liberating insight is not vijñā but avijñā. Thus where vijñā means liberating insight, manodhātu is associated with ignorance rather than knowledge. Liberating insight is of a different nature, and according to this interpretation it does not involve manodhātu, even though the individual with the five senses is still manifest during the lifetime in which he or she achieves Enlightenment. On the other hand, the use of vijñā in connection with manodhātu can be explained because given that the eventual liberating insight is to a certain extent dependent on the gradual elimination of ignorance as the bhikkhu proceeds along the path, manodhātu might be associated with eventual knowledge: the samsāric perspective from which virtually everyone operates is that from which ignorance is gradually diminished and liberating knowledge is correspondingly built up, culminating in insight itself. And according to this interpretation, manodhātu may even be involved in such insight.

What this passage establishes, whichever variant one reads, is that manodhātu is different from the other senses. Since the context is concerned
with ignorance or knowledge, this difference might be because according to Buddhist teachings liberation comes about by means of the cognitive faculties of which manodhātu is in some way the sense. As such it is directly involved in the process of liberation in a way the other senses are not.

The way in which manodhātu functions as the sense which is associated with the cognitive faculties is suggested elsewhere. We read that manodhātu functions as a ‘collator’ (paṭisaraṇa) for the five mutually distinct senses (pañca indriyān) and experiences or realises the scope of their activity. As such it is directly involved in the process of liberation in a way the other senses are not. The way in which manodhātu functions as the sense which is associated with the cognitive faculties is suggested elsewhere. We read that manodhātu functions as a ‘collator’ (paṭisaraṇa) for the five mutually distinct senses (pañca indriyān) and experiences or realises the scope of their activity. Paṭisaraṇa, the word I have translated as ‘collator’, more literally means ‘refuge’, ‘shelter’ or ‘help’. I. B. Horner translates it as ‘repository’. In my opinion the context demands something more like ‘collator’, and, as we shall see when its function is explained in more detail, this is not incompatible with the more literal meanings: the other five senses are directed through it, as it were, and in acting as the collator of the data fed in by them it is both a repository for those data and also assists them in rendering those data comprehensible.

Mrs C. A. F. Rhys Davids discusses this passage in her Buddhist Psychology. She assigns to manodhātu the role of co-ordinator, and refers to it as the sensus communis, a description which has also been used by subsequent scholars. Mrs Rhys Davids was no doubt drawing on the meaning given to the ‘internal sense’ referred to as sensus communis by Thomas Aquinas. Accordingly, she suggests that manodhātu as sensus communis is the subjective correlative of dhammā, which it recognises as the objective mundus sensibilis. What this seems to me to mean is that manodhātu serves as a special filtering and collating ‘sense’ which is the subjective side in our relation to the objective world, all of which is referred to collectively as dhammā. Dhammā as counterpart to manodhātu is a pluralistic representation of the world, which has a certain inherent rationality, and manodhātu is the receiver of these phenomena in general (without any initial specification as to sound, visible objects, odour, and so on): and it is able to act as their collator, rendering them cognisable for the cognitive faculties. This is a necessary process since we receive data from different sensory objects simultaneously. The perception of a person, for example, might involve sight, hearing, smell and touch. The sense of sight, however, cannot itself distinguish colour from sound, odour and touch: we need something to synthesise all the sense impressions. So, Mrs Rhys Davids writes, through manodhātu as sensus communis, “we get a simulated unity and simultaneity of impressions, which are really single and successive, if exceedingly and most delicately swift”. Manodhātu can also be considered a sense in that it ‘senses’ the ‘sensibility’ of phenomena (dhammā). Rather than ‘ideas’, ‘mental objects’ and so on, dhammā according to this explanation of its meaning might therefore be translated as ‘sensory phenomena’, which covers the samsāric world in its entirety as experienced by us through our senses.
In accord with understanding dhammā as all sensory phenomena, Geiger, in his Pali Dhamma, interprets dhammā as the “empirical world”. In the light of this, a point needs to be clarified about the Khandha Samyutta passage first cited above in which the existence of manas and dhammā were referred to after the arising of the five senses. Woodward’s translation of this passage is that manas and dhammā are the result of the manifestation of the five senses. In my opinion this is not what the passage means. It refers to manas and dhammā separately because they have a unique role in the cognitive process as data collator and raw data respectively. The raw data, dhammā, may be the empirical world as experienced through our senses, but that is not to say that the empirical world itself arises because of sensory activity.

It is not uncommon in the Sutta Pitaka for the word dhammā to mean more than just sensory phenomena. In the tilakkhaṇa formula, for example (which is discussed in chapter iv), dhammā has the universal meaning of all phenomena of whatever nature. Such a meaning would obviously include more than Geiger’s ‘empirical world’. Another understanding of dhammā is that it refers to phenomena which are ‘knowable’, though as such one cannot either claim or deny their universality. Carter, for example, states that dhammā are phenomena that “can be grasped, known by the ‘mind-organ’ (manas) ... are themselves without substance but cooperate in a changing but orderly co-production in such a manner that they can be noted, thought out, and mastered, so to speak – internal psychic and external physical patterned processes, as ‘knowables’.”

I agree with Carter’s suggestion that dhammā as the object of manodhātu are knowable phenomena. But his statement needs, in my opinion, two qualifications. First, there is no evidence that the manodhātu has what we would call the mental faculties of grasping and knowing. In its capacity as sensus communis, it receives dhammā as incoming raw data at the preliminary stage of the cognitive process. Grasping and knowing both take place at subsequent stages of the cognitive process as functions of the various mental faculties. We saw above that in guarding the senses as doors, the bhikkhu must not be entranced. Though the Pali for this is na nimittaggāhi, which more literally means that he must not seize upon (any sensory experience), I mentioned there that such entrancement or seizing comes not from the sense but from the sankhārakkhandha. Even if one interprets Carter’s use of the word ‘grasps’ metaphorically, as indicating something like ‘pays attention to’ or ‘is conscious of’, by stating that it ‘knows’ he would still be attributing more to manodhātu than we are able to confirm from the texts.

Second, Carter’s description of dhammā as “internal psychic and external physical” phenomena is potentially ambiguous. The analysis of the āyatanaś is into the subjective senses and the objective sense objects: the āyatanaś as a whole represent the means whereby the individual as subject
interacts with the objective world. As such the former are internal or subjective to the individual and the latter, including *dhammā*, are external or objective to the individual. I have deliberately stated ‘external or objective’ and not ‘external’ alone because knowables may not strictly be external, even if they are objective. *Dhammā* as knowables would include phenomena such as teachings, doctrines, concepts, and so on. It also includes thoughts and ideas insofar as these are objectified: someone else’s thoughts and ideas, for example, or one’s own previous thoughts and ideas which have become objectified through the lapse of time. The subjective mental processes which arise immediately subsequent to one’s subjective interaction with the objective world, such as thinking and knowing, are not (yet) objectified and are thus not included in the term *dhammā* as the stream of incoming raw data: they are not the object but the content of the mind. So *dhammā* in the context of being the object of the *manodhātu* refers to all objective phenomena, and the sentence referred to above might have been clearer as ‘objective psychic and physical’ phenomena. Whether they are sensory or abstract, all such phenomena are filtered through or collated by the *manodhātu*, subsequent to which the cognitive processes function.

The fact that *manodhātu* also processes abstract or conceptual *dhammā*, as well as all other sensory *dhammā*, suggests its second role as that of an ‘ordinary’ sense: processing data which are specific to its nature, as it were. The abstract or conceptual *dhammā* are phenomena which are as specific to *manodhātu* as, say, sound is to the ear. So though all *dhammā* are processed by *manodhātu*, it also has this aspect to its function which one might consider to be a more ‘normal’ sensory function. I will return to this second understanding of *manodhātu* in the Sutta Piṭaka shortly.

The understanding of *dhammā* as objective phenomena in general rather than being limited to mere sensory phenomena is compatible with the use of *dhammā* in the *Satipatthāna Suttas*. In these Suttas the fourth *satipaṭṭhāna* is the contemplation of *dhammā*. This exercise is to be undertaken considering in turn the *nibbaṇas*, the *khandhas*, the *āyatanas*, the seven *bojjhāṅgas* and the four Noble Truths. The context suggests that it is the teachings on each of these things which are to be meditated upon; presumably why they were given, their significance, meaning, and so on. Here *dhammā* represents all phenomena which arise in the course of each meditation exercise, and the doctrinal concepts which form the objects of the meditation are as objective to the individual as are strictly external sensory phenomena.

Writing from within the Theravāda tradition, Nyanatiloka explains that the term *dhammā* refers to *nāmarūpa dhammā* “as presented to the investigating mind by mindfulness”. Though Nyanatiloka, following Buddhist tradition, interprets *nāmarūpa dhammā* as “bodily and mental phenomena”, we shall see in chapter vi that this is not necessarily an
appropriate interpretation of it: nāma is not the equivalent of arūpa, and therefore mental, dharmā. Rather, it is the equivalent of conceptual or abstract dharmā, which precisely fits with the conceptual or abstract (and objective) dharmā referred to in the last paragraph. Rūpadhammā refers to sensory phenomena. The nature and status of all dharmā later became the subject of extensive philosophical speculation within the Buddhist tradition as a whole, much of which is recorded in Vasubandhu’s Abhidharmakośa and its bhāṣya. But there is no such speculation in the Sutta Piṭaka: there, even the term nāmarūpa dharmā is not used, let alone defined.

We find manas in one other context which appears to confirm its unique role as what one might call a quasi sense and that it functions as collator of a wide range of incoming data. This is in a reference to the level of awareness achieved in the fourth jhāna. “What can be understood through manovināṇa when it is ‘purified’, that is when it is isolated from the five [other] senses?” The reply is that one can know that space is unending (ananto akāsa), that consciousness is unending (anantam viśiṣṭam) and one can know the sphere of no-thing (ākāśaniratana). These three represent consecutive jhāna levels of meditation, none of which is knowable through the senses.

Here the role of manodhitu appears to be similar to that meant by sensus communis as described above, in that it collates the incoming data as the first stage of the cognitive process, but those data are what one might call supra-sensory rather than simply abstract or non-sensory. In another description of the jhānas, what one knows at the fourth level is described differently:

...through completely transcending all apperceptions based on appearance, through the cessation of apperceptions which are sensory in origin, through not paying attention to apperceptions of multiformity.

Though in this passage the involvement of manodhitu is not explicitly stated, what one knows is clearly not from sensory data. Perhaps in line with this, the Vibhaṅga suggests that manas might function at even higher non-sensory levels when it states that both manas and dharmā are sometimes lokaśc (worldly) and sometimes lokuttara (supramundane).

I stated above that where dharmā refers to all phenomena whatsoever the term clearly referred to more than Geiger’s ‘empirical world’. We have now arrived at an understanding of dharmā when it is the object of manodhitu which includes sensory, non-sensory and supra-sensory phenomena. Whether or not this meaning of dharmā also represents more than Geiger’s ‘empirical world’, on the grounds that it includes phenomena which are not actually empirical, is open to debate. The non-sensory and supra-sensory phenomena may not be empirical in the Western materialistic meaning of the word, but it may be a valid word to use in Buddhism. Even at supra-sensory jhāna levels phenomena are part of
samsāric experience: in spite of terms such as ‘the sphere of no-thing’, such levels do not constitute liberating insight and are part of the samsāric cognitive process. They would not be psycho-cosmological ‘spheres’ if they were not. On the other hand, if dharmā applies at lokuttara levels it might include within it the unconditioned as well as conditioned phenomena, as it does in the tilakkhana formula (discussed in chapter IV). In view of the diversity of phenomena included within the term dharmā, it is perhaps unnecessarily ambiguous to define it as the empirical world when ‘knowables’ is more clearly an inclusive term.

An important implication of understanding manodhātu as sensus communis is that any and all sensory activity involves the activity of the manodhātu. If it is the coordinator and collator of all sensory input, then it is activated whenever any of the other five senses functions. In this respect it is unique among the senses; it functions, as already suggested, as a quasi sense. References in the canonical material to only five kāmaguṇā might be based on this assumption: though manodhātu would be involved in the process of the arising of visual, auditory, olfactory, gustatory and tactile pleasure it would not in itself be the basis for a specific type of pleasure in its own right.

But this assumption overlooks the ‘normal sense’ aspect of manodhātu, and it is this aspect alone which features in the second understanding of manodhātu that one can extract from the Sutta Pitaka, to which I now return. Even if manodhātu functions as a quasi sense which processes all incoming raw data, another part of its function is as the sense which processes abstract phenomena, as we have seen above. As such, one might think that pleasure could be associated with these abstract thoughts or ideas. This possibility is referred to in some passages which are otherwise problematic in the light of the analysis of manodhātu as sensus communis. Such passages only treat manodhātu as an ordinary sense, that is the sixth in the series of senses, and assume that it functions in the same way as the other senses in relating to its corresponding object. Though such passages confirm one role of manodhātu, however, they indicate that for the authors of such passages it is not understood as comprehensively as has been described above.

An example of this is in the description of the arising of feelings in the Madhupindikasutta, which was quoted from above. It gives exactly the same description for all six senses: visual, auditory, olfactory, gustatory, tactile and ‘mental’. Thus the sentence construction for the description of ‘mental feeling’ is the same as it is for visual feeling. No mention is made of the manodhātu being activated as collator for the other senses. Nor does the commentary on this passage suggest that manodhātu functions differently from the other senses: having described the arising of visual feeling, it states that the same process applies to auditory feeling and all the others. Similar passages about the arising of feelings are found elsewhere in the canon. Likewise, in many of the Suttas whose content is primarily
concerned with the senses, the description given of *manodhātu* is in precisely the same formula as that given for the other five senses.\(^{163}\)

Rahula, writing from within the Theravāda Buddhist tradition, also understands *manodhātu* in this way,\(^{164}\) as does Nāṇavira Thera.\(^{165}\) In such contexts *manodhātu* is translated as 'mind'. And as object corresponding to 'mind', dharmā is translated by words such as 'thoughts', 'ideas', 'mental images', 'mind states' or 'mental states'.\(^{166}\) Such translations are justified because in these contexts there is no indication that the object corresponding to *manodhātu* is any less specific than are the objects corresponding to the other five senses. And if *manas* literally means 'mind' then it is understandable that a translator, and indeed the Theravāda tradition, might assume its object to be something like thoughts, ideas, mental images and so on. Such translations confirm that here the function of *manodhātu* is not considered to be that of receiving *all* incoming data whether sensory or abstract. Rather, in these contexts the understanding of *manodhātu* seems to be limited to its being the sense which processes the abstract phenomena discussed above, while sensory data (*rūpadhamma*) are the province of the other five senses.

In this understanding of *manodhātu*, then, only one aspect of it is recognised: that it is the sense which corresponds to abstract 'mental' objects. It is not seen as the collator of all the incoming data from the other senses. As such it functions in the same way as the other senses in that contact with abstract objects – the thoughts of another, a teaching, one's own previous thoughts – can give rise to 'mental' feelings and so on. This less comprehensive understanding of *manodhātu* might have a prosaic origin. It is possible that the mnemonic style of many of the passages found in the Nikāyas resulted in a sixfold analysis being included in a manner which made it impossible to convey the unique function of *manodhātu* in handling both the abstract phenomena which are said to be the object of it as a sense, and the other sensory data which it collates as *paṭisaraṇa*. It could simply have been that because of an oversight the passages in question were arranged mnemonically at the expense of comprehensiveness.

It might also simply be that we do not understand the meaning of *manas* as a sense and thus are unable to interpret the relevant passages correctly. And the Theravāda tradition perpetuates but does not co-ordinate the two meanings, showing that it is itself unclear as to the meaning of *manodhātu*. We have seen above that in the commentaries no distinction between *manodhātu* and the other five senses is introduced when commenting on canonical passages which refer to *manodhātu* as the sixth in a series of senses, and that writers within the Theravāda tradition accept *manodhātu* as a sixth sense in this way. But elsewhere in the commentaries and the Theravāda tradition, *manodhātu* is interpreted as a collator for all sensory data (that is as *sensus communis* as already defined). We read in the Abhidhamma commentarial literature, for example, that the apperception of a visible object arises at the door which is the visual sense and also at the door which is *manodhātu*. The
same is the case with all the other senses." Similarly, Karunadasa, writing about the Buddhist analysis of matter according to the Abhidhamma and Pali commentarial material, states: "...all the rūpadhammas become the objects of manoviññāna". This does not mean that the objects of manodhātu are limited to rūpadhamma, but is confirming that the objects of the other five senses, collectively the rūpadhamma, are collated by manodhātu.

In spite of the unclear and/or conflicting evidence, one might suggest that the most satisfactory way of understanding manodhātu in the Sutta Piṭaka is that it has both a unique function as a collator of incoming data and also can be described in terms of the sixth in a series of senses in that it is the sense corresponding to ‘mental’ objects. The translation of manas and dhammā as ‘mind’ and ‘mental objects’, however, is potentially misleading, not least because of the ambiguity and insufficiency of such English words in this context: they are neither precise nor indicative of the complexities of the Pali terms. These translations might also imply too developed a cognitive role for these two āyatana. Though we have seen the crucial role of manodhātu as collator of all incoming data (dhamma), which is the raw material for the cognitive process, the fact remains that they are included in classifications of the senses, and not in the analysis of the individual in terms of the pañcakkhandha which gives such comprehensive attention to mental activities. And though it is this unique combination of being a sense and also functioning so crucially in all cognition that justifies calling it a quasi sense, this nevertheless does not make it (according to the analysis as given) part of the mental processes as such. What one can say is that just as the other five senses each act as the door between their particular kind of object and the subjective experience of the individual, so manodhātu (whether or not it has a corresponding physical organ, gross or subtle), as collator, acts as the door between the objective world in its entirety (whether it be rūpa or arūpa) and the cognitive experience of the individual. Sensus communis is a suitable name for it only insofar as such a name is not understood as limiting it to incoming sensory data. The English word ‘sensitivity’ has connotations which go beyond the mere senses: it implies an intuitive dimension which perhaps corresponds to the role of the manodhātu at trans-sensory levels of experience. Overall, however, manodhātu can perhaps not be translated by any current English term.

The figurative understanding of the senses as doors suggests not just that they link the individual and the objective world but that they are also the link between the rūpakkhandha and the four arūpakkhandhas: not strictly the former nor the latter themselves, they nevertheless have their rūpa aspect (with the possible exception of manodhātu) and yet function as that by which all the activities of the arūpakkhandhas are sub-divided. That they are explicitly classified (if confusingly) in the Abhidhamma is perhaps unsurprising since the Abhidhamma is primarily concerned with classifying. The analysis of the human being into khandhas in the Sutta Piṭaka, on the other hand, is
not intended to be a comprehensive classification. It describes the *rūpa* and *ariippa* aspects of the way an individual manifests which, when understood, illustrates the inappropriateness of thinking in terms of separate selfhood: not only is this clearly the didactic context in which they are frequently referred to in the texts, but we have seen from our examination of just one of the *khandhas* a manifest absence of any attempt to be descriptively comprehensive. The senses themselves are not included in this analysis because what is relevant about them is neither *rūpa* nor *ariippa*. But their necessary role in the functioning of the human being is perhaps why they are included in the *paticcasamuppāda* formula.

**Notes**

1. SN, Vol III.
3. Wayman (1984, p.619) discusses the use of the pun on *nimā* by Vasubandhu, Saghabhadra and Asaliga. Namana literally means 'bending', and the point is that the four *ariippakkhandhas* (collectively taken to mean *nimā*, though this assumption is discussed in chapter vi) "go towards objects (artha) as though naming them, thus 'bending' toward them ... [and] because when the body disintegrates, these aggregates, so to say, bend toward another existence".
4. For example, MA.I.221; Vism p.528.
5. KS.I.73, n.1.
7. KS.II.73, n.1. Karunadasa (1967, p.98) discusses the use of *ruppi*.
8. For example, SN.III.59: *Katamafica bhikkhave rūpaṃ? Cattāro ca mahābhūtān ca mahābhūtānam upādāya rūpaṃ idam vuccati bhihkhave rūpaṃ.*
9. For example, MN.I.423, III.241. In the Abhidhamma, *akāsadhatū* is considered to be part of the category of *upādā* (secondary 'or derived') *rūpa* (for example, Dhs 638). As we shall see, *upādā rūpa* is systematised and classified in the Abhidhamma in a way which is completely absent from the four main *Nikāyas* of the Sutta Pitaka.
10. MN.I.185ff, 421ff, III.24off: *Pāṭhāvīdhātū [āpo-, tejo-, tāyu-] sīya ajjhattikā sīya bāhītra.* I mentioned in the Introduction the convention where ajjhattam and bahītra are used to make a distinction between oneself and others. Here, this convention is not being used (save in the sense that what is external to oneself includes other people). In the *Patisambhādāma* of the Khuddaka Nikāya, there is a classification of what is 'internal' (ajjhatta) and 'external' (bahītra). Among other characteristics, they are defined as being 'produced by craving' (tattvānabhādā), suggesting they are *upādā* (see the discussion below). The senses and sense objects are the factors classified, but they are not specifically stated to be *rūpa* (Paśi I.76–78).
12. Udāna VIII.1: *Attā bhihkhave tad āyatanam, yattha n'eva pāthavī na āpo na tejo na vēyo ...* Pande (1983, p. 71f) discusses the lateness of the prose sections of the *Udāna* as, in effect, commenting on the earlier verses it contains. Our quotation is part of a prose section, maybe indicating that the question of the conditioned nature of the *cattāro mahābhūtā* needed to be clarified. The passage need not (and, in my opinion, should not) be interpreted ontologically: the four elements are a feature of *samātic* perception, not of 'seeing things as they really are' (Nirvana). Nor does the term *āyatanā*, often translated as 'sphere', necessarily have spacial implications: we shall see in the next section of this chapter that when used in connection with the senses it has no spacial meaning. In the context quoted here, 'condition' is meant in the sense of 'state', with no causative connotations.
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13. cf. Dhs 877-80, where it states that some no-upādā rūpa does not result from karma. In chapter IV, we shall see that it is intention that conditions all five of the khandhas in future lives, including the body.


15. SA.III.276.

16. Dhs 594: Cakkhāyatanam, sālayatanam, ghāṇyatanam, jīvāyatanam, kāyāyatanam; rūpāyatanam, saddāyatanam, gandhāyatanam, riṣyāyatanam, phoṣṭhabbāyatanam.

17. Vibhaṅga p.70ff: Catunama mahābhātānān upādiyā.


19. Dhs 596. cf. also Nyāgātiloka, 1957, p.23. Karunadasa (1967, p.31) states that derived rūpa is not defined until the commentaries, overlooking the extensive Abhidhamma explanations.

20. Vism p.444. Buddhaghosa makes one exception from the āyatanas, tangible data (phoṣṭhabbāyatanam). Nānāmoli, in his translation of the Visuddhimagga (1964, p.489, n.13), points out that in the Paramattha-maṇḍūka, the Visuddhimagga Commentary, it is explained that the exception is because tangibles are included in primary rūpa.


22. For example, in the paticcasaṃuppāda formula, the Čechakkaṇāsa (MN.III.28ff), the Mahāsaṃyātanasthāna (MN.III.287ff) and the Sālayatana Vagga (SN, Vol. IV).

23. SN.II.3, cf. fel. freq.

24. For example, the Čechakkaṇāsa and the Sālayatana Vagga.

25. For example, Vibhaṅga 70ff.


27. Dhs 743 (I take it that this is referring back to Dhs 596).

28. Dhs 1045. cf. also Dhs 1208, 1418.

29. Dhs 744.

30. The use of the term anīdassa with regard to the āyatanas at Vibhaṅga 70ff does not mean that the physical sense organs are not indicated, but that one cannot, in seeing the sense organs, actually see any more than their material constituents: it is their function as senses that is not visible. cf. Dhs 887-90.

31. For example, SN.III.46, V.205; MN.I.180. Sometimes (for example at SN.III.46, V.205) these are fivefold, excluding manas, but at MN.I.180 manas is referred to as manindriyam.

32. For example, in the Dhitu Somyutta, SN.II.140ff. The Abhidhamma systematises the āyatanas, indriyas and dhārās, and the senses are included in all three classifications. cf. Nyāgātiloka, 1957, pp.27ff. These terms are discussed further in part 2 of this chapter.

33. Sn 170: Kataman taṃ upādānaṃ yathā loka vihārita击 hita ... pani kāmagnā loka manovacchathā paṇeṣāva.

34. For example, at SN.III.58f.

35. SN.III.47.


37. MN.I.85f, 421ff, III.24ff.

38. MN.I.89.


40. Kataman c’ātuso ajjhattikā paphādhipatu? Yān ajjhattam paccattān āpe āpegatam upādiyam; seyyadham pitam samaham sambhavo līlātanam sēd mēho assa vasa khe sabhāthagā ledikā mutakā, yam va pariṇāmaṃ pi kāci ajjhattam paccattān āpe āpegatam upādiyam, ayaṃ vuccati c’ātuso ajjhattikā paphādhipatu.

41. Kataman ca ajjhattikā tejohipatu? Yān ajjhattam paccattān te tejohipatam upādiyam seyyadham yena ca santappathi yena ca jīrṇarī yena ca pariṇāyhati yena ca arāṭṭhakāyaśiṣṣiyāram samma pariṇāmaṃ gacchati, yam va pariṇāmaṃ pi kāci ajjhattam paccattān te tejohipatam upādiyam, ayaṃ vuccati ajjhattikā tejohipatu.

42. I. B. Horner (trans.), MLS.I.4, n.9.

43. MN.I.296: Yuddha kho ātuso imas saṃyāya saṃyo dharmā jihantā; aṣa usmay ca viñāṇam, aṭṭhaṃ kāye ajjhatto avakkhito seti yathā kaṭṭham aceton ti. cf. also SN.III.143; DN.II.335.

44. MN.I.295.

45. MN.I.296.

46. Ayamabhātā: the context implies that all three factors are included in the plural (MN.I.295).

49. CATAMAM CA AYUTHATIKA VAYODHATU? YAM AYJHIATAM PACCAATTAM VAYO VAYOGATAN UPADIPAM; SEYAYITHADAM UDDHANGAMATHA DAD ADHAMAGAM VATA KUCHHASAYA VATA KOHYASAYA VATA ANGAMANGUNUSARINATO VATA ASAJO PASAO, YAM T'A PAN AAYITHAM PI KIITI AYJHIATAM PACCAATTAM VAYO VAYOGATAN UPADIPAM: AYAM VUCCATI AYJHIATIKA VAYODHATU.


51. The later Mt. Up. 2.6 describes the respective function of each breath in detail.

52. cf, for example, Br. Up. 3.9-9, 4.1-3, 5.13-2, 6.1-1; Ch. Up. 3.15-4, 5.1-1.

53. Vism 350.

54. SN.IV.230; AN.II.87, III.131, V.110.

55. Ps. II.6 and Pva. 94. cf. also Vibhanga 84.

56. Reat (1991, p.214ff) traces and discusses the fifteen vital, perceptual and volitional faculties (each of the three consists of five faculties) in the Upajjados.

57. MN.I.423; III.241: Katamam ca ayyuthitakakkasaddhathu? Yam ayyuthatam paccaattam akasam akkasagatan upadipan, seyyathadam karacchiddam nasacchiddam mukhadacchra, yena ca astaytuakhyatisayatam ayyoharatu, yatha ca astaytupakhyatisayitam santiyatif, yena ca astaytupakhyatisayitam adhoabhage nikkhamaati; yam t'a pan aayitham pi kiiit ayyuthatam paccaattam akasam akkasagatan upadipan: ayyam vuccati bikkhu ayyuthitakakkasaddhathu.

58. For example, MN.I.352; rupasasayaniikam samatikkama.

59. MN.I.57; AN.III.323, V.109; DN.II.293; SN.V.278.

60. For example at MN.I.57: Attih imassam kaye keri roman nakka dantac ca manam na kahana attih attihimithi kaham hadayaman yakanaman kilomakan phikham paayphsaman antam antagatam udatiyam karism puttam semham pubbo lohita medo medo vasa khele singhanakikassikak kuthan uttan.

61. The processes included vary, the Satipatthana Suttas (MN.I.57; DN.II.293) being the most comprehensive.

62. Puna ca param bikkhav dikkhiv imam eva kayam yathathata yathapanikkhatam dikkhav paccekkhathati: attih imassam kaye patthavdhathu apodhathu tejadhathu vayodhathi.

63. We shall see in chapter iv that there are exceptions to this. But such exceptions take place at such an advanced stage on the meditative/soteriological path that they do not compromise the importance of the senses in the cognitive process.

64. St. DN.I.545; MN.I.266; AN.III.411; SN.IV.225: at these references the kamaguna are listed. There are other references to the term paticca kamaguna which do not explicitly state what they are, for example AN.III.411; DN.II.271, III.131, 234. cf. Reat, 1990, p.227ff on the five classical sense faculties in the Upajjados.

65. Dhs 594ff.

66. Namaacch-group samayatanam.

67. MN.III.280ff.

68. MN.III.287ff.

69. SN, Vol. IV.

70. MN.III.239.

71. MN.I.180f, 266, 346.

72. SN.III.50ff.

73. Chayime vedanakayya: cakkhuamassaggaya vedanah, sotasamassaggaya vedanah, ghnasamassaggaya vedanah, jivhassamassaggaya vedanah, kayasamassaggaya vedanah, manosamassaggaya vedanah.

74. Chayime viappamakayya: cakkhuviappamakayya, sotaviappamakayya, ghnaviappamakayya, jivhaviappamakayya, kayaviappamakayya, manaviappamakayya.

75. So for the sahakkhandha we read: chayime sahakkayya: rupasahah, saddasahah, ghnasahah, rasasahah, phothebhasahah, dhammasahah, and the samkhurakkhandha is described in the same way except that cetan is substituted for sahah in the Pali.

76. For example, KS.III.52ff.

77. For example, SN.II.3: Katamaicca bhikkhae samayatanah? Cakkhayaatanam sahayaatanam ghnayaatanam jivayaatanam manayaatanam.

78. PED, p.105.

79. Ibid., quoting from Aung, 1963.

80. When it is found in contexts where the justus are being described it is usually translated 'sphere'.

The Rūpakkhandha
5.1.276: Saddhi, faith, in a psychology of 'confidence.'

This might read: comprised of) the four elements" (my translation).

Gethin suggested to me by Mr. Lance Cousins that bhatta here is likely to mean (and the form is the same for the other three senses).

Again, this triad is discussed in chapter iv.

For example, DN.I.69, 70, 250; SN.II.218, IV.103, 117, 194. In the Chândogya Upanishad (III.13), the heart is said to have five 'openings of the gods' (deva-upaţaya), corresponding to the five senses. They are the 'doorkeepers' of the 'world of heaven' (svarga y lokaya dwara).

The heart is said to have five 'openings of the gods' (svarga y lokaya dwara). cf. Radhakrishnan, 1953, p.390. cf. also Cousins, 1981, which discusses the way a 'sense-door process' is developed in the Abhidhamma.

In her translation of the Vibhanga, Mrs Rhys Davids suggests that āyatanañāna be included in this sentence (A Buddhist Manual of Psychology and Ethic, p.160, n.2).

The translation of bhikkhu as the "primary reference, this does not invalidate the point I am making.

In some contexts in the Sutta Piţaka, āsāda also means mental composure or serenity. Gethin (1992, p.112ff) discusses the close relationship, in such contexts, between āsāda and saddha, faith, in a psychology of 'confidence.'
119. PED gives extensive examples of both explicit and implicit associations of citta with the heart: pp.266ff. Citta is discussed further in chapter v.

120. SN.IV.95: Yena lokasmin lokasannī hoti lokamāni.


122. It is discussed further in chapter v.


124. Cf. Karunadasa, 1967, p.62f: possible reasons for the failure to identify the physical location of the manodhātu are discussed.

125. The editor of this passage notes that the suffixes dhamma and viññāna are post-canonical developments. An important proviso has to be added here. Because of the addition of the suffixes dhamma and viññāna in the commentarial tradition as a whole, precise comparisons between such terms and the manas of the Sutta Piṭaka are necessarily handicapped. Others have made detailed studies of the development of the terminologies (cf. for example, Cousins, 1981). My aim here is to draw out an overview in order to suggest a coherent general picture.

126. See note 109.


translator for the PTS, F.L. Woodward, considers the reading avijjādhātu more appropriate to the context and translates accordingly (KS.III.41, n.2).

135. *Acytyasamhassagena bhikkhave vedagilere phutthassa asutavalo pattisayjaneva asmiiti p'issa hoti, ayam
aham asmītī p'ssa heti, bhavassānti p'ssa heti, na bhavassānti p'ssa heti, rūpī bhavassānti p'ssa heti, arūpī bhavassānti p'ssa heti, saññī bhavassānti p'ssa heti, asāsī bhavassānti p'ssa heti, nesaasītātibhavassānti p'ssa heti.*

136. *Tittathāti kho paṇa bhikkhate tathēva pañciindriyāti. Ath'ettāta suvatavo ariyāsāvakkassa avijjā pahyati
vyā pāppati. Tassa avijjānāgā vyā pāppadat asmītī p'ssa na hoti, ayam ahām asmītī p'ssa na hoti, bhavassāntī
da nāvassāntī, rūpī, arūpī, saññī, asāsī, nesaasītātibhavassāntī p'ssa na hoti.*

137. MN.I.295; SN.Va.18: Pañcī tīnāni indriyāni nānāsāvāyāmi nānāsāvīrāni ... kim paṭisāramān, ko ca
naṃ sāvatthiyaṃ paṭcchabbhati ... Mano paṭisāraṇaṃ, mano ca naṃ sāvatthiyaṃ paṭcchabbhūti.

138. It is used in this more literal sense at, for example, MN.III.9 and MN.I.310.

139. MLS.I.355, Mrs Rhys Davids discusses the translation in the introduction to her translation of the *Dhammasaṅgati* (1974, p.lxxxvii).


142. cf. also PED, p.520.

143. Aquinas gives the 'internal sense' the further function of being that by which we know that we see a visible object rather than hear it; that we hear a sound rather than feel it, and so on.

Reat (1990, p.225f and p.243ff) discusses the meaning of *manas* in the *Upanisads*, where it has many meanings ranging from *sensus communis* right up to "the supreme faculty of the soul, capable of apprehending ultimate truth". Reat also discusses the role of *manas* in the pre-*Upanisadic Vedas* (p.107ff), where it is most commonly stated to be the locus of emotions or the repository of the individual's character traits. One such epithet is *nymanas*: 'hereminded'. Zaehner (1969, p.156) compares the Buddhist understanding of *manas* as *sensus communis* with *manas* in the Bhagavad Gītā, where it sometimes is the controller of the senses (3.7; 6.24) and sometimes has to be controlled (2.60, 6.7).

144. C. A. F Rhys Davids, 1914, p.70.

145. PED, p.520.

146. In the chapter which describes the evolutes of *prakṛti*, the *Sāṁkhyā Sūtras* state that *manas* is the principal (*pradhāna*) evolute "because it is the receptacle of all *sanskāras*": *Tathā *śeṣasāṃkhyādhetarūtāt* (Sāṁkhyā Sūtras, II.42).


148. KS.III.41.


150. DN.I.70.

151. In the *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* (III.2) nose, speech, tongue, eye, ear, mind, hands, and skin are said to be the eight 'graspers' (*grābhaḥ*; lit. 'grasping') (*Radhakrishnan* translates this as 'perceivers' - 1953, p.215). But it is their objects (*atigrahaḥ*) which do the grasping: *jihvā* (for example) *nai grahaḥ*, *sa rasatriyagāne ghiṭā ...* The notion of grasper and grasped might be a figurative indication that the functioning of the senses requires the coming together of subject and object; or it might more generally be a metaphor for the relationship between subjective experience and the objective world. This notion was developed in later Buddhist systematic philosophy.

152. MN.I.60; DN.II.301: *Pana ca paraṃ bhikkhavo bhikkhavo dharmasātu dharmānaṃapassī viharati.*


154. In common with the other senses, in order to function *manodhātu* is 'activated' by *vikāra*, hence *mano-vikāra*.

155. MN.I.293: *Nissattvāna h'āravo paṭacahi indriyāni paścattathāna manovikārānaṁ kāya neyyan it?*

156. MN.I.352: ... *sabbā sattvā satvānānaṁ samākkhitā paṭhasāvānāṁ atikAlanā naṁattasāvānānaṁ amanaskārā.*

157. Vībhanga p.76: *Dāsāyantā lokajīvā; dāsāyantā sīyā lokajīvā sīyā lokuttarā.* This comes in a chapter where *manas* and *dhamma* are always referred to as the eleventh and twelfth of the *sahātanas*.

158. The psycho-cosmological spheres are discussed in chapter viii.

159. MN.I.111ff.
Manafi c'āvuso paṭice dhamme ca uppażjati manoviññānam, tiṁam saṅgati phasso, phassapaccayā vedanā, yam vedeti taṁ sañjānati... Cakkhiṁ c'āvuso paṭice rūpe ca uppażjati cakkuviññānapaṁ, tiṁam saṅgati phasso, phassapaccayā vedanā, yam vedeti taṁ sañjānati...

MA.II.77: Sakāte 'āvuso ti ādusu pu es'e eva nayo.

For example at MN.III.28off, 287ff.

The Mahāsālayatana-sutta (MN.III.287ff); the Chachakkasutta (MN.III.28off); and much of the Saññiyatana Samyutta (SN, Vol. IV).

Rahula, 1985, p.23.


cf; for example, Rahula, 1985, p.23; KS.IV.56 and passim; Further Dialogues, Vol II, p.315ff.

Asl 74: Rūpārammaṇam hi jñanam cakkutoṣāṇa pu uppażjati manodoṣāṇa pu saddādiārammaṇa pu es'eva nayo. Elsewhere in the same hook (Asl 264) we read the following: Lakkhaṇādīto ... manoviññānadhātu ... hajārammanaviññāna-lakkhaṇā-saṅkhepa-dharanī... From the context and meaning of this passage it appears possible that manoviññānadhātu is the equivalent of manodhātu in the Sutta Pitaka. Here the characteristics of manoviññānadhātu are said to be knowing the six sense objects and having the property of investigating them. cf. Cousins, 1981, where the development and meaning of the technical Abhidhamma and commentarial terminologies are discussed.

Karunadasa, 1967, p.63. Similarly, Karunadasa's use of the term manoviññāṇa appears to refer to the same thing.
Introduction to the arūpakkhandhas

The four khandhas other than the rūpakkhandha are collectively called arūpa in the Pali texts. They are sometimes referred to in scholarly works and translations as the ‘mental’ khandhas, in the sense of being opposed to the corporeal (rūpa) khandha. We have seen in the discussion of the rūpakkhandha, however, that the term rūpa is not limited to corporeality. Defining the arūpakkhandhas as ‘mental’ in this polar sense should therefore be done with caution. And just as the composition of the rūpakkhandha was not described in terms of substance, so one should not anticipate that the arūpakkhandhas comprise some sort of mental entity. In describing the four elements which comprise rūpa, I stated that they represented the occurrence of certain states or processes which are characterised by solidity (or extension), fluidity, heat and motion. The arūpakkhandhas might be similarly interpreted as the occurrence of certain states or processes that are not characterised according to the four elements. In Buddhism this distinction does not imply the ontological dualism posited by Descartes’ well-known polarisation of consciousness (which is unextended) and matter (whose primary property is extension). Rather, one might suggest that it implies that the states or processes occur at different levels on a spectrum of density. Those which are designated by the term rūpa occur at levels on the spectrum which are characterised by the four great elements. Though the most dense of these is solid, that they include heat and motion illustrates that their range is considerable. Those states or processes which are designated by the term arūpa occur at levels on the spectrum which do not have any of the characteristics associated with rūpa. The significance of this spectrum is discussed in chapter vii. The four arūpakkhandhas are vedanā, saññā, sañkhāra and viññāṇa.
The Vedanākhandha

Vedanā is usually translated as feeling or sensation. We read in the Khandha Samyutta that there are six kinds of feeling. Literally, the Pali states that they are feeling which arises through contact of eye, feeling which arises through contact of ear, through contact of nose, through contact of tongue, through contact of body, through contact of mind (manas). I have already suggested in chapter 1 that in such contexts the terms used to refer to the senses, cakkhu, sota, ghāna and so on, mean the faculties of vision, hearing, taste, etc. rather than the physical organs of eye, ear and tongue. This passage, therefore, is better translated as stating that the different types of feeling arise from visual contact, auditory contact, gustatory contact, olfactory contact, tactile contact and 'mental' contact.

In the MadhupindaSutta of the Majhima Nikāya, the arising of feeling is stated to be dependent on the presence of several factors: consciousness, at least one of the organs of sense, and contact between the organ and its corresponding external object of sense. The feeling is subsequently apperceived (or identified). The Sutta describes the arising of feelings according to each of the senses, the process being the same in each case. So of visual feeling, for example, we read as follows:

Visual awareness arises because of eye and [visible] forms; contact [is the] combination of the three; feelings are caused by the contact; that which one feels, one apperceives (or identifies)...

This passage makes more sense of the sixfold definition of feeling referred to above as we now see that (visual) contact is defined as the combination of consciousness, eye and visible form. Thus contact is more than the mere contact of eye and visible form: it is the conscious coming together of sense organ and corresponding object. In other words, it is a conscious sensory event. This passage also makes clear that visual awareness (also often called 'eye consciousness') (cakkhuvināna) is a prerequisite for the whole process of the arising of the feeling: if there can be no visual contact without the presence, or activation, of cakkhuvināna, then without it there can be no feeling.

There are many different descriptions of the types of vedanā. By far the most commonly referred to are the three types covered by the term tīso vedanā: agreeable, disagreeable and neutral. It is this analysis which stands first in the Vedanā Samyutta. It is also stated that vedanā which is agreeable, disagreeable and neutral is experienced (vedayitam) either bodily or mentally, making six types of feeling in all. And in the Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta it states that agreeable, disagreeable and neutral feelings can be experienced with regard to material (sāmsa) or non-material (nirāmsa) things. These last two sentences have been interpreted as meaning that feelings have both a physical and a mental aspect. In my view, however, it seems more
likely that the first refers to the fact that feelings that have a tactile origin are experienced bodily (kāya is the object corresponding to the sense of touch) and feelings that have a non-tactile origin are experienced mentally: so, for example, the agreeable feelings we experience as a result of hearing or seeing something nice are not in this sense 'bodily' feelings. In the Dīgha Nikāya it states that bodily pain is produced through bodily contact; grief is an example of mental pain, which arises through mental contact (manosampahassajān). As manas appears to be understood in this context as meaning the 'mental' sense, and grief does not obviously arise from eye, ear, nose or tongue, this passage does not explicitly support my suggestion that the bodily/mental analysis differentiates between kāya as the tactile sense object and all other sense objects. But it does support the point I am making, which is that this analysis refers to different types of feeling and does not mean that all feelings have both physical and mental aspects. With regard to the second sentence, sāmīsa and nirāmīsa are used to make a distinction between the experience of feelings which arise from the riṇakhandha, which means from sensory contact, and the experience of feelings which arise from levels of meditation. This is explained in the Vedanā Samyutta, where feelings are stated to be of three kinds, delightful (pīti) agreeable (sukha) and neutral (upekkhā). Sāmīsa refers to the five kamagunā. Nirāmīsa(ām) pīti/sukham/upekkhā, however, is experienced in levels of meditation (jhāna). Elsewhere āmīsa is put in opposition to dhamma, with a similar contrast in meaning. We are told that a feeling is pleasant or unpleasant depending on whether pleasure or pain is the dominant feature of the feeling.

Many different classifications of feelings are given in the Vedanā Samyutta. It starts by stating that feelings are of two kinds (bodily and mental), or three kinds (agreeable, disagreeable and neutral). It continues with five, six, eighteen, thirty-six and one hundred and eight kinds. The five kinds are the moods (indriya) of pleasure, pain, joy, grief and indifference. The six kinds are those which arise from contact with each of the six senses. The eighteen kinds are the six ways (presumably according to the senses) of paying attention to (upānicāra) joy, grief and indifference respectively. The thirty-six feelings comprise a more complex analysis of feeling in that it relates the six forms of joy, grief and indifference (that is, each of them experienced according to the six senses) with the worldly life and with the renunciatory life in turn. According to the analysis into one hundred and eight feelings, the thirty-six feelings can be classified as past, present or future.

The analysis that pleasant, unpleasant and neutral feelings can be experienced as worldly (gehasita) or as renunciatory (nekkhammasita) is also given in the Majjhima Nikāya. The distinctions 'worldly' and 'renunciatory' apply to the manner in which the feelings arise: whether they arise from the perception of material things, or whether they arise from the discernment of the transitory nature of things seen. This reflects the distinction made
throughout the Pali canon between the ordinary (ignorant) man, the puthujjana, and the advanced disciple of the Buddha’s teaching, the ariyasāvaka. The well-taught ariyasāvaka knows, for example, that there is a refuge from disagreeable feeling other than happiness through sense pleasures. He or she would, presumably, experience feelings as renunciatory. This is also described as having feelings but being detached from them.

In one text a lay person, Pañcakāṅga, expresses his doubts about neutral feeling and insists that there are only two kinds of feeling, agreeable and disagreeable. He repeatedly refuses to accept the venerable Udāyi’s teaching that there are three kinds of feeling, including neutral. Eventually the Buddha pronounces that different people explain vedanā in different ways, and that they are all correct. According to some explanations there are only two, but it is also correct to say that there are three, five, six, eighteen, thirty-six and one hundred and eight kinds of feeling. The Buddha goes on to make the point that inevitably some people will quarrel about how many kinds of feelings there are, but that such quarrelsomeness is futile and harmful. It is far better to accept that people can understand the matter differently and to dwell in harmony with the different opinion.

Vedanā is sometimes translated as ‘sensation’ rather than ‘feeling’, and it could be argued that ‘sensation’ is a word which is more readily associated with neutrality than is ‘feeling’, which is more often associated in our minds with pleasure or pain. The word ‘sensation’ also implies a connection with the senses, which might be said to be more appropriate to vedanā, which requires the coming together of a sense organ and its corresponding sense object in order to arise. But ‘feeling’ can be used neutrally: it is not uncommon to say ‘I feel indifferent about that’. And not only is it commonly accepted that feelings require sensory activity, even if this is not obviously implicit in the word itself, but in the Buddha’s analysis of the khandhas this does not only apply to the vedanākhandha but to all four of the anipakkhandhas. The main reason I prefer the use of the word ‘feeling’ rather than ‘sensation’ in translating vedanā is, however, because I suggest that vedanā has a cognitive dimension which is conveyed by the word ‘feeling’ but not by ‘sensation’. The word vedanā comes from vīdi, which has a twofold meaning involving both knowledge and (mere) feelings: intellectually it means to know and experientially it means to feel. In vedanā both of these meanings are relevant. Though itself referring only to potential cognitive processes, the wording of the twelvefold paṭiccasamuppāda formula suggests that the purely sensory event takes place when ‘contact’ occurs. The Pali word for this contact is phassa, and it is from phassa that vedanā then arises, which in turn subsequently gives rise to craving (tanhā). From this we see that vedanā is more than the (mere) sensory event: it is one stage further on in the process. We have also seen above that feelings are intrinsically pleasant, unpleasant or neutral. This also implies that at the level of the feeling itself
there is a degree of discrimination or cognition sufficient for its classification in one of these three ways. A further point arises from the description given above of the arising of feeling, which is that it illustrates that it is part of a process involving both sañña and viññāna. We shall see below in the chapters on these two khandhas that both of these are part of the cognitive process. But the samkhārakkhandha is not involved. Again as we shall see below (in chapter IV), this is where the emotions Westerners associate with feelings come from.

The cognitive role of vedanā is unsubtle: one might say that it is affective rather than intellectual cognition. It is nevertheless significant enough to be an important factor in understanding the role of the vedanākhandha correctly. From a psychological point of view, it is not too difficult for us to understand that vedanā is part of the cognitive process. We know, for example, that feelings can be expressed cognitively: if we say we are feeling sad, we also mean that we know that we are experiencing sadness. We also commonly refer to feelings as a vague level of knowledge in expressions such as 'I have the feeling that this is correct', or 'I feel there is something wrong here'. Thus vedanā plays a part, however nebulous, in the cognitive process of an individual. It is perhaps significant that vedayita, the (irregular) past passive participle of the verb vedeti, from which vedanā comes, is often interpreted as meaning 'experienced' rather than 'felt'. And 'experience' might be a better translation of vedanā when it is found in the context of the cognitive process as a whole: in English to state that cognition necessarily involves experience is more readily acceptable than stating that it necessarily involves feelings. I will return to the question of the cognitive role of vedanā in the chapter on the viññānakhandha, when we will have more information available to us.

What the discussion here has shown is that though different types of feelings are referred to, descriptions of what feelings are emphasise the way they arise. The concern is not with understanding what a feeling is per se, but in seeing that feelings arise as part of a process.

I have pointed out above that according to the twelvefold version of the pañciccasamuppāda formula, feeling (vedanā) has contact (phassa) as its condition and that feeling itself is therefore more than mere sensory event. And in the description of the arising of feeling to which I have referred it is also from phassa that feeling is stated to arise. Indeed, in the Phassamūlaka Sutta in the Vedanā Samyutta the dependence of vedanā on phassa is stressed: the three feelings (agreeable, disagreeable and neutral) are born of contact, rooted in contact, caused by contact, conditioned by contact. Before going on to discuss the saññaikhandha, therefore, it would seem appropriate to investigate the role of phassa in more detail.
Phassa

In the *Majjhima Nikāya* passage which describes the arising of, say, visual feeling (and the form of the Pali is the same for all six senses), *phassa* is said to be the combination of three things: eye, (visible) object and consciousness.25 This is what I have suggested should be understood as the conscious (visual) sensory event. And it is from this conscious sensory event that feeling arises.26 Elsewhere the way in which *phassa* gives rise to agreeable, disagreeable or neutral feeling is described by means of analogy. So of agreeable feeling we read that just as when two sticks come into contact together (i.e. when there is friction between them), warmth and heat are produced, but when the two sticks are separated and kept apart, the warmth and heat dissipate and are no longer produced, in just this way agreeable feelings arise because of the appropriate *phassa* and do not arise when the appropriate *phassa* ceases.27 There is no suggestion in the text that this description refers exclusively to bodily (tactile) feelings, and the reference to contact as tactile has to be understood as meaning the coming together of any of the senses and a corresponding object. This point is stressed by the commentator on the *Brahmajāla Sutta* who states that sense and object are not to be thought of as literally touching one another: rather, *phassa* is what occurs when there is the appropriate coming together of the two (and viññāna).28 A further point about the analogy of the sticks is that it raises the possibility that *phassa* itself is agreeable, disagreeable or indifferent. That appropriate feelings arise from appropriate contact suggests that, say, the agreeableness of the feeling is determined at the *phassa* stage of the process of the arising of the feeling.

As we shall see in chapter 11, the passage from which I have quoted a description of the arising of feeling states that as the process continues apperception and identification of the experience in question take place. I have also suggested, partly in the light of this passage but also in the light of others (which are discussed fully in chapter 5) that *vedanā* is not to be understood as mere feeling but that it is part of the cognitive process as a whole. It follows from this suggestion that *phassa* is also a *sine qua non* of the cognitive process as a whole. That this is the case is explicitly supported by some canonical passages in which *phassa* is found. In the *Brahmajāla Sutta*, in which the Buddha systematically refutes a wide variety of views held by Brahmans and ascetics, *phassa* is stated to be involved in each and every one of the views referred to.29 Without *phassa*, the *Sutta* states, none of those views would be held.30 All of the views arise because of continual contact in the six spheres of contact.31 And in the *Samyutta Nikāya* we read that (visual) contact is defined as the meeting, coincidence, coming together of eye, visible object and consciousness.32 Later the passage states: “Contacted one feels, contacted one thinks, and contacted one apperceives”.33 In a description of the five *khandhas* in the *Khandha Samyutta* of the *Samyutta Nikāya* we
read that it is from the arising of phassa that vedana, sañña and samkhara arise, and from its cessation that they cease.34 In the same passage, rūpa is said to arise and cease according to the arising and cessation of food (āhāra), and viññāna arises and ceases according to the arising and cessation of nāmarūpa. These differences are unsurprising if one remembers that the classification into khandhas is an analysis rather than a prescription for the arising of the human being. What is meant, therefore, is that the body is dependent for its functioning on food; and vedana, sañña and samkhara are dependent for their functioning on phassa (which the passage has defined as the conscious sensory event). Viññāna is not dependent on phassa since phassa involves viññāna. It is, rather, dependent on nāmarūpa. Nāmarūpa is discussed in chapter vi, when it will become clearer in what sense viññāna might be said to be dependent on it.

It appears from what we have seen thus far that it is reasonable to describe phassa, which is defined as the contact which takes place when viññāna, sense organ and sense object come together, as a conscious sensory event, as I have suggested. But in the Cūḷavedalla Sutta, we find phassa used in a context where this definition and understanding of phassa do not seem quite appropriate.35 The nun Dhammadinna is asked by Visākhā how many contacts impinge (phusanti: literally ‘contact’ or ‘touch’) on a bhikkhu when he has emerged from the meditation which involves the stopping of apperception and feeling.36 Dhammadinna replies that when a bhikkhu emerges from the attainment of the cessation of apperception and feeling three contacts impinge on him: the contact as void, the contact that is signless (i.e. without any object), and the contact that is undirected (i.e. free from all longings).37 Here phassa seems to mean something like ‘impression’: when a bhikkhu emerges from the (highest) meditative level, saññāvedayitanirodhasamāpatti, he is conscious of the impression of voidness, signlessness and freedom from longing. These have not arisen as a result of the coming together of viññāna, sense organ and sense object because the bhikkhu’s meditative state was one which transcended such activity.38 But when he emerges from this state and sensory experience returns, he has an impression of his non-sensory experience. One might say that the impression occurs when his non-sensory experience comes in contact with sensory experience. Such impressions are distinct from, perhaps less ‘defined’ than, the conceptions which are associated with the saññākhandha, discussed in chapter iii. The contrast appears to be between conscious discursive thought, from which conceptions arise, and meditative experience which is non-discursive), from which impressions arise.

