The Five Aggregates
Understanding Theravāda Psychology and Soteriology

Mathieu Boisvert

EDSR
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Although most books are attributed to one single author, various individuals and many factors contribute to the development of any manuscript. As the theory of dependent origination suggests, there is no initial cause (or authorship), but merely a succession of inter-dependent events that are responsible for what comes into being. As an author, I am simply one of these necessary conditions, and I truly wish to express my gratitude to all those who have contributed directly or indirectly to my work.

More especially, I wish to thank my parents and my whole family who offered me the emotional and financial support needed to undergo all these years of study. Venerable Jāgara and S.N. Goenka also played a crucial role in providing the inspiration needed to pursue my objective. Richard Hayes' humble yet apposite comments proved to be pivotal in the elaboration of my argumentation, and in encouraging me to persevere. I am further indebted to A.K. Warder and Ravindra Panth, both of whom showed an extreme amount of patience in teaching me Pāli. My style and rhetoric have also been reviewed by a legion of editors, starting with Diana Allen, Raynal d Prévèreau, Stephen Jones, Philip Moscovitch and Lisa Kosuta. The writing of this book would not have been possible without the help of many other individuals (and circumstances), for which I am extremely grateful.

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In Buddhist philosophy, the theory of the five aggregates (pañcakkhandha) of realities, or real occurrences known as "principles" (dhamma), is the analysis of what elsewhere is often called the "problem" of matter and mind. In Buddhism, to separate these would be to produce a dilemma like the familiar one of "body" and "soul" (are they the same or different?). But the resolution is different. Whereas the "soul," according to Buddhism, is a non-entity and the problem therefore meaningless, consciousness is as real as matter. The tradition emphasizes that consciousness is inseparably linked to matter: there can be no consciousness without a body; although there could be a body without consciousness, it would not be sentient.

Matter and consciousness are two of the "aggregates"; the other three link them, or rather show them inseparably bound together in a living being. These are, to use Boisvert's translations, "sensation" (vedanā, variously translated as "experience," "feeling," etc.), "recognition" (saññā or "perception") and "karmic activities" (saṅkhāra, "forces," "volition," etc.). Sensation — being either pleasant, unpleasant or neutral — can occur only in a body which is conscious. Similarly, recognition occurs solely when consciousness is aware of sensations. The karmic activities, sometimes restricted to volition (cetanā), were gradually elaborated to include about fifty principles, from "contact" (phassa, the combination of a sense organ, its object and consciousness), energy and greed to understanding, benevolence, compassion and attention.

In what are supposed by many to be the earliest Buddhist texts, the five aggregates are taken for granted, as if pre-Buddhist thought generally accepted them. Boisvert argues that they are a theory intrinsic to Buddhism and extracts from the texts the passages needed to explain them and show that these five, in this order, are required to describe and understand the process of "transmigration" (or "rebirth"). The greater part of the book (chaps. 2 to 6) clarifies the nature of the individual aggregates. "Recognition" has usually been found the most obscure, to the point of elision in translation. But Boisvert shows that this aggregate is central to the transmigration process since it links desire (tanha, "craving") to sensation. Release (nibbāna) requires that recognition be replaced by understanding (paññā). The reactions of the
aggregates with the external world are clarified by their interaction with each other. The ultimate argument relates the aggregates to conditioned origination (*paṭiccasamuppāda*), the essentially Buddhist description of transmigration. Through this analysis the proper sequence of the aggregates is established.

Boisvert has been able to use *BUDSIR*—the Bangkok *Mahidol University Databank* of 1989—to search exhaustively for contexts in Pāli literature. It is to be hoped that he will search further and clarify more Buddhist terminology.

A.K. Warder  
Toronto
## Abbreviations

References to primary sources are given by the abbreviation of the source used, followed by a lower-case Roman numeral indicating the volume number and an Arabic number indicating the page. For example, a quotation from the third volume of the *Dīghanikāya*, p. 238 would be listed as D. iii, 238.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Source/Commentary</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A.</td>
<td>Aṅguttaranikāya</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AA.</td>
<td>Aṅguttaranikāya commentary (Manorathapūraṇī)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AbhS.</td>
<td>Abhidhammatasāṅgaha</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AbhA.</td>
<td>Commentary on the Abhidhamma excluding the <em>Dhammasaṅgāṇi</em> and the <em>Vibhaṅga</em> (Pañcappakarana-nathakathā)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AbhK.</td>
<td>Abhidharmakośa</td>
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<tr>
<td>It.</td>
<td>Itivuttaka</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ud.</td>
<td>Udāna</td>
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<td>Kvū.</td>
<td>Kathāvatthu</td>
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<tr>
<td>Th.</td>
<td>Therā-Therigathā</td>
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<tr>
<td>D.</td>
<td>Dīghanikāya</td>
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<tr>
<td>DA.</td>
<td>Dīghanikāya commentary (Sumanāgalavilāsinī)</td>
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<td>Dh.</td>
<td>Dhammapada</td>
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<td>DhA.</td>
<td>Dhammapada commentary</td>
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<td>Dhs.</td>
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<td>Dhammasaṅgāṇi commentary (Atthasālinī)</td>
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<td>Nid.</td>
<td>Niddesa (Mahā)</td>
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<td>PsA.</td>
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<td>M.</td>
<td>Majjhimanikāya</td>
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<td>MA.</td>
<td>Majjhimanikāya commentary (Papañcasūdanī)</td>
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<td>Mil.</td>
<td>Milindapaṇṇhapāli</td>
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<td>Ymk.</td>
<td>Yamaka</td>
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<td>Vin.</td>
<td>Vinayapticaka</td>
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<tr>
<td>Vbh.</td>
<td>Vibhaṅga</td>
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<tr>
<td>VbhA.</td>
<td>Vibhaṅga commentary (Sammohavinodani)</td>
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<td>Vsm.</td>
<td>Visuddhimagga</td>
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<td>Abbreviation</td>
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<td>S.</td>
<td><em>Samyuttanikāya</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>SA.</td>
<td><em>Samyuttanikāya</em> commentary (<em>Sarathappakāsinī</em>)</td>
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<td>Sn.</td>
<td><em>Suttanipāta</em></td>
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<td>SnA.</td>
<td><em>Suttanipāta</em> commentary</td>
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Introduction

The following study presents a detailed analysis of each of the five aggregates (pañcakkhandhā); its primary intention is to establish how the Theravāda tradition views their interaction. It therefore attempts to clarify the fundamentals of Buddhist psychology by analyzing one of the earliest classifications of the conditioned phenomena (saṅkhata-dhamma)—the five aggregates—investigating the role that these aggregates play in the cognitive process and explaining how they chain us to the wheel of misery. Once the individual meaning of each of the five aggregates is conceptualized, we try to understand the relation that exists between each of them. This explains the reason for the nomenclature of the five aggregates in the specific order found in canonical literature. Evidence against both Mrs. Rhys Davids' view that "the primary reason for the khandha-division was practical ... and not scientific"¹ and Th. Stcherbatsky's opinion that the order in which the aggregates appear is merely "a gradual progress from coarseness to subtleness"² is also presented. By demonstrating that the customary taxonomy hints at a psycho-physical process present in every individual, I have clarified the significance of the traditional order of the five aggregates, and this significance is far greater than Stcherbatsky suggested. By using computer technology,³ I feel that the results of this


3 By using a databank containing the whole Pāli canon [BUDSIR databank, designed by Mahidol University, Bangkok, 1989], I was able to make a thorough contextual analysis of the concept of pañcakkhandhā and of each of its members. This task was made possible by the Vipassanā Research Institute, Igatpuri, India, who allowed me to use their databank. Without this tool, I could have never accomplished what I had set out to do. Using "masks" [a "mask" is used in computerized searches to find variations on a word or string of characters; for example, searching for "*khandh*" will find "khandhā," "khandham", "pañcakkhandhā", "nīpakkhandhassa," etc.], I searched for every occurrence of the word khandha, standing on its own, in whatever declensions it appeared, or as a member of a compound—thus incorporating the more specific term of pañcakkhandhā. The same procedure was followed with each of the five aggregates. Whenever a reference was found, it was stored on disk with
research are exhaustive in the sense that they take into consideration the entire Pāli canon. These results not only explain the psycho-physical workings of the individual, but also shed light on the mental process which, according to the Pāli sutta (texts known as the discourses of the Buddha), constitutes the grounds of transmigration.

The aim of this study is not to discover what the Buddha actually said about the five aggregates, nor what his intended meaning was, for it is impossible to state with conviction that any particular texts were spoken by the Buddha himself. Although many scholars have attempted to offer a chronological classification of various canonical texts, a consensus has not been reached. For example, H. Saddhatissa claims that the Suttanipāta, a work mainly containing verses, “is one of the oldest collections of Buddhist discourses in the Pāli canon,” while A.K. Warder is of the view that prose texts of the Dīghanikāya “are more authentic in their preservation of the utterances and dialogues of the Buddha.” Moreover, it is very likely that advances in linguistics will raise questions about the originality of Pāli texts. A definitive statement as to the originality of Pāli canonical texts does not lie around the corner! My concern here is not so much with what the Buddha said, but rather with the position that the Theravāda tradition supports. This school, which has regulated the lives and beliefs of millions of people for over two millennia, has elaborated an intricate scholastic and commentarial tradition. Undoubtedly, there is a huge chronological and geographical gap between the time the Buddha uttered his discourses (the fifth and sixth centuries B.C.E., in North India), and when they were written down for the first time (most probably the first century B.C.E., in Sri Lanka). It is highly probable that either certain elements present in the “original” canon were “forgotten,” or that passages not

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uttered by the Buddha himself were “remembered.” Another seven centuries separate the actual writing down of the canon and the elaboration of most commentaries. Again, this gap offers more grounds for those arguing that the exegetical literature is not necessarily consistent with “original” Buddhism. Since “original” Buddhism is a tradition that we have not yet discovered, we cannot prove whether the exegetical literature is or is not consistent with the primeval tradition.

We can postulate, however, that since the commentarial tradition was incorporated within the Theravāda tradition itself, the latter must have insured that the former was consistent with every aspect of its own theory. The Pāli sutta, the abhidhamma (the scholastic literature), and Buddhaghosa’s commentaries have all been accepted as integral parts of the Theravāda tradition. Consequently, I have assumed that the Theravāda tradition itself must have assured the integrity of a text before accepting it. This study of the five aggregates will be based on the whole of the Pāli canonical literature, and will refer to the commentaries whenever certain canonical passages seem unclear. This book will therefore analyze the five aggregates within the Theravāda tradition as a whole.

According to Buddhist texts, the entire universe, including the individual, is made up of different phenomena (dhamma). Although all these phenomena are reduced to transitory entities by the theories of impermanence (anicca) and selflessness (anatta), Buddhism classifies them into different categories in order to explain the conventionally accepted concept of person. The three concepts of bases (āyatana), elements (dhātu), and aggregates (khandha) constitute different schemes for classifying the various phenomena. Although the aggregates are nothing but a “convenient fiction,”6 the Buddha nevertheless made frequent use of the aggregate scheme when asked to explain the

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6 In his Buddhist Dictionary, Nyānātiloka emphatically remarked that these five aggregates “merely form an abstract classification by the Buddha, but that they as such ... have no existence. [It is]. Due to a lack of understanding ... that the five Khandhas are often conceived as too compact, too substantial, so to speak, as more or less permanent entities, whereas in reality, as already stated, they as such, never exist; and even their representatives have only an evanescent existence” (Nyānātiloka, Buddhist Dictionary [Colombo: Frewin, 1956] p. 77). These five aggregates are therefore classified under the heading of conventional truth (sammutisacca or vohārasacca) as opposed to “truth in the highest sense” (paramatthasacca) to which the theory of dependent origination (paṭiccasamuppāda) belongs. The Milindapañha clarifies the distinction between these two levels of truth (Mil. 160).
The Five Aggregates

elements at work in the individual. According to this scheme, what we conventionally call a “person” can be understood in terms of five aggregates, the sum of which must not be mistaken for a permanent entity since beings are nothing but an amalgam of ever-changing phenomena. According to the Theravāda sutta literature, the human personality is composed solely of the five aggregates, and to perceive any of these as the self leads to a particular kind of wrong view known as “the view that the body is existing [permanently]” (sakkāyadiṭṭhi). If the entire personality is confined within these five aggregates, the Buddhist theory of perception—and of “misperception” as well—should become clear through an understanding of their interrelation.

The five aggregates are variously translated as matter or form (rūpa); sensation, emotion or feeling (vedanā); recognition or perception (saññā); karmic activity, formation, or force (saṅkhāra); and consciousness (vinnaṇa). Nevertheless, I believe that to rely solely on these standard translations is ultimately misleading, primarily because the concepts that some of these terms represent are heavily loaded with connotations inapplicable to the textual context in which the actual Buddhist aggregates were initially defined. For example, the term vedanā can be restricted neither to physical sensations nor to mental emotions or feelings, since the Pāli tradition itself informs us that vedanā can arise both on the body and in the mind. Moreover, the Sāhyuttanikāya states that one should “dwell observing the impermanence of pleasant sensations on the body,” thus implying that the term vedanā refers not only to an emotional “feeling,” as Mrs. Rhys Davids has put forward, but also to a physical sensation occurring on the body. However, other passages such as “all mental objects culminate (flow) into vedanā” stress the fact that vedanā is not a mere physical element, since it is influenced by mental contents. Yet

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7 M. i, 229
8 M. i, 130, also M. i, 140-41 and A. ii, 128.
9 As we will see in Chapter 3, the Sāhyuttanikāya presents a fivefold classification of the concept of vedanā, where the first two divisions (suṣkhandriyā and dukkhandriyā) refer to pleasant and unpleasant physical vedanā, the third and fourth (somanassindriyā and domanassindriyā) are pleasant and unpleasant mental vedanā, and finally, the fifth (upekkhandriyā) consists of neither pleasant nor unpleasant physical and mental vedanā (S. v, 210).
10 So kāye ca sukhāya ca vedanāya aniccānupassī viharati (S. iv, 211).
11 Vedānāsamosaranā sabbe dhammā (A. iv, 339).
most scholars adopt a certain translation for *vedanā* without first clarifying this nuance, thus leading the reader to think that *vedanā* is solely either physical or mental.

This confusion may be partially due to the fact that Sanskrit and Pāli sources, in most instances, fail to provide descriptive definitions of the five aggregates, let alone any treatment of their interrelationship. It is essential, therefore, to establish the deeper meaning of each of these elements, and then to explain their complex interaction. Since the Pāli literature illustrates these concepts with words of the same etymology, determining their meaning is more difficult than if they were paraphrased. For example, the *Majjhimanikāya* explains the meaning of *vedanā* thus: "it is called 'sensation' because it 'senses.'"¹² This problem is solved by discerning a definition of each aggregate through a systematic contextual analysis of every reference found in the Theravāda canon. By amalgamating all the passages where each of the aggregates is mentioned, I clarify their meanings and their implications to Buddhist doctrine.

Another problem arising from the study of the aggregate theory is whether the order of their nomenclature is purely random or has a certain significance. The fact that the five aggregates are always presented in the same order throughout Pāli literature does not necessarily imply that anything significant can be deduced from this very order. The Pāli canon was not written down until three or four centuries after the death of the Buddha and certain mnemonic devices had to be elaborated to facilitate its memorization. The sequence, then, may have become standard primarily as a pedagogical means to ease memorization. As noted above, Rhys Davids and Stcherbatsky wondered why this particular order was chosen rather than another, and they each put forward a different explanation. Rhys Davids suggested that the order of the aggregates was purely practical and not scientific; but she did not elaborate on what she meant by "practical." Stcherbatsky, on the other hand, hypothesized that the order reflects a gradual process from coarseness to subtlety. While it is true that the order, starting with "matter" and ending with "consciousness," seems to reflect this gradual process, we will see that the "material" aggregate possesses elements which stand on the same level of subtlety as the "consciousness"

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¹² *Vedeti vedetitiko avuso, lasmā vedanā āvuccaiti* (M. i, 293).
aggregate.\(^{13}\) My intention, however, is not to refute Stcherbatsky’s argument, but to show that the reason for the particular order of the aggregates is grounded in something much more important than this “gradual process.” In fact, I show that there was an underlying reason for choosing this particular order: the nomenclature of these five aggregates had to be in total accord with the theory of dependent origination (\textit{paticcasamuppāda}; literally “arising on the ground of a preceding cause”). Although the theory of dependent origination is traditionally approached as the highest truth, and the five aggregates as conventional truth, I present evidence that these levels of truth are not merely juxtaposable, but represent different expressions of the same process.

The \textit{paticcasamuppāda} could very well be considered the common denominator of all the Buddhist traditions throughout the world, whether Theravāda, Mahāyāna or Vajrayāna. The canonical texts of the Theravāda tradition portray Bhikkhu Sāriputta as saying that “whoever understands the \textit{paticcasamuppāda} understands the teaching of the Buddha, and whoever understands the teaching of the Buddha understands the \textit{paticcasamuppāda}.”\(^{14}\) In the Vajrayāna tradition, a similar view is expressed by the present Dalai Lama who states that the fundamental precept of Buddhism is this law of dependent origination.\(^{15}\) Regardless of the tradition, we can clearly see the importance attributed to this theory. The \textit{paticcasamuppāda} seems to constitute a fundamental tenet of Buddhism, indispensable for realizing and understanding the implications of Buddhist philosophy.

The theory of dependent origination is usually divided into twelve links (\textit{nidāna}), each of which conditions the following one. The order presented below, where one link conditions the next (for example: “on account of ignorance, karmic activities arise”: \textit{avijjāpaccayā saṅkhārā}), is traditionally referred to as the “normal” order.

\(^{13}\) Such elements are included in the list of secondary material elements (\textit{upādārūpa}) on p. 39.

\(^{14}\) After this statement, an implicit correlation between the \textit{paticcasamuppāda} and the five aggregates is established: \textit{Yo paticcasamuppādaṁ passati so dhammaṁ passati, yo dhammaṁ passati so paticcasamuppādaṁ passatī}. \textit{Paticcasamuppānā kho paṁ ime yadidaṁ paṅcupādānakkhandhā.} “In fact, the five clinging-aggregates are dependently-arisen” (M. i, 190-91).

The *paṭiccasamuppāda* is also often presented in reverse order (*paṭiloma*), which simply indicates that if one link is eradicated, the next is also eradicated.

**Table 1**

**The Twelve Links of the Chain of Dependent Origination**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1.</th>
<th>Ignorance</th>
<th><em>(avijjā)</em></th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Karmic activities</td>
<td><em>(sankhāra)</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Consciousness</td>
<td><em>(viññāna)</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Mind and matter</td>
<td><em>(nāmarūpa)</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>Six sense-doors</td>
<td><em>(saḷāyatanā)</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>Contact</td>
<td><em>(phassa)</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>Sensation</td>
<td><em>(vedanā)</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.</td>
<td>Craving</td>
<td><em>(tān̄hā)</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.</td>
<td>Clinging</td>
<td><em>(upādāna)</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.</td>
<td>Becoming</td>
<td><em>(bhava)</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11.</td>
<td>Birth</td>
<td><em>(jātī)</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12.</td>
<td>Old age, death, ...</td>
<td><em>(jaramaraṇa, ... )</em></td>
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</table>

The chain of dependent origination is often approached as a causal theory. We usually speak of causality when we say "there being this, there appears that." Yet we have to stress that a substantial cause from which the effect was generated cannot be deduced from the *paṭiccasamuppāda*. As Stcherbatsky remarked:

In this sense the logical law of Causation is the reverse of the real law of Causation. A cause is not a reason. The cause is not a sufficient reason for predicating (or predicting) the effect. But the effect is a sufficient reason for affirming apodictically the preceding existence of its cause.

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16 Literally [combing] "in the direction of the hair."

17 The usual wording of this reverse order would run thus: "From the thorough eradication of ignorance, karmic activities are eradicated." *Avijjāya tveva asesavirāganiruddhā sankhāranirodho.*

Each of the links of the chain of dependent origination is, therefore, necessary for the emergence of the next element; yet none can definitely be perceived as a cause sufficient to engender the following link.

Since this complex chain of causation is always said to give rise to suffering, the deactivation of any of the twelve links is bound to break the causal process and to eliminate suffering. According to the Pāli canon, both the chain of dependent origination and the five aggregates are responsible for suffering (dukkha). The Buddha stated repeatedly that the root of all suffering lies in the five clinging-aggregates, which represent the psycho-physical constituents of the individual. This is further evidenced by the Mahāvagga of the Aṅguttara-nikāya, where an intimate relation between the five aggregates and the theory of dependent origination is established. In this specific discourse, a description of the four noble truths is offered in terms of the paṭiccasamuppāda. Therein, the first noble truth follows the standard canonical rendering and ends with the following phrase: “in short, the five clinging-aggregates are suffering.” Yet the description of the two following truths does not comply with the paradigmatic rendition. Instead, they are depicted in terms of the theory of dependent origination. The noble truth concerned with the arising of suffering is simply explained by the paṭiccasamuppāda in normal order, while the noble truth of cessation of suffering is defined by the paṭiccasamuppāda in reverse order. It is clear, then, that the paṭiccasamuppāda, traditionally seen as an explanation for the arising and the eradication of suffering, is intimately related to the theory of the five aggregates.

The paṭiccasamuppāda is a theory that establishes the connectedness of all the phenomena. Since it deals with all the phenomena of existence, it becomes evident that the different schemes

19 “This [the paṭiccasamuppāda] is the origin of the entire mass of suffering.” Evam etassa kevalassa dukkhakkhandhassa samudayo hoti.

20 The “clinging-aggregates” (upādānakkhandhā) are basically the same as the “five aggregates” except that the former are responsible for binding the individual to the cycle of birth, death and rebirth (samsāra). I shed more light on the nuances between the two concepts on p. 20 and following.

21 A. i, 176-77.


23 ... sankhittena pañc’upādānakkhandhā dukkhā (A. i, 177).
used to classify them can be traced within the \textit{paticcasamupp\text{"a}da} itself. The five aggregates are merely a classification of the various phenomena of existence, and this taxonomy ought to be applicable to the \textit{paticcasamupp\text{"a}da} as well. I therefore offer evidence supporting the correlation between the five aggregates and the links of the chain of dependent origination; the establishment of such a relationship will clarify the meaningfulness of the traditional nomenclature of the five aggregates.

The Therav\text{"a}da tradition holds that certain links of the chain of causation are limited either to the past, present or future. In other words, as exemplified in Table 2, different links constitute different temporal divisions\textsuperscript{24} Although this chronological division is not expressed explicitly in the P\text{"a}li canonical literature itself, it is supported by Anuruddha\textsuperscript{25} and is taken for granted by the tradition\textsuperscript{26}. What is unclear, however, is the reason for clear delineation and theoretical distinction among these three divisions. Since the past is nothing but the aging of the present, and the present the actualization of the future, each temporal division has to be seen as the paraphrasing of, or a different perspective on, the two other divisions. Furthermore, \textquoteleft{}Le tableau dressé ici se refère à un groupe de trois existences découpé [sic] artificiellement dans la suite infinie des existences s'intégrant dans un \textit{Sams\text{"a}ra} qui n'a pas eu de commencement\textquoteright{}\textsuperscript{27} Since these divisions are merely arbitrary, the links of the \textit{paticcasamupp\text{"a}da} that were classified under a certain time period could have been easily classified under another. What comes under \textquoteleft{}past\textquoteright{} could have been under \textquoteleft{}future\textquoteright{} or \textquoteleft{}present\textquoteright{}, and vice versa. Therefore, it becomes evident that elements belonging to a specific time period represent a process similar to the one reflected by the elements

\textsuperscript{24} Tattha tayo addhā ... Katham? Avijjā saṅkhārā aṭṭo addhā jāti-jarā-maraṇam anāgato addhā majjhe aṭṭha paccuppanno addhā ti tayo addhā. Anuruddha, \textit{Abhidhammatthasaṅgaha} (J.P.T.S., 1884, 1-46), p. 36. \textquoteleft{}There are three periods. Ignorance and karmic activities belong to the past; birth, old-age and death belong to the future and the middle eight [links] belong to the present.\textquoteright{}

\textsuperscript{25} As Mrs. Rhys Davids pointed out in her revised edition of Shwe Zan Aung's translation of the \textit{Abhidhammatthasaṅgaha} (Shwe Zan Aung, trans., \textit{Compendium of Philosophy: Abhidhammatthasaṅgaha} [London: P.T.S., 1967], p. 189, n. 4).

\textsuperscript{26} See Nyānatiloka, \textit{Buddhist Dictionary}, p. 120.

\textsuperscript{27} Étienne Lamotte, \textit{Histoire du bouddhisme indien: des origines à l'ère Śaka} (Louvain: Institut Orientaliste, 1967), p. 43.
belonging to another. Ignorance and karmic activities operate on the same principles as birth and old age and death, and as the eight middle links. The physical and psychological elements at work in the individual remain the same whether in the past, present or future. Stated differently, the theory of dependent origination could run thus: within one lifespan (links 11-12; birth and old age and death), one keeps generating karmic activities (link 2) because of ignorance (link 1), and this generation of karmic activities due to ignorance is more easily understandable by examining the process described by the eight middle links.

Table 2
The Three Temporal Divisions of the *Paṭiccasamuppāda*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Past</th>
<th>Present</th>
<th>Future</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. <em>Avijjā</em> (Ignorance)</td>
<td>7. <em>Vedanā</em> (Sensation)</td>
<td>11. <em>Jāti</em> (Birth; Rebirth)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. <em>Viññāṇa</em> (Consciousness)</td>
<td>9. <em>Upādāna</em> (Clinging)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. <em>Saḷāyatanā</em> (Six sense-doors)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. <em>Phassa</em> (Contact)</td>
<td></td>
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</table>

Equally striking is that the division of the chain of causation into three time periods implies the presence of the five aggregates in each of these periods, for individuals (themselves composed of the five aggregates) must experience this process within each of the periods.²⁸

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²⁸ This perspective was already put forward by Vasubandhu in his *Abhidharmakosā*: *Ye eśa skandhasantāno janmatrayāvastha upadīṣ tāḥ | sa pratityasamutpādo dvādaśāṅgas trikāṇḍakah | pūrvāparāntayor dvē dve madhye 'ṣṭau paripūrṇah ||* (AbhK. iii, 20). Louis de La Vallée Poussin has translated this passage as follows: "Cette série de
Although the interrelation between the temporal divisions and the working of the aggregates within each of the divisions could be demonstrated, my research has focused on the middle division (i.e., links three to ten), for it is the most detailed temporal division and the one wherein the process is most readily observable. Through this study, I am able to clearly establish the correlation between Buddhist soteriology and psychology, depicted respectively by the *paticcasamuppāda* and the five aggregates. By correlating some of the links of the chain of dependent origination with the five aggregates, it becomes clear that these links share the same order as the traditional nomenclature of the five aggregates, and that the latter fulfill the same function as the links of the *paticcasamuppāda*.

No attempt has ever been made before to explicitly connect both doctrines, and to state which links of the theory of dependent origination refer to which particular aggregate. In fact, scholarly research on the five aggregates in general is almost nonexistent. Although many works have been published on Buddhist psychology, very few deal with the Theravāda tradition. While the mental process, in terms of the five aggregates, is a key aspect of Buddhism, it has never been thoroughly analyzed, nor been given more than the slightest academic attention. Most works on Buddhism enumerate the five aggregates and only offer a short description for each of them. David Kalupahana only devotes four continuous pages to the discussion of the five aggregates in his treatise entitled *The Principles of Buddhist Psychology*. Etienne Lamotte (*Histoire du bouddhisme indien*), A.K. Warder (*Indian Buddhism*), Steven Collins (*Selfless Persons*) and E.R.
Sarathchandra (Buddhist Theory of Perception) only mention them in passing. For example, Lamotte only explains succinctly the transitory and selfless character of these five aggregates without even trying to explain the role they fulfill.\textsuperscript{30} The most extensive studies on the five aggregates so far are those of Bhikkhu Bodhi,\textsuperscript{31} Jui-Liang Chang\textsuperscript{32} and Rupert M. Gethin.\textsuperscript{33} However none of these articles contains a rigorous examination of the nature and interrelation of each of the aggregates. Most of Gethin's and Bodhi's articles are devoted to the relation between the aggregates and the four noble truths and the difference between \textit{khandha} and \textit{upadh\=anakkhandha}, whereas Jui-Liang Chang is primarily concerned with correlating the concepts of \textit{khandha}, bases (\textit{\=ayatana}) and elements (\textit{\=dh\=atu}). This absence constitutes a gaping hole in the field of Buddhist studies, for although the five aggregates are seen as responsible for the arising of suffering, no academic research has established how the function of each of these aggregates chains beings to the cycle of birth, death and rebirth. I am convinced that without a thorough understanding of the five aggregates, we cannot grasp the liberation process at work within the individual, who is, after all, nothing but an amalgam of the five aggregates.

The first step, before proceeding to establish the function of each of the five aggregates, is to clarify what is meant by the P\=ali concept of \textit{khandha} and to describe the connotations of this concept at the time of the Buddha. The first chapter therefore focusses on explaining the concept of \textit{khandha} itself and on contextualizing this conception within the wider Indian and Buddhist frameworks. It also clarifies the distinction between the "five clinging-aggregates" (\textit{pa\=ncup\=ad\=anakkhandh\=a}) and the "bare" five aggregates (\textit{pa\=nicakkhandh\=a}). The five following chapters discuss each of the aggregates and hint at the place they could occupy among the eight middle links of the \textit{pa\=ticca-samupp\=\=ada}. I follow the traditional order of nomenclature, starting with matter (\textit{rupa}) and ending with consciousness (\textit{vi\=\=n\=\=\=\=n\=\=a\=\=\=\=n\=\=a}), for my intention is also to show that this particular order reflects the eight middle links

\textsuperscript{32} "An Analytic Study on Three Concepts of 'Skandha,' 'Ayatana' and 'Dh\=atu'" [Chinese: Che hs\=eueh lun p\=y\=jing] (\textit{Philosophical Review} 8 [January 1975]: 107-21).
\textsuperscript{33} "The Five Khandhas: Their Treatment [sic] in the Nik\=\=aya\=\=s and Early Abhidhamma," \textit{Journal of Indian Philosophy} 52 (1986): 35-53.
of the \textit{pāṭiccasamuppāda}. In order to arrive at a clear and precise definition of each of the aggregates in these five chapters, I will first analyze the etymology of the terms and study the canonical references that shed light on their function. The seventh chapter is threefold. It first establishes a correlation between the five aggregates and the \textit{pāṭiccasamuppāda}. This correlation is then used as an argument to contest the theory that the traditional nomenclature of the five aggregates is purely random. The implication of these findings is finally briefly analyzed in light of the process involved in traditional Theravāda meditation (\textit{vipassanā}).
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Chapter 1

The Concept of Khandha

Buddhism differs from other religions in that no room is allotted for an ultimate reality corresponding to the concept of “self.” Most Buddhist traditions view the entire universe (and the individual as well) as composed of different, irreducible phenomena (dhamma). Although these phenomena serve as a common denominator for different Buddhist doctrines, their number and classification vary from one school to another. Nevertheless, most schools have elaborated numerous approaches for the purpose of analyzing reality. One of these consists of the division of these elements into two categories: conditioned (saṅkhata) and unconditioned (asaṅkhata). The larger conditioned category refers to all conditioned (that is, having a beginning and an end) phenomena of existence. The Aṅguttaranikāya describes the conditioned phenomena as possessing three characteristics: arising, passing away, and impermanence;¹ while the unconditioned phenomena are referred to as causeless²—this being defined as nibbāna.³ The Theravādins and the Sarvāstivādins differ as to the constituents of the unconditioned-group; the former allows only nibbāna in this category,⁴ while the latter considers space (ākāśa) and two kinds of nibbāna (pratisaṅkhyañānirodha and apratisaṅkhyañānirodha)⁵ as unoriginated principles. The phenomena in the major group, generally known as the conditioned-group, are responsible for elation and depression⁶ because they inherently lead to an inaccurate perception of reality. This group

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1 A. i, 152.
2 Kātame dhammā asaṅkhata? Yo eva so dhammo appaccayo—so eva so dhammo asaṅkhato (Dhs. 193).
3 Kātame dhammā asaṅkhata? Nibbānaṁ—ime dhammā asaṅkhata (Dhs. 244).
4 Lamotte, Histoire du bouddhisme indien, p. 675.
5 This first type of nibbāna refers to the eradication through wisdom of already existing defilements, while the second type refers to the obstruction through meditation (dhyāna) of any future defilements.
6 M. iii, 299.
is further classified into five aggregates: ruṣaṇa (matter), vedanā (sensation), sañña (recognition), saṅkhāra (karmic activities) and viññāṇā (consciousness)—which alone stand as the constituents of the individual.

**Etymology of the Term Khandha**

The term khandha (or its Sanskrit equivalent, skandha) was already used in pre-Buddhist and pre-Upaniṣadic literature. One of the oldest Indian treatises on semantics and etymology, the Nirukta, holds that the general meaning of skandha in the Veda is restricted to “the branches of a tree” since they “are attached to the tree.” It is interesting to note that the word “trunk,” which stands for the union of all the branches of the tree, is one of the connotations of the Pāli term khandha as well. The author of the Nirukta also alludes to a secondary meaning, viz. “shoulder,” which is derived from the same root (skandh = “to be attached”), and is used in this peculiar sense because the shoulder “is attached to the body.” We find a similar usage in the Pāli canon: the Sānuyutaniśāya and the Visuddhimagga use the word khandha to designate shoulder. Some later pre-Buddhist texts, such as the Chāndogya Upaniṣad, use the word skandha in the sense of “branches” referring to the three branches of duty: trayo dharmaskandhāḥ yajñāḥ.
adhyayanam dānam. In contrast, the Maitri Upaniṣad uses the term skandha in the sense of a “mass” of smoke. A similar usage of the word is found in the Pāli canon: the sutta also use the word khandha to refer to a “mass” of fire and of water (aggikkhandha and udakakkhandha). This usage is widespread in Pāli literature, for we find constant references to the “mass of suffering” (dukkhakkhandha).

The word khandha is also used in Theravāda literature to refer to the concept of “division,” in the sense of a variety of constituent groups. The Dīghanikāya, for example, alludes to four khandha: morality (sīla), concentration (samādhi), wisdom (paññā) and release (vimutti). The same source mentions another association of three khandha which corresponds to the previous grouping less release.

In both pre-Buddhist and Buddhist literature, the number of meanings associated with the term khandha is striking. However, the most important usage of the term in Pāli canonical literature is in the sense of the pañcakkhandha, “the five aggregates.” The importance of this meaning is evidenced by the fact that Nyānātiloka’s Buddhist Dictionary provides only the definition referring to the five aggregates. It also must be stressed that this particular definition of the term is non-existent in currently available pre-Buddhist literature, whether Upaniṣadic or Vedic.

The Five Aggregates and the Dhammacakkappavattanasutta

The number of appearances of the term pañcakkhandha in the sutta and the fact that the five aggregates are discussed in the first discourse of
the Buddha—the *Dhammacakkappavattanasutta*—would indicate their intrinsic Buddhist character. A careful reading of the Buddha's first discourse, however, casts some doubt on this assumption. Before preaching his first sermon, the Buddha's doctrine was unfathomable to people of that day and age. Yet he only briefly referred to the *pañca-kkhandhā* in that discourse. This implies that their intricate connotations were already understood by those to whom the discourse was addressed. For example, in summarizing the various reasons for unhappiness, the Buddha concluded "in brief, the five clinging-aggregates lead to suffering," without elaborating on the term *pañcupādānakkhandhā* any further. Neither of the two texts that contain commentaries on the *Dhammacakkappavattanasutta*, the *Saraththappakāsīni* or the *Samanthapassādika*, shed light on this matter. Therefore, the term *pañcupādānakkhandhā* (basically endowed with the same connotation as *pañcakkhandhā* as we will soon see) seems to have been a term in current use.

The absence of a definition of the Buddhist sense of the word *khandha* in pre-Buddhist literature leads us to three possible hypotheses: (1) the term existed then but was not recorded in the pre-Buddhist philosophical treatises available to us (or might have been incorporated in some of the Ājivaka speculative works, sources which have not yet been discovered, if they exist); (2) the word *khandha* might have been a philosophical innovation introduced by the Buddha but, for literary reasons, the compilers of the Pāli canon decided not to include the detailed explanation of the term in the *Dhammacakkappavattanasutta* even though the Buddha might have explained it then; or (3) the *Dhammacakkappavattanasutta* was not composed at the beginning of the Buddha's ministry, but later in his career (or even after his death) when the Buddhist meaning of the term *pañcakkhandhā* had been established and was familiar to those within the tradition. The hypothesis that a well-developed doctrine was projected back into an earlier time to gain special authority is quite popular among Western scholars. It is also possible, however, that the abundant references to the term found in later discourses might have prompted the compilers to suppress its explanation here, so as to shape the first discourse of the Buddha into a concise and thorough summary of the entire doctrine.

Initially, the first hypothesis seems the most plausible, since a forerunner of the Buddhist *khandha* is found in early *Brāhmaṇa* and

19 *Sākhittena pañcupādānakkhandhā dukkha* (S. v, 421).
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Upaniṣad, where five factors also compose the major divisions of the individual. The Taṭṭṭīrīya Upaniṣad elaborates a division of the individual (purusāḥ) into five different selves (ātmā)—the self made of food (annarasamayaḥ), the self made of organic activities (ātmāprāṇamayaḥ), the self made of the mind (ātmāmanomayaḥ), the self made of cognition (ātmāvijñānamayaḥ), and the self made of bliss (ātmānandamayaḥ)—all of which are relatively similar to the five Pāli khandha. The rūpakkhandha could correspond to the “self made of food” since the Dīghanikāyā describes rūpa as “being made of the four great elements which consist of gross food.” The saṃskṛtakhandha and the viññānakkhandha could respectively be associated with the self made of mind and the self made of consciousness. The saṃkhyārakkhandha, as K. N. Jayatilaka has pointed out, could also be related to the self made of organic activities since the saṃkhyārakkhandha is described in the Majjhimanikāyā as including the “in and out breathing,” while the self made of organic activities resembles the Upaniṣadic meaning of prāṇa, the vital breath. Only vedanākhandha and the self made of bliss seem not to correspond. As with the Buddhist pāñca-khandhā, these five Upaniṣadic factors are united only during one’s lifespan; at the moment of death, they separate. Stressing the similarity between the Buddhist and Upaniṣadic interpretation of the components of the individual, Stcherbatsky said,

This difference [between the Buddhist and Upaniṣadic aggregates] bears witness of the enormous progress achieved by Indian philosophy during the time between the primitive Upaniṣads and the rise of Buddhism. In the Buddhist system we have a division of mental faculties into feeling [vedana], concept [saṃjñā], will [saṃkhyā] and pure sensation [viññāna], in which modern

21 Tiṭṭṭh’ atevisyam Potṭṭhapāḍa olārik asattā rūpi cātummaḥbhūti ko kabaliṅkāraḥhārabhakkho (D. i, 186).
23 Assasapassāsā ... kāyasankhāro (M. i, 301).
psychology would not have much to change. In the Upaniṣads it is a very primitive attempt, giving breath, speech, sense of vision, sense of audition and intellect as elements. But one point of similarity remains: the last, and evidently, the most important element is in both cases manas. The macrocosm, or the Universal Soul, is likewise analyzed by the Upaniṣads into five component elements. In the number of the Buddhist skandha and in the position of manas (= vijñāna) among them we probably have the survival of an old tradition.²⁶

As Stcherbatsky suggested, the term pañcakkhandha might have been either a synonym for, or a popular term referring to, these five brähmanic factors. Yet the context in which pañcakkhandha is used in the Dhammacakkappavattanasutta implies connotations such as impermanence and no-self, both of which are incongruent with the brähmanic tradition. If the concept of khandha had been one referring to the earlier brähmanic division of the personality, the Buddha would not have attached so much importance to the difference in meaning implied by his own use of the term. This leads us to consider the second and third hypotheses as more probable—namely, that the Buddhist meaning attributed to khandha represented an innovation in Indian philosophy. It is impossible, however, to ascertain whether the Dhammacakkappavattanasutta originally included a detailed discussion on the pañcakkhandha, subsequently suppressed for literary reasons, or whether the concept of pañcakkhandha was later included in the first discourse of the Buddha. But we do have sufficient grounds to assert that the term pañcakkhandha is a philosophical innovation on the part of the Buddhists.

