

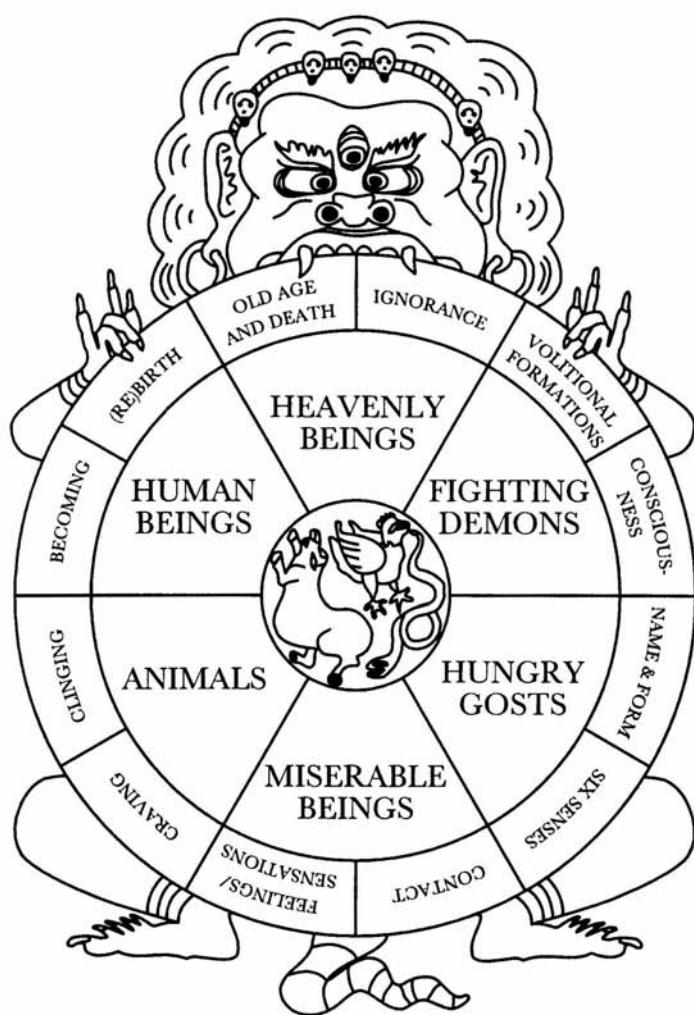
IDENTITY AND EXPERIENCE

*The Constitution of the Human Being
According to Early Buddhism*



Sue
Hamilton

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Frontispiece : the demon of Dukkha

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According to Early Buddhism*

SUE HAMILTON



LUZAC
ORIENTAL

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For Ma, with love and thanks

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Foreword

"WHAT ARE LITTLE BOYS MADE OFF?", asks the nursery rhyme, and religious traditions ask the same question. Though the Buddha apparently denied that the human being contains something called a soul, what he meant by the denial, or by the word in his language which we translate "soul", has rarely been scrutinised.

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

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

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

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

Richard Gombrich
Oxford, March 1995

Acknowledgements

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

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

It is a happy custom that writers of books have an opportunity to thank those who have made a notable contribution, in one way or another, to its production. In my case, thanks are owed to many. Alexis Sanderson was an inspiring teacher in the early part of my graduate studies at Oxford. Richard Gombrich, who supervised my D.Phil, was an invaluable source of advice, thought-provoking comments and constructive criticism. The examiners of the thesis, Lance Cousins and Paul Williams, made useful criticisms and suggestions, some of which have been incorporated in this book: any omissions or errors that remain are entirely my own. During the years of my graduate studies I was fortunate enough to be a member of

Wolfson College, Oxford, which provided an incomparable environment for such an intellectual undertaking, for which I am most grateful. Whilst there I had the benefit of so many useful and stimulating discussions and suggestions that the people concerned are too numerous to mention, but I nevertheless acknowledge my indebtedness.

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

Sue Hamilton
London, 30 March 1995

Abbreviations

Abh.K.B.	Vasubandhu's <i>Abhidharmakośabhāṣya</i>
Ait. Up.	<i>Aitareya Upaniṣad</i>
AN	<i>Āṅguttara Nikāya</i>
As	<i>Atthasālinī</i>
Br. Up.	<i>Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad</i>
Ch. Up.	<i>Chāndogya Upaniṣad</i>
CPD	Critical Pali Dictionary
DA	<i>Dīgha Nikāyaṭṭhakathā</i> (<i>Sumaṅgalavilāsinī</i>)
DhA	<i>Dhammapadaṭṭhakathā</i>
Dhs	<i>Dhammasaṅgaṇī</i>
Dialogues	<i>Dialogues of the Buddha</i> (translation of the <i>Dīgha Nikāya</i>)
DN	<i>Dīgha Nikāya</i>
ERE	Hastings (ed) <i>Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics</i>
Further Dialogues	<i>Further Dialogues of the Buddha</i> (SBB translation of the <i>Majjhima Nikāya</i>)
GS	<i>Gradual Sayings</i> (translation of the <i>Āṅguttara Nikāya</i>)
J	<i>Jātaka</i>
JPTS	Journal of the Pali Text Society
KhA	<i>Khuddakapāṭhaṭṭhakathā</i> (<i>Paramatthajotikā</i>)
KhP	<i>Khuddakapāṭha</i>
KS	<i>Kindred Sayings</i> (translation of the <i>Samyutta Nikāya</i>)
K. Up.	<i>Kauṣītaki Upaniṣad</i>
MA	<i>Majjhima Nikāyaṭṭhakathā</i> (<i>Papañcasūdanī</i>)
Miln	<i>Milindapañha</i>
MK	Nāgārjuna's <i>Madhyamakakārikā</i>
MLS	<i>Middle Length Sayings</i> (translation of the <i>Majjhima Nikāya</i>)
MN	<i>Majjhima Nikāya</i>
Mt. Up.	<i>Maitrī Upaniṣad</i>
Muṇḍ. Up.	<i>Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad</i>
Paṭis.	<i>Paṭisambhidāmagga</i>
PED	<i>Pali English Dictionary</i>
PTS	Pali Text Society
Pug	<i>Puggalapaññatti</i>
Pv	<i>Petavatthu</i>
PvA	<i>Paramatthadīpanī</i> Vol IV (commentary to <i>Petavatthu</i>)
RV	<i>R̥g Veda</i>
SA	<i>Samyutta Nikāyaṭṭhakathā</i> (<i>Sāratthapakāsinī</i>)

Śat. Br.	<i>Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa</i>
SBB	Sacred Books of the Buddhists Series
SBE	Sacred Books of the East Series
SN	<i>Samyutta Nikāya</i>
Sn	<i>Sutta Nipāta</i>
SnA	<i>Sutta Nipātaṭṭhakathā (Paramatthajotikā II)</i>
Śvet. Up.	<i>Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad</i>
Tait. Up.	<i>Taittirīya Upaniṣad</i>
Vin	<i>Vinaya</i>
Vism	<i>Visuddhimagga</i>
YS	Patañjali's <i>Yoga Sūtras</i>

Introduction

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

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

This is the one doctrine which separates Buddhism from all other religions, creeds, and systems of philosophy and which makes it unique in the world's history. All its other teachings ... are found, more or less in similar forms, in one or other of the schools of thought or religions which have attempted to guide men through life and explain to them the unsatisfactoriness of the world. But in its denial of any real permanent Soul or Self, Buddhism stands alone. This teaching presents the utmost difficulty to many people and often provokes even violent antagonism towards the whole religion. Yet this doctrine of No-soul or *Anattā* is the bedrock of Buddhism and all the other Teachings of the Buddha are intimately connected with it ... Now, what is this 'Soul' the existence of which the Buddha denies? Briefly stated, the soul

is the abiding, separate, constantly existing and indestructable entity which is generally believed to be found in man ... it is the thinker of all his thoughts, the doer of his deeds and the director of the organism generally. It is the lord not only of the body but also of the mind; it gathers its knowledge through the gateways of the senses ... Buddhism denies all this and asserts that this belief in a permanent and a divine soul is the most dangerous and pernicious of all errors, the most deceitful of illusions, that it will inevitably mislead its victim into the deepest pit of sorrow and suffering.¹

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

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

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

In his "The Mind-body relationship in Pāli Buddhism: a philosophical investigation", Harvey states that his intention is to attempt to "understand the full meaning and actual implications of the teaching that 'all *dhammas* are *anattā*'".³ Harvey's thesis is that consciousness (*viññāṇa*) is in effect a conventional self. Both these scholars write about the Theravāda Buddhist tradition as a whole, using as their primary sources not only the early part of the Pali canon, the *Sutta Piṭaka*, but also the later, scholastic *Abhidhamma Piṭaka*, the commentarial tradition and the *Visuddhimagga* of Buddhaghosa, a highly influential Theravāda Buddhist who lived in the fifth century CE, and many other traditionally Theravāda texts. Other scholars have sought to establish that the early texts implicitly teach that there is an absolutely transcendent non-empirical Self. A recent example

of such work is Pérez Remón's book *Self and Non-self in Early Buddhism*, in which he seeks to make "a systematic and complete study of the *anattā* doctrine in the five *Nikāyas*".⁴

Another approach in modern scholarship is exemplified by those who have concentrated on establishing that the early Pali texts teach an elaborate psychology. For example, this is the aim of Johansson, in his book *The Dynamic Psychology of Early Buddhism*.⁵ He states his work is "a psychologist's attempt to understand what the Buddha meant by 'dependent origination'".⁶ Similarly Reat, in his *The Origins of Indian Psychology*, attempts to understand the human being in terms of a "theoretical psychology".⁷ For such scholars, it is the content of the mind that as it were explains the individual human being, and, incidentally, the external world. I will be returning to the subject of the status of the external world shortly.

In attempting to answer the question "what is the human being according to the Buddha's teachings?", I decided, unlike the authors referred to above, to focus on the *Sutta Piṭaka* of the Pali canon, principally the four main *Nikāyas*. These represent the key doctrinal treatises of the earliest Buddhist material we have. A comprehensive comparison between the earlier *Sutta* material and the elaborated and systematised material of the *Abhidhamma* and commentaries would undoubtedly be most interesting and would be a fruitful area for further research, but as a single work it would necessitate an extremely lengthy book. Perhaps more importantly, I also wanted to see what the earliest Pali material had to say on the subject before it was significantly adapted or elaborated as the Theravāda tradition developed. This approach is not so much intended to suggest that there is a pre-Theravāda form of Buddhism as to look at the primary texts without reference to how the tradition has interpreted them in later material.⁸ In some circumstances, particularly in chapter 1, I have also drawn on the later *Abhidhamma* and commentarial material, and on Buddhaghosa's *Visuddhimagga*, but this is the exception rather than the rule. Such references to the later texts are usually by way of confirmation or contrast in interpreting an ambiguous point. In chapter 1, however, it was the notable shortage in the *Sutta Piṭaka* of references to the subject matter of the chapter, the *khandha* of the body, that prompted my consulting the later material. Chapter VIII draws on later material, particularly that represented by Buddhaghosa's *Visuddhimagga*, specifically to illustrate a divergence of interpretation as the tradition developed.