In an unusual passage in the Mahāniddesa, a book of the Khuddaka Nikāya, the significance of the impressions of voidness, signlessness and freedom from longing (saññato phassā, anīmitto phassā, and appanihito phassā) becomes clear. The passage gives a commentary on the term ‘a seer of discrimination in respect of contacts’ (vivekadassī phassesa). First, a comprehensive list of
different types of phassa is given which is not found elsewhere. This first of all includes contact relating to the six senses, then goes on to include verbal and sensory contact, contact from agreeable, disagreeable and indifferent feeling; good, bad and indifferent contact; contact of the sensory, form and formless realms; void, signless and desireless contact; mundane and supramundane contact; past, future and present contact.39 The passage goes on to state that the virokadassī regards all such contacts except for suññato phasso, animitto phasso, and appanīhito phasso as free from self, from what belongs to a self, from what is permanent, stable, unchanging.40 Suññato phasso, appanīhito phasso and lokuttaro phasso are not explicitly referred to, but the passage then states that whatever contacts are noble, rid of the isavas, supramundane, connected with the void, are seen as free from passion, ill-will, ignorance and so on.41 Because suññato, appanīhito and lokuttaro phasso are not stated to be free from a self, Pérez-Remón draws on this passage to support his thesis that early Buddhism posits a non-empirical Self.42 In fact all this passage seems to be stating is that there are some kinds of phassa which are associated with those things which are commonly mistaken for a permanent self, but which the virokadassī comes to realise are not associated with such a self, and other kinds of phassa which are conducive to liberating insight, where such a sense of self is not relevant.

Elsewhere, two of the types of contact listed in the Mahāniddesa referred to in the last paragraph, are referred to in a way which suggests that they represent an understanding that phassa is of two distinct kinds, not including the meditative impressions mentioned above. These are adhivacanasamphassa and patighasamphassa. In the Mahāniddesa Suttanta of the Dīgha Nikāya, for example, these terms are used to describe the way in which namarūpa gives rise to phassa in a ninefold version of the paticasamuppāda formula which excludes the salīyatatan link.43 Namarūpa is discussed more fully in chapter vi. In the Vibhanga (of the Abhidhamma Pitaka), patighasamphassa and adhivacanasamphassa refer to saññā,44 and this context will also be referred to below in chapter iii. In both of these two contexts, however, patighasamphassa refers to phassa in the sense of sensory contact, and adhivacanasamphassa refers to phassa which is verbal or conceptual, that is abstract. Neither of these two contexts refers to the non-sensory jhānas: it follows from what we have seen in the Mahāniddesa passage that the lokuttaro types of phassa transcend conceptualisation. They indicate that the range of ‘ordinary’ (i.e. non-lokuttara) phassa includes two kinds: sensory contact in the literal sense (patigha means ‘striking against’ and refers to the ‘meeting’ of sense organ and sense object) or sensory contact in the abstract sense (a good translation of adhivacanasamphassa would be ‘metaphorical contact’). This distinction probably corresponds in the first instance to the contrast between the first five senses and the manodhātu as the ‘standard’ sixth sense: the latter functioning abstractly by comparison with the others; and also to the two aspects of the saññākhandha discussed fully in chapter iii. There, on the one
hand, the literal sense of sensory contact corresponds to apperception, and, on the other hand, its abstract sense to conception.

It also seems clear that *phassa* is a conscious event, whether sensory or metaphorical contact, or meditative impression. It is defined as the coincidence of *vīñāṇa*, sense and sense object. And as abstract impression on emerging from *jhāna*, it is experienced when consciousness is once again 'normal'. It is thus clear that the English word 'contact', which tends to have a tactile or spacial connotation, is insufficient on its own to convey the full meaning of *phassa*. Rather, the meanings of *phassa* which we have discussed suggest that it refers to the moment of contact between the subjective world of the individual and the objective world with which he or she interacts. This explains why consciousness is included in the definition of *phassa*, for the individual is not interacting with the world if he or she is not conscious, and why the consciousness of the event is of more significance than the (mere) contact. In the Buddha's teaching it is what happens subjectively that matters.

Writing as a modern Theravāda bhikkhu, Ṛnāvīra suggests that if one understands that *phassa* is primarily contact between subject and object, rather than contact between eye, forms and eye consciousness, then it is possible to see that such contact implies the presence of the illusion of 'I' and 'mine'. Thus for an *arahant*, when there is cessation of such illusion, there is also *phassanirodha*. He refers to a verse in the *Udāna*, which states: "Contacts impinge dependent on ground; how should contacts impinge on a groundless one?" His point is that eye as sense organ is a sense organ in *pūthujjana* and *arahant* alike, and is a mere physiological aspect of the human being. Eye consciousness as a subjective aspect of the human being, on the other hand, is part of that human being's psychological constitution and is affected by his or her degree of insight on the path to liberation. *Phassa* as a practical function continues for an *arahant*, when cognitive faculties still function on the basis of eye, visible forms and eye consciousness. But it must no longer be regarded as contact with *me*, or with *him*, or with *somebody*, Ṛnāvīra states. He refers to the *Saṅyatana Sutta*, where it states that the Blessed One possesses an eye (and all the other sense organs), he sees visible forms with the eye; but he has no desire and lust, and his *citta* is wholly freed. Having no desire and lust is a concomitant of no longer having false notions of 'I' and 'mine' according to Buddhist teachings. According to Ṛnāvīra, then, the subjective aspect of *phassa* implies the involvement of some illusory sense of 'I' in relation to the objective world. This is borne out by the role of *phassa* in the continued *samsāric* existence of an individual, the continuity of which will cease after *arahants*hip is attained.

A final point is that the verb from which *phassa* comes, *phusati*, is also used in contexts where its meaning is perhaps an extension of the meanings contact and impinge. The expression *ceto-samādhīṁ phusati*, for example,
The Vedanākhandha

means "[the bhikkhu] attains a state of concentration of the mind".48

Nirodham phusati means "he attains cessation".49

Phassa, then, is of two kinds and is found in two corresponding contexts. Most commonly it refers to the conscious sensory or metaphorical contact which is a sine qua non for the arising of feelings and for the cognitive process as a whole. It also refers to an abstract impression which is also conscious but which does not originate from the coming together of a sense and its corresponding sense object.

Notes

1. SN.III.59f: Katamā ca bhikkhave vedanā? Chayine bhikkhave vedanākāyā ... cakkhasamphassajā vedanā, sotassamphassajā vedanā, ānasamphassajā, jīvānasamphassajā, kāyasamphassajā, manosamphassajā vedanā.

2. MN.I.111. Apperception is the function of the saññīdha, the subject of chapter 111.

3. Cakkhūci tuva pañca rūpe ca uppañjati cakkhuvinīānaṃ, tiyaṃ sangati phasso, phassapaccayā vedanā, yam vedeti taṃ saññānāti ... .

4. e.g. DN.III.275; SN.II.53, 82, IV.204, 207, etc; AN.III.400: Sūkhā vedanā dukkhā vedanā adukkhasukhā vedanā.

5. SN.IV.204.


7. MN.I.302; SN.IV.208, etc. However, the Abhidhamma classifications note only five types of feeling: bodily agreeable and disagreeable, mentally agreeable and disagreeable and neutral. cf., for example, Vībhanga 72 and Dhs 133.

8. MN.I.59.

9. This is suggested by Reat, 1987, p.23.

10. DN.II.306: Kāyikam dukkhaṃ ... kāyasamphassajāṃ ... domanassaṃ ... etasikām dukkhaṃ ... manosamphassajāṃ.


12. The Sutta states: Īddha bhikkhave bhikkaḥ ... pathamaṃ jhanam ... dutiyaṃ jhanam ... tatiyaṃ jhanam upasampojja vihanati; idaṃ vuccati bhikkhave nirāmīsena sukhām.

13. cf., for example, MN.I.12.


15. SN.IV.234: Katamā ca bhikkhave pañca vedanā? Sukhindriyām dukkhindriyām domanassindriyām upaṭkhandriyām imā vuccanti bhikkhavo pañca vedanā.

16. Cha somanassupavicārā ca cha somanassupavicārā ca upaṭkhandupavicārā; imā vuccanti bhikkhave aṭṭhārasa vedanā.

17. Cha ghehasitāni somanassāni/domanassāni/upaṭkha ca nekkhammasitiṃ somanassāni/domanassāni/upaṭkha.

18. Aṭṭhā chaṭṭhima veditā, anāgatā chaṭṭhima veditā, paccuppannā chaṭṭhima veditā; imā vuccanti bhikkhave aṭṭhārasa veditā.


20. MN.IV.209: Pajñātā bhikkhave suteva ariyasācaco aṇiṣatra kāmasukkhā dukkhāya vedanāya nissanam.

21. MN.IV.213: So sukhaṃ/dukkhaṃ/adukkhasukhāṃ ce vedanāṃ vediyati va suvivekā aṭṭhasa vediyati.

22. MN.IV.223f.

23. In a description of the vedanākhandha, Pio (1988, p.9f) gives a long account of different emotions. In my opinion, she has fallen into the trap of projecting a Western interpretation of feelings onto the vedanākhandha.

24. SN.IV.215: Tissu imā bhikkhavo vedanā phassajā phassamūlakā phassanidāna phassapaccayā.

25. MN.I.111: Cakkhuñci evuso pañca rūpe ca uppañjati cakkhuvinīānaṃ, tiyaṃ sangati phasso.

This state is referred to again in chapter DN.I.184; DN.I.13, clundariigo Nanavira, sumphaso the meaning or parallelism between the three types of uddana

vCpmmati; tgo abhinibbattati, vuccati dukkhaupanikkhipitvii vedan@. The predicative form sun'tatato phasso does not seem to affect the meaning or parallelism between the three types of phassa.

39. This state is referred to again in chapter v.

40. Visakadasii phassu ti cakkhusampasambhavutta [and so on] viittam passati attena v. attanissaya v. niccama v. dhana v. sassata v. uppannettavipassan€na te.

41. Abhara ye te phassa arjya an€avat€ lokuttar€ su€natap€pasam€n€t€, te phasse viitt€t€ passati r€g€na dosena molena, etc.

42. Pérez Remón, 1980, p.176

43. DN.I.62.

44. Vohanga 6.


46. Udaka 2.4: Phussati phassa u€padhin€ po€tice, nir€padhin€ k€na phusseryum phassa?

47. SN.IV.164. Sam€gajati k€na phuss ph€g€vato cakkhu [and so on], passati Bhagav€ cakkh€nu€ r€pm, chand€r€go Bhag€vato n€ll€, su€mattaticc€ Bhag€v€. The meaning of citta is discussed further in chapter v.

48. DN.I.13, III.30,108, etc.

49. DN.I.184; Abhidhammattha-sangaha IV.11.
CHAPTER III

The Saññākhandha

There are six types of saññā and, like feelings, they arise through contact of the six subjective senses with their corresponding ‘external’ objects. The precise function of the saññākhandha has been considered difficult to assess since the term saññā is used in different ways in the canonical material. Mrs Rhys Davids, for example, wrote of it: “The apparently capricious way in which the intension of the term saññā is varied in the Pitakas makes it difficult to assign any one adequate English rendering”. It is true that most canonical references to it do not give an explanation of what it means or what it does. There are, however, exceptions, and from a consideration of such explanations, together with careful analysis of the context in which the term is found, one can ascertain that there appear to be two different ways in which saññā is understood. On the one hand, it is found in contexts where it is said to have a discriminatory or identificatory role. Though sometimes such a role is indicated in what appears to be a merely token definition of saññā, there being no clear understanding on the part of the author as to its precise role, elsewhere the discriminatory role is more clearly defined. On the other hand, it is also clear that conceptual processes of various kinds (ideas, imagination, abstract conceptions, and so on) are part of its role.

Saññā as Apperception

An example of what appears to be a token definition of saññā is found in the Khandha Samyutta. The context is one of many where the Buddha is recorded as explaining that one should understand oneself in terms of the five khandhas. In this particular passage he is explaining why each of the khandhas is referred to as it is.

The precise meaning of the description of saññā is unclear. The Pali could be translated as follows:

What, O monks, do you call saññā? One perceives, O monks; that is why the word saññā is used. Perceives what? Perceives blue, yellow, red and white. One perceives, O monks; that is why the word saññā is used.
The rendering of sañjānāti simply as ‘one perceives’ here, is, perhaps, somewhat unsatisfactory, because perception as such might be considered to be a sensory function – of the eye. Even allowing for the fact that the word ‘perception’ has an elasticity of meaning which can extend it beyond a simple sensory function, it is nevertheless inadequate, and certainly too ambiguous, to express accurately the meaning of sañjānāti (or sañā). An alternative translation would be ‘one identifies’, giving sañjānāti a more discriminatory meaning, and the sañnakhandha a discriminatory function: “Identifies what? Identifies [that a colour is] blue, yellow, red or white [rather than green, orange, or brown, etc.]”. In the passage describing the arising of feeling, to which I have already referred, it is clear from the Pali that sañjānāti does not mean ‘one perceives’, since it is directed towards something that has not only already been seen, but about which a feeling has already arisen. Perception is neither required nor meaningful at this stage. The context demands that it be translated in a way which conveys that it is discriminatory, and/or that it acts in some way as a comprehender or processor of what has already taken place.

So, on the face of it, ‘one recognises’ is a preferable translation to ‘one perceives’ in the Khandha Samyutta passage. But the situation is complicated by the fact that in the same Khandha Samyutta passage recognition or identification seems to be the function of the viññākakkhandha. The Pali description of viññāna corresponds structurally to the description of sañā; sañjānāti being replaced by viñjānāti and various gustatory qualities, such sourness, sweetness, saltiness, replacing the colours. In the context of this passage it is difficult to translate viñjānāti in a way which does not incorporate discriminatory knowledge: viññāna distinguishes that something is sour, sweet, salty, and so on. The solution may be that even if sañā and viññāna are both to be understood as discriminatory faculties, they differ in the degree, or level, of discrimination for which they are responsible. So, for example, it may be that viññāna identifies that something has colour and sañā identifies that it is yellow; or that viññāna identifies that something is sour and sañā identifies it as lemon. Unfortunately, the Khandha Samyutta passages on sañā and viññāna respectively are not directly comparable in this respect, so we cannot from this material alone ascertain the precise function of sañā (or of viññāna). The colours and flavours referred to in the passage are standard lists, so it may be the case that the author of this passage did not know the difference between sañā and viññāna and merely gave two different standard lists as a way of avoiding giving a proper definition of each of them. If the author understood viññāna as the faculty of discrimination, it may even be that as far as he was concerned sañā had no readily identifiable function, but he felt obliged to offer some token description of it as one of the khandhas (or vice versa).

The Mahāvedallasutta also gives what appear to be token definitions of both sañā and viññāna. Here too the definitions imply that both are
discriminatory: viññāna is said to discriminate (vijñānāti) pleasure, pain and the absence of pleasure or pain and the standard list of colours is again the example given for what saññā discriminates. The discrimination between feelings according to pleasure, pain and their absence is also mentioned in the Satipatthāna Suttas, but there it is mentioned as part of the process of attaining insight rather than as a brief definition of the function of viññāna: the cognitive verb used is pajanāti rather than vijanāti. The Mahāvedallasutta, which is discussed in chapter v, gives a comprehensive description of the cognitive process. As we shall see, the function of viññāna is to provide ‘consciousness of’ all cognition rather than to discriminate. But the brief definitions given in this Sutta for these two terms do little to clarify their roles. What we seem to have here is another example of the author of the passage having difficulty in defining the terms he is using: he is able to describe the cognitive process using the relevant terminology, but when it comes to defining the khandhas involved in the cognitive process he resorts to standard formulas in place of adequate definitions. Alternatively, both of these passages may reflect the practical difficulties associated with an oral tradition: the ease with which teachings that are standardised for mnemonic purposes can end up in contexts that are not quite suitable.

Centuries later, Buddhaghosa gives more comprehensive definitions of both saññā and viññāna as cognitive faculties (jānabhiva) (along with paññā), and he uses colours as examples for both of them, thus making a proper comparison possible. The difference between saññā and viññāna, he explains in his Visuddhimagga, is that the former identifies an object as blue or yellow but cannot bring about the penetration of its characteristics as impermanent, unsatisfactory and impersonal. The latter identifies an object as blue or yellow, penetrates its characteristics, but cannot bring about, even through endeavour, the manifestation of the supramundane path. It is paññā that does all these things. Thus Buddhaghosa understands all three as discriminatory faculties. He goes on to give the analogy of the understanding of a child, an adult and an expert respectively. While there may be the germ of such a threefold division of cognitive functions in the Sutta Pitaka, it is far from being as tidy and consistent as Buddhaghosa presents it. And we shall see in chapter v that though it is integral to the cognitive process, viññāna is not specifically discriminative.

If we return to the passage in the Sutta Pitaka describing the arising of feeling, we have a context which gives us a much clearer description of saññā as a faculty which discriminates or identifies. It is significant that viññāna in this context has no discriminatory function, but is stated to arise when eye (for example) and visible object are mutually present. Here viññāna has the meaning of the ‘awareness’ which underlies or ‘attends’ all human (i.e. conscious) experience. We then saw that the feeling subsequently gives rise to saññā. The Pali continues: yam saññāna tām vitakketi, yam vitakketi tām papañcetī. To make sense of this, it is relevant that in
classical Sanskrit one of the meanings of samjñā (Pali saññā) is 'name'. In Buddhism, the samsāric cognitive process is based on not seeing things as they really are: and this misperception is what constitutes the ignorance which generates continued samsāric existence. Misperception involves ‘naming’: the process by which what we see or experience is identified by us according to our understanding of it. It is also relevant that though the Pali papāṇiceti is usually understood to mean ‘to be obsessed’ (so the phrase above is translated “what one reasons about obsesses one”), in Sanskrit prapāṇa means manifoldness. It is the term used by the great Mahāyāna Buddhist Śaṅkara in his Madhyamakakārikā to indicate that which needs to cease in order for liberation to take place. Manifoldness implies our mistaken imposition of separateness upon things that are in reality dependently originated. The Pali English Dictionary states that it is unclear whether papāṇa means the same in Pali as it does in Sanskrit. In my opinion, the context in which we find it here demands a similar interpretation of it. While such manifoldness could be understood in terms of obsession, in the sense that it is our misperception of the way things are that brings about the various desires which represent bondage (or ‘obsess’ us), the meaning of the passage is more readily understood if we translate papāṇiceti as ‘one causes to become manifold’. Papāṇa is associated with saññā throughout this Sutta in a manner which suggests that manifoldness is a concomitant of identification. And the significance of such manifoldness here, as for Nāgārjuna, is that it implies that in perceiving manifoldly one is attributing separate independent existence to everything one perceives. That this is the meaning of papāṇa is confirmed by other passages in the Sutta Piṭaka in which it is found. In the Sālāyatanasamāyutta, for example, we read:

Men who have conceptions of manifoldness of some kind go on separating things when apperceiving; but [eventually] he [a bhikkhu] drives out everything that is [thus] constructed by the mind and to do with the mundane life and proceeds to a life of renunciation.

In this passage there is a clear indication that the attribution of manifoldness, in the sense of separateness, where there is (according to the Buddha’s teaching) no such separateness, is part of samsāric perception: the term manomaya, constructed by the mind (literally, ‘mind-made’) indicates that papāṇa is not perception of ‘things as they are’ (yathābhūtam) but that the bhikkhu has to proceed from such mundane ('constructed') samsāric perception. Similarly, in the Aṅguttara Nikāya we read that whoever is given to manifoldness will not reach Nirvana. In two other passages in the Aṅguttara Nikāya, we read that the classical ‘unanswered questions’ (referred to in the Introduction) are papāṇicetam, and that other such views are the result of “making manifold what is not (really) manifold”.

Johansson points out that such examples “bind the concept of papāṇa to the psychological area of associative and analytical thought”, and
Nānananda has suggested the translation 'conceptual proliferation'. Both Johansson and Nānananda discuss papañca in considerably more detail than is necessary to understand it in the context we are discussing in this chapter. Neither of them, however, appears to have understood the profound implication of papañca as making manifold. Johansson, for example, sums up his chapter as follows: "Papañca is, then, a word for a vaguely defined prolific tendency, in the fields of imagination, thought and action. It is the tendency to produce associations, wishful dreams and analytic thought." But this surely misses the much more profound point that in seeing things as manifold one is attributing independent existence to them, and to oneself as perceiver. Nāgārjuna's Madhyamakārikā are above all concerned to refute independent existence and to teach dependent origination, and in singling out the term papañca he is giving us an indication of the underlying meaning of it. This meaning is also indicated in the Sutta Nipāta where it states: "The wise man should put a stop to the thought ‘I am’, which is the root of all naming in terms of manifoldness". Of this passage, Johansson states: "It [papañca] is an ego-related activity, which gives satisfaction to human vanity and pride... To get rid of papañca is therefore one of the problems of the Buddhist disciple". In Buddhism, ego-related activity is more than just satisfying to human vanity and pride: it is the fundamental ignorance which has to be eradicated. And the use of asmi in the above sentence is surely both literal and figurative; that is, it means both the erroneous sense of ‘I am’ on the part of the individual bhikkhu, and the erroneous attribution of independent existence to that which he sees as manifold. Furthermore, as the fundamental ignorance which has to be eradicated, it is the problem for the Buddhist disciple, as Nāgārjuna states, not merely one of them.

To return to our discussion of saññā, from the Majjhima Nikāya passage we are discussing here, we see that saññā has a discriminatory or identificatory function which is in effect one of ‘naming’. This in turn leads on to the various thought processes (vitakka) of samsāric existence, and a separated or manifold way of interpreting our experiences. This sequence is confirmed in the Sutta Nipāta, where we read:

One who is conscious of neither a conception nor a false conception, and who is neither unconscious nor conscious of a conception that has disappeared: for one who has attained such a state, form disappears, for naming in terms of manifoldness arises subsequent to conceptions.

As Johansson points out, the first part of this probably refers to the higher jhāna levels in which there are no conceptions of form. The second part clearly confirms that papañca follows saññā.

From this perhaps the most satisfactory translation of saññā would be ‘apperception’, which implies both that its function is discriminatory, and also that it incorporates a function of assimilation or comprehension of
what has been perceived so that identification can take place. Such apperception (which one might also call the way we name things) and the resulting thoughts and application of manifoldness, would be ‘accurate’ in ultimate terms according to one’s degree of insight as to the way things really are. This differs from the assimilatory function of manodhātu in that manodhātu collates sense impressions in order to impose some sort of pattern or order, whereas the saññākhandha assimilates data at a more ‘refined’ or ‘classified’ level. Manodhātu renders sensory data comprehensible, whereas the saññākhandha does the comprehending; the former is a preparatory stage for the latter, cognitive process. This is perhaps to be expected from the etymology of the word saññā: the prefix saṅ functions similarly to the Greek syn (synthesis) and the Latin con or co (comprehension, cognition): saññā synthesises the raw data presented to it by the manodhātu. This distinction is formally recognised in the Abhidhamma, where it is explicitly stated that saññā operates on information from the manodhātu:

What, then, is saññā? Saññā is the apperception, the apperceiving, the state of having apperceived which arises because of contact with manodhātu; this, then, is saññā.

One might think from the foregoing that the saññākhandha is associated, at least to some extent, with discursive thought. The discrimination, assimilation and/or comprehension, and ‘naming’ of what might loosely be called incoming data all involve at least some degree of thinking about the data. And in the Jātaka, the expression saññā karosi is clearly used in the sense of ‘you think’. But though both viṭṭaka and papañca, which are described as taking place subsequent to the activity of saññā, are more obviously discursive processes, whether or not saññā itself is discursive remains unclear.

The use of the standard list of colours in definitions of saññā, and the fact that the example given of the arising of feeling is referring to visual feeling, does not mean that saññā functions only in connection with visual perception. Feelings based on the other senses arise in the same way and subsequently go through the same identificatory and interpretative process: the Khandha Samyutta states that saññā is sixfold according to the six senses, and in the Mahāsatipatthāna Suttanta saññā is explicitly linked with all the senses.

Saññā as Conception

The fact that saññā functions as the ‘naming’ faculty means that it can also be thought of as the faculty of conception, or what Johansson calls ‘ideation’. Johansson makes his suggestion not because saññā is the ‘naming’ faculty but on the grounds that the colours referred to in the
definitions of sañña can be both visually apperceived and also imagined. In the context of sañña as naming faculty, this might be further explained as follows: sañña identifies our experience, and for as long as one is unenlightened it as it were superimposes samsāric criteria onto reality 'as it really is', or apperceives reality through samsāric spectacles. In so doing, concepts (Johansson would call them 'ideas') are generated as well as 'things' being named; and such concepts or ideas may be of a much less specific nature than, say, the interpretation of a single visual perception. In this respect sañña functions in the sense of 'conception' (which I prefer to 'ideation') rather than 'apperception'. Put differently, the functioning of sañña is not dependent on the co-temporal input of sensory data. When such sensory data is co-temporal, sañña apperceives (identifies) them; when they are not co-temporal, sañña functions conceptually. The latter might either be in the sense specifically suggested by Johansson, of imagining a (previous) apperception (one might describe this as the bringing to mind of an image of an earlier identification). Or it might be in the less specific and more abstract sense of imagining or conceiving of something that has not actually been apperceived as it is (presently) being imagined or conceived of. As mentioned in the discussion of phassa, in the Abhidhamma the twofold role of sañña as apperception and conception is referred to as patighasamphassajā and adhitvacanasamphassajā respectively: apperceptions arise from sensory experience and are described as 'gross' (olārikā), conceptions are abstract and are described as 'subtle' (sukhumā).

We read elsewhere that at the meditative levels known as the arūpajhānas, which are beyond sensory experience and (therefore) apperception, a meditator can have abstract conceptions even though he or she does not 'sense' that sphere. The abstract conceptions are that 'space is infinite' (ananto ukāsa ti), 'consciousness is infinite' (anantam viññānam ti), 'there is no-thing' (natihi kācī ti), which correspond to the first three arūpajhānas. The fourth arūpajhāna is non-conceptual as well as being beyond apperception: nevasaññānāsaññāyatana.

The distinction between apperception and conception is illustrated in a passage in the Majjhima Nikāya where we read that gods with rūpa are the product of manas and arūpa gods are the product of sañña. From the context, it is not clear whether there are such gods or whether they are being referred to hypothetically. What is obviously being referred to is the difference between gods which have form, which can be apperceived, and gods without form, which can only be conceived of.

The role of sañña as the faculty of conception is referred to in the Anguttara Nikāya where the Buddha mentions four types of distorted conception (visañña) as having ideas of permanence in what is impermanent, of satisfactoriness in unsatisfactoriness, of the concept of self in impersonality, and the idea of beauty in what is not beautiful. The Buddha's use of the term visañña to refer to these four types of erroneous
conception has the concomitant implication that saññā can be correct: if the term saññā on its own meant erroneous conception, there would be no need of the prefix vi. So though certain conceptions may be incompatible with ‘seeing things as they are’, other conceptions may also be correct: the term saññā does not in itself mean false conceptions. This is illustrated in a description of deep meditation given by Sāriputta. On the one hand, he states that deep meditation is a state “in the world but without any concept of the world”⁴⁹ This suggests that ideas or concepts are of an ongoing nature, part of our general samsāric experiential baggage, and that in our normal waking state what we experience as the ‘world’ involves ‘naming’ by us according to our level of insight. On the other hand, in such meditation Sāriputta is nevertheless able to have a specific idea,⁵⁰ in this instance that Nirvana is the end of rebirth,⁵¹ which is clearly not false according to Buddhist teaching.

There is no suggestion that the world is merely conceptual, only that it is saññā that interprets it according to our level of insight. We find saññā described as ‘like a mirage’,⁵² but the passage is one in which each of the khandhas is being described in a manner which conveys its impermanence: the context does not imply that saññā is being singled out as unreal. In this context, it is relevant that the meditative levels of the rūpajjhānas and the first three arūpajjhānas (or spheres – āyatanas) are all referred to as saññā.⁵³ These three arūpajjhānas have already been referred to above. The fourth arūpajjhāna is called the realm of neither-conception-nor-non-conception⁵⁴ (which is why it did not feature in the Anguttara Nikāya passage which gave the abstract conceptions of the meditator in the arūpajjhānas). The fourth arūpajjhāna does not, however, represent the attaining of insight any more than the preceding jhānas do: it is a state free from conceptions of whatever nature, and is conducive to the attainment of Nirvana since it is thus free from any notion of ‘I’,⁵⁵ but liberating insight has still to be achieved. There is controversy about whether the subsequent and highest meditative level of the cessation of conception and feeling (saññāvedayitanirodha) represents liberation or not.⁵⁶ If it does, then it cannot be just because of the cessation of conceptions. Not only does the fourth arūpajjhāna, which, as I have said, does not represent liberation, also appear free from conceptions, but it is also stated elsewhere that the destruction of the āsavas (which does represent liberation) can take place in one who has conceptions. Indeed, the experience is described as being the highest activity of saññā.⁵⁷ It would appear from this that saññā not only apperceives and conceives all our samsāric experiences, sensory and abstract, but is also instrumental in identifying the liberating experience. And though it precedes papañca when papañca occurs, it would appear that papañca is not automatically a result of saññā, as might be inferred from the description of the arising of feeling.⁵⁸

Supporting the points made in this and the last paragraphs, it is stated in the Abhidhamma that saññā can be bad, good and neither-good-nor-bad.⁵⁹
We also read of the conceptual activity of sanā as conception being deliberately used, in the sense of a visualisation process or mindfulness exercise, to give names to things or concepts in a way which conduces to subsequent ‘right thinking’, rather than only to a continuation of samsāric perception, so aiding the bhikkhu’s progress towards liberation. This function of sanā might be called the ‘constructive imagination’, since it represents a process of good/positive (constructive) conditioning of one’s faculty of apperception by means of deliberate conceptualising (constructing). The most simple example of this is the three ‘conceptions of a bhikkhu’, found in the Samanasanā Vagga in the Anguttara Nikāya. The three conceptions are: “I have come to a state of being without caste; my livelihood is dependent on others; I must dress [or behave] myself differently”. A sick bhikkhu, Girimananda, is also taught ten conceptions (dasa sanā) in order to allay his illness. The ten are: impermanence, selflessness, unpleasantness, wretchedness, abandoning, dispassion, cessation, discontentedness with all the world, the impermanence of all samsāric phenomena, and mindfulness of inbreathing and outbreathing.

Each of these is subsequently elaborated in an explanation of what it represents. Elsewhere in the Anguttara Nikāya there is another list of ten conceptions given for the purpose of attaining the deathless, Nirvana (amatogadā amataparyosāna): conceptions of what is unpleasant, of death, of the repulsiveness of food, of distaste for all the world, of impermanence, of unsatisfactoriness in impermanence, of selflessness in unsatisfactoriness, of abandoning, of dispassion, of cessation, and another for the purpose of preventing any evil unprofitable states overpowering one’s state of mind.

In the Samyutta Nikāya we find similar conceptions, but with the addition of the four brahma vihāras. The ‘conception of impermanence’ (aniccasanā), if practised and developed, is specifically stated to cause all sensual lust, all desire for form, all desire for continued existence, all ignorance and all notion of ‘I’ to come to an end. Conversely from certain appropriate insights the corresponding conceptions of impermanence (aniccasanā), unsatisfactoriness (dukkhasanā) and selflessness (anattasāna) arise.

The foregoing suggests that this deliberate use of sanā in the sense of constructively imagining certain conceptions acts psychosomatically: the imagining of a mental state that is being aspired to contributing in some way to the achieving of the aspiration. This role of sanā is further supported in the Dīgha Nikāya where we read that if a bhikkhu turns his attention to the idea of light, and sustains the idea of day [i.e. light] both during the day and the night, both during night and day, then with his thoughts open (or unveiled) and uncovered he develops a luminous mind. This is one of the four developments of concentration, samādhi bhāvanā. Similarly, we read that if a bhikkhu enters and abides in the idea of happiness and lightness, then his body is lighter, softer, more plastic and more luminous, and he is able to levitate easily. This is part of how psychic power (iddhi) is established.
From all of the foregoing, it seems likely that the sanakkhandha represents the processes of apperceiving and conceptualising, where apperceiving refers to the identificatory process that takes place on receiving incoming sensory data and conceptualising refers to the process of bringing to mind any abstract images, conceptions, ideas and so on which are not cotemporal with incoming sensory data. Those passages where this is only referred to by means of the standard list of colours are those where viiłayana seems to be understood as the faculty of discrimination and the difference between the two faculties is not clearly defined. There is clear evidence elsewhere, however, that sanā has an identificatory function. As conception (in the sense of constructive imagination) it can also be used as a meditational tool with which to develop insight.

Another passage which refers to sanā is particularly interesting, although it is not a passage in which the physical and mental faculties are being analysed or explained. In the Poṭṭhapāda Sutta71 the Blessed One is asked by Poṭṭhapāda how the mental state of abhisaṅkāmyāna (i.e. the cessation of consciousness – discussed below) comes about. During the conversation between Poṭṭhapāda and the Blessed One, we come across saṅhīti (he becomes conscious) in apposition with asaṅhīti (he becomes unconscious). Throughout the Sutta the word saṅhī is used in the sense of ‘consciousness’ as a blanket term for mental awareness in general, or the sum of the mental faculties. But it is also used in the sense of the arising or cessation of particular ‘conceptions’, or states of consciousness (such as joy or desire), which is achieved through training the mind,72 and saṅhāgam (highest consciousness) is referred to as something which is to be achieved, a meditational goal, as it were.73 At a point where the Blessed One is describing various meditational states,74 we also read: “there arises in him a consciousness, subtle but yet actual, of everything being within the sphere of the infinity of cognition”.75 So in this Sutta as a whole, sanā appears to cover an extraordinarily wide range of meanings and functions. An explanation for this might be that the Buddha’s interlocutor, Poṭṭhapāda, is not a Buddhist (in the Sutta, he is described simply as a paribbajaka, a wandering mendicant). It is possible that the Buddha conducted the conversation using terms in a way which was meaningful to Poṭṭhapāda even if this was not how he would have used them himself in a different circumstance. The Sutta is unusual in being the only one in which the term abhisāṅkāmyāna is found. Rhys Davids, in his translation of this Sutta, remarks that it is the earliest reference to the term in Indian literature.76 It has usually been interpreted to mean the cessation of consciousness in the sense of ‘trance’, the Pali English Dictionary, for example, stating that the prefix abhi qualifies the whole compound, giving it the meaning ‘trance’.77 Its actual meaning, however, remains unclear, and though this passage is an interesting one, its uniqueness does not in any way detract from the consensus derivable from other passages about the meaning of sanā.
Notes

1. SN.III.60.
2. C.A.F. Rhys Davids (trans.) Buddhist Psychological Ethics, p.6, n.4.
3. In using words such as 'ideas', 'imagination', 'conceptions', and so on, I assume their everyday common sense meaning and intend no association with technical usages by psychologists or philosophers.
4. SN.III.87.
5. Kīrti bhikkhave saññāna vadetha? Saññānatīti kha bhikkhave tasmā saññā tī vuccati. Kīrti saññānatī?
Nīlam pi saññānatī pītakam pi saññānatī lohitakam pi saññānatī odātam pi saññānatī. Saññānatīti kha bhikkhave tasmā saññā tī vuccati.
6. MN.I.111.
Ambalam pi viññānatī tītakam pi viññānāti madhukam pi viññānāti khārikam pi viññānāti. Akhārikam pi viññānātī loñakam pi viññānātī alañakam pi viññānātī. Viññānatīti kha bhikkhave tasmā viññāna tī vuccati.
8. An alternative interpretation of viññānā is given in chapter v.
9. cf. Williams (1992): in (Tibetan) Mahāyāna Buddhism, the precise classificatory role of saññā (the Sanskrit form of saññā), as suggested here, has become clarified.
10. MN.I.292fX MN.I.59; DN.II.298.
11. Vism 437: Saññā nilam pitukan ti irumma saiñcinaatam eva hoti; aniccama dukkha anattī ti lakkhañopaññedham pi pāpetum na saketi.
13. Paññā vuttanayanavaññam árammananā ca jānāti, lakkhañopaññedhañ ca pāpeti, usakkītī maggañopaññedhañ ca pāpeti. Paññā is discussed in chapter v.
15. I will return to this function of viññāna below under point (2) in chapter v.
16. Yaṃ vedeti, taṃ saññānā.
20. SN.IV.71: Pāpacañcānāhī stātītā nārā pāpacañcayaññi upayanī saññihino; manomaya gehāsitañca sabbam panuya nekkhammasi iriyati. I have translated saññā as 'conceptions' in this and some of the following sentences. The notion that conceptual processes are part of its role is discussed below.
21. Manomaya is considered in greater detail in chapter viii.
22. AN.III.294: Yo pāpacañcam anyuyto ... virādhyā so nibbānām.
23. AN.IV.68f.
24. AN.II.161: Appañcacakam pāpañceti.
28. Sn 916. cf. also, AN.IV.229: Mīlaṃ pāpacañcānāhī ... mantā 'asmi ti' sabbam uparundhe.
30. Sn 874: Na saññāsati na vissukkāsati na pī asati na vijīhāsati, evaṃ sametassa vibhoti rūpam, saññānīdānā hi pāpacañcānāhī.
32. AN.IV.68f.
33. cf. Verdu, 1979, p.41.
34. Dhū 4: Katamā tasmiṃ samaye saññā hoti? Yā tasmiṃ samaye taṣāva manovinnadhatussamphassajjā saññā sañjānāna sañjānātattam; ayaṃ tasmiṃ samaye saññā hoti. And in the Abhidhammaśabhañāya, Vasubandhu states that saññā means "identifying what is indicated by sense objects", an interpretation very similar to that which we have arrived at here: Abh K B II.24: viññanātipattadharma. (Verdu (1979, p.41f) mistakenly attributes this to the Kōla itself.) The technical translation of viññanātipattadharma, given to me by Paul Williams in a personal communication, is "apprehending of the nimmāsa – the signs of class-inclusion – with
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to an object”. This specifically refers to the discriminatory (i.e., classificatory) aspect of saññā as more formally understood in later Buddhist schools of thought. cf. also Williams 1992.

The Abhidhamma defines vitakka as ‘thinking of’ something and vicāra as ‘thinking about’ the same thing. Both are terms used in a technical sense in meditation. This is explained in Cousins 1992.

This would probably understand this passage to mean that the minds further in chapter DN.I.182:

Also: SN.III.112:

The commentary states DN.I.178ff.

In a personal communication, Lance Cousins known. I will discuss the term manomaya, which has arisen twice in this chapter, more fully in chapter VII.

For example, SN.IV.217: Rūpasanñā, ākāsānātāyatanasaññā, viññānaśāyatanaññā and ākāśairātāyatanasaññā.


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73. DN.I.184.
74. The jhānas and vimokkhas.
75. DN.I.184: Viññāṇaṁcittasukhassaccasaññā tasmāṁ samaye hoti. I have used T. W. Rhys Davids' translation (Dialogues, p.250).
76. Dialogues, p.251.
77. PED, p.70. cf. also CPD s.v. abhisāññānirodha, which gives the same rendering.
CHAPTER IV

The Samkhārakkhandha

Samkhāra has been variously and often confusingly translated by terms such as mental formations, habitual tendencies or dispositions, conditional aggregates, and former impressions, terms which have little precise meaning for us in English. The term samkhāra occurs in many different contexts in the Nikāyas, and has been notoriously difficult to explain and understand. We can, however, substantially clarify its meaning by looking at it in three distinct contexts: in the tilakkhāna formula, as the second link in the paṭiccasamuppāda formula, and the samkhārakkhandha. We shall see that the second and third of these contexts are closely linked through the cyclic nature of karma and through the Buddha’s ethicising of the law of karma, and how this largely functions through the ethical life of the individual. Though in both the second and third of these contexts one can initially come to a relatively clear understanding of the meaning of samkhāra, we shall see that in fact the boundaries between the two contexts are blurred and extended through their mutual involvement in the overall causal nexus which provides the ‘fuel’ by which the individual persists in samsāra.

Samkhāra in the Tilakkhāna Formula

First, and fundamentally, the term appears in the tilakkhāna formula. I put this first, and say that it is fundamental, because the tilakkhāna formula describes the nature of sāṃsāric existence as a whole, insight into which is liberating knowledge according to the Buddha’s teachings. Clarifying what it means in this formula also shows how different the meanings of samkhāra can be, since in this context its meaning is significantly different from the two which follow. In the passage in the Aṅguttara Nikāya where this formula is found, it is stated that the formula refers to ‘the fact that things are a certain way’ (dhammatthitā), and ‘the fact that there is a regularity of things’ (dhammaniyāmatā) which applies whether or not a tathāgata (an epithet of the Buddha) appears in the world. The formula is: “all conditioned
phenomena (sāṃkhārā) are unsatisfactory, all conditioned phenomena (sāṃkhārā) are impermanent, all phenomena (dhammā) are selfless”. In fact all the phenomena of sāṃsāric experience, of whatever kind, are conditioned: this is precisely why they are impermanent and unsatisfactory. So all sāṃsāric phenomena are sāṃkhāras (or sāṃkhata – conditioned; the two words are virtually interchangeable). The construction of the word sāṃkhāra itself gives us insight as to its precise meaning: the verb kar (Sanskrit: कर) basically means ‘make’ or ‘do’; but the addition of the prefix sams gives ‘make’ the more specific meaning of ‘put together’, ‘compose’, ‘form’ or ‘condition’. As nothing to do with sāṃsāric experience is asāṃkhata, what this clearly means is that nothing exists as an ultimate element or simple: all sāṃsāric phenomena are ‘formed’ or ‘conditioned’. This is re-stating that all sāṃsāric phenomena are dependently originated.

The characteristic referred to in the third line of the formula, selflessness (anattā), is implicit in the meaning of sāṃkhāra: being conditioned does not allow for the independence that selfhood presupposes. But in this third line, sāṃkhāra is juxtaposed with the word dhammā. Dhammā refers here to all phenomena, whether conditioned (sāṃkhata) or otherwise: in other words the last line of the formula, all things are selfless (sabbe dhammā anattā), includes the sāṃkhata phenomena of sāṃsāric experience referred to in the first two parts of the formula, but it goes further than they do in that it includes the unconditioned (asāṃkhata), which in the Buddha’s teachings refers specifically to the experience of Nirvana. Impermanence and unsatisfactoriness are not attributed to the unconditioned, but it is important to establish that for it too, along with conditioned phenomena, any attribution of independent selfhood is erroneous.

First, then, the term sāṃkhāra refers to all the phenomena of sāṃsāric existence: there exists nothing in sāṃsāra which is not sāṃkhata. Everything being discussed here in connection with the five khandhas, for example, is, as well as any other meaning or significance it may have, a sāṃkhāra. This is what is meant when the nun Vajirā describes a ‘being’ (sattā) as a “mere heap of sāṃkhāras”.

Sāṃkhāra in the Paṭiccasamuppāda Formula

Second, sāṃkhāra is the second link in the formula of paṭiccasamuppāda. In order to ascertain the meaning of sāṃkhāra in this context, it is important to understand the purpose of the formula. It has usually been understood to have been intended as a metaphysical formula explaining the nature of sāṃsāra as such. Indeed the doctrine of paṭiccasamuppāda above all states that all sāṃsāric phenomena are causally originated, conditioned. At the
beginning of a canonical passage in which the formula is given, the Buddha states that he is teaching dependent origination and about things which have arisen dependently.\(^6\) He also states that he is referring to the way things are (dhammaṭṭhitatā), the fact that there is a regularity of things (dhammaniyāmatā), and that things are causally related (idappaccayatā).\(^7\) We saw the first two of these phrases used in introducing the tilakkhāna formula above. The third, idappaccayatā, is used elsewhere in the canon in a context which indicates clearly that it is a term which refers to the metaphysical nature of āmātra.\(^8\) Such phrases support the usual understanding of paṭiccasamupāda, that it describes the conditioned nature of samsāra.\(^8\)

I suggest, however, that the term paṭiccasamupāda – dependent origination – applies to a general doctrine, and that the actual formula given by the Buddha is intended to have a more specific purpose. This is to explain the ‘how’ of human existence in samsāra, to give a synthetical formula which explains the mechanics of how a human being is a human being. The dilemma in response to which it might have been given could have gone something like this: ‘If the whole of samsāric experience is paṭiccasamuppāna (i.e. it consists only of conditioned, dependently originated, phenomena), if all that can be said about conditioned phenomena is that they are impermanent and unsatisfactory, and if absolutely all phenomena are selfless, how does what we experience as an individual life actually function? How does it hang together as a seemingly coherent whole? One might be able to accept that inanimate things are unsatisfactory, impermanent and selfless, but the case of human beings is more complex and requires further elucidation.’

My suggestion that the formula has this purpose is well supported in the texts. Most significantly, this purpose is implied by the fact that the formula itself refers specifically to a human being. Terms such as ignorance, consciousness, senses, feelings, birth, old age and death, are clearly referring to a human being.\(^9\) In the Mahāmātāna Suttanta in the Dīgha Nikāya, which is one of the most important passages dealing with paṭiccasamuppāda, each stage of the formula is further elaborated in terms of human characteristics such as holding opinions, quarrelling, slander and lies, and so on.\(^10\) Elsewhere, the formula is given in order to explain dukkha, the term the Buddha used to describe the samsāric experience of human beings, as stated in the first Noble Truth.\(^11\) It is precisely because samsāric experience is dukkha that the Buddha gave his teaching to lead people away from it: it was the human condition he was concerned about. The formula is used in other contexts to describe the Middle Way: the lack of independent existence of anything at all is conceived of as the ‘middle way’ between existence and non-existence.\(^12\) But the fact that it is so obviously associated with the human being surely reflects both the Buddha’s express statement that he was solely concerned with helping people to gain Enlightenment and so escape from the cycle of samsāra, and also that he was not concerned
to give ontological explanations. The achieving of Nirvana involves ‘seeing things as they really are’ (yatābhūtam), but exactly what things really are is never described by the Buddha: only the way to achieve such insight oneself is described. This suggestion is also supported in the texts by the fact that understanding the teaching is stated to mean that one will no longer ask questions about individual existence in saṃsāra, past, future, or present, such as “Am I, or am I not? What am I? How am I? This ‘being’ that is ‘I’, where has it come from, where will it go?”

Paticcasamuppāda as a generally applicable doctrine which demonstrates that all things are causally originated is unquestionably fundamental to the Buddha’s teaching. In some contexts where the formula is also given, and in one context where the formula is not given, the general doctrine is stated as follows: “When this is, that is; when this arises, that arises; if this is not, that is not; when this ceases, that ceases”. The modern way of putting this is “When A is, B is; A arising, B arises; when A is not, B is not; A ceasing, B ceases”. In my opinion, however, it is only through understanding that the purpose of the twelvefold formula itself is specifically to explain how human beings exist in saṃsāra that one understands it accurately. This is certainly the case when it comes to understanding what saṃkhāra means in this context: the term applies to the way in which a human being arises, not to the way in which saṃsāra in the wider sense of the objective world in general arises, and confusing the two can be very misleading. My point is that the formula is not explaining that the ‘stuff’ of saṃsāra (the objective world) is the saṃkhāras, viññāṇa and so on, conditioned by ignorance. I will return to this point below.

The formula varies as to the number of ‘links’ it contains. The common twelvefold version (given in the Introduction) starts with ignorance, and states that ignorance is the condition for the arising of the saṃkhāras, which in turn are the condition for the arising of viññāṇa, nāmarūpa, the saḷāyatanas, and so on. It explains the whole cycle of human existence, how individuals are reborn again and again. As existence is thought to be cyclical in Buddhism, it seems most likely that the formula is intended to be understood as circular rather than linear; but given that liberation from the saṃsāric cycle is brought about by insight, it is perhaps not surprising that the formula as given should begin with ignorance. ‘Ignorance’ simply means ‘lack of insight’. This can vary in degree, but always means that liberating insight has not taken place. This, indeed, is why there is continued saṃsāric existence as an individual. Ignorance represents the prime condition for the human condition as a whole. And because of such ignorance or lack of insight, certain volitional and formative activities, called saṃkhāras, take place, which in turn are the specific conditions of a particular human being. I say ‘specific’ and ‘particular’ because in this case saṃkhāra is not merely a generic term covering all conditioned phenomena. Here, saṃkhāras arise according to the nature of the ignorance of each
individual: no two people’s ignorance is precisely the same (it is dependent on where someone is on the path to liberation) and so no two people’s samkhāras are the same. To understand in what way they are volitional, it helps if one bears in mind that according to the Buddha’s teaching, karma (action) is cetanā (volition), and that the words karma and samkhāra come from the same verbal root, kar (Sanskrit: kṛ). How one acts or intends, therefore, is conditioned by one’s level of ignorance (or knowledge), and so long as they are conditioned by ignorance, such actions or intentions continue to have their place as a condition for the arising of a particular individual. We read in the canon that only an ignorant person (purisapuggalo) will have good or bad intentions; when ignorance has ceased, he or she will have neither good nor bad intentions.¹⁷ The term samkhāra has sometimes been translated or interpreted as ‘formation’.¹⁸ When it refers to samkhāra as the second link in the paṭiccasamuppāda formula, this is a particularly apt translation because it has more of an actively formative meaning than mere ‘volition’ has. That the samkhāras are formative is also implied from their position as the condition for the subsequent arising of an individual. In an abstract sense they are the creative principle in a human being. The second meaning of the word samkhāra, then, is the actively formative principle which, conditioned by ignorance, in turn conditions (or forms) the arising of a particular individual. One might say that it is the individualising faculty, in the sense of being the formative principle which distinguishes individual A from individual B. We shall see in chapter v how, by way of association with the faculty of consciousness (viññāna), this subsequently gives rise to the ‘name and form’ of the individual concerned. ‘Formative activities’ would perhaps be an appropriate translation of the term samkhāra in this context.

Samkhāra as a Khandha

The third relevant context in which the term samkhāra is found is the samkhārakkhandha. I have put this third because understanding what it means here is facilitated by having already looked at the preceding two contexts. As we shall see, the meaning of samkhāra here is closely related to that in the paṭiccasamuppāda formula, with one distinction. Once again, we need to bear in mind the reason for the analysis of the person into khandhas in order to grasp its proper meaning. We have already seen that the tilakkhaṇa formula explains the fundamental nature of samsāric existence in general, and that the paṭiccasamuppāda formula is a synthetical explanation of the ‘how’ of individual human existence. As we know, the khandhas also apply to human existence, but analytically rather than synthetically: they show that while it is possible to show how an individual human being arises, as the paṭiccasamuppāda formula does, that individual should be understood
not in terms of separate selfhood but in terms of how each khandha can be seen to 'contribute' certain key characteristics of the human being as a whole. The analysis is entirely impersonal (in the psychological rather than the metaphysical sense of impersonal), and is not at all intended to explain a particular or specific human being in the way the paṭiccasamuppāda formula can.

In the Khandha Samyutta, the saṃkhārakkhandha is defined as the six groups of volitional activity. Once again the sixfold classification is according to the connection of the six senses with their corresponding six objects. Significantly, this definition of the saṃkhārakkhandha clearly separates what in the West would probably be called 'will' from other mental states. In Buddhism, the teaching that karma is intention makes it particularly important that this be clearly defined: the nature, presence or absence of volitional states determines the way in which, and extent to which, one is 'bound'.

This is established in another definition of saṃkhāra given in the Khandha Samyutta. From the Pali one can see that there is a complex play on verbal and nominal forms of words associated with saṃ vkar: Saṃkhāram abhisamkharontī bhikkhave tasmā saṃkhārā ti vuccanti. What it means is: "The khandha of volitional activities is so called because they volitionally construct (abhisamkharonti) conditioned phenomena (samkhatam)". The passage goes on:

What conditioned phenomena do they volitionally construct? They volitionally construct the conditioned phenomenon that is the body as body; they volitionally construct the conditioned phenomenon which is [the khandha of] feeling as feeling; they volitionally construct the conditioned phenomenon which is [the khandha of] apperception as apperception; they volitionally construct the conditioned phenomenon which is [the khandha of] the volitional activities as volitional activities; and they volitionally construct the conditioned phenomenon which is [the khandha of] consciousness as consciousness.

What this passage clearly indicates is the way in which the individual's will determines his or her future samsāric existence: one's volitions are the instrumental factor in the coming-to-be of the entire human being. The key role played by volitional activities in the cyclic samsāric existence of an individual human being is further discussed below.