Pañcakkhandha and Pañcupādānakkhandha

So far, the terms pañcakkhandha and pañcupādānakkhandha have been used almost interchangeably. The only, but crucial, difference between these two forms of aggregates is that the group of the pañcupādānakkhandha is potentially subject to biases (āsava) and clinging (upādāna), while the other is not. With regard to clarifying the meaning and the interrelation of the pañcakkhandha by establishing a correlation with the theory of dependent origination, only a study of the pañcupādānakkhandha would be relevant; those khandha not involved in the

²⁶ Stcherbatsky, Central Conception of Buddhism, p. 61.
multiplication of misery and the binding to the wheel of birth and
rebirth are not related to the *pañcakkhandhā* and the *pañcupādānakkhandhā*, for the
simple reason that our primary goal is to establish the function and
clarify the interrelation between each of the aggregates. Since the
aggregates of one group function in exactly the same manner as those
of the other group—with the slight nuance that aggregates of the *pañc-
cupādānakkhandhā*-group are still objects of clinging—this comprehen-
sive approach is the most appropriate to achieve our aim.

The distinction, however, between the two sets of *khandha* ought
to be clarified. The *Atthasālīni* explains the word *ādāna* (*pañca +
upa + ādāna + khandhā*) by suggesting that it means “to catch hold of
strongly,” and that its prefix *upa* merely adds an emphasis, just as in the
words despair (*upāyasa*) and denounced (*upakkulīṭha*). The *Khandha-
sutta* of the *Samyuttanikāya* explicitly defines these two sets of
“aggregates” without, however, comparing them:

And what, monks, are the five aggregates? Whatever matter,
sensation, recognition, karmic activities, and consciousness, be it
past, present, or future, internal or external, gross or subtle,
inferior or superior, far or near, these are called matter,
sensation, recognition, karmic activities and consciousness
aggregates. ... And what, monks, are the five clinging-aggregates?
Whatever matter, sensation, recognition, karmic activities, and
consciousness, be it past, present, or future, internal or external,
gross or subtle, inferior or superior, far or near, that are subject
to cankers [āsava: biases], subject to clinging, these are called
matter, sensation, recognition, karmic activities and consciousness
“clinging-aggregates.”

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27 Upādānan ti daḷhagahaṇam, daḷhatto hi etha upasaddo upāyāsa-upakkulīṭhādisu viya (Dhs. 385).
28 Yāti kiṭci bhikkhave rūpam (vedanā, saññā, sankhārā, viññānaṁ) atīṭanāgatapaccup-
pannam ajjhattam vā bahiddhā vā oḷārikaṁ vā sukhumāṁ vā hīnaṁ vā panītaṁ vā
yan dūre santike vā ayan vuccati rūpakkhandho—vedanākkhandha, saññākkhandha,
sankhārakkhandha, viññānakkhandha va yaṁ dure savaram upādānyarn vā ayaṁ
vuccati rūpupādānakkhandho—vedanupādānakkhandha, saññupādānakkhandha,
sankhārupādānakkhandha, viññāṇupādānakkhandha (S. iii, 47-48).
In his article “Khandha and upādānakkhandha,” Bhikkhu Bodhi points out that “the fact that a differentiation is drawn between the two sets with the phrase sāsava upādāniya implies that a genuine difference in range does exist: that there are, in other words, aggregates of each sort which are anāsava anupādāniya.” This implies that certain aggregates are neither subject to biases (āsava) nor clinging (upādāna). I will borrow Bodhi’s expression and refer to this particular set of aggregates as “the bare aggregates.” Bodhi also points out that, since each of these pañcupādānakkhandhā is either an individual instance of matter, sensation, recognition, karmic activities or consciousness, we can postulate that they are all included among the pañcakkhandhā themselves. For example, any matter (rupa) belonging to the pañcupādānakkhandhā automatically belongs to the pañcakkhandhā. Pañcakkhandhā is therefore a generic term that includes both the pañcupādānakkhandhā and the “bare aggregates,” those aggregates which are not subject to clinging.

The word pañcupādānakkhandhā is often translated as the “clinging aggregates,” in the sense of “the aggregates that are clinging.” However, according to the sutta literature, “clinging” can be divided into four categories: clinging to sensual pleasures, clinging to wrong views, clinging to rites and rituals, and clinging to the theory of self. In fact, “clinging to sensual pleasures” is classified under the mental factor of greed (lobha), and the three other forms of clinging under the mental factor of wrong views (diṭṭhi); and both these mental factors belong exclusively to the saṅkhārakkhandha. Accordingly, we cannot possibly state that all the five aggregates are “clinging,” for only the saṅkhārakkhandha is directly responsible for this activity. Therefore, this translation of pañcupādānakkhandhā as “the aggregates that are clinging” is misleading.

29 Bhikkhu Bodhi, “Khandha and Upādānakkhandha,” Pali Buddhist Review 1(1) (1976): 94. Note that the hyphenated spelling of “clinging-aggregates” is used to refer to the pañcupādānakkhandhā since it leaves the expression in its original compounded form; whereas “clinging aggregates” is used to express a specific interpretation (karmadhāraya) of the compound which would then mean the “aggregates that are clinging.”
30 Bodhi, “Khandha and Upādānakkhandha,” p. 94.
31 Cattāro me āvuso upādāna: kāmapupādānaṁ diṭṭhupādānaṁ silabbatupādānaṁ attavādupādānaṁ (M. i, 51; also at M. i, 66; D. ii, 58, iii, 230; S. ii, 3).
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A more accurate translation of the term *pañcupādānakkhandhā* would be “the five aggregates which are the object of clinging.” Since, by definition, a totally liberated person (an arahant or a buddha) does not generate any form of clinging, we could say that by extension this definition of the *pañcupādānakkhandhā* indirectly associates the five “clinging-aggregates” with the ordinary people (puthujjana) caught up in the wheel of *samsāra*, and the five “bare aggregates” with those who have escaped the cycle of birth and rebirth and have attained enlightenment. It is important to stress that these totally liberated “persons” generate neither craving nor aversion.

It would seem, therefore, that the concept of *pañcupādānakkhandhā* would not apply to liberated persons since none of their aggregates can possibly be the object of their own clinging which is, in theory, non-existent. In defining the five clinging-aggregates as those “that a person clings to as his personality,” David Kalupahana supports this theory. By definition, upon realizing the state of stream-entry (sotāpanna), one eradicates all the different types of “personality beliefs” (*sakkāyadi tīṭhi*) and no longer perceives the aggregates as one’s own self. According to this reasoning, enlightened persons who are alive on this mundane plane are not characterized by the five clinging-aggregates (*pañcupādānakkhandhā*), but rather by the “bare aggregates” which are beyond biases and clinging, and are not perceived as “one’s own.”

It would be wrong, however, to establish a parallel between the five “bare aggregates” and the aggregates of arahant and buddhas, as the *Samyuttanikāya* explicitly denies any such correlation:

An arahant, friend Kotṭhita, should examine these five clinging-aggregates with method as being impermanent, suffering, sick, as a swelling, as a dart, as ill-health, as alien, transitory, void and selfless. For the arahant, friend, there is nothing further to be done, nor is there return to upheaving of what is done. Nevertheless, these things, if practised and enlarged, conduce to a happy state [*dīṭṭhadhammasukhavihāra*] and to mindfulness and thorough understanding.34

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34 Arahata pi kho āvuso Kotṭhita ime pañcupādānakkhandhe aniccato dukkhato rogato gandato sallato aghato ābādhato parato palokato saññato anattato yeniso manasi kattabbā. Natthi khvāvuso arahato uttarikārānīyam katassa va paṭiccayo. Api ca kho
This passage states that even arahant possess the five “clinging-aggregates” although, by definition, they do not generate clinging nor do they entertain any form of “personality beliefs.” It therefore contradicts Kalupahana’s definition of the clinging-aggregates as those to which an individual clings as one’s own personality.

Where, then, can we find these “bare aggregates”? In his article, Bodhi suggests that the “bare aggregates” can be found only in “the happy state” (diṭṭhadhammasukhavihāra), which he interprets as the “fruit of arahantship in which the world disappears and Nibbāna remains.”\(^{35}\) As with many Pāli words, the term diṭṭhadhammasukhavihāra has several shades of meaning. Literally, it simply means “abiding in bliss owing to the dhamma being observed,” yet it is often translated as “a pleasant abiding here and now.” In the Devadaha Sutta of the Saṁyuttanikāya, for example, it seems extremely difficult to read anything more into the term than this peaceful abiding. But elsewhere, it is clearly used to refer to the absorptions (jhāna) themselves,\(^{36}\) as well as to the attainment of the fruits of arahantship (arahattaphalasamāpatti).\(^{37}\) In private correspondence, Bhikkhu Bodhi explained that the correlation between diṭṭhadhammasukhavihāra and the arahattaphalasamāpatti is supported by the fact that “insight” into the aggregates as impermanent, suffering, etc. is not required for entering into the absorptions, while it does lead to the attainment of fruition.\(^{38}\) Therefore, in this particular context, Bhikkhu Bodhi’s interpretation of diṭṭhadhammasukhavihāra as the fruits of arahantship seems convincing, especially since the Visuddhimagga itself states that noble persons attain fruition “for the purpose of abiding in bliss here and now.”\(^{39}\) Before proceeding any further, however, we need to clarify what is meant by “fruit of arahantship” in order to grasp the distinction between “clinging-aggregates” and “bare aggregates.”

\(^{35}\) Bodhi, “Khandha and Upādānakkhandha,” p. 94.

\(^{36}\) M. i, 40-41; iii, 4.

\(^{37}\) SA. ii, 239.

\(^{38}\) Refer to Chapter 23 of the Visuddhimagga for a complete description of the practices required for entering into the jhāna. For a more elaborate discussion on jhāna, see Winston Lee King’s Theravāda Meditation: The Buddhist Transformation of Yoga (University Park: Pennsylvania University Press, 1980).

\(^{39}\) Kasmā samāpajjantī ti diṭṭhadhammasukhavihārathām (Vsm. 700).
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Theravāda Buddhism claims that four levels of realization (the “fruits of the path,” maggaphā/a) are attained before reaching final nibbāna: stream-entry (sotāpanna), or the fruits of one who falls in the stream—the person attaining this fruit will attain final nibbāna within seven lives at the most; once-return (sakādāgāmi); non-return (anāgāmi); and arahantship (arahant). At the moment of entering the path of any of these four stages, the person leaves behind the defilements and the five aggregates that are consequent upon wrong views. 40 At that very moment, all the phenomena, except for mind-produced materiality (cittasamutthānām rūpam) are wholesome (kusala). 41 This implies that the five aggregates, which are a mere classification of the different elements (dhamma) of an individual experiencing this state, are free from biases and clinging at that specific time; none of the aggregates present is the result of wrong views. 42 It also seems that when someone reaps the fruit of any one of these four paths, one temporarily “surveys” nibbāna. According to Buddhaghosa, at the end of the fruition, the consciousness re-enters the life continuum, 43 and the person proceeds to review nibbāna in the following manner: “this is the state that I surveyed as an object.” 44 The passage from one level of realization to another is also called a change of lineage (gotrabhā), for one has (temporarily) eradicated the external signs of karmic activities (saṅkhāra) and becomes intent on the pursuit

40 Sotāpattimaggakkhaṇe [sakadāgāminaggakkhaṇe, anāgāminaggakkhaṇe, arahattamaggakkhaṇe] dassanatthena sammādiṭṭhiyā vaṭṭhāti, tadanuvattakakilesehi ca khandhehi ca vaṭṭhāti (Ps. i, 71).
41 Sotāpattimaggakkhaṇe jātā dhammā ṭhapetvā cittasamutthānām rūpaṃ sabbe va kusalā honī (Ps. i, 116).
42 Ps. i, 71. Strictly speaking, both path (magga) and fruit (phala) are specific citta, states of consciousness. In the cognitive series of the path, the magga occurs for one mental moment, which destroys the defilements to be eliminated by that particular path. The magga is followed immediately by two or three mind-moments of phala, which experience the bliss of liberation accomplished by the magga. Thereafter, the mental process returns to the bhavaṅga. For a more elaborate discussion on the presence of the four mental aggregates while one is experiencing the fruits of the path, see the Visuddhimagga, Chapters 14 and 23.
43 Phalapariyosāne pan’assa cittam bhavaṅgam otarati (Vsm. 676).
44 Ayam me dhammo ārammaṇato patividdhi ti amantām nibbānāṃ paccavekkhāti (Vsm. 676). Nibbāna is often classified as one of the five objects of thoughts dhamma-rammaṇa. See Shwe Zan Aung, trans., Compendium of Philosophy (Abhidhammasangaha) (London: P.T.S., 1967), p. 3.
of nibbāna. Although one may have undergone a change of lineage and surveyed nibbāna, however, as long as arahantship has not been attained, one has not reached the final goal. As the Āthaśālinī says:

Although a gotrabhū has seen nibbāna, he is like one who came to see the king for a specific purpose: Having seen the king riding on an elephant on a certain road, and being asked whether he had seen the king or not, he replies that he had not, for he had not seen the king for the specific purpose he had come. In the same manner, although a person might have seen nibbāna, he cannot be said to have “insight” (dassana) because the impurities to be forsaken have not been eradicated yet.

Those experiencing any of these four fruits of the path are temporarily surveying nibbāna as an object, and dwell in a state where their four mental aggregates cannot be perceived by those who still have certain types of biases and clinging. It is in this state that the “bare aggregates” can be found, for those dwelling in it, whether they are mere stream-enterers or arahant, are temporarily free of biases and clinging as long as the time their “supramundane” experience lasts. Afterwards, they will assume the five clinging-aggregates again. The arahant, however, can induce this state of “surveying” by the mere contemplation of their five clinging-aggregates as suffering, impermanent, selfless and so on. A passage of the Sarhyuttanikāya even states that arahant involved in the practice of contemplating the breath (ānāpānasati) may also attain the state of ditṭhe dhamme sukhavihāra, the fruit of arahantship.

45 Bahiddhāsaṁkhāranimittamaṁ abhibhuyitvā nirodham nibbānam pakkhandattāṁ gotrabhū (Ps. i, 66).
46 So hi paṭhamaṁ nibbānam dassanato dassanani ti vutto. Gotrabhū pana kim cāpi paṭhamataram nibbānam passati? Yathā pana raṇīno santikaṁ kenacid eva karaniyena āgato puriso dūrato va rathikāya carantam hitthikkhandhagataṁ rājanaṁ divā pi ‘ditṭhe te rājā ti’ putṭho divā kattabbakiccassā akatattā ‘na passāmi ti’ āha, evameva nibbānam divā kattabbassa kiccassa kilesappahānasūbhāvā na dassanani ti vuccati (DhsA. i, 43).
47 Sabbe [dhammā] ‘va kusalā honti (Ps. i. 116).
48 Ye ca kho te bhikkhave bhikkhū arahanto khūṇāsavā vissīhavanto katakaraniyā ohitabhārā anuppattasadāt āparikkhiṇabhavasariyajanā sammaadārāna vimutta. Tesam ānāpānasatisāmadhi bhāvito bahulkato ditṭheva dhamme sukhavihāraya ceva sarivattati satisampajaññāya ca (S. v, 326).
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The passage of the Sarhyuttanikāya cited above alludes to the fact that arahant can still be characterized by the pañcupādānakkhandhā. Buddhaghosa clarifies the difference between pañcupādānakkhandhā and the “bare aggregates” in his commentary on the Dhammasaṅgāni, the Atthasālinī:

Although the aggregates of the arahat [sic] who has destroyed the cankers [āsava: biases] become conditions for clinging in others, when they say, for example, “Our senior uncle the Thera! Our junior uncle the Thera!,” the noble paths, fruits, and Nibbāna [the navalokuttaradhammā; see p. 28] are not grasped, misapprehended, or clung to. Just as a red-hot iron ball does not provide a resting-place for flies to settle, so the noble paths, fruits or Nibbāna [navalokuttaradhammā], due to their abundant spiritual sublimity, do not provide a condition for grasping through craving, conceit, and wrong views.49

This implies that, although those who do not generate any more clinging (the arahant) have totally eradicated the biases, they still possess the five clinging-aggregates in the sense that their five aggregates still constitute a ground for clinging in others. As a result, these aggregates are still clinging-aggregates. However, arahant do have the possibility of dwelling in a supramundane state of consciousness that “cannot be apprehended by a mind defiled with the biases and clinging due to their sublime purity, a purity flowing from the absolute purity of their object, nibbāna.”50 Therefore, the aggregates can only exist as “bare aggregates” in beings dwelling in this state of consciousness which is neither accessible to, nor perceptible by, those who are still subject to clinging.

In order to shed light on this state of consciousness where “bare aggregates” are present, we need to review certain elements of Theravāda doctrine: the thirty-one levels of existence and the transcendental realm (lokuttara). This will offer an explanation as to


50 Bodhi, “Khandha and Upādānakkhandha,” p. 96; see also Dhs. 196, 213, 248, 258.
why the material aggregate cannot possibly be included as one of the "bare aggregates." According to the Sāratthappakāsinī, a commentary on the Samyuttanikāya, the material aggregate (rūpa) is only present in the kāmāvacara (realm of sensuality), while the remaining four aggregates (vedanā, saññā, saīkhāra and viññāna) can be found in any of the four divisions: kāmāvacara, rūpāvacara, arūpāvacara and lokuttara. The first three realms (āvacara) comprise the thirty-one planes of existence constituting the mundane realms, whereas the fourth (lokuttara) includes the supramundane (nibbāna). The kāmāvacara is characterized by craving towards objects such as form, sound, odour, taste, touch and idea. This realm includes eleven planes of existence: the six celestial realms (sagga), the human realm (manussaloka), and the four states of misery (apāya). The material realm (rūpāvacara) is characterized by the four absorptions (jhāna) and corresponds to the sixteen material heavenly planes, while the immaterial realm (arūpāvacara) is characterized by the four attainments (samāpatti) and corresponds to the four immaterial planes. In two of the latter only the four mental aggregates can exist—they are devoid of material bodies.

The transcendental realm (lokuttara), on the other hand, refers to a sphere that is beyond or above (uttara) the mundane worlds (loka) and the three realms of existence; in other words, it refers to nibbāna. However, the word lokuttara is often used to refer to the nine supramundane elements (navalokuttaradhammā). In such a context, the word is used to designate the four paths and their respective fruits as well as nibbāna. The four paths are those that lead to the realization of the states of stream-entry, once-return, non-return and arahant; the fruits are the realizations themselves in which a sight of nibbāna is also

51 Rūpakkhandho kāmāvacaro cattāro khandhā catubbhūmakā [sic] (SA. ii, 270). The term catubbhūmakā should be read as catubbhūmika; an enumeration of these four bhūmika is given in Buddhaghosa’s Visuddhimagga (Vsm. 452, 475, 493).
52 The six celestial realms of the kāmāvacara are: catumahārājikadeva, ṭāvatiṃsa, yāma, tusita, nimmānarati, paranimmittavasavatti.
53 These four states include hell (nirayaloka), the animal kingdom (tiracchānayoniloka), the ghost realm (petaloka), and the demon world (asuranikāyaloka).
54 These planes are: ākāsānānīcayatanūpāgadeva, viññānāniyatanūpāgadeva, ākīñcaññāyatanūpāgadeva, nevaññānāsaññāyatanūpāgadeva. Only beings who have experienced the four attainments can be reborn in these planes.
55 Katamo lokuttaro vimokkho? Cattāro ca ariyamaggā cattāri ca sāmaññaphalāni nibbānañ ca. Ayān lokuttaro vimokkho (Ps. ii, 40).
implied. According to the *Paṭisambhidāmagga*, although the term *lokuttara* implies a certain dissociation and a crossing over from the world, it does not seem that the term refers to a totally transcendental experience, for the individual only dwells temporarily in the fruition states, and these states are still characterized by the four mental aggregates. However, it is impossible to detect any of the five aggregates within *nibbāna* without residue (*nirupādisesa nibbāna*) for that state is defined as the full extinction of the five aggregates (*khandhaparinnābāna*). When the word *lokuttara*, then, refers exclusively to *nibbāna* without residue and not the four paths and their fruits, the term *loka* means the five aggregates, while *uttara* means beyond or above.

The *Sāratthappakāsinī* says that the material aggregate is only present in the realm of sensuality, and the remaining four aggregates can be found in any of the four divisions. Although the fourth division consists of the transcendental realm (*lokuttara*), it has to be understood as the first eight constituents of the nine supramundane elements (*navalokuttaradhammā*), where *nibbāna* without residue is excluded, for none of the aggregates can be present in that state. It is in the transcendental realm that the four mental aggregates (*vedana*, *saññā*, *saṅkhāra* and *viññāna*) cannot be approached as objects of clinging (or as *pañcupādanakkhandhā*). This is so because, on the one hand, liberated individuals are totally free from the biases and clinging and, on the other hand, their four mental aggregates function on a different level of consciousness from those of ordinary people, since their mental aggregates have *nibbāna* as their object (*nibbānārammaṇā*). Therefore, this level of consciousness cannot be apprehended by the common people.

Since the material aggregate exists only in its grosser form in the realm of sensuality, it always remains a clinging-aggregate in the sense that it is a potential object of clinging for beings dwelling in the sensual sphere. Therefore, the material aggregate can never be classified under the terminology of "bare aggregate," for it is always associated (at least potentially) with clinging. As Buddhaghosa stated in the *Visuddhimagga*,

56 Ps. ii, 166-67.
57 It., 41. A more elaborate discussion of *nibbāna* without residue is offered on p. 55.
59 Ps. i, 116.
the four mental aggregates (vedanā, saññā, sañkhāra and viññāna) can be free from biases while the material aggregate (rūpa) cannot. Technically, matter always falls into the category of the clinging-aggregates (pañcupādānakkhandhā), but when seen in the global perspective of the four other “bare aggregates” (vedanā, saññā, sañkhāra or viññāna in the fruition states), it is classified as part of the “bare” pañcakkhandhā simply for purposes of classification (rāsaṭṭhena).

The term pañcakkhandhā, then, is all inclusive. While the term pañcupādānakkhandhā refers only to those aggregates that are potential objects of clinging, the term “bare aggregates” cannot refer to that which could potentially become objects of clinging. Now that this distinction has been established, we shall analyze each of the khandha to discover what their respective functions are, and how they relate to the doctrine of dependent origination.

60 Etiha ca yathā vedanādayo anāsavā pi atthi, na evam rūpaṁ (Vsm. 478).

61 Yasmā paṭ’assa rāsaṭṭhena khandhabhāvo yujjati, tasmā khandhesu vuttam; yasmā rāsaṭṭhena ca sāsavaṭṭhena ca upādānakkhandhabhāvo yujjati, tasmā upādānakkhandhesu vuttam. Vedanādayo pana anāsavā va khandhesu vuttā, sāsavā upādānakkhandhesu. Upādānakkhandhā ti c’etiha upādānagocara khandhā upādānakkhandhā ti evam attho daṭṭhabbo. Idha pana sabbe p’ete ekajham katvā khandhā ti adhippetā (Vsm. 478). “Because rūpa can be described as a [bare] aggregate on account of its ‘totalness,’ it is classified amongst the [bare] aggregates. Because it can be described as a clinging-aggregate (upādānakkhandha) on account of its ‘totalness’ and its association with clinging, it is classified amongst the clinging-aggregates. But vedanā, saññā, sañkhāra and viññāna are classified as [bare] aggregates when they are free from clinging, and as clinging-aggregates (pañcupādānakkhandhā) when objects of clinging. The term upādānakkhandha should be understood as referring to aggregates that are subject to clinging. On the other hand, all the aggregates ('bare aggregates' and clinging-aggregates) taken together are encompassed by the expression ‘five aggregates’ (pañcakkhandhā).”
Chapter 2

The Rūpakkhandha

At first glance, the sutta literature defines the rūpakkhandha—the material aggregate—in a concise and clear manner. “What is this material ‘clinging-aggregate’? The four primary elements (mahābhūta) and secondary matter (upādārūpa). The four primary elements consist of earth, water, fire and air.”¹ The problem with this definition, however, is that nowhere in the nikāya is there a clarification as to the nature of the upādārūpa (“secondary elements”). The sutta simply offer a general definition of matter stating that all matter is either past, present or future, internal or external, gross or subtle, small or large, far or near.²

In this chapter, I will first examine whether the general concept of rūpa can be correlated with the rūpakkhandha and then establish a correlation between the rūpakkhandha and some of the links of the paṭiccasamuppāda. Later abhidhammic and commentarial literature will help clarify what is meant by primary elements and secondary elements. All the elements comprised in the terminology of nlpa will then be classified in order to help us deepen our understanding of the different categories of matter (e.g., internal, external; gross, subtle; far, near, etc.). With an understanding of these classifications as well as the threefold classification mentioned in the sutta literature itself, we will then be in a position to establish a classification of all the material elements and to gain insight into the meaning of “matter,” as well as to correlate the rūpakkhandha to some of the links of the paṭiccasamuppāda.

According to Y. Karunadasa’s study, Buddhist Analysis of Matter, four major meanings can be ascribed to the term rūpa: rūpa in the sense of generic matter, rūpa in the sense of what is visible, rūpa in the sense of the rūpadhātu (rūpaloka or rūpāvacara; see p. 28) and finally, rūpa in

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1 Katamo c’āvuso rūpupādānakkhandho: cattāri ca mahābhūtūni catunnañ ca mahābhūtūnam upādāya rūpain. Katame c’āvuso cattāro mahābhūtā: paṭhavidhātu āpodhāru tejodhātu vāyodhātu (M. i, 185; a similar passage is also found in M. i, 53 and S. ii, 3-4; iii, 59).

2 Attītanāgataapaccuppannam ajhattan wā bahiddhā wā oḷārikam wā sukkhumam wā hīnam wā panitam wā yām dūre santike wā, sabban rūpam (S. iv, 382).
the sense of four rūpajjhāna or the four absorptions (jhāna). As Karunadasa remarked, “These four may be represented as the generic, specific, cosmological and the psychological meanings of the term.”3 Mrs. Carolyn Rhys Davids,4 Surendranath Dasgupta5 and S.Z. Aung6 argue that not all of the elements that constitute “generic matter” are part of the rūpakkhandha. Karunadasa claims, however, that they have misinterpreted a passage from the Yamaka.7 The passage reads,

Is matter the material aggregate? Pleasant matter (piyarūpam) and agreeable matter (sātarūpam) are rūpa, but do not belong to the material aggregate; whereas the material aggregate is both matter and the material aggregate. What is neither the material aggregate nor matter? Pleasant matter (piyarūpam) and agreeable matter (sātarūpam) do not belong to the material aggregate but are matter; everything except matter and the material aggregate is neither matter nor the material aggregate.8

According to this, everything that comes under the heading of rūpa, except pleasant (piyarūpa) and agreeable matter (sātarūpa), belongs to the rūpakkhandha. Both Rhys Davids and Dasgupta agree with Aung’s interpretation of this passage, in which Aung explains the terms piyarūpa and sātarūpa as the eighty-one worldly classes of consciousness and their concomitants that are attractive and pleasant.9 These eighty-one classes of consciousness do not, according to Aung, belong to the rūpakkhandha, which is made up solely of twenty-seven material qualities (the four primary elements and the twenty-three secondary elements). This interpretation suggests that the Yamaka’s definition of the term rūpa is not limited to matter, but also includes mental states (the eighty-

4 Ymk. i, xi.
5 Surendranath Dasgupta, A History of Indian Philosophy (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1975), 1:94.
7 Karunadasa, Buddhist Analysis of Matter, pp. 4-5.
8 Rūpaṁ rūpakkhandho ti? Piyarūpaṁ sātarūpaṁ rūpaṁ, na rūpakkhandho; rūpakkhandho rūpaṁ ceva rūpakkhandho ca. ... Na rūpaṁ na rūpakkhandho ti? ... Piyarūpaṁ sātarūpaṁ na rūpakkhandho, rūpaṁ; rūpaṁ ca rūpakkhandhaṁ ca ṭhapetvā avasesa na ceva rūpaṁ na ca rūpakkhandho (Ymk. i, 16-17).
9 Aung, Compendium of Philosophy, p. 273.
one classes of consciousness). However, this particular interpretation is based, it would seem, on speculation as it is not supported by any textual evidence. Karunadasa has pointed out a further weakness in this interpretation, since elsewhere in the abhidhammic literature we find a definition of /piyarūpa and sātarūpa which includes the six internal and external sense-doors, all of which are included in the rūpakkhandha. There seems to be a contradiction between the Yamaka, which asserts that /piyarūpa and sātarūpa do not belong to the rūpakkhandha, and the Vibhaṅga, which implicitly includes /piyarūpa and sātarūpa in the rūpakkhandha since the six sense-doors, which are part of the rūpakkhandha, are included in the definition of these two terms. However, Karunadasa indicates that the two seemingly contradictory statements of the Yamaka and the Vibhaṅga are not mutually exclusive because the former belongs to a method of exposition particular to the Yamaka—a method that cannot be used to define the rūpakkhandha. The Yamaka passage, therefore, is not relevant to a discussion of the similarity between rūpa and the rūpakkhandha.

In the Visuddhimagga, Buddhaghosa defines rūpa (in Karunadasa’s sense of “generic matter”) as the four primary elements and the matter derived from them. As we saw on 31, this is the standard definition of the rūpakkhandha. Here, Buddhaghosa not only applies the definition of the rūpakkhandha to the concept of rūpa, but also urges his reader to refer to his previous discussion on the rūpakkhandha in order to clarify the meaning of rūpa. On the basis of this statement by as established an authority as Buddhaghosa, we may proceed with the assumption that, at least traditionally, the rūpa-

10 Karunadasa, Buddhist Analysis of Matter, p. 5.
11 In order to avoid confusion, we will, from now on, refer to the “internal sense-doors” as “sense-organs” (eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, mind), and the “external sense-doors” as the “sense-objects” (forms, sounds, smells, tastes, touches, thoughts).
12 Kī ca loke piyarūpam sātarūpam? Cakkhun loke piyarūpam sātarūpam etth’esa tanhā uppajamāna uppajjati, ettha nivisamāna nivisati. Sotam ... pe ... ghānaṃ ... jivhā ... kāyo ... mano ... rūpā ... saddā ... gandhā ... rasā ... phoṭṭhabbā ... dhammā loke piyarūpam sātarūpam etth’esa tanhā uppajamāna uppajjati, ettha nivisamāna nivisati (Vbh. 101-102).
13 Explaining Karunadasa’s argument is not necessary. However, those desiring further clarification can refer to Karunadasa’s Buddhist Analysis of Matter, pp. 5-8.
14 Rūpan ti cattāri mahābhūtāni catunnañ ca mahābhūtānan upādāya rūpan (Vsm. 558).
15 Tesam vibhāgo Khandhaniddese vutto yeva ti (Vsm. 558).
kkhandha has not been seen as different from rūpa in the sense of "generic matter."

While most Indian philosophical systems claim that there are five primary elements, the Buddhist and Jain traditions postulate only four. These two traditions, however, do not consider space (ākāsa) to be a primary element. The Theravāda school, however, incorporates space into its list of "secondary elements" (upādārūpa).16

The Four Primary Material Elements (Mahābhūta)

In a discussion with his son,17 the Buddha concisely explains the four primary elements and their particular qualities. The earth element (paṭhavīdhātu) is described as whatever is hard and solid (kakkhalam kharigattam), such as the hair, nails, teeth, and other parts of the body. The water element (āpoddhātu) is characterized by liquid (āpogataṁ), as in the case of blood, tears and saliva. The Buddha describes the fire element (tejodhātu) as that which is hot, like the heat that digests food. And finally the air element (vayadhātu) is characterized by motion, like the different gases in the stomach and the abdomen.18 According to a different source, the first three primary elements (earth, fire and air) also share the fundamental characteristic of solidity (paṭigha)19 in the sense that there is bound to be an impact, a shock, when two of these material particles collide. This quality of solidity (Skr. pratighāta) is defined in the Abhidharmakośa as "l'impenetrabilité, le heurt ou résistance (pratighāta), l'obstacle qu'un rūpa oppose à ce que son lieu soit occupé par un autre rūpa."20

Buddhaghosa, in the commentary on the Dhammasaṅgāni and the Visuddhimagga, offers us a more extensive definition of these four primary elements. According to the commentator, the earth element is

16 See p. 39.
17 Mahārāhalovādasuttaṁ (M. i, 420); a similar description is found in the Mahāraththipadopamasutta (M. i, 185).
18 Strangely enough, a discussion of the ākāsadhātu follows the description of these four elements just as if it belonged to primary matter. However, as we mentioned, the ākāsadhātu is not included in the Buddhist list of primary elements, but belongs to secondary matter.
19 Implied by Dhs. 147. For a further discussion on the term paṭigha, please refer to p. 41.
20 La Vallée Poussin, Abhidharmakośa, 1:24-25.
so called because it "is spread out," and it is the platform that supports the other three elements. In commentarial literature, the earth element is literally perceived as a support for the other three primary elements, just as the earth is a support for mountains and trees. According to Buddhaghosa, the water element is thus termed because of its characteristic of flowing (appoti), gliding (āpiyati) and satisfying (appāyati). The validity of the definition is questionable, however, for the Theravāda commentarial literature tends to define words through the use of terms that share the same etymology. For example, the earth element (paṭhavi) is described as pathatattā, and matter (rūpa) is often characterized by the verb ruppati. These apparently false etymological interpretations could, in fact, simply be mnemonic devices that were never intended to be linguistically accurate. As for the definition of the water element, however, we know that the verb appoti is derived from the root āp, while āpiyati and appāyati seem to be connected to the Sanskrit root r—which is not etymologically linked to āpo. However, the Dhammasaṅgīni uses the terms sineha and bhandana (which have no apparent or real etymological link with āpo) to define the water element. These two words support Buddhaghosa's previous definition by implying that the water element is endowed with the characteristic of liquidity (sineha) and binding (bhandana). The fire element is defined by Buddhaghosa as that which possesses the characteristic of temperature (teja) but, as with the water element, the Dhammasaṅgīni and the Atthasālinī offer a definition that does not restrict itself to providing a cognate word: "the fire element has the quality of heat (usmā or uṇhā)." The air element represents the most

21 Patthaṭattā paṭhavī [sic] (Vsm. 364). The word paṭhavī may have been misspelled; on the other hand, this "error" may have been a conscious alteration on the part of Buddhaghosa in order to indicate the etymological derivation of paṭhavī from paṭṭhaṭa.

22 Taṭha kakkhaḷattalakkhanā paṭhavidhātu paṭṭhānārasaṁ sampaṭicchanaṇappacca-paṭṭhānā (DhsA. 332).


24 The reader may wish to refer to the discussion on p. 46.

25 Kataman taṁ rūpaṁ āpodhātu? Yañī āpo āpogataṁ sineho sinehagataṁ bandhanattaṁ (Dhs. 177).

26 "It heats therefore it is called fire-element." Tejāti ti tejo (Vsm. 364).

27 Yañī tejo tejogataṁ usmā usmāgataṁ usmajī usmajgataṁ (Dhs. 177); a similar definition is found in DhsA. 332.
dynamic of the four primary elements in that it is primarily characterized by mobility and fluctuation.  

It is of crucial importance that none of the four primary elements can exist without the presence of the other three. Fire, for example, is not merely composed of the fire element, nor does water consist solely of the water element. The primary elements cannot exist independently of one another, all four are present in every material particle. The Paramatthamaññāsā, a commentary on the Visuddhimagga, expands upon this point:

... likewise their [the four primary elements] undemonstrability, since they are not found inside or outside of each other for support. For if these elements were found inside each other, they would not each perform their particular functions, owing to mutual frustration. And if they were found outside each other, they would be already resolved (separate), and that being so, any description of them as unresolved (inseparable) would be meaningless. So although their standing place is undemonstrable, still each one assists the other by its particular function—the functions of establishing, etc., whereby each becomes a condition for the others as conascence condition and so on.

Karunadasa stresses that all four primary elements appear in equal quantity in every manifestation of matter. What renders different manifestations of matter distinct is not the quantitative, but rather the qualitative or "capability" (sāmatthiya) proportion of the primary elements. The difference between water and fire does not reside in the quantity of the fire element or water element found therein, but rather in the intensity of these two elements.

The last aspect of the primary elements that I would like to mention is their deceptiveness. According to the Theravāda tradition, these four primary elements and their respective qualities are inherent in every material particle. Matter is composed of nothing else, yet we not only perceive material particles as warm or cold, stable or moving,
hard or soft or spread or coagulated, but also as imbued with other qualities, such as colour. The primary elements, then, appear in a variety of forms apparently unrelated to their own qualities. Buddhaghosa explains this by resorting to one of his favourite methods of clarification: he makes a play on the word mahābhūta by comparing the four primary elements to a great magician:

Just as a magician (mahābhūta) turns water that is not crystal into crystal, and turns a clod that is not gold into gold, and shows them, and being himself neither a spirit or a bird, shows himself as a spirit or a bird so too, being themselves [the four mahābhūta] not blue-black, they turn themselves into blue-black derived materiality [secondary elements], being themselves not yellow ... not red ... not white, they turn themselves into white derived materiality [secondary elements] and show that. In this way they are primary elements (mahābhūta) in being like the great creatures (mahābhūta) of a magician.

Thus, these primary elements are the foundations which support the secondary elements.

The Secondary Material Elements (Upādārūpa)

The difference between primary and secondary elements is adumbrated in the sutta literature itself, yet no specific description of the secondary elements is found in the nikāya. Although the Abhidhamma-piṭaka has elaborated a scheme of twenty-three secondary elements,

I have found neither such an elaboration, nor even a passing mention

32 Yathā māyākāro amaṇiṁ yeva udakam maṇiṁ katvā dasseti, asuvām na maṇiṁ leddum suvaṇṇam katvā dasseti;—yathā ca, sayāṁ neva yakko na yakkhī samāno, yakkhabhāvam pi yakkhībhāvam pi dasseti, evam eva sayāṁ anilān’ eva hutvā nilāṁ upādārūpaṁ dasseti, aputāṁ alohitāṁ anodātāṁ eva hutvā odātāṁ upādārūpaṁ dasseti” ti māyākāramahābhūtasāmanitāni mahābhūtāni. Vsm. 366-67. Translation from Nānamoli, The Path of Purification, p. 98. A similar passage is found in DhsA. 299.