My approach to the subject was prompted by the Buddha's own concern with the human condition or the human being itself, an orientation which suggests that understanding the human constitution is important in the context of following his teachings. Three of the key teachings contained in the early *Suttas* illustrate this orientation. The first is perhaps the most well-known of the Buddha's teachings, the Four Noble Truths. These are given in terms of understanding the human condition in *samsāra*. In them

the human condition is diagnosed (the first Noble Truth states that *saṃsāric* existence is unsatisfactory (or suffering) – *dukkha*⁹); the cause of the condition is identified (the second Noble Truth states that the arising of *dukkha* is because of desire or craving – *taṇhā*); a prognosis is given (the third Noble Truth states that the condition is not terminal – the cessation of unsatisfactoriness (*dukkhanirodha*) is possible); and finally a prescription for achieving *dukkhanirodha* is given (the fourth Noble Truth teaches the Eightfold Path which leads to Nirvana,¹⁰ a synonym for *dukkhanirodha*).

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

Ignorance is the condition for [the arising of] the *saṃkhāras*¹¹
 The *saṃkhāras* are the condition for [the arising of] consciousness
 Consciousness is the condition for [the arising of] *nāmarūpa*¹²
Nāmarūpa is the condition for [the arising of] the six senses
 The six senses are the condition for [the arising of] contact¹³
 Contact is the condition for [the arising of] feeling
 Feeling is the condition for [the arising of] craving
 Craving is the condition for [the arising of] attachment
 Attachment is the condition for [the arising of] becoming
 Becoming is the condition for [the arising of] (re)birth
 (Re)birth is the condition for [the arising of] old age and death.¹⁴

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

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

The importance of the first two of these three key teachings is emphasised by their formulaic form: formulas were often used as a mnemonic device in the oral tradition in which the Buddhist teachings took root. The third teaching is the standard analysis of the human being in a large number of *Suttas*. And though the *khandha* doctrine has usually been associated with the doctrine of *anattā* in the specific sense that human beings *have* no self but only five constituent parts (an interpretation to which I will return in the conclusion), its importance is more positively emphasised by the Buddha’s identification of the five *khandhas* together – in effect the earthly life of an individual – with *dukkha*.¹⁷ Thus the fundamental characteristic of the

human condition as stated in the first Noble Truth is given not just in descriptive terms but is intrinsic to being human, indicating that the need to understand the constitution of the human being is crucial to achieving the goal of Nirvana, given as the cessation of *dukkha*. Above all, these teachings indicate that however central the doctrine of *anattā* is, the Buddha's concern is most undeniably with the human condition as a whole, and though consciousness is mentioned in two of them it is given no more elevated a place than the other parts of the respective teachings. I therefore chose to approach a study of the human being by looking at the way the texts describe the *khandha* analysis, with frequent cross-references to the *paṭiccasamuppāda* formula.

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

In view of such diversity just in the contemporary Western understanding of the human being, one cannot assume *a priori* that any culture will have a consistent or coherent view of what constitutes a human being. And it would be particularly inadvisable to make such an *a priori* assumption of the Pali canon since it is a body of oral literature which is generally thought to have come together over time. Accurate oral preservation of literature had been crucial in the pre-Buddhist Brahmanical tradition in India for many centuries, and it is not uncommon the world over for the essential parts of important teachings to have been incorporated into stories, songs, chants, and so on, in order to preserve them accurately. There is clear evidence in the Pali canon of such a process of preservation, and we can thus be fairly sure that much of the *Sutta Piṭaka* is of a very early origin. Nevertheless, it would have been impossible for any one person, or even one close-knit group of people, to have preserved all the extant material, and there is textual evidence that different groups were given the task of preserving certain sections of the teachings. The Theravāda tradition records that there were periodic councils at which the teachings as a whole were recited. It was at these councils (*saṅgīti*s) that the teachings were, over time, codified. But it is also probable that the teachings were more widely disseminated in this way: after hearing a complete recitation, a group of

bhikkhus might have spread topics which it was not strictly their duty to preserve. So there was much opportunity for variations to be included in the material. Though the Pali canon as compiled from all its different sources was written down in approximately 25 BCE, scholars accept that even after that date changes are likely to have taken place.¹⁸ This process of preservation applies to the *Vinaya*, in which the *bhikkhus'* code of discipline is recorded, and the *Sutta Piṭaka*, which contains the doctrinal teachings. The *Abhidhamma Piṭaka* is a later scholastic compilation which deals systematically and minutely with a wide range of issues in the Buddha's teachings. It aims to give definitive views on points which might not have been clear in the earlier material.¹⁹

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

The Buddha was one of the first few earliest thinkers to introduce proper philosophical terms and phraseology with a distinct philosophical method and he had often to use the same word in more or less different senses. Some of the philosophical terms at least are therefore somewhat elastic ...²⁰

In discussing this point, I. B. Horner has suggested that this indicates a certain insufficiency of terms rather than an unsettled state of philosophical and psychological terminology by the time the *Nikāyas* came into being.²¹ But philosophy and psychology were in a far from settled state at the time of the Buddha's teaching. The philosophical enquiry in the Brahmanical religion, as recorded in the *Brāhmaṇas* and the early *Upaniṣads*, was a relatively recent phenomenon, seen as merely supplementary to the ritualistic sacrificial system. The development took place gradually, and this is reflected in the early *Upaniṣads* which were perhaps extant at the time of the Buddha. In them we find both the ritual of the *Vedas* and the speculative beginnings of a psychology based upon the new idea of salvation as a special kind of knowledge. The systematic use of philosophical and psychological terminology is far from established, and terms are

used to mean different things in different contexts in much the same way as they are in the Pali canon.

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

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

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

In this respect, the most central doctrine of the Buddha's teaching is based on his interpretation of the law of karma, a word which literally means 'action'.²⁵ The notion that karma, or action, brings results was deeply embedded in Indian religion by the time of the Buddha. In the

classical *Vedic* sacrificial religion, karma is the *sine qua non* for individual well-being, for the well-being of society and for the maintenance of the universe as a whole. The rationale of the entire sacrificial system is the efficacy of (correctly performed) actions bringing about desired, and desirable, results. Sacrifices are performed for specific personal benefit in the short, medium or long term. Such sacrifices can have as their desired results things such as good health, the birth of a son, good fortune both in this world and in the next, or the benefit of one's ancestors already in the next world. Personal ritual duties are also, and more commonly, performed simply for general wellbeing, again both in this world and the next. Sacrifices are also performed for the prosperity of the community as a whole: the performing of the sacrifices serves to please the gods, who not only grant individual desires but also maintain the universe.

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

In the early *Upaniṣads* karma is also of central relevance in the doctrine of transmigration they espouse. In the earlier *Vedic* material, life after death could be in one of several different *lokas* or worlds, the most important of which are the *pitṛloka*, the 'world of the ancestors', and the *devaloka*, the 'world of the gods'.²⁶ Which of these is attained depends on whether or not sacrifices have been correctly performed, though attainment of the *pitṛloka* also requires a man to have performed public services and almsgiving.²⁷ Gradually this belief developed into a system whereby individual existence was seen in terms of a series of lives. And in the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka* and *Chāndogya Upaniṣads* we read that the kind of deeds performed in one earthly life will determine the nature of the next earthly life: good deeds are rewarded with rebirth in a high status and bad deeds result in a correspondingly unattractive rebirth.²⁸ Though in these passages there is the suggestion of a difference between the ritual and ethical dimensions of actions, this differentiation was never developed in the Brahmanical religion; good and bad deeds are ritual actions which are correctly or incorrectly performed.

The Buddha took for granted the concept of rebirth in a series of lives, but revolutionised the concept of karma by teaching that karmic consequences accruing to any particular individual are entirely dependent on his or her mental volition.²⁹ He defined karma as follows: "O *bhikkhus*, I say that volition (*cetanā*) is *kamma*. Having willed, one acts through body, speech

and thought".³⁰ The ethical implications of such a radical interpretation of a well established principle condition the Buddha's teaching about how salvation is attained: spiritual progress is frequently described in terms of moral development, for example, and anything which helps or hinders progress is described as wholesome and unwholesome (*kusala/akusala*) respectively. The Buddha's reinterpretation of the law of karma was also unlike the ideology of the sacrifice in that it involved the body, or corporeal faculty of the human being, with the mind, or mental faculties, in an unprecedented way: *having willed*, one acts through body, speech and thought. Though the ritual actions of the Brahmanical religion are said to bring about *desired* results, 'will' and 'mind' nevertheless have little or nothing to do with the efficacy or quality of the action, which depend entirely on the accuracy with which it is performed. The Buddha's version of the law of karma also had the profound effect of making the individual human being responsible for his or her own spiritual progress. Priests, gods and scriptural injunctions were bypassed by the Buddha and his teaching was centred on the moral condition (in its broadest sense) of individuals themselves and how they could bring about their own liberation. Once again this teaching suggests the importance of understanding how the human being works.

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

In stating that liberating knowledge is the realisation that the transcendent Reality, Brahman, is identical with the individual self, *ātman*, the *Upaniṣads* are ultimately concerned with being, *sat*. One can see, therefore, that the question they are thus concerned with is "*what* is man?" This would no doubt be the common sense approach to understanding the constitution of the human being; it was, indeed, the question I myself formed when I started my research. But though the Buddha's teachings also stress the need to 'know thyself', in contrast to the transcendent self of the *Upaniṣads* he taught liberating knowledge in terms of insight into 'things as they are', *yathābhūtaṃ*. Most importantly, the macrocosmic/microcosmic correspondence was expressed by the Buddha not in terms of an ontological identity, but in the fact that all things are dependently

originated. By extension, this is applied to his teaching on the law of karma: one has to understand how one's existence is conditioned by dependently originated in) one's volitions. For the Buddha, the important thing is to understand the *nature* of the human condition and we see that he emphasises not what things are but how they operate. Given that all things are dependently originated, he states that it is not fitting to think in the separative (independent) terms of "This is mine, this am I, this is my self".³¹ So he does not give us a different answer to the same question "*what* is man?" but asks an altogether more sophisticated question: "*how* is man?" And he sustains this approach systematically throughout his teachings. The Buddha thus substitutes processes for objects. Primarily, he teaches the process of attaining Enlightenment as a goal which is achievable if one understands, and thus is able to overcome or reverse, the mechanics of that which is preventing it. Descriptions in the *Sutta Piṭaka* of the Buddha's own Enlightenment describe it precisely in such terms: and there is no mention of his experiencing *what* he is. And just as this ultimate experience involves understanding the nature of the human being and how he or she exists in *saṃsāra*, so, my research has found, the Buddha also teaches that the analysis of the human being into five *khandhas* is not an analysis of what the human being consists of, but of those processes or events with which one is constituted that one needs to understand in order to achieve Enlightenment. Knowing what the body is, for example, is of relevance only insofar as such knowledge contributes to an understanding of how it operates in the overall process of human existence. And we shall see in chapter 1 that contrary to what one might expect given that we have 'sense organs', the senses are not explicitly included in descriptions of the *khandha* of the body, an omission which serves to highlight the importance of understanding them in terms of the process in which they are involved rather than as organs of the body in the physical sense. Perhaps because our everyday commonsense world consists very much of what we think of as objects, and our tendency to want to know *what* things are, this important point has frequently been missed even within the Buddhist tradition itself.