The saṃkhārakkhandha is unique among the khandhas in that it need not, and indeed ultimately should not, be 'activated' in the functioning of a human being. We have already seen above, in our discussion of the paṭiccasamuppāda formula, that ignorance is the condition for the arising of the formative activities (saṃkhāras). Ultimately, a bhikkhu is aiming to substitute knowledge for ignorance, in which case the condition for the arising of these formative activities will cease. Indeed the paṭiccasamuppāda formula is given in reverse in the Nikāyas to illustrate how it is possible for human existence in the cycle of samsāra to cease. Similarly, the analysis into
khandhas shows that a human being can function without the involvement of the samkhārakkhandha, without volitions in the sense that is intended here. The description of the arising of visual feeling, for example, to which we have already referred, shows clearly that it is quite possible for the feeling to arise without any involvement at all of the samkhārakkhandha:

Visual awareness arises because of eye and [visible] forms; contact [occurs] when there is a combination of the three; feelings are caused by contact; that which one feels, one apperceives...24

From this we can see that the sensory activity, including both the organ and object of sense, involves the rūpakkhandha; awareness is the function of the viññānakkhandha; apperception takes place in the saññākkhandha: and these three khandhas are involved in the activating and recognising of what is experienced in a fourth – the vedanākkhandha. The feeling can be agreeable, disagreeable or neutral, but the samkhārakkhandha is only involved if there is a concomitant volition concerning the feeling: if it is an agreeable feeling, a concomitant volition might be to desire it; if it is a disagreeable feeling, one might be revolted by it. In practice, the feelings of an unenlightened individual usually are accompanied by volitions, and this is illustrated by the fact that in the patīcassamuppāda formula feelings are said to be the condition for the arising of craving (tanha). But one can, and ultimately should, experience feelings without any concomitant volitions: an arahant is able to experience pleasant and unpleasant feelings while remaining entirely detached from them. This is stated in the Vedanā Samyutta, where we read that the well-taught Ariyan disciple has no repugnance for painful feeling, or delight in sensual pleasure.26 The process of analysing the person into khandhas shows how this is a constitutional possibility. An interesting passage in the Majjhima Nikāya, which is discussed in detail in chapter v, states that it is impossible to separate vedanā, saññā and viññāṇa, but does not say that samkhāra is similarly inseparable.27

The samkhārakkhandha, then, is the khandha of the will, and it might be translated as the ‘volitional constituent’ of the human being.

The Cyclic Causal Nexus

As we have seen, both the samkhārakkhandha and the patīcassamuppāda formula are specifically connected with the samsāric experience of the human being. It is perhaps not surprising, then, that the meaning of samkhāra in each of these two contexts should be closely linked, as we shall now see.

First, however, I return to the point made above that there is one difference between the meaning of samkhāra as a khandha, that is as the volitional constituent of a human being, and its meaning as the second link in the chain of the patīcassamuppāda formula, the formative activities. This is
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that the volitional constituent does not function as that which conditions or forms the constitution of the individual for this life (as can be inferred from the fact that its inactivity does not affect the composition of an individual). Rather, the volitions of the samkharakkhandha are concerned with how the individual operates: his or her day to day volitions during this life. This difference is compatible with the fact that the paticasamuppāda formula is a synthetical explanation of how a human being functions, while the khandha formula is analytical: the former is creative and the latter is not. It is also compatible with the fact that there are two distinct aspects to the way karma works. In the first instance, samkhara as formative activities, the second link in the paticasamuppāda formula, forms the human being for this life: it is the creative aspect of karma. In the second instance, the samkharakkhandha, which is the volitional constituent of that human being in this life, functions according to the way he or she has been formed: it is what we might call the operative aspect of karma. Being cyclical, of course, the operative karma of this life will (unless it is neutral) become the creative karma of a future life: one’s present volitions eventually condition the ignorance on which future formative activities are based. This is explicitly evidenced in the passage above which defines the samkhirakkhandha as volitionally constructing the human being.

The difference between the meanings of samkhara in these two contexts is by way of their representing two aspects of karma, which is itself the linking factor between them. It is in this sense of the cyclical nature of karma that Frauwallner, who translates samkhara as Gestaltung, ‘formation’, states that it “signifies that something is put in a condition of readiness which further influences and operates”, and compares this with its meaning in the classical Samkhya system, where the term samkhard denotes “the condition of the wheel which is moving in rotation and continues to move of itself”.

Interestingly, the word (abhisamkhara is used in the Anguttara Nikāya in a passage in which a wheelwright is discussing how long a wheel will continue to roll: a wheel will keep rolling for as long as ‘the impulse that set it rolling’ lasts. This is clearly an apt analogy for the ‘wheel of samsāra’, which is a popular way of expressing the cyclical nature of the two different aspects of samkhara being discussed here, and which together might be said to be the ‘fuel’ of the individual in samsāra. Frauwallner is attempting to give a single translation for these two meanings of samkhara, which I have called ‘formative activities’ and ‘volitional constituent’ respectively. While this is a perfectly legitimate aim, there is nevertheless an ambiguity which results from using one translation rather than analysing the differences between the contexts in which the term is found. In fact, from the discussion above of the two aspects of karma represented by the two meanings of samkhara which I have suggested, we are in a better position to see that where such a single translation is required, Frauwallner’s ‘formation’ can have the connotation of both the creative and
the operative aspects of the term in these two contexts. But it does not immediately convey the cyclic nature of the two kinds of volition, and without first offering an analysis of the two meanings this twin connotation might easily be missed. Confusion may also arise because ‘formations’ has been used extensively by I. B. Horner in her numerous translations to refer solely to samkhāra when it is part of the paticcasamuppāda formula: its creative aspect. She uses ‘habitual tendencies’ when translating samkhāra as the fourth of the five khandhas. The best single translation is ‘inherited forces’, since here there is a much clearer implication in the word ‘inherited’ of an operative aspect and in the word ‘forces’ of a creative aspect. That volitions are ‘inherited’ does not necessarily mean that they are entirely pre-determined (without at least a degree of free will the Buddha’s ethicising of the law of karma would be pointless), but they are nevertheless as conditioned as any other aspect of the individual by one’s overall moral state in one’s previous life or lives.

A frequently used formula brings together the two meanings of samkhāra as aspects of the ethical life of the individual which functions cyclically in his or her continuing rebirth process through the law of karma. This is the triad ‘thought, word and deed’ by which all the actions of an individual are carried out. Highlighting both the ethical nature of this triad, and the way the samkhāras condition the individual’s life in every way, we read in Kukkuraṭṭikasutta: “One volitionally acts through body, speech and thought”. It is according to whether such actions are harmful (sābyābajha) or harmless (abhyābajha) that one is subsequently reborn, the Sutta states. Elsewhere this triad is described in terms of karma, with karma being used as a synonym for samkhāra. Taking the two passages together, we see the Buddha’s ethicising of karma clearly tied in with the function of the samkhārakkhandha as the khandha of volitions. E. J. Thomas, in his History of Buddhist Thought, suggests that the division of samkhāra into kāya, vaci and citta (or manas) is the earliest classification of the samkhārakkhandha. He is referring to the fact that the later Abhidhamma classifies the samkhārakkhandha according to fifty different mental activities, only one of which is volition.

There is another early classification in the Sāṅgīti Suttanta, not mentioned by Thomas, which ties in the ethical teaching by using a different triad. This is into good (puñña), bad (apuñña), and (literally) imperturbable or stationary (āneñja). The literal translation of āneñja might suggest that this classification includes karmically neutral volitions. According to the commentary, however, āneñjābhissamkhāra here refers to the will for rebirth in the ariyā loka, and this meaning of the term is also found in the Abhidhamma. The context of the Dīgha Nikāya passage does not help us in determining the way in which it is being used, because the Sāṅgīti Suttanta gives lists for recitation purposes without any explanations: it is generally agreed to be a kind of proto-Abhidhamma, an early work of scholastic classification, no doubt for mnemonic purposes. But the view of the
commentator that ānēṇābhisamkhāra is not referring to neutral volition is supported by the other context in which the same triad is found.38 Here the three types of samkhāra of the triad are stated to be the volitions of an ordinary ignorant man (avijjāgato purisa-puggalo), and the passage goes on to state that when ignorance has been replaced by wisdom the bhikkhu will not have volitions of these three types.39 Rebirth in the arūpa loka (or the result of any other volition which is not neutral) is ultimately undesirable since it does not represent liberation. So a bhikkhu in whom ignorance had been replaced by wisdom would not have such volitions. We have here, then, two early triadic classifications which might be applied to the activity of the samkhārakkhandha, both of which are ethical in nature.

We also find the former of these triads, that into kāya, vacī and citta, in a passage where it is clear from the context that the classification is referring to samkhāra as the second link in the patīccasamuppāda formula rather than to the samkhārakkhandha. This is located in the Nidāna Samyutta, the section of the Sutta Piṭaka which discusses the doctrine of patīccasamuppāda, and the passage is describing the links of the patīccasamuppāda formula in turn. Samkhāra is defined in terms of body, speech and mind.40 In a passage in the Abhidhamma, we find the two triads linked in a description of samkhāra as the second link in the patīccasamuppāda formula. So formative activities (samkhāras) which are good, bad or desirous of the arūpaloka, are bodily, verbal and mental.41 The application of these triadic ethical classifications of samkhāra to both of these two contexts, the samkhārakkhandha and samkhāra as the second link in the patīccasamuppāda formula, clearly emphasises the interconnectedness of these two kinds of samkhāra in the cyclic continuum of the individual in saṁsāra as well as their significance in the ethical process.

A word needs to be said at this point about the role of samkhāra in conditioning future rebirth. I have said that the samkhārakkhandha as the operative aspect of karma becomes the creative aspect of karma in determining a subsequent individual life, and this was evidenced in the &$andha Samyutta passage where the constituents of the human being were all said to have been volitionally constructed. In the Samkhārakkhandha, the Buddha explains the arising of samkhāras in a different context.42 The Sutta states that a bhikkhu who possesses faith (saddhi), moral standing (sīla), learning (sutta), detachment (cāga) and wisdom (pañña) can set his mind to being reborn in a particular favourable circumstance, such as a wealthy noble (khattiya-mahāsīla), brahmin or householder, a god, or in one of the many brahma realms. Together with the five qualities, a bhikkhu’s mind must have ‘constant inclinations’ (bhavānā-bahuliṭā) towards the rebirth he desires. The Sutta is somewhat simplistic in style, and it is therefore tempting to interpret it equally simplistically, and assume that it is intending to explain how a bhikkhu is able to will himself into a nice rebirth if he so wishes. This indeed it does, and illustrates the way in which his inclinations or intentions in one life condition his subsequent life. One
might in any case expect to find a passage on this subject included in the canonical material since it is a pan-Indian belief that one can to a greater or lesser extent choose or influence one’s next life by one’s particular aspirations at the time of death. And the Buddha’s teaching that karma is volition gives considerably more credence to this notion. But the message the Sutta contains is far more powerful if considered in the light of its final paragraph. This states that a bhikkhu who has reached the advanced stage implied by possession of the five qualities of faith, moral standing, learning, detachment and wisdom, need not have inclinations towards a specific favourable rebirth such as those already mentioned. He also has the choice of liberation, which is achieved through the extinction of the ásāvas. Since one of the ásāvas is the desire for continued becoming, we can see that it is the extinction of this altogether, rather than desiring to continue to become in a favourable circumstance, that is necessary in order to bring about the liberating factor of no subsequent arising (rebirth) at all. So while this Sutta does serve to illustrate that specific mental inclinations can produce specific results, the message of the Sutta is, rather, a warning of the binding power of volitions.

Having discussed samkhāra in the contexts of the paticcasamuppāda formula and the samkhāra-khandha and established a relatively clear understanding of how each contributes in its own way to the cyclic ethical activities of the individual, I turn now to illustrating that, in practice, the complex of volitional factors of which an individual is comprised is far from being so clearly defined. Volitions do not come to fruition according to a set temporal pattern. They can therefore lie dormant, as it were, and for long periods of time condition the constitution of the individual through the cyclic way the formative activities and the volitions condition each other. The term used in Pali to indicate this is anusaya, which means: “bent, bias, proclivity, the persistence of a dormant or latent disposition, predisposition, tendency. Always in a bad sense”. ‘Bad’ of course means binding, not bad in the legal sense of criminal or even in the simple sense of unpleasant. The English term ‘bias’ is perhaps a good word to convey the connotations associated with anusaya. That anusaya implies ‘bad’ tendencies is suggested in passages which equate their absence with the absence of other fundamentally binding factors. In the Sutta Nipāta we read of “the bhikkhu in whom there are no latent tendencies, in whom the unwholesome roots are destroyed”. The venerable Khemaka, who has managed to eradicate overt identification with each of the five khandhas, still has not “eradicated the tendency to think ‘I am’”. The subtle nature of this tendency is likened in the text to a soiled cloth which has been washed clean but which still has about it the vague smell of salt or cow-dung. It has to be returned to the washerman to leave it for some time in a sweet-scented coffer (analogous to further meditation on selflessness). The vague smell will then be completely removed.
Though this passage illustrates that Khemaka’s persisting notion of ‘I am’ is subtle, it also suggests that the *anusayas* function at a very deep level. They are almost what one would describe as ‘part of human nature’. In the *Mahāmāluṇḍyasutta*, the Buddha states that even in a baby there are the latent tendencies to the view of (identifying with) its own body, to doubt, to clinging to customs and rituals, to sense pleasure, and to ill-will towards other beings. The *Sāṅgīta Suttanta* lists seven *anusayas*: sense pleasures, anger, views, doubt, conceit, the desire for continued existence and ignorance, and each of these is found in many places throughout the *Sutta Piṭaka*. Elsewhere a triplet is given: obstinacy, prejudice and bias. The profundity of the *anusayas* is perhaps most strongly suggested by the fact that four of them mentioned here, sensual desire, the desire for continued existence, views and ignorance, are together referred to as the āsavas. These are the last binding factors to be eradicated by the disciple on the path, and their eradication is accompanied by Enlightenment.

The association of the *anusayas* with the āsavas reinforces the suggestion made above that they are almost what one would describe as ‘part of human nature’. Cyclically reinforced over many lives, they have become deeply embedded in an individual’s psychological make-up. They are the origin of unwitting, asampaja, actions. We also see the threefold classification of volitions according to bodily actions, speech and thoughts identified with breathing, discursive thought, and apperception and feeling respectively, all of which are normal processes in every human being. This is perhaps why the term ‘roots’, mūlā, is so often associated with binding defilements in Pali material: they have to be rooted out. Paradoxically, however, it is volition which is applied in the rooting out process. In the light of the deeply embedded nature of the *anusayas* (or āsavas), which fuel one’s continued saṃsāric existence, this process is so difficult that it is referred to as going ‘against the current’, patisotagāmi.

We have seen that saṃkhāra and karma are classified according to good and bad. Though in popular teaching good volitions or actions are usually said to lead to a favourable rebirth, they can also be used intentionally to direct one’s will towards the following of the Eightfold Path and eradicating the roots of defilement. In the *Sabbāsavasutta*, for example, it states that the āsavas can be eradicated by wisely paying attention (yoniso manasikāra) to their control (saṃwara), to endurance (adhibhāsanā) and so on. All of these are deliberately or volitionally applied. We also find the terms pathanā and panidhi, respectively meaning aspiration and mental resolve, in association with cetanā, volition, in contexts where all three can be used towards the continuing of dukkha or can be directed towards activities which conduce to sukha, its direct opposite (and as such sometimes used as a synonym for Nirvana). A bhikkhu has to keep his thoughts under control by a deliberate act of will (saṃkhāra) involving habitual restraint.
The way the *sāṃkhāras* act as a ‘fuel’ for the individual’s continuing *samsāric* existence is not difficult to understand from all of the foregoing. We can see the way volitions in one life condition a subsequent life and how this process is reinforced through its cyclic nature. We have also seen how fundamentally this is embedded in the psychological nature of the human being, in the desire for continued existence, for example. This probably explains why the term *sāṃkhāra* is also used together with āyu or jīvita to mean the ‘life-force’. In the *Mahāparinibbāna Sutta*, we read that the Buddha can either deliberately hold on to this life force or give it up and die. Elsewhere it is used as one of the defining characteristics of a live person: without it there is only a dead body.

In view of the complexity of the causal process, it seems reasonable to suggest that the goal of volitional inactivity mentioned above applies only to those volitions that are potentially karmically binding; volitions such as hate, desire, anger have to be distinguished from those karmically neutral volitions which are continually involved in the practical functioning of an individual, such as deciding to sleep, eat, sit down, and so on. The former are to be eradicated, the latter continue and are insignificant to one’s progress on the Path. What this means is that karmically neutral actions are not technically volitions. This is relevant to understanding the meaning of *sāṃkhāra* both in the *paṭiccasamuppāda* formula and in the *sāṃkhārakkhandha*. In the case of the *paṭiccasamuppāda* formula, in spite of the fact that *sāṃkhāras*, the volitional formative activities which condition an individual, are dependent on ignorance, it is possible for a human being to continue to function even after all ignorance has been eradicated. One only has to recall that the Buddha continued to live for forty-five years after his Enlightenment to realise that this is the case. This need not be problematic if one considers the formula in the spirit in which it was intended rather than pedantically applying logic to it. As already stated, the formula is intended to show how a human being’s continued rebirth is primarily dependent on ignorance, and once ignorance is eradicated there will be no more rebirth; the life of an Enlightened individual may continue until death takes place in due course but that death will not be the condition for rebirth. It is at the death of an Enlightened individual that the entire causal nexus, including karmically neutral activities, ceases. In the case of the *sāṃkhārakkhandha*, it would seem that this *khandha* is only activated when volitions in the technical sense take place: karmically neutral, or non-technical, activities do not involve the *sāṃkhārakkhandha*. Once again, no problems arise if one bears in mind the purpose of giving the analysis: the Buddha’s overriding concern was to offer a path to liberation rather than a complete classification of every process that occurs, and, since karmically neutral activities are not a soteriologically significant factor within human existence, they do not have to be part of an analysis of the human being which is given for the sole purpose of leading to liberating insight. The
technical status of samkhāras is suggested in passages which state that Nirvana, the cessation of ignorance, is the stilling (or cessation) of samkhāras. At this point one’s state of mind is without volitional activity. But at this point that part of the causal nexus which fuels one’s basic functioning as a human being nevertheless continues.

A final point concerning samkhāra brings me back to the suggestion that it is important to understand that the paticcasamuppāda formula applies to the way a human being arises and not to the way samsāra in the general sense of the objective world arises. We can see that the meaning of samkhāra in the tilakkhaṇa formula differs from its meaning as the second link in the paticcasamuppāda formula and in the samkhārakkhandha in that the first has a passive meaning, ‘conditioned phenomena’, and the last two have an active meaning, ‘formative activities’ and ‘volitional constituent’. We saw above that all the phenomena of samsāric experience are samkhāras, and in this sense all the khandhas and parts thereof are samkhāras regardless of any other more specific function they may have. Given also that the paticcasamuppāda formula describes a process wherein the samkhāras are the active and formative principle of individual samsāric continuity, one might say, as Franke does, that the term samkhāra refers both to process and product. In making this point, however, it is crucial to understand (as Franke does not) both that this can be said only with reference to human samsāric continuity, and also that both process and product are concerned with method and not with substance (that is, with how it works rather than with what it is). Franke claims that samkhāra is both process and product of an entirely mental creative activity; that the process, being based on ignorance, is psychological, and the product imaginary. He makes this claim for the world as a whole. Franke has failed to understand that the paticcasamuppāda formula is intended to explain the ‘how’ of human samsāric existence, not the ‘what’ of the world as a whole. He erroneously states on the one hand that because the samkhāras are conditioned by ignorance and give rise to the subsequent parts of the chain, the entire process is mental, and mistakenly claims on the other hand an idealistic ontological status for the product.

In my opinion, it cannot be claimed that the samkhāras are both process and product of the objective world (samsāra) as a whole, because we have no evidence to support the supposition that the world is volitionally formed, only that it is conditioned (samkhāta).

Notes

1. AN.I.286. The formula itself is also found at Dhammapada 5-7; 277-279. cf. also MN.I.236; DN.II.157.
2. E.L. Woodward translates dhammatthavatā as ‘causal law of nature’ and dhammanipātatā as ‘orderly fixing of things’ (GS.I.264). His translation of the formula itself is misleadingly incorrect because he gives ‘phenomena’ for both samkhāra and for dhammā.
3. Sabbe samkhāra dukkha, sabbe samkhāra aniccā, sabbe dhammā anattā.
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For example, at SN.II.25 and throughout the Nidāna Sutta.

SN.II.25: Paticcasamuppādātā vo bhikkhave desissāmi paticcasamuppanne ca dhamme.

Ibid.

For example, SN.1:196: ... duddaśaṁ idānānāṁ yad idām idappacchayā paticcasamuppādo: “This is something hard to perceive: that this is conditioned by that, it is dependently originated.”

The formula may also refer to other beings on the saṁsārī cycle of rebirth: animals, devas and so on. But the path to liberating insight is primarily given in terms of the human condition and it is this with which this book is concerned.

DN.II.55f: Dīttāntipadīna ... tucayutthu-puṣṭhā-musaṭtā.ā.

For example, AN.I.177; SN.II.2 etc.; MN.I.90.

Anupagamma may refer to other beings in the Nidāna Sutta; for example, SN.II.17. cf. Mrs C. A. F. Rhys Davids’ comment in Dialogues Vol II, p.42f.

SN.II.27: ... ahaṁ nu kho smi, na nu kho smi; kīṁ nu kho smi; kathāṁ nu kho smi; ahaṁ nu kho satto kuto āgato so haṁgangīṁ bhavissati iti.

MN.II.92 (without the formula); SN.II.28,95; MN.III.63. Not at DN.II.55f or AN.I.176f.

Ixaṁsin ni, idān āti; inass’ utpādā idām uppasajjati; inass’ nisu, idān āti; inass’ nirodha idām nirūhīti.


15. I will henceforth make this distinction: the term paticcasamuppāda means the doctrine of dependent origination, whereas the paticcasamuppādā ‘formula’ refers to the chain itself.

SN.II.82.

The interchangeability of either of the khandha the passage is defining or of the role of volitions in the constructing of an individual.

MN.I.111: Cakkhaṁ cātuns paticca rittipe ca uppajjati cakkhuvināṇṇam, tiṁsāṁ saṅgati phasso, phassapaccheyya vedanā, yaṁ vedeti tum saṁjñāti. . .

The viññāṇa-khandha is discussed in chapter v.

MN.IV.209: Tassā yeva kho pānā dukkhāya vedanāya patīghavā na hoti . . . kāmasakkhaṁ nābhikhandato.

MN.I.203: Ya cātuns vedanā yā ca saṁjñā ye ca viññāṇāṁ ime dhammaṁ saṁsajīvati na visamajīvati, na ca labbhaṁ imevaṁ dhammaṁ ca viññāṇījīvati vinnubhūjīvitaṁ nānakaṁ ca paññāpetum.

Frauwallner, 1973, p.159.

AN.I.112: Yāvatikā abhisamkhaṇṇaṁ gati.


MN.I.369: Kāyasamkhārāṁ abhisamkhāroti . . . vaṭisamkhaṇṇaṁ abhisamkhāroti . . . manosamkhāraṁ abhisamkhāroti.

MN.I.415f: Kāya-kammano . . . vaṭi-yammano and mano-kammano. The interchangeability of cittas and manas in this context is discussed in chapter v.

Thomas, 1933, p.61, n.2.

For example, Dhs 62.

DN.III.217: Tāto samkhāro puññābhisamkhāro, opuññābhisamkhāro, āneñjābhisamkhāro.


SN.II.82.

Ato kho bhikkhave bhikkhiye avijjā paśīṇā hoti avijjā uppannā, so avijjasirāga vijuppaddā n eva puññābhisamkhārāṁ abhisamkhāroti, na opuññābhisamkhārāṁ abhisamkhāroti, na āneñjābhisamkhārāṁ abhisamkhāroti.
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41. SN.II.4: Katame ca bhikkhave samkhārā? ‘Tayo me bhikkhave samkhārā kāyasamkhāro varisamkhāro cittasamkhāro; ime vucaṇī ti bhikkhave samkhārā.


43. Gombrich (1971, chapter 5) discusses how this is understood by Buddhists in a village setting in Sri Lanka.

44. MN.II.103: Ayaṃ, bhikkhave, bhikkhu na kathaci uppaṣajati na kuhīci uppaṣajati.

45. PED, p.44.

46. Sn 14: ‘Yassamussayat saṃkhāra na santi keci mādī akusālā samāhāraya. cf. also Sn 369.

47. SN.III.130: Aṃśupanna asamāhāraya.


49. DN.III.254: Kāmarāgāsanā, paṭighāsanā, diṭṭhāsanā, viccikkhāsanā, mānāsanā (this is usually associated with ‘I am’), bhūvarāgāsanā, avijjāsanā.

50. Adittapānābhāsāsanā. For example at MN.I.136, III.31, 249; SN.II.17, III.10, 135, 161; AN.V.111.

51. AN.II.158, SN.II.40. cf. also AN.I.171.

52. MN.I.301.

53. MN.I.7.

54. For example, AN.I.32, V.212.


56. DN.II.99.

57. DN.II.106.

58. MN.I.296. This passage, where āyusamkhāra is combined with heat, usmā, and consciousness, vibhāsa, was referred to in chapter 1 and is also discussed in chapter 5. cf. also DN.II.355.

59. I use the word ‘karmically’ here in the (possibly Westernised) general meaning of that which binds an individual to the cycle of rebirth.

60. SN.I.196; AN.I.133: Sabba samkhārasamatho... nibbānaṃ.


62. Franck, 1913, pp.307–18. I am indebted to Birte Plutat for assistance in translating from the German.

63. Reat (1987 passim, and 1990, chapter VI, especially pp. 317ff) makes the same mistake. Reat bases his idealistic interpretation of the pātīcasaṃnuṭṭhāya formula on his understanding of nāmarūpa, which will be discussed in chapter VI.
CHAPTER V

The Viññānakkhandha

The fourth and last of the arūpakkhandhas is the viññānakkhandha. Unlike the terms used to denote the other three arūpakkhandhas (vedanā, saññā and samkhāra), viññāna is often used in the Pali texts as a generic term to denote 'mind' in general. This generic use means that it is found in many different contexts in which there is no clear indication of its precise meaning or function as a khandha. The lack of clarity is compounded by the fact that other terms are also used in a generic sense to denote 'mind' in general; and they too have their own specific meanings in other contexts. By the time the Abhidhamma was compiled, numerous different terms had been introduced to denote general mental activity, the meanings of which were elaborated in the commentaries. In the Sutta Pitaka, however, the most common terms used, often seemingly interchangeably with viññāna, are citta and manas. All three are used far from systematically: on the one hand, the same term means different things in different places; on the other hand, the meanings of the terms overlap and they sometimes appear to be being used synonymously.

The term viññāna is usually translated as 'consciousness' or 'awareness'. Because one of the most fundamental characteristics of human beings is that they are conscious, this makes it a particularly important term in the analysis of the human being. But because there is such a widely diverse use of the term in the Sutta Pitaka, it is not immediately obvious that the authors or compilers of the material had a clear understanding of what the viññānakkhandha is or does. We have already had some indication that defining viññāna is not likely to be a simple matter. In the discussion on the saññākkhandha we saw that in a brief description of each of the five khandhas in the Khandha Samyutta, both saññā and viññāna were defined as discriminative faculties, with standard formulas being used in each case. The difficulty in understanding the term is not helped by the fact that to this day philosophers, psychologists, doctors and theologians, not to mention physicists, of both East and West continue to speculate about what consciousness is: there is no consensus as to its meaning or function.
In attempting to define viññāṇa here, many of the numerous contexts in which it occurs are necessarily omitted: a thorough analysis of them all would constitute a book in itself. My concern has been to draw on those contexts which I consider both to be important and to offer some clarification of the term. I will first attempt to establish how one might understand the meaning and function of viññāṇa as a khandha. An overview of the mass of unsystematic contexts in which it is found has suggested five headings under which it is most helpful to do this, though some of the points made under each heading will overlap: (1) Viññāṇa as impermanent, (2) Viññāṇa as ‘consciousness of’, (3) viññāṇa as a factor in cognition, (4) Viññāṇa as providing continuity, and (5) Viññāṇa as evolving. In imposing such headings on unsystematic material there is of course the danger that one is projecting onto it a greater degree of coherence than exists in the texts. Indeed, such is the lack of any systematic approach in the texts that to a certain extent this is unavoidable if one is to attempt to come to any meaningful understanding of the function of viññāṇa. But so far as I am aware none of what I will discuss under these headings is significantly compromised by anything I have omitted. Similarly, though some of the contexts on which I have drawn do not explicitly identify viññāṇa as a khandha, in my opinion these contexts are nevertheless relevant in an attempt to understand how the khandha functions. In the second part of this chapter, I will discuss the common association of viññāṇa with kāya, body, and will suggest that even if this is understood as an alternative analysis of the human being it is nevertheless compatible with the khandha analysis. And in the third part I shall also briefly discuss the terms citta and manas in both their generic and their more specific meanings.

**Viññāṇa as a Khandha**

1. **Viññāṇa as impermanent**

In the introduction to the arūpakkhandhas at the beginning of chapter II, I suggested that they might be described as the occurrence of certain states or processes which do not involve the four mahābhūtā. In considering vedanā, saññā and samkhāra, this suggestion does not present any conceptual problems. We do not tend to think of feelings, apperceptions or conceptions, and volitions or will, as permanent; our experience of them is that they constantly change, and they can all readily be understood as processes which operate given the appropriate conditions. Viññāṇa, however, has connotations which are both substantive and permanent. Such connotations derive partly from the association in the Upaniṣads of the Sanskrit term viñjāna with Brahman. In the Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad, for example, Brahman is defined as consciousness and bliss.* It is cardinal to Upaniṣadic teaching both that Brahman is permanent and also that it is ‘being’, sat.
Because it is also cardinal to Upānissadī teaching that there is a macrocosmic/microcosmic correspondence between Brahman and ātman, it follows that the consciousness, viṁśāna, of the individual is also permanent and is ‘being’: it is the essential stuff, both of the individual and the cosmos. The connotations associated with viṁśāna also derive from the common translation of viṁśāna as ‘consciousness’. In English, this nominal form is open to interpretation as a substantive noun, suggesting that consciousness is some sort of permanent entity. Such a translation allows ontological significance to be projected onto the term viṁśāna and tends to suggest that it is not ordinarily conditioned. Finally, our subjective experience is that our consciousness is in some sense the common denominator of all our experiences. It seems to us to have some degree of constancy.

I shall discuss further the way in which viṁśāna functions as a process under point (2). And I shall discuss its apparent constancy under point (4). Here our concern is to establish that any interpretation of viṁśāna as permanent is erroneous. The most fundamental point to make here is that any suggestion of permanence does not accord with the key doctrinal teachings of the Buddha. The doctrine of paṭicca samuppāda and the tilakkhaṇa formula, for example, underline that everything that is connected with samsāric experience is conditioned, dependently originated, and therefore impermanent. With regard to the constitution of the individual, we also see in the standard twelfold version of the paṭicca samuppāda formula that viṁśāna arises conditioned by ignorance and the formative activities. In an alternative version which appears in the Mahāniddāna Sutta, the formula begins with viṁśāna, but it is stated that viṁśāna and nāmarūpa, given as the second link in the chain, are mutually conditioning. Similarly, the khandha analysis with which we are concerned was given by the Buddha in order to illustrate his teaching that no part of the individual should be thought of as having independent existence (self-hood). So of viṁśāna, for example (and the form of the Pali is the same for each of the khandhas), we read that the well-taught ariyasaṅkha “does not view viṁśāna as self, nor self as possessing viṁśāna, nor viṁśāna in self, nor self in viṁśāna”. None of these doctrinal teachings is compatible with attributing permanence to viṁśāna.

One passage on the paṭicca samuppāda formula which might be considered to indicate that viṁśāna is some sort of enduring transmigrating entity is in the Mahāniddāna Sutta, where the ninefold version of the paṭicca samuppāda formula is given. Though I cited this Sutta above as stating that viṁśāna and nāmarūpa are mutually conditioning, we read further on in the Sutta that viṁśāna ‘descends’ or ‘enters’ into a mother’s womb.* Literally the Pali means: “If viṁśāna did not descend into a mother’s womb, would nāmarūpa take shape therein?” The context of the passage is an explanation of what is meant by the various stages of the chain in the paṭicca samuppāda formula, where viṁśāna is followed by nāmarūpa. The meaning of nāmarūpa will be discussed in chapter vi and need not concern us here. This passage has
been construed to mean that viññāṇa is the reincarnating factor which 'descends' into a woman's womb when conception takes place, and without which the embryonic individual would not take shape. But an alternative interpretation of this passage is as follows: a human being will not develop if all the relevant constituents are not present; and the development of the individual, indicated by the term nāmarūpa, requires the faculty of viññāṇa. These two interpretations imply very different roles for viññāṇa.

The key word in this passage is okkamissatha, from a verb which literally means 'descend' or 'enter'. But it also has a figurative meaning, perhaps indicated in English by 'arise' or 'manifest'. In glossing okkamissatha, the commentary on this passage states that it means 'entering', but, importantly, it adds 'as it were'. We also find the same verb used figuratively elsewhere in the Pali material. The expression sukhasanāṇam okkamitvā, for example, does not imply that the sense of happiness literally 'descends'; and likewise okkante middhē does not mean that sluggishness literally 'descends'.

I mentioned in chapter 1 that where we find avakkanti associated with the senses, the meaning is best conveyed by 'manifest'. Two consecutive Suttas in the Nidānī Samyutta, which form part of a series of Suttas illustrating the dependently arising links of the paṭiccasamuppāda formula, use the verb avakkanti, also literally 'descending' or 'entering', in connection with nāmarūpa and viññāṇa respectively. In both contexts the meaning is clearly intended to be figurative: that nāmarūpa and viññāṇa arise dependently. In view of this figurative use of the verb avakkanti elsewhere, together with the fact that the Mahāniddāna Suttanta also states that viññāṇa and nāmarūpa are mutually conditioning, it seems unlikely that this passage should be interpreted to mean that viññāṇa is an enduring transmigrating entity. Moreover, the Mahāniddāna Suttanta passage on the paṭiccasamuppāda formula ends by reiterating the interdependency of viññāṇa and nāmarūpa and by stating that the cycle of rebirth, ageing, death and rebirth is experienced by nāmarūpa together with viññāṇa (nāmarūpaṃ saha viññāṇena); at no stage in the process is viññāṇa independent. Nor can one deduce that nāmarūpa and viññāṇa together form some sort of enduring reincarnating entity: we are told elsewhere that there is no coming or going, decease or rebirth, persistence, growth or increase of viññāṇa without all the other khandhas, and the rūpakkhandha manifestly is not permanent. The point of these passages is to establish that viññāṇa is conditioned.

Though we shall see under point (4) that viññāṇa functions as the provider of a sense of continuity, the evidence does not suggest that it should be understood to be an enduring reincarnating entity. The use of verbs which mean 'descend' or 'enter' are a linguistic convention which indicate that viññāṇa is a vital factor in the arising of an individual and in the samsāric experience.

The fact that viññāṇa is not permanent or unconditioned is more specifically confirmed, explicitly and implicitly, in many passages in the Sutta
Piṭaka. It is recorded in the canon that adherents to an abiding soul theory, also referred to as ‘eternalists’, tended to assume that this was the role of viññāṇa. This view is emphatically and comprehensively refuted by the Buddha when, for example, it is propounded by a bhikkhu named Sāti. Sāti repeatedly states: “Insofar as I understand the dhamma taught by the Lord, it is that this viññāṇa, not another, transmigrates and continues from life to life”.

The Buddha replies:

Foolish man, have I not said in many ways that viññāṇa is dependently originated; that without conditions there is no arising of viññāṇa? Foolish man, you slander me through your misunderstanding, and you also destroy yourself and produce much demerit. Foolish man, this will be harmful and painful for you for a long time.

A passage in the Nidāna Samyutta emphasises even more the transient nature of viññāṇa. Though here viññāṇa is being used generically, together with manas and citta, the analogy given in the passage would by extension apply to viññāṇa as a khandha: if the ‘mind’ as a whole is impermanent, then any constituent of it could not be permanent. The Buddha states that what we call viññāṇa (and citta and manas):

... arises as one thing and ceases as another, by day and by night. Just as a monkey moving through the forest or the woods holds on to a branch, lets it go and holds on to another; in the same way what we call viññāṇa (and citta and manas) arises as one thing and ceases as another, by day and by night.

This idea was developed by the Abhidhamma and commentarial traditions, and by many later Buddhist sects, into a theory of ‘momentariness’ (khanikavāda, Sanskrit: kṣanikavāda). But in the Sutta Piṭaka, the purpose of this passage is simply to illustrate that one’s mental processes are impermanent. And its concern is not to establish that the object(s) of one’s mental processes are constantly changing (though of course they are) but that this is how one’s mind operates subjectively: the context of the Sutta indicates that it is to one’s subjective experience that the Buddha is referring.

The impermanence of viññāṇa is implicit in passages which state that it is dependent on the other four khandhas. In the Khandha Samyutta, for example, we read: “By means of body (the form of the Pali is the same for the other khandhas), bhikkhus, viññāṇa, having a foothold, will persist”. In the Samaññaphala Sutta, one of the fruits of the life of a religieux who has attained the meditative state of the fourth jhāna is said to be that he has so purified himself that he is able to turn his thoughts (citta) to gaining insight into the relationship between his body and viññāṇa: he realises that his body has form, is made up of the four elements, it arises from father and mother and is nourished by boiled rice, and is subject to impermanence, decay, abrasion, dissolution and disintegration. He also understands that his
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viññāṇa is bound up with his body and tied to it. The passage goes on to give an analogy to explain that the relationship between viññāṇa and kāya is like that between gem and thread in a necklace. This analogy suggests that just as both gem and thread have to be present in order for there to be a necklace at all, so it is with the human being: body and viññāṇa are interrelated and interdependent. Indeed, the passage implies that far from being an independent entity, viññāṇa is bound up with and dependent on the body: viññāṇaṁ ettha sitam ettha paṭibaddham means ‘here [to this body] is viññāṇa bound and tied’. The analogy of the gem on a thread further suggests that occurrences of consciousness are held together, as it were, by their common physical locus, a particular body. The way in which viññāṇa represents continuity of experience is discussed further under point (4). Of importance to the point we are discussing here is that in the meditative state of the fourth jhāna, a bhikkhu gains the insight that as an ‘individual’ he comprises both body and viññāṇa, integrally bound up with and dependent on each other: without either of them there is no ‘individual’ at all.

One further example will suffice to illustrate that viññāṇa is conditioned and impermanent. A passage in the Nidāna Samyutta states:

If we neither will, nor determine, nor are occupied with anything, there is no arising of an object for the persistence of consciousness. There being no object, there is no foothold for consciousness.

This indicates that viññāṇa only functions when there are other concomitant mental states which are primarily of a volitional nature. We saw in chapter IV that volitions form the causal nexus which ties us to the wheel of rebirth. Thus our samsāric existence is both kept going and characterised by volitions of various different sorts. In order to function, viññāṇa is dependent on this ‘fuel’ of samsāric existence; it does not function independently. This point is also made in the twofold version of the paṭiccasamuppāda formula, where viññāṇa arises conditioned by saṁkhāra. And conversely, it is when volitions cease that viññāṇa ceases.

From all of these references, both to general doctrinal teachings and to contexts in which viññāṇa is specifically discussed, it is clear that viññāṇa is impermanent. Doctrinally, it is, as part of the samsāric existence of a human being, subject to dependent origination. More specifically, we have seen that it does not function independently of a body, and it is dependent for its occurrence and persistence on there being other concomitant mental states.

2. Viññāṇa as ‘consciousness of’

I mentioned above that one of the reasons why viññāṇa tends to have connotations which are substantive and permanent is because it is usually translated as ‘consciousness’. Here, I will draw on canonical references
which indicate that viññāna functions as a process which is better conveyed by the translation ‘consciousness of’.

One of the Khandha Sanyūlta passages to which I have already referred in introducing each of the preceding khandhas puts the question “And what, bhikkhus, is viññāna?” The reply is: “There are these six types of viññāna: visual, auditory, olfactory, gustatory, tactile and mental. When name and form arise, viññāna arises; when name and form cease, viññāna ceases.”

Of this reply, I will discuss here only the six types of viññāna. In order to interpret the second part of this statement we need to consider the meaning of the term nāmarūpa. This is a substantial subject and will be discussed at length in chapter vi. The usual translation of the Pali terms referring to the six types of viññāna, cakkhuviññāna, sotaviññāna, etc., is ‘eye consciousness’, ‘ear consciousness’, and so on, which has little or no precise meaning for us in English. By using a little licence, however, in interpreting the terms in the light of what we now know about the senses, much more sense can be made of the Pali terms. If we translate the words cakkhu, sota, ghāna, jīvha, kāya and mano not as the organs of sense themselves but as representing the functions of those organs of sense, that is sight or seeing, hearing, smelling, and so on, and if we specifically word the translation of each term as a genitive tappurisa compound, then we have the following: cakkhuviññāna, for example, would mean awareness of sight or seeing; sotaviññāna would be awareness of sound or hearing; ghānaviññāna awareness of taste, and so on. The same meaning is perhaps achieved more elegantly by translating as ‘visual awareness’, ‘auditory awareness’, and so on, but by using the overtly genitive wording in the first instance we gain a clearer understanding of the viññakkhandha as providing ‘consciousness (or awareness) of’.

We can gain some idea of how this occurs from the passage we have already discussed in previous chapters which shows that viññāna is a key factor in the arising of feelings and apperception. This passage, in the Madhupindikasutta, states: “Visual consciousness arises because of eye and visible form ... auditory consciousness arises because of ear and sound (and so on through all six senses)”. The presence of the three, the Sutta states, is called ‘contact’, phassa. If we consider this together with the analogy which states that the activity of viññāna can be likened to the way a monkey travels through a forest grasping and letting go of branches, we see both how viññāna works as a process and also that it provides awareness of each stage of the process. In arising as it were sequentially from one or other of the senses coming into contact with its corresponding ‘external’ stimuli (and we have seen that manodhātu collates this mass of incoming data), viññāna is a process which provides seemingly continuous awareness. And in arising dependent on specific senses, it provides us with awareness of sight, hearing, taste, and so on. In our subjective experience of awareness, we know that at
certain times we see, hear, taste, and so on. This point is highlighted when we consider that if we have not been aware of a sound then we have not heard it: awareness of the sound is hearing it, and visual awareness is sight. Of course that does not necessarily mean that if we have not been aware of a sound then it has not happened, but for an individual to be able to say 'I heard a sound' he or she has to have been aware, or conscious, of it.

A passage about the arising of consciousness elsewhere in the Majjhima Nikāya emphasises that one has to be conscious of by stating that samannāhāra, 'attention', is a part of the process. It states:

If the individual's eye is intact and external (visible) forms come within its range, but there is no appropriate attention, then there is no arising of the appropriate type of consciousness. But when the individual's eye is intact, external (visible) forms come within its range, and there is appropriate attention, then there is the arising of the appropriate type of consciousness.

Reat suggests that from these two passages about the arising of consciousness:

... two equations emerge: (1) faculty + object + viññāna = phassa/samannāhāra, and (2) faculty + object + phassa/samannāhāra = viññāna. Sensory contact, accompanied by appropriate attention, is as necessary for consciousness as consciousness is for sensory contact and appropriate attention.

The term samannāhāra also means 'coming together', so it is possible that the terms phassa and samannāhāra are broadly interchangeable in these contexts as Reat suggests. The 'attention' referred to here does not appear to refer to deliberately paying attention, but, rather, to the fact that a conscious event provides one with awareness of its object; without awareness of its object it is not a conscious event.

Elsewhere we read that viññāna is categorised according to sense only because a particular sense is the origin of its arising, not because there are different kinds of consciousness. The passage states:

Consciousness is known by this or that name [i.e. visual, auditory, olfactory (and so on)] because an appropriate condition arises. If consciousness arises because of eye and visual form, it is known as visual consciousness (and so on).

In the same way, the Sutta goes on by way of analogy, a fire is defined according to what is burning. If it is burning sticks, twigs, and so on, it is known as a stick or twig fire. The analogy implies that just as fire is fire whatever is burning and whatever name is given to it, so viññāna is viññāna whatever sense originated the cognition and whatever name is given to it as a result: it is not fire or viññāna itself that is of different types. This analogy accords well with understanding viññāna as 'consciousness of'. As fire can
be described as the process of burning which only occurs given appropriate conditions, so consciousness can be described as a process of being aware which occurs given appropriate conditions. Though those conditions are infinitely variable, in the case of the former the relevant characteristic of fire is burning, and in the case of the latter the relevant characteristic of the viññānakkhanda is providing consciousness of them.

The association of consciousness of with attention referred to above, however minimal that attention might be, raises the question of how ‘involuntary’ reactions are accounted for. I have suggested that if one is not conscious of a sound then one has not heard it. We can, however, sometimes react ‘involuntarily’ to a sound without being conscious of it: in sleep, for example, a loud sound can cause one to make a movement even if there is absolutely no consciousness of the sound at all. We also experience peripheral awareness which we do not seem to be conscious of. We regularly avoid obstacles in our path while our attention is wholly elsewhere, for example. Though such experiences of peripheral awareness might indicate the minimal level to which consciousness of, or awareness, operates, this question is not explicitly dealt with in the Sutta Pitaka. Nor is the experience of involuntary reactions explained. This is a significant omission because involuntary reactions such as wet dreams became the subject of controversy in the early Buddhist saṅgha: if they are unconscious, do they constitute a volition with moral implications?

One passage in the Sutta Pitaka is problematic when it comes to translating viññāna as ‘consciousness of’. This is in the Mahāvedallasutta, where viññāna appears to be identified as a ‘life principle’ (āyusamkhāra). The context (referred to in earlier chapters) is one in which Sāriputta states that the five senses (pañcindriyāni) are dependent on vitality (āyu), vitality is dependent on heat (usmā), and likewise heat is dependent on vitality. Sāriputta then introduces the term āyusamkhāra, and goes on to state: “When three things leave this body, life, heat and viññāna, then this body lies down abandoned, cast off, like a senseless log of wood”. The suggestion is that life, heat and viññāna collectively represent some sort of basic life principle, and there is little room here for viññāna to mean ‘consciousness of’. But there are only two contexts in which viññāna is used in this way. In other contexts where the term āyusamkhāra is used it either appears in the singular, or is not explicitly associated with viññāna. It is possible that the notion of viññāna as a life principle contributed to the development in later Buddhist traditions of more elaborate theories of consciousness. In the Sutta Pitaka, however, it does not significantly compromise the many other contexts in which viññāna seems to mean ‘consciousness of’.

Several times in this chapter I mention that being conscious is a fundamental characteristic of a human being and this might be why it is associated with the life-principle in the Mahāvedallasutta. But in Buddhism
there is a further reason for suggesting that it is consciousness of that is of greater importance. This is the Buddha's teaching that karma is volition. The purpose of this teaching is precisely that one should be conscious of the process of cyclic rebirth that is fuelled by one's volitions: the qualitative causal dimension implicit in the Buddha's definition of karma requires consciousness of what one is willing. This association between consciousness of and spiritual progress might also explain why there is no discussion of peripheral awareness or involuntary reactions: they are not spiritually relevant.

So having established that viññāna is impermanent, we see here that descriptions of viññāna in the Sutta Piṭaka also suggest that it functions as a process of being aware, and that a good translation of it is 'consciousness of'. Another way of putting this point would be to say that while in the Upaniṣads consciousness is the very stuff of existence, in Buddhism consciousness is not explained in terms of a metaphysical entity. The Buddha's teaching is more concerned with how the human being operates than with what he or she consists of, and viññāna refers to the process which provides consciousness of.45

3. Viññāna as a factor in cognition

As one might expect, viññāna, awareness, is a key factor in the cognitive process. This is indicated in the passage in the Majjhima Nikāya, to which I have referred several times, which begins “Visual consciousness arises because of eye and visible form”.46 We discussed the passage in full in the chapter on the saṅgīkhāndha. I need not repeat the Pali here, but in English it continues:

Contact [occurs] when there is a combination of the three; feelings are caused by contact; that which one feels, one apperceives; that which one apperceives, one reasons about; that which one reasons about, one causes to become manifold.

This passage represents our normal samsāric experience and the way in which we interpret it; it describes the samsāric cognitive process, in which viññāna is here seen to be a key factor. It appears at the beginning of the sentence because it is a prerequisite to every stage in the cognitive process. The sensory event, phassa, which gives rise to feeling, does not occur simply because of the proximity, or, to give phassa its literal meaning, because of the contact of eye and visible form: viññāna has to be present at the preliminary stage of the process. When phassa, the sensory event, subsequently gives rise to feeling, this is then identified by saññā. This is then followed by discursive thought (reasoning, vitakka) and the process of seeing things as manifold, as discussed above. It is the function of viññāna to enable us to be aware of each of these aspects of the cognitive process.
In chapter 111, I referred to a passage in the *Samyutta Nikāya* which appeared to suggest that there is a discriminative function to *viññāna*, and that this can be applied to each of its six types. The passage was translated there as follows: “And what bhikkhus, do you call *viññāna*? It is called *viññāna* because it discriminates”.

*Viññāna* appears to discriminate whether something is sour or bitter, acid or sweet, alkaline or non-alkaline, saline or non-saline. The tentative suggestion was made in chapter 111 that the difference between the discriminatory functions of *sañña* and *viññāna* might be one of degree: *viññāna* discerns that a taste is sweet or sour, but it is *sañña* that discriminates or identifies it more precisely as, for example, sugar or lemon. But we also noted that the author(s) both of this passage and the similar passage in the *Mahāvedallāsutta* seem to have difficulty describing the difference between *sañña* and *viññāna*, using standard formulas about colours and tastes. The verbs used in both these passages to define *viññāna* and *sañña* are *vijñāti* and *sañjñāti* respectively. These verbs are associated with cognition, but neither of them has a precise meaning and their use further indicates that the author(s) had difficulty in attempting to define *viññāna* and *sañña*. The description of the cognitive process can assist us here, in that it contains no suggestion that *viññāna* acts in a discriminatory capacity. If one bears this in mind, together with the understanding of *viññāna* as consciousness of, one can make more sense of the apparent confusion created by the author(s) of the *Samyutta Nikāya* passage and the *Mahāvedallāsutta*. Kalupahana makes the helpful suggestion that the phrase *vijñāti* ... *sañña* is interpreted “*viññāna* stands for the function of ‘being conscious’”.

This accords with *viññāna* as consciousness of, and as such it functions in providing awareness when something is discriminated, regardless of whether the discrimination is general or precise. Perhaps this is the point that the author of these passages has failed to understand. I have stated that we have to know that we hear something. We also have to know when we discriminate something. *Viññāna* does not specifically do the discriminating, but, rather, is the awareness by which we experience every stage of the cognitive process, including the process of discriminating.

In this sense, *viññāna* is comparable to *prajñā* as described in the *Kauśitaki Upaniṣad* (which is almost certainly later than the time when the Buddha was teaching). There we read:

Verily, without *prajñā*, speech does not make known any name at all. One thinks ‘My mind was elsewhere; I was not aware of this name’. Without *prajñā*, breath does not make known any smell at all. One thinks ‘My mind was elsewhere; I was not aware of any smell’ (and so on through all the senses).

The passage concludes:
Without *prajñā*, no thought whatever would happen. One would not be aware of what one should be aware of.

The *Mahāvedālāsutta* gives us an account of the way in which the three *arūpakkhandhas* of *vedanā*, *saññā* and *viññāṇa* function together in the cognitive process, and the centrality of the cognitive process to making progress on the path to liberating insight is also illustrated, using the cognitive term *paññā*. The different cognitive terms are not clearly explained and their different meanings have to be drawn out. It appears from the *Sutta* that *paññā* refers to a specific type, or attainment, of cognition. Sāriputta is being questioned by one Koṭṭhita the Great. Koṭṭhita wants to know in what respect one is described as either *duppaññā* or *paññā*. Sāriputta explains:

One is said to be *duppaññā* if one does not comprehend ‘this is dukkha’, ‘this is the arising of dukkha’, ‘this is the cessation of dukkha’ and ‘this is the course leading to the cessation of dukkha’. Conversely, one is said to be *paññā* if one does comprehend these things.

The verb I have translated as ‘comprehend’ is *paññā* which is within the range of cognitive verbs such as *samanā* and *viññā* to which I have already referred, none of which has a precise meaning. The prefix *pa*, however, suggests an intensification of *ñā*, to know, giving us a meaning such as ‘to know completely’, or ‘to know qualitatively better’. This meaning is also suggested by the context in which we find it used in the *Mahāvedālāsutta*. Completely knowing or comprehending the Four Noble Truths is indispensable for liberating insight, and thus it is qualitatively different from other kinds of knowledge. This qualitatively different knowledge can perhaps be translated as ‘wisdom’. *Paññā*, therefore, seems to refer not just to the cognitive process that all human beings experience but to the cognition of someone who has advanced in understanding the teachings of the Buddha; one who is well on the way to ‘seeing things as they really are’.