33 Such as in M. i, 53, 185; S. ii, 3-4, 59.

34 Dhs. 167. Some commentarial literature recognizes a twenty-fourth “secondary matter,” the heart-basis (hadasāvatthu). The heart-basis seems to be a post-canonical development since it is only mentioned in literature compiled during or after Buddhaghosa. To my knowledge, this element is not mentioned in the sutta literature. Since the mainstream canonical literature does not list this last element, I will not include it in the discussion of matter.
of the exact meaning of the secondary elements in the *sutta*. However, one passage found in a few instances in the *sutta* offers us a hint as to the nature of these secondary elements: “the four primary elements and the matter derived (*upādānaya rūpaṃ*) from them are called *rūpa*.”

The *P.T.S Dictionary* renders the term *upādāya* as “derived” and “secondary,” thereby implying a prior substratum from which it could be “derived” (the primary elements). The *Atthasālīni* explains what is meant by the “matter derived” from the four great elements: “matter which is dependent on, is derived from, and is still attached to the four great elements. What is known as ‘all matter’ consists of the four great elements and the twenty-three derived material ‘things’ shown in due order.” These two references indicate that the secondary elements are always dependent on, and therefore secondary to, the four primary elements.

The list of the twenty-three secondary elements is given in the *Vibhaṅga* and the *Dhammasaṅgāni*. The elements can be grouped into seven different categories, as indicated in Table 3.

Discussing every one of the twenty-three secondary elements would be far too tedious. Two points concerning them, however, merit some discussion. The first is the exclusion of bodily impressions (*phoṭṭhabbāyatana*) from the list of the various elements that constitute secondary matter. Since touch is one of the sense-organs, it would be natural to expect its respective sense-object to be included in the enumeration. The reason for its exclusion lies in the fact that this particular sense-object is constituted by three of the primary elements earth, fire and wind. According to the Theravāda tradition, these three primary elements can be known by the tactile sense-door.

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35 Cattāri ca mahābhūtāni catunnaṃ ca mahābhūtānaṃ upādāya rūpaṃ, idam vuccat’ āvuso rūpaṃ. Found in M. i, 53, 185; S. ii, 3-4, 59.


37 Cattāri mahābhūtāni upādāya nissāya anuñcittvā pavattarūpan ti atho. Idam vuccati sabbām rūpaṃ ti, idam cattāri mahābhūtāni padapatisāṭiyā niddīṭṭhāni tevisati upādātipāni ti sattavīsaṭipabhedām sabbām rūpaṃ nāma (DhsA. 300).

38 Vbh. 1ff.

39 Phoṭṭhabbādātu pana pathavi-tejo-vāyo-vasena tayo dharmā ti sankhaṃ ganchati. Vsm. 488. Similar statements are found in Dhs. 143, 179; Vbh. 72.

40 Not all Buddhist traditions, however, agree on this point. The *Abhidhammakośa*, for example, maintains that all the four primary elements are tangible: “Le tangible est de onze espèces. Onze choses sont des choses tangibles (sprastavyadraya): les quatre grands éléments (mahābhuṭa), le doux, le rude, le lourd, le léger, le froid, la faim et la soif” (La Vallée Poussin, *Abhidhammakośa*, 1:18).
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>A</th>
<th>The first five sense-organs (internal sense-doors):</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>cakkhāyatana (organ of sight)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>sotāyatana (organ of hearing)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>ghānāyatana (organ of smell)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>jīvāyatana (organ of taste)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>kāyāyatana (organ of touch)</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>B</th>
<th>The first four sense-objects (external sense-doors):</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>rūpāyatana (the visible)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>sattāyatana (sound)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.</td>
<td>gandhāyatana (smell)</td>
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<tr>
<td>9.</td>
<td>rasaśāyatana (taste)</td>
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</tbody>
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>C</th>
<th>The three faculties:</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>10.</td>
<td>itthindriya (faculty of femininity)</td>
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<tr>
<td>11.</td>
<td>purisindriya (faculty of masculinity)</td>
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<tr>
<td>12.</td>
<td>rūpaśāvitenindriya (material faculty of life)</td>
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<th>D</th>
<th>The two modes of self-expression:</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>13.</td>
<td>kāvāviniñāatti (bodily expression)</td>
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<td>14.</td>
<td>vacviniñāatti (vocal expression)</td>
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<tr>
<th>E</th>
<th>The three characteristics of matter:</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>15.</td>
<td>lahutā (lightness)</td>
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<td>16.</td>
<td>mudutā (elasticity)</td>
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<td>17.</td>
<td>kammaññatā (adaptability)</td>
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<tr>
<th>F</th>
<th>The four phases of matter:</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>18.</td>
<td>upacaya (growth)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19.</td>
<td>santati (continuity)</td>
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<td>20.</td>
<td>jaratā (decay)</td>
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<tr>
<td>21.</td>
<td>aniccatā (impermanence)</td>
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</table>

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>G</th>
<th>The two unclassified elements:</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>22.</td>
<td>ākāsadhātu (space-element)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23.</td>
<td>āhāra (food)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
cannot say, therefore, that the Theravāda tradition excludes the bodily
impressions from its list of the different elements that constitute
secondary matter, since it is implicitly included by the presence of the
first three primary elements.

The second problem related to this enumeration is that
Buddhism admits six sense-organs, the sixth being the mental organ
(mano). However, we have seen that only the first five sense-organs are
discussed and that the mental organ as well as its respective object, the
mental object (dhammāyatana), are not included in the list of elements
that constitute secondary matter. The reason for this exclusion is not,
as David Kalupahana has suggested, that the mental organ and its
respective object (dhammāyatana) belong to the viññānakkhandha
rather than to the rūpakkhandha. Kalupahana's interpretation is most
likely grounded in the theories of the Sarvastivāda, Sautrāntika and
Yogācāra systems, according to which the mental organ (Skr.: dharm-
āyatana) is not part of the rūpaskandha (Pāli: rūpakkhandha). According
to the Theravāda tradition, however, while it is true that the mental
organ belongs to the viññānakkhandha, its respective object, the
mental object, belongs to the rūpakkhandha itself. Since the range of
the mental object is extremely wide, it does not limit itself to secondary
matter. The mental object includes one primary element as well as
fifteen of the elements that constitute secondary matter (numbers ten
to twenty-three in the above list), which are collectively termed
dhammāyatana pariyaṭṭhāna. Therefore, since the mental object
is composed of these sixteen elements of matter, it clearly does belong
to the rūpakkhandha rather than to the viññānakkhandha.

The Three Divisions of Matter

According to the Saññitissa of the Dīghanikāya, matter is divided into
three dual categories: visible and “resisting”; invisible and “resisting”;

41 Kalupahana, *The Principles of Buddhist Psychology*, p. 29.
42 However, as mentioned in n. 34 on p. 37, post-canonical literature has incorporated
a twenty-fourth element into the list of the elements that constitute secondary matter:
the heart-basis (hadayavaṭṭhā). This twenty-fourth element is recognized by Theravāda
scholasticism as the physical basis for the mental organ (VsmA. 449-50). The term
hadaya itself, not as belonging to the secondary matter category, is also sometimes
used as a synonym of mano and manoviññāna (Vbh. 87, 88, 144).
43 Dhs. 179; Vbh. 14, 72.
and, finally, invisible and "unresisting." This threefold division occurs only once in the nikāya literature, and no explanation is given for it. The commentary on this particular sutta does not shed much light on the topic either. The Dhammassaṅgani, however, clarifies the meaning of the terms. According to this abhidhammic text, the term visible (sanidassanām) is restricted to what is visible (rūpāyatanā)—the only material element which can actually be perceived by the eye. All the other elements of matter (primary or secondary) are considered anidassanām, for they are invisible. This statement may seem to conflict with the sutta definition of the primary elements (see p. 34) according to which the earth element finds expression in, for instance, hair, nails, etc., and the water element in blood, tears, and so on—all of which are visible. The Abhidharmakoṣa resolves this apparent contradiction by claiming that although all four primary elements are invisible, we can actually see them in partial manifestations, for their visibility is understood from the perspective of common usage. In reality, the elements themselves are invisible:

Dans l'usage commun, ce qu'on désigne par le mot "terre," c'est de la couleur et de la figure; de même pour l'eau et le feu; le vent, c'est ou bien l'élément vent, ou bien de la couleur et de la figure. En effet, on parle de "vent noir," "vent circulaire"; mais ce qu'on appelle "vent" dans le monde, c'est aussi l'élément vent.

The elements classified under "resisting" (sappatīgham) are the five sense-organs and their respective objects, for they can actually or potentially come in contact with one another. We notice that bodily impression (phoṭṭhabbāyatanā) is included in the list of resisting

44 Tividhena rūpa-saṅgaho. Sanidassana-sappatīgham rūpaṁ, anidassana-sappatīgham rūpaṁ, anidassana-appatīgham rūpaṁ (D. iii, 217).
45 DA. 997.
46 Kataman taṁ rūpaṁ sanidassanāṁ? Rūpāyatanāṁ—idan taṁ rūpaṁ sanidassanāṁ (Dhs. 146).
47 Kataman taṁ rūpaṁ anidassanāṁ? Cakkhāyatanāṁ ... pe ... kābājīnkāro āhāro—idan taṁ rūpaṁ anidassanāṁ (Dhs. 146. See also Kvu. 331ff.).
49 Kataman taṁ rūpaṁ sappatīgham? Cakkhāyatanāṁ, sotāyatanāṁ, ghānāyatanāṁ, jivhāyatanāṁ, kāyāyatanāṁ, rūpāyatanāṁ, saddāyatanāṁ, gandhāyatanāṁ, rasāyatanāṁ, phoṭṭhabbāyatanāṁ—idan taṁ rūpaṁ sappatīgham (Dhs. 147).
elements while not being explicitly part of the enumeration of the twenty-seven elements of \( \text{rupa} \)—the four primary elements and the twenty-three elements that constitute secondary matter. Although bodily impression does not seem to be a constituent of the list, it is implicitly included, for the three primary elements of earth, fire and air do in fact constitute bodily impression. Bodily impression is probably excluded out of a desire to avoid duplication: since the first three primary elements constitute bodily impression, there is no need to mention this element again in the enumeration. Therefore, when the \textit{Dhammasangani} says that bodily impression is resisting (\textit{sappatigam}), the first three elements of earth, fire and air are intended. The unresisting elements (\textit{appatigam}), on the other hand, are all those which are not resisting\textsuperscript{50} water and all the fourteen elements that follow, including femininity (\textit{ithindriya}). Therefore, the classification of visible and resisting (\textit{sanidissanam; sappatigam}) refers only to what is visible, while that of invisible and resisting (\textit{anidassanam; sappatigam}) designates all the sense-organs and the sense-objects (with the exception of the \textit{rupayatana} and the inclusion of the first three primary elements as bodily impression). And, finally, that of invisible and unresisting (\textit{anidassanam; appatigam}) stands for all the remaining elements, i.e. water, femininity, masculinity, faculty of life, bodily expression, vocal expression, lightness, elasticity, adaptability, growth, continuity, decay, impermanence, space and food.

To summarize the implication of the classification of matter in the \textit{Sanghisutta}, we can say that the twenty-seven material elements are invisible \textit{(anidassanam)} except, of course, \textit{rupayatana} (the visible) which is visible \textit{(sanidassanam)} by definition. The first five sense-organs and their respective objects, which include the first three primary elements as bodily impression, are resisting \textit{(sapatigam)} and invisible \textit{(anidassanam)}, while all the other elements are non-resisting \textit{(apattigam)} and invisible \textit{(anidassanam)}. The reason for this first division of the material elements will become apparent at the conclusion of a discussion of the various categories of matter.

\textsuperscript{50} We become more and more aware of inherent tautologies in etymologically grounded definitions.
Further Classifications of Matter

All the elements of matter can be further classified, as we have seen, according to different categories such as past/present/future, internal/external, gross/subtle, small/large, and far/near. In this section, we will briefly look at the implications of three of these categories, namely (1) internal and external (ajjhatta and bahiddhā), (2) gross and subtle (olārika and sukhumā) and (3) far and near (dūre and santike).

The first category establishes a distinction between internal or personal (ajjhatta) and external or foreign (bahiddhā) elements. This first distinction will prove to be of great import for correlating the five aggregates with the paṭiccasamuppāda. This classification is not restricted to the material aggregate, but is also applicable to the other four khandha,51 for the distinction between external and internal lies simply in the fact that internal elements are those which “belong” to the individual while the external elements are those which “belong” to other individuals.52 The first five sense-organs are the only material elements which are internal.53 According to the same source, the external material elements (see Table 4) include the four primary elements (literally the sphere of the tangible [phoṭṭhabbāyatana] and the water element), the four sense-objects enumerated under the twenty-seven elements of rūpa, and all the following elements that constitute secondary matter.

The two following categories, gross and subtle, and far and near are used, as Karunadasa points out,54 as a method for distinguishing the elements constituting mental objects55 from the other elements of rūpa. According to Buddhaghosa, the meanings of “far” and “near” are not at all linked, as we would expect, to the notion of spatial proximity, but rather to the capacity of being perceived.

51 Dhs. 187.
52 Katame dhammā aijhattā? Ye dhammā tesāṁ tesāṁ sattānaṁ aijhattam paccattāṁ niyatā paṭipaggalikā upādinnā rūpā vedanā saññā saikkhārā viññānāṁ—ime dhammā aijhattā. Katame dhammā bahiddhā? Ye dhammā tesāṁ tesāṁ parasattānaṁ parapuggalānaṁ aijhattam paccattāṁ niyatā paṭipaggalikā ... pe ... viññānāṁ—ime dhammā bahiddhā (Dhs. 187-88).
53 Dhs. 154ff.
54 Karunadasa, Buddhist Analysis of Matter, p. 38.
55 See p. 40.
Table 4
The External Material Elements

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sanskrit</th>
<th>Pali</th>
<th>English Translation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>paṭhavi</td>
<td>earth</td>
<td>element (part of bodily impression)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tejo</td>
<td>fire</td>
<td>element (part of bodily impression)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>vāyo</td>
<td>air</td>
<td>element (part of bodily impression)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>āpo</td>
<td>water</td>
<td>element</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>rūpa</td>
<td>the visible</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sadda</td>
<td>sound</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>gandha</td>
<td>smell</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>rasa</td>
<td>taste</td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>kammaññatā</td>
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<tr>
<td>aniccatā</td>
<td>impermanence</td>
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<tr>
<td>ākāsadhātu</td>
<td>space-element</td>
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<td>āhāra</td>
<td>food</td>
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Gross [oḷārikaṁ] means thick, that which may be seized by impact of the sensitive surface, because it has become the basis and the object of thought. Subtle [sukhuma] should be understood as the contradictory of what has been said. Remote: (an object may be) far [dūre] even though it stands near. This is when there is a difficulty of cognizing, because it is not to be seized by way of impact [ghatţana]. The other term near [santike] (may apply to an object) though it stands far. This is when there is ease of cognizing, because it may be seized by way of an impact [ghatţana].

Karunadasa, in turn, comments that:

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Table 5
Classification of the Twenty-seven Material Elements

Only the five previously discussed categories are listed. If an element possesses a certain quality, a “Y” is given under that particular quality. If an “N” is given, this element is characterized by the opposite quality.

Opposite qualities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>mahābhūta</th>
<th>patīgha (sappatīgha)</th>
<th>ajjhatta</th>
<th>oḷārika</th>
<th>santike</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>mahābhūta (primary elements)</td>
<td>patīgha (resisting)</td>
<td>ajjhatta (internal)</td>
<td>oḷārika (gross)</td>
<td>santike (near)</td>
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<td>mahābhūta</td>
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The Rūpakkhandha 45
because of their being thus easily known (*gahanassa sukaraṭṭā*), they are styled *santike* (proximate). For this self-same reason they are also called *olārika*. The *dhammāyatana-rūpa* [elements constituting mental object] cannot be known through the medium of any of the first five sense-organs; their existence is known by a process of inference. In this sense they are not easily known (*duppariṇṇeyya*). Hence they are described as *dūre* (far). For this self-same reason they are also called *sukhuma* (subtle).\(^{57}\)

Therefore, the material elements constituting mental objects are described as far and subtle because they are not easily perceptible. Buddhaghosa’s definition of far and subtle revolves around the concept of lack of impact (*ghallana*), for there is no direct contact between the first five sense-organs and the mental objects. The concept of lacking an impact is similar to that of unresisting (*appatiṭhamī*; see p. 42) and, therefore, it is no surprise to learn that the fifteen material elements classified as far and subtle refer to the exact same elements that are classified as unresisting, i.e., those that constitute mental objects.

**Implications of the Previous Classifications**

Many scholars, including F.L. Woodward,\(^{58}\) S.Z. Aung\(^ {59}\) and S. Dasgupta,\(^{60}\) have been puzzled by a certain canonical definition stating that *rūpa* has a definite “subjective” element: *Rūpaṁ rūpatti* (or literally: “*rūpa* affects”). Although I agree with Woodward that *rūpatti* cannot be considered as the proper etymology for the word *rūpa*, I feel that this particular definition sheds light on the nature of matter, since matter is not simply an objective reality independent of the perception of the individual.

The distinctions that we have covered so far between the different kinds of “matter” emphasize the deep empirical sense that characterizes Buddhism. It seems that Theravāda Buddhism stresses that for something to be present for someone, it needs to be perceived. Unless there is perception of the object (be it perception of the object itself or perception of its mere conceptualization), it is absolutely

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60 Dasgupta, *A History of Indian Philosophy*, 1:94.
meaningless for that person—it is absent. Absence does not deny the absolute reality of the object when unperceived by a subject, but stresses that the object is of no significance to such a subject. Understanding this, we can now make sense of the distinctions between the different kinds of matter.

The division of matter into internal and external has strong implications for this study, for it also establishes a distinction between matter endowed with ontological reality independent of its being perceived, and matter whose reality is dependent on a potential perception. The elements of matter in the internal classification are the five sense-organs (vision, audition, smell, taste and touch), and they are endowed with reality whether or not they are perceived. These five sense-organs are also dependent on the primary elements, which constitute their foundation. The four primary elements, therefore, are also endowed with the same reality. The category “external” refers to the material elements whose reality is dependent on a potential perception. It is easy to understand why four of the sense-objects (visible forms, sounds, smells and tastes) are included in this division, for they can all potentially be perceived by an individual.

The inclusion in this division of the four primary elements and the last fourteen elements that constitute secondary matter may seem problematic at first. Furthermore, the exclusion of bodily impressions and of mental objects (dhammāyatana) from the “external” category would seem equally odd. We must recall, however, that bodily impression is made up of the first three great elements (earth, fire and air). Although all the four great elements have a reality independent of potential perception, they become factors in the bodily impression only when they can be perceived by an individual, that is, only when there can be an actual contact between an individual and the first three elements. In other words, these three great elements are not always bodily impression, although the bodily impression itself is always composed of them.

As for the mental objects, they are only apparently left out since they are described by the fifteen elements: the fourth primary element (water) and the last fourteen elements that constitute secondary matter (water, femininity, masculinity, faculty of life, bodily expression, vocal expression, lightness, elasticity, adaptability, growth, continuity, decay, impermanence, space and food). The same reasoning employed above regarding the bodily impression is applicable to the mental object: the
mental object is always composed of one or more of the fifteen elements given above.

With respect to the *paṭiccasamuppāda*, the most important of the various divisions of matter is that between internal (objective) and external (subjective) matter. The first refers to material reality (as well as our five sense-organs) existing independently of the potential perception of it, and the second to the form that matter takes in order to be apprehended by the senses. In other words, this twofold division can be expressed as (1) the five sense-organs as well as the four primary elements, and (2) the six sense-objects. The first four sense-objects are explicitly listed in the Pāli canon as categories of matter, while the last two (bodily impression and mental object) are implicitly included by, respectively: (1) the first three primary elements, and (2) the water element and the last fourteen elements that constitute secondary matter. It is these six sense-objects that constitute the “subjective” aspect of matter—subjective in the sense that they can potentially be perceived by, and affect (*ruppati*), the individual.

**Correlation between the Ṛūpakkhandha and the Paṭiccasamuppāda**

There is a direct relation between the Ṛūpakkhanda and the fifth and sixth links of the chain of dependent origination: the six sense-doors (*saḷāyatanaḥ*) and contact (*phassa*). The six sense-doors (*saḷāyatanaḥ*) are usually understood in terms of “internal” and “external”—respectively, the six sense-organs and the six sense-objects. However, it is widely understood that in the formula of the *paṭiccasamuppāda* itself, the term *saḷāyatanaḥ* includes only the six sense-doors and not their respective objects.61 The *sutta*, abhidhammic and commentarial literature support this view.62 There is, therefore, a direct correlation with the six sense-doors link of the *paṭiccasamuppāda* and the five sense-organs that partly constitute the Ṛūpakkhanda. The problem that we face, however, is that the six sense-doors include six sense-organs, whereas the Ṛūpa-

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62 Kuttamāca bhikkhave saḷāyatanaṁ. Cakkhāyatanaṁ sotāyatanaṁ ghānāyatanaṁ jivhāyatanaṁ kāyāyatanaṁ manāyatanaṁ. Idam vuccati bhikkhave saḷāyatanaṁ (S. ii, 3). Tathā katamaṁ nāmarūpapaccayā saḷāyatanaṁ? Cakkhāyatanaṁ ... pe ... manāyatanaṁ; idam vuccati nāmarūpapaccayā saḷāyatanaṁ (Vbh. 164. See also a similar interpretation in Vsm. 565).
kkhandha only admits five of them by excluding the mental organ from its list, the latter belonging to the viññānakkhandha. However, the mental sense-organ has already been implicitly introduced into the chain of dependent origination by the two preceding links, viññāna and nāmarūpa, and, as we will now see, the following link, contact (phassa), explicitly requires the presence of the mental organ.

Contact is usually defined as the meeting of consciousness (viññāna), a sense-organ (indriya) and an external stimulus (visaya). In keeping with this understanding, contact not only requires the presence of a consciousness, but also of the sense-organs and the sense-objects. The sense-objects are presumably excluded from the six sense-doors link as it seems to be an explanation of our personal bondage to misery; since sense-objects, when unperceived, have no influence on our binding to samsāra, it is understandable that they are not included. However, they are included in the link of contact, for here, by actually being perceived, they have a direct influence on the individual. There is a further correlation between the sense-objects discussed in the rūpakkhandha and those of contact. In the rūpakkhandha the sense-objects are potential objects of perception, while here, because of the congregation of consciousness, sense-organs and sense-objects, they are actual objects of perception. The conjunction of these three implies that contact is bare sensory experience, devoid of any subjective inclinations. Contact therefore refers to bare percept. It is important, however, to note the difference between contact and the sense-objects. While the latter can potentially be perceived, the former is actually perceived.

In our discussion of the rūpakkhandha, we have seen that, when divided into the categories of sense-organs and sense-objects, matter can be correlated to two links of the paṭiccasamuppāda—namely the six sense-doors (saḷāyatanā) and contact (phassa). The sense-organs (except the mental organ) belong to the six sense-doors, while the sense-objects along with the mental organ are included in contact. When these sense-objects are actually perceived, they constitute, along

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63 The exact interrelation among viññāna, nāmarūpa, mano and the other sense-organs and the following links of the chain will be explained in the chapter on viññāna.
64 Cakkhuñ cāvuso paṭicca rūpe ca uppaṭi jāti cakkhuviññānam tiṇṇām saṅgati phasso (M. i, 111. A similar passage is found in S. iv, 32).
65 As we will see in the chapter on viññāna, there are six types of consciousness, one of which is the manoviññāna.
with consciousness and the sense-organs, “contact”—which I would describe as bare sensory experience, devoid of any subjective inclination. This experience can potentially turn into a sensation (vedanā),\(^6\) the aggregate discussed in the next chapter.

\(^6\) Phassapaccayā vedanā (M. ii, 32); stated slightly differently at M. iii, 242. See also M. iii, 17 and its commentary MA. iv, 78.
Chapter 3

The Vedenākkhandha

The whole of the rūpakhandha, as we saw in the previous chapter, is contained by “the six sense-organs” (saḷāyatana) and contact (phassa). According to the formula of the paṭiccasamuppāda, phassa is a necessary condition for the arising of vedanā (sensation). The principal difference between contact and vedanā should be noted carefully: the former is the mere perception of external stimuli—a perception devoid of any subjective interpretation; the latter, however, has a definite subjective content, for it must either be pleasant, unpleasant or neutral. It is this subjectivity that differentiates vedenā from contact.

According to the Yamaka, there is no distinction between the terms vedenā and vedenākkhandha, and nowhere in the canon is such a distinction elaborated. The Majjhimanikāya explains the meaning of the term vedenā by “vedeti vedettī kho āvuso, tasmā vedenā ti vuccati”: “it is called ‘sensation’ because one ‘senses.’” Here again, a Pāli text defines a term through the use of etymologically related terms, thus hindering a clear understanding. However, the Pāli Text Society Dictionary agrees with the canonical statement holding that the word vedenā is derived from the root “ved” or the verb “vedeti,” both meaning “to know” or “to experience.” If the word vedenā is indeed related to vediti, the implication is that vedenā means either physical or mental experience.

Several divisions of vedenā into categories ranging in number from two to one hundred and eight can be found in the Pāli Canon.

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1 Katamā pan’ ayye sukhā vedenā, katamā dukkhā vedenā, katamā adukkhhasukkhā vedenā ti. Yaṁ kho āvuso Visākha kāyikaṁ vā cetasikaṁ vā sukhaṁ sātaṁ vedayitaṁ ayarī sukhā vedenā ... (M. i, 302).
2 Vedenā vedenākkhandho ti? Āmantā (Ymk. 17).
3 M. i, 293.
4 “Oh, Ānanda, according to one classification, vedenā are classified in two, according to another, in three, according to another, in five, to another, in six, according to another, in eighteen, to another, in thirty-six, to another, in one hundred and eight.” Dve p’Ānanda vedenā vuttā mayā pariyyena tisso pi vedenā vuttā mayā pariyyena, pañca pi vedenā vuttā mayā pariyyena, cha pi vedenā vuttā mayā pariyyena, atīhādasa pi vedenā vuttā mayā pariyyena, chattimāpi vedenā vuttā mayā pariyyena, atīhasatam vedenāsatam pi vuttam mayā pariyyena (M. i, 398; also at S. iv, 224).
Of these, the most important classifications group *vedanā* into categories of three, five and six. The *Majjhimanikāya* clarifies the threefold division of *vedanā* into pleasant, painful and neither pleasant nor painful. By further distinguishing these three sorts of *vedanā* between those experienced either on the body or in the mind, we arrive at a sixfold division.\(^5\) The *Samyuttanikāya* elaborates a similar classification\(^6\) which takes into consideration whether the *vedanā* is mental or physical in nature. This classification is usually known as the *pañcindriyā*, where the five *indriya* refer to the five types of *vedanā*; these are not to be confused with the five moral strengths (*pañcabalā*) of the same name (*pañcindriyā*).\(^7\) As *pañcindriyā*, *vedanā* are divided into five groups: the first two refer to pleasant (*sukhindriyā*) and painful (*dukkhindriyā*) bodily *vedanā*, the third and fourth are pleasant (*somanassindriyā*) and painful (*domanassindriyā*) mental *vedanā*, and finally the fifth consists of neither pleasant nor painful (*upekkhindriyā*) bodily and mental *vedanā*.\(^8\) *Vedanā* are also grouped into six divisions based on the

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5. M. i, 302.
7. Almost no difference is found between the five faculties, *pañcindriyā*, and the five strengths, *pañcabalā*; both refer to the exact same qualities. The only semantic nuance found in the texts is one pertaining to the quality and opposite quality of each of the *indriya*. The faculties of (1) faith, (2) effort, (3) mindfulness, (4) concentration and (5) wisdom, respectively, have as qualities and opposite qualities: (1) determination and disbelief, (2) energy and idleness, (3) establishing and negligence, (4) calmness and agitation and (5) knowledge and ignorance (Ps. iii, 22-23). These pairs of qualities play a critical role in the distinction between *bala* and *indriya* because the meaning of these two terms is defined in reference to these qualities and opposite qualities. The *Saravatthappakāsini* seems to derive its interpretation of *indriya* from the word *inda*, meaning ruler [*Indra* in Sanskrit refers to the wrathful god who held a powerful position in the vedic pantheon, hence the Pāli meaning] since each of the five faculties is regarded as the controlling factor, a ruler of its respective quality (SA. iii, 247). For example, the faculty of faith is considered an *indriya* because of its perfect control over the characteristic of determination. The same source explains the use of *bala*, or strength, because it is unshakable by the opposite faculty. The *bala* of faith is so-called because its steadiness when confronted with its opposite quality, disbelief (SA. iii, 247). The *Paṭisambhidāmagga* commentary gives a very similar definition, with the distinction that the author has replaced the word *inda* by *adhipati*, which also means "ruler" (PsA. iii, 618-19). The *Paṭisambhidāmagga* commentary's definition is copied verbatim in the *Visuddhimagga* (Vsm. xxii, 37). Although the nuance identified in the commentaries is worth noting, it does not indicate any major distinction between *indriya* and *bala*.
8. S. v, 210-11.
particular sense-organ (āyatana) through which the vedanā is “perceived.” The first five sense-organs—eye, ear, nose, tongue and body—are physical, while the sixth sense-organ—the mind—is mental. Although there is a clear distinction between mental and physical vedanā, this arrangement from the Majjhimanikāya—with its predominance of bodily vedanā—implicitly underscores the aggregate’s physical aspect. Since only the vedanā triggered by the sixth sense-organ (the mental organ) has a stronger mental content, it is logical to assume that most of the vedanā are physically based. However, it is important to stress that even those vedanā related to the five physical sense-organs do have a mental function, for vedanā is different from mere percept in that a certain interpretation of the stimuli must have taken place. Vedanā, as stated previously, are always either pleasant, unpleasant or neutral, a characteristic that differentiates them from objective percept. Therefore, my use of the term “sensation” as a translation for vedanā does not, it should be stressed, refer to an anoetic sentience, or a bare experience devoid of personal inclinations.

In order to understand the role that vedanā plays within the theory of dependent origination, it is of crucial importance to examine the states which are deprived of vedanā, for these attainments have been the objectives of most Theravāda Buddhist practitioners. They are also those that are attained when any link of the paṭiccasamuppāda is deactivated. In the next pages we will therefore clarify the distinctions with two types of nibbāna and with a state that resembles it—saññāvedayitanirodha.

The Eradication of Vedanā

Pāli texts repeatedly refer to a state beyond sensation or, more literally, a state characterized by the eradication of saññā and vedanā (saññāvedayitanirodha), which Buddhaghosa and Dhammapāla have compared to nibbāna. An understanding of the nature of this state will have a

9  Cha vedanākāya veditabbā ti iti ... paṭicca vuttaṁ? Cakkhuṁ ca paṭicca rūpe ca uppajjati cakkhuviññānam, tiṇṇaṁ saṁgati phasso, phassapaccayā vedanā; sotāna ca paṭicca sade ca uppajjati sotaviññānam; ghānaṁ ca paṭicca gandhe ca uppajjati ghānaviññānam; jīvhaṁ ca paṭicca rase ca uppajjati jīvhaṁ viññānam; kāyaṁ ca paṭicca pūṁe ca uppajjati kāyaṁ viññānam; manaṁ ca paṭicca dhamme ca uppajjati manaviññānam, tiṇṇaṁ saṁgati phasso, phassapaccayā vedanā. Cha vedanākāya veditabbā ti iti yan taṁ vuttaṁ idam etam paṭicca vuttaṁ. Idam paṭiccam añña theravāda (M. iii, 281).
The Five Aggregates

direct impact on our understanding of Buddhist soteriology and of nibbāna itself. I begin my investigation of saññāvedayitanirodha by examining the textual evidence describing it, and then looking at some modern interpretations of the state.

Since nibbāna, according to the Theravāda tradition, is possessed of a single nature, without division, there is a certain irony to the heated debates among scholars as to its exact nature. Some equate nibbāna with the state of consciousness attained by Siddhattha Gotama at the age of thirty-five under the Bodhi tree; this state is also experienced upon attaining arahanthood. Others perceive nibbāna as a state that can be attained only upon death, since it is often described as a condition beyond mind and matter (nāmarūpa), transcending the five aggregates. A third group interprets nibbāna as being synonymous with the mental state known as saññāvedayitanirodha (literally “the cessation of recognition and of sensation”). The last interpretation falls somewhere between the first two, for it is clearly described as an experience beyond mind and matter but wherein the experiencer continues to live after exiting the trance. (It is worth noting, however, that the experiencer is clinically dead during the trance.)

A Bharadvāja brāhmaṇa once asked the Buddha: “How can one untangle this mess?” Considering the tradition’s seemingly conflicting opinions regarding the true interpretation of nibbāna, this is a question we could ask too! I will look at subtle distinctions between these apparently different states. An examination of the distinction between the nibbāna that the Buddha attained at the age of thirty-five and the nibbāna he entered into at the time of death, followed by a study of traditional and academic controversies associated with saññāvedayitanirodha, will shed light on the question of whether the interpretation of

10 AbhŚ. vi,14.
11 Th. Stcherbatsky represents the followers of this perspective: “Buddha and Nirvāṇa are different names for the same thing” (Th. Stcherbatsky, The Conception of Buddhist Nirvāṇa [Varanasi: Bharatiya Vidya Prakashan, 1968], p. 79).
12 As Louis de La Vallée Poussin stated in one of his lectures at Manchester College: “It may therefore be safely maintained that Nirvāṇa is annihilation” (The Way to Nirvana: Six Lectures on Ancient Buddhism as a Discipline of Salvation [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979], p. 117).
13 Anto jaṭā bahi jaṭā jaṭāya jaṭīya pajā: tam tam Gotama pucchāmi: ko imaṃ vijaṭaye jaṭan ti. S. i, 13; 165. Also quoted in Buddhaghosa’s introduction to his Visuddhisti-magga (Vsm. 1).
saññāvedayitaniruddha is consistent throughout the tradition, and on the role of vedanā in the attainment of the Buddhist ideal.

Most Buddhist schools hold that the historical Buddha experienced enlightenment under the Bodhi tree at the age of thirty-five and, according to certain scholars, reached nibbāna simultaneously. According to others, however, he only entered into nibbāna when he passed away at the age of eighty. These two perspectives on nibbāna are not, however, mutually exclusive; there are said to be two types of nibbāna, namely sopādisesa (with residue) and nirupādisesa or anupādisesa (without residue).

According to Pāli texts, nibbāna has a single nature and is thus without division or distinction. But for analytical purposes, and in order to describe the attainment of nibbāna, the concept can be divided into two categories: with residue and without residue. This apparent paradox is thoroughly explained by Buddhaghosa in the Visuddhimagga:

But this [single goal, nibbāna] is firstly called with result of past clinging left (sopādisesa) since it is made known together with the [aggregates resulting from the past] clinging still remaining [during the arahant’s life], being thus made known in terms of the stilling of defilement and the remaining [result of the past] clinging that are present in one who has reached it by means of development. But [secondly, it is called without result of past clinging left (nirupādisesa)] since after the last consciousness of the arahant, who has abandoned arousing [future aggregates] and so prevented kamma from giving result in a future [existence], there is no further arising of aggregates of existence, and those already arisen haven disappeared. So the [result of past] clinging that remained is non-existent; and it is in terms of this non-existence,

14 “Aussi bien quand le Bouddha est parvenu du même coup à la Clairvoyance et au Nirvāna, c’est un cri de triomphe et d’allégresse qui s’échappe de ses lèvres à l’idée qu’il a enfin brisé les chaînes du Destin et s’est pour toujours libéré de la prison corporelle” (A. Foucher, La Vie du Bouddha d’après les textes et les monuments de l’Inde [Paris: J. Maisonneuve, 1987], p. 326).

in the sense that “there is no [result of past] clinging here, that
the [same goal is called] without result of past clinging left.”

The Itivuttaka—upon which the previous passage of the Visuddhimagga
probably bases its interpretation—mentions that one who has attained
nibbāna with residue continues to possess the five senses and to
experience both pleasant and painful sensations, while the attainment
of nibbāna without residue is characterized by the eradication of all
becomings (bhava), implying that no emergence from this state is
possible.

On the other hand, the state of sopādisesa nibbāna, as the words
themselves imply, is nibbāna with residue in the sense that subtle
kamma still remain. These kamma are not strong enough to propel the
arahant into another rebirth, but merely sufficient to maintain the life
process. Liberated persons cease to produce further kamma, for the
kamma-process (kammabhava) has been eradicated. They have
eradicated all kamma-results (kammavipāka) that may lead to another
life, but must still reap some subtle kamma-results in this life. It is these
kamma-results that maintain both the regeneration of the five
aggregates and the kamma-process itself. Therefore, nibbāna with
residue could be correlated to a state of mind that alters our perception
of the world, or rather, enables us to really perceive the world as it is
(yathābhūta).

Nirupādisesa nibbāna, on the other hand, is “nibbāna without
residue” in the sense that all kamma have been completely eradicated
and, consequently, no fuel remains to perpetuate life. Nibbāna without
residue is usually referred to as a total extinction of the five aggregates
(khandhapanibbāna). The state of nibbāna without residue is beyond
mind and matter and no different from the state of nibbāna that the
Buddha attained at the moment of death.

Correlations are often made between the terms nirupādisesa
nibbāna (without residue) and parinibbāna, and between sopādisesa

16 Nāṇamoli, The Path of Purification, pp. 580-81. This subject is further elaborated in
the Itivuttaka (38-41) as well as in Kameswar Bhattacharya’s article, “Upadhi, upādi
et upādisa dans le canon bouddhique pāli,” in Mélanges d’indianisme à la mémoire
de Louis Renou (Paris: Publications de l’institut de civilisation indienne, 1967), pp. 81-
97.
17 Disesā nibbānadhātu (It. 38).
18 Anupādisesa pana samparāyikā yamhi nirujjhanti bhavāni sabbaso (It. 38).
nibbāna and “plain” nibbāna. However, there is no sound textual justification for such an identification. In the sutta literature the term parinibbāna is restricted to the passing away of arahant—the attainment of nibbāna without residue. Yet the substantive in these particular passages functions as an elegant or polite term for an arahant’s death rather than entering into nibbāna without residue itself. We often find the verb form parinibbāyati being used to mean the attainment of arahantship itself without implying the passing away of the arahant at that particular moment.19 Furthermore, commentarial literature mentions two kinds of parinibbāna: (1) kilesaparinibbāna, the extinction of defilements which is equated with nibbāna with residue, and (2) khandhaparinibbāna, or the extinction of the aggregates—the passing away of the arahant, nibbāna without residue. As Peter Masefield pointed out in his article “The Nibbāna-Parinibbāna Controversy,”20 not even the past participle parinibbuta refers exclusively to the state of nibbāna without residue.21 Because of its dubious significance, I prefer not to use the term parinibbāna. The concepts of without residue (nirupādisesa) and with residue (sopādisesa) are the precise technical terms that refer respectively to the total eradication of the aggregates at the time of the death of the arahant, and to the state attained by a living arahant.