One might suggest that the consistency of the Buddha's concern with processes rather than substance is reinforced by his dismissal of questions concerning ontological issues. He states that he is only concerned to give whatever information will assist the individual in attaining liberating insight, the process whereby one becomes free from the cycle of lives in *saṃsāra*, and that ontological questions are irrelevant and/or misleading.³² When asked questions which he did not think would be conducive to the attaining of insight, he refused to answer them. Classically, there are four 'unanswered questions': whether or not the universe is eternal, whether or not the universe is finite, whether or not that which is the vital principle (*jīva*) is different from the body, and whether after death a *tathāgata* (an epithet of the Buddha and the implication is that it means any liberated

being) exists or not, whether s/he exists and does not exist, or whether s/he neither exists nor does not exist.³³ In similar vein, a long list of all sorts of ontological views are refuted by the Buddha in the well-known *Brahmajāla Sutta*. Here the implication is that all such views are not just erroneous in the sense of holding to the wrong ontological view, but erroneous in the sense that holding to an ontological view is simply the wrong approach to the solution of the problem of bondage to *saṃsāra*. This point is further supported by the fact that the having of 'views' (*diṭṭhi*) is sometimes stated to be one of the *āsavas*, the most binding and deeply entrenched of all misplaced tendencies needing to be 'rooted out'.

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

However, the question of ontology continues to arise in the scholarship of early Buddhism. In particular, several ambiguous passages in the Pali material have been interpreted as suggesting an idealistic ontology, like the one formulated by the much later Buddhist school of Vijñānavāda. This development perhaps corresponds to the fact that there are passages which suggest idealism in the *Upaniṣads* and this ontology was later attributed to them wholesale by Śaṅkara and other Advaita Vedāntins. The debate about canonical passages which are ambiguous in this way recurs several times in this book, and we shall see that in every case much depends on how a passage is interpreted. An example of how differently a passage can be interpreted can here be drawn from the *Dīgha Nikāya*. In translating the Pali *ajjhataṃ rūpa-saññī eko bahiddhā rūpāni passati*,³⁴ Johansson gives: "When somebody experiences forms inside himself, he will see forms outside..." and writes of it: "The objective world, according to Buddhism, is no different from the experienced world: it simply consists of the subjective world projected by our mind..."³⁵ But the passage can be translated and interpreted differently, as follows: "One who apperceives a visible feature of himself [likewise] sees visible features of others". This translation follows the convention found in some contexts in the *Sutta Piṭaka*, usually those

concerned with meditation, of using the terms *ajjhataṃ* and *bahiddhā*, 'internal' and 'external', to refer to oneself in contrast to others. In the *Satipaṭṭhāna Suttas*, for example, which contain descriptions of key meditation exercises to be practised by *bhikkhus*, these terms are used to indicate that the meditation exercises are to be practised both on one's own physical and mental faculties and also on those of others.³⁶ The purpose is to realise that one's nature is the same as the nature of anyone else. Even if in the *Dīgha Nikāya* passage the term *bahiddhā* is interpreted simply as 'external', so far as I am aware there is no convention in the *Sutta Piṭaka* of *ajjhataṃ* being used as part of a psychological term to indicate an 'internal picture'. So in my opinion it is unlikely that this passage was intended to have the implications which Johansson reads into it. Rather, it suggests to me that one sees that both one's own and external (be they of other individuals or not) visible parts are of like nature. This is the more likely because the context of the passage is one in which the various insights which come with meditation are described. One of the most important insights for a *bhikkhu* to achieve is that all things are of like nature, not whether or not the external world is a projection of his mind.

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

The metaphorical use of the term *loka* pre-dates the Buddha's teaching. Though in both Sanskrit and Pali the term *loka* does have the conventional meaning 'world', even in the earlier sacrificial religion of the Brahmins its meaning was not limited to the external world. According to Gonda, the Sanskrit word *loka* has an "inherent vagueness".³⁷ It does not necessarily indicate a spacial location but often means a state of happiness or stability. Gonda traces the changing meaning of the term, and states that its earliest meaning is a "free, open space" or a "safe, sacred space".³⁸ This concept was of particular importance to the early Aryan settlers in India because of the religious significance in early Indo-European culture of clearings, forest glades and so on. Thus in the sacrifice a sacred space is constructed to represent the desired *loka* in this world and the next. In this way the term also became associated with cosmological planes (desired *lokas*), which tend to be interpreted spacially.³⁹ But the association of security and happiness with the sacred space becomes extended metaphorically so that in fact the desire to 'gain a *loka*' in this world (through sacrifice) and/or the next does

not just refer to the spacial location but to the individual's state of security and happiness. So there are two principal meanings of *loka*, the one spacial and the other psychological.

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

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

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

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

If one takes the first part of these passages out of context they can be construed to be stating that both *dukkha* and the world arise as part of one's psychological experience of perception. In other words, an idealist

might conclude from this that the world has no external reality, that it only exists in our perception. But if one considers the context in full, the terms *dukkha* and *loka* are in fact associated with the life of an individual and the *Suttas* are describing the process by which craving (*taṇhā*) brings about continued becoming, rebirth, and so on, and it is through the cessation of craving that continued rebirth ceases. It is this individual 'world' (*loka*) of the individual, sometimes called *dukkha*, that is the subject of these passages, not the arising of the 'world' in general terms.

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

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

Bhikkhus, I declare that the end of the world is not to be learned, seen, or attained by going to the end of the world. Nor do I declare, *bhikkhus*, that the end of *dukkha* can be made without attaining the end of the world.⁴⁶

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

Two points arise from the foregoing discussion. The first point is that these passages and the possible interpretations I have shown illustrate the need for ambiguous passages to be interpreted in the light of the material as a whole. Those of us whose work lies primarily in attempting to understand questions of a philosophical or doctrinal nature have to ask ourselves which of the possible translations is the more likely given the doctrinal background of the Buddhist teachings. With regard to ambiguous passages which have potentially ontological implications, we have to ask ourselves the *prima facie* question of whether it is likely that the Buddha would have made such ontological statements. If we answer no to this question, then we have to consider both whether a passage has an alternative meaning

and whether the ontological statements of others are incompatible with his teachings. The second point is that I am in no way attempting to refute an ontological position that other scholars have adopted because I wish to adopt another one. I merely think that in view of the fact that the Buddha clearly dissociates his teachings from anything to do with ontology, it is a mistake to project any ontological significance onto the text.

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

A large part of the third volume of the *Saṃyutta Nikāya*, itself entitled the *Khandha-Vagga*, consists of the *Khandha Saṃyutta*, which exhaustively discusses the five *khandhas*. Used in this way, the term *khandha* is distinctively Buddhist, not being found in the earlier *Vedic* literature except in the sense of 'trunk'. Most frequently, the *khandhas* are referred to by name without giving any explanation as to what the name means or implies; where descriptions are given, these are sometimes so brief that it is difficult definitively to ascertain the precise characteristics and functions of each one. Nevertheless it is possible to extract from the material as a whole a coherent picture of each of the *khandhas*. No reason is given for the order of the *khandhas*, which is virtually always in the order in which I will discuss them below: *rūpa*, *vedanā*, *saññā*, *saṃkhāra* and *viññāṇa*.⁴⁷ With regard to the first of these, the *rūpakkhanda*, this presents certain organisational complications in that cross-references between material relevant to understanding it and

material relating to the other four *khandhas* are not necessarily self-explanatory until the later chapters have been read. For this reason, some readers may find it helpful to delay reading the first chapter until they have read chapters two to five.

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

Notes

1. Malalasekera, 1957, p.33f.
2. Collins, 1982, p.5.
3. Harvey, 1981, p.xi.
4. Pérez Remón, 1980, p.2.
5. Johansson, 1979.
6. Ibid., p.7.
7. Reat, 1990, p.8.
8. Though I am aware this approach is somewhat controversial (cf., for example, Collins, 1990; and it is also an unwelcome approach in other religious traditions), it can nevertheless produce interesting, and in my opinion valuable, results.
9. *Dukkha* is notoriously difficult to translate literally into English. 'Suffering' is often used, but can be misleading if understood in a narrow sense. 'Unsatisfactoriness' is more appropriate in that it conveys that all things are ultimately unsatisfactory because they are impermanent – and therefore if one is seeking the permanence of ultimate bliss (or the ultimate bliss of permanence) then the human condition is, by contrast, suffering. cf. the Glossary entry and Rahula, 1985, chapter 2.
10. The Sanskrit word Nirvana has been integrated into the English language so I shall not italicise it. When translating direct from Pali, I will use *nibbāna*.
11. The meaning of *saṃkhāra* is discussed in chapter iv.
12. The term *nāmarūpa* is discussed in detail in chapter vi.
13. This means contact between the sense organ and its corresponding external sense object, together with consciousness. It is discussed further in chapter ii.
14. *Avijjā-paccayā saṃkhārā, saṃkhārā-paccayā viññāṇaṃ, viññāṇa-paccayā nāmarūpaṃ, nāmarūpa-paccayā saḷāyatanaṃ, saḷāyatana-paccayā phasso, phassa-paccayā vedanā, vedanā-paccayā tanhā, tanhā-paccayā upādānaṃ, upādāna-paccayā bhavo, bhava-paccayā jāti, jāti-paccayā jarāmaraṇaṃ*. e.g. SN.II.25 and throughout the *Nidāna Saṃyutta*. All translations are my own unless otherwise stated.
15. I will discuss this purpose, and the varieties, of the formula more fully in chapter iv.
16. These translations are all discussed in following chapters.
17. *Samkhittena pañc' upādānakkhandhā dukkhā*: e.g. SN.V.421; MN.I.48; AN.I.177. cf. also SN.III.158: *Katamañ ca bhikkhave dukkham? Pañc' upādānakkhandhā ti 'ssa vacanīyaṃ*. This question and answer in SN.III.158 is referred to again in chapter viii below. cf. also Gethin, 1986, p.41.

