Early Meanings of Dependent-Origination

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Abstract   Dependent-origination, possibly the most fundamental Buddhist philosophical principle, is generally understood as a description of all that exists. Mental as well as physical phenomena are believed to come into being only in relation to, and conditioned by, other phenomena. This paper argues that such an understanding of *pratītya-samutpāda* is mistaken with regard to the earlier meanings of the concept. Rather than relating to all that exists, dependent-origination related originally only to processes of mental conditioning. It was an analysis of the self, not of reality, embedded in the *Upaniṣadic* search for the *ātman*. The teaching also possessed important ontological implications regarding the nature of the relation between consciousness and reality. These implications suggest that rather than things being conditioned by other things, they are actually conditioned by consciousness.

Dependent-origination is widely acknowledged by students of all schools of Buddhism as one of Buddhism's most fundamental principles. The principle that things arise in dependence on their conditions is understood to be a central

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aspect of Buddhist philosophy, psychology and soteriology. Nonetheless, as will become evident in the following pages, we still lack a clear definition of what dependent-origination actually means. Different understandings, representing distinct uses of the concept by numerous Buddhist teachers and schools, are grouped together so as to cloud our view of the development of the teaching. This paper intends to cut through the later layers of these developments so as to reveal the earlier, perhaps original uses of the concept.

The prevalent understanding of *pratītya-samutpāda* is that all factors of existence depend on other factors in order to exist. Nothing exists on its own, no-thing possesses independent identity. This principle is said to apply to all mental as well as material phenomena. In the famous words of the suttas:

> ''When this is, that is. Once this arises, that arises. When this is not, that is not. Once this ceases, that ceases.''

> *Imasmiṃ sati idaṃ hoti, imass' uppādā, idaṃ uppajjati.*
> *Imasmiṃ asati, idaṃ na hoti, imassa nirodhā idaṃ nirujjhati.*

In the following pages I will address the question of the initial meaning of this formula. Commonly, the formula is read as a characterization of all that exists. This view is adhered to by the majority of modern scholars writing on the subject. Specifically, it is accepted by authors who discuss early Buddhist doctrine. Many agree that Buddhism is not an ontological teaching, or was not so initially, and that its doctrinal emphasis is on the workings of the mind.[1] Nonetheless, it is generally believed that the Buddha described all things as *paṭiccasamuppanna*—dependent arisings.[2] A good example is Steven Collins' classic *Selfless Persons*:

> In considering the teaching of dependent origination, which Buddhism used to oppose Brahmanism on the conceptual level, it is crucially important to distinguish between the general idea of conditionality, and the 12-fold series which has come to be the traditional way in which the teaching is expressed.

He continues to quote the formula quoted above, and says that

> This general principle is *idappaccayatā*, 'the fact of things having a specific cause', which is said always to be the case even when there is no Buddha to penetrate it in depth and teach the full sequence.'' (p. 106)

Collins' words offer an example of the understanding that all ''things'' exist dependently. Many other examples can be supplied in which leading modern

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[1] The point that *paṭiccasamuppāda* deals *mainly* with the workings of the mind has been cogently made by Hamilton (1996, pp. 67–69) and Ronkin (2005, p. 200). Nonetheless, both these sources believe the discussion of the mind to be a particular case of a more general philosophical principle relating to all things.

[2] I will hereby refer to the noun *paṭiccasamuppāda/pratītya-samutpāda* as 'dependent-origination,' and use the term 'dependently-arisen' for the adjective *paṭiccasamuppanna/pratītyasamutpāda*.

scholars support such a claim.[3] Most popular is the view that the teaching of the 12 links of dependent-origination—which as we will soon see discusses the workings of the mind—is a ''particular case'' of the more general principle of *idappaccayatā* (''dependence'') and of the abstract formula quoted above.

This paper will claim that the reading of dependent-origination thus described deviates significantly from the initial meaning of the concept. Although the teaching does have ontological *implications*, it is not an ontological teaching as such. In addition, these ontological implications differ from the ones generally ascribed to the doctrine, relating rather to certain phenomena being dependent on subjectivity. In clear distinction from dependent-origination as ''existence in dependence'' and as the true nature of all phenomena, I will argue that dependent-origination addresses the workings of the mind alone. Dependent-origination should be understood to be no more than an inquiry into the nature of the self (or better, the lack of a self). Viewing *pratītya-samutpāda* as a description of the nature of reality in general means investing the words of the earlier teachings with meanings derived from later Buddhist discourse. This results in a misrepresentation of much of what early Buddhism was about.