The State of Saññāvedayitanirodha

Although the distinction between these first two kinds of nibbāna is clear, the problem associated with the state of saññāvedayitanirodha is not so simple. Pāli texts repeatedly refer to this state beyond sensation—a state characterized by the eradication of recognition and sensation (saññā and vedanā) which Buddhaghosa and Dhammapāla compare to nibbāna. In order to better understand this mysterious state,

19 See M. i, 67.
21 See the two following references. Sukhaṁ vā yadi va dukkhaṁ adukkhamasukhaṁ sahā ajjhattaṁ ca bahiddhā ca yāṁ kiñci atthi veditaṁ etāṁ ‘dukkhaṁ’ ti niṭṭhāna mosadhammaṁ palokinaṁ phussa phussa vayaṁ passaṁ evan tathā virajjati vedanānaṁ khāyā bhikkhu nicchāto parinibbuto ti (Sn. 144). Samāhito sampajāno sato buddhassa sāvako vedanā capajānati vedanānaṁca sambhavaṁ. Yattha cetā nirujjhanti maggaṁca khayaṁgarinānaṁ vedanānaṁ khāyā bhikkhu nicchāto parinibbuto ti (S. iv, 204; similar passage at S. v, 57).
I will now examine pertinent textual evidence, and respond to some modern interpretations.

The life of Siddhattha Gotama just prior to his enlightenment, as portrayed in the Ariyapariyesanasutta, offers numerous references to "trancelike" states. According to this text, the bodhisattva visited many saints who were engaged in different types of penance, the most eminent being Āḷārakālāma and Uddaka Rāmaputta. Gotama first approached Āḷārakālāma and mastered the third attainment (the stage of ākiñcāyatanasamādhi) which was the highest known to his teacher. When he realized this state did not correspond to final liberation, he left Āḷārakālāma and went to study under Uddaka Rāmaputta. With the latter, he quickly mastered the fourth attainment (nevāsaṅgāsaṅgā samādhi)—again, the highest he could learn from him. The bodhisattva did not regard this condition as final liberation either and thus left to pursue his goal independently.²² Only then did he finally experience nibbāna²³ and become a buddha. The text states explicitly that Gotama had attained all the eight stages—the four absorptions and the four attainments—and that he attained an even higher state: nibbāna. In this same sutta, Gotama is portrayed as instructing the monks, not only as to how to attain each of these eight absorptions, but also how to reach a state higher than these eight. This state is called saṅkadvadānirodha,²⁴ the eradication of recognition and sensation. At first glance this state seems to be the same as nibbāna. As La Vallée Poussin says:

Il[les bouddhistes] pensent que ce neuvième [recueillement] a été découvert par le Bouddha; ils le nomment, non pas recueillement d'inconscience ("sans saṁjñā"), mais recueillement de destruction de la conscience et de la sensation ("saṁjñāvedayitanirodha") ou, plus simplement, recueillement de la destruction (nirodhasamāpatti); ils lui donnent un caractère nettement bouddhique en le définissant comme une prise de contact avec le Nirvāṇa (ou avec une entité semblable au Nirvāṇa).²⁵

²² Nāyān dhammo nibbidāya, na virāgāya na nirodhāya na upasamāya na abhiññāya na sambodhāya na nibbānāya sarivattati (M. i, 165).
²³ M. i, 167.
²⁴ M. i, 174-75.
Yet many modern scholars, such as Rune Johansson, hold that saññāvedayitanirodha is different from nibbāna:

... saññāvedayitanirodha is not included and it is not identified [in Pāli texts] with nibbāna. There are texts that would seem to imply a very close relationship, but they are exceptions. Nirodha is frequently mentioned as an aid to the attainment of nibbāna; but nibbāna can be attained on the other levels just as well, even without meditation [the author probably means the practice of the jhāna and samāpatti]; what is important is the destruction of the obsessions.²⁶

Yet the Ariyapariyesanasutta depicts the Buddha teaching his disciples how to successively reach the eight absorptions, the same eight that he had himself attained, and how to experience saññāvedayitanirodha. According to this text, the Buddha establishes a parallel between the various attainments his disciples achieve, and his own. From a rhetorical perspective, then, it would be strange for the ninth attainment of the Buddha—nibbāna—to be described as radically different from the ninth attainment of his disciples, saññāvedayitanirodha. Theoretically, there should not be any major difference between the two, especially since saññāvedayitanirodha is described in the same way that nibbāna often is. Both are described as “crossing over the entanglement of the world,” and as being out of reach of the Evil One (Māra).²⁷

If the correlation between saññāvedayitanirodha and nibbāna were based solely on this hypothesis, of course, it would not stand on firm ground. However, the correlation finds strong support in the commentarial literature—texts that Johansson may have overlooked. For example, in a chapter devoted to the discussion of saññāvedayitanirodha, the Visuddhimagga states that certain monks enter into this “trance” thinking: “Let us dwell in bliss by being without consciousness here and now and reaching the cessation that is nibbāna.”²⁸ A few pages later, the same text reiterates that saññāvedayitanirodha is “an attainment which a noble one may cultivate; the peace it gives is reckoned as

²⁷ M. i, 175.
²⁸ Ditth' eva dhamme acittā huvā nirrohaṁ nibbānam patvā sukhaṁ viharissāmā ti samāpajjanti (Vsm. 705); translation from Ēnānāmoli, The Path of Purification, p. 828.
nibbāna here and now.

The commentary of the Visuddhimagga goes even further by introducing a vague correlation between the term saññāvedayitanirodha and nibbāna without residue: Nibbānam patvā ti anupādesesanibbānam patvā viya. It is noteworthy that the commentator’s introduction of the particle viya suggests similarity rather than identity. The passage should therefore be translated thus: “[in this particular context of the Visuddhimagga, the expression] ‘attaining nibbāna’ means attaining [a state] similar to nibbāna without residue.”

Dhammapāla established no more than a correlation between saññāvedayitanirodha and nibbāna without residue (anupādesesanibbāna); he did not establish a one-to-one correlation between the two terms, but only stated that they are “similar.” However, Buddhaghosa mentions that the mind of one who has emerged from saññāvedayitanirodha tends towards nibbāna. This suggests that the “trance” is a kind of adumbration of nibbāna that bends the mind towards achieving nibbāna itself rather than being a state resembling it.

Although commentarial literature vaguely links saññāvedayitanirodha with nibbāna without residue, this equation is often questioned by scholars. For example, David Kalupahana stated that “scholars more conversant [than William James] with the Buddhist tradition go to the extent of equating the state of cessation (saññāvedayitanirodha) with freedom (nibbāna).” According to Kalupahana, these two states cannot, in any way, be equated. There seems, however, to be a flaw in Kalupahana’s argument against correlating saññāvedayitanirodha with nibbāna. While he correctly points out that the former ought to be experienced by the body (kāyena sacchikaraṇīya), his preceding remark is misleading; Kalupahana argues that the Ariyapariyēsanasutta, in which the Buddha refused to equate freedom with the state of cessation, should serve as a corrective to this misidentification by James.

29 Iti santāṁ samāpattam imāṁ ariyasevitaṁ, diṭṭh’ eva dhamme nibbānaṁ iti sankhāram upagataṁ. Vsm. 709; translation from Nāṇamoli, The Path of Purification, p. 833.
30 VsmA. 902.
31 Vasubandhu, in his Abhidharmakośa, seems to have been as careful as Dhammapāla in his definition of saññāvedayitanirodha: he stated only that it is similar (sadṛśa) to nibbāna (AbhK. ii, 44).
32 Vuttuppattiṁ kin ninnāṁ cittāṁ hoī ti nibbānaninnāṁ (Vsm. 708).
33 Kalupahana, The Principles of Buddhist Psychology, p. 76.
34 Which is interpreted by the commentator as arising simultaneously with the mental body (nāma). Kāyena ti sahajātā-nāma-kāyena (D.A. iii, 1023).
A careful reading of the Ariyapariyesanasutta, however, shows that the Buddha never refused to equate nibbāna with saññāvedayitanirodha. What we do find in this particular text is simply a statement that none of the eight absorptions can be equated with nibbāna:

This dhamma [the teaching of Āḷāra Kālāma] does not lead to disregard, nor to dispassion, nor to cessation, nor to tranquillity, nor to super-knowledge, nor to awakening, nor to nibbāna, but only as far as reaching the plane of “no-thing.”36

Kalupahana seems to have mistakenly associated saññāvedayitanirodha with the four absorptions and the four attainments, perhaps because it is sometimes described as the ninth absorption37 or because it is one of the eight deliverances (vimokkhā).38 It is important to recall, however, that saññāvedayitanirodha is not usually even mentioned along with the eight absorptions except when it is described as being higher than any of them. Moreover, the Ariyapariyesanasutta does not mention the attainment of saññāvedayitanirodha in this specific passage,39 and taking it for granted as implied is risky. It is, therefore, far from clear that the Buddha refused to equate saññāvedayitanirodha with nibbāna.

Saññāvedayitanirodha is known as a state beyond mind and matter, as is nibbāna without residue. However, one notable difference between the two is that the latter can only be experienced after death, while the former requires that one be alive. Alive, yes, but not apparently so. For all intents and purposes, one dwelling in saññāvedayitanirodha exhibits the same features as a deceased person, with the slight exceptions that life (āyu) and bodily heat are still present, and

35 Kalupahana, The Principles of Buddhist Psychology, p. 94.
36 ṝāyam [Āḷārakālāmassa] dhammo nibbidāya na virāgāya na nirodhāya na upasamāya na abhiññāya na sambodhāya na nibbānāya saññāvattati, yāvad-eva ākiñcanaññāyatanūpanissattavi (M. i, 165); translation inspired by I.B. Horner, trans., The Collection of the Middle Length Sayings (Majjhimanikāya) (London: P.T.S., 1959), 1:209. The same is said about the teaching of Uddaka Rāmaputta with the slight nuance that this latter leads no further than to the state of “neither-perception-nor-non-perception” (see M. i, 166).
37 For example, the Dīghanikāya describes nine successive “cessations,” which consist of the four absorptions, the four attainments and saññāvedayitanirodha (D. iii, 266).
38 A. iv, 306.
39 That is, M. i, 166-67.
that the sense-organs are purified.\textsuperscript{40} Thus the experiencer is technically but not actually dead.

We saw earlier that nirupādisesa nibbāna is sometimes defined as the total extinction of the five aggregates. Nibbāna without residue is also comparable to saññāvedayitanirodha in that the five aggregates are almost completely deactivated and become temporarily latent. As the name saññāvedayitanirodha implies, this state is devoid of saññā and vedanā. Without the existence of these two aggregates, neither of the two remaining mental aggregates (sankhāra and viññāna) can be present in their active form. According to the paṭiccasamuppāda, sañkhāra is necessary for the arising of the viññāna, which has the potential to turn into vedanā. Thus, if vedanā is eradicated, there can be no sankhāra, for the three links of the paṭiccasamuppāda that follow vedanā (tanha, upādāna and bhava) are members of the sankhārakkhandha.\textsuperscript{41} Furthermore, in the absence of sankhāra, viññāna cannot arise. This argument is implicitly supported by the Visuddhimagga in its definition of saññāvedayitanirodha: “What is the attainment of cessation [saññāvedayitanirodha]? It is the disappearance of consciousness (citta) and its mental factors (cetasika) owing to their progressive eradication.”\textsuperscript{42}

Noteworthy is that abhidhamma literature synonymously interchanges the terms citta and viññāna,\textsuperscript{43} while cetasika comprises not only vedanā and saññā, as we would expect from saññāvedayitanirodha, but also the fifty factors that constitute sankhāra. It follows that since saññāvedayitanirodha is devoid of citta and cetasika, it is therefore devoid of viññāna, vedanā, saññā and sankhāra as well. Only the remaining aggregate, the rūpakkhandha, must continue to be present, for the body remains alive and must be sustained by the material faculty of life (rūpajīvindriya), one of the twenty-three elements that constitute secondary matter. Therefore, saññāvedayitanirodha is not simply a “more radical negation

\textsuperscript{40} Ayu aparikkhino, usmā avāpasantā, indriyāni vippasannāni (M. i, 296).
\textsuperscript{42} Tattha kā nirodhasamāpatti ti yā anupubbanirodhasena cittacetasikānaṁ dhammānāṁ appavatti (Vsm. 702).
\textsuperscript{43} Nyānatiloka, Buddhist Dictionary, p. 37.
of apperceptions [saññā]," as Tilmann Vetter suggests,⁴⁴ but a radical negation of all four mental aggregates. In this sense, neither can it be equated, as Winston King advances,⁴⁵ with the fruits of the paths, for these are still characterized by the four mental aggregates, while saññāvedayitanirodha is completely devoid of them.

It is said that while in the state of saññāvedayitanirodha, the body is entirely protected from injury. Pāli texts offer the startling example of Mahānāga, who was dwelling in this trance when the house in which he was temporarily living caught fire. The blaze persisted until the villagers put it out; Mahānāga, meanwhile, was oblivious. After all, without the four mental aggregates, he could not possibly have been aware of anything! It is said that only the house burned; the monk was left untouched by the flames. It is interesting to note that when describing the villagers’ attempt to quench the fire with water, Buddhaghosa employed the causative form (nibbāpetvā), which shares the same etymology as nibbāna. Emerging from saññāvedayitanirodha, Mahānāga made a pun (“I am discovered!”).⁴⁶ While in the trance, Mahānāga’s own fire (i.e., his five aggregates) was temporarily quenched; after he emerged from saññāvedayitanirodha and realized that the villagers were trying to extinguish the fire, he exclaimed “I (meaning the five aggregates metaphorically associated with the fire) am discovered,” thus stressing the crucial polarity between fire and water, the five aggregates and nibbāna. He then flew away.

Unfortunately, the sensational (albeit deprived of sensation) state of saññāvedayitanirodha is not available to just anyone. According to the Visuddhimagga, only the non-returner and the arahant who have

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⁴⁴ “Probably in a period already dominated by the method of discriminating insight some persons wished to make use of this wasteland and discovered in the cessation of apperceptions and feelings [saññāvedayitanirodha] a state (or rather a name) not yet touched by any criticism. ‘Neither apperception nor non-apperception’ [the fourth samāpatti] now becomes the last but one stage and its description is to be understood as a middle-way formulation allowing for a more radical negation of apperceptions” (Tilmann Vetter, The Ideas and Meditative Practices of Early Buddhism [Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1988] p. 68).

⁴⁵ Saññāvedayitanirodha “is the maximum possible temporal extension of those nibbāna realizations contained in Path and fruition awareness as well as the experiential ultimate, nibbāna itself, tasted in one’s present existence” (Winston Lee King, Theravāda Meditation: The Buddhist Transformation of Yoga [University Park: Pennsylvania University Press, 1980], p. 104).

⁴⁶ Vsm. 706.
successively passed through the eight absorptions can enter it. This point is extremely important, for many scholars argue that equating saññāvedayitanirodha with nibbāna is impossible since, according to the Theravāda tradition, nibbāna can be experienced only by means of wisdom (paññā) and discriminative insight (vipassanā), while the eight absorptions can be attained simply by practising concentration (samatha). However, the fact that it is compulsory to be either a non-returner or an arahant in order to experience saññāvedayitanirodha implies that a certain amount of wisdom and discriminative insight have been acquired. In fact, only those who have perfected these two qualities could be capable of experiencing the state of saññāvedayitanirodha. As Winston King emphasizes, “only those who have attained the Path can attain cessation. It cannot be repeated too often that cessation is an integral blending of the two [insight (vipassanā) and concentration (samatha)].” Therefore, non-returners and arahant who have reached the goal (sopādhivesanibbāna) but have not followed the path of the absorptions cannot reach this state.

Paul J. Griffiths disagrees with this position so strongly that he devotes an entire book to refuting it. According to Griffiths, only the path of discriminative insight leads to nibbāna, and only the path of concentration leads to the absorptions and to saññāvedayitanirodha. The two are distinct and thus can never be blended, as King suggests, in order to attain either goal. Griffiths claims that Buddhaghosa and other commentators wrongly attempt to reconcile these two paths by correlating saññāvedayitanirodha with nibbāna without residue and by stating that in order to experience cessation, one must have already perfected wisdom through discriminative insight to the level of non-returner. His disagreement with Buddhaghosa is so intense that he

47 Ke taṁ samāpajjantī ti sabbe pi puthujjanaṁ sotāpannaṁ sakadāgāmino, sukkhavipassakā ca anāgāmino arahanto na samāpajjantī. Aṭṭha samāpattilābhino pana anāgāmino kūṁsāvā ca samāpajjantī: dvāhi balehi samannāgatatā tayo ca sankhārānam paṭippassaddhiyā solaśahī nānacaryāḥī, navahī samādhicaryāḥī vasibhāvatā paññā nirodhasamāpattiyo nānaṁ ti hi vuttam (Vsm. 702).

The reader might want to refer to the section of the Visuddhimagga (pp. 702-709) which explains how one can enter saññāvedayitanirodha, what the requirements are and how one emerges from that state, etc.

48 See A. iii, 192; Vsm. 705.

49 King, Theravāda Meditation, p. 108.
comes close to accusing him of heresy. Griffiths' statement is rather fierce, and I do not feel his arguments bear out the charge.

Griffiths presents two major arguments against the identification of *saññāvedayitanirodha* and *nibbāna*. The first is based on the following statement from the *Visuddhimagga*: "Why do they attain nirodha? ... they attain it thinking: 'let us live happily [sukham] by being mindless in this very moment and having attained cessation which is nibbāna'." According to Griffiths,

it is unclear how a condition in which no mental events occur can possess affective tone as appears to be suggested [by Buddhaghosa]. Presumably it would be more accurate to describe the attainment of cessation as a condition which is free from both happiness and sadness and indeed from all affective tone whatever.

The remark is accurate; *saññāvedayitanirodha* is a state where none of the mental aggregates function, making it impossible to experience either pleasant or unpleasant sensations. However, Griffiths' reference does not give proper consideration to Dhammapāla's commentary to the *Visuddhimagga*. According to Dhammapāla, the word happiness (*sukham*) in this particular passage simply means the absence of suffering. The commentator believes that this is what Buddhaghosa intended when he said that those wishing to attain cessation do so in order to "live happily." The first noble truth postulates the universality of suffering. Suffering does not merely result from unpleasant sensations, physical or mental, but is inherent in all compounded phenomena (*saṅkhāra*)—all psycho-physical phenomena of existence, all five aggregates. These are characterized by constant change. They arise and pass away; they are transitory (*anicca*). Because of this inherent instability, they are subject to suffering. Moreover, suffering is often

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51 *Kasmā samāpajjantī ti ... diṭṭh' eva dhamme acittukā huttvā nirodham nibbānam patvā sukham viharissāmā ti samāpajjantī* (Vsm. 705).
53 *Sukham ti niddukkham* (VsmA. 1673.22).
54 As stated in the *Sāriyuttanikāya*: "What do you think, monks: is rūpa permanent or impermanent?" "Impermanent, Sir." "And that which is impermanent, is it suffering or pleasant?" "Suffering, Sir." *Taṁ kim maññatha bhikkhave rūpaṁ niccaṁ va*
directly correlated with the five clinging-aggregates (saṅkhīttena pañc-upādānakkhandhā pi dukkhā). Although the state of saṅnāvedayitanirodha, defined as being beyond any of the four mental aggregates, can certainly not be characterized by pleasant and unpleasant sensations, it can be understood as a “pleasant” experience in Dhammapāla’s sense, for it transcends the suffering that is inherent in all types of sensations.

Griffiths’ second argument is that Buddhaghosa’s identification of nībāna with saṅnāvedayitanirodha “seems to approach uneasily close to a standard Buddhist heresy ... for it ... encourages some version of the annihilation view.” In the Theravāda tradition, the annihilation view (ucchedaditīhi) is defined as the belief (held by non-Buddhists, of course) that there is an unchanging self that remains constant throughout life and which, at the time of death, simply disappears. Of course, Buddhism categorically rejects the view that there is a permanent entity which is identified with the five aggregates: the tradition denies the truth of this presupposition altogether by affirming that there is merely a sequence of similar events that are causally related, but that this similarity can in no way be perceived as identity. Furthermore, Buddhism also repudiates the view that there is absolutely no existence after death, but rather that there exists a continuum from one life to another, wherein the last consciousness of the present life (cuticūta) engenders the first consciousness of the next (paṭisandhivīṇāṇa). The only possible way to exit this cycle of birth, death and rebirth is to eradicate all karmic activities (saṅkhāra) during the lifetime and to attain nībāna; otherwise the samsāric cycle is perpetuated. This being standard Buddhist doctrine, I do not see how Griffiths can make a statement such as “many Buddhist texts, especially those which discuss the question of the nature of nībāna, do in fact read as though they embrace just this ‘annihilation view.’” It is true that nībāna is most often described using negative terms, but reaching the goal is often the

aniccaṁ vāti. Aniccam bhante. Yam panāniccam dukkhaṁ vā taṁ sukhāṁ vā ti. Dukkham bhante (S. iii, 67). The same mode of questioning is used for the four other mental aggregates.

55 Griffiths, On Being Mindless, p. 29.
56 Rūpaṁ vedayītāṁ sarīraṁ viṇṇāṇaṁ yañca saṅkhataṁ n’ eso aham asmi (S. i, 112).
57 Such as portrayed in D. i, 55.
58 Griffiths, On Being Mindless, p. 29.
result of many lives of practice;\textsuperscript{59} this very point indicates that there is some sort of continuum from one existence to another, a view that the nihilists would reject. “However this may be,” as Griffiths continues, “it certainly seems as though this text of Buddhaghosa’s, identifying the attainment of cessation with \textit{nibbāna}, is one of those that encourages some version of the ‘annihilation view.’”\textsuperscript{60} It is not the association of \textit{sānāvedayitanirodha} with \textit{nibbāna} which should be considered in this light, but \textit{nibbāna per se}, as it is the latter (or at least \textit{nibbāna without residue}) which is described as being beyond the five aggregates\textsuperscript{61}—a statement resembling the annihilation view in the sense that all constituents of the individual are destroyed, but contradicting it in that there is still something left (perfect bliss; \textit{paramam sukham}), and that something existed prior to the attainment.

The Theravāda commentarial tradition has established a vague relationship between \textit{sānāvedayitanirodha} and \textit{nibbāna} without residue, in the sense that in the particular passage of the \textit{Visuddhimagga} referred to earlier, Buddhaghosa does not seem to be making a straightforward doctrinal statement that \textit{sānāvedayitanirodha} is \textit{nibbāna}. He simply states that certain monks enter this trance thinking: “let us dwell in bliss by being without consciousness here and now and reaching the cessation that is \textit{nibbāna}.”\textsuperscript{62} The rhetorical device of placing the statement in the mouths of others is not typical of Buddhaghosa when writing in a strictly analytical manner and when supporting a doctrinal point. Perhaps the statement is meant to be understood metaphorically. Hence the commentator, Dhammapala, rushes in to prevent misunderstanding by explaining that “reaching the cessation that is \textit{nibbāna}” means “as though reaching \textit{nibbāna} without residue.”

\footnotesize{59} For example, the \textit{Jātaka} offers the biographies of hundreds of the previous lives of the \textit{bodhisattva} on his way to enlightenment.

\footnotesize{60} Griffiths, \textit{On Being Mindless}, p. 29.

\footnotesize{61} “But [secondly, it is called \textit{without result of past clinging left (nirupādisesa)}] since after the last consciousness of the Arahant, who has abandoned arousing [future aggregates] and so prevented kamma from giving result in a future [existence], there is no further arising of aggregates of existence, and those already arisen have disappeared. So the [result of past] clinging that remained is non-existent; and it is in terms of this non-existence, in the sense that there is no [result of past] clinging here, that the [same goal is called] \textit{without result of past clinging left}” (Ñānamoli, \textit{The Path of Purification}, pp. 580-81).

\footnotesize{62} Vsm. 705.
However, according to Pāli sources, there is a major distinction between saññāvedayitanirodha and nibbāna. On the one hand, nibbāna is not merely a meditative state, but a phenomenon which exists by itself (sabhāvadhamma). As an ontological phenomenon, nibbāna differs from all other dhamma in that it is unconditioned, unborn, undying, etc. It is realized by practitioners when they attain the paths and fruits, but its existence is by no means dependent on anyone’s attainment. Nibbāna exists and remains as such whether or not it is realized. On the other hand, saññāvedayitanirodha is not a phenomenon which exists by itself since it has no individual essence and it is produced (nipphanna). For the simple reason that it has no individual essence, according to the Visuddhimagga, it is not classifiable as formed or unformed, mundane or supramundane. According to Pāli literature, nibbāna is a real phenomenon (dhamma), base (āyatana), and element (dhātu), while saññāvedayitanirodha is not. The latter is simply the cessation of mental factors reached through the procedure described in the Visuddhimagga. In the light of these canonical definitions of saññāvedayitanirodha and nibbāna, the equation of these two states becomes almost impossible.

Finally, a few words must be said with regard to a final hypothesis, put forward by Louis de la Vallée Poussin regarding saññāvedayitanirodha and its place within Buddhism. In his article, de La Vallée Poussin explores the debt of Buddhism to the ancient form of Saṁkhyā-yoga where the practice of complete withdrawal of the senses was the only means of achieving cessation of the mental activities (cittavrūti nirodha), which was in turn the only means of attaining liberation (kaivalya). He argues that the early Buddhists wanted to show that having incorporated every kind of practice into their system, they had reached an attainment higher than any of those associated with

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63 Dhs. 2; Sn. 362; It. 87; Ud. 80, etc.
64 Vsm. 507.
A similar statement regarding the mundane and supramundane classification of saññāvedayitanirodha is found in the Kathavatthu, p. 516.
66 Vsm. 705ff.
other practices.\textsuperscript{68} Therefore integrating \textit{sānāvedayitanirodha} into the Buddhist tradition may have been simply the result of an attempt to make Buddhism appear superior to rival practices.

As mere scholars with limited resources at our disposition, it may be impossible to determine with certainty whether \textit{nibbāna} and \textit{sānāvedayitanirodha} are truly one and the same; but we can be sure of the existence of profound controversies on the subject! I have argued, however, that Kalupahana and Griffiths, both of whom challenge the commentarial correlation between the two terms, fail to provide adequate support for their positions. Nor do the Pāli texts seem to be in total accord on this matter: the \textit{sutta} literature does not explicitly equate \textit{sānāvedayitanirodha} with \textit{nibbāna}, the \textit{abhidhamma} seems to stress the difference between these two stages, and the commentarial and sub-commentarial literature imply a similarity between them. Yet, one point seems clear: \textit{nibbāna} and \textit{sānāvedayitanirodha} both share a “blissful feeling”\textsuperscript{69} (which itself may again be interpreted in various ways). The peace generated by \textit{sānāvedayitanirodha} “is reckoned as \textit{nibbāna} here and now”\textsuperscript{70} for it shares \textit{nibbāna}’s peaceful quality. However, \textit{sānāvedayitanirodha} cannot be identical to \textit{nibbāna}, for it has no individual essence (\textit{sabhava}) and it is produced (\textit{nippaṇṇa}). It could simply be a kind of blissful foretaste of the \textit{nibbāna} element without residue, but on this matter as well, the texts remain unclear. One certain thing, however, is that \textit{sānāvedayitanirodha} is a state where the four mental aggregates are temporarily deactivated.

The State of \textit{Vedanākkhaya}

Now that we have discussed \textit{sānāvedayitanirodha}, we also ought to mention another kind of elimination of sensation. This, however, is not termed eradication (\textit{nirodha}), but rather destruction (\textit{khaya}), and refers to a slightly different state. We find passages including this term in the \textit{Suttanipāta}:

68 This hypothesis of “appropriation” was also advanced by Martin Wiltshire regarding other Buddhist doctrines. See \textit{Ascetic Figures Before and in Early Buddhism: The Emergence of Gautama as the Buddha} (New York: Mouton de Gruyter, 1990).

69 Blissful in the sense that it is devoid of sensation rather than being characterized by a pleasant feeling.

70 VsmA. 833.
Whatever sensations one experiences, pleasant, unpleasant or neutral, inside or outside, they should be understood as suffering, as illusory, as destined for destruction. Realizing that whenever there is contact, sensations pass away [as soon as they arise], one is free from passion, has destroyed the sensations and is fully liberated (parinibbuto).  

Similar passages are found in the Samyuttanikāya:

A disciple of the Buddha, with concentration, awareness and constant thorough understanding of impermanence [sampajāno] knows with wisdom the sensations, their arising, their cessation and the path leading to their destruction. One who has reached the destruction of sensation is freed from craving, is fully liberated (parinibbuto).

According to the texts, people “destroying sensations” are fully liberated, yet nowhere is it stated, as it is with the state of sañña-vedayitanirodha, that in order to undertake this practice and attain the goal, one must have previously attained the eight absorptions. Therefore, a difference seems to be implied between the state of destruction of sensations (vedanākkhaya) and sañña-vedayitanirodha. Moreover, people who have accomplished the state of destruction of sensations are still alive and interact with the world, whereas those dwelling in the state of sañña-vedayitanirodha are characterized by a complete alienation from experience.

As was pointed out by Padmasiri de Silva, the state of destruction of sensations (vedanākkhaya) does not imply the destruction of all sensations. According to the Samyuttanikāya, vedanā can be classified into eight types. The first four are caused by bodily disturbances such as those originating from bile (pitta), phlegm (semha),

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71 Sukhaṁ vā yadi va dukkhaṁ adukkhamasukhaṁ sahā ajjhattaṁ ca bāhiddhā ca yaṁ kireci atthi veditaṁ etarī ‘dukkhaṁ’ ti niṭṭvāna mosadhamaṁ palokinami phussa vayam passaṁ evaṁ tattha virajjati vedanānaṁ khāyā bhikkhu nīcchāto parinibbuto ti (Sū. 738-39).

72 Samāhito sampajāno sato buddhassa sāvako | vedanaṁ capajānaṁti vedanānaṁca sabhavam | yathā vetā nirujhanti maggaṁca khayaṁ maggamhān | vedanaṁnaṁ khāyā bhikkhu nīcchāto parinibbuto ti || (S. iv, 204. Another similar passage is at S. v, 57).

73 Padmasiri de Silva, “Kamma and vedanānupassana,” in The Importance of Vedanā and Sampajāna (Igatpuri: Vipassanā Research Institute, 1990), n.p. (paragraph 11 of the article).
wind (vata), and a combination of them all (sannipātika). The fifth originates from climatic conditions (utuparīnāmajā). The sixth arises from disagreeable things coming together (visamaparīhārajā) such as sitting too long or an improper combination of food. The seventh is caused by injuries and external attacks (opakkamika), such as being bitten by a snake. And finally, the eighth type of vedanā is caused by the ripening of one’s own kamma (kammavipākajāni vedayitāni). Of all these types, it is only the last, those sensations generated by past kamma, that are destroyed when the expression vedānākkhyā is used. The other seven types of vedanā are still functioning. When one has attained the state of destruction of sensations, one still functions normally, but no vedanā arises because of past kamma. Furthermore, those vedanā that arise do not lead to the production of any new kamma, for those who have attained this state are, as stated in the two passages quoted above, fully liberated (parinibbuto). This attainment of full liberation, as long as one is alive, is no different from nibbāna with residue, for it can be considered a state of mind, or more accurately, the state of a purified mind.

Vedanā as Bifurcation Point

The place that vedanā occupies in Buddhist soteriology is crucial, since vedanā constitutes the bifurcation point from which diverge the road leading to the multiplication of unhappiness and the road leading to the eradication of misery. Because of the Buddhist pivotal theory of dependent origination (paticcasamuppāda), vedanā is often misunderstood as not only being the basis for, but also as inevitably leading to, craving. However, if we carefully examine the Great Discourse on Causation (Mahānidānasutta) where each of the twelve links of the theory of dependent origination is explained, we do not find any textual

74 S. iv, 230.
75 Arahattapattito paṭṭhāya kilesavaṭṭha khepitattā sa-upādisesena carimacittanirodhena khandhavaṭṭha khepitattā anupādisesena cā ti dvihī pi parinibbānehi parinibbuta anupādāno viya padipo aparāṇattikabhāvāṁ gata (DhA. ii, 163).
76 Vedanāya kho Vaccha aṭṭhānā vedanāśāmiyadaye aṭṭhānā vedanānirodhe aṭṭhānā vedanānirodhāgāminiyāpaṭṭi ipapāya aṭṭhānā. Evam imāni anekavihitāni diṭṭhigatāni loke uppaιanti. “Vaccha, it is from the lack of knowledge in reference to the arising of sensations, to the eradication of sensations and to the path leading to the eradication of sensations that various wrong views regarding the universe arise” (S. iii, 258). Wrong views are said to bind one to misery.
evidence stating that *vedanā* necessarily leads to craving. All that is said is:

"With sensation as condition, there is craving. This, Ānanda, should be understood in this way. If there were no sensation at all, of any kind, anywhere—i.e., no sensation arising from eye-contact, no sensation arising from ear-contact, no sensation arising from nose-contact, no sensation arising from tongue-contact, no sensation arising from body-contact, and no sensation arising of mind-contact—then, no sensation would be present; with the cessation of sensation, would craving be discerned?" "Definitely not, bhante." "Therefore, Ānanda, sensation is the cause, source, origin and condition for craving."

This passage explicitly states that *vedanā* is a condition for craving, and that if no *vedanā* is found, craving cannot arise. But it does not state that *vedanā* is the only causal factor involved in the production of craving. The fact that craving cannot be produced without the presence of a *vedanā* does not imply that craving is necessarily produced when a *vedanā* is present. As Kalupahana noted:

While it is true, and this is actually the position held by the Buddha, that pleasant sensations *could* give rise to craving and lust, and unpleasant sensations (*dukkhā vedanā*) can be the cause of aversion and hatred (*dosa*), the causal relation is not a one-to-one relation.

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77 "*Vedanāpaccayā tanhā ti’ iti kho pan’ etam vuttaṁ, tad Ānanda iminā p'etaṁ pariyāyena vedītabbān yathā vedanāpaccayā tanhā. Vedanā va hi Ānanda nābhavissa sabbena sabbāni sabbathā sabbāni kassaci kimhi, seyathidāni cakkhu-samphassaja vadanā, sota-samphassajā vadanā, ghāna-samphassajā vadanā, jivhā-samphassajā vadanā, kāya-samphassajā vadanā, mano-samphassajā vadanā, sabbaso vadanāya asati vadanā-nirodhā api nu kho tanhā paññāyethāti? No h’etam bhante’. Tasmā ih’Āmanda (sic) es’eva hetu etam nidānam esa samudayo esa paccayo tanhāya, yadidaṁ vadanā’" (D. ii, 58). A similar passage is repeated for each of the twelve links.

78 Kalupahana, *The Principles of Buddhist Psychology*, p. 46. Th. Stcherbatsky supports this view by saying that the “*pratityasamutpāda* can hardly be called causation in the sense in which it is usually understood. It really means dependently co-ordinated-origination or dependent existence. According to it every momentary entity springs into existence in co-ordination with other moments. Its formula is ‘*asmin sati idam bhavati*’ there being this, there appears that! According to this, there could be neither *causa materialis*, nor *causa efficiens*. An entity is not really produced, it is simply co-ordinated” (*The Conception of Buddhist Nirvāṇa*, p. 9).
Vedanā itself is devoid of the connotation that many have read into the paṭiccasamuppāda; vedanāpaccayā taṇhā does not imply that vedanā is a sufficient condition for the arising of taṇhā (craving), but simply that it is a necessary condition. For example, when narrating his experience before he attained enlightenment, the Buddha mentioned to Aggivessana that while dwelling in jhānic ecstasy, he was not affected by the pleasurable vedanā that characterize such states,79 and was not, therefore, generating craving. The Buddha was experiencing sensations, but was not producing any kamma or craving. A further example is found in the Majjhimanikāya where the Buddha is described as experiencing the arising and fading away of sensations.80 Since a Buddha, by definition, is completely free from craving, the vedanā that arise within him cannot give rise to craving. Hence, vedanā itself is not a sufficient condition for the emergence of craving; rather, the perspective from which sensations are approached plays a crucial role in the emergence of craving. In fact, the Majjhimanikāya states that those vedanā approached as impermanent, sorrowful and subject to the vicissitudes of life (vipariṇāmadhamma) eradicate the tendency of reacting to sensations with greed,81 which would ultimately generate craving.

Wholesome and Unwholesome Vedanā

This particular soteriological approach to sensations is further described in the Samyuttanikāya as leading away from craving and any other defilements. Describing a monk in contemplation, the Pāli sources say:

He is aware of the vedanā thus: “there has arisen in me one of the five types of vedanā. Now this has its condition, its cause, its reasons, and has been conditioned. That this vedanā should arise without these is impossible.” Thus he comes to know fully the vedanā, its arising and its ceasing; and, thereafter, when a vedanā

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79 Evarūpi pi kho me Aggivessanauppannā sukhā vedanā cittaṁ na partīdāya titṭhati. Literally: Thus, Aggivessana, my mind was standing not having been overpowered by the pleasurable vedanā previously arisen (M. i, 247).
80 Yampi bhante Bhagavato vidītā vedanā upajanti, vidītā upatṭhahanti, vidītā abbhattāhammad gacchanti (M. iii, 124).
81 M. iii, 218-20.
The Majjhimanikāya further states that a “certain kind” of ādhisthānakāya arises, it comes to cease without remainder,—that also he fully knows.  

The Majjhimanikāya further states that a “certain kind” of ādhisthānakāya—which kind may still be either pleasant, painful or neutral—is conducive to the development of unwholesome states (akusalā dhammā), while “another kind” of ādhisthānakāya leads to the cultivation of wholesome states. This passage does not reveal which kind of ādhisthānakāya is conducive to either wholesome or unwholesome states, but its commentary, the Pañcasūtīpālani, clarifies this point. This source defines the sensations leading to the unwholesome states as belonging to the householder (gehasitā), but makes no mention of those leading to the wholesome state. In another sutta of the Majjhimanikāya, however, unwholesome states are contrasted with those belonging to the renouncer (nekkhamasitā), it seems that those belonging to the renouncer are conducive to wholesome states since their very quality lies in the way they are approached. They are perceived as “they really are,” i.e., as painful and impermanent. This distinction between these two types of ādhisthānakāya is not intrinsic to the ādhisthānakāya themselves, but rather results from the way one approaches the ādhisthānakāya. However, we have to be careful not to be misled by the terms. Although the words gehasitā and nekkhamasitā literally refer to the household life and that of renunciation respectively, they concern the mental disposition of a person rather than their outer dress or apparent condition. Nothing prevents a householder from attaining stages that certain monastics have failed to reach due to their lack of practice. As is stated in the
Dhammapāda: “Even though one may be highly dressed—in other words, not wearing the simple monastic habit and therefore being a householder—if one is poised, calm, controlled and established in the holy life, having laid aside the rod towards all beings, this person is truly a brahmaṇa, a recluse, a bhikkhu.” This passage supports the popular adage habitus non facit monachum (clothes don’t make the monk). The Pāli canon even apprises us of certain householders who had attained a higher development than certain monks. For example, Citta Gañhapati, who remained a householder throughout his life, possessed a thorough understanding of the teaching of the Buddha and had attained a stage that was superior to many who had become monastics. Equally, there are cases of monks who remained as undeveloped at the mental level as an ordinary householder (putthujana). For example, the venerable Nanda was tormented by thoughts of his former wife, and his mental state did not reflect the calm of the true renunciate, but rather the agitation of the householder. Therefore, we have to stress that the terms nekkhamasitā and gehasitā refer to ways of approaching the vedanā rather than to physical appearance and social status.