18. On the subject of the compilation of the Pali canon see Frauwallner, 1956; Lamotte, 1958; Zürcher, 1962, and Cousins, 1983.
19. The precise chronology of all parts of the three *Piṭakas* is unknown, and there appear to be small areas of possible correspondence of style in late sections of the *Sutta Piṭaka* and early sections of the *Abhidhamma Piṭaka*. But in general terms the *Abhidhamma* is later.
20. Dasgupta, 1975, p.86, n.1.
21. Horner, MLS, Vol. I, p.xxv.
22. Manné (1990) has analysed much of the material in the *Nikāyas* and shown that different passages have a different, usually didactic, purpose.
23. See, for example, the *Paṭṭhapāda Sutta*, the *Brahmajāla Sutta* (both DN, Vol I), etc.
24. For example, Gombrich, 1988, chapters 2 and 3; Collins, 1982, Part I; Reat, 1990, *passim*.
25. Again, the Sanskrit word karma has been integrated into the English language so I will not italicise it. When translating from the Pali, I will use *kamma*.
26. cf. Collins, 1982, p.45ff on existence after death in the *Vedas*.
27. Ch. Up. V.10.3.
28. Br. Up. IV.4.5; Ch. Up. 5.10.7. This teaching is repeated in later *Upaniṣads* such as K. Up. 1.2; Kaṭha 5.7; Śvet. Up. 5. 11–12.
29. Gombrich (1988, p.67ff) places the Buddha's ethicising of the law of karma in its historical context.
30. AN.III.415: *Cetanā'haṃ bhikkhave kammaṃ vadāmi. Cetaṃvā kammaṃ karoti kāyena vācā manasā*.
31. For example, MN.I.232f: *Etam mama, eso 'ham asmi, eso me attā ti*.
32. cf., for example, SN.II.223, V.437; MN.I.395; DN.III.134ff.
33. MN.I.157. cf. also the *Cūḷa-Mālukya-sutta* (MN.I.426ff), the *Ayākata Saṃyutta* (SN.IV.374ff) and the *Aggi-Vacchagottasutta* (MN.I.483ff) (much of the last two are phrased as a series of questions and answers).
34. DN.III.260.
35. Johansson, 1979, p.83.
36. MN.I.55ff; DN.II.290 ff.
37. Gonda, 1966, p.110 and *passim*; cf. also Collins, 1982, p.45ff.
38. Gonda, 1966, pp.1–41.
39. Collins (1982, p.45 ff) discusses the three principal *lokas*: the *pitṛloka*, the *devaloka* and the *sukṛtām loka*.
40. SN.III.139: *Loke lokadhammo*.
41. *Evam etassa kevalassa dukkhakkhandhassa nirodho hotīti*.
42. SN.II.71 ff.
43. *Dukkhaṣṣa/lokassa bhikkhave samudayaṇa atthaṅgamaṇa desissāmi ... Cakkhuṃ ca paṭicca rūpe ca uppajjati cakkhuvīññāṇaṃ tiṇṇaṃ saṅgati phasso phassappaccayā vedanā vedanāpaccayā taṇhā. Ayaṃ kho bhikkhave dukkhassa/lokassa samudayo. Taṇhāya asesavirāganirodhā upādānanirodho ...*
44. AN.IV.430: *Pañca' ime ... kāmagaṇā ariyassa vinaye loko ti vuccati*.
45. AN.IV.431f: *Bhikkhu ... paññāya e' assa divvā āsavā parikkhīṇā hontī. Ayaṃ vuccati ... bhikkhu lokassa antaṃ āgamaṃ lokassa ante viharati tiṇṇo loko visattikaṃ ti*.
46. SN.IV.93: *Nāham bhikkhave gamanena lokassa antaṃ nātayyaṃ daṭṭhayaṃ pattayyaṃ ti vadāmi. Na ca paññāham bhikkhave āpatvā lokassa antaṃ dukkhassa antakiriyāṃ vadāmi ti*.
47. They are found with *saṃkhāra* and *viññāṇa* having changed places at SN.I.112: *Rūpaṃ vedayitaṃ saññaṃ viññāṇaṃ yaṇca saṃkhataṃ ...*. This is, however, the first two lines of a verse, and the change in order (and the use of *saṃkhata* rather than *saṃkhāra*) is in order to conform to the *śloka* metre. The interchangeability of *saṃkhata* and *saṃkhāra* is discussed in chapter iv.

CHAPTER I

The Rūpakkhandha

Introduction

IN THIS CHAPTER, MY CONCERN is with the body of the human being, referred to as the *rūpakkhandha*. Having selected the earliest part of the Pali canon, the four main *Nikāyas* of the *Sutta Piṭaka*, as my source material for this study of the *khandhas*, however, an immediate problem presents itself which needs to be dealt with at the outset. In this early stratum of the texts there is a notable lacuna in the information we are given about the human being, a lacuna that at first sight appears to lie in the descriptions of the *rūpakkhandha*. From the two types of definitions of the *rūpakkhandha* that we are given one can draw out an overall view of how the *khandha* is meant to be understood. Though relatively brief, this overall view is in some crucial respects very informative, as we shall see. But as one proceeds to reading canonical descriptions of the four *arūpakkhandhas* (*arūpa* refers to the four that are not *rūpa*) one sees with hindsight that an important and frequently mentioned feature of the human being has not anywhere been explained. This feature is the senses. All the *arūpakkhandhas* are subdivided according to the senses, thus stressing their important role, but they are neither considered actually to be part of the *arūpakkhandhas* nor are they mentioned at all in descriptions of the *rūpakkhandha*. When later Theravāda Buddhists realised the importance of the senses, and attempted to redress the lacuna in the descriptions of the *khandhas*, they included the senses in the *rūpakkhandha*. In view of this, it seems appropriate to discuss the senses in this chapter, and where necessary I have drawn quite extensively on commentarial texts and parts of the *Abhidhamma*, notably the *Dhammasaṅgaṇī* and its commentary the *Aṭṭhasālinī*, and the *Vibhaṅga*. In so doing, I have been guided (perhaps limited) by a desire not to arrive at a definitive view of the *rūpakkhandha* as understood by the (later) *Abhidhamma* tradition, but to suggest an overall picture of how the *rūpakkhandha* and the senses might be understood that is compatible both with the brief definitions found in the *Sutta Piṭaka* and with other aspects of the human being described in later chapters.

To this end, my discussion of this *khandha* will be structured as follows. In the first part of the chapter, the definitions of *rūpa* as given in the *Sutta Piṭaka* will be discussed, including a consideration of the terms 'primary' (*no-upādā*) and 'secondary' (*upādā*) as used in this context. The discussion will also cover the so-called 'elements', the *mahābhūtā*, as briefly referred to in the *Sutta Piṭaka* and more elaborately in later material. The second part of the chapter will concentrate on a specific discussion concerning the senses. Recognising their importance, the Theravāda tradition as a whole (that is the *Abhidhamma*, commentaries, Buddhaghosa's *Visuddhimagga* and the writing of modern Theravāda Buddhists) singles out the senses and their corresponding objects (collectively referred to as *āyatana*s) in defining the 'secondary' level of the *rūpakkhandha* (which itself is not defined in the *Sutta Piṭaka*). In spite of this, the attempt here to gain a meaningful understanding of the senses has not been an easy one. As we shall see, even the *Abhidhamma* is inconsistent in its descriptions. Though it defines them at times as *rūpa*, at other times it describes them in a way which suggests they are not *rūpa*. In the light of such ambiguity, I shall question just what it is that is being referred to when the senses are mentioned in the *Sutta Piṭaka*. Not only do descriptions of each of the four *arūpakkhandhas* state that the senses (or their objects) determine the different kinds of activity the *khandha* represents, as I have said, but the senses are also one of the links in the chain of the *paṭiccasamuppāda* formula which describes how the functioning of a human being is dependently originated. I also referred in the Introduction to passages which state that the ongoing existence of the individual, his or her *loka*, is caused by desire based on the senses. The Theravāda Buddhist tradition, and many scholars of Buddhism, have understood that where the senses are said to determine the different kinds of activity of the *arūpakkhandhas*, they are the physical bases of the corresponding mental activities. But I find this unsatisfactory: if the physical sense organs are meant, one might expect them to be included in a description of the *rūpakkhandha* in the *Sutta Piṭaka*, particularly in view of the fact that they are subsequently mentioned, but *not* classified, in the descriptions of each of the *arūpakkhandhas*. I shall suggest a way they might be understood to be neither *rūpa* nor *arūpa*, thus explaining why they are not included in the *khandha* analysis in the *Sutta Piṭaka*.

In Buddhism, and in other Indian religions also, it is common that the senses include the five which are common to us in Western culture and also a sixth sense, *manas*, the corresponding object of which is *dhammā*. The term *manas* literally means 'mind', and as such appears qualitatively different from the other senses. Perhaps because of this, it remains uniquely ambiguous as a sense, throughout the Pali material. Nor is it immediately obvious what *dhammā* refers to. Neither is explained in the *Sutta Piṭaka*, but in the *Abhidhamma* and commentaries they are classified as *āyatana*s, a term which covers all the senses and their objects (thus giving a total of twelve *āyatana*s).

But in spite of the fact that the other (five) senses and their corresponding objects (that is, those ten of the *āyatana*s) are clearly defined as 'secondary' *rūpa*, neither *manas* nor *dhammā* is defined as being *rūpa*, or at least not consistently so. The lack of clarity is compounded because the *Aṭṭhasālinī*, the commentary on the *Dhammasaṅgaṇī*, contains what one might call a 'theory of sense' (if an imperfect one) in the context of a description of *rūpa*, but it omits *manas* and *dhammā* from this theory. In fact both terms have a multitude of meanings in the Pali material and, in my opinion, they have never been adequately understood in the context of sense and corresponding object, either by the Buddhist tradition or by modern expositors. In view of the role of all six of the senses as determining the sixfold classification of each of the *arūpakkhandhas*, it is important to establish how *manas* and *dhammā* might best be understood and what the function of *manas* is before we go on to consider those *arūpakkhandhas*. The concluding part of this chapter will therefore be a discussion of these two terms.

The *rūpakkhandha*

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

In the *Sutta Piṭaka* there are two main kinds of description of the *rūpakkhandha*: the simple and general description, which gives us minimal information, and the detailed and specific description, from which we get a more comprehensive account of what the *khandha* comprises. The simple descriptions are just two, both being found in the *Khandha Saṃyutta* of the *Saṃyutta Nikāya*.¹ The first occurs, so far as I am aware, only once. But it is picked up repeatedly by the later commentarial tradition. The second

constitutes a common formula used throughout the Pali material to define *rūpa*, and is of considerably more interest to us here. We shall see in the comprehensive descriptions of it that the term *rūpa* also refers to a general category, described as 'external', suggesting an overlap between the 'form' characteristics of the body (*rūpakkhanda*) and those of visible objects in general (*rūpāyatana*). But both types of analysis of *rūpa* indicate that the term primarily refers to the body, in accord with the Buddha's central concern with the human being.