In chapter III I mentioned that Buddhaghosa understood *paññā* to contribute to insight in a way which neither *saññā* nor *viññāṇa* does, and suggested there that Buddhaghosa’s interpretation is more systematic than that found in the *Sutta Piṭaka*. Many contexts in the *Sutta Piṭaka* nevertheless indicate that *paññā* is of a qualitatively different nature from other knowledge. It is implicit in the fact that the term is used in the traditional threefold division of the Eightfold Path into *paññā*, *sīla*, and *samādhi*. Here a distinction is made between cognitive wisdom (*paññā*) and the meditative experience (*samādhi*). Though both are to be practised or cultivated, in the Buddhist teaching it is the penetrating insight which is achieved through wisdom, rather than meditative levels *per se*, which constitute liberation. As a division of the Eightfold Path, *paññā* covers ‘right view’ (*samma dūṭhi*) and ‘right thought’ (*samma sankappā*). We read in the *Majjhima Nikāya* that ‘right view’ is of two kinds, mundane and supramundane. It is supramundane
'right view', which is of the Path (leading to liberation), that is associated with *panṇā*. The importance of developing *panṇā* is highlighted in other canonical passages. We read, for example, that it is through wisdom that the advanced *bhikkhu* comes to see dependent origination and conditioned phenomena as they really are. The development of *panṇā* results in the eradication of ignorance. Even the destruction of the *āsava* can be realised through the development of *panṇā*. Elsewhere the Buddha describes Sāriputta as having *panṇā* that is great (*maha*), broad (*puñha*), joyful (*hāsa*), alert (*javana*), clever (*tikkha*) and penetrating (*niḥbdhika*). Here *panṇā* clearly means Sāriputta’s wisdom, since the Buddha goes on to state that he, Sāriputta, is able to teach dhamma even as well as the Buddha. Finally, it is only through wisdom (*panṇā*) that things are properly understood, intellectual and discursive knowledge is insufficient.

The *Mahāvīra-śallasutta* continues with definitions of the terms *vedanā*, *saññā* and *vinñāṇa* (and the absence of clear definitions has been discussed above). Koṭṭhita goes on to ask Sāriputta whether *vedanā*, *saññā* and *vinñāṇa* are associated or whether they are dissociated; is it possible, he wants to know, that they will be seen to be separate from each other after repeatedly analysing them. Sāriputta replies as follows:

*Vedanā*, *saññā* and *vinñāṇa* are associated, not dissociated, and even after repeatedly analysing them one does not see them as separate from each other: that which one feels, one apperceives; that which one apperceives, one is aware of. Therefore they are associated, not dissociated, and even after repeatedly analysing them one does not see them as separate from each other.

Koṭṭhita also asks whether *vinñāṇa* and *panṇā* are associated or dissociated, and whether one can see them as separate from each other after repeatedly analysing them. The reply to this too is that they are associated, and that whatever one comprehends, that one is aware of; and whatever one is aware of, that one comprehends. Then Koṭṭhita asks: if they are so associated, what is the difference between *panṇā* and *vinñāṇa*? Sāriputta tells him that *panṇā* is to be developed (*bhāvetabbā*) and *vinñāṇa* is for everything that is to be known (*pariññeyya*). My translation of *pariññeyya* as ‘for everything that is to be known’ is clumsy, but what I want to convey is that the difference between *panṇā* and *vinñāṇa* is that *vinñāṇa* functions as the faculty which provides awareness of everything (indicated by the prefix *pari*) that is to be known (*pñeyya*), and this contributes to the development of wisdom, which is developed (*bhāvita*) and eventually culminates in liberating insight. In this passage *vinñāṇa* is singled out from the cognitive faculties to be discussed alongside *panṇā* because it is, as we have seen, the fundamental factor without which no process takes place: it as it were ‘activates’ the cognitive process because without awareness there is no cognition or experience of any kind. Its inextricable association with
vedanā and saññā in the cognitive process is unequivocally stated by Sāriputta, and we have already seen an example of how all three work together in the arising of a feeling. Its inseparability from paññā implies that wisdom has to be conscious; you have to know what you know. This is compatible with the fact that the term saññā was used to refer to liberating insight: we saw above that insight has to be identified. Here we see that it has to be known.

I suggest that this passage is giving us a picture of the way the cognitive process works and the contribution it makes to, and its involvement with, the development of the wisdom that is an indispensable prerequisite for proceeding to liberating insight. We have the three mental khandhas of vedanā, saññā and viññāṇa working together, each contributing to the process: vedanā as affective cognition, saññā as discriminatory or identificatory cognition, and viññāṇa as consciousness of each and every part of the process as a whole. The absence of the samkhārakkhandha here will not surprise us since we have seen that it is the source of volitions, which are to be neutralised completely if wisdom is to be attained. Viññāṇa, the khandha which provides awareness, represents the very basis of all knowledge, and while the highest levels that constitute liberating insight may be qualitatively and inconceivably different knowledge from mundane cognitions, one is nevertheless conscious of it in some way: this much is evident from the Buddha’s accounts of his own experience of Enlightenment.

4. Viññāṇa as providing continuity

I have suggested that one of the reasons why viññāṇa tends to have connotations of permanence is because our subjective experience of being conscious is that it is constant. When awake we do not experience discontinuity between different moments of awareness: the process appears to us to be a continuous one. I referred to the analogy of the monkey moving through the forest, constantly changing his grasp from branch to branch. Though this illustrates the impermanence of viññāṇa, it also suggests how it represents continuity. For the monkey, the experience is of travelling. In the same way, our experience is that our consciousness has continuity. Even when we wake after being asleep, our consciousness seems to us to continue as it did before we slept. The same is true after other periods of being ‘unconscious’, such as having an operation or even being in a coma. It even appears to function at times when one is not ‘normally’ conscious. People relate that while asleep they are aware of dreams, or that they have had awareness while in a coma, and even severely mentally ill people have some sort of awareness of their surroundings. With respect to continued samsāric existence as a whole, I have already stated that it is volition of various different kinds which provide the ‘fuel’ for this, as also discussed fully in chapter IV. This ‘fuel’ is a complex of factors which causes our continued
existence even in states of total unconsciousness. With respect to the continuity of consciousness while in deep (i.e. dreamless) sleep, the Abhidhamma and commentarial tradition developed the theory of bhavanga. This theory is not present in the Sutta Piṭaka, but it is interesting that the term bhavanga appears in the Anguttara Nikāya as follows: “There are, monks, four constituents (anāgāri). What four? Rūpa, vedanā, saññā and bhava”. Here the close association between samkhāra and viññāna is indicated by the fact that they are both represented by the term bhava, becoming. It is the operation of consciousness, propelled by volitions, that quintessentially constitutes continued samsāric existence.

But the continuity I am referring to here is that which we associate specifically with being conscious. Because we are conscious of all our experiences, viññāna as the process of being conscious in this way provides us with a sense of continuity. It is a sense of continuity of a subjective nature: we are each conscious of our own experiences. This does not imply a spatial limitation to what we are conscious of. We shall see below under point (5) that in Buddhist meditation the individual’s awareness (viññāna) of experiences is said to be ‘unlimited’. But it is the individual meditator who is conscious of his or her own experiences, whatever they may be. We discussed above a passage in the Samaññaphala Sutta which stated that the relationship between viññāna and the body was analogous to a gem on a thread. I suggested there that this analogy not only confirms the impermanence of viññāna because it is dependent on a body, but also that it further suggests that occurrences of consciousness are held together, as it were, by their common physical locus, a particular body. Similarly just as the paticcassamuppāda formula can explain the arising of a particular individual, so this synthetical formula also suggests that each individual’s viññāna is subjective to themselves: it functions conditioned by the individual’s ignorance and samkhāra.

The subjective sense of continuity is not merely historical. It also gives us an expectation of continuity in the future. It is perhaps because of this that viññāna is classified as one of the four ‘foods’ (āhāra) which contribute to continued existence. In the Āhāravagga in the Nidāna Samyutta, viññāna is singled out. To the question “Of what is consciousness the food?”, the reply is: “The food which is consciousness is the cause of renewed becoming, of rebirth in the future”. From this, it seems that the sense of continuity provided by being aware of our existence becomes in itself a factor which contributes to our continued becoming. One might infer from this that it is consciousness that acquires some sort of ‘momentum’. But it is more likely that the expectation of continuity of awareness functions as some sort of volition. In one passage on the four foods, we read that they themselves are dependent on volitions such as passion, delight and craving, and without such volitions viññāna will not be ‘stationed’. As samsāric existence continues, however, so one subjectively continues to associate it with...
continuity of awareness, and that sense of continuity becomes inseparable from a desire for continued existence: consciousness becomes propelled by volitions. And, as already mentioned, desire for continued existence is so fundamental a part of our experience that it is one of the three āsavas that is rooted out only immediately prior to liberation.

This sense of continuity provided by viśñīṇa is also emphasised when it is described as a ‘stream’.

In the Sampasadaniya Suttanta in the Dīgha Nikāya, for example, one “insight meditation” (dassana samāpatti) is described as follows: “He understands a man’s stream of consciousness, unbroken in both cases, which is stationed both in this world and in the next world”.

Two points arise from this passage. The first is the notion that viśñīṇa is ‘stationed’. This is a common metaphor which is discussed further under point (5). Of relevance to us here is that the term translated as ‘station’ is always thiti, or some variation of it (here patiṭṭhitam). This term itself implies continuity: being ‘stationed’ implies that it ‘persists’. As the Pali English Dictionary points out, were the term intended to have spacial significance, it is more likely thāna would have been used.

The second point that arises from this passage is that the process of being aware is to be discerned in meditation, and it is likened to a stream. The implication is that just as the flow of a stream appears to be continuous, so viśñīṇa continues to function from life to life. This does not imply that viśñīṇa is a permanent entity which transmigrates: there is no part of a stream which can be said to be permanent; it is changing all the time. It means that the individual’s viśñīṇa functions as the process of being aware as seemingly continuously as a stream flows. And as the flowing of a stream depends on a supply of water, so the continuity of viśñīṇa is dependent on the volitions which fuel the cycle of lives in samsāra. Conversely, as we saw under point (1), when that volitional fuel comes to an end, there will no longer be any need for viśñīṇa to function.

Similarly, in the Māra Sanyutta we read that the bhikkhu Godhika’s viśñīṇa is not ‘stationed’ (appatiṭṭhitena) again (does not persist) at his death because he has destroyed craving and the root of craving (samūlam tanhaṃ). The ‘unbroken stream’ is compatible with the general Indian belief that rebirth follows immediately after death.

5. Viśñīṇa as evolving

The cycle of samsāric existence which consists of a series of rebirths is occasionally referred to in the Sutta Piṭaka as the ‘evolving’ of beings. By good deeds one ‘evolves’ to heaven, and by bad deeds one ‘evolves’ to rebirth as a hungry ghost. Given the fundamental role of consciousness in the life of the human being that we have seen, it is unsurprising that in one place it is viśñīṇa that is said to ‘evolve’. This expression is not used systematically and does not always appear to suggest that beings evolve in the sense of making progress along the path to liberation; it is used, as we
have just seen, to indicate a bad rebirth, for example, more in the sense of a
metaphor for rebirth. But the point of the Buddhist teachings is that
individuals should make progress along the spiritual path, and that progress
can be understood in terms of the evolving of viññāṇa.

I have discussed under point (4) the way in which viññāṇa is the provider
of a sense of continuity because it functions throughout the cycle of lives in
samsāra. And I have also referred to a passage which stated that viññāṇa is
‘stationed’ in successive lives, to Godhika’s viññāṇa no longer being
‘stationed’, and also to the fact that the body provides a ‘platform’ for
viññāṇa where it is ‘stationed’. It is this expression (usually thiti or some
variation of it), which can be translated as ‘station’ or ‘platform’ and which
has the connotation of persistence, which is more frequently used in
association with viññāṇa to indicate the different types of samsāric existence
experienced by individuals. Each ‘station’ (or life) is sometimes simply
referred to as ‘a consciousness’, and “every consciousness whatever” is
described as: “past, future or present, one’s own or someone else’s, gross or
subtle, low or high, far or near”. A tathāgata is said to know “all the
stations of consciousness”. As the disciple makes progress on the path to
liberation, so viññāṇa is ‘stationed’ in more favourable rebirths, culminating
in rebirth in one or more of the rūpā or arūpā loka. These loka are also
attained at certain levels of meditation, and so in meditation too viññāṇa can
be ‘stationed’ at different levels.

We have seen that in the process of rebirth viññāṇa provides a sense of
continuity without being a permanent transmigrating entity. Likewise, we
can interpret the ‘stationing’ of viññāṇa metaphorically, so it refers simply to
the existence of an individual in a particular life or at a particular level
during which the viññāṇa-khandha fulfils the function of providing awareness:
the centrality of consciousness to the human condition allows viññāṇa to
function as a metaphor for the entire life of the individual.

But this metaphor notwithstanding, during each life viññāṇa functions as
the provider of awareness and the sense of continuity, and we also read that
when stationed, it “seeks enjoyment, persists, grows and increases”. This
can be interpreted as the enjoyment (in the sense of experience) of a
particular life, the persistence of the functioning of viññāṇa throughout the
life, and its participation in the growth and development of the human
being as he or she matures. One might think this sense is more likely
because this expression also occurs in association with nāmarūpa: we read
that if viññāṇa is cut off in a young person there would be no “persistence,
growth or increase” of nāmarūpa. But I suggest that the expression ‘growth
and increase’ might also relate to the way viññāṇa can be understood to
evolve, and that this can be explained as follows.

The Buddhist path to liberation is a progression from ignorance to
insight. ‘Normal’ samsāric cognition represents ignorance, and the path
leads the disciple through progressively subtle, and eventually formless,
levels of meditation, culminating in the attainment of insight. Both normal samsāric existence and the various meditative levels correspond to cosmological levels, in which one can be reborn as well as experiencing them in meditation. This can be summed up by saying that the metaphor of the spiritual path underlies Buddhist cosmology. At every stage of one’s progress along the path to liberation one’s experience, which is one’s ‘consciousness of’ one’s life, is conditioned by one’s level of ignorance. That ignorance is characterised by volitions of various kinds and degrees, which are summarised in Buddhist teachings by the expression ‘greed, hatred and delusion’, and it is a pan-Indian phenomenon to state that the consciousness of an ignorant person is ‘defiled’, ‘veiled’, ‘tainted’, and so on. As progress along the path is made, ignorance is reduced and one’s experience is characterised by increasing insight. Decreasing ignorance is therefore accompanied by (or leads to) the experience of subtle and formless levels of meditation and/or rebirth. At every one of these levels viññāna provides awareness and a sense of continuity. As the individual progresses, the consciousness provided by viññāna becomes qualitatively different: it is increasingly less conditioned (or ‘restricted’) by ‘normal’ samsāric ignorance. The four formless levels (the arūpajjhānas), for example, are described as ‘the plane of infinite space’ (ākāsānañcaññayatana), ‘the plane of infinite consciousness’ (viññānañcaññayatana), ‘the plane of nothingness’ (akñcaññayatana) and ‘the plane of neither apperception (or conception) nor non-apperception’ (neva saññānañcaññayatana). Though from a perspective of ‘normal’ awareness we cannot know precisely what is meant by these descriptions of the arūpajjhānas, it is clear that they represent experience which is quite different from that of samsāric existence which is in the cosmological level known as the kāmadhātu. ‘Infinite space’ and ‘infinite consciousness’ might mean the intensification of awareness as one withdraws from the limiting objectivity of samsāric perception, or one might describe it as the ‘expansion’ of awareness which accompanies the breaking of the boundaries of samsāric cognition; ‘the plane of nothingness (no-thing-ness)’ and ‘the plane of neither apperception nor non-apperception’ are likely to refer to levels at which one ceases to ‘make manifold’. Whatever their meaning, at all of these levels viññāna continues to provide consciousness of: the individual continues to be aware. Even the practice of saññāvedayitanirodha, which one can attain subsequent to experiencing the fourth arūpajjhāna, and which involves the suspension of all conceptual activity as we know it does not mean a cessation of consciousness as such. In describing the goal of the path as insight into how things really are (yaññābhūtanti), the Buddha indicated that consciousness functions at the final level: we have already seen above that one has to know what one knows (paññā is accompanied by viññāna). This is the case even though the final insight transcends any familiar cognitive experience. Because viññāna provides awareness at all these levels, it is viññāna that can be described as
becoming less ‘defiled’ by ignorance. And as the awareness it provides is progressively less limited according to one’s degree of ignorance, so it can be said to ‘grow and increase’.

According to the Buddha’s teaching, insight is also called purity: the path to insight is a path of purification, the removing of the ‘defilements’ referred to above. This correspondence between insight and purity explains why *vinñāṇa* can also be described as ‘purified’ in the sentence “that by which one knows, when it is purified and cleansed”.95 The Abhidhamma and commentarial traditions, and many later Buddhist schools, developed the idea that *vinñāṇa* in its ‘natural’ state is pure. In the Theravāda tradition, this idea is contained in its theory of the bhavaṅga mind.96 But in the Sutta Piṭaka the implication is not that *vinñāṇa* returns to its natural state, but that as the individual progresses on the spiritual path, so *vinñāṇa* gradually functions in a way that can be described in terms of purity. Once again, this accords with the Buddha’s concern only to explain how insight can be achieved. And just as he remains silent on the subject of possible existence after liberation, so he also comments on the “inconceivability of the beginning”.97

The *vinñāṇa* of an arahant is also said to be ‘radiant’. If it is not restricted by the objectivity of ignorance, an analogy for the ‘unlimited’ or ‘unbounded’ (by ignorance) awareness it provides is that it ‘radiates’.98 And when ignorance is eradicated entirely, *vinñāṇa* can be said to be ‘free’ or ‘liberated’. Radiance is most often attributed to citta, and this will be discussed later in this chapter. But in the Kevaddha Sutta in the Digha Nikāya we find the following sentence describing the *vinñāṇa* of an arahant: *vinñāṇam anidassanam anantam sabbato paham.*99 A variant reading for *paham* here is *pabham*, and from the context it seems most likely to me that this variant makes most sense.100 With *pabham*, the sentence reads: “[His] *vinñāṇa* is formless [literally, ‘invisible’], unlimited, and radiates all round”. This reading is compatible with the statement that of all things that radiate, a Buddha is said to be the best, his radiance is beyond compare.101 The correspondence between insight and purity referred to above also explains why beings are said to ‘evolve to the radiant levels’.102 The subtle or formless (again ‘unbounded’) levels which are attained on the path to purity are described in terms which correspond to the state of the individual.

Another way of understanding the association of *vinñāṇa* with terms such as ‘purity’ and ‘radiance’ is to interpret its role as the provider of awareness on the path to insight as being analogous to the providing of light for one who needs to see. As one cannot see without light, so one cannot be aware without *vinñāṇa*. According to this metaphor, then, as one progresses along the path to insight, so the ‘light’ that is shed by the *vinñāṇa*-akkhanda (in the sense of the awareness it provides) becomes purer and more radiant. The metaphor is one of progressing from darkness to light, or of becoming en-light-en-ed.103 Again, it is not that *vinñāṇa* is an entity which either
becomes or is revealed to be purer or more radiant, but that the key role played by viññāṇa in the path to insight lends itself to its being identified metaphorically in this way.

So viññāṇa can be said to evolve because it operates as the provider of awareness as the individual progresses along the path to liberating insight. As insight replaces ignorance, so viññāṇa provides awareness of the individual’s changing experience. And as that changing experience involves the breaking of the boundaries (separateness) which arise because of ignorance, so viññāṇa ‘expands’ or ‘evolves’ and is eventually ‘free’.

Summary

To sum up the way viññāṇa operates as a khandha, we have seen first that it has no more permanence than anything else in sāṁsāra. The tendency to attribute permanence to it is emphatically refuted in the Sutta Pitaka and is incompatible with the fundamental doctrinal teachings of the Buddha. Viññāṇa is, rather, the process of being conscious. As such, it is integral to the cognitive process, providing subjective awareness at all stages. Similarly, because the viññāṇakhkhandha functions throughout the series of lives of an individual in the sāṁsāric cycle, it provides a sense of continuity both within a single life and also from life to life, such continuity being likened to a stream. Being conscious is so fundamental to human experience, that an individual life is sometimes described as a ‘station’ of viññāṇa. And it is because the functioning of viññāṇa is fundamental to human experience that as the individual progresses from ignorance to insight, viññāṇa can be said to ‘evolve’: viññāṇa provides awareness of the changing experiences and insights which accompany spiritual progress.

Viññāṇa with Kāya

In the discussion of viññāṇa as a khandha, I have several times mentioned that it is fundamental or integral to life as a human being. Indeed, this is our subjective experience of consciousness, and the reason why the term has attracted so much interest and speculation in all ages and cultures. It is perhaps for this reason that the term viññāṇa is used in so many contexts in the Sutta Pitaka with so many different meanings: it is used to signify virtually any and every mental state, sometimes being used in the same Sutta with more than one meaning. Here, I will discuss the common association of viññāṇa with kāya, body. I have mentioned that the individual life is sometimes expressed by stating that viññāṇa is ‘stationed’: the centrality of consciousness allows it to be used as a general metaphor for an entire life. In association with kāya, viññāṇa is often used as a metaphor for ‘mind’ in general: all the individual’s mental faculties without further analysis. Thus
viññāna and kāya, mind and body, together represent the individual human being as a whole. We have seen that each of the khandhas is more properly understood as a process rather than as offering an analysis which polarises physical and mental entities. It is perhaps surprising, therefore, to find the human being so often described in the Sutta Piṭaka in terms of mind and body. But though the analysis of the human being into khandhas might give a greater degree of insight into the fact that we consist of various processes, our normal subjective experience nevertheless is one of being conscious and having a physical body. At a practical level, this is a simple and acceptable way of understanding ourselves, and the terms viññāna and kāya are used to designate the former and the latter respectively.

Though the following of the Buddhist path, in particular the meditation exercises, gives understanding that the individual is more complex than at first appears, the simpler analysis is a useful convention for others who do not have that insight. This is illustrated in the Mahāvaggo Sutta, which is one context in which viññāna is used both generically, in the general sense of ‘mind’, and in the more specific sense of a khandha. In the section where it is used generically it appears in opposition to ‘body’ (kāya), and this is clearly stated to be the way ‘ordinary people’ (puthujjana) understand themselves. In the section of the Sutta where it is used to refer to the khandha, it is stated that the ariyasāvaka understands that the individual he appears to be is made up of five khandhas. In other words, while the ordinary person thinks about the human being conventionally, it is part of the ariyasāvaka’s agenda to make a more refined analysis than simply ‘mind and body’. Here the generic meaning appears to be a popular convention and the specific meaning is used for a more sophisticated group. But the convention is also used by the Buddha and his close associates, as we shall see below, illustrating its usefulness at all levels.

In contexts in which viññāna is used generically in opposition to ‘body’, the expression most frequently used is saviniññānaka kāya, ‘the body with mind’. In the Anguttara Nikāya, for example, Ānanda questions the Buddha as follows:

Is it possible that a bhikkhu can attain such formless meditation that in this body and mind, or in anything external to it, he has no notion of ‘I’ or ‘mine’? The Buddha replies that it is indeed possible, and briefly tells Ānanda how to bring this about. In the following Sutta, Sāriputta exclaims to the Buddha that he is ready to teach the dhamma. The Buddha replies: “Then, Sāriputta, you must train yourself as follows. In this mind and body, or in anything external to it, there is no notion of ‘I’ or ‘mine’”. In a third similar example, the Buddha tells some bhikkhus that it is advantageous not to think in terms of self, to have no idea of ‘I’ and ‘mine’, in the body
with mind, or in anything outside it. In none of these examples is any other analysis of the individual given, only savināṇa kāya. So savināṇa kāya is a general expression which serves well in a situation where one wants to convey the meaning of the whole human being’s bodily and mental faculties. In contexts where it appears together with bahiddhā sabbanimittesu, the implication is that one should not think in terms of ‘I’ or ‘mine’ (that is, separate individuality) in anything at all, whether it be subjectively or objectively. So in such contexts savināṇa kāya bahiddhā ca also serves well to convey everything within samsāric existence as a whole.

Two further points need to be considered concerning passages in which those with considerably advanced insight are stated to understand the human being in terms of body and consciousness. We have discussed some such passages here when the Buddha is talking with his close disciples Sāriputta and Ānanda, and under point (1) I referred to a passage where the relationship between the body and viññāna (which was described in terms of a gem on a thread) was discerned at the meditative state of the fourth jhāna. I suggested that these passages show that such an analysis was a useful convention at all levels. But they can also be construed to mean that viññāna was considered so central to the life of a human being that it is singled out as the faculty whose relationship with the body needs to be fully understood. The complexity of viññāna, which is apparent from the variety of headings under which it has been discussed in this chapter, and its association with permanence, might mean that insight into its relationship with the body comes at an advanced stage of meditation.

It might also be the case that the analysis of the human being in terms of kāya and viññāna is earlier than that into khandhas. The Pali English Dictionary, for example, suggests that the generic meaning of viññāna is its “simpler unecclasiastical, unscholastic popular meaning” and that its classification as a khandha is part of “ecclasiastical scholastic dogmatic”. This implies that the latter is considerably later than the former. While in my opinion this division is too formal, and there are many contexts in which both analyses appear together, it may nevertheless be the case that some passages which only mention the simple analysis are early. The Dīgha Nīkāya passage containing the analogy of the gem and the thread might be a case in point. The passage also refers to the fact that liberating insight is attained from the fourth rūpajjhāna. Elsewhere, insight follows from the arūpajīvānas, which are attained subsequent to all the rūpajīvānas, and it might be that the fourfold analysis is earlier than the eightfold one.

The possible lateness of the khandha analysis has also been brought up by (among others) Mrs C. A. F. Rhys Davids in a paper entitled Towards a History of the Skandha-Doctrine. In this paper Mrs Rhys Davids contends that the analysis of the human being into khandhas was a late “editorial increment”, interpolated into texts which originally stated that man was simply body (kāya) and consciousness (viññāna). Though she states that her
research is not comprehensive, she contends that the interpolations are suggested by the presence of material about the khandhas in some contexts where they appear to be an ill-fitting gloss or insertion, and also by the absence of any mention of them in some contexts where one might expect them to be included, notably the section on ‘fives’ in the Anguttara Nikâya.

Mrs Rhys Davids’ main concern is that the khandha analysis is reductionist, and the implication of institutional systematisation in PED’s description of it as “ecclesiastical scholastic dogmatic” also perhaps has reductionist connotations. The earlier analysis into kâya and viññâna is understood by Mrs Rhys Davids to have meant that the intelligent, persistent, ‘indwelling’ man (viññâna) enjoyed and used his group (kâya) of faculties. In the khandha analysis kâya is replaced by rûpa and viññâna becomes a mere aspect of mind.\(^\text{116}\)

Though textual analysis of this kind is not the specific concern of this book, I would make two brief comments on the matter of a possible interpolation. The first is to express my surprise that such a comprehensive exercise, if such it was, neither more efficiently excised the earlier view if it was incompatible with it, nor was included in obvious contexts such as the ‘fives’ section of the Anguttara Nikâya. Second, Mâné and others whose work is specifically in the area of textual analysis have shown that different kinds of Suttas were written and compiled for a different (usually didactic) purpose.\(^\text{117}\) This might explain why certain teachings are more prominent in some texts than in others. And it also might explain why in some places teachings are put differently and over time come to be mixed together. Aside from these two points, my concern here, rather, is to suggest that the khandha analysis is not incompatible with the simple analysis of the human being as savinñânakâya, and, more importantly, that if it was late then it was not reductionist in the manner Mrs Rhys Davids suggests.

First, the use of the term rûpa in the khandha analysis rather than the more specific term kâya seems to me merely to indicate that the body is comprised of elements that are similar in structure or characteristics to those of rûpa when it occurs anywhere else. This is not incompatible with understanding the human body as a ‘group’ (kâya). On the contrary, it stresses that the body is comprised of a group of processes which are classified according to four kinds of characteristics, and I have suggested that these characteristics are best understood in terms of solidity, fluidity, heat and motion. The more complex term rûpa allows the reader to gain more understanding of how the body is constituted in a way the designation kâya does not.

Second, if the use of viññâna as a generic term in association with kâya (notably in the expression savinñânakâya) was early as well as being a simple and/or popular convention, it emphatically does not follow that the earlier meaning of the term was the ‘intelligent, persisting, indwelling man’. We
have seen, for example, that when Sāriputta states that he is ready to teach the dhamma, the Buddha replies:

Then, Sāriputta, you must train yourself as follows: in this mind and body, or in anything external to it, there is no notion of 'I' or 'mine'.

Likewise, in our discussion of the passage in the Saṃmaññaphala Sutta which stated that the relationship between viññāna and the body was analogous to a gem on a thread, we saw that there was no suggestion that viññāna is a persisting 'essence' of man. Rather, in emphasising its dependence on a body the passage illustrates the impermanence of viññāna. And its impermanence has been discussed and illustrated in many other ways.

There remains an important point, however. Though in my opinion there is no suggestion in the Sutta Piṭaka that viññāna was ever as exalted as Mrs Rhys Davids would like, there is no suggestion either that it was ever as reduced to nothing as Mrs Rhys Davids fears. This point has two aspects. First, we have established at some length the complexity of its functions. We have seen that it is the sine qua non of all awareness and cognition, that it is the provider of continuity and can be said to evolve. It is so central to human existence that it is used as a metaphor for an individual life. By including it in an analysis of the human being into khandhas, none of these functions is diminished. What the Viññānakhandha analysis does do is to give more detailed information about how the human being is constituted in a way which is intended to assist in attaining liberation by preventing identification with any component of the empirical individual.

Second, and more important, is that to identify viññana in any context with an abiding essence of man is to fall into the trap of projecting onto material which is concerned with how things operate an interpretation in terms of what they are. So if comprehensive textual analysis were to support the suggestion that the khandha analysis was interpolated into the texts, it cannot in my opinion be considered fundamentally to alter or compromise any earlier teaching. Though the analysis of the human being which it gives may be more comprehensive than others, it is nevertheless compatible with the central doctrinal tenets of the Buddha's teachings.

The term viññāna, then, is used specifically to indicate that constituent of the human being which provides certain functions as we have discussed above. It is also used generically to indicate both an individual life and, more commonly, the mental processes as a whole. When used in the latter sense, it is frequently found in conjunction with the term kāya.

Manas and Citta

The two terms most closely associated with viññāna in the Sutta Piṭaka are, as I have already indicated, manas and citta, and the three terms are sometimes
used in sequence to refer to one's mental activities as a whole.\textsuperscript{120} Like \textit{viśnāna}, \textit{manas} and \textit{citta} are sometimes used in the generic and non-technical sense of 'mind' in general.\textsuperscript{121} And like \textit{viśnāna}, they are used in many contexts, often with different meanings even in one sentence.\textsuperscript{122} Sometimes a passage contains both \textit{manas} and \textit{citta} in the sense of 'mind', each associated with a different adjective,\textsuperscript{123} and sometimes \textit{citta} is used in association with \textit{kāya} to indicate 'body and mind'.\textsuperscript{124} Of the numerous contexts in which both \textit{manas} and \textit{citta} are found, I can only select here what I consider to be the most important for an understanding of their main meanings. I will first discuss \textit{manas} in contexts where it is used to mean 'thinking', and will suggest that in such contexts \textit{manas} is in effect being used in the non-technical sense of 'mind', and that by extension this is regarded in general terms as that with which one thinks. We shall also see that sometimes thinking is not so much the general activity of the mind but is a deliberate activity which might also be described as volitions. We shall see that \textit{citta} is also used to mean thoughts, and that several of its cognate forms are used actively in the sense of thinking or willing. I will go on to suggest, however, that the primary meaning of \textit{citta} itself is not active, but that it represents one's 'state of mind'.

Because several terms which are grammatically closely associated with \textit{citta} will be mentioned in the following discussion, we need first to consider the relationship between them before looking at \textit{manas} and \textit{citta} separately. The cognate forms are \textit{cintā}, \textit{cetas}, \textit{cinteti}, \textit{ceteti} and \textit{cetanā}. We know that all these terms come from the same two closely associated verbal roots, \textit{cit} and \textit{cint}.\textsuperscript{125} In Sanskrit, the two verbs have slightly different meanings: \textit{cint} means to think, whereas \textit{cit} has a more abstract or cognitive meaning of to perceive, know or appear. The two roots are conflated in Pali and are generally understood to mean to think. In Sanskrit, \textit{citta} is the past participle of the root \textit{cit}, but the \textit{Pali English Dictionary} less specifically states it is the past participle of \textit{cinteti}.\textsuperscript{126} So in Pali \textit{citta} literally means 'thought' and by extension also has the non-technical meaning of 'mind'. We shall see that it has a further specific meaning (which I suggest is its primary meaning) which reflects its passive form. \textit{Cintā}, which in Pali means 'the act of thinking', is an abstract noun from the root \textit{cint} according to Whitney,\textsuperscript{127} or from the root \textit{cit} according to PED\textsuperscript{128} (in which case it has been nasalised). \textit{Cetas} is a noun from the root \textit{cit} which in Pali is only found in the instrumental, \textit{cetasā}, or in a compound \textit{ceto-}. When the term \textit{cetasā} is used, \textit{cetas} has almost exactly the same meaning as does \textit{citta} when \textit{citta} is used in the general sense of 'mind'. Thus \textit{cetasā} is what one does 'with the mind': thinking. A frequent use of \textit{cetas} in a compound is \textit{cetovimutta}, 'liberated through \textit{cetas}'. In Pali this is a technical term used to describe a certain sort of liberation with which we are not concerned here.\textsuperscript{129} In the \textit{Abhidhamma} tradition \textit{cetas} was developed into another technical term, \textit{cetasika}, and applied to an analysis of all possible mental states, but this is not found in
the *Sutta Piṭaka*. Finally, *cetana* is an action noun formed from the root *cit*. In Pali this term means more than just ‘thinking’. Emphasising its active form, it has the technical meaning of volition, and actively separates deliberate willing from the general activity of thinking. Where the verb *cinteti* is not used, we shall see that one thinks ‘with the mind’: *manosamkhāra/kamma* or *cittasamkhāra/kamma*, *manasā* or *cetasā*. Willing, however, is more specifically indicated by *cetana*: it is the term the Buddha uses to define *karma*.130

With regard to the term *manas*, this has already been discussed when it has the specific meaning of a sense, which I have called the *manodhātu*, and another specific use is discussed below in the chapter on *manomaya*. I will discuss here the way it is used as ‘thoughts’ (or thinking), and occasionally as ‘volitions’. That the term *manas* is used in the sense of ‘thoughts’ is unsurprising since it comes from the same verbal root as *maññati*, to think, and is etymologically connected to the English words ‘mind’ and ‘mental’. We have seen above the problems this presents for understanding the meaning of *manas* as a sense. There its role could be associated with mental processes through its function as the collator of incoming data which it then presents, as it were, to the *sānaṅkhandha* for further processing. The *manodhātu* itself, however, does not function as a mental faculty. The use of the term *manas* in the sense of thinking appears to be an extension of its use in a generic and non-technical sense as ‘mind’ in general. In a non-technical sense one might simply define thinking as mental activity and so state that one thinks ‘with the mind’, *manasā*. And the fact that in some passages the emphasis is more overtly on what appears to be volitional activity might also be because volitions are in effect deliberate thoughts: the distinction between thinking and willing becomes blurred. Technically, however, we are reminded in some contexts that in defining *karma* as volition the Buddha separates the will from thinking. And one can see how this can be so: one can, for example, make a conscious act of will not to think negative thoughts.

*Manas* appears as the general thinking faculty in numerous contexts. For example, in the *Sutta Nipāta* we read: “thinking over views with the mind”,131 which implies that *manas* is that which thinks. And elsewhere in the same text we read: “If he is a buddha, one who sees without obstructions, he will verbally answer the questions asked in [your] mind”.132 This is a reference to the ability of one who has gained insight to ‘read’ other people’s minds. But it also implies that *manas* is the faculty which thinks, or ‘asks questions’. A similar passage is found in the *Dīgha Nikāya*: “Ask me whatever question you wish that is in your mind”.133 Elsewhere we read that *manas* as a thinking faculty has to be purified: “Our mental activity (i.e. thoughts) will be completely purified”.134 In this, the Buddha states, the *bhikkhus* are to train themselves.135 Finally, *manas* is often used together with the verbal root *kar* in the sense of ‘paying attention’. The term *manasikāra* is often used to express this,136 and we also frequently find the following
passage: “Listen and pay attention well and I will speak”. One has to direct one’s attention to the right things: liberation, for example, is described in terms of not paying attention to any outward sign, and paying attention to the signless realm. The commentary glosses sabbanimittana ca amanasi karo as Nirvana. Though to ‘pay attention’ is the appropriate English idiom, manasikara in fact simply means ‘applying the mind’, and this term suggests how the distinction between willing and thinking becomes blurred in practice: deliberate thinking is in effect indistinguishable from willing. This is apparent in a passage that might be translated either as: “Just as this man’s volitions are directed, so after this state of mind he will reflect that reflection”, or as: “Just as this man’s thinking is directed ...”. The point is that the thinking is intentional.

Some contexts attribute a volitional aspect to manas in a different way. For example, the eighteen ‘investigations of the mind’ (att'hadasa manopavicara) consist in investigating whether something has given rise to joy, grief or equanimity (somanassa, domanassa or upakha). Manas is also said to be ‘pleased’, to be ‘delighted’, to be ‘angry’, and to be ‘irritated’. A frequent synonymous use of the terms manas and citta is found in the common ethical triad of kaya, vaca and manas/citta which was mentioned in chapter IV. In simple terms, this means ‘body, speech and mind’, and it refers to the categories more usually expressed in English as ‘thought, word and deed’. The English expression better conveys the meaning of the Pali formula than does the simple translation. This triad represents three ways of practising sila, the morality which bhikkhus have to develop alongside their training in meditation and insight. That manas and citta in such contexts mean thoughts in the general sense that thinking is the function of the ‘mind’ is more readily apparent in contexts where the three terms of the formula appear as compounds with samkhira and with kamma. Their association with the terms samkhira and kamma, both of which have the general meaning of activity, makes the compound mean ‘activity of the mind’, or ‘thinking’. This is clear from one context which states:

A bodily action is to be done [only] after much attention, a verbal deed is to be done [only] after much attention, a mental action is to be done [only] after much attention.

This context clearly implies that manasakamma is the thinking which mentally (as opposed to bodily or verbally) puts into action previous deliberations (more usually specifically called volitions). The same is the meaning of the expression manosamkharam abhisamkhroti. Such usages were discussed in chapter IV.

This point is also more readily apparent in contexts where the triad is found in the instrumental, kayena, vacya, manas/cetas. I have mentioned that when used in the instrumental case the noun cetas has the same meaning as does citta when it is used to represent the mind in a non-technical
The most well-known context in which this formula is found is in the definition of karma: “I say, bhikkhus, that karma is volition. Having willed, one acts through body, speech and mind”. At first sight the second sentence here appears to have the rather odd meaning of ‘having willed (mental activity), one acts through the mind (more undifferentiated mental activity)’. But this is a context in which the will is clearly distinguished from thoughts, and so the definition of karma means: “Bhikkhus, I say that action is the will. It is according to one’s will that what are referred to as bodily actions, speech and thoughts take place”. So while the term cetanā means ‘will’, these passages suggest that the use of manas and citta in these contexts, whether alone or together with samkhāra or kamma, are intended to indicate thinking as mental activity. And the instrumental terms manasā and cetasā have the same meaning.

If we recall the discussion in chapter IV on anusaya, latent tendencies, we see that the process of thinking following volition can happen unwittingly. The latent tendencies themselves are expressed in thought (and word and deed). Here again the close association between volitions and thoughts is illustrated. Even those thoughts which arise unwittingly have the causal nexus of volitions as their origin. And once again we can see the cyclic nature of how this operates if we consider two other contexts in which the threefold formula of thought, word and deed is found. The first is in the Samyutta Nikāya, where it is suggested that one owns one’s actions of thought, word and deed, and carries them forward to the next life as a threefold ‘karmic baggage’, as it were. More explicitly, we read in the next Sutta that bad bodily actions, speech and thoughts lead to an unfavourable rebirth and good bodily actions, speech and thoughts lead to a favourable rebirth. Not only do volitions condition our thoughts, but by putting those volitions into action thoughts contribute to the cyclic volitional process in a way which in practice blurs the distinction between volitions and thoughts even if doctrinally the will is distinguished from other mental activity.

To sum up, we have seen that the term manas is frequently used in contexts which suggest that it means thinking, and that this is often expressed in the general sense that manas is ‘that which thinks’ or in the sense that thinking is what one does ‘with the mind’. Thinking is closely associated with volitions, because mental activity is one of the three ways that volitions are stated to manifest themselves: having willed, one acts through body, speech and thoughts. And volitions are also described in terms of deliberate thinking. The close association between thinking and willing might account for some contexts in which manas is described in terms which suggest that it actually has volitions. One further point arises in connection with the close association between volitions and thinking as a general activity of manas. It is significant because in the description of the cognitive process in the Sutta Piṭaka, the term manas is not used (except for
the preliminary role of manodhātu as discussed). The discursive activities in
cognition itself are the function of saññā, together with reasoning (or reflection) (vitakketi) and making manifold (papāñceti).\textsuperscript{131} This suggests that the
‘thinking’ that manas does is more closely linked to volition than to the
discursive processes which are associated with apperception: it is the
mental activity which follows from having willed, whenever that willing
took place.

Thinking as the general activity of the mind also applies to contexts
where citta means thoughts. We have seen in these examples the use of cetas
as a synonym for cittasamkhāra or cittakamma, meaning general activity of the
mind, or thoughts, and that in such contexts these terms are synonymous
with manas/manasā. I also mentioned above that citta is etymologically
cognate with the verb cinteti, to think. This verb appears so many times in
the Sutta Pitaka that it is unnecessary for me to cite examples here. Citta is
also, though not often, used in nominal form to mean thought, and, as I
have stated above, in Pali this is its literal meaning. In a short section of the
Samyutta Nikāya entitled Cintā, ‘the act of thinking’, we read “Bhikkhus, do
not think an evil and unwholesome thought”\textsuperscript{132} The Sutta goes on to state
that one should think the four Noble Truths. The importance of thoughts
is summed up in the following passage: “The world, bhikkhu, is led by
thoughts, it is carried along by thoughts, it proceeds under the control of
thoughts which have arisen”.\textsuperscript{133} In the Introduction I discussed the use of
the term loka to mean the life or experience of the individual human being.
Here we see that it is thoughts which dominate and shape that life. As one’s
willing conditions one’s thoughts (cetayitt... kammam karoti manasā), so it is
those thoughts which condition one’s future. We saw in chapter iv the way
different types of saṅkhāra in fact act cyclically. What we have here is the
same process expressed in different terms. And those terms also suggest
why thoughts are sometimes described in terms that one might more
readily associate with willing. In a non-technical sense the mental activity
we have been discussing here includes both willing and thinking, not just
the general cognitive process.

In these two passages in which citta means ‘thought’ we can see two
factors which are significant to what in my opinion is its alternative, central
meaning. The first is that as ‘thought’ it always appears in the singular.
Though this might indicate that it functions as a collective noun, in my
opinion it is because its central meaning is expressed in the singular case,
and ‘thought’ is in fact a secondary meaning extended from this. The
second point is that the nominal term citta has a passive meaning, corre-
responding to its grammatical form as a passive past participle: ‘a thought’,
not ‘thinking’; the activities associated with citta as ‘mind’ in general are
expressed by the active terms cinteti or cetasā. The central meaning of citta I
would like to suggest is also passive in meaning. This is that it represents
one’s ‘state of mind’. By this I mean that citta is the term used to refer to the
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qualitative picture, as it were, of the way all one's mental processes are functioning at any given moment. This is very different from any of the different mental processes of which the whole 'mind' is comprised: citta is neither an entity nor a process (which probably accounts for its not being classified as a khandha, nor mentioned in the paticcasamuppāda formula), but is a term which abstractly indicates one's progress on the path, or, even more generally, one's mental condition. One might suggest that it corresponds to one of the possible meanings of the term citta as the past participle of the root cit in Sanskrit: the 'appearance' of the mind at any given time. I noted that in the passage cited above which states that the world is led by thoughts, the term citta is in the singular and suggested that the singular form reflects the more central meaning of citta. The passage could in fact also be interpreted according to this meaning, so that what it is stating is that as citta is a qualitative indication of the state of one's mind, so it also qualitatively indicates the way in which one conditions one's existence in samsāra.

Understanding citta to mean 'state of mind' clarifies otherwise confusing passages, such as the following examples: "Without understanding the thoughts of his mind, one is reborn in life after life (literally, 'runs from existence to existence') with a restless state of mind". Likewise: "My state of mind is not of such nature that it will return to kāmabhava levels of existence; knowing this, one's state of mind is well acquainted with wisdom". Johansson suggests these (and other similar) passages imply that citta "seems to signify a surviving entity". But what they are indicating is that one's state of mind reflects one's progress, or lack of it, on the path to insight.

In the Satipatthāna Suttas we read that citta is to be 'meditated upon': "How does a bhikkhu proceed to meditate on [his] state of mind qua [his] state of mind?". By doing this he will see whether he is passionate or detached (sārāgam cittaṃ viññāgam vā; literally, 'a state of mind with passion or without passion'), whether or not he has hatred (sadosam cittaṃ viññadosam vā), whether or not he is deluded (samoḥam cittaṃ viññamoḥam vā), and so on. This meditation on the state of his mind also tells the bhikkhu what types of meditation he has practised: if it has 'become great' (mahaggatam cittam) this indicates that he has attained certain meditative levels (jhāna). This was referred to under point (5) above, where I suggested that as one progresses on the path to insight so one's awareness is progressively less restricted and can be said to 'grow' or 'increase'. Here we see that that attainment alters one's state of mind, and, further, that an examination of one's state of mind correspondingly indicates the meditative attainment. This is implicit in a simile we are given elsewhere where the state of mind of one who is ignorant is likened to a "dirty, stirred up and muddied pool of water", and that of one who is enlightened is "transparent, clear and not stirred up". The meditation exercises described in the Satipatthāna Suttas are for the
purpose of detached observation, as we shall discuss in chapter viii. But we read in the Cetokhila-sutta that the purpose of knowing that one’s states of mind are unwholesome is so that one can direct one’s attention towards getting rid of such unwholesomeness and thus make progress in the dhamma. Thus a passage in the Majjhima Nikāya states: “A bhikkhu has power over his state of mind; he is not the slave of his state of mind”. We also read in the Majjhima Nikāya that it is in citta that one’s “wholesome moral habits” (kusalaśīla) and “unwholesome moral habits” (akusalaśīla) originate (cittasamutthāna). I stated earlier in this chapter that the association in the Upaniṣads and the Vedānta traditions of cit with Brahman might be one reason why citta is sometimes understood in terms of an entity. Passages such as this in the Majjhima Nikāya which state that it is the source of volitions, also probably account both for substantialistic interpretations of citta and for definitions of it solely in terms of thinking, in both cases overlooking the central meaning I have suggested here of ‘state of mind’. But such passages do not refer to an entity nor to citta as that which wills. If they did, one might ask why it is not included either in the analysis of the human being into khandhas, or in the pañcasamuppāda formula. What is meant here is that as it is the complex causal nexus of volitions which one experiences (discussed in chapter iv) that continuously conditions one’s actions, thoughts and so on, and as one’s state of mind at any given moment as it were reflects that complex causal nexus, so the causal origin of one’s actions, thoughts and so on can become associated with one’s state of mind. But this is a manner of speaking. Though citta from moment to moment as it were reflects one’s causal nexus, this does not mean that it actually is that causal nexus: it is perhaps better understood as an abstract reflection. We see here an important similarity between viññāna and citta: they are both associated with the qualitative condition of a human being. Viññāna functions as the provider of awareness and continuity by which one knows one’s moral condition (in its broadest sense), and citta is an abstract representation of that moral condition. This reflects the fact that ethical concerns (also in their broadest sense) are paramount in Buddhism. In attempting to understand the close association of citta and volitions indicated by the manner of speaking referred to in this paragraph, one can perhaps understand better the fact that citta comes from the same verbal root as the active terms cetanā, cetas and cinteti.

It is important to remember here that an indication of meditative attainment also represents progress on the path to insight in a cognitive sense. The removal of unwholesome states does not correspond to becoming ‘nicer’ in some sentimental sense. Though the defilements which represent ignorance are described in moral terms, and though the development of morality (sīla) is fundamental to the Buddhist teachings, the removal of defilements implies the development of wisdom, which is part of the cognitive process. In giving us an abstract picture of our state of mind,
citta reflects one's cognitive as well as one's more strictly moral progress. In this sense it has a broader meaning than when the term citta is used in the sense of mind in general or thinking.

The bhikkhu having power over his citta, we also frequently read that it is to be 'tamed' (dantam), controlled (guttam) and 'guarded' (rakkhitam). The guarding and taming of citta is the subject of the Cittavaggo chapter in the Dhammapada. Such injunctions are meant metaphorically: because the state of one's mind is an indicator of one's spiritual progress, one should ensure that it does not indicate unwholesome states. In effect, the 'guarding' is done by the process referred to above: one consciously wills to concentrate on the dhamma.

In similar vein, we read that a bhikkhu 'purifies' his citta (cittam parisodheti), and that it becomes 'radiant' (sappabhāsam cittam bhāveti). The radiance (pabhassara) of citta is likened to the radiance of pure gold, and, like gold, it can be defiled. We saw the term pabhassara used to describe viññāna, and I there suggested that it meant that as one progresses from ignorance to insight, so one's awareness is progressively less restricted by the objectivity of samsāric perception and can be said to 'radiate'. It functions as it were as the 'light' of knowing. As those stages are reached, so one's state of mind will reflect the fact that one's volitional activity is ceasing. Eventually, this is a state of viśālāragatam cittam, and corresponds to the transparent and radiant state of the unmuddied pool of water. In the Anguttara Nikāya we read: "This state of mind is luminous, but it is defiled by defilements from outside". Though this passage might be construed as suggesting that citta has 'original' purity, in the context of the Buddha's teachings as a whole it is no more likely that this passage about citta is intended to suggest original purity than that viññāna should be thought of in such a way, as discussed earlier in this chapter. But because one's state of mind is in fact an abstraction, there is an abstract sense in which citta might in principle be thought of as pure: just as a pool of water might be thought in principle to have a calm surface which reflects all ripples and muddiness, so one's state of mind might be thought in principle to be luminous but to reflect all mental activity.

The attaining of a 'purified' citta corresponds to the attaining of liberating insight. And just as viññāna is described as being 'free', so citta is also described as being 'completely liberated'. At liberation, it is citta which is stated to be 'free' of all the āsavas. By extension from this, one who has attained liberating insight is frequently referred to as cetovimutta. This has a technical meaning with which we need not be concerned here. What it indicates in general terms, however, is that at liberation one's state of mind reflects no defilements, no ignorance. And as defilements and ignorance represent bondage, so their absence is described in terms of being free.

It is perhaps because citta is a general qualitative indicator that the Abhidhamma and commentarial traditions developed its association with the
heart as a psycho-affective centre. A reference to this in the Pali English Dictionary, for example, describes citta as:

The heart (psychologically), i.e. the centre and focus of man’s emotional nature [more properly, volitions] as well as that intellectual element which inheres in and accompanies its manifestations, i.e. thought.\(^\text{177}\)

The association with the heart does not imply, as it might in the West, that citta is thought of in the sentimental terms referred to above. In pan-Indian thought the heart is associated with one’s mental faculties.

To sum up, then, our discussion here of the terms citta and manas has shown that both are frequently used in a generic non-technical sense of ‘mind’ in general. Both are also associated in general terms with the activity of the mind, and this is primarily the thinking which originates in volitions. Manas is particularly used to refer to such mental activity. We have seen that though the verbal root cit, from which we get the term citta, also gives us the active terms cetanā, cetas and cinteti, all of which are specifically associated with volitions or thinking, the nominal term citta itself primarily has the passive meaning of one’s ‘state of mind’. This is neither an entity nor a process, but, rather, is an abstract qualitative indication of the moral and cognitive condition of a human being at any given time.