The Papañcasūdani further interprets these two terms of gehasitā and nekkhamasitā as being similar to the terms āmisā and nirāmisā, also used to describe vedanā. The Satipaṭṭhānasutta, a text essentially concerned with meditative practices, also uses these terms of āmisā and nirāmisā vedanā. The term āmisā is derived from the Sanskrit āmiṣa or āmis, both meaning “raw flesh,” and the word nirāmisā literally means “without raw flesh.” We might easily say that the Buddhist meaning of the terms has been extended respectively to “non-vegetarian” and “impure” and to “vegetarian” and “pure.” However, as Seyfort Ruegg established in his article “Ahimsa and Vegetarianism in

86 Alankato ce’pi samadhiccajy a santo danto niyato brahmačāri sabbasu bhūtesu nidhāya daṇḍaṁ so brāhmaṇa, so samoṇa, so bhikkhu (Dh. 142).
87 A. i, 26.
88 Vsm. 442.
90 MA. i, 278. The kinds of vedanā that the Papañcasūdani is referring to are described in detail in the Saṭṭhāvatānāvibhaṅgasutta (M. iii, 219).
91 M. i, 59 also at A. iii, 411 and D. ii, 298.
the History of Buddhism,” the establishment of vegetarianism in Buddhism is closely connected to “a specific religious and philosophical teaching: the tathāgatagarbha doctrine,”93 which was elaborated much later than the Satipaṭṭhānasutta. It seems that, at the time the Satipaṭṭhāna was composed, meat-eating was not yet perceived as “corrupting.” We cannot therefore establish a relation between the meaning of these two words and the connotations implied by eating meat. However, it is very clear from this particular sutta that the vedanā represented as nirāmisā symbolize those vedanā which are not conducive to further defilements such as craving or aversion.

In this chapter, we have discussed the states of saññāvedayita-nirodha and of vedanākkhaya. The former is a state comparable to nibbāna without residue, for none of the mental aggregates can be found therein. The latter is more comparable to nibbāna with residue, for the five aggregates of a person experiencing such a state are still functioning. We have also discussed many classifications of vedanā such as nirāmisā, nekkhamasitā, āmisā and gehasitā. We came to the conclusion that a certain means of approaching vedanā would transform them into nirāmisā or nekkhammasitā vedanā, which are of an inoffensive nature, while an alternative approach would transform vedanā into āmisā or gehasitā vedanā, which are endowed with a negative connotation since they will act as potential agents in the future arising of craving and aversion. The factor responsible for this particular approach to vedanā is the next aggregate: recognition (saññā). It is this third aggregate that will transform sensations into nirāmisā (nekkhamasitā) or āmisā (gehasitā), a transformation that will be either responsible for the generation or eradication of craving.

Chapter 4

The Saññākkhandha

As we saw in the previous chapter, vedanā is a necessary but not a sufficient condition for the arising of craving (tan̄hā). Craving depends not only on the occurrence of sensation, but also on the occurrence of a particular type of saññā. My aim in this chapter is twofold: first, to circumscribe the meaning of the term saññākkhandha and second, to show how it contributes to the emergence of craving within the framework of the chain of dependent origination.

Like vedanā, saññā is usually defined with respect to the six sense-doors (āyatana) through which the faculty is applied. Thus, saññā is classified in terms of (1) visible object (rupasaññā), (2) sound (saddasaññā), (3) smell (gandhasaññā), (4) taste (rasasaññā), (5) touch (phoṭhabhasaññā), and (6) mental object (dhammasaññā). Moreover, as with vedanā, the canonical definition of saññā does not shed much light on the meaning of the term since the verb used to define it (sañjānati) refers to the root from which the term saññā is derived. Fortunately, the Saṁyuttanikāya offers us a glimpse of what saññā could mean by expanding on the former definition: “It is called ‘recognition’ because it ‘recognizes.’ What does it ‘recognize’? It ‘recognizes’ [regarding the organ of sight] such things as blue, yellow, red, white, etc. Because it ‘recognizes’, it is therefore called ‘recognition.’”

Words such as “to be conscious” and “consciousness” or “to perceive” and “perception” are often used to translate the term saññā. However, my translation is grounded in the belief that both “perception” and “consciousness” carry misleading connotations with

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1 A. iii, 413.
2 Sañjānātisañjānātūti kho avusottamā saññāvuccati (M. i, 293).
5 As I.B. Horner rendered them in The Collection of the Middle Length Sayings, 1:352.
regard to sañña. The word "recognition," on the other hand, tends to imply that the subject imposes certain categories upon the percept in order to classify it. The term "recognition" can definitely not be mistakenly ascribed to the concept of viññāna. To use our reference from the Samyuttanikāya as a supporting example for this decision, we may say that the words "to perceive" and "to be conscious of" would suggest that the blueness, yellowness or redness of the object is inherent in the object itself, whereas saying "to recognize" implies that the colour (which may not be exactly blue, yellow or red, if such pristine colours indeed exist) is "categorized" by being linked to previous labellings. In fact, the word blue names nothing but a concept, and different people form different concepts to describe the same sensation. For example, one person may call two colours with different tones blue, while another may recognize these colours as indigo and aquamarine. Both have an extremely similar sensory experience, yet their recognition differs. The classic dialogue between King Milinda and Nāgasena on the definition of a chariot further exemplifies this point. Milinda is unable to define the chariot without referring to all its constituent parts. The chariot is a mere category, a mental conceptualization used by the sañña to order, to classify the various sensory experiences resulting from contact with the external object that we normally term chariot. This faculty of recognition leads to the formation of concepts, usually rendered in Pāli by the expression paññatti. The Āṅguttaranikāya supports the analogy by elaborating on the result of sañña, saying that "sañña always results in a 'concept' [vohāra, expression of worldly usage]: whatever is conceptualized has previously been 'saññanized.' This is very similar to the Sanskrit equivalent of the term sañña (saṁjñā) which usually means "name," "technical term" or "notion."
The Vibhaṅga classifies saññā into three categories: wholesome (kusala), unwholesome (akusala) and neutral (avyākata). Neither canonical nor commentarial literature sheds much light on these classifications. However, before establishing a correlation between saññā and the paṭiccasamuppāda, I will attempt to clarify what the text means by “unwholesome” and “wholesome” saññā.

Unwholesome Saññā

Like vedanā, saññā can also be perceived as an obstacle to spiritual progress. While the Vibhaṅga does not clarify what constitutes wholesome and unwholesome saññā, the Suttanipāta mentions that “one has not even the slightest saññā as regards to what is seen, heard or said; how can anyone in the world here doubt about such brāhmaṇa—i.e., one who has not even the slightest saññā—who does not hold a view (diṭṭhi)?” This passage implies, first, that true brāhmaṇa are free from the control of saññā; and second, that saññā is associated with the generation of views—these emerge from ignorance (avijja) and are therefore linked to craving and conducive to an unwholesome future. By emancipating themselves from the hold of the saññā, these brāhmaṇa have automatically eradicated the possibility of the arising of new views and of craving. The Suttanipāta also states that “the destruction of sorrow follows, etc., the eradication of saññā.” This
view is grounded in the fact that saññā is seen as the cause of “obsession”16 (papañca), which hinders spiritual progress.17

A brief look at the word papañca will help us understand more thoroughly the negative aspect of saññā. The term papañca itself is problematic, for it seems to have been used differently in the sutta, abhidhammic, and commentarial literatures. In the sutta, the term obsession seems interchangeable with wrong views (diṭṭhi). For example, the Suttanipāta clearly states that the ground of obsession lies in the belief that “I am the thinker.”18 The Samyuttanikāya goes even further by stating that most human beings approach reality with obsessions, but if one has removed the worldly things (gehasita) which are the product of the mind, one moves towards renunciation (nekhammasita).19 The Sāratthappakāsini vaguely explains the term papañcasaññā, as used in this particular passage, as the notion of obsession created by unwholesome saññā.20 This leads us to a narrower

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16 Saññānidanā hi papañcasānkha (Sn. 874). The Niddesa equates papañca and papañcasānkha. Papañca yeva papañcasānkha (Nid. i, 280; 344). The term papañca literally means “proliferation” and may refer to the proliferation of thoughts that govern our behaviour without our being aware of it. This is why I translate the term as “obsession.” However, as Richard Hayes notes, “the term ‘papañca,’ when used in the context of a Buddhist work is virtually devoid of any precise meaning. [The terms ‘prapanea’ and ‘diṣṭi’] may be regarded as variables that are capable of being given a more or less precise meaning by the Buddhist who uses them. Despite being variables, they do have a constant feature, which is that every Buddhist uses these words to connote wrongful uses of the mind. So, whenever we encounter the terms in a given text, all we can know for sure is that they refer to mental habits that have to be got rid of if we are to attain the greatest good” (Dignaga on the Interpretation of Signs [London: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1988], p. 68, n. 35). For a detailed analysis of the term, however, the reader should refer to Bhikkhu Nāṇananda’s Concept and Reality in Early Buddhist Thought (Kandy: B.P.S., 1986), a work devoted entirely to the study of papañca.

17 M. 1, 65; S. i, 100; iv, 52, 71; A. ii, 161; iii, 393, etc.

18 Mantā ‘ham asmi (Sn. 916).

19 This is a loose translation of the following verse: Papañcasaññā itaritara narā | papañcayantū upayanī saññīno | manomayam gehasitaṇca sabbāni | panujja nekkhammasitam irvati || (S. iv, 71).

20 Kilesasāṅgayā papañcasaññā nāma hutvā (SA. ii, 382). It is interesting to note that the term kilesa is often associated with the mind-defiling passions. See Nyāṇatiloka, Buddhist Dictionary, p. 80.
interpretation of the term, where *papāṇca* is used, more or less, as a synonym for desire, wrong views and conceit.\(^{21}\)

The *Pāli Text Society Dictionary* translates the compound *papāṇcasāṇṭa* as idée fixe, a translation which renders the meaning of the term very adequately, for the *Papaṇcasūdanī* explains the term as "the faculty of recognition associated with the obsessions related to wrong views and craving."\(^{22}\) However, clarifications on obsession are found in the *Majjhimanikāya* where the term is used as part of a small causal chain reflecting a psychological process:

Visual consciousness arises on account of visual forms and the eye, the meeting of these three is contact (*phassa*). On account of contact there is a sensation (*vedanā*). What one senses (as a sensation), one recognizes (*saṃjñāti*, from *saṃñā*). What one recognizes, one "thinks about" (*vitakka*).\(^{23}\) What one thinks about, one is obsessed with. What obsesses one is the cause of the number of obsessions which assail a person with regard to past, present or future visual forms cognizable by the eye.\(^{24}\)

According to this and other examples, contact is a necessary element for the arising of sensations, and sensations in turn are needed for the recognition to arise. However, recognition constitutes a further precondition for the appearance of "thinking about" and obsessions. This passage demonstrates that the *saṃnakkhandha* definitely follows *vedanākkhandha* and precedes obsessions.

The concept of obsession is also closely associated with desire. As one of the verses of the *Theragāthā* reports: "one who follows [his] obsessions is [like] a deer delighting in obsessions who has failed to

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21 *Tanhañi thimānappañabhedaṃ papācaṃ* (SnA. II, 431). Similar at Nid. i, 280; 344-45 and Net. 37.
22 *Papaṇcasāṇṭa ti tanhañi thhipapaṇcasampayutta saṇṇa* (MA. ii, 75).
24 *Cakkhuñ ca vā sosācī sāpe ca uppañjati cakkhuvinṇānam tiṇnam saṅgati phasso, phassapaccayā vedanā, yaṁ vedeti taṁ saṃjñāti, yaṁ saṃjñāti taṁ vitakketi, yaṁ vitakketi taṁ papañcceti, yaṁ papañcceti tato niḍānāṃ purisaṃ papaṇcasankhā samudācaranti aṭṭhānagatapaccuppannesu cakkhuvinneyesu rūpesu* (M. i, 111-12). Similar occurrences of the formula also appear at M. i, 259; S. iv, 67, etc.
attain nībāna, the peace from bondage and the unsurpassable."²⁵ This metaphorical passage does not directly point to the association of obsession with craving. However, E.R. Sarathchandhра expands the image to arrive at the following: one ruled by his obsessions is comparable to a deer who follows a mirage thinking that it is a pool of water; the deer is thirsty and believes that the mirage (papañca) will quench its thirst, just as people seek happiness and are convinced that sensual pleasure will fulfill their desire.²⁶ Although obsession cannot be directly correlated with craving, it can be associated with the emergence of craving because, as the Sakkāpañhasutta states, envy (issā) and avarice (macchariya), as well as desire (chanda²⁷), have their origin in papañcasañña.²⁸ Therefore, it would seem that both sañña and the more precise papañcasañña are necessary conditions for the arousal of craving—the link of the paṭiccasamuppāda that follows vedaṇā.

However, it must be stressed that obsession and papañcasañña are not elements of the saññākkhandha itself. As we have seen, the saññākkhandha is seen as the cause (or one of the causes) of obsessions,²⁹ but these are never said to be part of the saññākkhandha. Furthermore, the causal chain of the Majjhimanikāya mentioned above implies that sañña is a necessary condition for thinking about (vitakka), which in turn is responsible for obsessions. It is also worth noting that this same causal chain implicitly establishes a distinction between the saññākkhandha and the sankhārakkhandha since, as we will see later, thinking about is one of the members of the sankhārakkhandha and it would be illogical if obsessions, which follows thinking about, belonged to the saññākkhandha.³⁰

According to the sixth book of the Abhidhamma, the saññākkhandha needs to be distinguished from recognition of views (diṭṭhi-

²⁵ Yo papañcam anuyutto papañcābhūtiro mago, cirādhāyi so nibbānaṁ yogakkhe mar ṣa nutteram (Th. i, vs. 989).
²⁷ Chanda is equated in the commentary with craving (tanha).
²⁸ D. ii, 277-78.
²⁹ Sn. 874.
³⁰ In fact, if we adopt the sutta hypothesis mentioned on p. 80 that papañca is a synonym of diṭṭhi, papañca is automatically classified under the sankhārakkhandha category, for diṭṭhi is explicitly described as one of the fifty elements that fall into the category of sankhārakkhandha (see p. 107).
saññā). Only the Yamaka refers to this nuance, while other texts, such as the Dhammasaṅgani, imply that the faculty of recognition, the fact of having recognized and the state of having perceived all belong to the saññākkhandha. The Dhammasaṅgani does not seem to admit a distinction between the various saññā, while the Yamaka does. This apparent contradiction might be due primarily to a semantic misunderstanding of the term diṭṭhisāññā. The Pāli Text Society Dictionary translates the word diṭṭhi as “view, theory, belief, dogma” and stresses that unless preceded by the adjective sammā, it usually carries a negative connotation. To my knowledge, however, the compound diṭṭhisāññā is almost never used in the sutta literature and seems to be particular to the Yamaka. The Yamaka commentary elucidates the term by equating it with the concept of papañcasaññā which, as we have seen, is intimately related to craving.

This first distinction between the saññākkhandha and recognition of views (diṭṭhisāññā)—defined as papañcasaññā by the Pañcappakaraṇāthakathā—indicates that the saññākkhandha does not include obsessions and that craving is not inevitably generated by the saññākkhandha itself. In fact, obsessions—as well as recognition of views—would fall into the category of sankhārakkhandha and not of the saññākkhandha, for, as the Nettipakāraṇa states, “obsessions are craving, views, conceit and whatever sankhāra are activated by them.” The same text further supports this statement by saying that “whatever is obsession, whatever are the sañkhāra and whatever are the delighting in the past, future and present, all these are the same.” The Yamaka does not classify recognition of views (and obsessions) as saññākkhandha because it belongs to the sankhārakkhandha. As noted previously, saññā is often seen as the cause of obsessions. The saññākkhandha is the ground for the development of obsessions (as views, diṭṭhi). I must stress, however, that obsession itself does not belong to

31 Katamo tasmiṁ samye saññākkhandho hoti? Yā tasmiṁ samaye saññā sañjānā sañjānītattarā—ayaṁ tasmiṁ samaye saññākkhandho hoti (Dhs. 17).
32 One occurrence of the term has been found in the Mahāniddesa of the Khuddakanikāya where it is equated to wrong views (Nid. 93).
34 Papañcā nāma taṇṭhādiṭṭhimāna tadabhissankhāta ca sankhāra (Net. 37).
35 Yo cāpi papañcā, ye ca sañkhāra yā ca attānāgatajapaccuppānassā abhinandana, idam ekattāṁ (Net. 38).
the saññākkhandha, for the latter is merely a function that triggers the arising of the former, which, in fact, partakes of the sañkhārakkhandha.

**Wholesome Saññā**

Saññā is not always represented as a hindrance to salvation. The Āṅguttaranikāya, for example, provides us with an example of the positive value of saññā. Once, the closest disciple of the Buddha, Ānanda, came to report that the monk Girimānanda had been struck by a serious illness. The Buddha then told Ānanda to visit Girimānanda and recite “ten saññā” to the sick man; from this mere recitation, he says, “there are grounds to believe that the sickness will be allayed.”

These ten saññā consisted of (1) the recognition of impermanence (aniccasaññā), (2) the recognition of selflessness (anattasaññā), (3) the recognition of unpleasantness (asubhasaññā), (4) the recognition of danger (ādīnavasaññā), (5) the recognition of abandoning (pahānasaññā), (6) the recognition of dispassion (virāgasaññā), (7) the recognition of cessation (niruddhasaññā), (8) the recognition of disenchantment with the entire world (sabbaloke anabhirataasaññā), (9) the recognition of the impermanence in reference to all compounded things (sabbe sañkhāresu aniccasaññā), and (10) the mindfulness of breathing (ānapanasati).

We may wonder why the Buddha thought that there were grounds to believe that the mere recitation of these ten recognitions might alleviate the suffering of Girimānanda. The Asibandhakaputta-sutta demonstrates that the Buddha did not believe that the power of words could alter one’s destiny; hence for him to say that the mere recitation of the ten saññā would improve Girimānanda’s future seems incongruous. However, it is possible that he simply meant that hearing the ten saññā might encourage Girimānanda to develop these recognitions—this would result, if not in a cure for the sickness itself, in alleviating the unhappiness that caused it.

Just as there are two types of vedanā—āmisā and nirāmisā—we also find two kinds of saññā: those that lead to sorrow and unhappi-
ness because of their generating of obsessions, and those that improve one’s future by approaching reality through the three characteristics of existence (anicca, anatta, and dukkha) and seven other perspectives which, taken all together, constitute the ten saññā enumerated in the Girimānandasutta. The Girimānandasutta is not the only text to refer to this wholesome aspect of saññā. For example, these wholesome saññā are classified in categories of seven in the Dighanikāya, where it is said that they are conducive to [spiritual] prosperity, in categories of six in the Āṅguttaranikāya, where they are qualified as integral constituents of knowledge (vījī), in categories of five, in the Dīghanikāya, where they are described as leading to the maturity of liberation, and finally, in the Āṅguttaranikāya, where they are described as being very fruitful, merging in and leading to the deathless (nibbāna).

To my knowledge, the whole Pāli canon along with its commentaries support the view that saññā can be wholesome when it is geared towards the recognition of elements essential for liberation. What is important to note is that three main elements are explicitly or

38 As mentioned in Sn. 732; 802.
39 Dukkha is indirectly implied by the reference to asubha and ādīna.
40 Yāvakivā ca bhikkhave bhikkhū anicca-saññām bhāvessanti, anatta-saññām bhāvessanti, asubha-saññām bhāvessanti, ādīna-saññām bhāvessanti, pahiīna-saññām bhāvessanti, virāga-saññām bhāvessanti, nirodha-saññām bhāvessanti, vuddhi yeva bhikkhave bhikkhūnām pāṭikkānkhā no parihiṇī (D. ii, 79). The seven recognitions mentioned by this passage are those of impermanence, non-self, non-beautiful, danger, overcoming, dispassion and cessation. It seems clear that prosperity is used in the “spiritual” sense in this context for the Buddha is addressing a monastic audience.
41 Cha yime bhikkhave dhammā vijjābhāgyā. Katame cha? Aniccasaññā, anicce dikkhasaññā dukkhe anattasaññā, pahiīnasāññā, virāgasāññā, nirodhasaññā (A. iii, 334). These six recognitions are: impermanence, suffering amidst what is impermanent, not-self amidst what is suffering, overcoming, dispassion and cessation.
42 Pañca vimutti-paripācanyā saññā. Aniccasaññā, anicce dikkhasaññā, dukkhe anattasaññā, pahiīnasāññā, virāgasāññā. These are the recognitions of impermanence, of suffering amidst impermanence, selflessness amidst suffering, overcoming and of dispassion (D. iii, 243).
43 Pañcima bhikkhave saññā bhāvitā bahūlikatā mahapphalā honti mahānisaṁsā amatagadhā amatapariyosānā. Katamā pañca? Aṣubhasaññā maranasaññā ādīnasaññā dhāre paṭikkulasaññā sabbaloke anahiratasaññā (A. iii, 79). These are the recognitions of unpleasantness, death, danger, un wholesomeness with regard to food and disenchantment with the whole world.
implicitly incorporated in all of these lists: the recognition of impermanence (anicca), of suffering (dukkha) and of selflessness (anatta). As hinted above, these three main elements constitute the basis for wisdom. In order to attain the goal, whether nibbāna with or without residue, or even saññāvedāyutanirodha, what is definitely required by the practitioner is to have developed wisdom through vipassanā, insight, which in turn is cultivated by the awareness of impermanence, suffering and selflessness. As Buddhaghosa states in the Visuddhimagga, there are eighteen major kinds of vipassanā and six of these eighteen are among the various enumerations of wholesome saññā seen above. These are impermanence, selflessness, suffering, dispassion, eradication and danger (ādinava). The cultivation of these wholesome saññā will not lead to the further generation of craving, but will help to develop wisdom through which one can break away from the cycle of life and death and the chain of dependent origination.

Wholesome Saññā and the Saññakkhandha

At this point, we may wonder whether or not this wholesome saññā does, in fact, belong to the saññakkhandha. Buddhaghosa argues in the Visuddhimagga that the function of saññā as one of the aggregates is simply to recognize objects as “blue,” “yellow” and so forth. The saññakkhandha, according to this particular text, cannot lead to the penetration of the characteristics of existence: one could not, through the faculty of recognition, grasp at the deepest level the characteristics of impermanence, suffering and selflessness. Buddhaghosa goes on to establish, through a metaphor, a radical difference between the saññakkhandha and wisdom (pāññā). While the former merely recognizes the appearance of objects, the latter analyzes every object and perceives it as it is—that is, from a Buddhist point of view, as impermanent, painful and selfless. According to the Visuddhimagga, the saññakkhandha itself cannot deeply apprehend these three characteristics of existence. Yet, the discussion of the various

44 Vsm. 695. The eighteen contemplations (anupassanā) enumerated there are those of impermanence, suffering, selflessness, aversion, detachment, cessation, abandoning, destruction, vanishing, change, unconditioned, desirelessness, emptiness, higher wisdom regarding all phenomena, knowledge and vision of reality as it is (yathābhūtathānānadassana), danger, reflecting and turning away. Those that are italicized are included in at least one of the enumerations of wholesome saññā.

45 Vsm. 437.
wholesome saññā indicates that there can be a recognition of impermanence (aniccasaññā), of suffering (dukkhasaññā) and of selflessness (anattasaññā). As evidenced by the Sumanāgalavilāsinī,46 there are “five saññā leading to liberation.”47 Also interesting to note is that three of these five saññā are contemplations of the three characteristics of existence.48 The Sumanāgalavilāsinī implies not only that the object of saññā can be the three characteristics of existence, but also that these very recognitions can lead to liberation through the development of wisdom.

The Visuddhimagga, as I have noted, claims that the primary function of the saññākkhandha is to interpret by means of a sign (nimitta).49 The term nimitta, in this context, refers to the outward appearances of an object and excludes the more subtle attributes that characterize every phenomenon of existence. For example, a particular kind of deliverance described as signless (animitta) is interpreted in the Atthasālinī as being the result of the practice of the threefold contemplation.50 By observing the three characteristics of existence, one attains the deliverance known as the “signless.” The signs, in this context, are the beliefs in permanence, delight and self, which are all outward appearances not reflecting reality as it really is—as characterized by impermanence, suffering and selflessness. While the saññākkhandha itself is concerned with recognizing the outward appearances, the signs, the wholesome saññā apprehend the “signless.” Therefore, since wholesome saññā do not apprehend signs, they cannot be classified as members of the saññākkhandha, for the latter only deals with appearances.

Correlation between Saññā and the Paññiccasamuppāda

According to the paññiccasamuppāda, vedanā is a necessary condition for the arising of the next link, craving. However, in the chapter on vedanā
we saw that not all sensations generate craving.\textsuperscript{51} Depending on the response to a sensation, craving will either arise or not arise. \textit{Sanna} is primarily responsible for the way in which the individual approaches sensations.

Whenever something is sensed, it is also recognized.\textsuperscript{52} \textit{Sanna} always accompanies and follows \textit{vedana},\textsuperscript{53} but depending on the particular orientation of the \textit{sanna}, one may generate craving or start cultivating wisdom. The \textit{saññakkhandha} lies between two links of the \textit{pa\textit{ṭ}iccasamuppāda: vedana} and \textit{tanha}. We have just seen that it follows the \textit{vedanākkhandha}, and the causal chain of p. 81 implies that it also precedes \textit{tanha}. As we will see in the next chapter, \textit{tanha} and the following two links of the \textit{pa\textit{ṭ}iccasamuppāda} fall into the category of the \textit{sañkhārakkhandha}. That causal chain, then, places \textit{sañña} between \textit{vedanā} and thinking about (\textit{vitakka}). Since thinking about belongs to the \textit{sañkhārakkhandha}, it is evident that the \textit{saññakkhandha} finds its place in between the \textit{vedanākkhandha} and the \textit{sañkhārakkhandha}.

\textit{Sanna} imposes categories on our sensations and classifies them. The texts usually give the example that a certain sensation is interpreted as "blue" or "yellow."\textsuperscript{54} But this categorization goes much further by classifying sensations as "worth craving," and "worth hating." However, if the recognition that interprets the sensation is one of the positive \textit{sañña}, no craving or aversion will be generated, for the recognition itself will signal that this particular sensation is not "worth craving for" since it is impermanent, suffering and selfless. Yet, if the sensation is interpreted by a recognition that leads to obsessions (similar to views, \textit{diṭṭhi}), one will suffer under the illusion that this particular sensation is permanent, a source of pleasure or associated with the self. According to Buddhism, it is these particular views that are responsible for misperception of reality and bondage to \textit{samsāra}, for they are grounds for craving.

As Buddhaghosa states in the \textit{Visuddhimagga}, the \textit{saññakkhandha} (necessarily associated with obsessions) has the function of interpreting by means of signs that are apprehended, like the blind men who

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\textsuperscript{51} See pp. 71ff.  
\textsuperscript{52} \textit{Yam vedeti tan\textit{ɪ} sañ\textit{jānātī} (M. i, 111-12). Similar occurrences also appear at M. i, 259; S. iv, 67, etc.  
\textsuperscript{53} This is also evidenced by the causal chain described on p. 81.  
\textsuperscript{54} S. iii, 87. 
\end{flushleft}
describe an elephant. The comparison with the blind men probably refers to a story of the Udâna where men blind from birth are asked to describe an elephant by touching only a certain part of the animal. The blind men are all partially correct, but since their interpretation is based on their limited experiences, they cannot perceive the totality of the truth and the reality as it is (yathâbhûtaññânadassana). However, if the unwholesome saññâ were replaced by one or many of the various wholesome saññâ, craving would not be generated, proper understanding of reality would arise and wisdom would be developed.

In this chapter, we have seen that the main function of the saññâkkhandha is to recognize and interpret sensations through the imposition of categories. I have distinguished between two types of saññâ. The wholesome saññâ are recognitions of, in short, the three characteristics of existence. These do not belong to the saññâkkhandha as such. The unwholesome saññâ, on the other hand, are simply certain interpretations of reality that are not conducive to insight and that generate obsessions. The saññâkkhandha is essentially constituted of these unwholesome saññâ. Unless the saññâ of an individual are governed by the wholesome saññâ, that person is likely to generate craving, aversion, clinging and becoming, all of which fall under the next aggregate: saṅkhâra.

55 Yathâ gahitanimittavasena abhinivesakaranapaccupat ṭhānā, hatthidassaka-andhā viya (Vsm. 462).
56 Ud. 68-69. Although the simile found in the Udâna was used by the Buddha to explain to the king why different ascetics perceive the doctrine differently, Buddhaghosa has appropriated this parable and made it relevant to the function that saññâ performs.
57 Te ediso hatthi, n’ediso hatthi, n’ediso hatthi, ediso hatthi’ ti aṇñamaṇṇam muṭṭhīhi sanyujjhinisu (Ud. 69).
58 Noteworthy is that knowledge and vision according to reality (yathâbhûtaññânadassana) is one of the eighteen major kinds of insight (vipassanā) mentioned in n. 44 on p. 85.
Chapter 5

The Saṅkhārakkhandha

My purpose in this chapter is, primarily, to uncover the basic meaning that links the various contexts in which the term appears; and, secondarily, to arrive at a precise interpretation of saṅkhārakkhandha and its function with respect to the theory of dependent origination. I will not attempt to find one English translation with which to render all the connotations of saṅkhāra since, as we saw above, such an undertaking would be doomed to failure. Rather, I will attempt to adduce an extensive (and, I hope, comprehensive) explanation of saṅkhāra that will provide an understanding of the general meaning of the word by stressing the simultaneous presence of its causal and effective dimensions. To achieve this task, I will first use the fivefold division to analyze the different contexts of the word. I will not discuss saṅkhārakkhandha within the scheme. Once the different contexts have been presented, and the meaning of the term within them has been clarified, I will proceed to discuss the general sense of the term saṅkhāra. Finally, I will examine the specific function of saṅkhāra as one of the pañcakkhandhā. This methodology will offer us both a general understanding of the term saṅkhāra and of the saṅkhārakkhandha.

Polysemy of the Term Saṅkhāra

In order to unravel the specific function of the saṅkhārakkhandha, I will first explore the meaning of the word saṅkhāra in its larger context. Saṅkhāra is one of the Pāli words most highly endowed with philosophical implications. Stcherbatsky remarks that "the word and conception saṃskāra performs a conspicuous part in all Indian philosophical systems. It usually means some latent mysterious power, which later on reveals itself in some potent fact."¹ In her introduction to the translation of the Majjhimanikāya,² I.B. Horner refers to a passage from the Pāli Text Society Dictionary in order to stress the semantic depth of the word saṅkhāra. It is "one of the most difficult terms in Buddhist metaphysics, in which the blending of the subjective-

1 Stcherbatsky, The Central Conception of Buddhism, p. 18.
2 Horner, The Collection of the Middle Length Sayings, 1: xxiv.
The Five Aggregates

objective view of the world and of happening, peculiar to the East, is so complete, that it is almost impossible for Occidental terminology to get at the root of its meaning in a translation." Mrs. Rhys Davids also expresses her bewilderment regarding the significance of the term:

We are only at the threshold of its problems, and it is hence not strange if we find them as baffling as, let us say, our own confused usage of many psychological terms—feeling, will, mind—about which we ourselves greatly differ, would prove to an inquiring Buddhist. If I have not attempted to go into the crux of the sankhāra-skandha [sic], it is because neither the Manual [the Dhammasaṅgani] nor its Commentary brings us any nearer to a satisfactory hypothesis.\(^4\)

The exact meaning of this "mysterious power" still remains obscure. As Bandusena Madanayake points out in his doctoral thesis, "thirty scholars have put forward as many different meanings" for this single term.\(^5\) One of the reasons for this diversity of translations might be the fact that within the Pāli language itself, sankhāra possesses many meanings. Surendranath Dasgupta explains the polysemy encountered in the Pāli canon by the fact that

The Buddha was one of the ... 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 rather elastic when compared with the terms of precise and definite meaning which we find in later Sanskrit thought.\(^6\)

Yet many scholars, such as Hans Wolfgang Schumann, suggest that the rather wide semantic field associated with the word saṅkhāra was nonexistent at the time of the Buddha. According to Schumann, this diversity of meanings resulted from the growth of exegesis on the earlier sutta literature and from the development of an intricate and systematic

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6 Dasgupta, *A History of Indian Philosophy*, 1:86.
philosophical system that arose many centuries after the death of the Buddha.7

I.B. Horner divides saṃkhāra into four different categories, each having a different meaning. This classification consists of saṃkhāra (1) as one of the aggregates, (2) as one of the links of the paṭiccasamuppāda, (3) as a sort of activity associated with the body, speech and mind (kāya, vācī and citta) and finally (4) as properties when associated with the term life (āyu).8 Schumann, in his thesis Bedeutung und Bedeutungsentwicklung des Terminus Saṃkhāra im frühen Buddhismus, elaborates a similar scheme by classifying the various interpretations of the term into four categories.9 Using Horner’s and Schumann’s classifications as a starting point, I have developed a more extensive scheme consisting of five categories: (1) saṃkhāra as a saṃkhata-dhamma, as synonym of its cognate form sankhata, (2) as a paccaya, (3) as āyu-saṃkhāra, (4) as part of the compounded words sasaṃkhāra and asaṃkhāra, and finally, (5) as one of the five aggregates.

Saṃkhāra as Saṃkhata

Throughout the Pāli canon, the concept of saṃkhāra is closely associated with that of saṅkhata.10 The usual definition of the term runs thus: “it is called saṃkhāra because it ‘produces’ saṅkhata.”11 Because the Pāli word for what I have translated as “to produce” is abhisankhharoti, a cognate of saṃkhāra, the deciphering of this definition is rendered more difficult. The Atthasālinī provides us with a description of saṃkhata that may clarify the above definition of saṃkhāra. “The saṅkhata are made, having been assembled by conditions, and whatever is not saṅkhata is asaṅkhata.”12 S.Z. Aung, in his appendix to the translation of the Abhidhammattasañgaha, emphasizes that, although the notion of being compounded is implied by the term saṅkhata, the idea of being conditioned and having been caused is the closest to the definition of

8 Horner, The Collection of the Middle Length Sayings, 1:xxiv-xxv.
9 Schumann, Bedeutung und Bedeutungsentwicklung des Terminus Saṃkhāra in frühen Buddhismus, pp. 45ff.
10 Refer to p. 15 for a discussion of the saṅkhata and asaṅkhata groups.
11 Saṅkhataṃ abhisanakharatṇī bhikkhave tasmā saṃkhārā ti vuccanti (S. iii, 87).
12 Paccayehi samāgantvā katā ti saṅkhata, na saṅkhata ti asaṅkhata (DhsA. 47).
the term.\textsuperscript{13} These conditions, or causes, that produce the saṅkhata-dhamma seem to be saṅkhāra as well.

Clearly, there is a definite relation between the two concepts (viz. saṅkhāra as a cause, and saṅkhāra as an effect, i.e., saṅkhata-dhamma), but the texts go so far as to suggest that there is no difference at all between them. In the sutta literature, there are a few instances where the first two characteristics of existence—impermanence and suffering—are used to qualify the term saṅkhāra. In these same passages, however, the third characteristic of existence, selflessness, is an attribute of dhamma rather than saṅkhāra:

\begin{quote}
Sabbe saṅkhāra anicca tī; All saṅkhāra are impermanent;
Sabbe saṅkhāra dukkha tī; All saṅkhāra are suffering;
Sabbe dhamma anattā tī. All phenomena are selfless.\textsuperscript{14}
\end{quote}

I do not think that, here, the term dhamma is used in a different sense than saṅkhāra. If the Buddha had said “sabbe saṅkhāra anattā,” meaning that all the conditioned phenomena are substanceless, people might have wrongly inferred that the unconditioned phenomenon (asadāṅkhata-dhamma) must have a permanent entity (atta). The unconditioned phenomenon which, in the Theravāda tradition, is restricted to a unique component (nibbāna), is also devoid of any permanent entity (atta). In order to avoid the misunderstanding that sabbe saṅkhāra anattā could potentially imply, the term saṅkhāra is replaced by dhamma in this particular context. Moreover, by stating “sabbe dhamma anattā,” the text not only suggests that all the conditioned phenomena are anatta, but that the only unconditioned phenomenon—nibbāna—is anatta as well. The commentary on this passage also mentions that saṅkhāra is a synonym of saṅkhata, the latter referring to any element (dhamma) which has been conditioned.\textsuperscript{15}

Therefore, we may affirm that saṅkhāra, as a saṅkhata, refers to all the principles of existence except nibbāna (and other dhamma considered by other traditions as asaṅkhata). Stcherbatsky presents an interesting theory as to why the conditioned phenomena are called saṅkhāra:

\begin{quote}
13 Aung, Compendium of Philosophy, p. 273.
14 S. i, 200; D. ii, 157; also Kv. ii, 531.
15 Tattha aniccā vata saṅkhāra tī ādisu vutta sabbe pi sappaccaya dhammā saṅkhata saṅkhāra nāma (DA. ii, 230).
\end{quote}
The elements of existence were regarded as something more similar to energies (śāṁskṛta dhamma [skr. equivalent for saṅkhata-dhamma]) than to substantial elements. ... Since the energies [saṅkhata-dhamma] never worked in isolation, but always in mutual interdependence according to causal law, they were called “synergies” cooperators (saṁskāra [skr. equivalent for saṅkhāra]).

Thus, in certain contexts, conditioned phenomena are synonymous with saṅkhāra because they were previously produced, they were conditioned and, most of all, because they do not subsist independently of other saṅkhata—they are “cooperators”. This definition of saṅkhāra is valid for the entire universe: the individual microcosm (the five aggregates) is included in the term and so is the macrocosm, the entire phenomenal world we live in. Therefore, everything but nibbāna is saṅkhāra. Everything that has been compounded and has a cause is a saṅkhāra in the sense of conditioned phenomena (saṅkhata-dhamma).

**Saṅkhāra as Paccaya**

Within the complex theory of dependent origination, saṅkhāra is inserted as a link between ignorance (avijjā) and consciousness (viññāna). This means that on account of ignorance, saṅkhāra come into being and generate a consciousness. It seems that within the paṭiccasamuppāda the term saṅkhāra has a meaning radically different from the one previously ascribed to “saṅkhāra as a saṅkhata” since there is no explicit textual evidence of conditioned phenomena producing consciousness.