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

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

The verb I have translated here as 'suffers', in order to draw out the meaning of this passage, is *ruppati*. It is because of the use of this verb here that this description is repeatedly referred to by the commentarial tradition, and by Buddhaghosa in his *Visuddhimagga*. *Ruppati* is taken by the tradition as a pun on *rūpa*, though etymologically *ruppati* has absolutely no connection with *rūpa*. And in spite of a similar lack of etymological link the punning is also extended to *nāma*, which, as mentioned above, is frequently found twinned with *rūpa* in the compound *nāmarūpa*.³ So in Pali the play on words reads as follows: *Namanalakkhaṇaṃ nāmaṃ ... ruppanalakkhaṇaṃ rūpaṃ*.⁴ Discussing *ruppati*, Woodward, the translator of the *Khandha Saṃyutta* for the Pali Text Society, suggests that *ruppati* as a pun on *rūpa* could be taken to mean that body is embodied, form is in-formed, shape is shaped.⁵ Literally, however, *ruppati* means 'to be destroyed', 'to be vexed' or 'to be oppressed'. In Sanskrit, *rupyate* means 'to suffer violent pain', and by the *r/l* alternation it is closely related to *lupyate*, 'to be broken' or 'to be destroyed'.⁶ By extension one can understand *ruppati* simply as 'suffers', being analogous with *dukkha* (so the definition might better read: "It is characterised by unsatisfactoriness (*dukkha*)"). This, surely, is the point that is being made by the use of the verb: such etymologising was, typically, for didactic reasons. This point has been completely missed by Mrs Rhys Davids, who suggests translating *ruppati* as 'affected'. Woodward follows this, though he points out in a footnote that he prefers 'afflicted'.⁷ The latter is surely more appropriate, being in accord with the fact that *rūpa* is associated with *dukkha*, which in turn is in accord with the Buddha's definition of *dukkha*, representing the individual's existence in *saṃsāra*, as the *khandhas*. And

though it is the *rūpakkhanda* which is defined in terms of affliction, the *Sutta* goes on to state that one identifies mistakenly with each of the *khandhas* as part of *saṃsāric* existence and that one is to become detached from each and every one of them. The explicit association of *rūpa* alone with affliction is primarily because *rūpa* lends itself to this pun. But an individual's life in *saṃsāra* also tends to be predominantly associated with the body. Not only is it the physical presence of an individual, but as such it is the vehicle, so to speak, of his or her experience in a given life. It is therefore disproportionately associated with *saṃsāric* existence to the point where it is seen to be 'responsible' for the affliction of *dukkha*. This point is more comprehensively discussed in chapter VIII.

The second and perhaps the simplest analysis of *rūpa* is frequently found in the Pali material and represents the standard simple analysis not only of the *rūpakkhanda* but also, as we shall see, of *rūpa* in general (that is, whether the body of the human being or of any other visible object). The context in the *Khandha Saṃyutta* from which I am quoting is another in which the Buddha is teaching that the human being should be understood in terms of five *khandhas*, and that none of these constitutes a permanent, unchanging self: one is to become detached from each of them. Here *rūpa* is analysed into the four great elements and whatever is derived from them: "And what, *bhikkhus*, is the body (*rūpa*)? It is the four great elements and whatever physical thing is derived from the great elements: this, *bhikkhus*, is called the body".⁸ The four great elements (collectively known as the *cattāro mahābhūtā(ni)*, or less specifically as *dhātus*) are: earth (*paṭhavī-dhātu*), water (*āpo-dhātu*), fire (*tejo-dhātu*) and wind (*vāyo-dhātu*). In some contexts a fifth element, 'space' (*ākāsa*), is mentioned,⁹ but in contexts where *rūpa* is specifically being defined only the *cattāro mahābhūtā* are mentioned. In the commentarial tradition, these are explicitly understood to have the abstract meanings solidity, fluidity, heat and motion. In the *Sutta Piṭaka*, such abstract meanings are only implicit, though in the more detailed descriptions of each of the elements the implication is quite clear. It is the abstract meanings of the elements which suggest how they are applicable both to the *rūpakkhanda* of the human being and also to anything else that has form, explicitly described as the 'internal' and 'external' dimensions of *rūpa* in canonical passages which explain each of the four elements in turn.¹⁰ The abstract meanings of the four elements also serve to indicate that the notion of 'matter' is purely conventional here. Rather, *rūpa* refers to the occurrence of various states or processes, collectively referred to as the 'body' (or visible object), which are characterised in a certain way.¹¹ It is only by virtue of a state or process having the characteristics of solidity or extension that it can be described as 'matter', and the *rūpakkhanda* is not limited to this single characteristic.

In the *Sutta Piṭaka*, the four elements are said to be 'primary'. The term used for this is *no-upādā*, which has two literal meanings: 'underived' and

'not clinging or grasping'. The former does not in any way compromise the teaching that there is nothing in *samsāra* that is unconditioned. Indeed, we read in a passage about Nirvana, which is referred to as the unconditioned, that it is *without* the four elements, a confirmation of the conditioned nature of the four elements themselves: "Monks, there exists that condition [Nirvana] wherein is not earth nor water nor fire nor air..."¹² Anything to which analysis in terms of the four elements is applicable, therefore, is part of conditioned existence. The meaning 'underived' refers, rather, to the fact that these four elements cannot be further broken down or analysed in the way that, for example, a foot or a hand, both of which are complex organs with more than one function, can be broken down or analysed to the point where it is seen that they consist of an aggregate of elements. Put abstractly, a complex organ is an aggregate which has characteristics that are signified by more than one type of element. In this unaggregated sense *no-upādā* means 'underived'. The latter meaning, 'not clinging or grasping', suggests that *rūpa* has an underived state that is not the product of grasping. In the context of the *rūpakkhanda*, this is not explained any further, but the similar term *anupādā* is regularly found in other contexts in the *Nikāyas* in the sense of not having any more of the fuel (grasping) necessary for rebirth, not clinging to the world. It is grasping, more usually called volition, which leads to continued rebirth, continued human existence. In the light of this, *no-upādā rūpa* means 'primary' in that it has not (yet) been further conditioned by intention.¹³ In the *Aṭṭhasālīnī*, the commentary on the *Dhammasaṅgaṇī* of the *Abhidhamma Piṭaka*, this point is made explicitly: "*Upādā* means 'it grasps'; this means grasping the [four] great elements; not letting (them) go, such (secondary/derived forms) exist depending on them".¹⁴ This all suggests that the *cattāro mahābhūtā* are as it were the potential states from which the body, conditioned by one's karma (intention), is derived; or, put differently, they represent the potential characteristics of the body.

As well as *no-upādā*, *rūpa* is also described in the *Sutta Piṭaka* as 'derived' or 'secondary' (*upādā*). In the simple analyses of the *rūpakkhanda* there is no mention of what *upādā rūpa* comprises, and we shall see that the situation is not clear in the comprehensive description of the *rūpakkhanda* either. Though the commentary on the particular canonical passage we are discussing makes no comment on what *upādā rūpa* means,¹⁵ the Theravāda Buddhist tradition has generally understood the term *upādā rūpa* specifically to refer to the senses (usually taken to be the physical sense organs) and their corresponding sense objects, collectively called *āyatana*s. A typical definition of *upādā rūpa* is given in the *Dhammasaṅgaṇī* of the *Abhidhamma*, where it is stated to refer to ten of the *āyatana*s (that is excluding the sixth sense, *manas*, and its corresponding object, *dhammā*).¹⁶ In the *Vibhaṅga* the same ten *āyatana*s are in turn described as the four great elements which are derived,¹⁷ which amounts to the same thing put differently. In the *Aṭṭhasālīnī*,

upādā rūpa is discussed at length in terms of the *āyatana*s, so much so that the translator of the text for the Pali Text Society has entitled an entire chapter “Derived Material Qualities”.¹⁸ In addition to such definitions, where the *Abhidhamma* categorises *upādā rūpa* more extensively, so that it is said to comprise twenty-three different phenomena, the *āyatana*s are included.¹⁹ Likewise, in the section on the *rūpakkkhandha* in his *Visuddhimagga*, where Buddhaghosa lists twenty-four kinds of *upādā rūpa*, he includes the *āyatana*s in the same way as the *Abhidhamma* and the commentaries.²⁰ Modern Theravāda Buddhist writers also define *upādā rūpa* as the senses.²¹

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

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

The question is prompted not just by the omission but also by the fact that compared with what is found in the *Sutta Piṭaka*, the later tradition’s understanding of the senses becomes, on the one hand, more complex, and, on the other hand, more ‘physical’. Dealing with the first of these first, the *Abhidhamma* gives a more comprehensive classification of the twelve *āyatana*s collectively than is found in the four main *Nikāyas* of the *Sutta Piṭaka*. In the *Sutta Piṭaka*, there is more of a distinction between the senses and the sense objects, and the term *āyatana* is more frequently said to be sixfold.²² Where *salāyatana* appears in the *paṭiccasamuppāda* formula given in the *Sutta Piṭaka*, for example, only the senses are included in the definition, not the sense objects.²³ And though the senses and objects are at times referred to as separate groups in the same classification, that is as *āyatana*s,²⁴ the point is that the senses and objects are more clearly delineated from

each other, each as separate 'sixes', than in the *Abhidhamma* where the senses and their objects are all referred to individually and equally as *āyatana*s, giving twelve in all, and are grouped together in definitions or descriptions of *upādā rūpa*.²⁵ This inclusion of the objects of sense in a definition of something that is subject to 'grasping' is not, as might at first be thought, in itself problematic. These objects are not necessarily external to the human being: eyes and visibility, nose and smell, tongue and taste (and so on) are all aspects of the human body. But this development represents a more complex way of attempting to understand the senses than is found in the *Sutta Piṭaka*, a complexity that is compounded by lack of consistency.

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

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

The nearest the *Sutta Piṭaka* comes to associating the senses with *upādā* is in a passage in the *Sutta Nipāta* where there is a reference to the fact that the five sensual pleasures plus *manas* are the grasping (*upādāna*) which afflicts the world.³³ This does not, however, refer specifically to *rūpa*, nor to the senses themselves, but to the fact that sensual desire, the arising of which is based on the senses, represents the fuel of continued *saṃsāric* existence: *loka* here meaning the 'world' of the subjective individual rather than the external world as a whole, as discussed above.