Notes

1. cf. Dhs p.10 and Vibhanga p.144, where the following list is given: Cittam ... mano mānasam kadeyaṃ pandaram mano [sic] maṇiyatanam manindriyaṃ viññāṇam viññāṇākkhandhe tajjā manovijñāṇadhātu.
2. e.g. Asl p.274ff.
3. Pieris (1980) discusses the different terms found in the Abhidhamma and commentaries. Not even then, he states (p. 213), are the three terms viññāṇa, citta and manas formally differentiated.
5. cf Reat, 1990, p.205. Reat refers to Br. Up. 2.1.17, and discusses the Upaniṣadic suggestion that consciousness in some way emanates less essential levels of consciousness.
6. DN.II.56: Iti kho ānanda nāmarūpa-paccayā viññāṇam, viññāṇa-paccayā nāmarūpaṃ.
7. For example, at MN.III.18. cf also SN.III. 56f, 68, 86ff, 103. Sutatā aryasūkto ... na viññāṇam attato samanupassati, na viññāṇasamavatā viññāṇam, na viññāṇasamamattā samanupassati. A similar passage is found at Vin.1.12−3.
8. DN.II.63: Viññāṇam va hi ānanda mātā kucchim na okkamasattha, api nu kho nāmarūpaṃ mātā kucchismin samucchisathā? PED (p.687) states that the derivation and meaning of samucchati is uncertain. The context suggests that it is highly likely to be from sam 'much', to become solid, and should thus read samucchisathā.
9. For example, Johansson, 1979, p.57.
10. DA.II.502: Na okkamasatthā ti pavisitā pavatīmānaṃ vijja pavisandhitavasena na pavattissatthā.
11. SN.V.283.
12. Miln. p.299: the lateness of this text does not matter here; what it illustrates is an example of a linguistic convention.
13. SN.III.46.
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14. SN.II.90ff: Nāmarūpa avakkanti hoti and viññānassā avakkanti hoti. Nāmarūpa avakkanti hoti is also found at SN.II.66.
15. DN.II.69ff. The same ninefold paṭiccasamuppāda formula is given at DN.II.31ff, with explicit statements that viññāna and nāmarūpa are mutually dependent (pp.32, 34 and 35).
16. SN.III.53ff.
17. MN.I.256: Tatthi ‘han bhagavato dhammaṃ desaṃ ajānāmi yatathā ind ‘itaṃ viññāṇanā sandhāvati samvarati, ānāthaṃ ti.
18. MN.I.258: Namo mayā mohaparisa anekapariyāyena paṭiccasamuppānam viññāṇam vuttam; akāra pacchavati nattī viññānassa samabhavo ti. Aha va pana ivan mohaparisa atthā duggahātena amhe ‘e eva abhāvācikkhāti attānaṃ ca kharasi bāhūḥ ca apattāṇām passavat.
19. MN.II.65: Yān ca khe etāṃ bhikkhave vuccati cittam iti pi mano iti pi viññānaṃ iti pi tam rattiyā ca divassas ca aṅghaṇa eva uppaṭājiti aṅgham nirujjhati.
21. SN.III.53: Rūpupāyaṃ bhikkhave viññāṇanā tījhanam anātho tījhayya. The CPD (s.v. upaya) reads upāya for upaṇya in the title of this Sutta, which is given in the PTS edition as upāvāgo paṭhamo. The CPD reading suggests the above quotation would be amended so that a translation would read: “by attaching to body ...”. This does not seem significantly to alter the point being illustrated here.
22. Citte is discussed separately in the third part of this chapter.
24. Idāti ce pana me viññānaṃ etid aṭṭho aṭṭho pāṭaddhika ti.
25. SN.II.65f.: Yato ca kho bhikkhave no etā ceta ceti no ca pakappeti no ca anuṣītā ārammanam etam na heti viññānassa tījito. Ārammano asati pāṭaddhā viññānassa no heti.
26. Cf. also SN.II.101: the four ‘foods’ (āhāra), which include viññāna, are themselves each dependent on passion (rāga), delight (mudā) and craving (tānā).
27. For example, MN.I.53: sākkhānirāntidhā viññāṇanirāntidhā. cf. also SN.II.82: viññānaṃ ... anabhūsumkharānti vimuddham. In what sense viññāga is ‘released’ is discussed under point (5).
28. None of the discussion under this point precludes the possibility that viññāna might be associated with a ‘subtle body’, a possibility which is illustrated in chapter viii.
29. I intend no connection with any technical philosophical usage of ‘consciousness of’. I am using this expression simply to note the difference between a substantive entity (suggested by the single word ‘consciousness’) and the process of being conscious (‘consciousness of’).
30. SN.III.61.
32. MN.I.111f.: Cakkhu-c’ecito paticca rūpe ca uppaṭajjati cakkhuviññānāṃ ... sotañ-c’ecito paticca sadde ca uppaṭajjati sotaviññānām ....
33. Ajjhāttakaṃ cakkhu: I have translated this as ‘the individual’s eye’ because ‘personal eye’ is not an English expression, and the context suggests it is referring to the physical eye and not some abstract ‘internal’ faculty.
34. MN.I.190: Ajjhāttakkha-c’ecito āsavo cakkhuṃ aparibhinnanā hoti bāhūra ca rūpā āpāthagācchanti na ca taupa samanabhāgato hoti, n’eva taeva taupassa viññāṇabhāgase pasubbhāvo hoti. Yato ca kho āsavo ajjhāttakkha-c’ecito cakkhuṃ aparibhinnanā hoti bāhūra ca rūpā āpāthagācchanti ujjve ca samanabhāgato hoti, evam taupassa viññāṇabhāgase pasubbhāvo hoti.
36. MN.I.259: Yeṭ - itaṭ - eva bhikkhave pacchayam paticca uppaṭayati viññānaṃ tena ten’ eva saṅkham gacchati: cakkhu-c’ecito paticca rūpe ca uppaṭayati viññānaṃ, cakkhuviññānānāṃ t’eva saṅkham gacchati ....
The controversy is discussed in Cousins (1991).

The senses in the Pali canon. But the function is not systematically used in the Upānissads, and it does not directly correspond to the six senses in the Pali canon. But the function of prajnā in the cognitive process as described in this passage in the Upānissads is nevertheless very similar to that of viññāṇā.

In this passage prajñā is one of four sacchikaranāyā dhammānaṁ sammaññaṁya saññāṁ, which I have interpreted as figuratively representing intellectual activity.
The Viññānakkhandha

The possible different 'stations' for continuity to the human condition is indicated by the modern tendency to refer to those who are irreversibly comatose, or otherwise permanently unconscious, as 'vegetables'.

Though what I am discussing here only relates to well people, the importance of a sense of the continuity of the human condition is indicated by the modern tendency to refer to those who are irreversibly comatose, or otherwise permanently unconscious, as 'vegetables'.

For example, MN.I.261; DN.III.228, 276; SN.II.11ff, 101. The others are solid food (kabacinakāra), contact (phacc), and volitions (manoanicatana).

The metaphor of the stream is a common one in the canon, perhaps because the term saṃsāra is derived from Vṛ, which means, amongst other things, to flow. At SN.I.15 we find the expression bhavesota, 'stream of becoming', used to refer to the series of lives in saṃsāra. It is also used to denote the Noble Eightfold Path at SN.V.347: ariyo atthaṅkiko maggo sotā. Those who gain the necessary spiritual status to follow the path and not fall away (this is described in several different ways) are called 'stream-winners', saḷāpānā (cf., for example, SN.II.60f; V.346f, 357, 376; et seq.: cf. PED, p.725). Collins (1982, p.24ff) usefully divides the stream metaphor into negative and positive contexts: the stream of saṃsāra, which one wants to reverse or 'go against', and the stream to liberation, which one wants to follow or 'go with' (to oversimplify).

For example, MN.I.53: Samkhāraniruddhā viññānanirodho.

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with which I am concerned here, and I cannot go into other possibilities. In any event, they do not affect the point I am making.

92. The psycho-cosmological levels are tabulated by Collins (1982, p.217). This correspondence is also discussed in chapter vii.


94. This term was discussed briefly in chapter III. Griffiths discusses in detail the state of saṃsāra-vigata-nirvāṇa in his paper “Pure Consciousness and Indian Buddhism” (1990). cf. also Griffiths, 1986 and Williams, 1992.

95. MN.III.242: Viññānaṃ … pariṣuddhāṃ pariṣuddhāṃ, tena viññānaṃ kīci jānāti. There is some ambiguity in this passage about how viññāna comes to be purified and cleansed, but the implication is that it comes through the following of the Buddhist teachings.

96. In section (4) I referred to a different interpretation of the term bhavaṅga in the Aṅguttara Nīkāya. But in view of the fact that this reading is disputed, one cannot suggest that there is a later divergence from an original meaning. The bhavaṅga mind as naturally pure is discussed by Collins (1982, p.246).

97. In the Brahmanical tradition insight (which is the realisation that)

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100. There is considerable scholarly discussion on this word. cf. for example, Lamotte, 1980, p.2079, n.2; Norman, 1987, pp.23-31; Ruegg, 1969, p.412, n.2; and there is a discussion of the different ways scholars have interpreted this word in Dialogues I, p.283, n.2.

101. SN.I.15: Tattha tathā pabhāsatī sambuddho tapataṃ settho, esa abhā anuttara ti.

102. SN.I.17: Ābhassara-samvattanīkā satā; cf. also SN.I.95.

103. In a personal communication, Lance Cousins has suggested to me that radiance here has an experiential content rather than being a metaphor. And (though Mr. Cousins did not suggest this) this might correspond to the subjective experience of illumination that accompanies insight: from the subjective point of view the progress from darkness to light might well seem more literal than metaphorical.

104. In my paper “Anātā: A Different Approach” (1995), I have included the metaphorical interpretations described here to illustrate a particular hermeneutic approach to the Buddha’s teachings.

105. SN.II.94.

106. SN.II.95.

107. In a mnemonic passage, the Sāṅgīti Suttanta (DN.III.216), we find the term sakkāya used to refer to the human being as a whole. It is also used in this sense at MN.III.284.

108. AN.I.132: Sīyā nu kha bhante bhikkhuṃ tathāripi samādhipiṭṭhā bo ṣiha imasmi ca saviññāpanke kāye āhamkāra-maṃmakāra-maṭṭhānusaya nāsū, behiddhā ca sabbannimittesu āhamkāra-maṃmakāra-maṭṭhānusayā nāsū?


110. AN.IV.53. cf. also SN.II.252, 253; SN.III.79f, 80f, 169, 170.

111. In the PTS translation of this passage, E. M. Hare translates saviññāpanakāya as 'discriminative body' (GS.IV.30). This is, as Mrs Rhys Davids points out in her introduction (p.61), misleading; the body is not itself discriminative. Harvey (1981) also states that kāya (in the sense of corporeal body) can "be seen to have a mental component". Harvey states (p.92) that the presence of the terms nāmakāya and rūpakāya in the canon (for example, at DN.II.62) implies that both nāma (the mental faculties) and rūpa (the physical body) are faculties or characteristics of kāya (the physical body). I disagree with this interpretation, and take kāya here to have its abstract meaning as 'aggregate', not 'physical body'. And in concluding that such passages show that the term saviññāpanakāya represents all five khandhas (p.90), Harvey goes on to argue that kāya refers to the first four, giving viññāna a uniquely significant role. Again, I do not agree with this analysis.

112. PED, p.618.

113. This is suggested in PED, p.286.


115. Ibid., p.405.
The term

For example, SN.II.94.

For example, DN.I.20, III.32; SN.III.32, V.66; AN.II.137. The term sacitakāya is not found.

PED's mention of the two stems, cit and cet, is unhelpfully confusing (p.266).

PED, p.266.

Whitney, 1885, p.47.

PED, p.268.


Cetanāḥam kamman vodāmi. cf. also Böhlking and Roth, 1858, s.v. cit, cittā, cetas.

Sn 834; Manasā ditthigatāni cintayanto.

Sn 1005; Anāvavatadassāti yadi buddho bhāvissati, manasā pucchāne pārthe vācāya vissajjati.

DN.II.275: Puccha... man no paññān yam kiccī manasā icchasi.

MN.I.272: Purinuddho no manovamanācāro bhavissati. cf. also Dhammapada 98 and 233.

Evam hi vo bhikkhave sikkhitabbām.


For example, SN.II.24: Supatthā siddhukam manasi karantha bhāvissāmi. Manné (1990, p.341) cites formulas used to open discourses of various types which include this sentence.

MN.I.296: Sabbanimittana ca manasākaro, animittaya ca dhātuyā manasākaro.

MA.I.352.

DN.III.104: Tatā imassa bhoto manasamukhārā panihītā, tatā imassa cittassa anantarā amum nāma vitakkam viākkessati.

MN.II.216f.

Respectively: Sn.I.133: Me nirote mano; Sn 424: Me rañjati mano (cf. also Dhammapada 116);

MN.I.377, Sn 659: manopakopa; Dhammapada 233: manopakopa. Johansson (1965, p.186f) states that such contexts suggest manas functions as an affective centre. But the feelings and emotions here referred to are more properly understood as volitions, as I have discussed in chapter ii.

MN.I.389, 373, 415; SN.II.4; DN.III.191: kāyaśamkhāra, vācāshamkhāra, mano (or citta) samkhāra (and similarly with kamma). The generality of the meaning of the term citta in such contexts is indicated at MN.I.301 where cittasamkhāra is stated to comprise both satāti and vedanā. Though some scholars (for example Reat, 1990, p.313) have attempted to give a complex analysis of this passage, in my opinion it suggests that citta comprises general mental activity, or 'mind' in a non-technical sense.

MN.I.415: Paccekkhitvā paccekkhāhitvā kāyaṃ kamman kattabbān, paccekkhāhitvā paccekkhāvitvā vācāya kamman kattabbam, paccekkhāhitvā paccekkhāvitvā manasā kamman kattabbam.

MN.I.389.

AN.III.415: Cetanāḥ ham bhikkhave kamman vodāmi. Cittayitvā kamman kāro kāyaṃ vācāya manasā.

cf. also DN.III.104.

The term manosañcecatāna, which is stated to be one of the four aṭhāras (DN.III.228), probably has a similar meaning that volitions become mental activity.

AN.II.158; SN.II.40: Asampajjino... manasakārāna, abhisamkhecati.

SN.I.93: Yathā ca kāro kāyaṃ vācāya uda cetasā, tam hi tassa sakam hoti, tañca ādāya garahati.

SN.I.94: So kāyaṃ ducaritam carati vācāya ducaritam carati manasā ducaritam carati; so kāyaṃ ducaritam carati vācāya ducaritam carati manasā ducaritam carati, kāyaṃ bhedā paraṃ maranā epayyam duggatān evipatān uppajjati ... So kāyaṃ saccaritam carati vācāya saccaritam carati manasā saccaritam carati; so kāyaṃ saccaritam carita vācāya saccaritam carita manasā saccaritam carita kāyaṃ bhedā paraṃ maranā sugatim saggām lokam uppajjati. cf. also SN.I.102; AN.I.63; Sn 232; DN.III.96.

MN.I.111.
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152. SN.V.4:8: Mā bhikkhave pañcakam akusalān cittam cinteyyatha.

153. AN.II.177: Cittena kho bhikkhu loka nissati, cittena parikissati cittassa uppannassa vasam gacchāti.

154. Johansson (1965, p.166ff) states that it is “conceived predominantly as an entity ... on the other hand [it] may be used for the produced processes themselves [i.e. thoughts]”. In his lengthy paper he nowhere suggests that citta means ‘state of mind’, and assumes that its passive form implies the existence of an entity.


156. The different levels of existence are discussed further in chapter vii.

157. AN.IV.402: Aṇāsattidhammam me cittam kāmabhavāyā u paññāya cittam supariccheda hoti.


159. MN.I.59; DN.II.299: Kathaṁ ca bhikkhave bhikkhu cittena cittāṅgaperi viharati?

160. AN.I.9: Uda karahado avio livito kālacittakhita ... udakarahado accho vippasanno anāvito.

161. MN.I.10ff.

162. MN.I.214: Bhikkhu cittan vasam vatteti, no ca bhikkhu cittasa vasena vattati.

163. MN.II.27. cf. also MN.I.36; DN.I.71, II.81, III.270.


165. For example, Kalupahana, 1979, p.235; Reat, 1990, p.296.

166. AN.I.7, 261, III.435; SN.I.48.

167. Dhammapada 93ff.

168. SN.I.71, 77. cf. also SN.V.69.

169. DN.III.229; SN.V.278; AN.I.8 (pasannacitta), 10.

170. SN.V.92.

171. Dhammapada 154.

172. The term acittaka, which Paul Griffiths translates as ‘mindless’ (1986 and 1990 passim) when it relates to the condition of saṁñāvedayatanañca, suggests either that at that point one’s state of mind cannot be discerned: it is ‘blanked out’, as it were; or in this context the term citta means ‘thought’ or mental activity, and this state is one in which such activity is absent.

173. AN.I.10: Pañkasaran idam bhikkhave cittan taṁ ca kho āgantu kehi upakkilesi upakkiliṣṭham.

174. For example, SN.III.13, 45: Cittaṁ susimuttaṁ.

175. DN.II.81: Cittam sammad eva āsavo viñonaat.


177. PED, p.266.
CHAPTER VI

Nāmarūpa

The expression Nāmarūpa is an important one in ancient Indian psychology. The term nāma (name) on its own is first found in the Rg Veda where the ṛṣis gave names to things. The expression used for this is nāmadheya – 'conferring a name'. Later, in the Brhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad, when Yājñavalkya is asked what it is that does not forsake a man when he dies, his answer is 'name'. Name-conferring must, then, have been an important enough process for Yājñavalkya on this occasion to state that the name is eternal, a characteristic one might expect to be attributed to ātman rather than nāma. Yet in the giving of a name, some sort of abstract or notional identity is established which is independent of the empirical thing or individual. We need only consider that when someone we know dies, their name and all that is associated with it does not die, but conceptually represents that person to us in our memories. Likewise with, say, a book: its name persists even if the book itself is destroyed.

The earliest instance of the pairing of nāma with rūpa is probably in the Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa, and it continues to be found in Āraṇyaka literature and is not uncommon in the Upaniṣads. Scholars of Buddhism have commonly interpreted nāmarūpa as a metaphor for 'mind (nāma) and body (rūpa)', but the original meaning in the Brāhmaṇas and Upaniṣads is nearer to its literal meaning: 'name (nāma) and (visible) form (rūpa)'. The two examples given above clearly indicate that this is how nāma on its own is understood. And we shall see from the following examples that this is also the case with the compound nāmarūpa.

In the earliest reference in the Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa we read that when the universe consisted just of undifferentiated Brahman (neuter), it differentiated itself by means of nāmarūpa: whatever has a name, that is nāma; whatever one knows by its form (even if it has no name), that is rūpa. Nāma and rūpa are Brahman's two means of manifestation or representation, described as the two great forces (or monsters) of Brahman, and the two great tempting appearances of Brahman. Similarly, we read in the Brhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad (which is the last part of the Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa) that the unmanifest or undifferentiated (asyākṛta) world became differentiated (vyākṛta) by means of nāma and rūpa (nāmarūpābhyaṁ); even today, it states, the
world is differentiated in the same way, by saying of someone (or something) 'he [or it] is called so-and-so; he looks like such-and-such'.

Also in the Brhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad, the universe is said to be triadic in nature: name and form together with action (karma).

This is also the triadic nature of ātman, though karma in this instance is said to arise from ātman. This part of the triad need not concern us further here. Nāma and riṣpa together are said to be the real. Everything that is nāma arises from speech (vāc); and everything that is riṣpa arises from the eye. Vāc was an important term in the Brahmanical religion prior to the time of the Buddha as it was one of the subjects of speculation about the nature of the self and the universe in the late Vedic and early Upaniṣadic period. Here, however, apart from connotations associated with such speculation, the association of nāma with vāc suggests the conceptual nature of nāma: that it is the conferral of differentiation by verbal means, i.e. the practice of naming referred to above.

There is no cosmic significance associated with eye (caksus), but the association of riṣpa with eye is interesting for different reasons. On the one hand, in Pali canonical descriptions of the āyatanas, riṣpa appears as 'visible object', corresponding to the sense 'eye'. In the Pali context, riṣpa does not have eye as its source, as in the Upaniṣad, but it is nevertheless defined as that which is visible. The other point of interest is the etymological link between riṣpa, varpas and varna, through the root vr. According to Louis Renou varpas signifies change or metamorphosis of form, including deceptive appearances, practically equivalent in usage to vivarta (though vivarta is from vr, not vr). This suggests that though riṣpa is what the eye sees, such visual perception is not necessarily what really is, a teaching which was to become systematised by the proponents of Vedānta. Renou suggests that the term varna, the classical word for 'colour', seems to intend a 'category of recognition' in terms such as disa- or ārya-varna, rather than difference merely of colour. Such a meaning is considerably more conceptual than visible, and moves a long way from the meaning of riṣpa as the sense object corresponding to the eye, and also from any suggestion that the main criterion of riṣpa is visibility. The etymological link between riṣpa and varna is interesting partly because sometimes such links can throw a different light on a word and help in understanding its meaning, and partly because in Pali Abhidhamma literature, riṣpa is again associated with 'colour' (as well as shape). The term used for 'colour' is vannanibhā, 'coloured appearance', which suggests that riṣpa is form which is apparent by means of colour. Shwe Zan Aung, the translator of a late Pali text, the Abhidhammattha Sangaha, states in his notes to that translation that the most appropriate understanding of riṣpa is as colour plus extension (vanna and paṭhaṅī). Likewise, in his Abhidhammakośabhāṣya, Vasubandhu indicates that varṇa alone is too narrow a definition of riṣpa when he explains that riṣpa is of two kinds, shape (samsāstāna) and colour (varṇa). Wayman has suggested that in the Abhidhamma context
rūpa can best be understood as the verbal noun 'colouring', meaning 'touching up', 'filling out', 'giving body to'. And it may be that Vasubandhu's inclusion of samsthāna in his definition of rūpa results in a similar meaning to that proposed by Wayman. Wayman's suggestion brings the meaning of rūpa/varāṇa nearer to the more general criterion of visibility, which is the main characteristic of rūpa where it is the object of the sense 'eye', and also of rūpa as part of the cosmic triad in the Brhadāranyaka Upanisad passage we have been discussing here. While nāma, the conferral of a name, is a conceptual differentiation by verbal means, rūpa is differentiation by means of (visible) appearance or form: as the earlier passage of the Upanisad puts it, 'he [or it] is called so-and-so, and looks like such-and-such'. The Upanisadic understanding of nāmarūpa, then, is, as stated above, close to the literal meaning of the term. One might put this differently and suggest that name and form together confer individuality, and that in this figurative sense, therefore, nāmarūpa does have a psychophysiological meaning. Reat suggests that in the Upanisads nāmarūpa is used to denote the "conceptual and apparitional aspects of a given object". This fits well with the notion of individuality, since both concept (which represents name) and appearance are peculiar to the individual. And in spite of Yājñavalkya's statement about nāma being eternal, which is perhaps characteristically profound, nāmarūpa, as both conceptual and apparitional aspects, is associated with the temporal existence of a thing as much as with the duration of an individual's lifetime. Thus the Mundakopaniṣad states that just as flowing rivers cast off name and form when they flow into the ocean, so one who knows is freed from name and form and attains the divine person, higher than the high. Just as scholars of Buddhism have often understood the term nāmarūpa to refer to 'mind and body' rather than its more literal meaning of 'name and form', so the later Theravāda tradition has understood nāmarūpa. Such an understanding, however, is scarcely compatible with the main context in which nāmarūpa is found in the Pali canon, which is as the fourth link in the usual twelfold version of the chain of dependent origination, the patīcchasamuppāda formula. In another version of the formula, nāmarūpa appears as the second link in the chain, but is still preceded by viññāna. If mind and body arise at this stage, how can one make sense of the subsequent arising of what seem to be mental faculties, and why do we find jāti, birth, so much further along the chain? Several suggestions have been made to explain this, both within the Theravāda tradition and outside it, most of which have been in terms of spreading the chain over the previous, present and next lives of the individual. In the following discussion of nāmarūpa we will see that some of the contexts in which the term is found in the Sutta Pitaka do suggest that it means 'mind and body'. I will also suggest that in contexts where such an interpretation is problematic, primarily the patīcchasamuppāda formula, an alternative interpretation makes considerably
more sense of nāmarūpa. And the alternative interpretation of nāmarūpa also makes more sense of the formula itself.

Nāmarūpa is a relatively common term in the Sutta Piṭaka, and nāma and rūpa are formally paired together in the canonical ‘lists of twos’.22 In a post-canonical text, the Milindapaṭhika, the two are said to be inseparable.23 The term has been interpreted by scholars as meaning ‘mind and body’ for two reasons. First, there are a few passages in the Pali material where such a meaning might be implied. For example, there are passages in the Sutta Piṭaka where it is used to indicate the individual as a whole, in much the same way savīnīnānakāya is. We find such a usage in the Sānyutta Nikāya, where one of the metaphors describing an arahant’s freedom from rebirth is the total cessation of mind and body.24 A similar use of nāmarūpa occurs in the Sutta Nipāta.25 The second reason is because later Theravāda Buddhist exegetes have also understood nāmarūpa to mean ‘mind and body’ and have said so in some influential and widely read texts. In some passages, nāmarūpa is defined as representing the individual as a whole. In his Visuddhimagga, for example, Buddhaghosa states that in meditation a bhikkhu defines nāmarūpa in terms of the five khandhas, with nāma representing the four arūpakkhandhas and rūpa the rūpakkhandha.26 In the chapter in the Visuddhimagga entitled ‘Description of the Purification of View’ (Dīthiṣuddhiniḥdode), Buddhaghosa discusses definitions of nāmarūpa at some length. Quoting several canonical passages which illustrate the selflessness of the human being in terms of the khandhas, the body, and dukkha, he goes on to state that all such passages are in fact saying that the human being is only nāmarūpa, and that no self is found therein because in the ultimate sense there is only nāmarūpa.27 This clearly equates nāmarūpa with the five khandhas as representing the individual as a whole, analysed according to body and mind. In two other non-canonical Pali texts, the Netti Pakarana and the Abhidhammattha Saṅgaha,28 and in the commentary on the Dhammapada, we find the same definition.29

Nāmarūpa is most frequently found in the Sutta Piṭaka associated with viññāna, usually as consecutive links in the paṭiccasamuppāda formula, and the two together have been understood by later exegetes to represent the individual. In the version of the paṭiccasamuppāda formula found in the Dīgha Nikāya, for example, we read that viññāna and nāmarūpa are mutually dependent,30 and that the experience of the cycle of saṁsāra is by means of nāmarūpa together with viññāna.31 Neither nāmarūpa nor viññāna on its own is sufficient cause for the subsequent development of an individual.32 Elsewhere viññāna is said to be dependent on nāmarūpa, the other way round from the paṭiccasamuppāda formula.33 Though, as we have seen, Buddhaghosa defined nāma as representing all four of the arūpakkhandhas, he also discusses nāmarūpa together with viññāna in the chapter of his Visuddhimagga where he deals with each part of the paṭiccasamuppāda formula in turn. He interprets the two of them according to the analysis of the person into khandhas. Thus rūpa and viññāna correspond to their respective
khandhas, leaving nāma to represent the remaining three mental khandhas of vedanā, saññā and sañkhāra. As well as stating that nāma is three arūpakkhandhas, he defines rūpa in terms of the four elements. The Digha Nikāya passage where nāmarūpa and viññāna are said to be mutually conditioning, which has also been referred to in chapter v, is one in which the paticecasamuppāda formula begins with viññāna as the condition for the arising of nāmarūpa, omitting avijjā and sañkhāra. It may well be that viññāna and nāmarūpa are stated to be mutually conditioning so that independent existence cannot be projected onto viññāna as the first link in the chain. But to a reader of this text, or of any other which states their mutual dependency, who is aware that elsewhere nāmarūpa is explained as the four khandhas other than viññāna, the passage suggests that the mutually conditioned pair represent the individual as a whole, particularly since it also states that together they experience saṃsāra.

The only definition given of nāmarūpa in the Sutta Pītaka does not explicitly refer to the khandhas, but it is given in a way which has been interpreted as implying that translating nāma as ‘mind’ is appropriate. Rūpa is again defined as the four elements (and their derivatives) and nāma is said to consist of feeling, apperception, volition, sensory contact and attention. Vedanā, saññā, cetanā, phassa and manasikāra might all be said to be ‘mental’ rather than ‘physical’. In the Papañcasūdanī, the commentary on the Majjhima Nikāya, an analysis according to the khandhas is projected onto this definition, so saññā is said to stand for the saññākhandha, vedanā for the vedanākhandha, and cetanā, phassa and manasikāra collectively represent the sañkhārakkhandha. The canonical passages where this definition of nāma is found are dealing with the paticecasamuppāda formula. As viññāna is the condition for the arising of nāmarūpa, the definition of nāma given in the commentary ensures that all five khandhas are explicitly included in this passage, thus encompassing the mental and bodily faculties of the individual as a whole.

From all of the foregoing it is perhaps unsurprising that scholars have translated nāmarūpa as ‘mind and body’. It is significant, however, that nowhere in the Sutta Pītaka is nāma explicitly defined in terms of the arūpakkhandhas, or in terms of khandhas at all. Only one definition of nāma is given, that it is vedanā, saññā, cetanā, phassa and manasikāra, as mentioned in the last paragraph. Rūpa is consistently defined in terms of the four mahābhidā and their derivatives, but only in those contexts which are explaining the human being in terms of the five khandhas is it specifically referred to as the rūpakkhandha. In the discussion above on the rūpakkhandha we saw that parts of the khandha are either not visible or their visibility is unknown, unlike rūpa as visible object of the sense ‘eye’. And because as a khandha it is associated specifically with the human body, we concluded ‘khandha of the body’ to be an appropriate definition. With regard to the term rūpa as part of the compound nāmarūpa, there is no suggestion in canonical material that it is limited by a criterion of visibility. But the compound is almost exclusively found
either in the context of representing a human being as a whole, or in the context of the paṭiccasamuppāda formula. In chapter iv I suggested that the paṭiccasamuppāda formula should be understood as referring specifically to the ‘how’ of human existence within samsāra. It follows, therefore, that the term rūpa in the compound nāmarūpa also refers to the human being. In this respect I disagree with Reat, who suggests that nāmarūpa has a wider application because the human body is more usually referred to as kāya.36 The human body is indeed often referred to as kāya. It is also referred to as sarīra. But in every analysis of the human being according to the five khandhas the term used to refer to the body is rūpa. We have already seen that the same term also refers to that which is external to the human body; but we have also seen descriptions of the rūpakkhandha in which rūpa unequivocally refers to the human body. Perhaps Reat overlooks the fact that in connection with the human body rūpa has a wider meaning than that which is visible; it includes processes and functions which are definitely not physical, for example. It may well be the case, as I will suggest below, that in principle nāmarūpa might apply to that which is external to the human being. But when it is found in the context of the paṭiccasamuppāda formula it applies to the human being; and thus rūpa refers to the human body in the same way rūpakkhandha does. In making this statement I am not, however, suggesting that nāma corresponds to the four arūpakkhandhas. On the contrary.

I mentioned above that in the Milindapañha, a post-canonical text, nāma and rūpa are stated to be inseparable. In the Mahāniddāna Suttanta of the Dīgha Nikāya,39 which is the Sutta in which nāmarūpa and viññāna are stated to be mutually conditioning, we find another passage referring to the inseparability of nāma and rūpa. The passage also gives us insight into a meaning of nāmarūpa which does not present logical problems when attempting to understand the paṭiccasamuppāda formula. Here the Buddha is explaining the paṭiccasamuppāda formula to Ānanda. He points out that he has stated that nāmarūpa is the condition for the arising of sensory contact (phassa). He explains by asking Ānanda whether, if those various characteristics by which nāma is conceived of were absent, there would be any corresponding discernment of verbal impression with regard to rūpa. Ānanda correctly replies that there would not.40 Similarly, he asks if those various characteristics by which rūpa is conceived of were absent, would there be any corresponding discernment of sensory impression with regard to nāma, and again Ānanda replies that there would not.41 Next the Buddha establishes the inseparability of nāma and rūpa by asking if the various characteristics of both kinds were absent, would there be any discernment of either verbal or sensory impression, and the answer is that there would not.42 And finally, he establishes that without the various characteristics by which nāmarūpa is identified there would be no discernment of sensory contact.43

This passage tells us two things about nāmarūpa. First, it confirms the mutual dependency of nāma and rūpa: without one, there would not be the
other. Second, and more significantly for our attempt to suggest an alternative meaning for *nīmarūpa*, we learn that *nāma* is described as giving rise to a verbal or conceptual, that is abstract, impression on *rūpa*, and *rūpa* is described as giving rise to a sensory impression on *nāma*, and that there are thus these two aspects to the compound as a whole. The Pali words which are used for what I have called verbal or conceptual and sensory impression are *adhivacanasamphassa* and *paṭīgasamphassa* respectively. And the significance of this is more readily apparent if we remember that we met with both these terms in the discussions on *phassa* and the *sānantikhandha*. The two types of *phma* were abstract impression and sensory contact; and the two terms represented *sānā* as conception and apperception respectively. I suggest that this is relevant to understanding the role of *nīmarūpa* and that *nīmarūpa* represents a stage which one might call the ‘blueprint’ of the individual in terms of concept and conceived. It should go without saying that in Buddhism this ‘blueprint’ has no independent identity as early Greek notions of ‘form’ have. It is, rather, dependent on the *samkhāras*, which, as we have seen, are the creative aspect of the individual, in themselves conditioned by ignorance. Rather than representing ‘mind’, *nāma* provides an abstract identity for the individual. And we arrive at a meaning which is also the literal meaning of the word *nāma*: the individual’s ‘name’. This is not mere name, but, rather, ‘name’ as the entire conceptual identity of the individual. *Rūpa* provides ‘form’ or recognisability to the individual in the sense of giving shape to that abstract identity which, eventually, is apperceivable by means of sensory impression. At that stage, the form, *rūpa*, acquires solidity or extension, *patthavī*, and the characteristics of the other *mahābhūtā*. *Nīmarūpa* is thus name and named, and neither has any meaning or significance without the other: they are mutually necessary. And what this passage in the *Mahānidāna Sutta* is stating is how they relate, how they are said to give rise to ‘contact’. It states that according to the various characteristics of each, they impinge on or have contact with each other abstractly, or conceptually, in the case of *nāma* on *rūpa*; and by means of being that which is conceived, that which will be apperceivable, in the case of *rūpa* on *nāma*. The meaning of *nīmarūpa* in the *patissasamappāda* formula is, then, name and form, in a way which is remarkably close to the *Upaniṣadic* understanding of *nīmarūpa* discussed at the beginning of this chapter.44

That *nāma* means conceptual identity is illustrated in a slightly different way in a passage in the *Aṅguttara Nikāya* which discusses the perception of an *arabhant*. I have already referred to this passage in chapter III in order to illustrate the abstract conceptual function of *sānā*. The passage states that the perception of an *arabhant* is similar to that attained in the *arūpayānas*, which is beyond form perception and where apperception has ceased:45 there is just that which is called ‘vision’, but no sensing of objects or the sense of sight; that which is called ‘hearing’, but no sensing of sound or the
sense of hearing; that which is called ‘smelling’, but no sensing of odour or the sense of smell; and so on through all the senses. Here the senses only have abstract identity.

Nama is also defined, in the Mahānīkāsasā, as distinguishing mark or identity; it is the giving of names to things in our everyday experience in order to distinguish one thing from another.

Neither of these passages is suggesting that nama and rūpa as they appear as a link in the paticcasamuppāda formula are separable because neither of them is directly discussing nāmarūpa in that context. I quote them merely to illustrate that conceptual identity is a recognised definition of the term nama in the Sutta Pitaka.

I have already mentioned that many explanations of the paticcasamuppāda formula have been in terms of spreading the twelvefold sequence over more than one life, and this is how several Buddhist schools, including the Theravāda tradition, have attempted to make sense of it. The most common division is that the first two links in the chain, avijjā and samkhāra, represent the past life; the next eight links, viññāna to bhava inclusive, represent the present life; and the last two links, jāti and jāramarana represent the future life. While such a division avoids the anomaly of appearing to have two births for one life, it nevertheless leaves the present life somewhat incomplete: that this life might end with ‘becoming’ (bhava) is somewhat unconvincing.

Another of the explanations offered for the position of nāmarūpa near the beginning of the paticcasamuppāda formula, with the subsequent development of mental faculties and jāti further along the chain, is that nāmarūpa represents physiological conception. Collins associates this suggestion with contexts in which both nāmarūpa and viññāna are referred to in terms of ‘descent’ (into the womb). He states that the ‘descent’ of viññāna is the first ‘moment’ of consciousness when viññāna is about to join with the material causes of an embryo. In the Theravāda tradition (as well as in other schools of Buddhism), this ‘moment’ of consciousness is also referred to as the gandhabba. The ‘descent’ of nāmarūpa is the moment when the gandhabba and the material, or psycho-physical, causes of an embryo are conjoined. Though such an explanation also avoids the problem of two ‘births’ in the paticcasamuppāda formula, it seems unlikely that the Buddha intended the formula to be understood physiologically: there is no mention in it of the development of the body, and the tone of the formula is much more psychological than physiological.

In my opinion, a better explanation is provided by the suggestion that nāmarūpa is the conceptual and formational blueprint of the individual. In the terms of the formula, on-going ignorance is the condition for the arising of the individual’s samkhāras. These condition consciousness, which is a prerequisite for human life since human life is conscious. This consciousness in turn is the condition for the arising of nāmarūpa, and on
the basis of this conceptual and formational blueprint the individual has psychological faculties peculiar to him or her, is born (giving 'substance' to the form), ages, and dies, and the process may continue in a similar way in future lives. I have suggested above that the mutual dependence of nāmarūpa and viññāna, which is stated in versions of the paṭiccasamuppāda formula which begin with viññāna, is established in order to prevent independent existence being ascribed to viññāna. But given the alternative interpretation of nāmarūpa which I have suggested, it is not difficult to see that their mutual dependence could also be because these two represent the most fundamental aspects of the human being in his or her present life. Avijjā and samkhāra are 'inherited' from the previous life or lives. Viññāna and nāmarūpa are what actualise the individual in this life: and they are mutually necessary to the subsequent development of the individual. This would explain the Samyutta Nikāya passage referred to in chapter v where viññāna is said to be dependent on nāmarūpa. It may be convenient to regard the 'conception' (in the physiological sense) model and the 'blueprint' model as literal and metaphorical aspects of the same process. But since there is no mention in the formula of the physical development of the embryo it does not bear too literal a biological interpretation.

Elsewhere the relationship between nāmarūpa and conception is explicitly referred to, but unfortunately it is not clear whether the passage is intended to equate or to separate the two. The passage is found in the Aṅguttara Nikāya, and is concerned to refute the erroneous views of other teachers, such as that there is a creator God (issaranimmāna), that all things are uncaused and unconditioned (sabbam tam ahetu-appaccayā). In it we find a version of the paṭiccasamuppāda formula which is not found anywhere else in the Sutta Piṭaka, or, to my knowledge, in the Pali material as a whole. This gives an account of conception. The formula states that the six dhītās are the condition for the descent of the embryo, there being such descent there is nāmarūpa, nāmarūpa is the condition for the arising of the six senses, which subsequently give rise in turn to contact and feeling. This, the Buddha states, is dukkha. From this we see that the description of the relationship between the descent and nāmarūpa does not use the usual terms of causation, upādāya or paccayā, as does the rest of the formula. It states, rather, that 'there being descent, there is nāmarūpa'. It is thus not clear whether the descent is the condition for the arising of nāmarūpa, or whether the two are coincidental: the same thing. This structure is not normally found in the various paṭiccasamuppāda formulas, so it may be that the passage is stating that they are coincidental, especially since upādāya and paccayā are used for the rest of the formula. But the structure is found in the general causal formula of the paṭiccasamuppāda doctrine: this being, that arises ... (imasmin sati, idam hoti ...). This doctrinal statement is not intended to indicate coincidence, but, rather, the law of dependent origination. What makes this 'conception' version of the formula particularly unusual and difficult to
interpret is that it is not given as an alternative to the usual version of the *paticcasamuppāda* formula: the common twelvefold version immediately follows it in the text. It is also not clear how the six dhātu are the condition for conception. The dhātu are defined earlier in the passage as the four mahābhūtā, viññāna and ākāsa. The relationship between these and conception is nowhere explained. Even if one were to understand the mahābhūtā and viññāna to represent the bodily and mental aspects of the individual, this would not explain why ākāsa is separate; and it is difficult to see how these could give rise to conception. In view of its uniqueness and since it is immediately followed by the twelvefold version of the *paticcasamuppāda* formula, it may be that the ‘conception’ formula was interpolated into the text here. Or alternatively it may be that the ‘conception’ formula was considered incomprehensible and the twelvefold formula was interpolated. In any event, the formula does not help us in ascertaining the relationship, if any, between conception and nāmarūpa.

I have suggested that nāmarūpa is not being defined in terms of the five khandhas; but there are metaphorical parallels between the two: they both represent the identity of the individual. We have seen that it is only in later Pali material that nāmarūpa is defined as representing the khandhas. Maybe this definition was the only way the exegetes of the formula knew how to convey individuality. The definition of nāma given in the *Sutta Piṭaka*, that it is vedanā, saññā, cetanā, phassa and manasikāra, is an odd one for several reasons. First and most obviously, vedanā and phassa are both subsequent links in the *paticcasamuppāda* formula, and cetanā is represented by samkhāra (and tanhā). Second, it is surprising that manasikāra, which is usually interpreted as meaning mental attention or concentration, finds a place at a time when the individual is as yet undeveloped. Even if one understands it more generally, as ‘activity of the mind’, it seems premature to put this before other more basic psychological faculties. Third, and similarly, it is unlikely that saññā as we have defined it could have a place prior to the senses, sensory contact and vedanā: apperception is directly involved with sensory input, and conception (the cognitive, not the physiological, kind) is a relatively sophisticated psychological process. Perhaps this is another occasion when the author(s) of these passages did not really know how adequately to define the term, a suggestion which is borne out by the fact that the commentary on such passages does not explain why this sequence of five terms is used in the definition of nāma but merely transposes them into a classification in terms of the khandhas.

That nāmarūpa represents individuality is interestingly suggested in a passage in the *Sutta Nipāta* which relates it to papañca. The passage states:

Having understood nāmarūpa as manifoldness, which is the root of both subjective and objective disease, he is completely released from bondage to the root of all disease.
I suggest *roga*, disease, is being used in this passage as a synonym for *dukkha*. The root of *dukkha* is thoughts of 'I' and 'mine', from which root grows *papañca*, the process of making manifold, or attributing independent existence to, what is not manifold or independently existing. Attributing independent existence to oneself and attributing independent existence to what is external to oneself are equally relevant, hence the two terms *ajjhattam* and *bahiddhā*. That *nāmarūpa* can refer to external objects will be discussed below, but the point here is that an individual's *samsāric* existence, the identity of which is represented by *nāmarūpa*, is caused by failure to see that one does not exist independently. As such, *nāmarūpa* is *papañca*: one's (false) manifoldness.

In his paper “Some Fundamental Concepts of Buddhist Psychology”, and in Chapter VI of his *The Origins of Indian Psychology*, Reat discusses at some length the term *nāmarūpa* in the Pali canon.\(^5^7\) He suggests that it should be understood as “a comprehensive designation of the individuality of a perceived thing”.\(^5^8\) While “designation of individuality” appears similar to the way I have suggested *nīmaṇipa* should be understood, Reat’s suggestion is different in one very significant respect which in my opinion is not supported by the canonical material. This difference is represented by the fact that he refers to the designation of the individuality “of a perceived thing”. He states that:

> There is no indication in the *suttas* that the first four links of the standard enumeration of *paticcasamutpāda*, culminating in the phrase ‘*vīśñāna* conditions *nāmarūpa*’, are to be construed as confined to an explanation of rebirth. Instead, the conditioning of *nāmarūpa* by *vīśñāna* refers to the arising of any instance of consciousness.\(^5^9\)

In the case of the individual, the analysis into *khandhas* is actually an analysis of consciousness as experienced, Reat states: given sufficient conditions for the arising of consciousness, “the five aggregates are brought into the picture as an analysis of that consciousness”.\(^6^0\) He goes on to suggest that “just as consciousness does not arise without an object, so does an object not arise without consciousness”, and states that while “there is little evidence of an abstract interpretation of the elements [the standard definition of *rūpa* – ‘object’] in the *suttas* themselves ... there is also little to suggest that they posit an independently existing material world”.\(^6^1\)

Elsewhere he puts this point more emphatically: “... according to early Buddhist psychology, there are no ‘external’ objects as such, but only apparent objects based on the objectivization of certain aspects of consciousness.”\(^6^2\)

Reat bases this conclusion that early Buddhism is idealistic on two canonical passages. First, he refers to a passage in the *Mahāhatthipadopamasutta* in the *Majjhima Nikāya*.\(^6^3\) This, Reat states, supports his claim that the analysis of the human being into five *khandhas* is actually an analysis of
consciousness as experienced. In fact the Sutta is ambiguous, and Reat’s conclusion is not the only one that can be drawn from it. The Sutta starts by defining d̄ukkha as the five upādānakkhandhā. It goes on to give the detailed description of each of the cattāro mahābhūtā as they relate to the human body that has been referred to above in chapter 1. Then comes the passage in the Sutta which is relevant to us here. It begins by giving an analogy: just as space that is enclosed by stakes, creepers, grass and clay is known as a dwelling, so a space that is enclosed by bones, sinews, flesh and skin is known as a body.64 The Sutta goes on to state that for there to be an appearance of a corresponding kind of consciousness,65 there has to be one of the internal senses ‘intact’ (or functional), its corresponding external object within range, and appropriate attention or concentration.66 The form of the Pali is the same for all the senses. The Sutta then states that whatever is rūpa, vedanā, saññā, saṃkhāra and viññāna that comes to be in this way is included in the khandha corresponding to each of those five analyses.67

The precise meaning of this passage is not immediately clear. First, the analogy of the dwelling place and the body does not seem to have any connection either with what precedes it or with what follows and may be, as Reat suggests, a corruption in the text.68 In any event, it may be ignored in this discussion. According to Reat, the rest of the passage states that “rūpa, as a khandha … come[s] into existence on the basis of the functioning of consciousness”.69 In my opinion, however, it does no more than state in the first instance that consciousness is consciousness of, as already discussed in chapter v: for consciousness to arise there has to be internal sense organ, corresponding external object within range, and the appropriate attention (samannāhārā – literally the coming together of the two). And second, in what follows the Sutta is stating that it is by means of this process of the arising of consciousness that one analyses one’s experience according to khandhas: as human beings, our experience is conscious, and all our analyses are therefore by means of the subjective cognitive process. Reat’s claim that the analysis into khandhas is actually an analysis of consciousness as experienced suggests that all the khandhas are (merely) different types of consciousness. This suggestion is not supported elsewhere in the Sutta Pitaka, and in my opinion one should interpret this passage as stating that the analysis into khandhas is an analysis of experience as we are conscious of it. Such an interpretation does not have the implication that consciousness is the stuff of the khandhas, and it is in accord with the context of the Sutta as a whole: the detailed description of the cattāro mahābhūtā is classified as the rūpakkhandha by means of being conscious of it: without being conscious of it there could be no analysis of it. Though Reat is correct in stating that “consciousness does not arise without an object”, there is no evidence that he is also correct in stating that “an object does not arise without consciousness”.

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The second passage on which Reat bases his idealistic interpretation is in the *Dīgha Nikāya*, where the consciousness of an *arahant* is being discussed and it is stated that the four elements cease when *viññāṇa* ceases. Long and short, fine and coarse, pure and impure also cease, and name and form cease without trace.\(^70\)

In my opinion, Reat is mistaken in interpreting this passage as evidence that an idealistic ontology is posited in the *Sutta Pitaka*. I referred above to a passage in the *Udana* which states that ‘that condition wherein is not earth nor water nor fire nor air’ is Nirvana.\(^71\) I also pointed out that this need not, and indeed should not, be interpreted ontologically: the four elements are relevant to *samsāric* perception, not to Nirvana. Similarly, *arahantship* is stated to be the cessation of *nāmarūpa* in the sense that it represents freedom from rebirth: Enlightenment means that there is no further coming to be as an individual.\(^72\) At the death of an *arahant*, *viññāṇa*, along with all the other constituents of the human being, also ceases. And since human life is primarily characterised by consciousness (human beings are conscious beings), the cessation of an individual’s consciousness for the final time represents the cessation for that individual of all the other things which characterise *samsāric* existence. In the *Sutta Nipāta* this is expressed by stating that the cessation of consciousness is the cessation of the arising of *dukkha*.\(^73\) None of this implies, however, that human existence is a product of that individual’s consciousness (in the idealistic sense). Indeed the same *Sutta Nipāta* passage states that the cessation of each and every link in the *paṭiccasamuppāda* formula represents the cessation of the arising of *dukkha*, using the same form of Pali words as that quoted for *viññāṇa*, but with the relevant link of the formula in its place. What this is stating is that bondage to *samsāric* existence (*dukkha*) ceases for an individual when Enlightenment is attained. Subsequent death is the cessation of all the links of the *paṭiccasamuppāda* formula, so the cessation of any of them also represents the cessation of the arising of *dukkha*, not just the cessation of *viññāṇa*. But since human life is conscious, *viññāṇanirodha* is an appropriate term to use to signify an *arahant’s* ending of *samsāric* existence.

Reat does not account for the first two links in the twelvefold version of the *paṭiccasamuppāda* formula: *avijjā* and *sankhārā*. Indeed, though he suggests that the first four parts of the formula are applicable to any instance of consciousness, he does not again mention them. Nor does he mention the subsequent links in the formula. As I argued above in chapter iv, there is no evidence to suggest that anything other than individual sentient beings is volitionally formed. And the *paṭiccasamuppāda* formula is given in terms which clearly apply specifically to the individual. I do not, therefore, think that there is sufficient reason to conclude, as Reat does, that the term *nāmarūpa* in the *paṭiccasamuppāda* formula refers to the ‘comprehensive designation of the individuality of a perceived thing’. Rather, it refers to the comprehensive designation of the individuality of a human being according
I34

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to his or her ignorance and formative activities (avījā and samkhāra). I stated above in chapter IV that samkhāra as the second link in the paṭiccasāmañña formula is the individualising faculty in the sense of being the formative principle which distinguishes individual A from individual B. Nāmarūpa represents the point at which that individual, having become associated with the potential for being conscious, acquires identity in terms of name and form.

I have referred several times to the formula which is given in the Sutta Piṭaka to illustrate the cognitive process, particularly in the sections on the saññā and viññāna khandhas. It states that (visual) consciousness arises because of eye and visible object; contact occurs when there is a combination of the three; feelings are caused by contact; that which one feels one apperceives; that which one apperceives one reasons about and causes to become manifold. This is of interest to Reat since it begins with viññāna, and he discusses it at some length. He treats both this formula and the paṭiccasamuppāda formula as descriptions of processes of consciousness. They are each, therefore, in his view, open to interpretation in the light of the other. Thus because the formula describing the cognitive process states that saññā arises from feelings, one can assume that “the arising of saññā is implied in the standard formula of paṭiccasamuppāda by the arising of vedanā conditioned by phassa”. Similarly, he argues, because nāmarūpa and viññāna are mutually conditioning in the ninefold version of the paṭiccasamuppāda formula in the Mahāniddāna Sutta of the Dīgha Nikāya, one can assume that nāmarūpa is represented in the formula of cognition by the presence of a sense (he does not explicitly account for the corresponding sense objects but he may have intended to include them), with nāma referring to manas (and possibly dhamma), and rūpa referring to the other senses (and possibly their objects). It is in this way, Reat states, that nāma and rūpa give rise to adhibhava and patighasamphassa respectively.

In my opinion the two formulas have different purposes and describe different processes. On the one hand, the paṭiccasamuppāda formula is not describing the arising of consciousness and it is therefore inappropriate to attempt to establish a mini version of the cognitive process in the middle of it. It is possible to see that the persistent arising of the individual’s cognitive process, which is based on a false notion of self (i.e. ignorance) and its consequent craving, signifies the continuation of the individual’s samsāric existence as described in the paṭiccasamuppāda formula. This is explicitly stated in the Brahmajāla Sutta, where the (erroneous) views being refuted are stated to originate with sensations (that is, phassa), which give rise to feelings, craving, and so on, which represent bondage. But this is an explanation that such cognitive activity is samsāric activity which leads to further samsāric existence, not a description of the ontological status of the cognitive activity itself. And on the other hand, it is not appropriate to prefix the cognitive formula with nāmarūpa in the sense in which it is used in the paṭiccasamuppāda
formula (as Reat understands such use). Even if the objects involved in the cognitive process have their own name-and-form, a point which is discussed in the next paragraph, those objects are not themselves conditioned by avijjà, samkhàrà and/or viññàna. Thus these two formulas are not open to the kind of manipulation suggested by Reat.

As already mentioned, it might be the case that the term nàmarùpa could mean the name and form of things other than the human being. In the Samyutta Nikàya we read of ‘external’ (bahiddhà) nàmarùpa,29 and in the Sutta Nàpàta it states that a seeing man will see nàmarùpa.80 It might therefore be appropriate for the term to be understood to have two applications: in its most common context, the patìccasamuppàda formula, it refers to the name and form of the individual human being; in other contexts it refers to the name and form of any objects. The texts do not suggest that in the latter case such an object is dependent on viññàna for its existence. From descriptions of the cognitive process, however, we know that our perception and apperception of any such object are so dependent.

To sum up, we have seen that the term nàmarùpa is commonly understood by scholars of Buddhism to mean ‘mind and body’, and that the later Theravàda tradition has also understood it in such a way. I have suggested, however, that such an interpretation is incompatible with the main context in which nàmarùpa is found in the canonical material. A more meaningful understanding of the term is that it refers to the individualising, or abstract identity, of the human being (or other sentient being) in terms of name and form: dependent on the ignorance, formative activities and subsequent consciousness of a given life, that life has conceptual and formational individuality.