The *Vibhanga* defines saṅkhāra produced by ignorance (and implicitly generating a future consciousness) as volition (cetanā). The *sutta* literature also has a similar definition of saṅkhāra: the *Saṁyutta-***

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17 S. iii, 144.
18 The *Sammohavinodani* correlates the words anekadhātu-nānādhātuloka with upādinnakasanakkāraloka (VbhA. 456).
19 Avijjāpacca yā saṅkhāra; saṅkhārapacca yā viññāna (S. ii, 5).
20 *Tattha katamo avijjāpacca yā saṅkhāro? Yā cetanā saṅcetanā saṅcetayitattam, ayam vuccati avijjāpacca yā saṅkhāro* (Vbh. 144; a similar passage is also found at Vbh. 173).
nikāya equates the term with the six groups of volition, which are defined therein with respect to the six sense-doors.\textsuperscript{21}

Volition is clearly explained in the Aṅguttaranikāya, where the Buddha states that what he calls volition (cetanā) is simply kamma, and that one who “cetanizes” is one who generates kamma either by body, words or mind: “Monks, I say that volition is action. Having “cetanized,” one acts by deed, word or thought.”\textsuperscript{22} Another example of the relation between sankhāra (or volition) and kamma is symbolically exemplified in the Rathakāravagga of the Aṅguttaranikāya. In this sutta, a “wheel-maker” explains to the king that the wheel (and by analogy the kamma-concept) “kept rolling as long as the impulse that set the motion (abhisāṅkhārassa gati) lasted. It then circled and fell to the ground.”\textsuperscript{23} The term abhisāṅkhāra\textsuperscript{24} is a synonym of volition and refers here to the dynamism and momentum usually associated with kamma. For this reason, Padmasiri de Silva points out that sankhāra is often considered synonymous with the concept of volition or kamma.\textsuperscript{25}

These pieces of textual evidence support the relation that the Burmese meditation teacher Sayagyi U Ba Khin drew between kamma and sankhāra:

In this connection, we should understand that each action—either by deed, word, or thought—leaves behind a force of action, sankhāra (or kamma in popular terminology), which goes to the credit or debit account of the individual, according to whether the action is good or bad. There is, therefore, an accumulation of sankhāra (or kamma) with everyone, which function as the supply-

\textsuperscript{21} Katamā ca bhikkhave sankhārā? Chayime bhikkhave cetanākayā. Rūpa ... sadda ... gandha ... rasā ... phoṭṭhabba ... dhammasaṅcetanā ime vuccanti bhikkhave sankhārā (S. iii, 60).

\textsuperscript{22} Cetanāhāni bhikkhave kammaṁ vadāmi; cetayitvā kammaṁ karoti kāyena vācāya manasā (A. iii, 415).

\textsuperscript{23} Tam pavattātaṁ samānāṁ yāvatikā abhisāṅkhārassa gati tāvatikāṁ gantvā cingulāyitvā bhūmiyāṁ papati (A. i, 111).

\textsuperscript{24} The interchangeability of the terms abhisāṅkhāra and sankhāra is evidenced by the Saniyuttanikāya (S. iii, 87) and the Dīghanikāya (D. i, 18) where the function of sankhāra is said to be “abhisāṅkharoṭī.”

\textsuperscript{25} M.W. Padmasiri de Silva, Buddhist and Freudian Psychology (Colombo: Lakehouse Investments, 1973), p. 117; also see Aung, Compendium of Philosophy, p. 274.
source of energy to sustain life, which is inevitably followed by suffering and death. 

The Vibhaṅga further states that saṅkhāra produced by ignorance are threefold: meritorious saṅkhāra (puññabhisaṅkhāra), non-meritorious saṅkhāra (apuññabhisaṅkhāra) and “unshakable” saṅkhāra (āneñjābhisaṅkhāra). Meritorious saṅkhāra are defined as being profitable volitions—kamma—that will yield their results either in the sensual sphere or in the fine material sphere; these meritorious “actions” (of body, speech and mind) consist of charity, morality and meditation.

The non-meritorious saṅkhāra are explained as being unprofitable kamma, the results of which will be reaped only in the sensual sphere. The unshakable saṅkhāra are said to be wholesome kamma producing a result in any of the four immaterial spheres. This division of saṅkhāra into meritorious, non-meritorious and unshakable further stresses the relation between saṅkhāra and kamma, since the Vibhaṅga states that these three divisions constitute the entire field of the kamma-process.

The Vimohavinodani elucidates the meaning of saṅkhāra as threefold: there are saṅkhāra of body, of speech and of mind. The saṅkhāra of body are initiated by the body and express themselves through it. The saṅkhāra of speech and mind are initiated by speech and the mind and express themselves through them. According to the


27 Tattha katame avijjāpaccayā saṅkhāra? Puññabhisaṅkhāro apuññabhisaṅkhāro āneñjābhisaṅkhāro (Vbh. 135).

28 Tattha katamo puññabhisaṅkhāro? Kusalā cetanā kāmāvacarā rūpāvacarā dānamayā sīlamayā bhāvanāmayā, ayam vuccati puññabhisaṅkhāro (Vbh. 135).

29 Tattha katamo apuññabhisaṅkhāro? Akusalā cetanā kāmāvacarā: ayam vuccati apuññabhisaṅkhāro (Vbh. 135).

30 Tattha katamo āneñjābhisaṅkhāro? Kusalā cetanā arūpavacarā: ayam vuccati āneñjābhisaṅkhāro (Vbh. 135).

31 Tattha katamokammabhavo? Puññabhisaṅkhāro apuññabhisaṅkhāro āneñjābhisaṅkhāro: ayam vuccati kammabhavo (Vbh. 137). The compound kammabhava literally means “kamma-process.” However, this term is used in a technical sense and refers to links eight, nine and ten of the theory of dependent origination. See pp. 110ff. for further discussion of this concept.

32 Kāyena pavattito, kāyato vā pavatto, kāyassa vā saṅkhāro ti kāyasāṅkhāro. Vaci-saṅkhāra-citta-saṅkhāresu pi es' eva nayo (VbhA. 142).
Yamaka, the saṅkhāra of body are said to originate from breathing in and breathing out; the saṅkhāra of speech, from reflection and investigation which “denote the whole mental process of thinking”, the mental saṅkhāra, from saññā and vedanā or, in other words, all the principles associated with the mind except reflection and investigation. I do not believe that body-saṅkhāra (kāyasāṅkhāra) arise from the mere function of respiration, but since breathing is essential for the subsistence of the body and the performance of any other action, it is considered to be the precursor of any further body-saṅkhāra. Similarly, reflection and investigation are not inherently speech-saṅkhāra (vacīsāṅkhāra) but, because these functions precede all verbal activities, they are regarded as the foundation that allows a person to speak and thereby generate speech-saṅkhāra. Since the mental saṅkhāra are said to arise from saññā and vedanā, saṅkhāra as a paccaya is not simply deeds, but also physical, vocal or mental actions that will yield certain consequences in the future. Both of these, the karmically charged action and the future consequences, are saṅkhāra in the sense of conditioned phenomena, but only the former can be classified under saṅkhāra as a paccaya.

Saṅkhāra Used in the Compound Āyusaṅkhāra

Another type of saṅkhāra is also mentioned in the Pāli canon. The Kathāvatthu alludes to the Buddha entering into parinibbāna only after he had “let loose” his āyusaṅkhāra. The sutta literature, particularly in the discourses referring to the Buddha’s death, also makes a few allusions to this word. The term bhavasaṅkhāra also seems to have been used as a synonym of āyusaṅkhāra. The Aṅguttaranikāya employs this expression to state that when the Buddha had released his bhava-

34 Tayo saṅkhārā: kāya-saṅkhāro vacīsāṅkhāro cittasaṅkhāro. Assāsapassāsā kāyasāṅkhāro, vitakkavicārā vacīsāṅkhāro, saññā ca vedanā ca cittasaṅkhāro, ṭhapetvā vitakkavicāre sabbe pi cittasampayuttakā dhammā cittasaṅkhāro (Ymk. i, 229).
35 Ymk. i, 229.
36 Cāpāle cetiyā āyusaṅkhāro ossaṭṭho, Kusinārāyam Bhagavā parinibbuto ti? (Kvu. ii, 559).
37 Such as in D. ii, 99; 108.
saṅkhāra, he broke apart the “coat of mail”\(^{38}\) that originates from one’s own person.\(^ {39}\) None of the commentaries explain the meaning of these two terms, yet the words themselves suggest a kind of “life principle,” a vital energy which provides the necessary fuel to produce rebirth and without which life ceases. This is reminiscent of our interpretation of saṅkhāra as paccaya, where the term saṅkhāra was correlated with the dynamism and momentum associated with the concept of kamma. The only difference is that the āyusapaṅkhāra (as well as the bhavasaṅkhāra) refers to a specific force—not simply any karmic force, but the one responsible for rebirth. Both āyusapaṅkhāra and bhavasaṅkhāra refer to the force responsible for generating a new existence.

### Saṅkhāra Used in the Compounds Asaṅkhāra and Sasaṅkhāra

The fourth usage of the word saṅkhāra is found in the compounds “without saṅkhāra” (asaṅkhāra) and “with saṅkhāra” (sasaṅkhāra), the latter appearing in relation to the word parinibbāya in the sutta literature, and usually in conjunction with the term citta in the Abhidhamma texts.

While discussing the different methods of attaining nibbāna, the Samyuttanikāya states that one who eradicates the five fetters of the lower sort attains nibbāna “without saṅkhāra” and, following a similar procedure, can achieve nibbāna “with saṅkhāra.”\(^ {40}\) Although the meaning of this sentence is obscure because no textual evidence is implied as to the distinction between the procedures to be followed in order to enter either nibbāna “with saṅkhāra” or nibbāna “without saṅkhāra,” the meaning of these two terms seems fairly clear. Asaṅkhāra means “without saṅkhāra,” while sasaṅkhāra means “with saṅkhāra.” Therefore, the term asaṅkhāra applied to nibbāna suggests that nibbāna has been reached while the experiencer still possesses a karmic

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38 Kavaca: the P.T.S. Dictionary (p. 200) says that the word applies to “existence,” probably because the latter is made up of many factors and combinations, or, in other words, that life is the expression of an intricately knitted mail of conditioned phenomena.

39 Tūlan atulajñ ca sambhavam bhavasaṅkhāraṁ avassaji muni ajhattarato samāhi ṭo kalpañ kavaccam ipv’ attasambhavan ti (A. iv, 312).

40 No ce pañcannam orambhāgyaṁ saṁyoganaṁ parikkhayaṁ asaṅkhāraparinibbāyi hoti. Atha pañcannam orambhāgyaṁ saṁyoganaṁ parikkhayaṁ saasaktāpañcannam parinibbāyi hoti (S. v, 70). The same passage is found at A. i, 233.
residue.\textsuperscript{41} According to tradition, the Buddha attained \textit{nibbāna} at the age of thirty-five, but remained alive some forty-five more years. Because he “came back” to teach in the \textit{kāmaloka}, we might postulate that he still had certain stock of \textit{kamma} which allowed (or caused) him to come back into this world; he had not yet entered \textit{nibbāna} without residue. When he reached that state, no more karmic residue was present, thus no force could hold him to this world. The problem we encounter is that in the \textit{sutta}, the words \textit{sasaṅkhāra} and \textit{asaṅkhāra} are used not in reference to \textit{nibbāna}, but to \textit{nibbāna} without residue. A further difficulty emerges from the fact that Pāli is a highly inflected language; we often find two or more declined words losing their case endings and being compounded (concatenated) together. Sometimes, it is only through a careful analysis (and often, speculation) that we can unveil the syntactic relation uniting the members of the compounds. The compounds \textit{sa-saṅkhāra-parinibbāyī} and \textit{a-saṅkhāra-parinibbāyī} are extremely ambiguous. From one perspective, the first element (\textit{a-saṅkhāra} or \textit{sa-saṅkhāra}) could be interpreted as an attribute of the word \textit{parinibbāyī},\textsuperscript{42} hence meaning “one who has attained the state of \textit{parinibbāna} which has (or has no) \textit{saṅkhāra}.” Although grammatically correct, this analysis is rejected by the \textit{Sumangalavilāsini} which holds that an instrumental case relation\textsuperscript{43} links \textit{parinibbāyī} to \textit{saṅkhāra} and \textit{sasāṅkhāra}, hence attributing quite a different meaning to the compounds: one who has attained \textit{parinibbāna} from (or because of) \textit{saṅkhāra} (or from the lack of it in the case of \textit{asaṅkhāraparinibbāyī}). The commentator further elaborates by defining \textit{asaṅkhāra} as “without effort, with ease and pleasure,” and \textit{sasāṅkhāra} as “with efforts, difficulty and \textit{dukkha}.”\textsuperscript{44}

The \textit{Abhidhamma} literature strengthens the commentarial definition of \textit{sasāṅkhāra} and \textit{asaṅkhāra} by emphasizing that one who has completely eradicated the fetters and thereby perceives the noble path “without efforts” is called a person who has achieved \textit{parinibbāna}

\textsuperscript{41} The \textit{Atthasālīnī} apparently agrees with this interpretation since Buddhaghosa defines \textit{sasāṅkhāra} as “\textit{with sāṅkhāra}.” \textit{Tass' attho saha saṅkhārenā ti sasāṅkhāro} (DhsA. 156).

\textsuperscript{42} \textit{Bahuvrīhi} compound.

\textsuperscript{43} Instrumental \textit{tapatruṣa}.

\textsuperscript{44} \textit{Asaṅkhārenā appayogena akilamanto sukhena patto asaṅkhāra-parinibbāyī nāma. Sasaṅkhārenā sappayogena kilamanto dukkhena patto sasaṅkhāra-parinibbāyī nāma} (DA. iii, 1030); similar definitions are found in the \textit{Śrāvatthapakhāsīnī} (SA. iii, 143) and the \textit{Manorathapūraṇī} (AA. ii, 350).
“without efforts”; similarly, one who eradicates the fetters through striving, and thereby perceives the noble path, is called a person who has achieved *parinibbāna* “with efforts”.

The *Atthasalini* further elucidates the meaning of the term *sasaṅkhāra* (which the commentator considers to be a new word in Buddhist terminology) with a narrative. A monk had certain duties to perform, such as sweeping the courtyard, taking care of an elderly monk and listening to the dhamma, but was not naturally inclined to fulfill them. Yet, either by self-instigation or by being admonished by another monk, he realized the disadvantages of not performing his duties and the advantages of carrying them out, and ultimately performed what he had to do. This action of his, triggered by instigation and necessitating efforts on his part, is called an action which gives birth to a wholesome mental state because of *sālikhiira* (“with effort”).

According to Mrs. Rhys Davids, all the thoughts (*citta*) which are not called *sasaṅkhāra* are implicitly included in the concept of *asaṅkhāra*.

The story of Bāhiya Dāruciria serves as a good illustration of *asaṅkhāraparinibbāyi* within Theravāda Buddhism. The elderly ascetic Bāhiya, who was living in the vicinity of what is now Bombay, decided to travel all the way to Sāvatthi to seek advice from the Buddha. When he arrived in the capital city of Kosala, he met the Buddha and received a few words of inspiration. While he was listening, he suddenly reached enlightenment. Later, the Buddha said that Bāhiya Dāruciria was the supreme example of those who comprehended the truth instantly (*khippabhāna*). This story exemplifies the unexpected attainment of *nibbāna*—a realization devoid of proximate conscious striving (*asaṅkhāra*).

Both in the *sutta* and abhidhammic literature, the term *sasaṅkhāra* seems to refer to a thought, action or state attained by instigation or mental efforts that constrain the natural tendencies of the

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45 *So asaṅkhārena ariyamaggaṁ saṅjaneti upariṭṭhimānaṁ saṅnōjanānaṁ [saṅyojanānaṁ] pahānāya: ayam vuccati puggalo asaṅkhāra-pariṇibbāyi. ... So asaṅkhārena ariyamaggaṁ saṅjaneti upariṭṭhimānaṁ saṅnōjanānaṁ pahānāya: ayam vuccati puggalo sasaṅkhāra-pariṇibbāyi* (Pug. 17).

46 *Imamsim tāva dutiyacittaniddese sasankhārenā ti idam eva apubbāṁ* (DhsA. 156).

47 Dhs. 156.


50 A. i, 24.
individual, while asaṅkhāra points to a thought, action or state that has arisen effortlessly, without instigation, in accord with personal inner tendencies. The Atthasālinī offers a list of synonyms of asaṅkhāra ("with energy, with preparation, with effort, with the grasping of a cause"), all of which indicate that the term implies a conscious instigation on the part of the individual. We see that in the context of sasaṅkhāra and asaṅkhāra, the term saṅkhāra also refers to a certain dynamism or force of action, as with saṅkhāra as paccaya.

**General Meaning of the Term Saṅkhāra**

Now that we have looked at the meaning of saṅkhāra within the first four divisions of our fivefold classification, I will attempt to extract the essence of the term and to underline the general meaning of this puzzling concept.

We have seen that saṅkhāra, as a saṅkhiṭṭhata, refers to all the principles of existence, i.e., everything that exists except, of course, for nibbāna which is considered to be an unconditioned phenomenon. In this context, saṅkhāra is a synonym of conditioned phenomena since all of them are, by definition, conditioned. As mentioned before, this particular definition of saṅkhāra means "the entire universe," within and without; this includes the individual microcosm made up of the five aggregates, and the macrocosm—the entire phenomenal world we live in. In short, saṅkhāra as a saṅkhiṭṭhata refers to everything that causes and that is caused.

Saṅkhāra as a paccaya was defined in terms of two divisions. First we examined the various saṅkhāra divided into puñña, apuñña and āneñja, each being respectively described as meritorious kamma, unprofitable kamma and wholesome kamma producing a result in any of the four immaterial spheres. Then, the word was described in terms of kāya, vacī and citta, referring to physical, verbal and mental actions. In this context, saṅkhāra seems to mean any action that will ultimately bring about a result; here saṅkhāra is not different from

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51 Tena sasaṅkhāreṇa saussabhena sappayogena sa-upāyena sappaccayagahanenā ti attho (DhsA. 156).

52 This leads to a further problem: can nibbāna (an asaṅkhata dhamma) be produced or caused by anything (such as the practice of the eightfold noble path)?

53 Vbh. 135.
volition, which is often equated with *kamma*.\(^\text{54}\) *Saṅkhāra* as a *paccaya* is the initiating action (mental, vocal or physical), and the karmic force that will yield an effect. However, this effect, although not included in *saṅkhāra* as *paccaya*, falls under the definition of *saṅkhāra* as a *saṅkhata*, for the result of a particular *saṅkhāra* (or *kamma*) is nothing but a conditioned phenomenon.

*Saṅkhāra* as *āyusāṅkhāra* is a synonym of *bhavasaṅkhāra*, the energy which is responsible for sustaining life. Here, it is important to mention that at the instant of death, the *āyusāṅkhāra* is not necessarily extinct. In most cases, it is still present, and manifests itself as the energy that keeps an individual bound to the wheel of birth, death and rebirth. On the other hand, if eradicated, rebirth does not occur and the "person" enters into *nibbāna* without residue. Because the *āyusāṅkhāra* and the *bhavasaṅkhāra* are dependent on other activities, they are conditioned phenomena. And since they constitute the energy that will eventually lead to rebirth, they can also be seen as *saṅkhāra* as a *paccaya*, for they definitely are a force.

*Saṅkhāra* as it appears in the compounds *asaṅkhāra* and *sasaṅkhāra* is interpreted slightly differently in the *sutta* and abhidhammic literatures. In the former, these compounds are described mainly as attributes of the state of *parinibbāna*, while in the latter, they do not only qualify that state, but any conditioned phenomena as well. Although the qualified term varies depending on the *piṭaka*, the meaning of the qualifier remains the same. *Asaṅkhāra* refers to that which has arisen effortlessly as a result of an individual's inner tendencies. On the other hand, *sasaṅkhāra* points to something brought about by effort or striving. The meaning of *saṅkhāra* in these compounds is "conscious effort or instigation."

*Saṅaṅkhāra* means with effort or instigation, hence produced by. When used as a qualifier to *parinibbāyin*, it means that someone has attained *parinibbāna* through conscious effort. *Asaṅkhāra* means the opposite. Within this context, the actual meaning of *saṅkhāra* implies production, whether it be of *nibbāna* or a conditioned phenomenon.

The four contexts outlined above point to a generic meaning for the term *saṅkhāra*. This underlying meaning is twofold: first, *saṅkhāra* is a productive force, like volition, which outflows from actions (mental, physical or verbal) and produces effects; second, it comprises everything that exists—all compounded things—these are conditioned phenomena.
Some (such as anger, love, etc.) result from the “productive force” and are likely to become themselves “productive forces.” However, some of these conditioned phenomena (such as external objects) are independent of the personal psychological process and can by no means become “productive forces.” We can also see this twofold division in terms of a distinction between active and passive. If we say that the meaning of saṅkhāra is “everything that is compounded,” then we can divide these conditioned phenomena into “active” and “passive” components. The “active” saṅkhāra are those associated with the other four constituents of the individual (pañcakkhandhā), and are likely to produce more conditioned phenomena. The “passive” saṅkhāra (conditioned phenomena) would be those independent from any aggregate and incapable of producing anything except, of course, the process of decaying inherent in all compounded things.

The “mysterious” term saṅkhāra, as Stcherbatsky remarked, seems to have two distinct meanings. The first is saṅkhāra as “generating” and “producing” and, in this sense, it is a force of action (verbal, mental or physical), relying on the functioning of the four other aggregates (rupa, vedana, saññā and viññāna). Saṅkhāra in this sense cannot function independently of these four aggregates. The second meaning describes the term as whatever is produced by this force of action; this includes all conditioned phenomena. Let me offer an analogy that may clarify the twofold meaning of the term. Saṅkhāra could be compared to cooking. In fact, the verbal root saṁskt does, in some contexts, refer to food preparation. An analysis of the word for cooking (pacati) does indeed shed light on the meaning of saṅkhāra. The Vāyākaraṇasiddhāntakaumudi, one of the commentaries to Panini's Sanskrit grammar, explains the meaning of the word pacati as a complex activity. According to this Sanskrit text, the action of cooking requires undertaking several minor activities which ultimately lead to a result. For example, cooking rice, the commentary explains, involves putting the rice into the vessel, pouring water over it, washing the rice several times, placing the vessel on the fire with a suitable quantity of water, leaving it over the heat, testing a single rice grain, and so on. When all these minor activities are performed, the actual action of cooking is accomplished and leaves the performer with a specific result: in this case, soft and edible rice (viklūṭiḥ). This rather intricate description of

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55 Refer, for example, to Sn. 241 where “well-prepared” (susaṅkhata) meat is mentioned.
"cooking" is provided by the commentator to show that the word cooking itself implies two major elements: (1) the bare action of cooking (kriyā), including all the major activities it adumbrates, and (2) the result or the effect of these activities (phala). Similarly, the term saṅkhāra implies these two elements: (1) what is understood as volition or, to be more precise, a conation resulting in a volitional effort and eventually in an action (mental, vocal or physical), and (2) the bare effect, the result outflowing from previous actions. Any action will yield a result so long as it is performed on the basis of craving sensations—in other words, if it is performed as the result of the activity of saññā, or as a blind reaction towards the vedanā.

Although these two meanings are distinct, our discussion of the four previous categories of saṅkhāra could be combined and shaped to form a general meaning. Saṅkhāra (as a producing force) generates other saṅkhāra (conditioned phenomena). Yet, these conditioned phenomena can, in turn, become a producing force and create more conditioned phenomena. Whenever these conditioned phenomena are associated with the four other aggregates (i.e., when the conditioned phenomena are mental states and not external objects), they may very well become active or productive saṅkhāra. But, if independent from the four aggregates, these conditioned phenomena will remain passive saṅkhāra.

The Saṅkhārakkhandha

Having ascribed a generic meaning to the concept of saṅkhāra, we are in a much better position to understand the saṅkhārakkhandha. According to the Vibhaṅga, saṅkhāra, as one of the constituents of the personality, can be seen in many different ways. As "onefold," the saṅkhārakkhandha is associated with the mind; as twofold, it is either caused or uncaused; as threefold, it is either positive, negative or neutral. The first approach suggests that saṅkhāra are always associated with the mind (citta). The Dhammasaṅgani supports the Vibhaṅga by grouping the different kinds of saṅkhāra under three

57 Tattha katamo saṅkhārakkhandho? Ekavidhena saṅkhārakkhandho: cittasampayutto. Duvidhena saṅkhārakkhandho: atthi sahetu, atthi na hetu. Tividhena saṅkhārakkhandho: atthi kusalo, atthi akusalo, atthi avyākato ... pe ... evam bahuvīdhena saṅkhārakkhandho (Vbh. 72; there is also a similar passage at Vbh. 89).
distinct types of mind (kusala, akusala, and avyākata). This exhaustive listing of saṅkhāra classified under the only three possible kinds of mind implies both that saṅkhāra are associated with the mind, and that saṅkhāra are either good, bad or neutral—the third approach mentioned by the Vibhaṅga. (Refer to Table 6 for an overall view of these principles.) All these principles which arise in accordance with the paṭiccasamuppāda, and which exclude the vedanākkhandha, the saññākkhandha and the viññānakkhandha, fall under the saṅkhārakkhandha category. A total number of fifty different principles fall under the category of saṅkhārakkhandha. However, it is not necessary to analyze each of these independently here.

The second approach implied by the Vibhaṅga states that saṅkhāra can either be with or without cause (hetu). Here hetu refers to “the six roots of action,” three being wholesome (non-aversion, non-craving and non-delusion) and three unwholesome (aversion, craving and delusion). This would imply that certain saṅkhāra can be “unconditioned,” in the sense of not having a cause (ahetu). This is problematic, for, as we have seen, all saṅkhāra are conditioned. However, in this context, as A.K. Warder has pointed out, hetu is closer in meaning to mūla (root) than to “cause.” Hetu, in this specific sense, is one of the twenty-four paccaya of the Paṭṭhāna; by extension, ahetu would refer to whatever is not hetu, i.e., the twenty-three remaining paccaya. The author of the Vibhaṅga likely uses ahetu in the sense of the remaining twenty-three paccaya; otherwise his statement would contradict the rest of canonical literature.

As we have just seen, the Dhammasaṅgani and the Yamaka strongly correlate saṅkhārakkhandha with the different types of mind, thereby implying that saṅkhārakkhandha is an activity restricted to the mental realm. Here we should call attention to our previous discussion

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58 See Dhs. 18 for kusala, Dhs. 84-85 for akusala, and Dhs. 118 for avyākata.
59 When the list includes the saññākkhandha and the vedanākkhandha, the enumeration is known as the list of mental concomittants (cetasika); this is not the one exposed here.
61 For further clarification on saṅkhāra as hetu, one of the twenty-four paccaya, refer to Ps. i, 50ff.
### Table 6
The Fifty Elements of *Sāṅkhāra*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Avyākatacitta</th>
<th>Akusala</th>
<th>Kusala</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>contact</td>
<td>contact</td>
<td>contact (<em>phassa</em>)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>volition</td>
<td>volition</td>
<td>volition (<em>cetanā</em>)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>life</td>
<td>life</td>
<td>life (<em>jīvita</em>)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>concentration</td>
<td>concentration</td>
<td>concentration (<em>samādhi</em>)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>fixed thought</td>
<td>fixed thought</td>
<td>fixed thought (<em>manasikāra</em>)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>thinking about</td>
<td>thinking about</td>
<td>thinking about (<em>vīṭakka</em>)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>consideration</td>
<td>consideration</td>
<td>consideration (<em>vīcāra</em>)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>determination</td>
<td>determination</td>
<td>determination (<em>adhimokkha</em>)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>effort</td>
<td>effort</td>
<td>effort (<em>vīrīya</em>)</td>
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<tr>
<td>joy</td>
<td>joy</td>
<td>joy (<em>pīti</em>)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>resolution</td>
<td>resolution</td>
<td>resolution (<em>chanda</em>)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>delusion (<em>moha</em>)</td>
<td>wisdom (non-delusion; <em>amoha</em>)</td>
<td>shame (<em>hirī</em>)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>shamelessness (<em>ahiri</em>)</td>
<td>scrupulousness (<em>ottappa</em>)</td>
<td>faith (<em>saddhā</em>)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>unscrupulousness</td>
<td></td>
<td>attention (<em>sati</em>)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>agitation (<em>uddhacca</em>)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>envy (<em>issā</em>)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>selfishness (<em>macchariya</em>)</td>
<td>balance of mind (<em>tattamajjhittatā</em>)</td>
<td>non-anger (<em>adosa</em>)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>remorse (<em>kukkucca</em>)</td>
<td></td>
<td>non-greed (<em>alobha</em>)</td>
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<tr>
<td>greed (<em>lobha</em>)</td>
<td></td>
<td>serenity of body (<em>kāyāpassadhi</em>)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>views (<em>diṭṭhi</em>)</td>
<td></td>
<td>serenity of mind (<em>cittāpassadhi</em>)</td>
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<tr>
<td>pride (<em>māna</em>)</td>
<td></td>
<td>buoyancy of body (<em>kāyālahutā</em>)</td>
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<tr>
<td>sloth (<em>thīna</em>)</td>
<td></td>
<td>buoyancy of mind (<em>cittālahutā</em>)</td>
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<tr>
<td>torpor (<em>middha</em>)</td>
<td></td>
<td>flexibility of body (<em>kāyamudutā</em>)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>doubt (<em>vīcikicchā</em>)</td>
<td></td>
<td>flexibility of mind (<em>cittamudutā</em>)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>anger (<em>ādosa</em>)</td>
<td></td>
<td>alertness of body (<em>... maññatā</em>)</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>alertness of mind (<em>... kammaññatā</em>)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>fitness of body (<em>kāyapaguññatā</em>)</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>fitness of mind (<em>cittapaguññatā</em>)</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>straightness of body (<em>kāyojukatā</em>)</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>straightness of mind (<em>cittojukatā</em>)</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>refraining from unwholesome</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>bodily conduct (<em>kāyidduccaritavirati</em>)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>refraining from unwholesome</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>mental conduct</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(vācidudduccaritavirati)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>refraining from wrong livelihood</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(<em>micchājīvavirati</em>)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>compassion (<em>karunā</em>)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>sympathy (<em>mudūā</em>)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
on saṅkhāra as a paccaya and correlate saṅkhārakkhandha with saṅkhāra of mind. In that section, it was stated that “mental” saṅkhāra depend on vedanā and saññā, each being one of the five aggregates. Although there is a connection between saṅkhārakkhandha and “mental” saṅkhāra, it must be stressed that the realm of saṅkhāra-kkhandha is not restricted to “mental” saṅkhāra—it also includes verbal and physical saṅkhāra. As I noted above, verbal and physical saṅkhāra are both dependent on subtler activities, respectively “reflection and investigation” and “breathing in and breathing out.” I would go even further by suggesting that both verbal and physical saṅkhāra also depend on “mental” saṅkhāra. As the first verse of the Dhammapāda indicates, “mind leads all actions” whether physical or verbal. Any verbal or physical activity must be preceded by mental activity. Therefore, although we should understand saṅkhārakkhandha as a “mental” saṅkhāra, its comprehensive meaning adumbrates the whole realm of saṅkhāra as a paccaya. Saṅkhārakkhandha is the same as saṅkhāra as a paccaya.

The Visuddhimagga further clarifies our understanding of saṅkhāra as one of the aggregates by correlating the term with conditioned phenomena. Buddhaghosa holds that the saṅkhārakkhandha should be understood as whatever has the characteristic of forming (abhisankhara-lākākhaṇa) and heaping things together. The Atthasālinī, while using a different style, defines the term in the same manner. It is in complete accord with these sources to say that the function or energy that gives birth to conditioned phenomena is nothing but the saṅkhārakkhandha. Yet the Yamaka introduces an important distinction: not all saṅkhāra belong to the saṅkhārakkhandha. Rūpa, vedanā, saññā and viññāna (the other four aggregates) are saṅkhāra, but they are not saṅkhārakkhandha. We find a similar distinction introduced in the sutta literature itself. The SānNVuttanikāya states that saṅkhāra (k-kkhandha) is thus called for it conditions the five aggregates

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62 Refer to the discussion on p. 97 on verbal, physical and mental saṅkhāra.
63 Manopubbangamā dhammā manosetṭhā manomaya; manasā ce padutṭhena bhāsati vā karotī vā; tato nari dukkham anveti cakkhiṁ va vahato padam (Dh. i, 1).
64 Yam pana vuttam, yam kicci abhisankharaṇalakkhaṇam sabban tami ekato katvā saṅkhārakkhandho veditabbo ti, ettha abhisankharaṇalakkhaṇam nāma rāṣikaraṇalakkhaṇan (Vsm. 462).
65 Rāṣaṭṭhena abhisankharaṇat thena eko va saṅkhārakkhandho (DhsA. 154).
66 Ymk. 16.
of the next moment, or the next existence. Although the *saṅkhārakkhandha* is associated with all the other *saṅkhāra*, these two groups have to be seen as distinct. This distinction elucidates the difference between *saṅkhāra* as an aggregate and *saṅkhāra* in general. The former is an active force, producing and gathering together the conditioned phenomena (*saṅkhāra* as a *sankhata*) while the latter is more comprehensive and consists of any of the five aggregates, as well as any of the conditioned phenomena.

The *saṅkhārakkhandha* is definitely a *saṅkhāra* in the sense of conditioned phenomena since it has been formed and conditioned. Yet not all *saṅkhāra* are *saṅkhārakkhandha*, since they are not all endowed with the capacity of “forming” or generating more conditioned phenomena. It seems to me that a conditioned phenomena—this term, of course, also includes *saṅkhārakkhandha*—can only produce other conditioned phenomena when working in conjunction with *viññāna*, *vedanā*, *saññā* and *rūpa*; in other words, only the *saṅkhārakkhandha* (which, by definition, is closely connected to the other four aggregates) can produce conditioned phenomena. This implies that *saṅkhāra* as a *paccaya* is simply a paraphrase of *saṅkhārakkhandha*. They both refer to a force that will generate an effect. The effect, however, although being *saṅkhata* in the sense that it has been caused, is not necessarily a *paccaya* or a *saṅkhārakkhandha* for it may not generate a further effect.

**Correlation between the *Saṅkhārakkhandha* and the *Paṭiccasamuppāda***

Each of the aggregates discussed so far has been directly correlated with distinct links of the theory of dependent origination. The *rūpakkhandha* was equated with the six sense-doors (*saḷāyatanā*) and with contact (*phassa*), the *vedanakkhandha* with *vedanā*, and the *sannīkkhandha* was introduced between *vedanā* and craving (*taṇhā*). As for the *saṅkhārakkhandha*, we can establish a relation between this particular aggregate and the second link of the *paṭiccasamuppāda*, *saṅkhāra*, for we have seen

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67 *Kīnca bhikkhave saṅkhāre vadetha? Saṅkhataṁ abhisankharenti bhikkhave tasmā saṅkhārā ti vacantī. Kīn ca saṅkhataṁ abhisankharenti? Rūpam rūpattīya saṅkhataṁ abhisankharenti. Vedanāṁ ... Saññāṁ ... Saṅkhāre ... Viññānas ... (S. iii, 87). A similar distinction is found in Vasubandhu’s *Abhidharmakośa*: “Les saṁskāras, c’est tout ce qui est conditionné, mais on réserve le nom de samskāraskandha aux conditionnés qui ne rentrent ni dans les *skandhas* de *rūpa*, de *vedanā*, de *saññā* et de *viññāna*” (La Vallée Poussin, *Abhidharmakośa*, 1:15).
in this chapter that sankhārakkhandha is the same as sankhāra as paccaya; both are forces that will generate a result. This work is primarily concerned with the eight middle links of the theory of dependent origination, the links that are traditionally held to be representative of the present life. Since the sankhārakkhandha is one of the five aggregates characterizing human existence, its function must also express itself within these eight links, in the present.

According to the commentarial tradition of Theravāda Buddhism, the paṭiccasamuppāda, as well as the whole process of existence, is usually divided in two: (a) the kamma-process (kammabhava) or the karmically active aspect of existence, which is the cause of rebirth, and (b) the regenerating or rebirth-process (uppatibhava) or the karmically passive aspect of existence, which arises due to the first process (kammabhava). The active aspect of existence (kammabhava) determines the passive aspect (uppatibhava). The first five links of the present period of the paṭiccasamuppāda—links three to seven: viññāna, nāmarūpa, saḷāyatana, phassa and vedanā—are part of the passive aspect, while the last three links of the present period—links eight to ten: taṇhā, upādāna and bhava—are part of the active aspect of existence. This is illustrated in Table 7.

According to this, craving, clinging and becoming are part of the kamma-process of the present existence. Since we have previously defined kamma-process as the sankhārakkhandha, we can state with confidence that the kamma-process is identical with craving, clinging and becoming, and arrive at a distinct correlation between these three links and the sankhārakkhandha.

This appears to present a problem: according to the Vibhaṅga, becoming is itself defined as being composed of kamma-process and of rebirth-process and its commentary explains the terms in the same way as they have been defined here. This seems to imply that the sankhārakkhandha is only part of the concept of becoming, the one that is kamma-process.

68 Vsm. 200: 579.
69 Aung, Compendium of Philosophy, p. 43.
70 Tattha katamo upādānapaccayā bhavo? Duvidhena bhavo: atthi kammabhavo, atthi uppatibhavo (Vbh. 136; 137).
71 VbhA. 183.
Table 7
The Paticcassamuppada at a Glance

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Past</th>
<th>1. avijja</th>
<th>ignorance (as a paccaya)</th>
<th>Kammabhava</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. sañkhara</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3. viññâna</td>
<td>consciousness</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4. nâmarûpa</td>
<td>mind and matter</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5. saññyatana</td>
<td>6 sense-doors</td>
<td>Uppattibhava</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Present</td>
<td>6. phassa</td>
<td>contact</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>7. vedanâ</td>
<td>sensation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>8. tañhâ</td>
<td>desire</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>9. upâdâna</td>
<td>clinging</td>
<td>Kammabhava</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>10. bhava</td>
<td>becoming</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Future</td>
<td>11. jâti</td>
<td>(re-) birth</td>
<td>Uppattibhava</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>12. jarâmarañâ ...</td>
<td>old age, death ...</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

If we refer back to the list of fifty types of sañkhâra on p. 107, we see that thinking about and consideration are both included in sañkhâra. These two terms are precursors to the concept of obsessions previously discussed;\(^{72}\) without any of these three, craving could not arise because, as the Sakkapaññasutta states, envy (issa) and avarice (macchariya), as well as desire (chanda)\(^{73}\) have their origin in obsessions.\(^{74}\) The commentarial tradition is correct in affirming that the three links of craving, clinging and becoming belong to the kamma-

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\(^{72}\) As evidenced by the causal chain of the Majjhimanikåya: Cakkhu ca uppajjati cakkhuviññânam tinnam sañgati phasso, phassapaccayâ vedanâ, yam vedeti tañ saññânâti, yam saññânâti tañ vitakketi, yam vitakketi tañ papañcetî, yam papañcetî tato nidânam purisañ phassa papañcasankhâ samudâcaranti attâni paccuññeyyosu rûpesu. Visual consciousness arises on account of visual forms and the eye. The meeting of these three is contact (phassa); on account of contact there is a sensation; what one senses (as a sensation), one recognizes; what one recognizes, one “thinks about” (vitakka); what one thinks about, one is obsessed with; what obsesses one is the cause of the number of obsessions which assail a person in regard to past, present or future visual forms cognizable by the eye (M. i, 111-12; similar occurrences of the formula also appear at M. i, 259 and S. iv, 67).