In the *Sutta Piṭaka*, all five *khandhas* are sometimes referred to as the *upādānakkhandhā*,³⁴ and they too are *upādāna* in both senses of the word: they are both derivatives and conditioned by grasping. Another passage in the *Khandha Saṃyutta* describes both the *pañcakkhandhā* and the *pañcupādānakkhandhā*. The term *pañcakkhandhā*, it explains, refers to the five *khandhas*; *pañcupādānakkhandhā* means that each and every one of the five *khandhas* is subject to *āsavas*.³⁵ I referred to the term *āsava* in the Introduction. It is a notoriously difficult word to translate into English, but it refers to the strongest and most deep-seated of the factors ('graspings') which cause bondage to *saṃsāric* experience. There are said to be either three or four *āsavas*: the three are the *āsava* of sense desire (*kāmāsava*), the *āsava* of desire for continued becoming (*bhavāsava*), and the *āsava* of ignorance (*avijjāsava*), and the less common fourth is the *āsava* of holding views (*diṭṭhāsava*). The *āsavas* are to be eradicated; but so profoundly are they rooted in the human psyche that such eradication represents the very experience of Enlightenment, the goal of the path to liberation. Thus any reference to the *āsavas* being present indicates an association with the *saṃsāric*, pre-Enlightenment life of an individual, when he or she is conditioned by grasping. Ñānavīra, a modern Theravāda *bhikkhu*, suggests that this passage distinguishes between an *arahant*, in whom the *āsavas* have been eradicated, who comprises the *pañcakkhandhā*, and an unenlightened individual, who comprises the *pañcupādānakkhandhā*.³⁶ The point Ñānavīra is making is that an individual only arises as a result of continued grasping (the mechanics of which will become clearer in chapter iv), and after Enlightenment the individual will not arise (be reborn) again.

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

The more detailed and specific analysis of the *rūpakkhanda* is found in three places in the *Sutta Piṭaka* where the *cattāro mahābhūtā* are being explained.³⁷ This analysis gives us much more information about *rūpa* as the body of the human being, though it is here that the term *rūpa* is explicitly stated also to refer to *rūpa* that is 'external'. In each of the contexts in which the comprehensive analysis is found, it is given for the purpose of teaching that the individual's body is merely an aggregate of the elements and that it should not be thought of in terms of selfhood or identity. In one place, descriptions of the impermanent nature of the 'external' manifestation

of the elements are given in order to emphasise that the internal elements are equally impermanent. For example, the external element of motion, wind, is at times too strong and can blow down whole villages and at other times there is no wind at all and people have to fan a spark in order to make a fire burn.³⁸

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

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

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

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

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

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

And what is the 'internal' heat element? Whatever is internal to the individual and is heat, heated, and the product of grasping; that is to say that by which one is warmed, by which one ages, by which one is exhausted [lit: burned], that by which one properly digests [lit: transforms] what one has eaten, drunk, consumed or chewed, and whatever other thing internal to the individual which is heated or warm [and which is] the product of grasping: this is the 'internal' element of heat.⁴¹

I. B. Horner states that *tejo* includes cold as well as heat since both vitalising energy and decay are due to this element.⁴² Though it may be appropriate to refer to it as the element of temperature rather than just of being hot, it unclear whether this extends literally as far as being cold. In a passage elsewhere in the canon, we read that it is heat, life and consciousness that vitalise the human being (though the Pali word for heat in these contexts is *usmā*) and without them there is only a dead body, thus dissociating heat and the processes associated with it from a dead body.⁴³ But the concern of this passage is to establish the impermanence of the vitalising factors, not the extent of the activity of heat: *usmā* and *āyu* are said to be mutually dependent,⁴⁴ and *viññāṇa* is associated with the senses.⁴⁵ The three are also described as *samkhāras*,⁴⁶ which both indicates their constructed nature and implies that they are the result of past karma.⁴⁷ I. B. Horner's suggestion is supported by the description of the 'external' aspect of *tejo*, which refers to fire:⁴⁸ it might be that it is in its external aspect that this element is involved in the decay of a dead body. But this concern is an unimportant one: as we shall see, the analysis of the body according to the four elements is that of a live body rather than a dead one, which, though leaving questions such as this unanswered, serves to emphasise the consistency of the Buddha's concern with human experience.

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

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

I have translated the Pali word *vātā* as 'movements' in order to give this passage some meaning in English. Its literal meaning is 'wind', and this comprehensive description of wind passing all round the body, and along every limb, recalls the *Upaniṣadic* five *ānas*: *prāṇa* (the in-breath), *apāna* (the out-breath), *vyāna* (the circulatory or diffused breath), *udāna* (the up-breath) and *samāna* (the middle or equalising breath).⁵⁰ These were regarded as the vital faculties responsible for respiration, digestion and the distribution of food through the body.⁵¹ Breath (*prāṇa*) was also considered to be the vitalising principle in the early *Upaniṣads*, frequently used as a synonym for Brahman.⁵² The functions of the *Upaniṣadic* *prāṇas* do not correspond directly to those of the *vāyodhātu* according to the *Majjhima Nikāya*, since digestion, for example, is the province of the *tejodhātu*. Nor is there any understanding of *vāyu* as a vitalising principle in the Pali canon as there is in the case of heat: breathing is merely a bodily function. The Pali expression *aṅgamaṅgānūsārino vātā* is not explained in the canon, but is understood

by Buddhaghosa to refer to the winds (or forces) that produce flexing and extending and so on. This would be congruent with the abstract meaning of *vāyu*, motion.⁵³ There is evidence in the canon, however, (which is picked up in the commentarial literature) that wind acts as a 'humour':⁵⁴ normal wind conditions normal health, whereas winds which become strong (*vātā baliyanti*), or deranged winds (*ummāda vātā*), cause pains and/or uncontrolled movements of the body, eventually causing psychological derangement.⁵⁵ The similarity between the Pali description of *vāyu* and the *Upaniṣadic* description of the *prāṇas* is enough for it to be possible that the former was influenced by the latter.⁵⁶

In two texts a description of the element 'space' (*ākāsa*) is also given:

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

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

Here we have a comprehensive analysis of the *rūpakkhanda* according to the *cattāro mahābhūtā*. The term *upādīṇaṃ* ('the product of grasping') indicates that all the factors included within the analysis of internal *rūpa* are *upādā*. We shall see in chapter IV, and again in chapter VII, that this is compatible with the way volitions, which correspond to grasping, condition every aspect of the arising of the individual in future lives.

The descriptions of each of the elements contain bodily parts or functions which might logically be expected to be found there: solid things are found in the analysis of the element of solidity, liquid things within the element of fluidity, and so on. In other words, the analysis is common-sensical. But the *tejo* and *vāyo dhātus*, and the *ākāsadhātu* when it appears, comprise parts and functions which we might not immediately describe as corporeal. Temperature, ageing and digestion, breathing and various bodily movements, and orifices or internal spaces, are defined as being part of the *rūpakkhanda*. Taken as a whole, this description of the *cattāro mahābhūtā* (plus *ākāsa*) gives us the human body as a whole in full working order. The analysis emphasises the characteristics and processes which

enable the living body of a human being to function: this is not a description of a *dead* human body. It follows, then, that the term *rūpa* is not as strictly limited as one might in the first instance expect from the usual association of body with matter or from the common understanding that the word 'form' (the literal meaning of *rūpa*) means shape or appearance. From the comprehensive description we have here, *rūpa* does not refer to the physical body *qua* physical body; it is not concerned with what the body is but with its living characteristics understood in terms of the four elements.

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

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

And again, *bhikkhus*, a *bhikkhu* contemplates this body as it is placed or disposed in respect of the elements, thinking 'There are in this body the elements of extension, fluidity, heat and motion'.⁶²

No further analysis of the body according to *dhātu* is given, which again emphasises the lack of concern in the texts to understand the human body in terms of what its substance is.

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

The Senses

According to the evidence in the *Sutta Piṭaka* the senses are central to the psychological/cognitive functioning of the human being. We shall see below that even consciousness, the *sine qua non* of human life, is classified according to the senses. And we shall also see in more detail in following chapters that all discursive thoughts, ideas and knowledge arise because of the simultaneous presence of a sense, its corresponding sense object and consciousness: from this threefold event, known as 'contact' (*phassa*), all cognitive activity, of whatever nature, arises; and, conversely, without such an event no cognitive activity takes place.⁶³ From this we see that the senses are not only the means by which the individual interacts with the 'external' world in which he or she exists, but are also the means by which cognitive experience subsequently leads either to progressing along the path to liberation or to remaining in bondage within *samsāra*. And yet in spite of their importance in the individual's psychological functioning, in the *Sutta Piṭaka* they are neither included in the analysis of the *rūpakkkhandha*, as we have already seen, nor are they included in the analysis of any of the *arūpakkkhandhas*. I have suggested above that though the *Abhidhamma* discusses the *āyatana*s at length, its understanding of them appears to be inconsistent. I have also explained that the terms commonly associated with the senses, *āyatana*, *indriya* and *dhātu*, need not immediately suggest that it is the physical sense organs that are being referred to in the terms *cakkhu*, *sota*, *ghāṇa* and so on. In looking at these points in more detail here, we shall, I think, indeed see that what is meant by the senses is not their physical organs but that they have a unique role which is as it were neither *rūpa* nor *arūpa*, and that this is why they are not included in the *khandha* analysis.

I have stated in the first part of this chapter that in common with other Indian religions, Buddhism recognises six senses. Be that as it may, casual reference to different passages in the Pali material can cause confusion concerning the number of senses there are. The standard canonical list of sense pleasures (*kāmaguṇā*) includes only five senses: eye (*cakkhu*), ear (*sota*), nose (*ghāṇa*), tongue (*jivhā*) and body (*kāya*).⁶⁴ We saw the same five, together with their corresponding objects (ten *āyatana*s in all), referred to in the *Dhammasaṅgaṇī* definition of *upādā rūpa* mentioned above.⁶⁵ But this and similar passages in the *Abhidhamma* are not suggesting that there are only five senses: the reason the *Dhammasaṅgaṇī* definition in question only includes five senses is because the author of this passage is defining *upādā rūpa*, in which he does not include *manas* and *dhammā*. Generally in Pali texts (including the *Abhidhamma*) the senses are sixfold. In the *paṭiccasamuppāda* formula, for example, when *nāmarūpa* is said to be the condition for the arising of the senses, the senses are stated to be sixfold.⁶⁶ The six senses are the five mentioned above as the *kāmaguṇā* plus *manas*. Their corresponding objects are (in Pali) *rūpa*, *sadda*, *gandha*, *rasa*, *phoṭṭhabba* and *dhammā*, usually translated (visible) form, sound, odour, taste, tangible things and mental objects. They are discussed repeatedly, though not in detail, both in the *Chachakkasutta*⁶⁷ and in the *Mahāsaṅgāyatanikasutta*,⁶⁸ and an entire volume of the *Saṃyutta Nikāya* is entitled the *Saṅgāyātana Vagga*.⁶⁹ The sensory events (*phassa*), which are discussed in chapter II, are sixfold according to the six senses.⁷⁰ We also read that in order to establish the moral basis from which a *bhikkhu* can proceed as an *ariyasāvaka*, all six senses have to be brought under control,⁷¹ (a discipline which perhaps reflects one of the meanings of *āyatana*, which is 'exertion', 'effort', 'practice').