Before we begin our analysis of the relevant materials, we must consider a number of methodological matters. Readers who regard the Pali Canon as an authentic representation of ''what the Buddha taught'' may prefer to skip the next section.

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[3] Nyanatiloka (1971, p. 155), Varma (1971, p. 124), Rahula (1974 [1959], p. 53), Kalupahana (1975; p. 55—where he quotes Buddhaghosa who believes *paṭiccasamuppāda* characterizes ''coordinate phenomena,'' and explains it as ''that which has arisen dependent on causes,'' p. 59—where he accepts Buddhaghosa's view, and most clearly—p. 89), Wayman (1980, pp. 276–279), Yamada (1980, pp. 267, 275–276), Vetter (1988, p. 45), Nakamura (1989 [1980], p. 69, although I am not perfectly clear about what he means by ''all phenomena which appear''), Harris (1991, p. 138), Nagao (1991, pp. 174–176), Bodhi & Ñāṇamoli (1995, p. 1233, n. 408), Boisvert (1995, pp. 8–9), Hamilton (1996, p. 68), Ronkin (2005, p. 200), and Kragh (2006, pp. 271–272, especially n. 441). Lamotte (1988, pp. 35–40), although clearly emphasizing the mental aspect of the dependent-origination – ''…[T]he complex mechanism which indissolubly links desire to action and action to painful rebirth'' (pp. 35–36) - also speaks of the teaching as characterizing ''all the phenomena of existence'' (pp. 36, 40). In the same context, he reads the *anatta* doctrine as a teaching regarding the insubstantiality of all things, and suggests that dependent-origination supplements this insight by explaining how insubstantial phenomena appear and disappear (p. 36). He also understands *pratītyasamutpāda* as a middle way between existence and non-existence, basing himself on the *Kaccanagotta-sutta* (for a discussion of this last point see Section ''The Middle Path'' below, especially note 31). In Lamotte (1980, pp. 125–126), although again emphasizing the psychological and soteriological aspects of ''conditioned co-production,'' he is clear in stating that he views the ''law of causes and effects'' as ''presiding over the formation and evolution of the triple world.'' Gethin (1998, pp. 141–145) too emphasizes the subjective aspect of the teaching, but seems to believe it to relate to all phenomena. The most significant place to see this is in his quote from Buddhaghosa on page 143, where he discusses the nature of ''all conditioned things.'' Buddhaghosa speaks in the passage of milk and curds, in an example he may have borrowed from Nāgārjuna at *Mūlamadhyamaka-kārikā* 13.6.

Stcherbatsky (2005 [1922], p. 29) seems to have formulated the underlying principle of the position which regards *pratītya-samutpāda* as a formulation of the nature of all existents: ''In the popular literature of the Sūtras the term *pratītya-samutpāda* is almost exclusively applied to the ''wheel of life'', *although the general meaning of this formula must have been present to the mind of all Buddhists.*'' (emphasis mine)

Questions of Authenticity

In speaking of early understandings of dependent-origination I will be relying on materials from the Pali Canon. Such a use of Pali texts is notoriously problematic, as it is more than clear that these scriptures have been worked over by many generations of Buddhists.[4] Hence it is necessary to explain why I believe I may use the Pali texts as evidence for prominent trends in the early Buddhist community.

Although there are many problems regarding the authenticity of the Pali Canon, the major issue concerns the antiquity of the materials.[5] The oldest sources we have to work with in Pali in order to assess the date of the suttas are commentaries from the fifth and sixth centuries A.D. The Chinese Āgama texts parallel to the Pali suttas are slightly earlier, dating from the fourth century A.D. In addition, we are in no position to assess the precise contents of the Pali canon redacted towards the end of the first century B.C. at Alu-vihāra.[6] Another problem is posed by the different ''layers'' the canonical texts seem to be composed of.[7]