\(^{73}\) Chanda is equated by the commentary of the text with tañhâ, desire, craving.

\(^{74}\) D. ii, 277-78.
process, for thinking about and consideration both precede craving, and these two elements are included in saṅkhāra.\textsuperscript{75} However, this statement does not reject the theory that becoming can itself be divided into kamma-process and rebirth-process. Logically, there is no reason why kamma-process could not occupy a certain place within becoming, while extending to more than one link of the paṭiccasamuppāda. Kamma-process (or the saṅkhārakkhandha) can and does belong to becoming and to craving and clinging.

In this chapter, we have seen that not all saṅkhāra belong to the saṅkhārakkhandha, since they are not all endowed with the capacity for forming or generating more conditioned phenomena. A conditioned phenomenon can only produce other conditioned phenomena when working in conjunction with viññāna, vedanā, saññā and rūpa; in other words, only the saṅkhārakkhandha can produce conditioned phenomena. This implies that saṅkhāra as a paccaya is simply a paraphrase of saṅkhārakkhandha. They both refer to a force that will generate an effect. The effect, however, although being saṅkhāta in the sense that it has been caused, is not necessarily a paccaya or a saṅkhārakkhandha for it might not generate a further effect.

We have also situated the saṅkhārakkhandha within the present period of the paṭiccasamuppāda, namely, taking the place of the three links of craving, clinging and becoming. The next chapter discusses the element that is generated by this active force.

\textsuperscript{75} Refer to the list of elements belonging to saṅkhāra on p. 107.
Chapter 6

The Viññānakkhandha

In the traditional enumeration of the aggregates, viññāna is fifth and is commonly translated as “consciousness.” As with the previous four aggregates, six kinds of viññāna exist, with each designation dependent upon the sense organ through which the faculty performs its function. Therefore, we find viññāna associated with each of the six sense-doors. The canonical definition of this aggregate is, again, as obscure as those of the previous khandha. The Pāli canon tells us that viññāna is so called because it “viññānizes.” This definition could make sense only to native speakers of Pāli who had already interiorized through linguistic and cultural reinforcement the significance of “to viññānize.” Unfortunately, most of us are left without the slightest hint as to its meaning.

In looking elsewhere for clues that will help define this aggregate, we find that viññāna displays the characteristics of all conditioned phenomena: namely the truths of impermanence and selflessness. For example, the Cullavedallasutta condemns the attempt to regard not only viññāna but any of the five aggregates as the seat of individuality (atta), while the Alagaddūpamasutta stresses that viññāna itself is impermanent. And it is mentioned elsewhere that those who believe that viññāna has a destiny of its own, distinct from the other four khandha, are misled as to its true nature. Therefore, it is clear that within the realm of Pāli Buddhism, neither viññāna nor any of the

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1 Chayime āvuso viññānakāyā: cakkhuviññānām sotaviññānām ghānaviññānām jīvavipākām kāyaviññānām manoviññānām (M. i, 53; also M. i, 259; iii, 216, 281).
2 Vijānāti vijañātīti kho āvuso, tasmā viññānan ti vuccatīti (M. i, 292).
3 Sutavā ariyasāvako ... na rūpam attato samanupassati ... na vedanāṁ ... na saññāṁ ... na sankhāre ... na viññānam attato samanupassati, na viññānavantam attānam, na attani viññānam na viññānasmim attānam (M. i, 300).
4 Tam kim maññatha bhikkhave. Viññānam niccam va aniccam vā ti? Aniccam bhante (M. i, 138; also S. iv, 67-68).
5 Yo bhikkhave evaṃ vadeyya: ahampi aññatra rūpā aññatra vedanāya aññatra saññāya aññatra sakkāhehi viññāṇassa āgatiṁ vā gatiṁ vā cutiṁ vā upapattīṁ vā vuddhiṁ vā virūḍhiṁ vā vepullāṁ vā pariṇāpessaṁ ti n’etam ṭhānam vijjati (S. iii, 53.)
other aggregates can be considered as permanent or as occupying the place of an everlasting self.

Yet scholars such as Mrs. Rhys Davids\(^6\) argue that textual evidence does not always portray viññāna as an impermanent element. Their main argument is that viññāna is often approached as the seat of individuality, the residing place of the self, or of a permanent entity. They support their theory by canonical evidence which, according to them, refers to viññāna in the sense of “self.” There are at least two of these occurrences.\(^7\) After the death of certain monks who had reached arahanthood (Bhikkhu Godhika and Vakkhali), the evil spirit Māra searched in vain for their viññāna since the latter had utterly ceased to arise. According to Mrs. Rhys Davids, this definitely indicates that after death, the viññāna of a non-liberated person is expected to go somewhere before being “reborn”—therefore implying the existence of some sort of permanent entity which travels from body to body. Mrs. Rhys Davids also notes that the verb “to arise” (uppajjati or uppatti), usually used in reference to viññāna, is occasionally replaced by “to descend” (avakkhanti).\(^8\) Once again, she interprets this as alluding to a permanent entity, a kind of “soul” which descends into the body. Viewed in this manner, these few examples contradict the core doctrine of impermanence in general, the changing nature of viññāna itself,\(^9\) and the view that the body is existing permanently (sakkāyadiṭṭhi).\(^10\) Mrs. Rhys Davids suggests that, therefore, the notion of a transmigrating entity must have been an intrusion of popular belief into Buddhism—mere “folklore speech”\(^11\)—for, when contrasted with the emphasis given to the concepts of anicca and sakkāyadiṭṭhi throughout the entire realm of Buddhist literature, these pieces of evidence are far too scarce to be taken seriously.

However, her interpretation of these passages is, I believe, a result of a misunderstanding of the concept of impermanence and of the core theory of dependent origination. Viññāna is characterized by impermanence in the sense that it arises and passes away at every

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7 S. iii, 124; S. i, 121.
8 Rhys Davids, *Buddhist Psychology*, p. 22.
9 S. ii, 94; iv, 67; D. i, 21.
10 M. i, 300.
moment. Yet Buddhism stresses that new instances of viññāṇa continually arise in an unbroken causal sequence. As Richard Hayes remarks: “Accepting that a continuum of moments of mental events moves from one physical body to another, or even lives outside a physical body for a while, does not commit one either to a view of permanence or to a view that the continuum is a self.”¹² A continuing sequence of causally related viññāṇa needs not imply, as Rhys Davids suggests, any kind of permanence. This leaves us with no substantial grounds for affirming that the passages mentioned above represent an “intrusion of folklore speech.” Furthermore, other passages are congruent with the mainstream canonical interpretation of viññāṇa. As Lilian Silburn explains:

C'est autour de viññāṇa [viññāṇa] que graviteront les erreurs de la continuité personnelle, à commencer par celle de Sāti, un des disciples du Buddha, jusqu'à celle des Bouddhologues occidentaux qui s'acharnent à découvrir une personne qui dure et transmigre dans un viññāṇa que tant de textes pourtant décrivent comme conditionné et évanescent ... à chaque instant apparaît un viññāṇa conditionné par un viññāṇa précédent; il y a une certaine continuité parce que les moments de conscience dépendent de leurs conditions et se succèdent sans interruption; mais il n'y a pas de continuité d'un principe qui demeurerait essentiellement le même en dépit de ces changements.¹³

This concept of ever-changing viññāṇa, of “non-entity,” seems also to be in complete accord with William James’ understanding of consciousness:

To deny plumply that “consciousness” exists seems so absurd on the face of it—for undeniably “thoughts” do exist—that I fear some readers would follow me no further. Let me then immediately explain that I mean only to deny that the word stands for an entity, but to insist most emphatically that it does stand for a function.¹⁴

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¹² Electronic-mail message, received from Richard Hayes on March 12, 1992.
Therefore, to elucidate the meaning of *viññāṇa* we should, as James recommends, approach it as an abstract function, an intangible mental operation, just as we have approached all the other mental aggregates.

**The Function of *Viññāṇa***

Many scholars hold that the function of *viññāṇa* merely consists of apprehending the bare phenomenal world, “the immediately known thing which on the mental side is in opposition with the entire brain process.”\(^{15}\) Stcherbatsky’s interpretation is typical:

> It [*viññāṇa*] represents pure consciousness, or pure sensation, without any content. Its content is placed in the objective part which contains the definite sensation (*sparśa*), feelings (*vedanā*), ideas (*saṃjñā*), volition (*cetanā*). \(^{16}\)

He continues:

> ... *viññāṇa* and its synonyms, *cittā, manah*, represent pure sensations, the same as the *kalpanāpodha prayāksa* of Diṇṇāga, and *saṃjñā* corresponds to definite ideas. Every construction (*kalpanā*), every abstraction (*udgrahana*), every definite (*parichinna*) representation, such as blue and yellow, long and short, male and female, friend and enemy, happy and miserable—this is all brought under the head of ideas (*saṃjñā*) as distinguished from *viññāṇa* = pure sensation.\(^{17}\)

Stcherbatsky’s theory receives support from other scholars such as E.R. Sarathchandra, who advocates that when the term *viññāṇa* was “applied to the psychology of perception, it meant not full cognition, but bare sensation, a sort of anoetic sentience that occurs before the object is completely apprehended.”\(^{18}\) Jayatilleke also agrees, quoting the *Vibhangaṭṭhamuttaka*, to the effect that visual consciousness means mere visual perception.\(^{19}\)

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17 Ibid., p. 16.
The theory that correlates viññāna with bare sensations devoid of any content seems to be inconsistent with certain passages of the Pāli canon, since the Majjhimanikāya indicates that the function of viññāna is to “viññāṇize” what is pleasant, unpleasant and neither pleasant nor unpleasant. If, as Stcherbatsky and Sarathchandra propose, viññāna is pure sensation without any content, then it would be impossible for the viññāna to “viññāṇize” anything pleasant, unpleasant or neutral. This would be possible only if the pleasantness, etc., that the faculty viññānizes were intrinsic to the object (be it sensation or mere external form) being approached. Nevertheless, if the pleasantness were intrinsic to the object, then no difference would be found between viññāna and vedanā, which is also said to be pleasant, unpleasant or neutral.

The Pāli canon also explains viññāna differently. As Sarathchandra mentions, “viññāna in the earliest texts was almost synonymous with sañña.” One of the items of canonical evidence supporting this theory states that viññāna is so called because it viññāṇizes flavours as sour and bitter, acid and sweet, salty and bland. Recalling our definition of sañña (see p. 77), it is the recognition of a certain colour as blue, red or yellow which can be extended to the recognition of a certain sound as flute, drum or trumpet, or a certain flavour as sour, bitter or sweet, and so on. Hence, according to this interpretation, viññāna seems almost identical to sañña.

These numerous different interpretations of viññāna have confused scholars who have attempted to circumscribe the meaning of the term. The general meaning of viññāna is pure consciousness, mere attention, but what remains obscure is whether this consciousness or attention is of pure percepts devoid of any categorization, of something pleasant, unpleasant or neutral, or of a certain categorization. By examining these three possible definitions for viññāna, we notice that (1) pure percepts refer to our definition of secondary matter or of

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20 Kīna ca vijānātī: sukhan ti pi vijānāti, dukkhan ti pi vijānāti, adukkhasukhan ti pi vijānāti (M. i, 292; M. iii, 242).
21 Sarathchandra, Buddhist Theory of Perception, p. 16.
contact (see p. 49), (2) something pleasant, unpleasant or neutral can be correlated with our interpretation of *vedanā*, and (3) the categorization is in line with our explanation of *saññā*. I feel that it would be a mistake to assign the function of *viññāṇa* to only one of these three possibilities. *Viññāṇa* can be applied to contact, *vedanā* and *saññā*. The "mystical" sense of *viññāṇa* may be elucidated if looked at as a function which is applied throughout the mind and matter phenomenon. *Viññāṇa* is probably the faculty needed for the cognition of pure percept, of sensation and of conceptualization as well; it is not independent of any of these three aggregates. Since none of the aggregates has the capacity of being self-conscious, only *viññāṇa* can be considered as performing the function of consciousness or attention.

In our discussion of contact (see p. 49ff.), we saw that in order for a stimulus to be perceived, the presence of three elements is required. There must be a sense-object (*visaya*), a sense-organ (*indriya*) and attention or consciousness (*viññāṇa*). Only when these three elements come together can a stimulus be perceived. This implies, however, that *viññāṇa* itself is present before the stimulus has appeared, and that the former is independent of the latter. *Viññāṇa* as pure consciousness or mere attention does not necessarily need to be conscious of or attentive to something in order to exist.

As pointed out by Jayatilleke, another aspect of *viññāṇa* is its similarity to wisdom (paññā). The *Mahāvedallasutta* correlates wisdom with *viññāṇa* since the former is also characterized by cognition, but in this case, the objects cognized are restricted to the four Noble Truths. However, the same source mentions a difference between the two terms: "while *viññāṇa* needs to be thoroughly understood, wisdom needs to be developed." As Jayatilleke concludes, this fifth aggregate "seems to be the general term for 'cognition,' while paññā is more or less restricted in connotation to the cognition of spiritual truths." Therefore, when I translate the term *viññāṇa* as "consciousness," it is essential to bear in mind that although the function of what we call "consciousness" is mere cognition, what is cognized is either pure percepts (*rūpa*), percepts loaded with either pleasant, unpleasant or

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24 M. i, 292.
25 *Paññā bhāvetabbā viññāṇam pariñeyyaṁ, idaṁ nesaṁ nānākaraṇaṁ* (M. i, 293).
neutral connotations (*vedana*), or conceptualizations resulting from the activity of *saññā* on the sense-data.

Finally, there are two conditions without which "consciousness" cannot appear. As the *Majjhimanikāya* states:

> Whenever there is a functioning sense-organ (eye, ear, tongue, nose, body and mind), a sense-object (visual form, sound, taste, smell, touch and thought) entering into the field of the sense-organ then, with these brought together, there is the manifestation of the part of consciousness referring to the specific sense-organ.27

From this same Pāli passage, Jayatilleke reads three conditions: to the two we have mentioned, he adds "an appropriate act of attention on the part of the mind" which, he says, is the English equivalent of *tajjo samannāhāro hoti*.28 His elaboration of three conditions refutes the references found in the *sutta* literature, which mentions only two conditions, namely the sense-door and a respective sense-object.29 Furthermore, while the *Pāli Text Society Dictionary* renders *samannāhāro* as "bringing together," Jayatilleke stretches the meaning to an "appropriate act of attention." Even if his English rendering of *samannāhāro* were correct, what would this "mind" which applies the "act of attention" be? No "entity" shapes the individual other than the five aggregates, and, because of our systematic discussion of the khandha, we know that neither *rupa*, *vedana*, *saññā* or *sañkhāra* is responsible for anything that resembles "an appropriate act of attention." Rather, it seems that the "act of attention" is precisely the function of *vīññāṇa*.

**Vīññāṇa and Mano**

Many canonical and commentarial passages equate the terms *vīññāṇa* and *mano*. For example, the *Brahmajālasutta* and the *Visuddhimagga* indicate that *citta* and *mano* are both synonyms of *vīññāṇa*.30 Bhikkhu

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27 Yato ca kho āvuso ajjhatakiṁ c'eva cakkhuṁ aparibhinnaṁ hoti bāhirā ca ṛupa ṛපā āpāthāṁ āgacchanti tajjo ca samannāhāro hoti, evam tajjassa viññāṇabhāgassa pātubhāvo hoti (M. i, 190).


29 *Cakkhuṁ ca paṭicca ṛupe ca uppajjati cakkhuviññānam* (S. iv, 86; M. i, 259).

Nārada in the introduction to his translation of the *Abhidhammattha-sangaha* says that “citta, ceta, cittuppāda, nāma, mana, viññāna are all used as synonymous terms in Abhidhamma. Hence, from the Abhidhamma standpoint no distinction is made between mind and consciousness.”\(^{31}\) However, I would be more inclined to say that within the sutta literature, these terms were used more or less synonymously and that only in later abhidhammic and commentarial sources did the distinctions between them become more important. Yet, we must acknowledge that even in the sutta an implicit distinction is established between these terms.\(^{32}\)

Since the concept of mano has already been discussed (see p. 40), I shall only stress the difference between the “mental sense-organ” (mano) and viññāna itself here. In the discussion of “secondary matter,” we saw that matter, in general, forms the six sense-objects: touch (*phoṭṭhabbāyatana*), sound (*saddāyatana*), taste (*rāsāyatana*), smell (*gandhāyatana*), visual form (*nlpiiyatana*), and thought (*dhammāyatana*). There are also six faculties or sense-organs that allow us to perceive them: the tactile organ (*kāyāyatana*), the auditory organ (*sotāyatana*), the gustatory organ (*jīvāyatana*), the olfactory organ (*gandhāyatana*), the visual organ (*cakkhāyatana*), and finally, the mental sense-organ (*manāyatana*). However, we have seen that such perception is only possible when there is a contact between the sense-object, the sense-organ and the respective consciousness (viññāna). Manāyatana on its own, without the function of viññāna, cannot induce perception. Like the other five sense-organs, manāyatana is dependent on viññāna to bring the object to the attention of the subject. Manāyatana is purely a sense-organ that cannot function without viññāna. However, there is a substantial difference between manāyatana and the other sense-organs: while the latter can only apprehend their respective sense-objects, manāyatana apprehends only mental objects (*dhammāyatana*)—yet these very thoughts are derived from the contact of other sense-objects with their respective sense-doors. As Kalupahana elucidates this point:

In fact, its [mano's] function is to assist in bringing back the impression produced by the other sense faculties and, as such,

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The Viññānakkhandha constitutes a form of “reflection.” Mano, therefore, has “concept” (dhammā) as its objects, and these are generally considered substitutes for percepts. ... While mano is performing this special function, consciousness (viññāna) continues to flow uninterrupted like a stream fed by all the faculties including mano.  

The Uṭṭābhā Brāhmaṇo Sutta of the Sarīyuttanikāya explains the function of mano. According to this text, each of the first five sense-organs has a different scope and range, none of which are interchangeable. In other words, the eye cannot perceive smell. Yet mano is common to them all in the sense that it is able to interact with all the other sense-organs. The text does not imply that mano perceives smells, visual forms, etc., but only that it can perceive the concept (dhamma) that was derived from the percept apprehended by one of the first five sense-doors. Table 8 will help further clarify the distinction of manāyatana and viññāna. It shows that mano is endowed with a special function distinct from that of all the other sense-doors: mano has the ability to survey the fields (gocara) of the other senses. The term “field” does not refer to the sense-object itself, but to the actual contact between the sense-object, the sense-door and the respective viññāna. The sense-object as such is merely a potential object of perception, and, as long as it has not been apprehended by the senses and the consciousness, it cannot become an object of mano. Once contact has taken place, a percept arises. This percept may be either visual, auditory, olfactory, gustatory or tactile. In its turn, the percept becomes a potential object of mano, potential in the sense that not all percepts come in contact with both mano and a viññāna. However, when it does come in contact with these two other faculties, the percept itself is technically termed dhammāyatana for it becomes the direct object of mano.

The main distinction between viññāna and mano, however, is summed up in the following statement by Bhikkhu Ānāmoli:
Viññāna (rendered by “consciousness”) is, loosely, more or less a synonym of mano and citta; technically, it is bare cognition considered apart from feeling [vedanā], perception [saññā] or formations [sañkhāra]. Mano (rendered by “mind”), when used technically, is confined to the sixth internal base for contact.35

Mano is often employed as synonym of viññāna or citta,36 yet it seems that a slight nuance can be implied by these terms. Viññāna is often associated with sense cognition in general, while mano frequently refers to the intellectual activity triggered by the contact of the mental objects and viññāna37—a function similar to that of manas in Nyāya philosophy where it is “the instrument through which the objects of sense affect the soul.”38

Table 8

Mano and Viññāna

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Eye</th>
<th>Visual form</th>
<th>Visual contact</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ear</td>
<td>Sound</td>
<td>Auditory contact</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nose</td>
<td>Smell</td>
<td>Olfactory contact</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tongue</td>
<td>Taste</td>
<td>Gustatory contact</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Body</td>
<td>Tangible</td>
<td>Tactile contact</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

35 Nāṇamoli, The Path of Purification, p. 507, n. 35.
36 Such as in S. ii, 94: cittan iti pi mano iti pi.
37 Refer to our previous discussion of mano on p. 40.
Viññāṇa as Rebirth and Death Consciousness

In later Buddhist scholasticism, viññāṇa is often interpreted as being either a rebirth-consciousness (paṭisandhiviññāṇa) or a death-consciousness (cuticitta)—more literally, a “departing” consciousness. The death-consciousness constitutes the last consciousness of one’s life, whereas the rebirth-consciousness consists of the very first consciousness of a being. It is the factor that triggers the stream of consciousness which characterizes one’s existence and is wholly conditioned by previous sankhāra and kamma from previous lives. As Bhikkhu Nārada explains: “Dependent on past conditioning activities [sankhāra] arises relinking or rebirth consciousness in a subsequent birth. It is so called because it links the past with the present, and is the initial consciousness one experiences at the moment of conception.” This idea of rebirth-consciousness may be misleading; it is not a permanent entity transferred from one body to another. As Venerable Nāgasena explains to King Milinda, that which transmigrates from one life to another is neither the same nor another. In the Visudhimagga, Buddhaghosa explains this “transmigration” of consciousness very clearly:

But it should be understood that it [the viññāṇa] has neither come here from the previous becoming nor has it become manifest without the kamma, the formations, the pushing, the objective field, etc., as a cause. And here, let the illustration of this consciousness be such things as an echo, a light, a seal, a seal impression, a looking-glass image, for the fact of its not coming here from the previous becoming and for the fact that it arises owing to causes that are included in past becomings. For just as an echo, a light, a seal impression, and a shadow, have respectively sound, etc., as their cause and come into being without going elsewhere, so also this consciousness.

The cuticitta and paṭisandhiviññāṇa respectively stand for the death-consciousness and the rebirth-consciousness. However, their

39 The term citta has been used instead of viññāṇa in the expression cuticitta. However, in this specific context, both terms are synonymous. With regard to the interchangeability of these two terms, see p. 119, particularly n. 30.
41 Na ca so na ca añño (Mil. 40).
42 Nānamoli, The Path of Purification, p. 639.
meaning is not limited to these two particular types of consciousness, for viññāna in general is also subject to the three characteristics of existence. At every moment, each consciousness arises and passes away, continually yielding its place to a new one. Thus every consciousness must have the quality of both rebirth-consciousness, in the sense that it arose from the previous consciousness, and death-consciousness, in the sense that the rebirth-consciousness that has arisen must also die. The quality of this latter viññāna (which becomes a death-consciousness at the moment of death) will engender a new rebirth-consciousness. Birth, death and rebirth do not occur only at the beginning and the end of life. From a microcosmic point of view, the cycle repeats itself at each and every moment and each time a new consciousness is engendered.

**Correlation between Viññāna and the Paṭiccasamuppāda**

Like the four previous aggregates, viññāna holds a specific place in the theory of dependent origination. As one of the links of the paṭiccasamuppāda, viññāna is the third link of the chain, preceding mind and matter, the six sense-doors and contact; the last two being part of the rūpa-khandha. I will leave the explanation as to why viññāna, which is the fifth member in the traditional enumeration of the aggregates, occupies a place that precedes all the other aggregates in the paṭiccasamuppāda for the next chapter. Here I will explain the function of viññāna in the paṭiccasamuppāda and describe its relation to the viññānakkhandha.

We have to note that the explanation of the viññāna-link is often limited to the first consciousness that enters the mother's womb,43 which would be a rebirth-consciousness. To my knowledge, no such statement is found in the *sutta* literature itself. In later literature, however, we find that the viññāna-link is associated not only with the nineteen types of rebirth-consciousnesses,44 but also with the other types of consciousness that may arise from this “original” consciousness. The *Vibhaṅga*, for example, defines the viññāna-link as consciousness (citta, mano, viññāna, manoviññānahātu), the mind base (manāyatana), the controlling faculty of mind (manindriya), and the viññānakkhandha

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Therefore, the third link of the *paṭiccasamuppāda* includes the whole *viññānakkhandha* and not merely the *paṭisandhi viññāṇa*.

In this chapter, we have seen that *viññāṇa* is variously translated. Some scholars hold that it means "bare sensation," some, "pure consciousness" and others, "the cognition of something pleasant, unpleasant or neutral." However, none of these theories seems to be completely accurate, since *viññāṇa* is responsible for the cognition of all of these. Hence we defined the term as mere consciousness, whether that consciousness is of *rūpa, vedanā* or *saññā*. We have also seen the difference between *mano*—one of the six sense-organs—and *viññāṇa* itself. Both are necessary for perception of thoughts or concepts (*dhamma*), but only the latter is necessary for the apprehension of stimuli from any of the other sense-organs. Finally, we have established a correlation between the third link of the *paṭiccasamuppāda*—the *viññāṇa*-link—and the *viññānakkhandha*. Now that we have discussed the function of each of the five aggregates, let us turn to a discussion of their interrelation.

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45 *Tattha katamaṁ sankhārapaccayā viññāṇam? Yaṁ cittam mano mānasāṁ hadayāṁ paṇḍaraṁ mano manāyatanāṁ manindriyāṁ viññāṇāṁ viññānakkhandho taññā manovimūñāṇadhātu: idām vuccati sankhārapaccayā viññāṇam* (Vbh. 144).
Chapter 7

Interrelation of the Aggregates

In the previous chapters we discussed each of the five aggregates separately, without attempting to establish a detailed correlation between them. However, simply understanding the purport of these aggregates gives us merely a superficial insight into Buddhist psychology. The knowledge that rūpa is equated with the six sense-doors and bare perception, vedanā with sensation, saññā with recognition, sankhāra with any type of actions that will produce an effect, and viññāna with consciousness fails to shed much light on either the workings of the mind or the path leading to salvation. On the other hand, this understanding of the relationship between each of the aggregates will considerably increase our insights into Buddhist psychology.

The order in which the five aggregates have been presented so far reflects their typical canonical enumeration. To my knowledge, canonical literature does not offer a different order for the aggregates.不幸地，除了传统的顺序，在该顺序中没有提到这些聚合之间的关系。在经文文献中。我们必须，然后，推断出他们操作过程从核心的佛教理论。我将提出论点：每个聚合函数，与其顺序有关，可以与依赖起源理论，特别是与中间八环节直接相关。三个聚合 sankhāra，viññāna 和 vedanā—以及整个心理-物理现象被称为 nāmarūpa，被包括在依赖起源链条中，指示亲密的关系

1 Rhys Davids and Stede state in their Pāli Text Society Pāli-English Dictionary (p. 233) that one incidence of a different enumeration has been found in the Sānīyuttaniyakāya: Rūpaṃ vedayitam saññārī viññānārin yaśca sankhatārī nesā ham asmi netam me (S. i, 112). Yet, while the aggregate sankhāra seems prima facie to have been placed after viññāna, we must stress that the term sankhataṁ in this particular context comprises the four preceding elements. As the translation of this passage shows: “Matter, sensation, recognition, consciousness, that which is conditioned, is not I.” Therefore, we could hardly say that this particular passage offers a different sequence in the enumeration of the aggregates. It simply states that matter, sensations, recognition and consciousness and that which is conditioned cannot be identified with the self.
between the latter and the five aggregates. In this chapter, I will first address the "order problem" that presents itself when trying to establish a correlation with the five aggregates and the eight middle links of the *pañcicasamuppāda*. Second, I will examine each of the middle links of the *pañcicasamuppāda* and point out which of the five aggregates can be correlated with them. This investigation will demonstrate that all the aggregates but *sañño* play an obvious role in this middle division. Third, I will attempt to adduce evidence supporting the implicit, yet crucial, presence of *sañño* between the two links of *vedana* and *tanha*. Finally, I will briefly explain the workings of the five aggregates within *vipassanā* meditation.

The Position of *Viññāṇa* in the Enumeration of the *Pañcakkhandhā*

In the traditional enumeration of the *pañcakkhandhā*, *viññāṇa* appears as the last aggregate. This is puzzling, for how can the functions of *rūpa*, *vedana*, *sañño* and *saṅkhāra* be accomplished if no prior consciousness is present to cognize and to come in contact with the external world? This would imply the impossibility of having either "mere perception," a sensation, or even a recognition imposed on sense-data, for nothing would have been cognized by a *viññāṇa*. The curious point remains as to why *viññāṇa* is listed as the final constituent of the five aggregates throughout the bulk of canonical literature. I believe, however, that there is a simple explanation.

The concept of re-evolution, which finds an expression in the theory of rebirth, is central to Buddhism. According to this theory, death is a natural and unavoidable sequence to birth, and it is inevitably followed by another birth—unless, of course, one has escaped the saṃsāric cycle by becoming an arahant. In many Buddhist enumerations—such as the five strengths (*bala*) and the eightfold noble path—the final element revolves and comes back to condition or reinforce the first member. However, there has been a controversy among scholars on whether the different elements of these enumerations are to be construed sequentially or cyclically.² It is not my intent to prove that a

² K.N. Jayatilleke, in his work *Early Buddhist Theory of Knowledge*, deals with the concept of *saddhā* (trust) as the first member of the five strengths and shows that two distinct interpretative trends can be observed. Tilmann Vetter (*The Ideas and Meditative Practices of Early Buddhism*), on the other hand, offers evidence that the eightfold noble path can be construed both cyclically and sequentially.
cyclical perspective is definitively at work within the five strengths or the eightfold noble path. Such an approach is plausible, but establishing it would require a more exhaustive study. Moreover, whether the five strengths or the eightfold noble path can be approached from a cyclical perspective is not crucial for this study, since textual references indicate that the five aggregates are definitely subject to such an approach. This implies, therefore, that the last element of the five aggregates would also become the first, that viññāna revolves from its “last” position to become the “first” of the aggregates (see Table 9).

Table 9
The Wheel of the Five Aggregates

\[
\begin{array}{c}
\text{Rūpa} \\
\text{Vedanā} \\
\text{Viññāna} \\
\text{Saññā} \\
\text{Sankhāra}
\end{array}
\]

This theory finds support in the paṭiccasamuppāda itself, wherein viññāna is placed before the mind and matter link. The five aggregates themselves constitute the category of mind and matter. Since the last of the aggregates is viññāna, it will again engender a new set of aggregates until one breaks the chain of saṃsāra. The fact that consciousness “engenders” mind and matter emphasizes the cyclical aspect of the five aggregates. This theory is further evidenced by two major canonical
passages. The first is found in the *Samyuttanikāya*, where Sāriputta—the Buddha’s disciple known as the commander-in-chief of Dhamma (*Dhammasenapatti*)—explains to Mahākoṭṭhita that mind and matter are conditioned by *viññāna* and that the *viññāna* is also conditioned by mind and matter. The second passage is from the *Dīghanikāya* where the Bodhisattva Vipassi is said to have reflected on the nature of consciousness (*viññāna*) and of mind and matter. The result of his reflection is the same as that of Sāriputta: *viññāna* conditions mind and matter, and vice versa. This clearly shows that *viññāna* can either be approached as the last aggregate, as portrayed in the standard enumeration of the *pañcakkhandhā*, or as the first, for *viññāna* is necessary for the arising of the other four aggregates. Having shown that *viññāna* can be placed as the first or last member of the *pañcakkhandhā*, we may begin our actual analysis of the *paṭiccasamuppāda*.

**Correlation between Four Aggregates and the *Paṭiccasamuppāda***

In Table 10, the twelve links of the chain of dependent origination are divided into three traditional categories—past, present and future. Each of these divisions represents an alternative means of explaining the concept of mind and matter when taken in its largest sense, inclusive of the five aggregates. For the purpose of this book, I will limit my analysis to the second division, where the presence of the five aggregates is clearest, and I will clearly demonstrate the presence of the

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3 The *Anupadasutta* offers a long eulogy of Sāriputta by the Buddha (M. iii, 25ff.). Sāriputta is also known as chief among the disciples (*aggaśāvaka*).

4 *Apica* [sic] *viññānapaccayā nāmarūpanti*. ... *Api ca nāmarūpapaccayā viññānanti* (S. ii, 113).

5 *Atha kho bhikkhave Vipassissa Bodhisattassa etad ahosi: “Kimhi nu kho sati nāmarūpaṁ hoti, kim paccayā nāmarūpaṁ ti?”* *Atha kho bhikkhave Vipassissa Bodhisattassa yonisomanasikārā ahu paññāya abhisamayo: “Viññāne kho sati nāmarūpaṁ hoti, viññānapaccayā nāmarūpaṁ ti.”* *Atha kho bhikkhave Vipassissa Bodhisattassa etad ahosi: “Kimhi nu kho sati viññānaṁ hoti, kim paccayā viññānaṁ ti?”* *Atha kho bhikkhave Vipassissa Bodhisattassa yonisomanasikārā ahu paññāya abhisamayo: “Nāmarūpe kho sati viññānaṁ hoti, nāmarūpapaccayā viññānaṁ ti”* (D. ii, 32). It is interesting to note that this reflection of the Bodhisatta Vipassi involves a slightly different formula of the theory of dependent origination. This formula includes only ten links instead of twelve, excluding ignorance (*avijja*) and karmic activities (*saṅkhāra*)—the first two links of the more well-known formula—from its list. A similar formula is also found at S. ii, 104.

6 See discussion on p. 9.
aggregates within these eight links. The eight elements linked in this second group can be considered a mere rewording or a more detailed explanation of the psychosomatic process set in motion by mind and matter.

Table 10
The Paṭiccasamuppāda from a Mind and Matter Perspective

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mind and matter</th>
<th>Past</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. avijjā (ignorance)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. saṅkhāra (karmic activities)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. viññāṇa (consciousness)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. nāmarūpa (mind and matter)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. saḷāyatanā (six sense-doors)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. phassa (contact)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. vedanā (sensation)</td>
<td>Present</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. taṇhā (craving)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. upādāna (clinging)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. bhava (becoming)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mind and matter</th>
<th>Future</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>11. jāti (birth; rebirth)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. jarāmarāṇa (old age and death)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The first link enumerated in the middle group of the theory of dependent origination is viññāṇa. While viññāṇa is the last member of the pañcakkhandhā, it can also very well be considered the first. According to the traditional interpretation of the theory of dependent origination, consciousness, as a member of the chain, is nothing but a rebirth-consciousness. But as we have seen, every consciousness is a rebirth-consciousness at the moment of its emergence, and a death-consciousness at the moment of its dissolution. As soon as the consciousness emerges, however, mind and matter arise.

7 Vsm. 528. For clarification on the term paṭisandhi, see p. 123.
8 Idha paṭisandhi viññāṇaṁ okkanti nāmarūpaṁ ... (Ps. i, 52; also found at Vsm. 600). “Here [in this present life] there is a relinking which is consciousness, there is an appearance which is nāmarūpa.” The word okkanti literally means descent, but can
Many passages explain the second link of the middle group, mind and matter (nāmarūpa), as that which comprises all the five aggregates. The term nāmarūpa itself was already employed in pre-Buddhist philosophical systems. As Sarathchandra has pointed out:

The expression nāmarūpa, borrowed from the earlier upanishadic literature, possessed two meanings. In one sense it referred to the empirical individual who, in the Upanishads too, enjoyed only a relative reality. But sometimes it was used as a comprehensive term which included the entire phenomenal worlds comprising mind and matter.9

Buddhism also ascribes these two meanings to the term. In the context of the pañcicasamuppāda, however, the meaning of the term is limited to the psycho-physical structure of the individual. The authors of the Pāli Text Society Dictionary10 note that the commentary on the Dhammapada states that the four mental aggregates plus the material aggregate constitute mind and matter.11 Throughout Pāli literature,12 numerous passages support this statement. Yet, oddly enough, we also find repeated an explicit contradiction of this definition of mind and matter. This has been noted by Étienne Lamotte who remarked that "par mentalité [nāma], il faut entendre les trois skandha mentaux à l'exclusion du vijñāna."13 Although matter is always characterized by the rūpakkhandha, the mind (nāma), in certain passages, is defined only in terms of three aggregates—vedanā, saññā and sañkhāra—instead of

9 Sarathchandra, Buddhist Theory of Perception, p. 7.
11 Vedanādiyam catunnaṁ rūpakkhandhassa cā tī pañcannāṁ khandhānaṁ vasena pavattāṁ nāmarūpaṁ (DbA. iv, 100).
12 Nāmaṁ ti cattāro arūpakkhandhā, rūpaṁ ti rūpakkhandha (AA. ii, 154); a similar statement is also found at DhsA. 392.
four. This particular interpretation excludes viññāṇa from the mental category. Although there is an apparent contradiction, the problem might not be as serious as it seems, because the simple presence of the material aggregate along with the first three mental aggregates implies viññāṇa. Since saṁkhāra is listed as one of the mental aggregates, viññāṇa must naturally follow for, according to the paṭiccasamuppāda, saṁkhāra gives rise to viññāṇa (saṁkhārapaccayā viññānam). Moreover, as we have previously seen, the mind and matter category itself conditions viññāṇa. Perhaps certain sources exclude viññāṇa from the definition of mind and matter simply in order to avoid duplication, or perhaps they assume its presence to be so self-evident that it does not warrant mentioning. Whether consciousness is explicitly mentioned in the list or not, its function is always and undoubtedly present: on the one hand, mind and matter arise on the ground of viññāṇa, and on the other, saṁkhāra inevitably generates a viññāṇa. Therefore, the mind and matter category must contain all five aggregates.

The third link of this middle group is the six sense-doors (saḷāyatana), usually described as the six organs of cognition; namely, the visual, auditory, olfactory, gustatory, tactile and thinking organs. Each of these sense-doors is then further divided into internal (ajjhata) and external (bāhira). However, within the paṭiccasamuppāda formula itself, the term saḷāyatana includes only the six sense-organs (ajjhata) and not their respective objects. We can therefore establish a direct correlation with the six sense-doors link of the paṭiccasamuppāda and the five sense-organs that partly constitute the rūpakkhandha.

The fourth link of the middle group, contact (phassa), arises from the six sense-doors. But as we saw, contact is bare sensory experience devoid of any subjective content. We can establish a further correlation here between the sense-objects (bāhirasaḷāyatana) and the

14 For example, the Vibhaṅga excludes viññāṇa from nāma: Vедanākkhandho saññākkhandho saññārakkhandho: idam vuccati viññāṇapaccayā nāmaṁ (Vbh. 144). The Visuddhimagga also states that nāma only includes the three aggregates starting with vedanā: nāman ti ārammanābhimukham namanato vedanādayo tayo khandhā (Vsm. 558). This view is not shared by Vasubandhu who stated in his Abhidharmakośa that “les quatre skandhas immatériels, vedanā, samiṣṭā, saṁskāras, viññāṇa, sont nommés nāman, car nāman signifie ‘ce qui se ploie’, namaṭṭi nāma” (La Vallée Poussin, Abhidharmakośa, 2:94).

15 Although duplication was not a technique that the compilers of the Pāli canon frowned upon.

16 See p. 48.
rūpakkhandha. The sense-objects, which belong to the rūpakkhandha,
are potential objects of perception. But because of the congregation of
consciousness, sense-organs and sense-objects, they become actual
objects of perception and are termed contact.