Notes

1. RV. X.71.1.
2. Br. Up. 3.2.12f: Ìyàñavàkyà, yàtràyàm purùsa maññate, kim emàm na jahàti? Ñàma iti, anantàm vai ñàma.
3. In Sanskrit, nàman would be the correct form here. But because in the following discussion both Pali and Sanskrit are referred to, I will use the form ñàma in the interest of clarity.
4. Ñàta. Br. xì.2.3.3.
5. Ñàta. Br. xì.2.3.4f: Te hauie brahma<p>ī</p> <i>mahàti ahìvà ... te hauie brahma<p>ī</p> <i>mahàti</i> vajà.<p>ī</p>
8. Atha karmanàm ñànety etad ëśäm ukhàman.
10. Te<sup>-<i>t</i></sup> ñàmnàm vág ity etad ëśäm ukhàman, ato hi sarò<sup>-<i>n</i></sup> <i>ì</i> nàmà<sup>-<i>n</i></sup> <i>ì</i> ñàmà<sup>-<i>n</i></sup> yàt<sup>-<i>s</i></sup>ihànti ... ato hi rùpà<sup>-<i>n</i></sup> <i>ì</i> ñàmà<sup>-<i>n</i></sup> <i>ì</i> yàt<sup>-<i>s</i></sup>ihànti.
11. This is discussed by Wayman (1984, p.620), who refers to Louis Renou’s Études sur le Vocabulaire du Rgveda, Première Série, p.12.
13. Ibid., pp.14f.
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22. DN.I.223, III.212; AN.I.83.
23. Mūla p.49: Ānātānātāpamāsīsa... ecstatic upajjanti.
24. SN.I.13, 35; Tathā nāmarūpa rūpāhācī anāsa upariyalhū; cf. also DN.I.223.
25. Sn 1100; cf. also Sn 1037. PED suggests that nāmakāya is used as a synonym for nāmarūpā at Sn 1074. I do not agree. Nor does the translator for the PTS, K.R.Norman (The Group of Discourses, 1992, p.120), who translates nāmakāya as “mental body”, in the sense of ‘body/group of mental faculties’.
26. Vism p.438f: ... cattāriyassata nāmarūpāno; vavattāno rūpāhāno; yā rūpakkhandhassa vavattāhāno pāthāhā; yā rūpakkhandhassa vavattāhāno pāthāhā; yā rūpakkhandhassa vavattāhāno pāthāhā;..
27. Vism p.593f: Evam anekasathī sattantehī nāmarūpāno eva dīpōm, na satto, na puggalo ... paramattalhū; pana nāmarūpamāsīsa eva attīthi.
28. Of these two texts, the former is considerably earlier (c. second century CE) than the latter (c. eleventh century CE).
29. Rūpakkāya rūpakkhandhā, nāmakāya cattāriyārūpāno khandhā. Neti Pakaraṇa 41; Abhidhammatha Sangaha VIII.14; DH. IV.100. The Pali in the latter puts the same thing differently: Tathā sabbato ti sabbhāyam pi vedanādīnaṃ cattāriyā rūpakkhandhāsa cī ti paṭicchāyān khandhānaṃ rasena pāsāta nāmarūpā.
30. DN.II.56: Nāmarūpā-paccaya viññāṇaṃ, viññāṇa-paccayo nāmarūpam; their mutual dependency is also stated at SN.II.104, 113.
31. DN.II.64: Nāmarūpam saha viññāṇena.
32. DN.II.63. Uniquely, the paṭicca-samuppāda formula given at Vībhanga p.138 states that viññāṇa is the condition for the arising of nāma alone, which in turn is the condition for the arising of the senses, contact and so on. The commentary on this passage states that this is intended to cover the cases of beings without bodies (Samadhanavādī p.174).
33. SN.III.61: Nāmarūpamāsaddhā viññāṇaṃsaddhā, nāmarūpamātthadā viññāṇaṃsaddhā.
34. Vism p.558: Nāma ti ... vedanādīnaṃ saccino khandhā; rūpam ti cattāriyā mahābhātīti cattāriyā cattāriyā viññāṇānānaṃ uddāyā rūpam.
35. This version of the formula is also found at DN.II.32; SN.II.104f, 113.
36. MN.I.53; SN.II.3f; Pāṭis p.183: Vedanā salāhī cettāno phasso manasikāro, idam vuccat' ābhavo nāma; cattāriyā mahābhātīti cattāriyā cattāriyā viññāṇānānaṃ uddāyā rūpam, idam vuccat' ābhavo rūpam; idam idam idam idam vuccat' ābhavo nāmarūpam.
37. MA.I.221: Vedanā ti vedanākhandhā, saññā ti saññākhandhā; cettānu phasso manasikāro ti saññākākhandhā.
39. DN.II.62ff.
40. Yehi Ananda ākārhehi yehi linghehi yehi nimittethi yehi uddesehi nāmakāyassa paṁnaṭṭati hoti, tesu ākāresu tesu lingesu tesu nimittesu tesu uddesasāsa. aṭṭi, api nu kho rūpakāye adhiamiccassamphoṣa pāṇāyethāti? No h' etam bhante.
41. Yehi Ananda ākārhehi yehi linghehi yehi nimittethi yehi uddesehi rūpakāyassa paṁnaṭṭati hoti, tesu ākāresu tesu lingesu tesu nimittesu tesu uddesasāsa. aṭṭi, api nu kho nāmakāye patīkhasamphoṣa pāṇāyethāti? No h' etam bhante.
42. Yehi Ananda ākārhehi yehi linghehi yehi nimittethi yehi uddesehi nāmakāyassa rūpakāyassa paṁnaṭṭati hoti, tesu ākāresu tesu lingesu tesu nimittesu tesu uddesasāsa. aṭṭi, api nu kho adhiamiccssamphoṣa paṁnaṭṭati. paṁnaṭṭati? No h' etam bhante.
43. Yehi Ananda ākārhehi yehi linghehi yehi nimittethi yehi uddesehi nāmarūpāsa paṁnaṭṭati hoti, tesu ākāresu tesu lingesu tesu nimittesu tesu uddesasāsa. aṭṭi, api nu kho phasso pāṇāyethāti? No h' etam bhante.
44. Reynolds suggests (1976, p.77) that the term nāmakāya in the passage being discussed here is a synonym for the manomaya body. In my opinion, he is mistaken. I do not think the term kāya in the compound nāmakāya in this context is intended to be taken literally as ‘body’ but in its more generic sense of ‘aggregate’. Manomaya is discussed in chapter vii.
Rāpasaṅkhāṇanā samatikkamanā paṭīghasaṅkhāṇanāti athātāgamā.

46. AN.IV.426f. Tād eva nāma cakkham bhavissati, ti rāpā taṁ cāyatanam no paṭīsambodhissati; tad eva nāma sotam bhavissati, te siddhā taṁ cāyatanam no paṭīsambodhissati; tad eva nāma ghnānam bhavissati, te gandhā taṁ cāyatanam no paṭīsambodhissati; and so on.


48. Thomas (1951, p.65) mentions different Buddhist schools which divided the formula into three existences; Collins (1982, p.203f) gives different divisions of the formula. cf. also Nyānatiloka, 1980, p.159, who gives the standard Theravāda division.

49. Thomas, 1951, p.79.

50. This 'descent' has been discussed in chapter v.

51. SN.III.61.

52. AN.I.176.

53. Channaṁ bhikkhave dhiitāṁ upādāya gabbhasātakākanti hoti okkantiyā sati nāmarāpan, nāmarāpapacekkhā samāyataṁ, saḷāyataṇo paccekkhā phasso, passapacekkhā vedanā ... idām dukkhaṁ ti paṭṭikam.

54. SN.II.28, 95; MN.III.63.


56. SN 530: Anuvicca pāpaka nāmarāpan ajīhataṁ bāhiddhā ca rogālam sabbarogālam bandhanā pamutto.


59. Ibid., p.17.

60. Ibid., p.20.

61. Ibid.

62. Ibid., p.317.

63. SN.I.185ff.

64. SN.II.190f: Suyathā ṭī āvuso katthaṁ ca paticca vaḷṭiṁ ca paticca tīnaṁ ca paticca makkhaṁ ca paticca ākāśo pariṇāpi dhītāṁ tī ca eva sankhaṁ gacchati, evam eva kho āvuso atthiṁ ca paticca nāhārīṁ ca paticca na saṁnakāṁ ca paticca commaṁ ca paticca abhiṭṭhīṁ ca paticca ākāso pariṇāpi dhītāṁ tī eva satīkhaṁ gacchati...

65. Though bhāga literally means 'portion' or 'section', it makes more sense to translate it here as 'kind' because viññāṇa is defined as being of six kinds according to the six senses.

66. Tato ca kho āvuso ajīhatīkkan — cī eva cakkhaṁ aperihinam hoti bāhīrā ca rāpā āpūhāṁ āgacchanti tajjha ca saṁmakkhaṁ hoti, evam tajjhaṁ viññāṇabhāggo pāṭubhāhu hoti.

67. Ten tathābhūtassa rūpaṁ tam rūpupādānakkhandhe sāṅgaham gacchati, yā tathābhūtassa vedanā sā vedanupādānakkhandhe sāṅgaham gacchati, yā tathābhūtassa vedanā sā sāṅgahaṁātavādānakkhandhe sāṅgaham gacchati, yān tathābhūtassa viññāṇaṁ tam viññāṇupādānakkhandhe sāṅgaham gacchati.


69. Ibid.

70. DN.I.223: Viññāṇaṁ anidassanam anantaṁ sabbaṁ pabham (pabham as a variant reading for pahām here is referred to in chapter v). Ettha āpo ca pathaviṁ ejo vāyo na gādhati, ettha diggarhaṁ ca raṣṭhaṁ ca anum thulam subhasubham, ettha nāmaṁ ca rūpāṁ ca asamaṁ uparáhāti, viññāṇasā naṁdham te bhavanti.
CHAPTER VII

Manomaya

Introduction

In the introduction I made the point that many of the key terms which we have to consider in order to understand the early Buddhist analysis of the person, and to gain some insight into the psychological processes of the human being, are used in different contexts in the Sutta Piṭaka with quite different meanings. We have seen evidence of this problem in almost every chapter. Of the terms with which we are concerned, one of the most difficult to understand precisely is manas. I have already discussed this term in two very different contexts in which it is found. The first was as a sense, when I referred to it as manodhātu, discussed in chapter 1. We saw there that in that context its precise meaning and function were not clearly defined and that many passages had to be considered together in order to extract some degree of clarity. The second context was manas in the sense both of mind in general and of thinking, which I discussed in relation to the terms citta and viññāna. We now come to a third use of manas, manomaya.

Manomaya is one of the most obscure terms found in the Pali canon. Not only can the term can be understood in grammatically different ways but it is also found in many different contexts, some of which suggest it has a metaphorical as well as a more literal meaning. I shall discuss the two implications separately, but we shall see that the metaphorical meaning is in fact suggested by the more literal use of the term. Leaving aside for the present the metaphorical meaning, in all but one of the contexts which will be discussed here, the term manas refers to mind in general rather than manas as a sense (manodhātu). But the grammatical ambiguity arises because not only does maya have different meanings, but as a tappurisa compound it can be taken as a genitive, locative or instrumental. Maya can mean ‘consisting of’, ‘made’ or ‘originating’. So, if taken as a genitive tappurisa, the compound can mean ‘consisting of/made of the mind’; ‘originating in the mind’ if taken as a locative tappurisa; or ‘made by the mind’ if taken as an instrumental. In effect the locative and instrumental have the same
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meaning: that the mind is the cause of something else coming to be. The
genitive meaning, on the other hand, indicates that the stuff of something
is the mind, and its concern with what something is means that it is an
ontological interpretation of the compound. Both of these meanings of
manomaya are given in the Pali English Dictionary,¹ and both are used by
translators.² In understanding the term manomaya one needs to consider the
implication of these two possible meanings.

The point has already been made, especially in the Introduction and in
chapter v, that it is important to distinguish between what something is
made of, and how it is made: whether a passage is concerned with the
former or the latter. In the Sutta Piṭaka, I have suggested, the prime concern
is with understanding how samsāric existence operates so that one can
understand how to achieve liberation from the cycle of rebirth. Even those
analyses which appear to offer an explanation of what there is, and the
analysis of the person into khandhas is a good example, are intended to assist
in understanding how the human being should be understood to function,
rather than simply as a separate ‘self’. There is no suggestion that the
analysis has any ultimate ontological significance: rather, it is notable that
insofar as the analysis of the human being into khandhas is concerned with
the ‘what’ of the human being, it is ‘what’ in the sense of structure rather
than substance that matters; and we have seen that all the khandhas are to
be understood as processes. To achieve liberation it is more important to
understand, for example, that the processes which we think of as the
substance of the body are subject to decay and dissolution, thus emphasising
the body’s lack of permanence, than what that substance is. This point
is the subject of one of the stock expressions in Pali: “This is my physical
body, made up of the four great elements... and the very nature of it is
impermanence, it is subject to erosion, abrasion, decay and breaking up”.³
And it is also notable that in the analysis of the rūpakkhandha non-corporeal
bodily processes are given equal emphasis to the more concrete aspects of
the body, as we have seen.

I will discuss the term manomaya in four different contexts. First, I will
consider the first line of the first and second verses of the Dhammapada. In
this context the main question which arises is whether or not manomaya is
being used to indicate a particular ontology. The context also shows the
extent to which Buddhist teachings are concerned with the power of the
mind. Second, I shall briefly refer to manomaya in an unusual context
where it refers specifically to manas as a sense and not to ‘mind’ in general.
We shall nevertheless see that here too it is the power of the mind that is
being referred to, if in a different way. Third, I will discuss its use as a
metaphorical synonym for the rūpadhātu level in Buddhist cosmology and
how this corresponds to a samsāric mode of existence. In order to under-
stand its use in this context, I will also discuss the fact that in the Sutta
Piṭaka there is no explicit or implicit ontological discontinuity between what
one conventionally thinks of as body and mind, rūpa and arūpa. On the contrary, we shall see that the absence of discontinuity directly corresponds to the way in which cosmological levels metaphorically represent an individual’s spiritual progress. Lastly, I will discuss manomaya in its most well-known context, that of the ability of those who have attained a certain level of meditation to create a manomaya body. By extension from its meaning ‘mind-made’, manomaya in this context is sometimes interpreted as ‘formed by the magic power of the mind, magically formed’. And again one of the main points which arises from this context is the power of the mind in Buddhist teachings. We shall see that in the concept of manomaya these two points, the absence of ontological discontinuity between body and mind, and the power of the mind, are linked. We saw in the section on manas in chapter v how closely thinking is associated with volitions and we saw the role they both play in the cyclic causal nexus. In much of this chapter that association becomes merged and I have not distinguished between volitions and thinking: to do so would be too tediously pedantic and difficult to read. What is meant here is the collective power of the causal nexus as a whole.

In the discussion of the third and fourth contexts in which manomaya is found, I shall refer repeatedly to the fact that the concepts with which we are dealing are not exclusively Buddhist. I shall also preface my remarks by a brief discussion of the terms manomaya and vijñānamaya (literally ‘consciousness-made’) in the Upaniṣads. A more comprehensive comparison between these concepts as they are understood in Buddhism and as they occur elsewhere would no doubt be a fruitful area for more extensive research: many of the concepts are found in other Indian traditions, and the concept of the mind-made body is also a phenomenon found outside India. What distinguishes the Buddhist context from the others, however, is the combination of the Buddha’s teaching that karma is volition with his teaching that the path to liberation consists in the purification of the mind. It is clear in the Buddhist material that the acquisition and use of a manomaya body is associated with attaining a certain level on the spiritual path. In the Upaniṣads, by contrast, this point is far from clear.

First, then, I will consider manomaya as it is found in the first line of each of the first two verses of the Dhammapada. Here manas in the term manomaya is used in association with dhamma, which is potentially confusing in view of the association elsewhere in Pali material of the terms manas and dhamma as sense and sense object. As sense and sense object, these two terms were discussed in chapter i. In the Dhammapada however, both terms are being used in their generic sense: manas is being used as ‘mind’ in general, and dhamma is being used as it is in the tilakkhana formula, discussed in chapter iv. When these terms are used generically, the precise meaning of the passage has to be determined from the context. The line in question literally means something like: “Phenomena are the result of mind (or are preceded by
mind), have mind as their best, are mind-made". In isolation, this sentence might be construed as positing an idealistic ontology, that the phenomena which comprise the world as we know it, dhammā, are nothing but the mind: the external world is magically created by the mind and consists of mind. There is an alternative way of interpreting this line, however, which is, in my opinion, the accurate one. To understand this, we must look at the rest of the two verses in question. In full, the Pali is:

Manopubbaṅgama dhammā manosettthā manomaya, 
manasā ce paduttthena bhāsati vā karoti vā 
tato nam dukkham anvetti cakkam vā vahato padam.

Manopubbaṅgama dhammā manosettthā manomaya, 
manasā ce pasannena bhāsati vā karoti vā 
tato nam sukham anvetti chōyā vā anupāyini.

Excluding the first lines of these verses, a translation of the rest of them is:

If a man speaks or acts with a wicked mind, sorrow follows him as a wheel follows the foot of a draught [animal]... if a man speaks or acts with a pure mind, happiness follows him as a shadow always follows [him].

The point of these sentences is that one reaps the consequences of one’s actions: just as a wheel which is set in motion by a footed beast follows the actions of the foot, and just as a shadow always follows the actions of a man, in just such a way one’s future experience is determined by one’s speech and actions now. And one’s speech and actions are qualitatively conditioned by whether one’s mind is wicked or good. This corresponds to the Buddha’s definition of karma to which I have already referred: “Karma is volition: having willed, one acts by means of body, speech and thought”. The whole of the first chapter of the Dhammapada is concerned with this teaching: that one reaps as one sows, and that sowing is qualitatively determined by intention.

I mentioned in chapter IV that when used in a non-technical sense ‘mind’ (whatever term is being used) indicates general mental activity. So the first lines of the first two verses in fact have the following meaning: dhammā are an individual’s experiences – everything, in fact, that is a part of the individual’s life. And qualitatively those experiences follow from one’s mental activity: manopubbaṅgamā, it is mental activity which principally governs the nature of the life: manosettthā; and it is in mental activity that what follows originates: manomaya. To interpret this sentence ontologically is completely to ignore the context in which it is found and to divorce it from the subject matter of the entire chapter. To convey the meaning of manas in this context accurately, it is better to translate it as a verbal noun, denoting the activity or process of the mind: ‘thinking’. In English this
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gives us a less ambiguous sentence: “The individual’s experiences are preceded by thinking, have thinking as their best, originate in thinking”. It is the reification of manas as ‘mind’ which tends to mislead here.

There is a similar passage in the Aṅguttara Nikāya which states:

Whatever states (dhamma) are unwholesome, participate in unwholesomeness, are associated with unwholesomeness, all such things are preceded by thinking. One’s thinking arises as the first of those states: the unwholesome states follow. Whatever states are wholesome, participate in wholesomeness, are associated with wholesomeness, all such things are preceded by thinking. One’s thinking arises as the first of those states: the wholesome states follow.

Once again, this illustrates the role thinking plays in the karmic process. We saw some similar contexts above in the section on manas in chapter V where manas was associated with the activity of the mind.

In chapter IV, I referred to a passage which stated that one’s future rebirth can be influenced by one’s volitions. I suggested there that it was illustrating the binding power of volitions. The first two verses of the Dhammapada, and the Aṅguttara Nikāya passage which we are discussing here, also serve to illustrate the same power. But here it is referred to in more general terms as originating in the mind, or being the magical power of the mind, manomaya, rather than as cetana or samkhāra. And here the power is discussed with direct reference to its ethical dimension and can be summed up by stating that good experiences originate in a wholesome mind and, conversely, bad experiences originate in an unwholesome mind.

The second context in which manomaya occurs is when it is used to imply saṃsāric perception, or the mundane life of saṃsāra, in contrast to the lokuttara nature of liberation. Such a context is found in the Saḷāyatana Samyutta of the Samyutta Nikāya, and here saṃsāric perception is linked to manas as the sixth sense (i.e. manodhitu). The context is a teaching on the six senses (referred to as phassāyatana). Untamed, unguarded, unwatched and unrestrained, they are the bearers of ill. Conversely, when they are well tamed, well guarded, well watched and well restrained, they are the bearers of happiness. The text proceeds to give examples of the dangers to which a bhikkhu is subjected by each of the senses and in what sense they should be guarded. Through the eye, for example, there is the danger of finding the appearance of things delightful or disgusting, and one therefore has to restrain one’s desire for sights which are delightful. Similarly, one has to restrain one’s tendency to be led astray by sweet sounds. When it comes to manodhitu, the Pali states:

Pañcaasaññā tālānā naṇā,<br>Pañcaasaññā upaamanī sañānī<br>Manomayaṁ gehasīrca saddhāṁ<br>Pañjī nañkhammasiṭṭi iriyati.
This verse was discussed in chapter 11 with reference to the term papāṇa. It means:

Men who have conceptions of manifoldness of some kind go on separating things when apperceiving; but [eventually] he [a bhikkhu] drives out everything that is mind-made and to do with the mundane life and proceeds to a life of renunciation.

The term manomaya here clearly refers to the fact that all samsāric phenomena are processed by the manodhātu. In other words, the subjective experience of the mundane life is conditioned by (maya) the mind (manas). And the bhikkhu is to detach himself from such mundane life and turn himself instead to the lokuttara life which will lead to liberation.

This context in which manomaya is found appears different from the one discussed above because here the term manomaya has been attached to the incoming raw data of samsāric experience and not the thinking process as such: the former data precede discursive thought, and the latter might be described as the mind's processing of that data. But this passage gives us a clear indication of the link between manodhātu and the mental processes in general; and it suggests that the power of the mind in fact operates through every level of the mental processes as a whole, from manodhātu to thinking or volitions. We have seen in chapter 1 that the need for the senses to be guarded does not mean that it is in the senses themselves that unwanted volitions originate. But manodhātu is the door through which samsāra is subjectively experienced. It is for this reason that experience acquires the epithet manomaya, and also for this reason manodhātu can be understood as the source, as it were, of the volitional process which determines one's future lives.

There is, nevertheless, one further point which needs to be made concerning this context in which the term manomaya is found. We have seen that even liberating insight involves the use of the mind and we have also seen that liberating insight has to be known: in one context identifying such insight was referred to as the highest function of the saññākhandha. This would seem to suggest that the turning of the mind towards lokuttara rather than mundane things does not mean that the activity of manodhātu ceases completely but that it would have some supra-sensory activity such as was suggested in chapter 1. So the reference in this Saññāyatana Samyutta context to the driving out of that which is mind-made is intended to be figurative rather than literal. As with the teaching about the other senses, the point is that one should be on one's guard not to be entranced by samsāric experiences, but should instead be concerned with that which is conducive to liberation. One might put this point differently and say that the power of the mind is to be reorientated. This process was implied in chapter 11 where we saw that volitions can be used to eradicate other volitions.
The third context in which I will discuss manomaya is when it is used as an abstract synonym for the cosmological level of the rûpadhātu. I will also consider the relationship between rûpa and arûpa and the significance of this relationship for the subject of this chapter. This is closely linked with the fourth of the contexts in which I will discuss manomaya, which is when it refers to the ability of those who have mastered a certain level of meditation to create what is called a manomaya body deliberately. First, though, a brief outline of the way in which relevant subjects are understood in Vedic material, mainly the early Upaniṣads, is helpful by way of background.

I have already referred in this chapter to the place in Buddhist teachings of the power of the mind, and I shall return to this point in the discussion below on the remaining two contexts in which manomaya is found in canonical material. The concept of the power of the mind was not new in the Buddha’s teachings, however. It is alluded to in the Hymn of Creation in the Rg Veda, for example, where desire (or volition) is stated to be the first seed of the mind. The power of the mind is the motivating factor in the Paripāvatā of chapter VI of the Chāndogya Upaniṣad, where Being creates the universe by thinking “Would that I were many, let me procreate myself”. And in many other Upaniṣadic cosmogonies the mind plays an instrumental role.

The way these Upaniṣadic references to the power of the mind are expressed serves to emphasise the point made above that the reification of the term ‘mind’ can be misleading. In the Upaniṣads as in the Buddhist material the power of the mind originates in the process of thinking, or willing. This important point underlies my use of the expression ‘the power of the mind’ throughout this chapter.

In spite of the fact that the mind plays such an important cosmogonic role in Vedic material, the Brahmanical religion recorded in those Vedic texts is usually understood to be based on ritual actions. Indeed, the rationale of the Vedic sacrificial religion was that the universe and all individuals depended for continued existence, and the way in which they continued to exist, on the correct performance of ritual actions. To this day, the orthodox Brahmanical tradition teaches that such ritual actions are crucial to the nature of one’s future existence. In this causal process there is little or no ethical dimension as we know it. When Yājñavalkya states “One becomes good by good action, bad by bad action”, this refers to the fact that the details of the physical (and verbal) actions must be performed correctly. If they are not, bad (i.e. wrong) results will follow. In another passage where Yājñavalkya gives the same teaching, however, we also see the suggestion that it is the power of the mind which determines one’s future rebirth. He states first: “As one acts and behaves, so one becomes. The doer of good becomes good, the doer of bad becomes bad.” He goes on to state:
Some say that a person is made by desire. As is one’s desire, so is one’s intention (krama); as is one’s intention, so one performs actions; as is the action he performs, so he becomes.  

In spite of the introduction of the term ‘desire’, there is still no implication of any moral teaching here. As Collins puts it:

‘Desire’ here should not be taken in the general moral sense with which we are familiar...; rather it is that concentrated attention within the sacrificial ritual, focussed on the desired object of sacrifice, which was held to be a necessary condition of attaining it.

What Yājñavalkya does in using the term ‘desire’ is explicitly to suggest that the power of the mind is instrumental in obtaining the object of the sacrifice.

More usually in Vedic material, and in classical Indian religions which are based on the Upaniṣads, this power of the mind is associated with knowledge rather than intention in the sense of volitions. Knowledge of a thing gives power over it, and the importance of knowledge underlies the sacrificial rationale: it is knowledge which gives the ritual actions their power. The way this was thought to work in the early sacrificial religion is discussed in some detail by Collins, and I need not go into it here. What is of interest to us here is the early suggestion that knowledge of something through meditation can have a transformative effect on the individual meditator. The principle is found as early as the Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa, which states: “One becomes whatever one meditates on”. And it is referred to in an early Upaniṣadic passage on meditation, where Gārgya instructs Ajātaśatru as follows:

Verily, I meditate on him [Brahman] as a likeness. He who meditates on him in this way, to him comes what is like, not what is unlike; from him arises what is like him.

The suggestion that one becomes what one meditates on is also of cosmological significance. The Upaniṣads teach that Brahman is everything. So it follows that if one meditates on Brahman one becomes identified with everything. This is generally expressed in the microcosmic/macrocosmic formula that ātman is Brahman, and knowledge (in the sense of experience) of this constitutes liberation. One passage in the Brhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad identifies ātman/Brahman with all things. It states: “The self (ātman) is indeed Brahman; it is consciousness-made, mind-made and breath-made”. The passage continues: “[The self] is sight-made, hearing-made, earth-made, water-made, air-made, space-made, light- and no-light-made ... made of all”. This passage clearly indicates an absence of ontological discontinuity between the different things of (or by) which one is made and implies that in identifying with Brahman one identifies with everything.
The first three of the things of/by which one is made according to this Brhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad passage, that one is consciousness-made (vijñānamaya), mind-made (manomaya) and breath-made (prāṇamaya), are referred to elsewhere in the Upaniṣads in a way which suggests that they constitute a threefold analysis of the levels of human existence. The Taittirīya Upaniṣad states that one has as it were three layers of bodily existence. First, it states: “Breath is the life of all beings”, and this life is referred to as the "bodily self". This is not so far-fetched if one recalls that breathing is part of the rūpakākhandha, and that vāyu is one of the primary characteristics of rūpa. One might suggest that (together with heat) it is the least dense mode of rūpa itself. The similarity between Upaniṣadic descriptions of the prānas and the canonical description of the element vāyu was discussed in chapter 1. The Taittirīya Upaniṣad goes on:

Verily, different from and within that which is breath-made is a self which is mind-made. By that [mind-made self] this [bodily self] is filled. This, verily, has the form of a person; according to that [bodily] personal form is this [mind-made self] with the form of a person.

Of the third level, the text states:

Verily, different from and within that [self] which is mind-made is a self which is consciousness-made. By that [consciousness-made self] is this [mind-made self] filled. This, verily, has the form of a person; according to that [mind-made self's] personal form is this [consciousness-made self] with the form of a person.

This is a clear reference to one's existence at different levels of density and subtlety, ranging from bodily or solid existence through other existences which have form but are without solidity. This is supported by a more general passage in the Chāndogya Upaniṣad, which states that food (anna), water (āpa) and heat (tejo) exist in three modes: coarse (sthāvīṣṭha), medium (madhyama) and subtlest (aniṣṭha). It is from this passage that Śaṅkara concludes that everything is threefold in this way. We shall see below that in Buddhism the teaching that the path to liberation is a progressive purification of the mind corresponds clearly to cosmological levels which can be defined according to degrees of density or subtlety. In corresponding to an intermediate subtle level of cosmological existence, manomaya therefore also corresponds to an intermediate stage on the path to liberation. Though we have seen in the Brhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad passage above that there is no ontological discontinuity between these and other levels or aspects of existence, the teaching in the Upaniṣads is completely unsystematic, and it is unclear whether any comparable correspondence in terms of 'levels' in both microcosm and macrocosm can be made. From the little evidence there is, it seems more likely that the three Upaniṣadic bodies co-exist at all times and the range between dense and subtle represents the
range between the outer, empirical, self and the inner, 'real', self. In principle, this is suggested by the emphasis in the Upaniṣads on the 'inner controller' and the 'self within the heart'. It is also more specifically suggested in another passage in the Brhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad. In answer to the question "Which is the self?", it states:

The person [self] is the consciousness-made [self] which is among the breaths [that is, the bodily self, according to the Taittirīya Upaniṣad passage quoted above]; it is the light within the heart.30

The Upaniṣad goes on to state: "There is an intermediate third state, that of being in sleep [or dream]".31 In this context, the term manomaya is not used to describe the intermediate level of sleep/dream, but three levels are nevertheless indicated. There is a lengthy description of the freedom in the sleep/dream state to do whatever one wishes.32 This is remarkably similar to descriptions of the abilities acquired by the Buddhist who creates a manomaya body, as we shall see. Though in classical Indian thought dreams are not considered to be delusions or unreal (except insofar as any or all of samsāric perception is), they are not an ability or mode of existence which is acquired with spiritual progress. It might, however, be that the dream state is used to exemplify the creative power of the mind, in which case it could correspond to the existence in a manomaya body of a Buddhist bhikkhu who has achieved a certain level of meditation.

That the dream state is being used as an analogy for a level at which one exists seems more likely in view of the fact that the Upaniṣads give an alternative threefold analysis of the individual. This is the bodily self (śarīra), the dream self (svapna ātma) and the self in (dreamless) sleep (supta... svapnam na vijñānātī).33 These are three levels of the empirical self, and they act as the bearer of the deathless, bodiless (real) self.34 Here the dream state might suggest a level at which the power of the mind is able to act creatively. This state is not unreal, but nor does it constitute absolute reality: it is an intermediate state, between the physical body and the cessation of (samsāric) mental activity, symbolised by dreamless sleep.

Explicit reference to the fact that there is a subtle self or body is rare in the early Upaniṣads. So far as I am aware, the term liṅga śarīra, for example, occurs only once in the early Upaniṣads.35 It occurs more (though it is still not common) in later Upaniṣads,36 and it is frequently used by Śaṅkara in his commentaries on the Upaniṣads. In the early Upaniṣads, it is the terms manomaya and viṣṇunamaya (and possibly dreams) which suggest the subtle self. But the theory of the subtle self and its constitution is not well developed in the early Upaniṣads, and where these terms occur they often do not fit the threefold model suggested above in the passages cited from the Taittirīya and Brhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣads. Two passages seem to invert the levels of manomaya and viṣṇunamaya suggested above. For example, manomaya (not viṣṇunamaya) is used elsewhere in the Brhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad in a passage
which states: “This person who is mind-made is of the nature of light, is real, is within the heart ...”. And in another passage in the same Upaniṣad, vijñānamaya (not manomaya) is used of the mode of a person when he falls asleep. Then, the passage states, he functions as a “consciousness-made person”. Here it is the consciousness-made person who can do whatever he pleases in dreams:

When he moves about in dreams, these are his worlds: then he becomes as it were a great king, as it were a great brahman. He as it were enters high and low. As a great king can move around in his country as he pleases taking [with him] his people, so also here this [consciousness-made person], taking with him his breaths, moves about in his own body as he pleases.

Elsewhere, it is the prānas which appear to be the subtle self.

In his translation of the principal Upaniṣads, Radhakrishnan states: “In the dream state the self is identified with the subtle body”, but he does not give any textual references to support this statement. And we do not know whether he assumes that the concept of the subtle body incorporates both manomaya and vijñānamaya bodies. Another passage in the Bṛhadāravṛtyaka Upaniṣad adds to the confusion when it states that the subtle self has manas “attached to it” (nisāktam). In his commentary on this passage, Śaṅkara ignores the implication of nisāktam and states: “the subtle body is called mind because mind is the principal factor of the subtle body”. Śaṅkara clearly identifies the manomaya body with the subtle body. But the context of this passage does not indicate that this is the dream-body. The passage discusses what happens to someone when they die and are reborn. It states that the subtle self “comes again from that world to this world for [fresh] work”. This is another passage where manomaya is used where one might expect to find vijñānamaya. The situation is further complicated by the fact that in his bhāṣya on the Chāndogya Upaniṣad, Śaṅkara identifies the prāṇa śarīra with the subtle body.

From all these references, we can conclude that though there is some evidence in the Upaniṣads that the individual exists on three levels of density, this evidence is far from clear, and there are many confusing or contradictory references. The three levels seem to co-exist for all people and do not appear to be acquired through the power of the mind, or meditation. Through meditation one can, however, become identified with whatever one meditates on, and it appears that there is no ontological discontinuity between levels of existence.

I turn now to a consideration of manomaya in the third and fourth contexts in which it is found in the Sutta Piṭaka. The main concern of this book has been an investigation of the fivefold analysis of the human being into khandhas. We have seen that these are divided into one rūpakkhandha, which is the living body of the individual, and four arūpakkhandhas, which collectively represent the mental faculties of the individual. Though when
considered together this analysis appears to conform to the convention that the individual comprises body and mind, in Buddhism, this apparent dualism does not have the ontological significance it usually carries in dualistic religions or philosophies. As I have already mentioned, the distinction between the bodily and the mental *khandhas* in Buddhism is not intended to suggest that human beings consist of two ontologically distinct substances, one physical and the other mental. A later Buddhist school, the Yogācāra, interpreted this absence of distinction in an ontological sense: to mean that 'all is mind'. In my opinion this conclusion cannot be drawn from the material in the *Sutta Pitaka*. It has been a constant theme of this book that the teaching of early Buddhism is not concerned with offering an ontological analysis as such: it is concerned with offering whatever information and guidance are necessary to enable people to achieve liberating insight and so escape the cycle of *samsāric* existence. Such teaching does not include an analysis of whether the actual stuff of anything is mind (whatever that might be) or anything else. It does, however, include information concerning the nature of things, or the mode in which things exist. This teaching is contained in the metaphysics implicit in the *tilakkhana* formula and the doctrine of *paccasamuppāda*. From these, we know that all things are dependently originated and as such are impermanent, unsatisfactory and do not occur as (separate/independent) 'selves'.

This means that what it is important to understand for the purposes of liberating insight is that whether something is physical or mental it is of precisely the same nature. Whether it be solid or liquid, apperceived or conceived, it is equally dependently originated. This is why Buddhist meditation exercises, such as those described in the *Satipatthāna Suttas*, include as objects for meditation the body itself, thoughts, feelings, and abstract conceptual factors such as doctrinal teachings. The exercises are to be similarly practised in each case and the point of each of them is the same: the realisation that none of these things should be thought of in terms of their separateness or selfhood, subjectively or objectively. We have also discussed what appear to be widely differing constituents of the human being: the physical body as described in passages about the *rupakkhandha*, ideas as described in passages about the *saññākhandha*, and volitions as a product of the *samkhārakhandha*, for example. In spite of the apparent differences between them, all of these are *samkhāras* in the metaphysical sense: they are all conditioned. One might suggest, therefore, that insofar as our experience leads us to think in terms of the substance of things, all we can know about them from Buddhist teachings is that we experience a variation in the degree of density and/or in the behaviour of similarly conditioned phenomena. *What* the phenomena are, in the ultimate sense, is irrelevant to attaining liberating insight. Even the four *mahābhūtā* can be understood in such a way: it is hardly credible, for example, that the solid parts of the body literally consist of earth, *pathavī*. The point is their solidity
or extension. And the same is true for fluidity (āpo), heat (tejo) and motion (vīryo): these abstract meanings are more relevant than the literal meanings of these terms (water, fire and wind). These primary constituents of rūpa are not types of substance, but constitute different modes or states which come together as derived rūpa. And all of these primary constituents of the rūpakkhandha are samkhāras: the more detailed information refers to their position on what Johansson calls the “spectrum of density or solidity”.

All phenomena on the spectrum could also be called different modes of reality. In Buddhism, all samkhāras, whether solid or abstract, are different modes of reality: none is more real than any of the others. This is perhaps easier for us to grasp in view of the discovery in modern physics that matter is a gross form of energy. And the analogy of ice, water and steam also illustrates the absence of ontological discontinuity between different modes of existing on the spectrum of density.

This spectrum is reflected in Buddhist cosmology which, though it is only fully evolved in the commentarial tradition and in the Visuddhimagga of Buddhaghosa, is unsystematically present in the canon. Briefly, this is divided into three spheres: the sphere of desire (kāmadhātu), the sphere of form (rūpadhātu) and the sphere of formlessness (ariipadhātu). The first and third of these spheres have various complex levels. The first, the kāmadhātu, is comprised of the various heavens and hells in which beings are reborn in what in Buddhist terms are gross rūpa bodies. The middle sphere, the rūpadhātu, is the level at which live certain beings (often called devas) which have subtle rūpa bodies. The third sphere, the aripadhātu, is stratified according to the more rarified levels of meditation which are attained by advanced disciples. It is inhabited by those who died just before gaining liberating insight; they dwell at an appropriate level of pure meditation and at this stage they are formless.

Gombrich calls the aripadhātu “an elaborate spacial metaphor for spiritual progress”. In fact one might say that all three of the dhātas are spacial metaphors for spiritual progress. The kāmadhātu is inhabited by those whose actions are still impure or ‘gross’ enough to keep them in the cyclic world of sensual desire: it correlates with the gross physical body. Though the rūpadhātu is inhabited by the devas mentioned above, who derive from Mahā Brahmā, it is also inhabited by those who have performed an important service or who have achieved a certain level of meditation. And though such individuals possess a rūpa body, there is canonical evidence that it is subtle rūpa: as it were mid-way between gross rūpa and the formlessness of the aripadhātu level. In the fourth point raised in this chapter we shall also see that this subtle body, which is called manomaya, can also be acquired or created by some individuals who still inhabit the kāmadhātu, and that the ability to create such a body is acquired on the spiritual path. The metaphor of the spiritual path underlines the continuity between the spheres. And just as for Buddhists the path
represents the progressive purification of the mind, so the spheres represent corresponding degrees of density or subtlety. It is notable that just as liberation means the cessation of *samsāric* existence, so the achievement of insight itself does not have a corresponding cosmological stratum.

Collins discusses the relation between Buddhist cosmology and psychology, calling it psychological cosmology. He tabulates the cosmological spheres of early Buddhism and correlates them with meditative levels. This has been mentioned in chapter v. The correspondence between cosmology and psychology, and the lack of ontological discontinuity, is again evidenced by the fact that experience of a certain meditative level identifies the subject with that level of reality, enabling the meditator to manipulate it. We have also seen a somewhat different, and spiritually humble, example of this principle in chapter iii. There, we referred to canonical passages in which bhikkhus were encouraged to develop spiritually advantageous ‘concepts’, such as impermanence and selflessness. This practice would contribute to the bhikkhu’s realisation of these insights: in experiencing the psychological ideas he eventually identifies with them cosmologically.

The psychological/cosmological transmutation which comes about through meditation is the same as the rationale behind the practice of classical yoga, and we saw examples of this process above in the *Śatapatha Brāhmana* and the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad*. In these three examples, the transmutation of the meditator is different from that in Buddhism. In them, the point is to become the same as the stuff on which one is meditating (usually Brahman); in Buddhism, the point is to experience what is meant by selflessness. The former imply an ontological transmutation, of what one is. The latter is an epistemic transmutation, to know how one operates. In stating only that one realises how one is, Buddhist teachings leave unanswered the question of whether one thereby becomes identified with everything.

The term *dhātu*, which we have just seen used to refer to cosmological levels, is used elsewhere in the *Sutta Piṭaka* to refer to a classification of the four *mahābhūtā* (earth (*pāthavī*), water (*āpo*), wind (*vāyu*) and fire (*tejo*)), plus space (*ākāśa*) and consciousness (*vinnāṇa*). One can see that here, too, there is a progression from the grossest or densest element to the subtlest. And their classification together as elements indicates their congruity in all other respects: consciousness is not categorically distinct from earth. The fact that there are no category distinctions is further emphasised in this *Sutta*, which is called the *Bahudhātukasutta*, when the term *dhātu* is applied in like manner to processes such as the senses, to abstract notions such as comfort and discomfort, happiness and unhappiness, harmfulness and harmlessness, and to the three cosmological realms, as well as to the six elements just mentioned.

There is in the *Sutta Piṭaka* an alternative threefold division of the degrees of density of phenomena to that of the cosmological *dhātus*, and it
is here that we find the term *manomaya* introduced in this context. In the *Poṭṭhapāda Sutta* of the *Dīgha Nikāya*, the Buddha explains to Poṭṭhapāda that there are three modes in which an individual (*atta-paññābha)* can exist in *samsāra*. The term I have translated ‘an individual’, *atta-paññābha*, is uncommon and its meaning is not generally established. It literally means ‘the taking on of a self’. The commentary glosses it as *attabhīva*. The term *attabhīva*, which literally means ‘becoming a self’, has several meanings, given by the *Critical Pali Dictionary* as follows:

1. (abstract) existence of a soul … 2. The existence as an individual, proper nature; but most frequently concrete: a living being, or its bodily form, person, personality, i.e. the various appearance of the *attā*, opp. the continual existence of the *attā*… (among words denoting ‘body’).

In the context found here, it must surely have the meaning of existence as an individual in *samsāra*, which is, in effect, existence as a conventional self, because the three terms *lojārika*, *manomaya* and *ariṇa* undoubtedly refer respectively to gross and subtle form, and to absence of form. The commentary glosses the three as corresponding to *kāmabhava*, *rūpabhava* and *ariṇabhava* respectively. This would preclude the possibility of *attabhīva* having the more concrete meaning of ‘body’. So here *manomaya* has a metaphorical meaning which corresponds to the cosmological level of the *rūpaṅdhatu*: it is existence at a level which is between that of gross *rūpa*, which corresponds to the *kāmadhatu*, and that of formlessness, which corresponds to the *ariṇaṅdhatu*. It is existence as it were at the intermediate level of subtle *rūpa*, the *rūpaṅdhatu*. In the *Sutta*, the Buddha explains that the first has form, is characterised by the four great elements, and is nourished by solid food. The second also has form, but it originates in the mind; here, one has all the limbs of a (gross) physical body and has supernormal senses. The third is without form and originates at conceptual levels.

We see from the Pali that in this passage the three modes of existence all relate to the *atta-paññābha*. Indeed, the Buddha explicitly states that he teaches a doctrine which leads to the abandoning of the conventional notion of selfhood in each of these existences. They therefore might be said to represent the degrees of density in which one can have *samsāric* existence. And once again the absence of discontinuity between gross, subtle and formless is emphasised.

We noted above that in Buddhism the *ariṇaṅdhatu* is a spacial metaphor for spiritual progress, and I suggested that all the cosmological levels could be considered in the same way. This is supported in the commentary on the *Poṭṭhapāda Sutta* passage, where spiritual progress, by way of the attainment of certain levels of meditation, is clearly linked with the three spheres. Significantly, we also see from the Pali that the cosmological term *brahma-loka* is explicitly identified with meditational levels. The commentary states that *kāmabhava* refers to those who live at any of the levels between
hell and a certain type of god (the devas) by taking on a gross (olārika) rūpa body.66 Rūpabhava refers to those who live with a subtle rūpa (manomaya) body, and this level corresponds to a range of spiritual attainments from the first jhāna level right up to the highest brahma-loka level of meditation. Arūpabhava refers to those who live with an arūpa body, and this level corresponds to meditational attainments ranging from the brahma-loka known as the sphere of infinite space up to the brahma-loka known as the sphere which is neither conceptual nor non-conceptual.67

The Brahmagāla Sutta suggests that the intermediate level is also called the ‘sphere of radiance’.68 It states that beings here are “mind-made and radiating light from themselves”.69 I referred to this passage in chapter v and suggested there that as individuals progress on the spiritual path, so they are increasingly described in terms of light and radiance. It would appear that this radiance is apparent at the intermediate level of manomaya: the lightness which results from spiritual progress corresponds to the subtlety (or lightness) of the level at which one exists.

The clearest canonical reference to the distinction between rūpa and arūpa devas and their association with psycho-cosmological levels is found in the Majjhima Nikāya. Those devas which are rūpa are described as manomaya and those which are arūpa are described as saññāmaya.70 In discussing this passage in chapter iii, it was suggested that though the passage itself is not concerned to make clear whether or not such gods actually exist, the description indicates the difference between gods which have form, which can be apperceived, and gods without form, which can only be conceived of. Elsewhere in the Sutta Piṭaka, however, the existence of all such devas is taken for granted, and this passage serves to confirm the point that bodies which are manomaya do not consist of the mind, but have form, rūpa, which is created by the mind. Arūpa gods, on the other hand, exist at a level which can only be referred to as abstract, and correspond to arūpa levels of meditation. Like the commentary on the Potthapāda Sutta, the commentary on this passage also confirms that the subtle manomaya body of the rūpa deva requires a certain meditative state to have been achieved in the same way that existence at the level of the arūpa deva does. Rūpa and arūpa devas, it states, are the product of the rūpa and arūpa jhinas respectively.71 Here the attainment of a certain (unspecified in the commentary) rūpa jhāna is the prerequisite for the creation of a mind-made rūpa deva; and the attainment of a certain (again unspecified) arūpa jhāna is the prerequisite for the existence of an abstract or conceptual arūpa deva.

In the Anguttara Nikāya there is another passage which connects deva levels with meditational attainment and spiritual progress. Here, Sāriputta is relating to the bhikkhu Udāyin that if a bhikkhu who has achieved the meditative level of saññāvedayitamariñāha does not subsequently achieve liberation (no aṭṭham ānādheyya: literally, ‘does not accomplish wisdom’) while in this life (ditthe va dhamme: literally, ‘in a visible condition’), he will be
reborn higher than (atikamma: literally, 'go beyond') the deva community which feed on solid food and live (upapanno: literally, 'arise') in a mind-made body.

The prerequisites are that the bhikkhu shall have completely achieved morality, concentration and wisdom, and shall have entered and emerged from the state of saññāvedayitanirodha. Three times Sāriputta relates to Udāyin that this is so. When Udāyin repeatedly refuses to believe him, Sāriputta appeals to the Buddha, who asks Udāyin who he thinks has a mind-made body. Udāyin replies that it is those devas who are formless and conceptual, which, the Buddha states, is the word of an ignorant fool. Sāriputta was right: if a bhikkhu has achieved morality, concentration and wisdom and has entered and emerged from saññāvedayitanirodha, but nevertheless does not achieve liberating insight, he will be reborn with a mind-made body at a level higher than the community of rūpa devas who feed on solid food.

This passage seems to suggest that the manomaya, or rūpadhātu, level is complex (in the same way the kāmadhātu and arūpadhātu levels are): there are both those devas who feed on solid food, and a higher, or perhaps more subtle, level beyond that. In stating that those who have experienced saññāvedayitanirodha go to the rūpadhātu, it is possible that Sāriputta is referring to those who have experienced saññāvedayitanirodha without first experiencing the arūpajīvanas, since those who are proficient in the arūpajīvanas would be reborn in the arūpadhātu. Udāyin perhaps does presume that one who has experienced saññāvedayitanirodha has also first experienced the arūpajīvanas, but misuses the term manomaya. In any event, Udāyin is told he is an ignorant fool to confuse the two levels of manomaya and arūpadhātu.

The implication of this passage is that even if a bhikkhu has attained the highest meditational level of saññāvedayitanirodha, the next rebirth will be in the rūpadhātu unless he has experienced the arūpajīvanas. And we also see from the passage that there is the added proviso that the meditational achievement is accompanied by the proper following of the Eightfold Path (summed up in the three terms sīla, samādhi and pāññā). This is a further indication of the link between rebirth and spiritual progress: the bhikkhu must be spiritually accomplished in all respects. Only if he is accomplished in this way does meditational attainment achieve a corresponding future level of existence if he falls short of liberating insight.

Elsewhere we read that the process can be reversed: those with a subtle body can revert to having a solid body if they feast on the taste of the earth and feed on it and are nourished by it for a long time; to the extent that they thus feed, their bodies become solid. This passage is part of the Aggañña Sutta, and describes how the world begins to re-evolve. From its unevolved state the process is one of gradual solidification. The final stage is when, tasting the earth with their fingers, the subtle beings are overcome by the taste and this brings about desire. Here we have a figurative account
of the way in which false notions of separate selfhood, which are the corner-stone of the ignorance upon which desire is based according to Buddhist teachings, bring about solidification: and it is precisely the opposite of the process of liberation. Though the *Sutta* is concerned with the genesis of the social order and not with a regression in the progress of an individual, it supports the point being made in this chapter that ignorance corresponds to solidity and insight corresponds, according its degree, to subtlety or formlessness.

We read in the *Satipatthāna Sutta* that in the practice of *sati* on one's state of mind (*citta*), one of the states of mind that one might have achieved is that of having "become great" (*mahāgatta*). The commentary on this states that this means that one has experienced the jhānas, either rūpa or arūpa. At the level of the kāmadhātu, one's mental state is one of not having become great. This suggests that the experience of meditation makes the individual subtler in a way which is described as the mind expanding. This clearly fits with the suggestion that the process is one of liberation: the metaphor is that at its most dense or ignorant level, existence is contracted or restricted; at its most subtle level, it expands to the point where it is free from restriction. This point was suggested in chapter v.

In the *Aṅguttara Nikāya* there is a passage which clearly indicates that the term rūpa used in connection with the term *manomaya* refers to subtle (not gross) rūpa. The passage states that Kakudha, a personal attendant of Mahāmoggallāna, has just died and been reborn with a mind-made body. The form of the mind-made body is such that it fills two or three villages in Magadha. In this instance, one can clearly infer that the rūpa of Kakudha's body is subtle because the text goes on to state that in spite of its size it does not cause harm either to himself or to others. In this rebirth, Kakudha is a deva, the text states. There is no explicit mention in this passage that Kakudha has achieved an appropriate level of meditation. We cannot, therefore, tell whether this achievement has been taken for granted, or whether his service as Mahāmoggallāna's personal attendant is sufficient for the attainment of a spiritually advanced rebirth.

To sum up the third point in this chapter, *manomaya* is found in the *Sutta Piṭaka* in contexts which show that it represents the cosmological level of the rūpadhātu, which is the intermediate level between gross rūpa and formlessness, characterised by subtle rūpa. The stratification of the cosmological levels in turn corresponds to spiritual progress: the spectrum ranging from the most dense form level to the level of formlessness parallels the disciple's progress from ignorance to insight. Being at an intermediate level on the spectrum of density, the attainment of a *manomaya* existence represents an intermediate level of spiritual progress.

The fourth of my contexts for discussing *manomaya* is when it refers to the ability of those who have mastered a certain level of meditation to create a mind-made body. As the attainment of a certain meditational level in one
life results in rebirth at the \( \text{nīpadhātu} \), or \text{manomaya} level in a subsequent life, a \text{bhikkhu} may come to understand this link and use it to affect the mode in which he exists in his present birth. He learns the principle of this at an early stage in his meditative practice. We read, for example, that in the first \text{jhāna}, which arises from detachment (\text{viveka}ja), a \text{bhikkhu} “drenches, saturates, permeates and suffuses this same body with the happiness and joy which arise from detachment; there is no part of this whole body which is not filled with the happiness and joy which arise from detachment”. From this passage, we see that in meditation the \text{bhikkhu} is able to affect his body. At more advanced levels of meditation, he is able deliberately to create a subtle body while he is living in a gross \text{rupa} body. This ability is described in the \text{Sāmaññaphala Sutta} of the \text{Dīgha Nikāya}. The \text{bhikkhu} must have attained what is referred to as the meditative level of the fourth \text{jhāna} (elsewhere called the fourth \text{rupajjhāna}), which is characterised by equanimity and purity of mindfulness, and is without pleasure or pain. In some contexts in the \text{Pali} canon, the four \text{rupajjhānas} precede four \text{ariyapajjhānas}, and one has to be proficient in all eight \text{jhānas} before liberating insight can be achieved. But in this \text{Dīgha Nikāya} passage, it is clear that the fourth \text{rupajjhāna} represents the culmination of meditative practice, and insight is attained from this level. Prior to liberating insight, however, the \text{bhikkhu} progressively acquires various other insights and powers. Each of these is enumerated in the text and will be discussed shortly.

According to this \text{Sutta}, the first result of attaining the fourth \text{jhāna} is that the \text{bhikkhu} is able to purify his mind sufficiently to see clearly the relationship between his body and his consciousness: this passage was referred to in chapter v. With his mind so purified, the text states, he is then able to “apply and bend down his thoughts to the magic creation of a mind-made body” and “from this body, he magically creates another mind-made body, having form and all the [corresponding] limbs and parts and with supernormal senses (\text{ahinindriyam})”. According to the \text{Critical Pali Dictionary}, \text{ahinindriyam} means ‘without defect of any (sense)-faculty’. \text{Buddhaghosa} suggests that it has this meaning when he glosses the term in two places as \text{paripunindriya} and \text{avikal-indriya}. I have used the term ‘supernormal’ because if the context is concerned with a magically created mind-made body then it would seem likely that such perfected senses would also in some sense be ‘supernormal’. We shall see below that the use of supernormal (\text{dibba} - ‘divine’) senses is referred to in this passage, and if the ability to behave in such a way is acquired at a relatively advanced stage of the spiritual path then perhaps what is to us supernormal is in fact an indication that the senses are perfected. In support of this interpretation, we read elsewhere that a \text{bhikkhu} who attains the meditative state of \text{sattāvedayitanirodha} has senses which are “quite purified”.