Where each of the *arūpakkhanda*s is described according to a sixfold sub-classification, the terms mentioned above which are often associated with the senses, *āyatana*, *indriya* and *dhātu*, are not used, just the names of the senses or sense objects themselves.⁷² We read of *vedanā*, for example, that it is of six types. These arise from contact, and are classified according to the six senses.⁷³ Similarly the *viññāṇakkhandha* is of six types according to each of the six senses.⁷⁴ Both the *saññākhandha* and the *saṃkhārakkhandha* are again of six types, but these are classified not according to the six senses but to their objects.⁷⁵ The texts do not explain why two of the *arūpakkhanda*s are classified according to the senses and the other two according to the sense objects. The Pali word I have translated as 'types' is *kāyā* (literally 'bodies'). Though this is sometimes translated in this context as 'bases' or 'seats',⁷⁶ such translations act as red herrings, making it more difficult to understand why the classification differs. If one assumes, as has been done, that the senses refer to the physical sense organs, one might accept that an internal sense might be a 'seat' of a mental activity; but it is hard to see that an external object could be such a seat. If *kāyā* is translated as 'types', however, then neither the senses nor the objects need be considered

as the actual 'bases' of the mental activities. Rather, the difference between *vedanā* and *viññāṇa* on the one hand and *saññā* and *saṃkhāra* on the other hand might be explained as follows: *saññā* and *saṃkhāra* are more developed and discursive levels of the cognitive process than are either *vedanā* or *viññāṇa* and as such they are externally focussed. So with regard to *saññā* one would apperceive a smell or a sound rather than the nose or ear. Likewise with *saṃkhāra*, one's volitions would be directed towards the smell or the sound and not the sense itself. Moreover, both are able to focus on a specific smell or sound rather than being limited to the general olfactory and auditory senses. Thus the six types of *saññā* and *saṃkhāra* are classified according to the external objects. Neither *vedanā* nor *viññāṇa* is so clearly defined, both functioning more generally in the cognitive process when the activity of the senses is more relevant. So with regard to *vedanā*, one has visual or auditory feeling rather than visible object or sound feeling. *Viññāṇa* too is visual or auditory. Both of them function at the general level of the visual or auditory sense, for the focussing on a specific external object is the function of the *saññā* or *saṃkhāra khandhas*.

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

In the *Salāyatana Vagga* of the *Samyutta Nikāya*, the six senses are defined as being *ajjhattam*, personal or internal, and the six corresponding objects are defined as being *bāhiraṃ*, external, thus giving two 'sets' of six *āyatanas*. In the *Nidāna Samyutta*, however, which is concerned with explaining *paṭiccasamuppāda*, only the personal *āyatanas* are referred to by the term *salāyatana*.⁷⁷ This difference in usage in itself makes the term *āyatana* an ambiguous one, and it is unsurprising that the *Pali English Dictionary* does little to clarify the term when it states that *āyatana* means "sphere of perception or sense in general, object of thought, sense-organ and object".⁷⁸ The dictionary goes on to state "*āyatana* cannot be rendered by a single English word to cover both sense-organs ... and sense objects".⁷⁹ Other meanings of *āyatana* given in the *Pali-English Dictionary* are: "stretch, extent, reach, compass, region; sphere,⁸⁰ locus, place, spot; position, occasion ... relation, order."⁸¹ It also means "exertion, doing, working, practice,

performance", as mentioned above. If one considers *āyatana* in perhaps its most crucial context, that of the *paṭiccasamuppāda* formula, it is unlikely that it refers to the sense organs themselves. Though the definition of *saḷāyatana* in the *Nidāna Saṃyutta* is given in terms of *cakkhu*, *sota*, *ghāṇa*, *jīvā*, *kāya* and *manas*, it seems improbable that the physical sense organs would warrant their own stage in the description of the arising of an individual human being when no other physical organs are mentioned in the formula. *Nāmarūpa*, which precedes *saḷāyatana* in the common twelvefold version of the formula, is discussed in chapter vi. I suggest there that it does not mean 'mind and body' as commonly supposed, but that it means the 'name and form' of the individual in an abstract sense, according to which the psychological and eventually (at birth) the physical faculties of the individual develop. The *saḷāyatana* precede birth by several stages in the formula and thus represent part of the development of the psychological faculties of the individual: in this context it is virtually inconceivable that it is the physical sense organs in a literal sense that are being referred to. Rather, the context suggests that what is meant is the sphere or extent of vision, hearing, taste, and so on, the locus (in a non-physical sense) of the senses, which establishes the foundation (again in a non-physical sense) of the psychological life of the individual. Sphere, extent and locus are all meanings of *āyatana*. The 'external' *āyatanas* correspond to the 'internal' *āyatanas* because the interaction between the individual and the objective world is the 'occasion' when the spheres of vision, hearing, etc., are associated with their corresponding objects; it is the relation between, or the relating of, the internal and external aspects of the sensory event. Thus in the commentary to the *Dīgha Nikāya*, Buddhaghosa (to whom the commentary is attributed) defines *āyatana* as *samosaraṇa*, coming together or meeting.⁸² The *Pali English Dictionary* definition of *āyatana*, when it refers to the senses and their objects, would do better to confine itself to "sphere of perception or sense in general" and omit "sense-organ and object", and there need be no concern with the lack of a single English word for both sense organs and sense objects.

The terms *indriya* and *dhātu* support such an interpretation of *āyatana*. *Indriya* means 'power' or 'faculty' in the sense of controlling principle or directive force.⁸³ In connection with the senses, it thus means the power or potential of the individual to have sensory experience: *cakkhindriya*, for example, means the personal potentiality for seeing.⁸⁴ Other *indriyas* mentioned in the *Sutta Piṭaka*, which in the *Abhidhamma* came to be systematised with many others,⁸⁵ include, for example, pleasure and pain, joy and grief, and equanimity,⁸⁶ none of which is physical but which refer respectively to the personal potentiality for pleasure and pain, joy, grief and equanimity. *Dhātu* literally means 'element', and is often associated with the four elements which define *rūpa*, the *mahābhūtā*. Another of its meanings is 'phenomenon' similar to the meaning of *dhamma* in some contexts.⁸⁷ We

have seen above, however, that the four *mahābhūtā* can also have the abstract meanings of extension, fluidity, heat and motion. In the same way, the meaning of *dhātu* can be abstract. In the *Dhātu Saṃyutta*, where it is associated with the senses, we also find it used in connection with abstract characteristics such as radiance and beauty,⁸⁸ and ignorance.⁸⁹

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

A figurative interpretation of the senses is also suggested by a metaphor associated with them in the *Sutta Piṭaka*, which is later picked up and used more frequently (and again systematically) by the *Abhidhamma* and commentarial traditions. In the *Sutta Piṭaka* we find several references to the senses as 'doors' or 'gates' (*dvāra*) which need to be guarded.⁹⁰ Such a metaphor suggests that they are both physical organs and openings at the same time. The description of the senses as 'guarded' or 'unguarded' gives the same metaphor a qualitative colouring, even where the word *dvāra* is not mentioned.⁹¹ This metaphor is doubly appropriate to what we have been discussing here. On the one hand, it implies that there is an abstract meaning to the senses which goes beyond the physical sense organs. On the other hand, it indicates that the senses are a 'way in' or 'entrance', and in this sense they are of fundamental importance in the psychological processes of the human being. That they have to be guarded suggests that what one experiences through the senses can be interpreted or reacted to in a way which can be detrimental to one's progress on the path to liberation. This is explained in the *Sāmaññaphala Sutta*, where the Buddha tells King Ajātasattu how a *bhikkhu* guards the doors which correspond to his senses. When the *bhikkhu* sees a visible object with his visual faculty, the Buddha states, he is not entranced with views about its various characteristics. He is intent on restraining those things which give rise to unwholesomeness, evil, covetousness or dejection which flow over him for as long as he lives with

his sense of sight unrestrained; he guards the visual sense, and attains restraint over it.⁹²

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

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

It is obvious that the physical sense organs themselves, being part of the body of the human being, are part of the *rūpakkhanda* whether they are singled out for mention in a classification or not. Indeed the major part of what is contained in the later texts about the senses concentrates on describing the physical sense organs in minute and extensive detail and

classifies them clearly as *rūpa*.⁹⁷ But from the foregoing it also seems likely that in contexts where the senses are referred to in the *Sutta Piṭaka*, the terms *cakkhu*, *sota*, *ghāṇa* and so on are to be understood figuratively as the potential for vision, hearing, smelling and so on, rather than being *merely* the physical sense organs. This accords with contrasting references in later texts to the *āyatana*s being invisible, as mentioned above, thus implying the importance of their function and not their (visible) physicality.⁹⁸ So the question remains whether the senses as *āyatana*s should also be considered part of the *rūpakkhandha*. We have seen above that comprehensive descriptions of the *rūpakkhandha* are not restricted to physical organs. Indeed, we saw that the *khandha* includes processes such as breathing and movement.

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

The physical eye does not see because it is not conscious. Nor does consciousness see, because it is not an eye. But, when an object comes together with a sense door, one sees with one's consciousness together with the sense organ as the physical base.⁹⁹

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

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

For the eye has the characteristic of sentience for phenomena worthy of directly impinging on the object, or of sentience sprung from action caused

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

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

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

music would not be defined as physical merely because the instrument and the hands are physical. In the same way, neither the physical sense organs nor their corresponding objects are the senses, and the senses are not definable as physical.

In the text, *cakkhu*, the eye, is also referred to figuratively in that there is said to be an 'eye of wisdom' (*paññācakkhu*) which is of five kinds: the eye of awakening, the all-seeing eye, the eye of knowledge, the divine eye and the eye of *dhamma*.¹⁰³ This treatment of *cakkhu* is no doubt because of the role of insight in the path of liberation in Buddhism: such insight can be described in terms of seeing. But *paññācakkhu* refers to a qualitatively different kind of seeing which is more akin to cognition than to the level of the senses. *Paññā* is discussed in chapter v.