Contact conditions the fifth link of the middle group, vedanā. To
describe vedanā as one of the links is not necessary, since it has already
been discussed as one of the aggregates, and we can rightly assume that
the meaning of the term is the same in both contexts.

The sixth and seventh links which follow the vedanā-link are
craving (tanha) and clinging (upādāna). As Bhikkhu Nāṇamoli points
out in his translation of the Nettippakaranaṁ, the literal translation of
tanha is “thirst,” but the term tanha itself is never used in Pāli literature
to refer to “thirst” as such. Instead, the word pipāsa is employed when
thirst is intended. Moreover, our common understanding of craving
may be misleading, since tanha refers to both craving and aversion.
According to Buddhism, craving reflects our discontentment with the
present moment, with reality as it is. We desire or crave something
because of a deep inner dissatisfaction and because of our inability to
accept reality as it presents itself. Craving is nothing but aversion
towards our immediate situation. Similarly, aversion manifests itself as
the craving for a better condition. The word tanha refers to both craving
and aversion and henceforth, whenever the word craving is employed,
aversion is also intended since both are the two faces of the same coin.
Clinging is usually defined as an intensified form of craving. Tanha
and upādāna can be dealt with together since both represent craving at
different levels of intensity. Craving always expresses itself first at the
mental level, but it only rarely remains confined to that realm; through
verbal and physical deeds, craving shapes life. Since tanha cannot
express itself without a mental, verbal or physical action, we can equate
both tanha and upādāna with part of saṅkhāra, namely the activity that
arises from a mental conation. To return to the simile used to describe
saṅkhāra, craving would correspond to the activity of cooking, but
would not include the final cooked product.

18 According to the Visuddhimagga, “Clinging is characterized by ‘seizing’ (gahana), its
property is not to release, and it manifests itself as a strong craving and as diṭṭhi.”
Gahanalakkhaṇaṁ upādānaṁ, amuṇcanarasati, tanhādaḥ hatta-diṭṭhipaccupaṭṭhānam
(Vsm. 528).
19 See p. 104.
The *sutta* literature mentions that craving is the conduit to becoming (*bhavānētī*);\(^{20}\) therefore craving leads us to the eighth link in our investigation—becoming (*bhava*). However, a distinction should be made between becoming as a general concept and becoming as one of the links of the *paṭiccasamuppāda*. According to Pāli literature, becoming in the general sense is divided into *kamma*-process and rebirth-process.\(^{21}\) The former refers to all actions that lead to becoming—what Nyānātiiloka explains as “the karmically active side of existence ... while the latter refers to the ... karma-produced Rebirth or Regenerating Process, i.e. [sic] the karmically passive side of existence consisting in the arising and developing of the karma-produced and therefore morally neutral mental and bodily phenomena of existence.”\(^{22}\) Thus the rebirth-process is the result, the effect which outflows from the *kamma*-process and reproduces the five aggregates by generating a new *viññāṇa*.\(^{23}\) Yet becoming, as one of the links of the *paṭiccasamuppāda*, does not include what we described as rebirth-process, for it is only the *kamma*-process that is a condition for birth.\(^{24}\) Furthermore, the *kamma*-process is not restricted to the eighth link (*bhava*), but includes the two previous links of the chain of dependent origination, craving and clinging,\(^{25}\) for all the *kamma* leading to the general concept of becoming are included in *kamma*-process.\(^{26}\)

Here, again, there is an evident correlation with the *pañca-kkhandhā*: the *saṅkhārakkhandha* is connected to the concept of *bhava*. As we saw on p. 103, the underlying meaning of *saṅkhāra* is twofold. It is defined as a productive force and as whatever is compounded. The first aspect of *saṅkhāra* can be correlated with the *kammabhava*, i.e., to

\(^{20}\) S. iii, 190; v, 432.

\(^{21}\) Vsm. 571; also Vbh. 137.

\(^{22}\) Nyānātiiloka, *Buddhist Dictionary*, p. 28.

\(^{23}\) The *sutta* state that the five aggregates have craving or desire as their root. *Ime kho, bhikkhave, paṭic’ upādānakkhandhā chandamulakā ti* (M. iii, 16); also at S. iii, 100. Furthermore, Buddhaghosa briefly explains the *uppattibhava* as the [five] aggregates generated by *kamma*. *Uppattibhavo pana sankhepato kammābhinnibbattā khandhā pabhedato navavidho hoti* (Vsm. 571).

\(^{24}\) *Bhavo ti pan’etha kammabhavo va adhippeto, so hi jātiyā paccayo, na uppattibhavo* (Vsm. 575).

\(^{25}\) Vsm. 581.

\(^{26}\) *Sabbam pi bhavagāmikamman ti iminā pana cetanā sampayuttā abhijjhādayo vutta* (Vsm. 571).
craving, clinging and the link of becoming itself, while the second aspect is nothing but the uppattibhava.

Through this simple analysis of the middle group of the paticcasamuppāda, we have now assigned four of the aggregates to the eight links of the chain: with consciousness (vinṇāna), we have correlated the vinṇānakkhandha; with mind and matter, the five aggregates; with the six sense-doors (saḷāyatanā), matter (rūpa); with contact (phassa), matter as well; with vedana, sensation; and with craving (taṇhā), clinging (upādāna) and becoming (bhava), saṅkhāra. The only aggregate that has not been included is saññā. Although it is not mentioned as a member of the chain of dependent origination, nor even alluded to by the twelve links, its implicit presence plays a crucial role.

Inclusion of Saññā in the Paticcasamuppāda Formula

My work has already demonstrated that saññā comes in contact with sensations after they have arisen, and that saññā plays an important role in the emergence of craving, attachment and becoming—the three links of the paticcasamuppāda that are correlated with saṅkhāra. This claim was based upon two major arguments. The first is supported by the canonical statement that unwholesome saññā leads to “obsessions” (papañca),28 a concept similar to that of [micchā-] diṭṭhi,29 and by Buddhaghosa’s statement that clinging (upādāna) is manifested as [micchā-] diṭṭhi.30 It is important to stress that only unwholesome saññā (kilesasaññā) produce papañca.31 Since papañca is basically interchangeable with micchādiṭṭhi, we could easily paraphrase Buddhaghosa’s statement and say that clinging is manifested as papañca. And, as the Suttanipāta affirms, unwholesome saññā is responsible for the arising of papañca. Therefore saññā must precede clinging. Since saññā always follows vedana,32 it must perform its function between vedana and upādāna. Yet, we still ought to clarify whether saññā occurs between vedana and craving, or between craving and clinging.

27 Refer to pp. 87ff.
28 Sn. 874.
29 Refer to p. 80.
30 Vsm. 528. Previously quoted in n. 18 on p. 134.
31 This was discussed on p. 80, and evidenced by the Sāratthappakāsini (SA. ii, 382).
32 Tam vedeti tan sañjānāti (M. i, 111).
This is where we used the second argument which is grounded in the causal chain of the Majjhimanikāya, a psychological theory that E.R. Sarathchandra has qualified as one of the earliest Buddhist formulas of sense-consciousness. According to this formula, "visual consciousness (cakkhuviññāna) arises on account of visual forms (rūpa) and the eye (cakkhu). The meeting of these three elements is contact (phassa)" which is a necessary condition for the arising of the next link: vedanā. The formula continues by stating that "whatever is felt (vedeti) as a sensation is recognized (sañjānāti)," thus explicitly supporting our statement that saññā follows vedanā. Furthermore, this same formula affirms that "saññā is followed by three mental functions (vitakka, papañca and papañcasanākhā)" that fall into the category of sañkhārakkhandha. Therefore, this also implies that saññā operates precisely between the vedanākkhandha and the sañkhārakkhandha. Since tañhā belongs to the sañkhārakkhandha, the activity of the saññākkhandha must take place before tañhā and after vedanā. The commentary on the Dhammasaṅgani further supports this claim, for it places the activity of saññā between vedanā and cetanā, a synonym of sañkhāra. Stcherbatsky provides a diagram which clearly shows that the function of saññā is activated after the emergence of sensation (see Table 11).

As the chapter on vedanā demonstrates, sensation in and of itself does not necessarily lead to craving. The sutta themselves distinguish between two kinds of sensations: those that are impure

33 M. i, 111-12. Similar occurrences of the formula also appear at M. i, 259; S. iv, 67, etc. Previously discussed on p. 81.
34 Sarathchandra, Buddhist Theory of Perception, p. 63. Sarathchandra quotes Mrs. Rhys Davids from Buddhist Psychology (p. 63) and includes in parentheses that this formula "is one of the earliest."
35 Cakkhuñ c’āvuso paṭicca rūpe ca uppajjati cakkhuviññānam tiṇṇāni saṅgati phasso, phassapaccayā vedanā, yam vedeti taṁ sañjānāti, yam sañjānāti taṁ vitakketi, yam vitakketi taṁ papañceti, yam papañceti tato nidānaṁ purisaṁ papañcasanākhā samudācaranti aṭṭānāgatapaccuppannesu cakkhuviññeyyesu rūpesu (M. i, 111-12).
36 See p. 110.
37 Phassena pana phusitvā vedanāya vediyati saññāya sañjānati cetanāya ceteti (DhsA. 107).
38 As seen on p. 95.
39 I have translated Stcherbatsky's Sanskrit terms into Pāli, and replaced some of the English equivalents by those that were used in this work (Stcherbatsky, Buddhist Logic, 2:311).
40 See p. 71.
(āmisā) or belonging to the householder (gehasitā) and others which are pure (nirāmisā) or belonging to the renouncer (nekkhammasitā). The difference is that the former act as potential agents in the future arising of craving while the latter do not. A certain vedanā may engender craving only if it is accompanied by unwholesome saññā, for the latter is likely to give rise to obsessions. Because of this particular faculty of recognition, pleasant sensations are approached as likeable or unlikeable, and individuals very soon find themselves generating craving or aversion towards these sensations. Craving in turn generates more saṅkhāra and keeps the cycle of life and death rotating.

Table 11
The Emergence of Sensation (Vedanā)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>sense-objects (rūpa)</th>
<th>sense-organs (saññāyatanā; rūpa)</th>
<th>consciousness (viññāna)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>meeting point (phassa)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sensation (vedanā)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>recognition (saññā)</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The position traditionally attributed to saññā within the pañca-kkhandhā is of crucial importance, since the relation between vedanā and saññā is responsible for human bondage as well as for liberation. The saññā of an ordinary person (puthujjana) interprets and approaches the sensations as one's own property, considers them responsible for one's sorrow or happiness, and sets in motion the wheel of becoming; this would be what the Sāratthappakāsini terms unwholesome saññā, which in themselves constitute the giri saññākkhandha. The Anguttara-nikāya indirectly states that a wise person utilizes wholesome saññā to develop wisdom and, not being misled as to the nature of sensations, does not generate craving or aversion, therefore putting a halt to the cycle of life and death. This distinction between unwholesome and wholesome saññā is implicitly supported by many passages of the Majjhimanikāya. The function of saññā, as we may recall, is to recognize and interpret perceptions through their signs (nimitta) and minor characteristics (anubyanjana). The texts state that those established in the noble discipline, when seeing a form with the eye, hearing a sound with the ears, etc., do not hold on to their signs and minor characteristics (anubyañjana) because doing so would lead to the arising of desire, discontent and unwholesome states of mind.

Since the function of saññā is precisely to hold to the signs and minor characteristics, we could say, therefore, that unwholesome saññā is propitious to the emergence of desire. This is evidenced by another passage of the Majjhimanikāya:

When he has seen a material shape (rūpa) through the eye, he feels attraction for agreeable material shapes, he feels repugnance for disagreeable material shapes; and he dwells without mindfulness aroused as to the body with a mind that is limited (parittacetaso), and he does not comprehend that freedom of mind (cetavimutti) and that freedom through intuitive wisdom (paññāvimutti) as they really are, whereby those evil unskilled states (akusalā dhammā) of his are stopped without remainder. Possessed thus of compliance and antipathy, whatever feelings

41 A. ii, 382.
42 According to the Girimānandasutta, paññā is equated with the ten recognitions such as aniccasaññā, anattasaññā, asubhasaññā, and so on (A. v, 109).
43 The word used is abhijjā which, according to the Pāli Text Society Dictionary, is synonymous with lobha and is closely connected with saññā and upādāna.
44 M. i, 180-81; i, 270; i, 273; iii, 34-35.
The Five Aggregates

(vedanā) he feels—pleasant or painful or neither painful nor pleasant—he delights (abhinandati) in that feeling, welcomes (abhivadati) it and persists in cleaving (ajjhosa ya ti ṭhati) to it. From delighting in that feeling of his, from welcoming it, from persisting in cleaving to it, delight (nandī) arises; whatever is delight amid those feelings, that is grasping; conditioned by grasping is becoming; conditioned by becoming is birth; conditioned by birth, old age and dying, grief, sorrow, suffering, lamentation and despair come into being. Such is the arising of this entire mass of anguish.45

This passage clearly suggests that when a person generates attraction or repugnance to sensations (vedanā), craving—or actually, nandī—and clinging arise, and the rest of the links of the paṭiccasamuppāda are automatically called in. What is important to notice is that attraction or repugnance are directly linked to the activity of saññā. When saññā is primarily focussed on the signs and minor characteristics of the object, it is very likely that attraction or repugnance will be generated, and that craving and attachment will then follow. This is what is meant by unwholesome saññā. Tilmann Vetter, commenting on the above passage suggested that

One should not dwell on these impressions and thoughts a moment longer than is necessary to orientate oneself. If one goes too deeply into the signs of what is presented, or into minor features, then one cannot avoid the arising of desires and dejection and it will take a long time before these conditions disappear again.46

However, Vetter seems to ignore the positive aspect of saññā. The Aṅguttaranikāya clearly states that greed (rāga) cannot arise in one who is totally focussed on the signs of asubha47—as we have seen, asubha is one of the ten saññā described in the Girimānandasutta. Although Vetter interprets the concept of nimitta as the signs of an object, it must be stressed that the principal marks of any phenomenon are the three characteristics of existence—anicca, anattā and dukkha. Vetter uses the

47 Asubhanimittaṁ tiṁsa vacanīyāṁ. Tassa asubhanimittaṁ yoniso manasikarato anuppanno c’eva rāgo n’uppajjati uppanno ca rāgo pahiyati ti (A. i, 200-201).
term *nimitta* in the sense of outward appearance, while its signification also includes other characteristics. In this sense, Vetter is correct: one focussing on the signs which only reflect the outside appearance of an object will eventually generate desire. However, one focussing on the essential characteristics of every object—the three characteristics of existence and the other “positive *sañña*”—will eradicate greed.

Therefore, when *sañña* is primarily focussed on these three characteristics of existence, craving cannot be generated, for the person will understand the true nature of the object as well as the danger of associating any form of delight (*abhinandati*) with it. The recognition of these three marks of existence, as well as the other characteristics described in the *Girimanandasutta*, is the function of *sañña* that we termed wholesome. We must stress, however, that these wholesome *sañña* do not belong to the *saññakkhandha* as such. As we saw on p. 87, the essential function of the *saññakkhandha* is to apprehend a *nimitta* (sign). The fact that the three characteristics of existence—*anicca*, *anatta* and *dukkha*—are never considered *nimitta* and that, furthermore, they are classified as *animitta*, implies that the wholesome *sañña* does not apprehend *nimitta* and, therefore, does not belong to the *saññakkhandha*. It becomes clear that *sañña*, as unwholesome or wholesome, plays a crucial role between *vedanā* and craving; craving will or will not arise depending on the kind of *sañña* present. The inclusion of *sañña* between these two links of *vedanā* and craving further clarifies the emergence of *sañkhāra*.

As we have hitherto suggested, the first part of *sañkhāra* does not refer to all activities, but only to actions that have previously been conditioned by the *sañña*. In other words, any action performed with craving or aversion as its foundation—craving which arose due to the activity of *sañña*—results in a *sañkhāra*, since *sañña* predisposes a blind reaction to the sensations. However, actions performed with wisdom as their foundation do not result in *sañkhāra* since sensations approached as impermanent cannot give rise to craving and aversion.

Thus, a simple analysis of the eight middle links of the *paṭiccasamuppāda* explains each one of the *pañcakkhandhā*. Table 12 shows which elements of the middle link of the *paṭiccasamuppāda* are correlated with which aggregate.

We have seen, then, that each of the five aggregates finds a specific place in the theory of dependent origination. We have also explained that the *saññakkhandha* plays a critical role in the multiplication of misery, for it seems to be the faculty that is indirectly
The Five Aggregates

responsible for transforming vedanā into craving. When vedanā is coloured by the faculty of recognition, craving and attachment arise.48 Yet, if one deactivates the inherently unwholesome saññākkhandha, or transforms it into the ten recognitions mentioned in the Girimānanda-sutta, craving is no longer produced, because wisdom—and not wrong views (micchādītthi)—arises from the activity of this wholesome saññā. The chain of dependent origination is thus broken and the final goal of enlightenment is ultimately reached. We will now explore how this theory is applied to Theravāda meditation practice as taught in Burma, Sri Lanka and Thailand.

Table 12
Correlation between the Paṭiccasamuppāda and the Aggregates

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Elements of the Paṭiccasamuppāda</th>
<th>Corresponding Aggregate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>viññāna (consciousness)</td>
<td>viññāna</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>nāmarūpa (mind and matter)</td>
<td>the five aggregates</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>saḷāyatanā (the six sense-doors)</td>
<td>rūpa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>phassa (sensory stimuli)</td>
<td>rūpa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>vedanā (sensation)</td>
<td>vedanā</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tanhā (craving)</td>
<td>saññākkhāra</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>upādāna (clinging)</td>
<td>sañkhāra</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bhava (becoming)</td>
<td>sañkhāra</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Vipassanā and the Paṅcakkhandhā

The paṭiccasamuppāda constitutes a fundamental tenet of Buddhism, indispensable for realizing and understanding the implications of the Buddhist goal, nibbāna. Since this complex chain of causation is always said to give rise to suffering,49 the deactivation of any of the twelve links of this chain is bound to break the causal process and eliminate suffering. The theory of dependent origination in its reverse order (paṭiloma) is consequently one version of the path leading to the eradication of misery. In fact, the meditation practice in Theravāda

48 See pp. 79ff.
49 "This [the paṭiccasamuppāda] is the origin of the entire mass of suffering." Evam etassa kevalassa dukkhakkhandhassa samudayo hoti.
countries is traditionally known to be an application of the process described by this reverse order. The five aggregates being nothing but a paraphrase of the theory of dependent origination, their function must therefore be apparent in the Buddhist meditation process.

Before tackling the subject, I need to clarify what is meant by meditation. The term meditation has a vast panoply of meanings within the Theravāda tradition, let alone the Buddhist tradition at large. However, since this study is solely focussed on the Theravāda, I will refer to the meditation technique most widely practised in Theravāda countries: vipassanā. Although there are differences in the various techniques labelled vipassanā, all their proponents link them unanimously to the Satipaṭṭhānasutta, the discourse in which four modes of attention are described: attention towards the body (kāya), sensation (vedanā), mind (citta) and mental contents (dhamma). In essence, the technique consists in observing objectively these four objects of attention. Some teachers may lay more emphasis on one than another, but in most cases, observation of breathing⁵⁰ and of sensations are prevailing.

Through the observation of sensations, the practitioner becomes increasingly aware of the fleeting nature of existence; every sensation that arises eventually passes away. This awareness is the ground from which sprouts a certain understanding of the two other characteristics of existence; namely, suffering and selflessness. The transience of sensations and of the entire psycho-physical structure enables a meditator to become experientially acquainted with selflessness. Realization of impermanence also strengthens the belief that attachment to any sensation is doomed to produce misery, for that sensation will sooner or later pass away. Therefore, one attempts to simply observe the sensations objectively, without generating any form of desire or aversion towards them:

Here a bhikkhu, when feeling a pleasant sensation understands, "I am feeling a pleasant sensation"; when feeling a painful sensation, he understands, "I am feeling a painful sensation"; when feeling a neutral sensation, he understands, "I am feeling a neutral sensation." Now this awareness is firmly established in the present moment. This awareness develops to the extent that there is mere observation and mere understanding, nothing else, and he

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⁵⁰ Observation of breathing (ānāpāna) is one of the numerous practices included in the first mode of attention (kāyānupassanā).
delves in a state where he does not grasp anything, and there is nothing for him to grasp in the frame-work of the body. This is how a bhikkhu dwells observing bodily sensation in bodily sensation itself.\(^{51}\)

From a purely technical perspective, this attitude comes within the scope of the *paṭiccasamuppāda*. When sensations are observed with equanimity, *saññā* is no longer active and craving is not generated. When the habit pattern of the mind is broken and sensations are perceived as impermanent, they are no longer approached as desirable or undesirable. In fact, having replaced *saññā* by wisdom (*paññā*), one does not react to the sensations, and new *sankhāra* cannot arise.

Of course, this process of liberation is gradual in the sense that liberation is not necessarily attained the instant that one ceases to generate *saññā* and begins to develop wisdom. Even when a person observes sensations with the understanding of their true nature (*anicca*, *anatta* and *dukkha*) and does not generate new cravings, the wheel of birth and death keeps turning. The force that activates the motion of the wheel results from *sankhāra*. Even when one does not produce new ones, old *sankhāra* will still continue to bear fruit in the form of new *viññāna*, *rūpa*, and *vedanā*. However, by failing to react or impose particular evaluations on these newly arisen *vedanā*, one does not generate new *kamma*, and so the fruits of the old *sankhāra* are eradicated. In the presence of constant awareness, keen diligence and strong wisdom arising from wholesome *saññā*, new *sankhāra* cannot arise from sensations, since unwholesome *saññā* no longer exist to react to sensations with craving and aversion. The old *sankhāra* will eventually all come up to the surface and pass away. As the Buddha told Ānanda: “Indeed, all karmic activities are transient. Arising and passing away is their true nature. Having arisen, they are eradicated; the tranquillity attained from such eradication is the real happiness.”\(^{52}\)

Earlier, we compared *sankhāra* with cooking;\(^{53}\) I now wish to extend the metaphor further by correlating the process of eradication of *sankhāra* with that of fasting. If one ceases to give food to the body,

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51 D. ii, 298.

52 *Aniccāvata sankhāra uppādavaya dhammino; uppajjitvā nīnijhanti, tesam vūpasamo sukhō ti* (D. ii, 199). This same passage was uttered by Sakka in the *Mahāparinibbānasutta* at D. ii, 156.

53 See p. 104.
one does not die immediately after the first meal is missed. Rather, one can survive without eating for perhaps two or three months. This is possible even though the body has to feed itself at every moment, because the body is able to break down and digest the old stock of food, all the fat and muscle previously accumulated. Not until this storage of nutriment has been consumed and only skin and bones remain will the body finally die, no more sustenance being available. In a similar manner, the mind and matter phenomenon needs to be fed at every moment by sankhāra which are constantly resulting from craving and aversion towards vedanā. But if one remains in a state of equanimity characterized by wisdom, and does not react to sensations, the past sankhāra that are responsible for the arising of these very sensations dissolve, and a time comes when not a single sankhāra is left to propel the cycle. It is at this moment only that one attains or enters into nibbāna without residue, the final goal of true liberation.

From the perspective of the five aggregates, this process might be more easily understood by referring to Table 9 (see p. 129) where they are presented from a cyclical perspective. Sankhāra is responsible for the arising of viññāṇa; viññāṇa for rūpa; rūpa, for vedanā; vedanā for saññā; and saññā for sankhāra, upon which another re-evolution of the constantly repeated cycle is begun. If, however, one deactivates saññā, new sankhāra are not created and the chain is broken. This constitutes the attainment of nibbāna with residue. The individual is still alive and the five aggregates are still present, as in the case of the Buddha and all the arahant mentioned in the Pāli texts. The five aggregates are still present, for old sankhāra that were produced in the past continue to the surface and yield their fruits in the form of the four other aggregates. At this stage, the individual has transformed saññā into panna and further sankhāra cannot be generated. The five aggregates—or the individual's life—are maintained simply by dint of the previously accumulated sankhāra, and this keeps the wheel rolling.

54 The Majjhimanikāya supports our simile by mentioning that four kinds of substance are found; namely, material food, phassa, sankhāra and viññāṇa. Kabajīkāro āhāro oḷārīko vā sukhumo vā, phasso dutiyo, manusasmcetanā tatiyo, viññāṇam catuttho (M. 1, 48). Although the term sankhāra is not used explicitly in this text, the word used (manusasmcetanā) can be directly related to sankhāra. Such is the description of manusasmcetanā of the Paramatthamañjasā (VsM 335; reported by Bhikkhu Nānamoli in his translation of the Visuddhimagga, The Path of Purification, p. 372, n. 2).
as long as the impulse that set the motion lasts.\textsuperscript{55} This motion stops when all \textit{saṅkhāra}—past and present—have been eradicated. From then onwards, none of the five aggregates can arise; this is the attainment of \textit{nībbāna} without residue, achieved upon the death of the \textit{arahant}.

This exact same process can also be understood from the perspective of the \textit{paṭiccasamuppāda}. If one has totally transformed \textit{saññā} into \textit{paññā}, sensations cannot be the grounds for the arising of further craving. Therefore, clinging, becoming and (re-)birth, all being necessarily dependent upon the presence of craving, cannot arise either. Although one may keep living for a certain period, rebirth is no longer possible. The life of such an individual is temporarily maintained by \textit{saṅkhāra}—the link that precedes the eight middle links which characterize the present. When these past \textit{saṅkhāra} are totally eradicated, the switch from \textit{nībbāna} with residue to without residue can occur.

Whether we approach Buddhist soteriology from the angle of the \textit{paṭiccasamuppāda} or of the five aggregates, it has become clear that the same process is at work: from the Theravāda texts that were analyzed in this work, the deactivation of \textit{saññā} is the primary factor for the attainment of enlightenment. Of course, this deactivation can be expressed in different ways, such as the destruction of ignorance, the cessation of craving or the eradication of \textit{saṅkhāra}, but they all necessarily imply an objective observation of sensations (mental or physical) which will not produce craving or \textit{saṅkhāra}.

\textsuperscript{55} The 'wheel “kept rolling as long as the impulse that set the motion (\textit{abhisāṅkhārassa gati}) lasted. It then circled and fell to the ground.” \textit{Tārin pavattitaṁ samānam yāvatikā abhisaṅkhārassā gati tāvatikam gantvā cingulāyatvā bhūmiyam papati} (A. i, 111).
Conclusion

Although many scholars have referred to the five aggregates in their works on Buddhism, none have thoroughly explained their respective functions. By clarifying the importance of this previously untreated subject, this study has circumscribed the meaning and the role of each of the five aggregates and has established a correlation between each of the aggregates and certain links of the \textit{pa\textasciitilde ticc\textasciitilde casamupp\textasciitilde \textasciitilde da}}.

In the chapter on the \textit{r\textasciitilde upakkhandha}, I argued that the many classifications of this aggregate could be condensed and divided into two major categories: those elements belonging to the sense-organs, and those pertaining to the sense-objects. When approached from these two categories, the \textit{r\textasciitilde upakkhandha} can be integrally correlated to two links of the \textit{pa\textasciitilde ticc\textasciitilde casamupp\textasciitilde \textasciitilde da}; namely, the six sense-doors and contact. All the sense-organs except the mental organ (\textit{mano}) belong to the six sense-doors, while the sense-objects along with the mental organ are included in contact (\textit{phassa}). When these sense-objects are actually perceived, they, along with consciousness and the sense-organs, constitute contact: bare sensory experience, devoid of any subjective inclination. Contact can potentially become a sensation \textit{vedan\textasciitilde}}.

I also suggested that no distinction is found between the \textit{vedana\textasciitilde kkh\textasciitilde andha} and \textit{vedana\textasciitilde} as a member of the chain of dependent origination. By exploring how \textit{vedana\textasciitilde}, like \textit{r\textasciitilde upa}, was also classified according to different schemes—such as pure (\textit{nir\textasciitilde am\textasciitilde s\textasciitilde \textasciitilde a}), belonging to the renouncer (\textit{nek\textasciitilde ham\textasciitilde as\textasciitilde \textasciitilde it\textasciitilde a}), impure (\textit{\textasciitilde am\textasciitilde s\textasciitilde \textasciitilde a}) and belonging to the householder (\textit{geha\textasciitilde s\textasciitilde it\textasciitilde a})—I came to the conclusion that a certain way of approaching \textit{vedana\textasciitilde} would transform them into \textit{nir\textasciitilde am\textasciitilde s\textasciitilde \textasciitilde a} or \textit{nek\textasciitilde ham\textasciitilde as\textasciitilde \textasciitilde it\textasciitilde a} \textit{vedana\textasciitilde}—of an inoffensive nature—while an alternative approach would transform the \textit{vedana\textasciitilde} into \textit{\textasciitilde am\textasciitilde s\textasciitilde \textasciitilde a} or \textit{geha\textasciitilde s\textasciitilde it\textasciitilde a} \textit{vedana\textasciitilde}—endowed with a negative connotation because this type of sensation may act as an agent bringing about the future arising of craving and aversion. I have presented evidence which supports the idea that the factor responsible for this second approach to \textit{vedana\textasciitilde} is the next aggregate: \textit{sa\textasciitilde n\textasciitilde \textasciitilde a} (recognition). It is \textit{sa\textasciitilde n\textasciitilde \textasciitilde a} that will transform the sensation into \textit{nir\textasciitilde am\textasciitilde s\textasciitilde \textasciitilde a} (or \textit{nek\textasciitilde ham\textasciitilde as\textasciitilde \textasciitilde it\textasciitilde a}) or \textit{\textasciitilde am\textasciitilde s\textasciitilde \textasciitilde a} (or \textit{geha\textasciitilde s\textasciitilde it\textasciitilde a}), a transformation which will become responsible for generating or eradicating craving.

The main function of the \textit{sa\textasciitilde n\textasciitilde \textasciitilde a\textasciitilde kkh\textasciitilde handha} is to recognize and interpret sensations through the imposition of certain categories. Yet
not all *sañña* belong to the *saññakkhandha*. To clarify this nuance, it was again necessary to elaborate a scheme dividing *sañña* into two categories. The wholesome *sañña* are, in short, recognitions of the three characteristics of existence. These do not belong to the *saññakkhandha* as such for they do not apprehend signs (*nimitta*). The unwholesome *sañña*, on the other hand, are simply certain interpretations of reality through the major signs. The latter type of *sañña* is not conducive to insight; it generates obsessions, and essentially constitutes the *saññakkhandha*. Upon realizing the presence of the *saññakkhandha* between the two links of *vedana* and craving, the major function assigned to this aggregate in the arising of craving and aversion became evident: unless an individual's faculty of recognition is governed by the wholesome *sañña*, that person is likely to generate craving, clinging and becoming, all of which fall under the next aggregate: *sañkhāra*.

The *sañkhārakkhandha* was also analyzed in terms of different schemes. I came to the conclusion that the *sañkhārakkhandha* is definitely a *sañkhāra* in the sense of conditioned phenomena since it has been formed and conditioned. Not all *sañkhāra*, however, belong to the *sañkhārakkhandha*, for they are not all endowed with the capacity of forming or generating more conditioned phenomena. A conditioned phenomenon can only produce other conditioned phenomena when working in conjunction with *viññāna, vedanā, sañña* and *rūpa*; in other words, only the *sañkhārakkhandha*, which, by definition, is closely connected to the four other *khandha*, can produce conditioned phenomena. This implies that *sañkhāra* as a *paccaya* is simply a paraphrase of *sañkhārakkhandha*. Both these terms refer to a force that will generate an effect. The effect, however, although being *sañkhāta* in the sense that it has been caused, does not necessarily belong to the *paccaya* or the *sañkhārakkhandha* categories, for it might not generate a further effect. I have also correlated the *sañkhārakkhandha* with three of the links of the *paṭiccasamuppāda*: craving, clinging and becoming—the three links responsible for the emergence of a new existence, a new consciousness (*viññāna*).

We have seen that *viññānakkhandha* is variously translated. Some scholars hold that it means bare sensation, some, pure consciousness, and others, the cognition of something pleasant, unpleasant or neutral. Since the *viññānakkhandha* is responsible for the cognition of all of these, however, none of these suppositions is totally accurate. Consequently, the term was defined as “mere consciousness,” whether that consciousness be of *rūpa*, *vedanā* or *sañña*. The difference between
the mental organ and viññāna itself was also examined. Both are necessary for perception of phenomena (dhamma), but only the latter is necessary for the apprehension of stimuli from any of the other sense-organs. A correlation between the third link of the paṭiccasamuppāda—viññāṇanidāna—and the viññāṇakkhandha was finally established.

By correlating the five aggregates, in the order they traditionally appear, with the theory of dependent origination, I have presented evidence supporting the significance of their traditional nomenclature. The traditional order of the five aggregates is in perfect harmony with the theory of dependent origination. If the order of the aggregates were arranged differently, there would be a definite contradiction between the two theories. Having correlated these two theories, I emphasized that viññāna, which can cyclically manifest itself as either the first or last member, is a necessary condition for the arising of matter, which in turn conditions sensations. Sensation is necessary for the emergence of sañña, which might lead to saṅkhāra if the sañña is unwholesome (and therefore belongs to the saññākkhandha)—or to wisdom (panñā) if the sañña is wholesome. If a saṅkhāra is generated, then the grounds for the arising of a new viññāna are prepared. Thus, the cycle is complete: from viññāna to viññāna. Beings are trapped within a quasi-eternal round of birth, death and rebirth.

The Buddhist tradition usually explains the process that binds beings to saṁsāra by the use of the twelvefold chain of dependent origination in direct order (anuloma). This same process when viewed in the reverse order (paṭiloma) is perceived as a soteriological indicator by virtue of the implication that the chain can be broken. Thus the doctrine of dependent origination plays an irrevocably crucial role in Buddhism: it elucidates not only the process that binds beings to saṁsāra, but also the one necessary for attaining enlightenment. It is probably for this reason that canonical literature states that “whoever understands the paṭiccasamuppāda understands the dhamma, and whoever understands the dhamma understands the paṭiccasamuppāda.” While the theory of dependent origination has been allotted such great importance, the five aggregates have never received

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1 With the sole exception of viññāna which appears as the last member and was moved to the first place, for reasons explained on pp. 127ff.

2 Yo paṭiccasamuppādaṁ passati so dhamman passati, yo dhamman passati so paṭiccasamuppādaṁ passaṭīti (M. i, 190-1).
much emphasis in terms of the process that leads to *nibbāna*. Nevertheless, the *paṭiccasamuppāda* is a process that takes place within every individual, and since Buddhism describes the individual as constituted of the five aggregates, these aggregates must mirror the process hinted at by the *paṭiccasamuppāda*. Similarly, the five aggregates are reflecting a process of interdependence which must necessarily be in accordance with the *paṭiccasamuppāda*. By correlating the five aggregates with the theory of dependent origination, I have presented evidence that shows, on the one hand, the interdependence of the two theories and, on the other hand, how the process which binds beings to *samsāra* is reflected in the five aggregates, thus transposing Buddhist soteriology into a more concrete Buddhist psychological framework.
Glossary

The main purpose of this glossary is to refer the reader to the English equivalents of the Pāli or Sanskrit terms used in this book. Using the index, one may then locate the passage where the term is analyzed.

ajjhattta
akasa
amisa
anagamin
anupanasati
anatta
anuloma
anupadisesa
apaya
apodhada
appajigha
arahant
arahattaphalasamapatti
arupavacara
asaṅkhata
asaṅkhatahaddhama

asava
avacara
ayatana
bahiddha
bala
bhava
bhikkhu
cetanu
cesasaka
citta
cittavrittinirodha
cuticita
dhamma
dhammoyatana

internal
space
pure (vegetarian)
non-returner
contemplation of breath
selflessness
normal order (of the paṭiccasamuppada)
without residue (nibbana)
four states of misery
water, water element
unresisting
liberated person
attainment of the fruits of arahantship
immaterial realm
unconditioned
unconditioned phenomenon (in the Theravada tradition, nibbana is the only phenomenon)
bias
realm
base; sense-organs
external
strength (the five strengths, powers)
becoming
monk
volition
mental factors
consciousness
cessation of mental activities
death-consciousness
phenomenon of existence; teaching
mental objects

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ed
dīṭṭhi  
views (wrong-views)  
dīṭṭhisāṇṇā  
recognition of views  
dūre  
far  
dukkha  
suffering  
gehasitā  
belonging to the householder  
gotrabhū  
change of lineage  
hadayavatthu  
heart basis  
hetu  
cause  
indriya  
sense-organ  
ithindriya  
femininity  
jhāna  
absorptions  
kāmāvacara  
realm of sensuality  
kammabhava  
kamma-process  
kammavipāka  
kamma-result  
khandha  
aggregate  
khandhaparinibbāna  
total extinction of the five aggregates  
khaya  
destruction  
kusala  
wholesome  
lobha  
greed  
lokuttara  
transcendental realm  
maggaphala  
levels of realization  
mahābhūta  
primary elements (4)  
mano  
mental organ  
manussaloka  
human realm  
nāmarūpa  
mind and matter  
navalokuttaradhammā  
nine supramundane elements  
nekkhamasitā  
belonging to the renouncer  
nidāna  
link of the paṭiccasamuppāda  
nimitta  
sign  
nirāmisā  
impure (non-vegetarian)  
nirodha  
eradication  
nirupādisesa nibbāna  
nibbāna without residue  
oḷārika  
gross  
pāṇcakkhandhā  
five aggregates  
pāṇīṇā  
wisdom  
papañca  
obession  
paramatthasacca  
highest truth
paṭhavidhātu earth, earth element
paṭicasamuppāda dependent origination
paṭiloma reverse order
paṭisandhivināṇa rebirth-consciousness
phassa contact
phoṭṭhabbāyatana bodily impression
puthujjana ordinary people
rūpa matter
rūpāvacara material realm
saḷāyatanā six sense-doors
sabhāvadhamma phenomenon which exists by itself
sagga celestial realm
sakādāgāmin once-returner
sakkāyadiṭṭhi view that the body is existing [permanently]
samādhi concentration
samāpatti attainments (4)
samatha concentration
sammutisacca conventional truth
saṃsāra cycle of birth, death and rebirth
saṅkhāra karmic activities [compounded phenomena]
saṅkhata conditioned
saṅkhatadhamma conditioned phenomena
saṅhā recognition
saṅnakkhandha recognition aggregate
saṅñāvedayatinirodhā extinction of recognition and sensation
santike near
sappaṭighamī resisting
sīla morality
sopādisesa with residue (nibbāna)
sotāpanna stream-enterer
sukhuma subtle
sutta discourse
taṅhā craving
tejodhātu fire, fire element
ucchedadiṭṭhi annihilation view
upādāna clinging
upādānakkhandhā clinging-aggregate
upādārūpa secondary matter
uppatibhava rebirth-process
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Meaning</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>vāyadhātu</td>
<td>air, air element</td>
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<tr>
<td>vedanā</td>
<td>sensation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>vedanākkhaya</td>
<td>state of destruction of sensations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>vimutti</td>
<td>release</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>viññāna</td>
<td>consciousness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>vipassanā</td>
<td>discriminative insight; one of the theravāda meditation techniques</td>
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<td>visaya</td>
<td>sense-object</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>vitakka</td>
<td>thinking about</td>
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<tr>
<td>voharasacca</td>
<td>conventional truth</td>
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