There follow three analogies which imply that the mind-made body looks identical to the \text{bhikkhu}’s existing body. The first is the pulling of a
reed from its sheath: one knows that the two are separate from each other but they precisely fit together or correspond to each other. The point of the second and third analogies is the same as the first: a sword and its scabbard and a snake and its slough.\textsuperscript{94} The form of the Pali is the same for the sword (\textit{asi}) and scabbard (\textit{kosi}), and the slough (\textit{karan\textdelta}) and the snake (\textit{ahi}).

A possibility which arises from these analogies is that they might also be an indication that the creating of a mind-made body is of spiritual significance: that it is an ability which is acquired when a certain advanced stage on the path to liberation is attained. Eliade points out that the image of the snake and its cast skin, for example, is one of the oldest symbols indicating initiation, or mystical death and resurrection, and is found in Brahmanical literature.\textsuperscript{95} In the Sāmaññaphala Sutta, the acquisition of various magical or supernormal powers (\textit{iddhis}) and insights, which culminate in liberating insight, follows the stage at which the \textit{bhikkhu} is able to create the \textit{manomaya} body. As such, the process might have metaphorical symbolism as a rite of passage or initiation to the level at which the soteriologically advanced stages of the \textit{bhikkhu}'s progress along the path take place. This might be more plausible if one understands the creating of a \textit{manomaya} body as a ‘subtlising’ process, not as an \textit{other} body, as I suggest below. Alternatively, the analogies might just indicate the close relationship between the bodies, such as we saw described in the \textit{Taittiriya Upaniṣad}, where the three levels of bodies were said to ‘fill’ each other, indicating that they normally occupy the same space.

As well as the fact that the mind-made body looks identical to the \textit{bhikkhu}'s existing physical body, this passage tells us that it also has form, it is \textit{rūpa}. The variety in the modes of reality to which we have already referred gives us some indication that this mind-made body, though it has form, might differ in nature from our physical bodies. We have also seen that the Brahmanical religion recorded in the \textit{Upaniṣads} accepted the existence of an individual’s ‘subtle body’ (\textit{manomaya}, \textit{vijñānamaya} or \textit{linga sarīra}). And we have concluded above that rebirth at the psycho-cosmological level of \textit{manomaya} means having a subtle \textit{rūpa} body. It is likely, therefore, that in this context also the created body is a subtle body. Because the mind-made body referred to in the Sāmaññaphala Sutta has form, however, we know that it is not merely a concept that the \textit{bhikkhu} creates: its level of reality is \textit{rūpa} rather than \textit{arūpa}, even if it is subtle \textit{rūpa}.\textsuperscript{96} Its existence, therefore, is not in the mind or of the mind, but it is a body created by the power of the mind. In some way the \textit{bhikkhu}'s mind is able to manipulate \textit{rūpa} to create a subtle body in exactly the same form as the gross body.

The phenomenon of deliberately creating a body is not unique to Buddhism, or even to the Indian tradition as a whole. In his book, \textit{Yoga: Immortality and Freedom}, Eliade discusses the phenomenon of the transmutation of substance in tantric yoga and in Western alchemy.\textsuperscript{97} Both practices
involve the manipulation of matter by the power of the mind. And both involve the transmutation of the flesh into a subtle body. For alchemists it is a ‘body of glory’; for yogins it is a divine body (divya-deha), called a ‘diamond body’ by Vajrayānists and a ‘perfect body’ (siddha-deha) by Hatha yogins.88 In the light of our discussion above, we can see the likely significance of the fact that in the Sāmaññaphala Sutta passage the meditative level attained by the bhikkhu who creates the manomaya body is stated to be the most rarified of the rūpajhīnas and not an arūpajhīna. In attaining the level of subtle rūpa, he is able to identify with and manipulate it: his mind has the power to create a subtle body. If we relate this to our discussion above of manomaya as it corresponds to the cosmological level of rūpadhātu, then were this bhikkhu to die having attained this meditative level, he would be reborn as a deva in the rūpadhātu. The difference here is that in remaining alive, he is able to create the same mode of existence deliberately.

This relationship between the mind and the body is referred to in the Iddhipāda Samyutta, where Ānanda asks the Buddha if he knows he will reach the brahma-loka in his mind-made body by means of his psychic power (iddhi), and the Buddha replies that he does.89 Ānanda then questions the Buddha in exactly the same way if he knows he will reach the brahma-loka in his body made of the four great elements by means of his psychic power, and the Buddha again answers in the affirmative. This ability to do the same thing with both bodies, the Buddha goes on to state, is because the tathāgata concentrates the body in the mind and concentrates the mind in the body: in his body he enters and abides in the conception (sāññā: that is, he visualises) of bliss and lightness so that his body is lighter, softer, more plastic and more radiant.100 What this passage means is that in meditation the tathāgata identifies body and mind. This does not mean that he identifies with body and mind, but that he identifies them as of like nature. And being of like nature, only differing in degree of density, both can be manipulated in the same way.101

Johansson states of this passage that it illustrates the way “a material body may become less heavy and solid through meditation and by not identifying oneself with it”.102 He goes on to state that “the idea is probably that the mind (citta) is thin and light; by mixing it well with the body the combination will become less heavy. Concentration in itself is a force, and concentration on lightness is apt to reduce the weight of the body”.103 The Iddhipāda Samyutta itself does not state that the lighter body comes about because one does not identify oneself with it, but this is implicit in the fact that the subtle body is acquired at a certain level of spiritual insight: one can assume that it follows from this that progress has been made in the liberating task of ceasing falsely to identify with one’s empirical body. Johansson’s second and third sentences miss this point, however. It is not a question of mixing light mind with heavy body and producing something in between. The point is that greater degrees of insight correspond to less
dense levels of reality, so one no longer exists at the more dense levels. At the more dense levels of rūpa, the mind is correspondingly dense or ignorant; as one progresses, both one’s mind and one’s body become less dense. Concentration is indeed a force, but its task is to clarify (lighten) the mind: and the state in which one has bodily existence follows from this. When one has consciously understood this fact through spiritual progress, and crucially through the attainment of advanced stages of meditation, one is able to direct the mind to manipulating the more dense levels of reality. The tathāgata is Enlightened, and his complete understanding of the process enables him to identify body and mind in meditation and have mastery over both.

That one comes to understand the link between spiritual progress and the density of the body is dramatically exemplified in a passage in the Saññatiyana Samyutta. This passage relates the death of Upasena. Instead of his body being subject to the normal process of decay after death, it is spontaneously scattered like a handful of chaff. The reason for this, the text states, is that Upasena had for a long time removed any concept of ‘I’ or ‘mine’. This clearly indicates the link between conscious identification with one’s empirical existence, which in Buddhist terms is tantamount to the most basic (or dense) ignorance, and the continuing of one’s gross material body. Conversely, no longer having any false notions of ‘I’ represents insight, or en-light-enment, which means that one’s body is correspondingly light. And in this passage Upasena knows in advance that when he dies his body will spontaneously dissipate in this way: it is he who announces that this will happen. He instructs other bhikkhus to lift this body onto a couch and take it outside before it is spontaneously scattered like a handful of chaff.

In this use of the term manomaya, then, yet again the power of the mind is being referred to. This time there is no explicit link with an ethical dimension, as we saw in the Dhammapada: the link is, rather, with the achievement of an advanced stage on the spiritual path. But it is nevertheless cardinal to Buddhist teaching that in order to achieve spiritual progress ethical issues must first be dealt with. So what we see here is the way the power of the mind continues to determine one’s samsāric existence at advanced stages on the path. And at a certain advanced stage, the mind can be deliberately used in a creative manner to manipulate rūpa. We saw above that the samkhārakkhandha volitionally constructs every khandha in which one experiences a future life. What we are considering here is the implication of that. If liberation has been achieved through the mind (and the terms pañña- and ceto-vimutti clearly refer to the centrality of the role of the mind in liberating insight), those future lives are not experienced and the bodies are not formed. And if the presence or absence of major congenital abnormalities of the body is karmically determined, as suggested in chapter 1, and if karma is volition, then one can see an even
more direct link between the mind and the physical body. Though one is unaware of it, it is the mind that is the power or creative force behind not only the condition of one's body but also its very existence. Furthermore, we have seen above in a reference to the Aggañña Sutta that desire (or volition, the power of the mind) is instrumental in the solidification of re-evolving beings. In Buddhism such solidification might symbolically indicate ignorance, but it nevertheless also indicates the creative power of the mind in a manner which echoes the way human beings originate according to the Vedic cosmogenies I have mentioned. This point is implicit in the second Noble Truth. It states that the arising of dukkha is dependent on desire (tanha). Elsewhere, dukkha is defined as the five khandhas, or samsara existence. So it follows that the meaning of the second Noble Truth is precisely the point made in this paragraph: that volitions are the instrumental factor in bringing about future bodily rebirths in samsara.

In considering the creative power of the mind in Buddhism in this way, we illustrate even more strongly the absence of discontinuity between gross and subtle form, and formlessness, rupa and arupa. And according to the Samañña-phala Sutta, a bhikkhu is able, when he has attained the highest level of meditation and purified his mind appropriately, deliberately to create another body with his mind. It could be that having achieved a stage where karma is no longer the medium through which the power of the mind works, he is able to utilise that power intention-ally: he 'applies and bends down the mind' (cittam abhinirhārita abhinirmimeti) to creating a mind-made body (manomayam kiyam abhinimmiyam).

The Samañña-phala Sutta continues with a description of other things the bhikkhu is able to do at this stage, and from this description we can see other ways in which it is claimed that the power of the mind is able to manipulate rupa. First, he is able to practise the various iddhis, or supernormal powers: the bhikkhu has the ability to become many when he is one, and then to become one again; he can be either clearly visible or indiscernible; he goes unobstructed to the other side of a wall, a fence or a mountain as if through air; he enters and emerges from the ground as if it were water; he walks on water without sinking as if it were the ground; he travels cross-legged in the air like a bird on the wing; even the moon and the sun, with such potency and majesty, he touches and grasps with his hand; with his body he reaches even to the brahma-loka. In effect, he can make himself into anything he wishes. The Sutta gives the analogy of a skilled potter or his apprentice being able to make or create out of well prepared clay any shape of bowl he likes, or an ivory carver out of ivory, or a goldsmith out of gold.

The iddhis, also called magic or psychic powers, are a pan-Indian phenomenon and pre-date Buddhism. The Buddha seems not only to have taken it for granted that such powers exist, but, as we see here from the
Sāmaññaphala Sutta, he teaches that they are acquired as part of the meditative process.\textsuperscript{112} The Suttas also refer to the development of the \textit{iddhipādas}, the ‘bases of supernormal power’.\textsuperscript{113} There are four bases: resolution (\textit{chanda}), energy (\textit{viriya}), thought (or concentration) (\textit{citta}) and investigation (\textit{vīmamsā}). One might suggest from these four that the collective purpose of developing the \textit{iddhipādas} is the focussing of the power of the mind. In the \textit{Anguttara Nikāya}, the Buddha is stated to have identified disciples according to their specific mastery of such powers: Mahā Moggallāna is most skilled in the psychic powers, and Culla-panthaka is most skilled at the creating of a mind-made body, for example.\textsuperscript{114}

It is stated elsewhere that the \textit{iddhis} are either worldly (\textit{āmisa}) or in accord with \textit{dhamma} (sometimes called ‘spiritual’).\textsuperscript{115} In the \textit{Vinaya} the \textit{iddhis} described here are called \textit{putthujanika iddhi} and these are contrasted with the three knowledges (\textit{tissō viśyā}) and the divine sight (\textit{dibba cakkhum}), which are considered desirable for a disciple to acquire.\textsuperscript{116} In the \textit{Kevaṭṭha Sutta} the Buddha explicitly states that he is concerned about, ashamed of and detests the special psychic powers because he sees danger in the practice of them.\textsuperscript{117} For the Buddha, the real wonder or miracle is education.\textsuperscript{118} He explains that this begins with exercises in reasoning (\textit{vitakka} and \textit{manasikāra}) and proceeds through the entire range of teachings he has given, culminating in the realisation of the Four Truths and the destruction of the \textit{āsavas}.\textsuperscript{119} There are also strict rules in the \textit{Vinaya} about inappropriate practice of the \textit{iddhis}: the display of \textit{iddhis} beyond the capacity of ordinary men is prohibited,\textsuperscript{120} and a \textit{bhikkhu} who falsely claims possession of such powers expels himself from the \textit{Saṅgha}.\textsuperscript{121} There are, however, several references in canonical material to the use of \textit{iddhis} in contexts where they are considered acceptable. The several references to the practice of disappearing from one place and reappearing in another is a good example, and one which the Buddha himself practises.\textsuperscript{122} In the \textit{Kevaṭṭha Sutta}, this ‘magical’ form of transport is explicitly associated with the power of the mind: “Then, Kevaṭṭha, the \textit{bhikkhu} attained such a level (\textit{rūpa}) of concentration that, when his mind was completely concentrated, the way leading to the \textit{devas} appeared [to him]”.\textsuperscript{123} Later in the same \textit{Sutta}, the \textit{bhikkhu} uses the same technique when moving to the next \textit{devaloka}.\textsuperscript{124} The \textit{Mahāparinibbāna Sutta} also relates that the Buddha magically transports both himself and his following of disciples across a river.\textsuperscript{125}

The concern of the Buddha about the practice of the \textit{iddhis} and the presence of the rules in the \textit{Vinaya} together suggest that the distinction between these two types of \textit{iddhi}, worldly or in accord with \textit{dhamma}, is considered of great importance. Concern about abuse of the \textit{iddhis} probably reflects the fact that such powers were abused by some who perhaps were believed to practise certain meditations specifically in order to acquire the more sensational powers. In India such people became known as \textit{siddhas}, the same term used for the powers themselves in the Yoga tradition. In \textit{Patañjali’s}
Yoga Sūtras, the whole of chapter III is concerned with the supernormal powers.\textsuperscript{126} Patañjali's teaching is complex, but indicates that though the yogin acquires such powers the real power is achieved through \textit{samādhi}, not through the \textit{siddhis}, and the practice of the \textit{siddhis} can hinder liberating insight, defined as right \textit{samādhi}.\textsuperscript{127} So though such people could perform things which lay people could not, such practices alone neither indicate their spiritual accomplishments nor contribute to their eventual liberation. The teaching of the Buddha is thought by scholars to pre-date that of classical yoga, but the Buddha's opinion that the abuse of the powers is dangerous as well as not being in accord with \textit{dhamma} is highly likely to have been for the reason given by Patañjali: his concern was always with whatever is conducive to liberation.

From the level of the fourth \textit{jhāna}, there are several other things the \textit{bhikkhu} is also able to do. These are all conducive to insight and constitute what are called the superknowledges (\textit{abhiññā}) which are in accord with \textit{dhamma}. In summary, he is able to use his divine hearing (\textit{dībha sotadhātu}) (no doubt one of the supernormal senses) to hear both celestial and human sounds whether far or near. In similar manner, he is able to grasp fully with his own mind the minds of other beings and men and to know accurately the state of those other minds; whether they are angry, steadfast or attentive, for example. He is able to recall accurately any number of his own former places of existence (or former lives) and he can use his divine sight, \textit{dībha cakkhu} (another of the supernormal senses), to see beings passing from one life to another. He sees the way in which the qualitative nature of their activities has given rise to the condition in which they were reborn. Finally, the \textit{bhikkhu} is able to understand and root out the \textit{āsavas}. He understands as it really is the fact of unsatisfactoriness, the origin and cessation of unsatisfactoriness, and the path leading to the cessation of unsatisfactoriness (the four Noble Truths). Likewise, he understands the \textit{āsavas} of sensual desire (\textit{kāma}), the desire for continued existence (\textit{bhavasava}) and ignorance (\textit{avijjā}) as they really are, and is able to eradicate them. Knowing he is liberated, he realises the cycle of rebirth has been destroyed, the holy life has been fulfilled, he has done what had to be done: after this life there will be no further life.\textsuperscript{128}

Of all of these supernormal abilities, only one, the creation of the body, is specifically stated to be \textit{manomaya}. But just as the mind-made body required that the \textit{bhikkhu}, having achieved the stated meditative level, 'apply and bend-down his mind' in order to create such a body, so in the description of every single one of the other abilities, it clearly states that first the \textit{bhikkhu} has to apply and bend-down his mind.\textsuperscript{129} The difference seems to be that the body is \textit{created} by the mind whereas the other supernatural abilities are \textit{activities} of the mind: in the former case, the mind \textit{produces} something; in the latter case the mind \textit{does} something. And though it is not explicitly stated in the text, it would appear that it is the mind-made body
which is subsequently directed by the mind to perform the *iddhis*, use its 
divine hearing and seeing, have insight into the minds of others, and recall 
former existences, and ultimately eradicate the *tāvāvas*. This is perhaps more 
likely in view of the fact that the *iddhis* are the only one of the supernormal 
abilities referred to in this and other similar passages which are stated to be 
‘worldly’ powers; all of the others are in accord with *dhamma* and conducive 
to insight. The former, as we have noted, are not specifically Buddhist; the 
latter are. As such, the supernormal abilities might be said to be supra-
mundane (*lokuttara*) activities, possibly requiring a more subtle, or rarified, 
bodily vehicle. The *iddhis* are the only supernormal abilities which involve 
any external movement of the mind-made body. All the others are internal 
or subjective supernormal activities. So it might be that in the latter cases 
the mind-made body is not separate from the normal body, but is constitu-
ted as if the reed were still in its sheath, the sword in its scabbard, and so 
on. Thus in such circumstances the mind-made body could be thought of 
as some sort of ‘subtlising’, or ‘sensitising’ of the body and its faculties. This 
suggestion would fit well with the correspondence between developing the 
clarity of the mind and the density of the body, discussed earlier.

The term *manomaya*, then, in the context of the ability to direct the mind 
to the creating of a ‘mind-made’ body is another illustration of the central-
ity of the power of the mind in Buddhist teachings. Just as from the 
Buddha’s teaching that karma is intention it follows that the power of the 
mind creates and shapes our very existences, so at certain meditative levels 
that intention can be consciously directed to the creating of a body with 
certain faculties conducive to insight, such as supernormal senses. The key 
difference is that the former seems to us to happen ‘automatically’: we are 
not conscious that our existence originates in the mind. The latter is the 
deliberate creation of a body. There is also a difference in the quality of the 
rūpa with which the bodies are constituted when the mind itself has 
advanced to a certain stage on the spiritual path. Our ‘normal’ bodies are 
gross rūpa, whereas the mind-made body is subtle rūpa. This is true whether 
the *manomaya* body is one in which one is reborn as a result of having 
attained a certain level of meditation in a previous life, or whether the 
*manomaya* body is deliberately created in this life. The implication of both is 
that the clarifying of the mind which is achieved on the path to liberation 
results in a corresponding subtlising of the body. It is in this sense that the 
metaphorical meaning of *manomaya* is suggested by its literal meaning: the 
metaphorical meaning represents an intermediate psycho-cosmological 
level which corresponds to the fact that a certain degree of spiritual 
advancement has to have been achieved for the deliberate creation of 
something ‘originating in the mind’, the literal meaning of *manomaya*.

If we compare the concepts discussed in the last two points in this 
chapter as they are found in the Sutta *Pitaka* with similar concepts in 
*Upaniṣadic* material, we see that there are some close similarities between
them. In both traditions, the power of the mind plays a central role. According to both traditions, the practice of meditation harnesses that power in a way which transforms the meditating subject. Both traditions state that the individual exists at different levels of density or subtlety, and that there is no ontological discontinuity between the levels. We have seen that in the Buddhist material the metaphor of the spiritual path clearly underlies the continuity between the levels of existence. And as the Buddha’s teaching states that the path represents the progressive purification of the mind, so the levels of existence represent corresponding degrees of density or subtlety. In the Upaniṣads, this correspondence cannot be made in the same way. Though the material is far from clear, one can, however, suggest that there is a correspondence which differs only because liberation in the two traditions is understood differently. The material in the Upaniṣads suggests that the different dense and subtle bodies, or modes of existence, co-exist. It suggests that they represent the range between the outer, empirical, self and the inner, ‘real’, self. These are all simultaneously present in the life of the individual, whose task it is to identify with the real self rather than the empirical self. In Buddhism, the liberating process consists, rather, of progressing from ignorance to insight, which corresponds to the ‘subtlising’ of one’s body. In the Upaniṣads one has to realise what is already the case; in Buddhism, to make a process happen. In both traditions, the goal is achieved by progressively identifying with less dense levels of existence.

The contexts in which the power of the mind has been discussed in this chapter have dwelt in particular on its power in relation to the body. We have seen that the very existence of the body in samsāra originates in the volitional activity of the mind. And the mode of existence of the body corresponds directly to the spiritual progress of the individual, which in Buddhism is the progress from ignorance to insight: from density to light. This leads me to my final chapter, in which I will discuss the attitude towards the body in early Buddhism. We shall see that it is unjustifiably held responsible for many of the activities of the mind.

Notes

1. PED, p.521.
2. Dialogues, 1, p.30, 47f, etc. uses ‘made of mind’; Nāgamoli, in his translation of the Visuddhimagga, translates it as ‘mind-made’, which corresponds to an instrumental interpretation of the term (The Path of Purification, 1964, p.443f).
3. For example at DN.1.76: Ayam kho me kāyo rūpī cātum-mahābhūtiko ... anice’ uucchādana-parimuddana-bhedana-viddhamma-dhammo.
4. PED, p.521.
5. Dhammapada 1 and 2: Manopubbhōgamā dhammā manoṣeṭṭhā manomaya.
6. ‘Thinking’ is meant here in a non-technical sense (i.e. not equating manas with vitakka or any other more overtly discursive term), merely to convey the point being made.

8. MN.III.99.

9. SN.IV.70: Adantā agutā arakkhiyā asamutā dukkhaḥdīvināḥ ... Sudantā sugutā surakkhiyā susamutā sukkhaḥdīvikāḥ.

10. SN.IV.71.

11. We are reminded of the passage referred to above in the discussion on manas in chapter v which describes liberation in terms of not paying attention to any outward sign but paying attention to the signless realm: Sabbanimitte neta ca manasikāro, animittey ca dhāraya manasikāro (MN.I.96).

12. Rg Veda X.129.4: Kāmā tad age sam avaratādhi, manaso retaḥ prathamaṃ yad adit.


14. For example, Br.Up.1.2.1, 1.4.15, 1.4.17, Ait. Up. 1.1.1.


19. Reat (1990, p.111) also discusses the power of the mind in the sacrificial ritual described in the Rg Veda.

20. Collins (1982, p.85f) discusses the earlier background to this central teaching of the Upaniṣads.


22. Br. Up. II.1.8: Prātiṣṭhā iti vā abham etam upāsa iti, sa yu etam evam upāste, prātiṣṭhāṃ hāvaṇāṃ upagachchati, nāprātiṣṭhāṃ, aha prātiṣṭhāṁ śīrṣā jáyate. The whole of this chapter teaches that one becomes what one meditates on.


24. Ibid.: Cakṣurmayādu ṣṭoṣanayāḥ prāthādīnayāḥ ṣvayumayaḥ ākāśamayaḥ tejomayaḥ ... sarvamayaḥ. Cf. also Br. Up. III.7.3-23.


30. Br. Up. IV.3.7: Kātama āśiṃti? Yā yāṃ viṣṇumayaṃ prāṇesu hṛdy anarātyaḥ puruṣas. The expression prajñātmā is substituted for viṣṇumayaṃ puruṣa at Br. Up. IV.3.35, but the context indicates the same phenomenon is being referred to.


33. For example, at Ch. Up. VIII.9-11.

34. Ch. Up. VIII.12.1: Tad asaṃtyaṣṭayāṃ viśarjanātmano dhīṣṭhānam.


36. For example, at Śvet. Up. 1.18; Maitri Up. 6.10; 6.19.

37. Br. Up. V.6.1: Manomayaṃ yāṃ puruṣaḥ bhāh satyāḥ tasmān antar-hṛdaye ...


40. For example, Br. Up. IV.4.2.


42. Br. Up. IV.4.6: Līngam mano yatra niṣkramyati asya.

Nirvana is stated to be unconditioned (asamkhatam) (Udana VIII.3). Though we know from the third line of the tilakkhayā formula that this does not mean it is or has an independently existing self (sabbe dhamma anatti), the fact that it is unconditioned suggests that it is not subject to dependent origination. The paticcasamuppāda doctrine explains samsāric experience, however, so this question does not affect the points I am making in this chapter, which are also concerned with experience in sapsīra. The way selflessness is attributed to Nirvana is discussed in the Conclusion.

Johansson, 1979, p.37.
Johansson discusses the absence of discontinuity between the ābhis and the subtle, nipā and anipa, in his book The Dynamic Psychology of Early Buddhism (1979, passim).

Gombrich, 1975, p.133ff explains these in much more detail than it is necessary for me to go into here. cf. also Thomas, 1951, p.111f.


Surprisingly (in view of the widely accepted Ascension of Jesus Christ), Westerners often find it odd that gods can have gross rūpa bodies. But this is a common pan-Indian phenomenon and is explicitly referred to in the Sutta Pitaka, for example, DN.I.34. It is, perhaps, made easier to understand from the context we are discussing here: during the gradual progression through the stages on the spiritual path, there comes a point when an individual has advanced sufficiently to be known as a ‘god’: This point comes when he or she still has a gross rūpa body.

Gombrich, 1975, p.133ff: Katamo ca poñha pahānāya dhamman deseni.  

Slarampanno samādhisampanno paññasampanno satiññacakadāviko nirodham samāpajjeyya pi viññhāheta pi.
74. Att‘ e’tan thānān ti.
75. AN.III.194: Kām pana tva Udāyī manomāyakāyam paccessi ti? In the PTS edition of the Aṅguttara Nīkāya, this sentence reads as follows: kām pana tva Udāyī manomāyakāyam kāyam paccessi ti? This would have to be translated ‘What, Udāyin, do you think a mind-made body is’? Though it is a small point, I have chosen to emend the Pali to give a bahuvrīhi compound, manomāyakāyam, which both accords with the use of kām and makes more sense in the context.
76. Ye tē bhante deva arūpinā satānāmayā ... bālāsasāavyattassā bhanāya.
77. DN.III.86: Ātha kho te ... satā rasar-paṭhave pariḥbhūjantā tam-bhakkhā tad-abhārā cīram dīgham addhānanā attānānā. Yathā yathā kho te satā rasar-paṭhave pariḥbhūjantā tam-bhakkhā tad-abhārā cīram dīgham addhānanā attānānā, tathā tathā tesaṃ satānānaṃ kharattāt e’eva kāyasmin’ okkami.
78. DN.III.84: Ayam loko vattattā.
79. DN.III.85: Tassa rasar-paṭhave anūguliyā sāyato ascchāte, tatā c’ asa okkami.
80. MN.I.59.
81. MA.I.280: Mahaggatam tī rūpāpitācavaro; amahaggatam tī kārnācavaro.
82. AN.III.122: Tena kho pana samayena Kukudhe nāma Kālayputto āyasmato Māhāmoggallānassa upaatthāko adhunā hālakato anātatarāman manomayaṃ kāyaṃ upāpanno, tassa etarpu abhāvavatāṭhābhī hoti, sāvyathā pi nāma dvā vā tāvā māgadha-kānī gāmakkhitāni.
83. So tena abhāvavatāṭhābhāna n’eva atānānaṃ no pariṃ vyābhdheti.
84. Kukudhe devagutto.
85. Sukha, the opposite of dukkha. As a synonym for Nirvana, its meaning is not happiness in the affective sense, but refers to the absence of the dis-ease that is dukkha.
86. MN.I.276: So imam eva kāyaṃ vivekajena pirīcakha abhāsandeti parisonedeti parippurēti pariippurēti; nāsa kicca sabbāvato kāyassa vivekajena pirīcakha upphattum hoti.
87. DN.I.75: Adakkham assālum upakkāsati-pārisuddhī cattathikkhiṇānaṃ.
88. The eight jhānas correspond to the eight vimokkhas, and can be followed by a ninth attainment, satiññhāvedityaniruddha, what PED calls ‘trance’ (PED, p.286). This was referred to in chapter IV. Whether the jhānas are thought to be fourfold or eightfold, insight is separate from them: they are the means to the end and not the end in itself. It was because they made the jhānas themselves the aim of their teaching that the Buddha rejected the doctrines of two of his teachers, Ālara Kalama and Uddaka Rāmaputta (cf. MN.I.164).
89. MN.I.77; Manomayan kāyaṃ abhinimmiiñña citān abhinniharati abhinimmānati ... So imanah köyā attānam kāyaṃ abhinimmānati rūpiṃ manomayan sabbaṅga-paccāṅgan abhinimmāya. cf. also MN.II.74f.
90. CPD, s.v. abhinimmāya. PED (p.65) suggests that abhinimmāya is probably an inferior reading for abhinimmāna, which it suggests comes near in meaning to *abhinnimmāya. CPD rejects this as a misreading.
91. DA.I.120.
92. DA.I.222.
93. MN.I.296: Indriyāni evippasannāni.
95. Eliade, 1973, p.165, referring to Ājānīya Brahmāna II, 134, etc.
96. Again terminology makes the situation confusing: we have seen in chapter I that rūpa is defined as consisting of the four elements, of which pātha is one. It would have made it easier for us to grasp the notion of subtle body had a term other than rūpa been used. The point really is that the subtle body is not just conceptual. We have also seen the use of the term rūpa in another context in which it is without solidity in chapter VI.
98. Eliade, 1973, p.274. Siddha is the term used for the various powers acquired by the yogin, but it literally means ‘perfection’.
99. SN.V.282: Abhijñātāt na kho bhante bhagavaññ iddhiyā manomayena kāyena bhrahmalokān upasaṅgamiti ti... Abhijñātāt kho bhante Āṇāḍā abhāsa kāsīyā manomayena kāyena bhrahmalokān upasaṅgamiti.
100. SN.V.274: Yasmīn Āṇāḍā samaye tathāgato kāyaṃ pi cīte samādāhāti cītām ti ca kāye samādāhāti; sukkhasaṁsthānā parisaṁsthānā kāye okkamatāti viharati, yasmīn Āṇāḍā samaye tathāgatassa kāyo lokantar ca eva hoti mudutarā ca kammāniyataro ca pahassurātaro ca.
Identity and Experience

103. Ibid.
104. SN.IV.40f.
105. SN.IV.41: Atha kho āyasmato Upasennassa kāya tatth' eva vikiri seyyathāpi bhussanuttthā tī.
106. Ibid.: Tathā hi paññayasmato Upasennassa diññhārattam ahaṅkāra-mamaṅkāra-mānānusayā susamākhatī.
107. SN.IV.40: Etha me avuso imaṃ koyān maṅgakam ārepetāv bhikkhā niharaṇaṁ puriyantā kāye idheva vikirati seyyathāpi bhussanuttthātī.

108. Asajjamāno: literally, this means unattached, or not clinging, so it might be that the bhikkhu is able to do the things described because he has achieved a state where he is detached.

111. SN.IV.40f.: Etha me evam utthānatah tathāpanā samādiyam abyavattati. Bhuarpahāhā sīyathī ti.

110. Abhijjamāno: literally, without breaking through.


113. DN.I.103, 115; MN.I.103, II.11. They are also discussed at length in Paṭīs II.209ff.

114. ĀN.I.24: Etad aggam bhikkhave mama sāvakānāṁ bhikkhānaṁ iddhamantanāṁ yaddhaṁ Mahā Meggallāno… manemayam kāyam abhinimmanatanāṁ yaddhaṁ Cella-panthāko.


116. Vin.II.189.

118. ĀNusāsati-pāṭhāriyaṁ.

119. ĀN.I.214ff.
120. Vin.II.112.
121. Vin.III.91.

122. I am indebted to Mark Allon for the following references (as well as several others used in this chapter): DN.II.50 (the Buddha); DN.I.222, DN.II.37, 40, 46f, 181, 239f, 253-4 (other buddhas, bhikkhus or devas - including Brahma, who travels between lokas in this way).

123. DN.I.215: Atha kho so Kevaddha bhikkhvu tathā-rāpaṁ samādhiṁ samapajji yathā samāhette citte devayānīyo maggo pātutt āhosi.

124. DN.I.220.

125. DN.II.89. In a personal communication, Mark Allon informs me that similar examples of the Buddha making use of various iddhis are found more frequently in the Buddhist Sanskrit version of the Mahāparinibbāṇa Śūtra.

127. Ibid., p.265.
128. DN.I.84: Vinuttāsīmī vinuttam iti nānam hoti, khitā jāti vusītaṁ brahmaṇaṁ riṣeṇaṁ yathā samāhettā citte devayānīyo maggo pātutt āhosi.

129. Ānusāsati-abhinimmaṁ. 

103. Ibid. 
104. SN.IV.40f. 
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106. Ibid.: Tathā hi paññayasmato Upasennassa diññhārattam ahaṅkāra-mamaṅkāra-mānānusayā susamākhatī. 
107. SN.IV.40: Etha me avuso imaṃ koyān maṅgakam ārepetāv bhikkhā niharaṇaṁ puriyantā kāye idheva vikirati seyyathāpi bhussanuttthātī. 

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129. Ānusāsati-abhinimmaṁ.
CHAPTER VIII

The Attitude towards the Body

Our subject in this chapter is the attitude towards the human body in Pali Buddhism. We shall see that in the canonical material this attitude is primarily analytical, but that it changes to being openly negative by the time of Buddhaghosa. This change in attitude is important for two main reasons. First, it diverges from the doctrinal teaching on the relationship between body and mind; and second, it is likely to distort meditation exercises which use the body as the meditational subject. Theravāda Buddhism is spreading in Western countries at the same time as the attitude towards the body is enjoying what one might call a high profile in Western culture. If a view about the body which is fundamentally different from the canonical position is disseminated in the West as representing ‘the Theravāda Buddhist view’, then this misleads body-conscious Western Buddhists and non-Buddhists alike.

A further word needs to be said here about the expressions ‘body and mind’ and ‘the attitude towards the body’. In the foregoing discussion of the analysis of the human being into khandhas, and particularly in chapter VII, we have seen that though the khandha of the body is largely dense or solid and the mental khandhas are formless, there is nevertheless no ontological distinction between them: whether or not they involve the constituents of rūpa, they all represent the occurrence of different processes or events on a spectrum of possible modes of existence. It follows that the terms ‘body’ and ‘mind’ might misleadingly suggest some sort of Cartesian dualism, especially to a Western reader. They might also mistakenly be interpreted as denoting two opposing objects rather than a combination of processes or events. But the fact is that as ordinary people we do tend to substantialise body and mind, and our saṃsāric experience of rūpa and arūpa is that they are qualitatively different. As Griffiths puts it: “The mental and the physical are categories of event which are phenomenologically irreducibly different”. Ice and steam give us a good analogy to illustrate the situation. There is no ontological discontinuity between these different states in which the same chemical combination of hydrogen and oxygen occurs. Phenomenologically,
however, this is far from obvious: each is qualitatively distinct from the other and our experience of each of them is irreducibly different. We have to have some knowledge of chemistry to know the true relationship between them. Similarly, the absence of ontological discontinuity between, and the real nature of, the human processes are insights which are only realised as one progresses on the path to liberation. Conventionally, we continue to think of the body and mind as two distinct aspects of ourselves. It is with this conventional dualism that we are concerned in this chapter.

This book has been primarily concerned with the constitution of the human being as it appears to have been understood by the compilers of the *Sutta Pitaka* of the Pali canon. I have also in some places drawn on the Pali *Abhidhamma*, the commentarial material, most of which is believed to have been compiled by Buddhaghosa in the fifth century CE, and Buddhaghosa’s own work, the *Visuddhimagga*. The *Abhidhamma*, the commentaries and the *Visuddhimagga* together form a highly influential corpus of written material which has become the foundation of Theravāda Buddhism. Buddhaghosa’s writings in particular have been so influential as to have become the determinant of the orthodox Theravāda position on virtually every point of religious concern. Buddhaghosa himself, however, claims merely to have been an exegete of the canonical material upon which the commentaries are based and to which there are numerous references in his *Visuddhimagga*. This claim is extremely important for Theravāda Buddhists: the Pali canon has always been, and remains to this day, the canonical heart of Theravāda Buddhism. Those who accept the teachings of Buddhaghosa believe they are adhering to the teachings contained in canonical material.

Theravāda Buddhism is often, one might say commonly, understood to have a negative attitude towards the human body. Though there are what appear to be negative statements about the body in the canonical material, we shall see in this chapter that this negative attitude has largely been promulgated by Buddhaghosa, both in his *Visuddhimagga* and in the commentaries on the Pali canon: in spite of his exegetical claims, Buddhaghosa’s writing is in fact significantly different in this respect from canonical material. The statements in the canonical material and the increasingly negative attitude towards the body will be discussed in the light of the canonical analysis of the human being which has been the main subject of this book. I shall consider whether there is any constitutional or doctrinal basis for a negative attitude towards the body, and discuss possible reasons for the presence of negative statements in the canon. We shall also see that some translations of the Pali canon have been responsible for introducing negativity towards the body where none exists in the Pali. Other translators of what appear to be negative statements in the canon have failed sufficiently to consider the context in which certain Pali words have been used. The result of this is that the English versions sound more negative than the contexts warrant.
The attitude towards the body

In discussing first the attitude towards the human body in the canonical material, we have to consider an apparent paradox. On the one hand, we can see in the Pali Canon statements about the body which appear to be distinctly negative. We read, for example, that the body is a ‘heap of corruption’ (pittisanda), that bodily functions are ‘impure’ (asuci), and that only a completely deluded (or ignorant) fool would think of the body as beautiful. A passage in the Anguttara Nikāya describes the body as a boil (gando), which has nine open wounds (naua uanamukhi), nine natural openings (nava ahbedanamukhi). Whatever oozes out from them is impure (asuci), bad-smelling (duggandham) and loathsome (jaguchiyam).

In the Khandha Samyutta we read that it is one’s body that leads one astray, at least as much as the other parts of our fivefold psychophysical make-up (that is, the four khandhas other than the body). We are told, for example, that “[Our] teacher, sir, is one who speaks of the control of desire and passion ... in the body, in feelings, in apperception, in the volitional constituent, in consciousness”. Another passage states that we are to “... get rid of that desire and passion which are in the body, feelings, apperception, the volitional constituent, consciousness”.

Such statements are particularly relevant since passion and desire are the very source of karmic bondage in Buddhism, as we are told in the second Noble Truth and as has been further demonstrated in previous chapters.

Apart from canonical statements which attribute passion and desire in like measure to all the khandhas, from some translations of Pali texts it seems that it is the body alone which leads us astray. For example, in a Pali Text Society translation of the Sutta Nipāta, we read that it is from the body that “passion and hatred have their origin”, and thoughts which “toss up the mind” arise from the body. And in Müller’s translation of Dhammapada 202 and 203 he states: “there is no pain like the body” and “the body is the greatest of pains”. The importance of such translations should not be underestimated as they are widely disseminated as representing the canon of Theravāda Buddhism and as such are source books for students and believers alike.

On the other hand, the other side of the paradox is that it is cardinal to Buddhism that karmic consequences accruing to any particular individual are entirely dependent on his or her mental volitions. I have already referred above to the definition of karma in the Pali canon as volition, and that it is having willed that one acts through body, speech and mind. This is central to the Buddha’s message, and indeed is precisely what distinguished his teaching from that of other Indian religions of his time: in interpreting action (karma) as volition, he uniquely ethicised the law of karma. From this it is clear that the Buddha qualitatively distinguished volitions from the body so far as the function of the law of karma is concerned, in spite of the fact that volitions and body are equally impermanent and conditioned in their constitution and are not ontologically distinct, as we have seen in chapter VII.
In that chapter, I also referred to the power of the mind in a more general sense, and two points emerged there which are relevant here. First, not only is it volitions (tanha, according to the second Noble Truth) which condition our future existences (dukkha), but it is also volitions which keep us on the cycle of rebirth in samsara at all: because of, and conditioned by, one's ignorance, such volitions bind us to the cycle of becoming. And second, we saw that the spiritual path according to Buddhist teachings is a gradual clarifying of the mind, and that progress along this path corresponds to the level of density at which one exists in any given life.

In view of the centrality of the role of ignorance and volitions in influencing one's mode of existence, it seems prima facie unlikely that it is from the body that passion, desire and hatred, all of which are in themselves volitions which arise because of ignorance, originate. Indeed, we have discussed in some detail already that such volitions are directed towards something by the samkhara-khandha. But we have not yet specifically considered the attitude towards the body according to the Sutta Pitaka. And in view of the presence of what appear to be distinctly negative statements about the body in this material, we shall now turn to a consideration of the early attitude towards the human body.

The analysis of the human being into five constituent parts, the khandhas, was given by the Buddha in order to illustrate how one should understand the experience of individuality in terms of selflessness. Our study of this analysis has perhaps led us to a position where we can see that one can look at it in two ways: first, one can see that the different khandhas are each responsible for specific and different aspects of the human being, and second, one can see that they are all nevertheless interdependent and mutually conditioning: it is together that they produce the psychophysical continuum of an 'individual'. I shall treat these two aspects, the distinctiveness and the interrelatedness of the khandhas, separately.

In considering first their distinctiveness, I shall draw on canonical descriptions of the practice of sati, mindfulness. This practice is particularly relevant here because, first, the subjects on which the mindfulness meditation is to be practised include the body and volitions, and each subject is distinguished from the other in the meditation exercises, emphasising their distinctiveness, and, second, because mindfulness is a meditational practice which is so important in Pali Buddhism that it has two Suttas and a Samyutta entirely devoted to describing its techniques: the Satipatthana Sutta and the Mahasatipatthana Suttanta, in the Majjhima Nikaya and Digha Nikaya respectively, and the Satipatthana Samyutta in the Samyutta Nikaya. At the beginning and end of the Suttas, the practice of sati is described as follows:

There is a way, bhikkhus, leading to [only] one destination, for the purification of beings, for the transcending of grief and lamentation, for the cessation of unsatisfactoriness and misery, for the attaining of the [right] path, for the realising of nibbana; this [way] is the four foundations of mindfulness.
Likewise, in the *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta*, we read: "The four foundations of mindfulness, if cultivated and developed, are conducive to complete indifference, passionlessness, cessation, tranquility, highest knowledge, complete enlightenment, to nibbāna". The text goes on to state: "Whoever neglects the four foundations of mindfulness also neglects the noble path which is the way to the complete destruction of unsatisfactoriness".

The four bases, or meditational objects, for the mindfulness exercises are the body (*kāya*), feelings (*vedanā*), states of mind or thoughts (*citta*) and abstract mental objects (*dhamma*). We shall see that in this context volitions are included in the general term *citta*. According to the sources which describe the practice of sati in detail, all four of these are to be practised in precisely the same way. But we nevertheless read in the *Aṅguttara Nikāya* that mindfulness concerning the body (*kāyagatā sati*) is sufficient in itself for the attaining of Nirvana. We shall see from the more detailed descriptions of sati that the point is to achieve liberating insight into selflessness. The practice of all four of the exercises is advocated, but insight can be gained simply by meditating on the body. It is interesting to recall here that according to Buddhist tradition, it was observing the impermanent nature of the human body, through seeing in turn an ill person, an old person and a corpse, that prompted the bodhisatta Gotama to go forth from home on the journey that was to lead to his Enlightenment.

The *Satipatthāna Sutta* contain detailed descriptions of the method to be followed in the mindfulness exercises. All procedures are first of all to be followed using the bhikkhu's own (*ajhattam*) body, feelings, states of mind and abstract mental objects as the object of meditation. Then, the same procedures are to be followed on external (*bahiddhā*) body, feelings, states of mind and abstract mental objects. In this context, the term *bahiddhā* refers not just to what is 'external' to oneself in general, as it did in descriptions of the *rūpakkhandha* (and the use here of *kāya*, not *rūpa*, for 'body' probably reflects this), but to the body, feelings, states of mind and abstract mental objects of someone else. With regard to the body, the bhikkhu is first of all to centre his attention on the body qua body, and not on the feelings or anything else he might associate with the body but which are the subject of another specific mindfulness exercise. The techniques are essentially identical for the other three meditational subjects mentioned above, and in this way each of the subjects of meditation is considered to be distinct from the others. With regard to the body, we read (and the form is the same for the other subjects of meditation):

In this [exercise], bhikkhus, a bhikkhu proceeds contemplating the body qua body, ardent (i.e. conscientious), attentive and mindful, in order to remove [himself] from the covetousness and misery (abhiṣijjhādomanassam) in the world.

I have translated *abhijjhādomanassam* as ‘covetousness and misery’, but the term clearly refers to desire, which binds one to *saṃsāra* (*saṃsāra* is
indicated by 'in the world' – loka), and to dukkha, the unsatisfactoriness with which samsāra is associated. So one might paraphrase the last part of the sentence as: “in order to remove [himself] from desire and unsatisfactoriness, which are associated with samsāra”. Precisely this is the purpose of the meditation.

In the meditation exercise on the body, the bhikkhu then concentrates in turn on different aspects of the body, such as breathing, posture, the standard list of bodily parts, and functions (walking, sitting down) and so on. He also meditates on a corpse in progressive states of decomposition, which the texts describe in considerable detail. The bhikkhu trains himself (sikkhati) to ‘experience’ (paṭisamvīda) each object of meditation very precisely, excluding every thought other than that it is a part of the body. In this way the bhikkhu establishes that while the body, or part thereof, exists, he also becomes aware of and observes its impersonal nature: there is nothing about it which constitutes separate selfhood. The Suttas state:

... his mindfulness is present precisely to the extent necessary for knowledge, sufficient for mindfulness, and he proceeds unattached, not grasping [i.e. identifying with] anything in the world.20

The attitude of detached observation required for this exercise is suggested by Nyanaponika when he states that a bhikkhu meditates on each object “without reacting to them by deed, speech or mental comment”.21 The commentary confirms that the purpose of the meditation exercise is to gain insight into selflessness when it glosses ‘not grasping anything in the world’ as: “he does not grasp at [false notions] such as having a soul, or thinking ‘this is my self’ of anything in the world, whether it be the body or any of the other khandhas”.22

The Suttas also strongly imply in these exercises that there is nothing about any particular part, or condition, of the body that is intrinsically desirable or repugnant: be it breathing or posture, hair or pus, a young body or a rotting corpse, a bhikkhu is merely to observe it quite free from any connotation. The purpose of such mindfulness exercises is so to concentrate on each specific subject of meditation that there follows clear comprehension of its precise nature, which is that it is impersonal and conditioned. The exercise is purely analytical, and in experiencing each of the objects of meditation in this way as distinct from each other, a bhikkhu understands that there is nothing inherently disgusting, or hateful, or desirable, or anything else about the body; nor is there anything inherently desirable or repugnant about pleasurable or painful feelings.

Desire (sārāga citta; lit: ‘a state of mind with desire’) and hatred (dosa), along with other volitions, are meditated on as part of the mindfulness exercise on citta, the third of the four objects described in the Satipaṭṭhāna Suttas.23 In this exercise the bhikkhu observes and understands (pajānāti) every state of mind he experiences. Included here are volitions, such as those just
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mentioned, and whether or not he has experienced certain levels of meditation (jhāna). This is expressed by his meditating on whether he has experienced a state of mind that "has become great" or "has not become great", (mahaggataṁ, amahaggataṁ). I referred to these terms in chapter VII. They are glossed in the commentary as indicating that he has been associated through meditation with the subtle and formless cosmological levels and the gross material level respectively.24 In understanding other states of mind, the bhikkhu is also able to see to what extent he has gained insight. He sees, for example, whether or not his state of mind has other states of mind “superior to it”, whether or not it is “composed” (in the sense of having equilibrium), and whether or not it is “liberated”.25

Again, as with the other exercises which comprise the four foundations of the practice of mindfulness, the bhikkhu does this “precisely to the extent necessary for knowledge, sufficient for mindfulness” so that “he proceeds unattached, not grasping anything in the world”.26 Understanding his state of mind not only enables him to understand his progress on the path to liberation, but also allows him to see that any volitional activity is directed towards the body or feelings or abstract mental objects by certain mental states. By separately meditating on the body qua body, on feelings qua feelings, and so on, the bhikkhu sees that volitional activity need not accompany those constituents of the human being; they originate in mental states because of lack of insight.

So our consideration of the key meditation exercise, sati, which concentrates on the distinctiveness of the five khandhas, clearly indicates that in the Pali Nikāyas the attitude towards the body that the bhikkhu is to adopt is one of analytical observation. Such analytical observation is conducive to gaining insight into impermanence and selflessness. It also suggests that there is no foundation for stating that the body is the origin of passion, hatred and thoughts which toss up the mind.

I turn now to discussing the question of the attitude towards the body and the origin of passion, hatred and thoughts which toss up the mind in the light of the interrelatedness of the khandhas. In view of the many references I have made to the way in which the khandhas work together, this discussion need only be brief. As already stated, it is together that one is to understand the khandhas as aspects of the psychophysical continuum called an ‘individual’. Each of the khandhas, and part thereof, has precisely the same conditioned (samkhata) status, and as such is characterised by impermanence (aniccati), unsatisfactoriness (dukkhati) and impersonality (anattati), the ‘three characteristics’ of the tilakkhana formula. They are unsatisfactory precisely because they are impermanent, or transitory, and impermanent in that they do not exist independently. Their very lack of independently existing identity is the most fundamental aspect of their interrelatedness. This interrelatedness is emphasised by the fact that the khandhas are collectively defined by the Buddha as what constitutes dukkha.27
Given that it is as individual human beings, or, one might say, as individual bundles of khandhas, that we experience conditioned, samsāric, existence, this is essentially the meaning of the first Noble Truth.

It has already become clear to us in earlier chapters on each of the khandhas in turn that they are mutually dependent in their functioning. One of the passages which describes the cognitive process, to which I have referred several times, is probably the best example of such mutual dependency:

Visual consciousness arises because of eye and visible form; contact [occurs] when there is a combination of the three; feelings are caused by contact; that which one feels, one apperceives... 29

Here we can clearly see that the operation of the sense involves the rūpakkhandha, awareness is the function of the viññānakkhandha, feelings are classified as the vedanākhandha, and apperception is an aspect of the saññākhandha.

A particularly notable point which arises from this passage, apart from the fact that it obviously confirms that the khandhas are interrelated, is that both feelings and apperception can arise without any involvement of the samkhārakkhandha. We saw from the description of the analytical meditation exercise above that volitions are separate from the body and feelings. Here, likewise, in a passage which serves to illustrate the interconnectedness of the khandhas rather than that they are separate, we have a canonical passage which indicates that the presence of a feeling, be it physical or mental, agreeable or disagreeable, is not dependent on there being a concomitant volition concerning it. 29 I will return to this point.

We can now see more clearly that it is misleading to say that volitions such as passion, hatred and thoughts which toss up the mind arise from the body. The body is indeed present in the arising of feelings, but it is completely unactivated, as it were, unless the cognitive (‘mental’) faculties of awareness, apperception and feeling are simultaneously present: and it is towards this combination of functioning khandhas that volitions are subsequently directed. The fact that the khandhas function together, however, does serve to explain the presence in the canon of those statements cited above which advocate the driving out of desire and passion from all five of the khandhas. Furthermore, desire and passion arise because of ignorance regarding the selflessness of all things, and the reference to the driving out of desire and passion in each of the khandhas can be understood to mean that this selflessness has to be understood in every one of the khandhas. But we nevertheless know from the analysis of the human being given in the khandha formula that volitions actually originate in the samkhārakkhandha: though we might apparently experience volitions within the body itself, they have mentality rather than corporeality as their source. So we can state quite specifically that all karmic effects, which in Buddhism
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axiomatically arise from passions and desires, are produced by the samkhārakkhandha and do not originate from the body, the rūpakkhandha. This understanding of the body’s role does not suggest that a negative attitude towards it is appropriate. From the teaching given in the Sutta Piṭaka, it would seem that the attitude towards the body should be neither negative nor positive: one is to have a purely analytical attitude towards one’s body.

In view of this doctrinal position, why do we also find canonical statements which appear to refer to the body negatively? Why is there the apparent paradox mentioned above? Before addressing the specific quotations to which I referred above, I will suggest a few possible general reasons for the presence in the canon of what appear to be negative references towards the body.

The first and most obvious reason is the Brahmanical and śramana milieu in which Buddhist teachings were first promulgated. Some of these traditions taught that the body and its secretions were polluting, and many advocated physical asceticism and the mortification of the body. The practice of overtly subjugating the body to physical duress, combined with the view that it is polluting, indicate that the body was considered to have a negative effect on one’s chances of salvation. In the Pali canon itself, apart from a very few exceptions, the Buddha taught that extreme physical asceticism and self-denial were unnecessary. Indeed, they were potentially as misleading as indulgence: what is required is the Middle Way. The texts tell us that the Buddha himself, while still the bodhisattva Gotama, spent six years as a wandering ascetic, subjecting his body to extremes of heat, cold, hunger, thirst, and so on. It was not until he realised the futility of such behaviour from the soteriological point of view, and relinquished it, that he was able to become Enlightened. If, however, the negative view was widespread, then it is likely that some of the people who were converted to the teaching of the Buddha were influenced by this earlier attitude.

