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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SUE HAMILTON

LUZAC
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LUZAC ORIENTAL
46 Great Russell Street, London WC1
1996

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ISBN 1 898942 10 2

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Printed and bound in Great Britain by
Bookcraft (Bath) Limited,
Midsomer Norton, Avon

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

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

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 I, 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 I, 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 *saṃsāra*. 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] contact[13]
> 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 (*saṅgītis*) 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 Ājīvikas and Jains are referred to in the canonical texts, and others are mentioned in relevant Jain texts. When teaching such people, the Buddha might well have adopted their terms in order to communicate with them. And in so doing, it is possible that the terminology was on some occasions used in what appear to be different ways but in fact with the same meaning.

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

The Buddha's understanding of the constitution of the human being is best introduced in the light of a brief description of the way the doctrines and concepts he taught fit into the background in which he was teaching. I have stated above that the religious milieu in which the Buddha was teaching was a complex one and that the terminology he used was sometimes varied to take this into account. But the dominant religion was that of the Brahmans, including both the older *Vedic* sacrificial religion and the relatively new *Upaniṣadic* teachings, at least some of which were known to the Buddha. Others have written about the emergence of Buddhism from its Brahmanical background in considerable detail,[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 *ajjhattaṃ 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 *ajjhattaṃ* 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 *ajjhattaṃ* being used as part of a psychological term to indicate an 'internal picture'. So in my opinion it is unlikely that this passage was intended to have the implications which Johansson reads into it. Rather, it suggests to me that one sees that both one's own and external (be they of other individuals or not) visible parts are of like nature. This is the more likely because the context of the passage is one in which the various insights which come with meditation are described. One of the most important insights for a *bhikkhu* to achieve is that all things are of like nature, not whether or not the external world is a projection of his mind.

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

The metaphorical use of the term *loka* pre-dates the Buddha's teaching. Though in both Sanskrit and Pali the term *loka* does have the conventional meaning 'world', even in the earlier sacrificial religion of the Brahmans its meaning was not limited to the external world. According to Gonda, the Sanskrit word *loka* has an "inherent vagueness".[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 *Saḷāyatana 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 *rūpakkhandha*, which refers to the living body. It is analysed in terms of four 'elements', earth (*paṭhavī*), 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 *rūpakkhandha*, 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, saṃkhāra-paccayā viññāṇaṃ, viññāṇa-paccayā nāmarūpaṃ, nāmarūpa-paccayā saḷāyatanaṃ, saḷāyatana-paccayā phasso, phassa-paccayā vedanā, vedanā-paccayā taṇhā, taṇhā-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. *Saṃkhittena 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 *Poṭṭhapāda 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. Bṛ. 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. Cetayitvā 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-Māluṅkyasutta* (MN.I.426ff), the *Avyākata 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 *sukṛtāṃ loka*.
40. SN.III.139: *Loke lokadhammo.*
41. *Evam etassa kevalassa dukkhakkhandhassa nirodho hotīti.*
42. SN.II.71 ff.
43. *Dukkhassa/lokassa bhikkhave samudayañca atthaṅgamañca desissāmi ... . Cakkhuṃ ca paṭicca rūpe ca uppajjati cakkhuviññāṇaṃ tiṇṇaṃ saṅgati phasso phassapaccayā vedanā vedanāpaccayā taṇhā. Ayaṃ kho bhikkhave dukkhassa/lokassa samudayo. Taṇhāya asesavirāganirodhā upādānanirodho ... .*
44. AN.IV.430: *Pañca' ime ... kāmaguṇā ariyassa vinaye loko ti vuccati.*
45. AN.IV.431f: *Bhikkhu ... paññāya c' assa disvā āsavā parikkhīṇā honti. Ayaṃ vuccati ... bhikkhu lokassa antaṃ āgamma lokassa ante viharati tiṇṇo loke visattikan ti.*
46. SN.IV.93: *Nāham bhikkhave gamanena lokassa antaṃ ñātayyaṃ daṭṭhayyaṃ pattayyan ti vadāmi. Na ca panāham bhikkhave apatvā lokassa antaṃ dukkhassa antakiriyaṃ vadāmi ti.*
47. They are found with *saṃkhāra* and *viññāṇa* having changed places at SN.I.112: *Rūpaṃ vedayitaṃ saññaṃ viññāṇaṃ yañca 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 *āyatanas*) 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 *āyatanas*, a term which covers all the senses and their objects (thus giving a total of twelve *āyatanas*).

But in spite of the fact that the other (five) senses and their corresponding objects (that is, those ten of the *āyatanas*) are clearly defined as 'secondary' *rūpa*, neither *manas* nor *dhammā* is defined as being *rūpa*, or at least not consistently so. The lack of clarity is compounded because the *Aṭṭhasālinī*, the commentary on the *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

"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

ISBN 1-898942-10-2