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

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

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

According to Buddhist tradition, the physical basis of the mental faculties is the heart (*hadayavatthu*), and in Indian religion as a whole the Sanskrit

word for 'heart' (*hṛdaya*) is often used to refer to cognitive acts, rather than just to an affective centre.¹⁰⁴ But in spite of the fact that its literal meaning is 'mind', nowhere in the Pali canon, not even in the *Abhidhamma Piṭaka*, do we read that the heart is the physical base of *manas*.¹⁰⁵ There is one oblique reference in the *Abhidhamma* to *hadaya* being synonymous with *manas* in a passage which is defining *citta*, but in the context it does not have the specific meaning of *hadayavatthu*.¹⁰⁶ One might in any case expect the *Abhidhamma* not to state that the heart (or anything else) is the physical location of *manas* since we have seen that *manas* is specifically defined in the *Abhidhamma* as *arūpa*. There is, however, an apparent inconsistency on this point, and in one passage there is the suggestion that *manas* does have a physical base.¹⁰⁷ The somewhat obscure Pali is translated by Aung as follows:

That material thing on the basis of which apprehension and comprehension take place – that thing is related to both of them, as well as to their concomitants by way of the relation of Base.¹⁰⁸

The grammatical structure *yaṃ rūpaṃ ... taṃ rūpaṃ* could not be less informative about the location of the physical base for *manas*. Not until the commentaries do we find the term *hadayavatthu* being used,¹⁰⁹ and it is identified as the location of *manas* by Buddhaghosa in his *Visuddhimagga*.¹¹⁰ And Buddhaghosa accordingly includes *hadayavatthu* (amongst the other *āyatana*s) in his analysis of *upādā rūpa*.¹¹¹

Aung suggests¹¹² that the omission of the term *hadayavatthu* from the canonical material is not accidental, proving simply that the compilers of the early material and founders of the *Abhidhamma* doctrine did not believe the heart to be the location of *manas*.¹¹³ *Manas* is a sense, and as such it might not have been considered by the *Abhidhamma* tradition to have had sufficient cognitive function to be identified with the common pan-Indian understanding that *hadayavatthu* is the seat of the cognitive faculties. It is significant in this respect that in the *Sutta Piṭaka* it is *citta* and not *manas* that is associated with the heart, both explicitly and implicitly.¹¹⁴

Two writers within the (modern) Theravāda tradition assume the brain to be the physical location of *manas*. Ñānavīra Thera refers to a passage in the *Salāyatana Saṃyutta* which states that the senses are that by which, in the world, one is a perceiver and conceiver of the world.¹¹⁵ Ñānavīra takes this passage as substantialistic (though it need not be taken in such a way) and states that just as the eye is a physical thing, so *manas* is the "mass of grey matter contained in my head".¹¹⁶ Jayasuriya, writing about the psychology of the *Abhidhamma*, states that the "Heart or Mind-base element ... [is] in the brain".¹¹⁷ It is notable that in passages in the *Sutta Piṭaka* which refer to the sense organs in general, and *manas* in particular, the brain is never mentioned. And in only two occurrences of the standard list of parts of the body (discussed above) is the brain (*matthaluṅga*) mentioned. Both are in books in the *Khuddaka Nikāya*: the *Paṭisambhidāmagga*,¹¹⁸ and the

Khuddakapāṭha.¹¹⁹ The list is identical to the standard list of thirty-one parts found elsewhere in the *Sutta Piṭaka* save for the fact that it includes the brain (*matthaluṅga*) as the thirty-second part. The commentary does not acknowledge how unusual it is in including the brain, and no explanation for its inclusion here, or its exclusion elsewhere, is given.¹²⁰ The *Khuddaka Nikāya* is comprised of a variety of books, some of which are considered to be considerably later than other parts of the *Sutta Piṭaka*.¹²¹ It is possible, therefore, that these two passages are late, and that *matthaluṅga* might have been added to the extant standard list as a part of the body which had become more widely known about. Alternatively, this list might have been one which circulated among different people from those who recorded the list which survives in other places in the *Sutta Piṭaka*.

The brain is also mentioned both in the *Vinaya*¹²² and in the *Sutta Nipāta*.¹²³ The context in which it is found in the *Vinaya* is a discussion of a brain-destroying disease from which a householder is suffering. No other parts of the body are mentioned, and the passage does not offer an analysis of the body. The *Sutta Nipāta* passage, on the other hand, is more comprehensive:

Joined together with bones and sinews, having a plastering of skin and flesh, covered with hide, the body is not seen as it really is – full of intestines, full of stomach, (full) of the lump of the liver, of bladder, of heart, of lungs, of kidneys and of spleen, of mucus, of saliva, of sweat, and of lymph, of blood, of synovial fluid, of bile, and of fat ... and its hollow head is filled with brain.¹²⁴

Many of the parts mentioned are also included in the standard list. Probably because the *Sutta Nipāta* is in verse rather than prose, the order of those parts that are common to both is different; and several of the standard parts are omitted in the *Sutta Nipāta* passage.¹²⁵ It is acknowledged by scholars that much but not all of the *Sutta Nipāta* is very early. The inclusion of *matthaluṅga* here may be an indication that this particular passage is late. But it may only be that the brain was not an organ which was known to those early Buddhists who were concerned to give an analysis of the body, whether for classification or for meditational purposes. Certainly, there is no suggestion in the canonical material, early or late, that it is *manas* or the physical base of *manas*.

There are three possibilities concerning the location of *manas*. First, we have seen above that in the *Sutta Piṭaka* the senses are not explicitly stated to be *upādā rūpa*. I have suggested that this might be because they principally represent the potential processes of seeing, hearing and so on. Their corresponding physical organs might have been excluded from the classification partly because they are readily identified (in all but one case) and partly because the physical organs as such, though necessary, are of minor significance in the psychological implications of seeing. If the terms used to list the first five senses (*cakkhu*, *sota*, *ghāna*, *jivhā* and *kāya*) are actually

intended to mean the psychological elements of vision, hearing, smell, taste and touch rather than the physical organs of eye, ear, nose, tongue and body, then in the *Sutta Piṭaka* those senses are not explicitly located: we know their locations because they are familiar to us. One is at a loss to locate *manas* only because its location is not obvious to us any more than it was obvious to the writers of the *Abhidhamma*.

Second, it is possible that though *manas* is part of the *rūpakkhanda*, it has no gross physical organ. We find in the *Dhātukathā*, another book in the *Abhidhamma Piṭaka*, a classification of *rūpa* which includes an analysis of it according to whether it is subtle or gross.¹²⁶ This would account for the non-corporeal aspects of the *rūpakkhanda* we have already discussed, and might explain the elusiveness of *manas* in being physically located. Third, from the evidence (or lack of it) in the *Sutta Piṭaka*, it remains a possibility that *manas* has no corresponding physical organ, whether gross or subtle. This might be another reason why the six senses as a whole are not classified within the *rūpakkhanda* in the *Sutta Piṭaka*. And it is clearly the implicit understanding in sections of the *Abhidhamma* where *manas* is omitted from descriptions of *upādā rūpa*.

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

I turn now to the function of *manas* and the identity of its object, *dhammā*. *Manas* is one of the most ambiguous and confusing terms in Pali material. Western scholars and those working within the Theravāda Buddhist tradition usually translate it literally, as 'mind'. Given that *manas* is an *āyatana*, however, such a translation is perhaps questionable, since the word 'mind' tends to suggest that it undertakes processes that would be classified in one of the *arūpakkhandas*. Though there have been some twentieth century Western philosophers (notably Wittgenstein and Ryle) for whom 'mental' processes such as thinking are *not* incorporeal processes, most Westerners are still very much influenced by the Cartesian dualism between mind and body, whereby thinking is a non-corporeal process. And in the Buddhist analysis of the person into *khandhas*, thinking is definitely not a process which is associated with any of the elements by which the body is characterised. The extent to which the Buddhist tradition's understanding of the sense *manas* attributes cognitive processes to it is no clearer than whether or not it has a physical location. The lack of clarity in this respect may well be because cognitive, thinking processes *are* clearly stated to be the function of certain mental faculties, as we shall see.¹²⁷ The ambiguity of the situation is exacerbated by the fact that the term *manas* is

also frequently used in the *Nikāyas* in a generic sense (as opposed to the specific sense of *manas* as sense organ) in contexts where it *does* have a mental, cognitive meaning. And etymologically the word comes from the same root as the verb *maññati*, to think. Ascertaining in what sense *manas* is being used requires consideration of the contexts in which it is found, some of which are more ambiguous than others. In many passages it is contextually clear that it is as a generic term for the mind in its cognitive capacity that *manas* is being used. In a well-known passage, for example, it is used in sequence with *citta* and *viññāṇa*, which are definitely associated with cognitive activities.¹²⁸ Here the term *manas* clearly does not refer to the sense. Elsewhere, in contexts which one might loosely call 'formulaic', the formula appears sometimes with *manas* and sometimes with *citta* or *cetas*, which again are definitely mental or cognitive terms. Such contexts are discussed further in chapter v.

Ambiguity about the meaning of *manas* is compounded because the *Abhidhamma* tradition systematised the term, using various suffixes to give it different technical meanings in different contexts. Though these later technical usages of *manas* are occasionally mentioned in this chapter, their later technical meanings are far from obvious in the *Sutta Piṭaka*, the material with which I am primarily concerned. And the ambiguity is yet further exacerbated by the fact that *dhammā*, the object corresponding to *manas*, also has a multiplicity of meanings. When *manas* is translated as 'mind', *dhammā* tends to be translated accordingly as 'thoughts', 'ideas', 'mental images'.¹²⁹ Yet the term can refer to phenomena of any kind as well as to teachings and doctrines.¹³⁰

In order to distinguish *manas* as sense from *manas* as 'mind' in general I will henceforth call the sense *manodhātu*. In the *Abhidhamma*, *manodhātu* has a technical meaning which distinguishes it from *manāyatana* and *manoviññāṇadhātu*. There, *manāyatana* is a collective term referring to the whole of consciousness, but it is not clear to me whether either *manodhātu* or *manoviññāṇadhātu* means *manas* as sense as discussed here.¹³¹ My use of the term *manodhātu* in a completely non-technical way just to refer to the sense is similar to its use in the *Sutta Piṭaka* in contexts where all the senses are referred to as *dhātus*.¹³²

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

The first meaning of *manodhātu* is suggested from passages in which it is referred to differently, as a unique sense rather than as the sixth in a series of senses each having a similar level of functioning. A passage in the *Khandha Saṃyutta* refers first to the first five senses and then to

"WHAT ARE LITTLE BOYS MADE OF?", asks the nursery rhyme, and religious traditions ask the same question. Though the Buddha apparently denied that the human being contains something called a soul, what he meant by the denial, or by the word in his language which we translate "soul", has rarely been scrutinised.

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

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

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

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

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