Second, Buddhist teachings allow room for what one might call a ‘healthily negative’ attitude towards the body. This is represented by the Buddha’s reaction to his observation of the human body as it is when old, diseased and dead before he went forth from home, mentioned above. And its relevance is to the impersonality which lies at the heart of the Buddha’s teaching. Insight into this impersonality is liberating knowledge itself, and ignorance of it is what binds us to saṃsāric existence. If one has a slightly sceptical, or detached, attitude towards one’s body, one is less likely falsely to identify with it.

That having been said, we do tend to identify with our bodies. And this leads us to the third possible reason for negative statements about the body in the Sutta Piṭaka. Faced with the Buddha’s teaching that we are to realise that all things are impermanent, unsatisfactory and impersonal, one might instinctively apply this teaching to the body rather than to mental processes, at least initially. Our experience is of a mind which is ever-changing,
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flickering here and there constantly. But our bodies seem relatively permanent to us, and we intuitively identify to some degree with them.

That we also identify other people to some degree with their bodies is clearly illustrated in a well-known story in the *Mahāparinibbāṇa Sūtra*. We read there that Ananda, the Buddha’s closest friend and disciple, remained, in spite of his advanced wisdom, so attached to the physical presence of the Buddha that he did not achieve Enlightenment until after the Buddha died and Ananda was able to eliminate this attachment once and for all.¹ It is precisely in order to avoid this kind of mistake that the mindfulness exercises are to be practised both on one’s own and on someone else’s body.

The Buddha himself acknowledged the apparently greater permanence of the body. It is related in the *Nidāna Samyutta* of the *Samyutta Nikāya* that the Buddha stated that anyone looking for something permanent and lasting would do better to try the body, which lasts up to a hundred years, than the mind, which changes every moment.² For anyone struggling against false notions of permanence, what more obvious object is there on which they can both concentrate their efforts and also subsequently vent their frustrations than the body?

My final suggestion draws on the link between the mind and the body that we saw in the last chapter. There, it became clear that it is volitions that in effect cause the body to arise in successive lives. At its simplest, this is because the volitions which constitute karmic activity arise because of ignorance: and karmic activity leads to rebirth in another body. We also saw in that chapter the way in which the density of the body corresponds to degrees of ignorance. It was suggested that the density of the body in which a given existence takes place can reflect the spiritual progress of the individual. It might be, therefore, that in the spiritual struggle from ignorance to insight, the psychology of the situation tends to be inverted and the physical body, which is the most dense form of rūpa with which one can be reborn, is psychologically held responsible for ignorance rather than recognising that in reality the causal process is the reverse: the body represents the ‘impurity’ of the mind; it is not impure itself. This psychological reversal of the causal process might be even more likely because (with very few exceptions) Enlightenment is achieved while in the physical body. So what one might call the full extent of the spectrum of density can be experienced by an individual in one lifetime: the dense level of the physical body is present even when formless levels of meditation are experienced. With such great contrast, the most dense levels might attract negative associations even for a bhikkhu who is at a relatively advanced level of insight.

For any or all of these reasons the bhikkhus themselves might have been predisposed, even unconsciously, towards making negative statements about the body. In turning now to the quotations from the canon which I
cited above, however, we also see that in some cases a deeper consideration of their context shows them to be less negative about the body than at first appears.

The statement that “only an ignorant fool would regard it [the body] as beautiful” can perhaps be explained as follows: anyone ignorant as to the real nature of the body, who has not cultivated the foundations of mindfulness in order to see it as it really is, has not analysed it into its constituents. Such a person has not perceived the body merely and precisely *qua* body, but has a view of the body which is meta-physical, or what some modern writers might call ‘holistic’. In Buddhist doctrinal terms, what this means is that such a person still erroneously identifies in some way with his or her body. Because there is no room for such a view in the process of cultivating the penetrating analysis of the bodily complex necessary for liberating insight, and because anyone who has cultivated such insight is considered wise, anyone holding such a view might be deemed a fool, certainly from a relative point of view; and the more so because it is only from the holistic point of view that the body could possibly be considered beautiful: its constituent parts, activities and functions are merely parts, activities and functions.

In the reference to the body being a “heap of corruption”, the Pali term translated here is *piitisanda*. *Piti* is also sometimes used with *kāya* and sometimes with *sandalha*. All such expressions refer to the body. Other meanings of the word *piti*, apart from corruption, include ‘putrid’, ‘rotten’ or ‘decayed’. While the description ‘heap of corruption, rottenness or decay’ appears *prima facie* to be unequivocally negative about the body, in fact what such a term is doing is serving to emphasise the body’s impermanence, rather than that one should feel negative about it. This interpretation is confirmed by the fact that *piitisanda* is found in contexts which include other terms such as *bhindana*, which means ‘breaking up, brittle, falling into ruin’, and *pabhāṅgu*, which means ‘brittle, easily destroyed, perishable’. And in one passage which uses the term *pūṭikāya*, the context is explicitly intended to illustrate impermanence: after describing the body as *piti*, the Buddha asks Vakkali: “As to this, what do you think, Vakkali: is the body permanent or impermanent?”

I also referred above to the presence in the Pali canon of statements that the body is ‘impure’. There are many Pali words for impure, but the ones most frequently found in connection with bodily functions are *asuci* and *asubha*. *Asuci* is used in a passage in the Aṅguttara Nikāya to which I referred above which describes the body as a boil from whose nine openings impurity (*asuci*), stench and loathsomeness ooze out. To refer to purity in such a context clearly overlooks the meaning of purity in Buddhist doctrinal terms. The Buddha teaches that salvation is obtained by progressing from ignorance to insight. His prescription for how to achieve insight is given in terms of following a path which can also be described as
a process of purification. This, indeed, is how Buddhaghosa understands it, and he accordingly called his seminal work the *Visuddhimagga*: ‘The Path to Purity’. The path to purity cannot, however, be understood to mean that a disciple is to overcome or avoid the body or its functions and secretions because they are impure in the way suggested in the passage quoted above from the *Aṭṭhakaṭṭhā Nīkāya*. As we have seen, the psycho-cosmological status of the body in relation to the spiritual path represents the state of the mind: purity is a metaphor for the degree to which one has achieved insight, and is not associated with the body qua body. Doctrinally, in ethicising the law of karma, the Buddha taught that defilement was moral or psychological. Only indirectly is this connected with the physical body insofar as one’s body is one of the channels for one’s intention, or will to act, as we have seen in the definition of karma, and in the ethical triad of kāya, vacas and citta or manas. According to the Buddha’s teaching, impurity, or defilement, comes from unwholesome (akusala) states of mind. In Buddhist teachings the term for wholesome (kusala) implies karmic neutrality or spiritually beneficial states of mind.\(^3^7\)

A passage in the *Sutta Nīpāta* illustrates the doctrinal understanding of impurity. It states that some people think one can avoid all tainted fare (āmagandham) if one only eats certain foods which have been properly prepared: “Eating what is well-made, well prepared, given by others, pure, outstanding ... thinking ‘Tainted fare is not appropriate for me’...”.\(^3^8\) This view was widely accepted in the Brahmanical and śramaṇa milieu in which the Buddha taught. The Sutta continues, however, with the Buddha’s teaching that what pollutes us are activities which are harmful to others, such as killing (pāñcātipāla), stealing (theyya), telling lies (māsvādā), adultery (parāśrasena),\(^3^9\) or volitions which are based on ignorance and which are karmically binding, such as greed (giddhā), anger (kodha), arrogance (mada),\(^4^0\) and so on. The Sutta summarises the uselessness of external or ritual practices (in particular Brahmanical and śramaṇa ones) in the cause of purity:

Not the flesh of fish, nor fasting, nor nakedness, nor shaven head, matted hair, dirt, nor rough animal skins, nor observance of the fire ceremony, nor even the many penances there are in the world for (gaining) immortality, nor hymns nor oblations, nor the performance of sacrifices at the proper season, purify a man... .\(^4^1\)

Though bodily functions are not explicitly referred to here, it is clear from the context that it would be erroneous to think that they are polluting. Rather, the Sutta goes on to state:

One should wander guarded in the appertures (of the sense organs), with one’s sense-faculties conquered, standing firm in the doctrine, delighting in uprightness and mildness. Gone beyond attachment, with all miseries eliminated, a wise man does not cling to things seen or heard.\(^4^2\)
Here we have an unequivocal statement that what should concern a disciple is following the doctrinal path. The purpose is to go beyond attachment. And the implication of this passage is not only that it is not the body or its functions that are polluting, but that even to dwell on the question of whether bodily functions might be polluting constitutes clinging to things seen. The Buddha teaches that the true struggle should be within oneself: it is a moral and psychological struggle which should be directed towards the overcoming of clinging, which is itself a particularly unwholesome state of mind.

I have suggested above that the presence in the canonical material of negative statements about the body might be because, however unconsciously, the body was psychologically held responsible for ignorance. At least in theory, this might account for references to the body being impure. The metaphor associating density, ignorance and impurity is, however, a sophisticated one, and in my opinion it is more likely that the term 'impure', when used in connection with the body and its functions, is present in the canon as a result of the Brahmanical background in which the teaching took root. This is clearly the case when there is an explicit association of impurity with bodily secretions. The effect of the underlying metaphor is more likely merely to have predisposed the collators of the material to including such doctrinally inconsistent expressions.

I will return below to the reference to the body’s nine oozing openings when we consider Buddhaghosa’s attitude towards the body. But if we look now at the context of this passage, we see that the body is first described according to the stock phrase that it is made up of the four elements and begotten of mother and father. I have referred to this passage before, and the point of it is contained in what follows: that the body is impermanent, subject to erosion and decay, is perishable and subject to destruction.\(^43\) In Pali, it concludes: *Tasmā ti ha bhikkhave imasmim kāye nibbindathi ti.* E. M. Hare, in his translation for the Pali Text Society, translates this sentence: “Wherefore, monks, be ye disgusted with this body”.\(^44\) It is equally philologically correct, and in my opinion more appropriate both in this specific context and in the wider context of Buddhist teachings as a whole, to translate it: “So, monks, be indifferent towards (or dis-enchanted with) your body”.\(^45\) The purpose of this passage is not to encourage bhikkhus to feel disgust towards their impure bodies but to discourage them from seeking anything permanent in, or identifying with, their bodies. The terms in which the description of the body itself is couched are surely the result of non-Buddhist, and certainly non-doctrinal, influence.

There is in the canonical material, both in the *Samyutta Nikāya*\(^46\) and in the *Vinaya*,\(^47\) an important story which illustrates the way in which certain early bhikkhus disastrously failed to understand both the meaning of purity and also the fact that meditating on the body is intended to give insight into its impermanence. We read that the Buddha:
... talked to the bhikkhus in many ways on the subject of impurity (asubha). He spoke in praise of what is impure; he spoke in praise of the contemplation of what is impure; he spoke again and again in praise of the stage of meditation on what is impure.48

The bhikkhus go away to meditate on what is impure, and the text implies that the principal subject they used was their bodies. It states:

They dwelt intent upon the practice of contemplating what is impure in different ways. They were troubled by their own bodies, ashamed of them, loathing them.49

The Vinaya version of the story gives an analogy to describe the depth of their revulsion:

It is as if a woman or a man when young and delicate and fond of dressing up, having washed their hair, would be troubled, ashamed and full of loathing because they had the corpse of a snake or of a dog or of a man hung around their neck.50

It continues: “So these bhikkhus, being troubled by their own bodies, ashamed of them, and loathing them, by themselves deprived themselves of life and deprived each other of life”.51 Both the Vinaya and the Samyutta Nikāya accounts record that a great many bhikkhus either killed themselves, or were killed by another at their own request, for this reason.52

According to the Vinaya, when the Buddha learns of what has been done, he is extremely angry with them. He states: “Bhikkhus, it is not suitable for these bhikkhus, it is not fit, it is not proper, it is not worthy of a disciple, it is not good, it should not be done”.53 He then gave the following instruction: “Whatever bhikkhu intentionally deprives a human being of life, or who seeks to be a knife-bearer,54 he is defeated, he is not one of the community”.55 This instruction is the third of the parājika rules, the breaking of which means that a bhikkhu has expelled himself from the Sāṅgha: his discipleship is ‘defeated’.

Because of the disastrous nature of the episode which followed the bhikkhus’ misunderstanding of the teaching on impurity, it is unsurprising that one should read at the end of the Samyutta account that Ānanda said to the Buddha: “It would be a good thing, Lord, if you would explain [the teaching] in another way, so that the community of bhikkhus might be established in knowledge”.56 This plea, and indeed the episode as a whole, perhaps indicates the difficulty bhikkhus had in understanding that the purpose of meditating on impurity (or unloveliness) is to realise its impermanence.57

I turn now to the translations I cited. In Norman’s translation of Sutta Nipāta 271, we read that passion, hatred and thoughts which toss up the mind arise from the body. The word ‘body’ has been supplied by the
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translator: it is not present in the Pali at all, which reads: Rāgo ca doso ca itonidānā, arati ratī lomahamsī itojā, ito samuṭṭhāya manovitakkā kumārakā dhaṅkam ito'assajanti. Norman translates the verse as follows: “From this (body) passion and hatred have their origin. From this (body) aversion and delight and excitement are born. Arising from this (body) thoughts toss up the mind, as young boys toss up a (captive) crow.”58 At the front of his translation, Norman states: “Words in round brackets are those which need to be supplied in the English translation, although not found in the original Pali”. The key word in the Pali, to which Norman feels it necessary to add the English word ‘body’, is ito, literally ‘from this’.

The context is that the yakṣha Śuciloma has asked the Buddha, in order to test whether he is a real ascetic or just looks like one, where passion and hatred have their origin. Immediately following on from the verse quoted above, we read: Snehajā attasambhitā nigrodhasasva khandhajā. Norman translates this: “(They are) born from affection, arisen from oneself, like the trunk-born (shoots) of the banyan tree.”59 In an earlier edition of his translation, Norman gives an alternative rendering at the end of the story, translating ito as “from within”.60 In the context of Śuciloma’s question and the subsequent verse, this would seem to me to be far preferable to, and one might say more accurate than, “from this body”. The commentary glosses ito as attabhāvato. I cited the different meanings of the term attabhāva, as given in the Critical Pali Dictionary, in chapter vii. We saw that it has a variety of meanings ranging from ‘soul’ in an abstract sense, the conventional individuality experienced by an unenlightened person, represented concretely by the five khandhas, and sometimes it can mean body. In later material it is sometimes used when either the body or the five khandhas are erroneously taken in the sense ‘this is my self’.61 In Buddhist Sanskrit, ātmabhāva is used for ‘body’; but this is in conjunction with pratilambha, again meaning bodily existence in its broad sense.62 From the context in which we find it here, the most likely of all these meanings is, in my opinion, that of a conventional being, which is also its most frequent meaning. Nor does the context support the translation of ito in the earlier text as “from this body”.

In Müller’s translation of Dhammapada 202 and 203, he states: “there is no pain like the body” and “the body is the greatest of pains”.63 The Pali sentences from which these translations have been made are, respectively, as follows: n’atthi khandhādīsa dukkhā and samkhāra paramā dukkhā. The first of these is clearly repeating the Buddha’s definition that the khandhas are what constitute dukkha. With regard to the second, samkhāra does have a multitude of meanings, and on occasion means bodily existence in its broad sense. But it never means ‘body’ in the sense of ‘corporeality’. So what this sentence is saying is that the greatest dukkha is samsāric existence, which is precisely the content of the first Noble Truth. Bateson makes the same mistake in his article on “The body-Buddhism” in the Encyclopedia of Religion
and Ethics when he states “the body is the sphere of suffering” and “… the body is the origin of suffering”.64

The Pali word nibbidā is often found in contexts in the canon which refer to the human body. We saw it above in the Anguttara Nikāya passage about the impermanence of the body. The way nibbidā is translated frequently tends to further the view that the early Buddhist attitude towards the body was negative. Nibbidā can mean ‘disgust’, ‘revulsion’, ‘indifference’ or ‘disenchantment’.65 In contexts where it must mean ‘indifference’ or ‘disenchantment’, translating it as ‘disgust’ or ‘revulsion’ is highly misleading. In the Pali Text Society translation of Volume V of the Samyutta Nikāya, for example, a translation by Woodward includes the following: “These seven limbs of wisdom … conduce to downright revulsion (ekantanibbidāya), to dispassion, to cessation, to calm, to full comprehension, to the wisdom, to Nibbāna”.66 Nibbidā frequently occurs in this phrase, and in my opinion it cannot here mean anything other than ‘indifference’ or ‘disenchantment’: ‘downright revulsion’, directed towards the body or anything else, would be a karmically unwholesome, and therefore binding, volition quite inappropriate for a bhikkhu at this stage of the path. To use the words from another of Woodward’s translations, it would be one of the “evil, unprofitable states which come to be because of wrong views”.67 Even if one were to understand the qualities referred to in this sentence, disgust or indifference, dispassion, cessation, calm, full comprehension, wisdom, Nirvana, as being qualities which are acquired sequentially, it seems highly improbable to me that disgust would immediately precede so many other qualities which are more associated with detachment. Woodward repeats the translation of nibbidā as “downright revulsion” throughout his translations for the Pali Text Society.68 E. M. Hare translates nibbidā in the same context as “complete or as “complete weariness”.69 T. W. Rhys Davids, however, translates it as “detachment”.70

There are a multitude of similar examples of translations which are misleading about the attitude towards the body, but these will suffice to make my point. Scholarly works other than translations can be just as misleading in statements about the body, possibly because they have relied on the translations.

We can now reconcile the apparent paradox referred to above in summing up the attitude towards the human body found in the canonical material. We have seen that the doctrinal position according to the Buddha’s teaching is that the attitude towards the body should be analytical. This correlates with his teaching that karma is volition: it is one’s state of mind, not one’s body, which is the source of desire, hatred and other karmically binding states which determine the nature of one’s future rebirth(s). The presence in the canon of statements which appear to be negative about the body is probably the result of outside influence or doctrinal confusion which arises because of the demands of the spiritual
struggle. Many such statements are in any case not as negative as they at first appear if read in their context or if translated more appropriately.

I turn now to consider Buddhaghosa’s attitude towards the human body. My examples are mainly drawn from Buddhaghosa’s *Visuddhimagga*, but I will also refer to the commentaries, which are believed to have been compiled by him. Many people composed the material Buddhaghosa included in the commentaries, however, and I have already acknowledged that he can hardly have been the only one to write in such a way. Nevertheless, the *Visuddhimagga* is consistently and exaggeratedly negative about the body. I can only choose a few examples here.

I start with an example of the difference between the canonical material and the commentaries. Though it is a relatively minor example, it nevertheless clearly illustrates the difference between simple analysis, which is found in the former, and descriptive value which is added in the latter. I referred in chapter 1 to the standard list of the constituents of the human body which is found in several places in the Pali canon. The list of thirty-one parts (or thirty-two when the brain is added), which is invariably given without comment, is as follows:

There are in this body head-hairs, body-hairs, nails, teeth, skin, flesh, sinews, bones, bone-marrow, kidneys, heart, liver, membranes, spleen, lungs, intestines, mesentery, stomach, excrement, bile, phlegm, pus, blood, sweat, fat, tears, serum, saliva, mucus, synovic fluid, urine (brain).

It is this list which is used in the *Satipatthāna* exercise on parts of the body, which clearly illustrates the extent to which each and every part is to be observed in the same objective light as part of the analytical meditational exercise. This is regardless of whether it is, say, a tooth, or mucus or pus. In itself, each part has nothing that is to be regarded with anything other than complete neutrality. In the commentary on this list, however, qualitative words are added, so the body and its constituent parts are described as ‘vile’ (kucchita), ‘impure’ (asubha and asun), and ‘loathsome’ (juguccha).

In the section of the *Visuddhimagga* which describes the practice of mindfulness on the body, not only does Buddhaghosa give a substantial description (as opposed to an analysis) of each of the parts of the body to be meditated upon, but he also introduces many negative adjectives which are not in the canonical material. Thus just of mere head hairs we read that they are subject to a “fivefold repulsiveness” (pañcadhā paṭikūlāto), as to colour (vanna), shape (sanbhāna), odour (gandha), habitat (āsaya) and location (okāsa). As a specimen from a lengthy passage, I quote:

Head hairs are repulsive in colour as well as in shape, odour, habitat and location... Just as a baby’s excrement, as to its colour, is the colour of turmeric and, as to its shape, is the shape of a piece of turmeric root, and just as the bloated carcase of a black dog thrown on a rubbish heap, as to its
colour, is the colour of a ripe palmyra fruit and, as to its shape, is the shape of a [mandoline-shaped] drum left face down, and its fangs are like jasmine buds, and so even if both these are not directly repulsive in colour and shape, still their odour is directly repulsive, so too, even if head hairs are not directly repulsive in colour and shape, still their odour is directly repulsive.74

Other similes used in this passage are village sewage (gāmanissanda), a dunghill (gūharāst) and a charnel ground (susāna).75

Buddhaghosa uses the body in the chapter of the Visuddhimagga where the meditation subject is loathsomeness or impurity, asubha. He sums up his lengthy description of the body’s nature by quoting some verses:

Fools cannot in their folly tell;  
They take the body to be fair;  
And soon get caught in Evil’s snare  
Nor can escape its painful spell.

But since the wise have thus laid bare  
This filthy body’s nature, so,  
be it alive or dead, they know  
There is no beauty lurking there.

For this is said:

This filthy body stinks outright  
Like ordure, like a privy’s site;  
This body men that have insight  
Condemn, is object of a fool’s delight.

A tumour where nine holes abide  
Wrapped in a coat of clammy hide  
And trickling filth on every side  
Polluting the air with stenches far and wide.

If it perchance should come about  
That what is inside it came out,  
Surely a man would need a knout  
With which to put the crows and dogs to rout.76

The passage concludes:

So a capable bhikkhu should apprehend the sign wherever the aspect of foulness is manifest, whether in a living body or in a dead one, and he should make the meditation subject reach absorption.77

Even allowing for poetic licence, this passage is in striking contrast to the canonical analysis by which a bhikkhu also arrives at the conclusion that there is nothing inherently desirable about the body.
Buddhaghosa is traditionally thought to have been born a brahmin. I think this is almost certainly true, judging from the terminology he uses in describing the body. So far as I am aware, his concern is not with the origin of volitions such as passion and hatred but with the physical aspects of the body. One further example will serve here: a section of Buddhaghosa’s description of the body’s nature. The description begins relatively objectively, but becomes wonderfully lurid as it goes on:

This is the body’s nature: it is a collection of over three hundred bones, jointed by one hundred and eighty joints, bound together by nine hundred sinews, plastered over with nine hundred pieces of flesh, enveloped in the moist inner skin, enclosed in the outer cuticle, with orifices here and there, constantly dribbling and trickling like a grease pot, inhabited by a community of worms, the home of disease, the basis of painful states, perpetually oozing from the nine orifices like a chronic open carbuncle, from both of whose eyes eye-filth trickles, from whose ears ear-filth, from whose nostrils snot, from whose mouth food and bile and phlegm and blood, from whose lower outlets excrement and urine, and from whose ninety-nine thousand pores the broth of stale sweat seeps, with bluebottles and their like buzzing round it, which when untended with tooth sticks and mouth-washing and head-anointing and bathing and underclothing and dressing would, judged by the universal repulsiveness of the body, make even a king, if he wandered from village to village with his hair in its natural wild disorder, no different from a flower-scavenger or an outcaste or what you will. So there is no distinction between a king’s body and an outcaste’s in so far as its impure stinking nauseating repulsiveness is concerned.

If this is Buddhaghosa’s apology for Buddhism against the caste system of the Brahmanical religion (which is based on a complex structure of purity and pollution), in my opinion it fails dismally! What we read here is riddled with concern about the polluting effects of bodily secretions, and, in my view, it is nothing more than the Brahmanisation of Buddhist hermeneutics.

Further on in the same passage, we read the following:

So men delight in women and women in men without perceiving the true nature of [the body’s] characteristic foulness, masked by adventitious adornment. But in the ultimate sense there is no place here even the size of an atom fit to lust after.

Buddhism certainly teaches that lust, or desire in general, is misplaced. But not because the body is foul. It is misplaced because insight into the transient nature of all things brings the knowledge that what one is desiring is momentary, impermanent, and therefore unsatisfactory. Like the bhikkhus who committed suicide, Buddhaghosa appears to have missed this point altogether, even though it is implicit in the teaching given consequent to the
I return to the point made twice above that one can be aware of one's body and sensations without having any concomitant volition. It is fundamental to a bhikkhu's progress on the path to liberating insight that he achieves indifference, or detachment. It is nonsensical in a Buddhist context to cultivate antipathy, towards the body or anything else. Because of the presence in the canon of descriptions of asubha bhāvanā, it is sometimes argued that revulsion can be used as a meditational tool or catalyst for a bhikkhu. But we have seen above that the term asubha is used in contexts where the point is to understand impermanence, not that one should be disgusted: what the bhikkhu is aiming for is indifference. And any meditation on the bhikkhu's own feeling or mental state of disgust would be for the same purpose. Not only does this follow from the doctrinal teaching of freedom from all volitions, but it is explicitly stated in several places in the Sutta Pitaka. We read in the Digha Nikāya, for example, that a bhikkhu who "lives detached from sensual pleasures, detached from unwholesome conditions" experiences ease (sukha, the opposite of dukkha). In the Brāhmaṇa Sāmantutta in the Sāmantutta Nikāya, which redefines what a brahmin is, it states that a brahmin is one who has "cast out both wickedness and merit." In the third jhāna, a bhikkhu "pervades, drenches, permeates and suffuses his body with sukha without associating it with pleasure". Elsewhere we read that a bhikkhu is to reach a point where:

- his mind is immovable, his body is immovable, [he is] inwardly well established, well released. If he is aware with his mind of an attractive/a repulsive state, he is not affected (manku; literally, troubled).
- Finally, a later text, the Milindapañha, states that "arahants have neither attraction nor antipathy".

Having an attitude of disgust or revulsion towards anything would constitute a karmically unwholesome, and therefore binding, 'view', just as much as considering something to be beautiful and/or desirable; and the bhikkhu has to see through and transcend all views and attain a karmically neutral position. We have seen this point borne out in the canonical descriptions of meditation: there is nothing in them which is designed to induce any specific negative (or positive) attitude; merely a detached observation of what is. The question of gender is also relevant here. To have a positive or negative attitude towards the male or female would be just as much a karmically binding view; and the point is to be neutral. So one might say that doctrinally or philosophically there is no room for sexism in early Buddhism. The link between sexism and the attitude towards the human body is the subject of Wilson's paper "The Female Body as a Source of Horror and Insight in Post-Aśokan Buddhism". Wilson establishes and extensively discusses the antipathy towards the body in commentarial
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literature. She concentrates her study on the *Dhammapadattakathā*, but also draws widely on other commentaries and on Buddhist Sanskrit texts. She seeks to illustrate that the negativity is largely directed towards women’s bodies, representing the ultimate dis-enchantment for male bhikkhus. The examples she gives are certainly negative about the female body. But I am not convinced, as Wilson is, that such passages necessarily reflect misogyny on the part of the authors. Though institutionalised Buddhism, as part of Indian culture, was undoubtedly patriarchal, and though such patriarchy is not doctrinally defensible, the use of women’s bodies to illustrate impermanence might merely reflect the fact that the texts were mostly composed by and for men and that the sexual instinct is the most difficult desire to eradicate. In my opinion the most important point of Wilson’s paper is that the degree of negativity towards the body in later, non-canonical, literature has considerably increased. In concentrating on possible misogyny in the texts, however, Wilson misses the point that such negativity is non-doctrinal. It indicates a lack of understanding on the part of the authors of the later material that meditating on the body is for the purpose of understanding its impermanence. Through such understanding, a bhikkhu is able to be detached either from identifying with it or desiring it.

Because the cultivation of indifference, or detachment, is so central to understanding Buddhist teaching, in my opinion Buddhaghosa (and others writing in a similar tone) does a grave disservice to Buddhism in writing as he does about the body. He goes far beyond merely commenting on the canon, and his elaborate reinterpretations result in a teaching which bears little relation to that contained in the original material.

We have seen clearly that it is not from the body itself that the karmically binding passions and desires arise. We have seen too that the point of meditation exercises is to see the human being as it really is, and so to understand that there is nothing towards which any volition is justifiable: so one might say that there is nothing either desirable or repulsive about the body but thinking makes it so. All volition is due to ignorance concerning the fundamental impersonality of all phenomena, physical or mental. It is for this reason that the *paticcasamuppāda* formula, which the Buddha taught in order that others might understand how the human being continues to be reborn, while ultimately circular rather than linear, is described in canonical texts as beginning with ignorance. Put differently, volitions have mentality rather than corporeality as their constitutional source, and ignorance as their psychological source. According to the Pali canon there is little or no room in Buddhism for a negative attitude towards the body, and the negative terminology used by Buddhaghosa widely diverges from the original material. The earliest Buddhist attitude towards the body is neither positive nor negative: it is analytical.
I recognise that Buddhaghosa cannot single handedly have introduced the attitude recorded here and that there will have been (possibly many) others prior to him with a similar view. But it is he who has been of primary influence on the tradition as a whole, and such important figures attract the brunt of any subsequent criticism or disagreement. In spite of my criticism of and disagreement with him as stated in this chapter, I of course do not presume to suggest that his eminence as a Buddhist leader and thinker is in any way unjustified.

Dhammapada 148. This translation is used both by Müller in SBE Vol X, and by Radhakrishnan. For example, Sn 197, 205.

SN.199: Subhato nam maniññatë bële ariyajë purakkhatë.

6. AN.IV.386: Tato yan këti paggharëyya, asuci yëva paggharëyya, dugganëham yëva paggharëyya, jégucchayam yëva paggharëyya.

7. SN.III.7: Rûpe kho ñëuso chandarëganvinayakkhëyi satthë vedanëya satthëya samkhëresu evîññëne.

8. SN.III.27: Rûpasim (vedanëya/sathëya/samkhëresu/vîññàsasmin) chandarëgo tan peñihatha.


SBE Vol. X.

10. AN.III.415.

11. For example, at DN.II.308.

12. MN.I, sutta 10; DN.II. sutta 22; SN.V.141ff.

13. MN.I.55f, 63; DN.II.290, 315: Ekàyano ayam bhikkhave maggo sattananam visuddhiya sokaparidassanam samatikkamayë dukkhidomananassanam uthapammayë ñëyassa adhiyamayë nibbãnasassa sacchikirijëya; yadidam cattëro satîpattithëna.

14. SN.V.179: Cattëro me bhikkhave satîpattithëna bhàsitë bhulihkatë ekantaniibbidatë virågijëya niroddhëya upasamayë abhiññëya samabhodhiya nibbãnaså samvattantë.

15. SN.V.179: Yesanë kesañçi bhikkhave cattëro satîpattithëna viraddhë, viraddho tesanë ariya maggo sammãdukkhakkhyagamë. cf. also SN.V.182, 294. Gethin (1992, p.30f) discusses the term satîpattihëna, and how best to translate it, in great detail.

16. AN.I.43: Ekadhanno bhikkhave bhàsitë bhuhisakato mahato ... viyattimuttihalasacchikirijëya ... kàyagatë sati. cf. also Milindapâthaka 248, 336.

17. The commentaries state that ayyhatam means attano and bhikkhët means parissass (MA.I.249; DA.III.765).

18. MN.I.56; DN.II.290: idha bhikkhête bhikkhu kàye kàyanupatti viharati êciêhi sampojëne santimë vinayëko abhiññëhodhanassam.

19. MN.I.56; DN.II.292: ... assa sati poco-pcattëhi koti yëvad esa ñëcannamattëya patissattimattëya, anissito ca viharâti na ca këci lokë upâdiyati.


22. MN.I.59; DN.II.299.


24. MN.I.59; DN.II.299: Sa-uutaram ... anuttaram peñihntë, samãhïtan ... asamãhitam peñihnti, vimuttam ... avimuttam peñihntë.

25. MN.I.60; DN.II.300.


27. SN.I.111f: Cakkhùtë c' ñëuso pañca rûpe ca uppaïjati cakkhuvinirññam, tiyam saññati phasso, phasapaccayà vedanë, yam vedeti tan saññihnti ... .

28. As we have seen, there are what one might call the 'underlying' samkhïras, which function as the 'fuel' of continued existence in samsàra. What need not function in the example discussed here is the samkhïrakkhandha in the sense of conscious volitions.

29. This is related in the Ariyapariyesana Sutta, MN.I.160ff.

30. DN.II.142ff.

31. SN.II.94f.
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33. SN.I.131; MN.II.65; SN.I.131, III.120.
34. SN.I.131: "Iminā paññāyena bhūtaddhāna paññañgam ā ... ; Dhammapada 148: bhiyati pūnīsaneho.
35. SN.III.120: ... iminā paññāyena ... Tathā kim maññati Vakkali: rūpaṃ niccaṃ vā aniccāṃ vā ti? The use of rūpa and not kāya in the second part of this passage is not, in my opinion, significant: impermanence is, after all, an attribute of all aspects of rūpa, not just the body. Nor do I consider that the fact that the teaching given to Vakkali in this passage is usually considered to be ad hominem affects the point I am making here.
36. AN.IV.386.
37. By extension, the term kusala has the sense of 'skillful', referring to spiritually beneficial activities. This was extensively developed by Mahāyāna Buddhism where the frequently used expression 'skill in means' (Sanskrit: upāya kausālaya) refers to activities which are beneficial either to one's own spiritual progress or, in the case of a bodhisattva, in the assisting of others to salvation. This led to the suggestion by some Mahāyāna Buddhists that the Buddha's life as Gotama and his early teaching were but part of his upāya kausālaya to help all beings out of samsāra in a way they could understand at that time, the later form of them being superior or more complete.
38. Sn 240-1: Yad ahamāno sukataṃ sutthatham parehi dinnan paṇītaṃ paṇītam ... pariharājamanā ... na āmogandhiko mama kaṭṭhati ti. 'Tainted fare' is Norman's translation (The Group of Discourses, 1992, p.27).
41. Sn 249: Na maccamaṇṇam na dānasakattam na naggāyam mampiyen jāti jālam kharajināmi nāgghutattā upasasanā na yā yē vac āpi lokā marāri bahu tapā maratthi yāhāra-m-aśūpasevanā sodhenti maacāṇa. ... I have followed Norman's translation. I shall refer to his use of round brackets below.
42. Sn 250: Sotassu gutto viṣijandīriye ca dhamme bhūta ajñāsanīdattā rato sattato sabbadukkhaṁpattino na līpeti dittisāvatuṣu dhīro. I have followed Norman's translation except for relocating 'One should wander' at the beginning of the verse for easier reading.
43. AN.IV.386: Aniccañcchādana-paraśaddana-bhedanā-viddanānādhamma.
44. GS.IV.258.
45. I will discuss the term nibbidā below.
46. SN.V.320.
47. Vin.III.68;
49. Sn 249: Na maccamaṇṇam na dānasakattam na naggāyam mampiyen jāti jālam kharajināmi nāgghutattā upasasanā na yā yē vac āpi lokā marāri bahu tapā maratthi yāhāra-m-aśūpasevanā sodhenti maacāṇa. ... I have followed Norman's translation. I shall refer to his use of round brackets below.
50. Sn 250: Sotassu gutto viṣijandīriye ca dhamme bhūta ajñāsanīdattā rato sattato sabbadukkhaṁpattino na līpeti dittisāvatuṣu dhīro. I have followed Norman's translation except for relocating 'One should wander' at the beginning of the verse for easier reading.
51. AN.IV.386: Aniccañcchādana-paraśaddana-bhedanā-viddanānādhamma.
52. GS.IV.258.
53. I will discuss the term nibbidā below.
54. SN.V.320.
55. Vin.III.68;
56. SN.V.320: Tena kho paṇa samayena bhagavā bhikkhunāṁ anekaparipiyena aṣubhapakṣaṁ katheti. Aṣubha vannam bhāsati; aṣubhābhisamāya vannam bhāsati; adissa adissa aṣubhasamāpattiyā vannam bhāsati. Aṣubha can also be translated as 'what is not beautiful' (Woodward's translation of SN.V.88 uses 'unlovely': KS.V.284). This translation has the same implication of impermanence as 'impure' does.
57. Te anekākkāvikākan aṣubhabhisamānuyogam anuvuttī uharanti, te sokaṇa kāyaena aṭṭhanti jāreyanti jīvagachantī.
58. Vin.III.68: Seyyathāpī nāma iddhi vā puriso vā daheyo yuddā manḍana-kajjikātipi sīsam nhāto aṣubhapakṣena vā kikkurakkapattena vā manussakāpitena vā kāthe cāsattena aṭṭhassassā harajāya jīvagaccheyya.
59. Ēvaṃ eva te bhikkhū sokaṇa kāyaena aṭṭhanti harajāyantā jīvagacchāntī atitānaṁ jīvita vorepani aṭṭhamaṁjanīṇī ni jīvita vorepanī.
60. Vin.III.69;
61. SN.V.321.
63. Sathāhārāka: bringing a knife so that a bhikkha can kill himself.
64. Ibid.: Ye paṇa bhikkhū samadippakānaṁ jīvita vorepeyya sathāhārakānaṁ vāsasa pariyesaya, ayam pi pāraśa ha amasam iṣṭe.
65. SN.V.321: Saddhu bhante bhagaṇā aṇāṁ pariyyām acikkhatu tathā yathāyaṃ bhikkhuṁ asaṅghe aṇāyaṃ sattheheyya ti.
66. There are other accounts of bhikkhus committing suicide in the Sutta Piṭaka (for example at SN.I.120f, SN.III.129f), but they are not attributable to misunderstanding the nature of the body. The purpose of such passages, and the Vinaya passage discussed here, may have been primarily to indicate that one should not commit suicide. This does not, however, invalidate the point I have made.
I have followed Nanamoli’s translation, The Path of Purification (henceforth referred to as Path), p.269 of Vism, p.249f:

\[
\text{I have followed Nanamoli's translation, The Path of Purification (henceforth referred to as Path), p.269 of Vism, p.249f:}
\]

Vuttaṃ kētaṃ:

Duggandho asucikāya kunāpo ukkārap̄mo

niddho cakkhabhitve ṅa ṃi bhāhānānudāto

Allacammadpañicchāno navadōri mahaāvayo

Sace imassā kayassa anto bāliraco ṃayā

duṣṭānā nīna gehetāna kāke soke nisāraye ti.
The attitude towards the body


80. Damien Keown, in his article “Morality in the Visuddhimagga” (1983), states that Buddhaghosa’s treatment of Buddhist ethics in the Visuddhimagga is far more concerned with practices than with intentions. This would seem to support my point.


82. SN.I.182: Yo dha puṁśāna ca pāpaśā ca bāhūtā.

83. DN.I.75: Ecaṁ eva kho mahārājā bhikkhu imam eva kāyaṃ nippattiṃ kahama asaṃsatttho pariṣesanti pariṣiṇati pariṭṭhatthi.

84. SN.V.74: Tassa dhātu eva kāyo hoti thitam cittam ajjhattam susanāhitaṃ suvinuttam. Manasā kho pan’ eva dhammaṃ viṭṭhiya muṇḍpaṇi/amanāpāṇi na manuṣu hoti.

85. Miln 44: Naṭṭhi mahārājā arahato anunayo vā paṭīgho vā.


87. cf. AN.I.177, where dukkasamuddaya is explained according to the paṭicca-samuppāda formula, beginning with avijjā, rather than the more usual taṇhā.
I stated in the Introduction that three of the key doctrines taught by the Buddha, the four Noble Truths, the *paticcasamuppāda* formula and the *khandha* analysis, were all concerned with the human being and *samsāric* existence. This, I stated, suggested to me the importance the Buddha attaches to understanding the constitution of the human being and prompted the orientation of my research. I also referred in the Introduction to the fact that there is no suggestion in the *Sutta Piṭaka* that the Buddha had any concern with ontological matters; on the contrary, he dismisses all ontological questions as irrelevant and/or misleading. When applied to the human being, this means that in the early Pali material contained in the *Sutta Piṭaka* we do not find information concerning what we are comprised of, but only how we work. We have seen that the constitution of the human being is understood and taught by the Buddha in terms of processes and events. Here I wish to bring together these two points: the emphasis on the human being and the absence of concern with ontological matters.

First, I have considered in some detail several ambiguous passages which some scholars have interpreted as positing an idealistic ontology, in the perhaps somewhat limited sense that ‘everything is (merely) made of the mind’ (whatever that is). In each case I have suggested that the passages can be interpreted in another, non-idealistic (and, indeed, non-ontological) way, and that in my opinion this alternative interpretation is more likely to be correct. In introducing the Buddha’s lack of interest in ontological questions, I based my comments primarily on canonical passages which state that he refused to answer such questions. And I also stated that I did not want to counter one suggested ontology, usually the idealism as described, with another. But the further point I would like to make here is that any implicit ontology, if there is such a thing in the *Sutta Piṭaka*, needs to allow for the centrality of the human condition to the Buddha’s teachings. For the Buddha, the one basic truth is the reality of suffering. This, indeed, is the first Noble Truth, and is the *raison d’être* of the Eightfold Path to liberation. In idealistic systems suffering is sometimes said to be a delusion. There is no possibility that the Buddha’s teaching contained in the *Sutta Piṭaka* can be interpreted as saying that suffering is just a delusion. Though he never discusses whether the world is real, his concern to teach, and his emphasis on alleviating the human condition by offering release
from suffering, presuppose that there really are human beings who really can learn how to bring an end to samsāric existence. Though he is not interested in ontological questions, he most emphatically is a humanist.

Second, the centrality of the human being in the Buddha's teachings does not preclude the possibility that there are other sorts of beings existing in different sorts of ways, ways which are what we might call 'subtle', and certainly not obeying the laws of matter as they are conventionally understood. Of relevance here is the suggestion by Buddhist modernists that the Buddha anticipated modern physics, which explains that all matter is energy. In its emphasis on how things are rather than what things are the Buddha's teaching allows for beings to exist in an infinite number of ways in a manner not incompatible with this modern law of physics. To mix the terminologies of Buddhism and physics, such beings might be thought of as 'bundles of energies' (khandhas), manifesting at different degrees of density, brought together as conditioned by the power or fuel (energy) of volitions.

Third, and finally, I stated in the Introduction that one of the ways in which the Buddha's teaching diverged from that contained in the Upaniṣads is that he taught that the macrocosmic/microcosmic correspondence was not one of ontological identity but that all things are dependently originated. This book has perhaps shown how central this teaching is for an understanding of the constitution of the human being. I also referred to the fact that many scholars have approached the subject of the human being in early Buddhism by discussing the doctrine of anattā. We saw that this is often considered to be the central doctrine of early Buddhism and that it tends to be understood as a denial of any kind of soul or self. I would like to suggest here that the doctrine of anattā is not intended to be a denial of being as is implied in the English 'there is no self'. Rather, it is no different from the doctrine of patīccasamuppāda and is therefore simply intended to indicate how things are.

We have seen that everything within the cycle of samsāra is conditioned or constructed, samkhata. This is another way of expressing the doctrine of dependent origination: all things are dependently originated. From these two teachings, it follows that there is nothing in samsāric existence that is permanent. And it follows further from this that there is no independently existing or permanent entity which one might call a self or soul. Therefore, though the prime concern of these two teachings focusses on the way things exist rather than what exists, they might also be called a doctrine of anattā. Nirvana is also (implicitly) included in the doctrine of anattā: sabbe dhammā anattā is the last line in the tilakkhana formula. But the inclusion of Nirvana is also not intended literally as a denial of being. Rather, Nirvana is selfless both because it is the experience of ceasing to project the separateness of selfhood onto oneself and everything else and also in the sense that it is an epistemic experience. This means that thinking in terms of self or of there being no self is making a category mistake. None of the Buddha's
teachings is actually concerned with what is, or with what is not. The fundamental error is simply thinking in any such terms since they are all missing the point that the way things (really) exist does not correspond to the notion of separateness that is implicit in the confirmation and in the denial of selfhood. As the Buddha puts it: understanding dependent origination means one will no longer ask questions about individual (i.e. separate) existence in samsāra, past, future, or present, such as “Am I, or am I not? What am I? How am I? This ‘being’ that is ‘I’, where has it come from, where will it go?” Though the doctrine of anattā appears to convey an overriding concern to make ontological denials, I suggest that if one takes this term at face value it can act as something of a red herring in one’s attempt to understand the constitution of the human being.

Notes

1. See my paper “Anattā: A Different Approach” for an extensive discussion of this suggestion.
2. SN.II.27: ... aham nu kho smi, na nu kho smi; kim nu kho smi; katham nu kho smi; aham nu kho satto kuto âgato so kuññëgàmi bhavësivate it.
Primary Sources

I have used the Pali Text Society editions of all Pali texts and quote from them by permission of the Pali Text Society which owns the copyright to the works.


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Short Glossary

anattā  Selflessness. The Buddha taught that all things are dependently originated (see paññaticcasamuppāda): nothing occurs independently or separately, but, rather, all things occur because of/conditioned by other things. It is erroneous, then, to attribute separate, independent self-hood onto anything, either subjectively or objectively: this is not 'how things really are' (see yathābhūtām). Seeing 'things as they really are' (that is, that they are 'selfless' in this sense) constitutes the cessation of ignorance, or Enlightenment (q.ū.).

arahant  The term used to indicate an Enlightened person (literally: 'worthy one'). According to the early Buddhist texts, the experience of attaining Enlightenment (q.ū.) is the same for all people as it was for the Buddha.

ariyasāvaka  Literally 'disciple who is noble', this term refers to those who have made considerable progress on the spiritual path, hence they are also referred to as 'advanced disciples'.

āsavas  The āsavas are the fundamentally binding (to samsāra, q.ū.) aspects of what it means to be a human being, needing to be eradicated if one is to achieve Enlightenment (q.ū.). Three or four āsavas are referred to: all/any sensual desire(s), the desire for continued existence, ignorance, and (when four are mentioned) 'views'. Underpinning all of them is the basic error of separateness (see anattā, q.ū.): all desires presuppose a separate desirer; continued existence presupposes identity in terms of separateness; ignorance is the (normal samsāric) state of not seeing that things are really selfless, and therefore not separate; and 'views' are held by a 'separate' self about something perceived (erroneously) also to be separate (thus separateness is presupposed both subjectively and objectively). The āsavas are so deep seated in the human psyche that they are described as needing to be 'rooted out', which achievement is co-terminous with Enlightenment.

bhikkhu  A (male) member of a Buddhist monastic community. By extension, a disciple following the path taught by the Buddha. Members of female communities are called bhikkhuni. Males and females can experience Enlightenment (q.ū.).
**Identity and Experience**

**dhāmma**  Most commonly, this term is used to refer to the teachings of the Buddha as a whole: he taught 'the dhāmma'. It also means the Truth, in the sense that the Truth represents 'things as they really are' (see yathābhūtam), and what he taught was a means whereby one might experience that. Dhāmma is also used as a generic term to refer to all knowable things, and is a way of saying 'everything'.

**dukkha**  Often translated 'suffering', but 'unsatisfactoriness' less misleadingly conveys its meaning. It is the term that was used by the Buddha in the first Noble Truth (q.v.) to describe the principal characteristic of human existence in saṃsāra (q.v.). It relates to the impermanence (and hence ultimate unsatisfactoriness) of all things in saṃsāra. It can most accurately be understood if it is borne in mind that this is a truth statement, not a value judgement.

**Enlightenment**  On experiencing Nirvana (q.v.), one is Enlightened: one 'sees things as they really are' (see yathābhūtam), thus experiencing the cessation of ignorance. The word 'buddha' literally means awake, the analogy being that ignorance corresponds to sleep and Enlightenment/Nirvana corresponds to 'waking up' to 'how things really are'. In Buddhism, the (gradual) eradication of ignorance (one follows a progressive path over many lives) is referred to as acquiring 'insight'.

**jhāna**  Literally meditation. In Buddhism (and in other Indian religions), a common kind of meditation is said to be stratified into 'levels', meaning levels of experience and/or insight that are characterised in certain ways, and it is to such levels that jhāna refers. In the Pali texts, sometimes four and sometimes eight jhānas (levels of meditation) are referred to. When eight are referred to, these are usually sub-divided as to four rūpajjhānas and four arūpajjhānas. Rūpa and arūpa mean 'form' and 'formless' respectively. According to the Buddha, even experiencing the highest of such meditatinal levels does not in itself constitute insight into 'things as they really are' (see yathābhūtam/Nirvana). It is this insight that distinguishes Buddhist forms of meditation from others.

**karma**  Literally ‘action’, karma more specifically means (in Indian religions as a whole) that actions have consequences. The Buddha taught that the consequential aspect of any action (put into effect through thought, word or deed) lies in the intention behind it.

**lokuttara**  Literally ‘above the world’, this term refers both to those who have made spiritual progress beyond the merely mundane/ordinary level of the putthujjhāna (q.v.), and to anything associated with advanced (supramundane) stages of the path.
Nirvana  The goal to which human beings can aspire, according to the Buddha, is the cessation of the unsatisfactoriness (dukkha, q.v.) which characterises the human condition (samsāra, q.v.). The experience of such cessation (dukkhanirodha) is known as Nirvana. Nirvana literally means ‘blowing out’, and refers to the blowing out (cessation) of the fuel which causes the continuity of unsatisfactoriness. According to the second Noble Truth (q.v.), the fuel is craving or desire, often further subdivided into the three ‘fires’ (fuel) of greed, hatred (together the affective aspect of the fuel) and ignorance (the cognitive aspect of the fuel). After experiencing Nirvana, one will no longer be reborn in samsāra.

Noble Truths  In his ‘first sermon’, the Buddha taught four ‘Noble Truths’: that the human condition is characterised by unsatisfactoriness (dukkha, q.v.); that dukkha is caused by cravings; that there can be cessation of dukkha (dukkhanirodha, a synonym for Nirvana, q.v.); and a way to achieve such cessation (the Noble Eightfold Path).

paññāca samuppāda  Dependent origination. The Buddha taught that all things, of whatever nature (physical, mental, abstract, concrete, subjective or objective—all things), that are or can be experienced in samsāra (q.v.) are dependently originated. As such, nothing occurs independently or separately. It follows from this that the attribution of separate, independent self-hood to oneself or anyone or anything else is erroneous (see anattā).

puthūjana  By contrast with ariyasāvaka (q.v.), puthūjana refers to ‘ordinary’ or ‘ignorant’ (ordinarily ignorant) people who have not made progress on the spiritual path to insight.

samsāra  In Buddhism (and other Indian religions), all living beings are thought to experience a series of lives (reincarnation/rebirth). Samsāra, which literally means ‘going round’, is the term used to indicate this cyclic experience, and by extension is often used to refer to ‘life on earth’ or the human condition as a whole. (According to Buddhist/Indian cosmology, it is not limited to life on earth as such, and also applies to non-human living beings: rebirth can be at a variety of cosmological levels and in a variety of forms.) The experience of Nirvana (q.v.) means one will no longer be reborn, and is thus the ‘opposite’ of samsāra. Neither term should be understood spatially. They indicate different states of being: the former subject to rebirths, the latter not.

saṅgha  The Buddhist community. Sometimes the term refers to the community of all Buddhists, but more usually it refers specifically to the monastic community, the members of which are called bhikkhus (q.v.).
sukha  A synonym for Nirvana (q.v.), and the opposite of dukkha (q.v.). Literally, sukha means ‘bliss’ (contrasted with ‘suffering’/dukkha). It is not, however, an affective state of bliss (i.e. pleasure/happiness) but more profoundly refers to the cessation of the unsatisfactoriness which characterises the human condition. In particular, this refers to the ‘ease’ which corresponds to the absence of the ‘dis-ease’ of ignorance.

tathāgata  An epithet of the Buddha, and by extension a term for any Enlightened (q.v.) person. The term, virtually untranslatable, means something like ‘thus-gone’, referring to the absence/cessation of separate individuality experienced when one sees that ‘things as they really are’ (see yathābhūtam) are selfless (see anattā) in the sense of being not separately identifiable.

yathābhūtam  Literally ‘things as they are’, this important term refers to the Buddha’s teaching that the cessation of ignorance (the cognitive aspect of the ‘fuel’ which causes continued existence in samsāra (q.v.)) is ‘seeing things as they really are’. Such experience is the equivalent of Nirvana (q.v.). It follows that a key feature of human experience in samsāra is that one does not ‘see things as they really are’.
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“What are little boys made off?”, asks the nursery rhyme, and religious traditions ask the same question. Though the Buddha apparently denied that the human being contains something called a soul, what he meant by the denial, or by the word in his language which we translate “soul”, has rarely been scrutinised.

In ancient India the Buddha’s teaching was commonly summed up in a verse which says that he taught “the cause of things which arise from a cause, and their cessation too.” He explained life as a causal process which normally leads to suffering; salvation can only come from reversing that process.

The Buddhist texts assert that a human being – indeed, any being living in our world – has five constituents, one physical and four mental: feelings, apperceptions, volitions, consciousness. The word for these constituents is “bundles”, to show that they are plural. So it looks at first glance as if the Buddha was offering two analyses: the static, synchronic analysis of a person into “bundles”, and the dynamic, diachronic analysis into a causal chain of events.

Sue Hamilton began by asking the nursery rhyme question and analysed what the texts have to say about the “bundles”. She has found an exciting answer: they are bundles of experiences. On close scrutiny it turns out that the Buddha did not ask “What is a man?” but “How is man?”. For objects he substituted processes. And his analysis of the human condition was an integrated whole.

This book is a breakthrough in our understanding of the earliest Buddhism and offers a firm foundation for future research.

Richard Gombrich
Oxford, March 1995