Although this situation is clearly problematic when discussing Buddhist history, I wish to argue it is not nearly as perturbing when discussing such central doctrinal concepts as *pratītya-samutpāda*. In dealing with foundational articulations of doctrine, it is implausible to argue that they ceased to reflect their original meanings when the oral teachings were committed to writing. It is also unlikely that time worked on such central notions so as to give them completely new forms. In a case like *paṭiccasamuppāda*, it is likely that the words of the Pali suttas are relatively close to the earlier meanings of the term. This argument is particularly strong when dealing with a concept like dependent-origination, which possesses explicit philosophical and analytic

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[4] For important discussions of these issues see Schopen (1985), Vetter (1988), Gombrich (1996, most importantly chaps. 1 and 4), and Bronkhorst (1998, whose methodological position is much in line with the one I adopt here, although he is somewhat more liberal). For a general assessment of the problem, see Schmithausen (1990).

[5] One other problem regards the language of the Canon, as the original teachings were probably not given in Pali. The Pali canon was also translated a number of times, and the teachings were affected by the ''Sanskritization'' of the vernaculars and of the Pali. See Lamotte (1988, pp. 558–568) and Norman (1983, pp. 2–7, 1989) for more elaborate discussions. A second problem is that the canon is the written adaptation of teachings originally given and preserved orally. We will probably never know precisely what was gained and lost in this process. On the significant differences between oral and written traditions see Ong (1982). For a good summary of the questions regarding the oral character of the canon see Wynne (2004).

[6] In the short discussion conducted here I will refrain from addressing Schopen's claim (1985) that in Aśoka's Bhābrā Edict, the oldest reference to Buddhist scriptures we possess, seven texts are mentioned, the majority of which can not be identified with materials familiar to us today. In response, I will confine myself to the following short notes: First, as has become clear by now, different titles do not necessarily imply different contents, a point made in relation to the Bhābrā Edict by Lamotte (1988, pp. 235–237) as well. Second, we should hesitate before we equate the Buddhist texts familiar to Aśoka with the texts studied by ''professional'' Buddhists. His edict may represent more popular traditions.

[7] For a good example of such a case, see the discussions in Schmithausen (2000), Vetter (1988).

aspects. It could be argued that oral traditions would be fairly scrupulous in preserving the original intentions of materials of this sort.[8]

The considerations I am suggesting are further corroborated by a number of comparative works. Minh Ciau (1991) conducted a comprehensive study, comparing the contents of the Pali *Majjhima Nikāya* with the Chinese *Madhyama-Āgama*. Although he found a plethora of distinctions between the canons regarding technical and practical issues,[9] he discovered a striking agreement in doctrinal matters.[10] Such conclusions were reached also by Lamotte (1988, p. 156):

> "[W]ith the exception of the Mahāyānist interpolations in the *Ekottara (-āgama)*, which are easily discernable, the variations in question affect hardly anything save the method of expression or the arrangement of the subjects. The doctrinal basis common to the āgamas and nikāyas is remarkably uniform."

Based on such observations we can agree that Pali Canon materials were generally accepted in the IVth century A.D.

Another interesting piece of evidence will allow us to extend these conclusions back to the first two centuries A.D. Basing himself on Gandhāran manuscripts from the Robert Senior collection, Andrew Glass (2006) compared sūtras from the beginning of the second century A.D. with their Tibetan, Sanskrit, Pali and Chinese counterparts. Although his sample is small, based on only four short sūtras, his conclusions are much in line with those reached by Minh Ciau and Lamotte. Again we find technical differences and doctrinal unity. The translations read much like the more familiar ones from the Pali, and are clearly examples of the same Buddhist attitudes to life and reality. According to Richard Salomon (1999, ch. 1), the materials contained in the fragments from the British Library collection, which date from the beginning of the first century A.D, do not diverge significantly from better known traditions in regard to central points of doctrine as well.

The studies mentioned, although not conclusive, support the view that the Pali suttas reflect Buddhist scriptures in circulation at the beginning of the first Millenium A.D. In fact, this discussion brings us very close to the Alu-vihāra redaction of the canon in the last quarter of the first century B.C. Therefore, I

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[8] I must remark that I would be less enthusiastic about generalizing these suggestions to questions of practice, although they could hold some ground there as well. Obviously, on minute points of both conduct and doctrine this argument will not carry us very far.

[9] Major technical differences exist in the arrangement of the materials, as well as regarding titles of sūtras, their setting (*Nidāna*), the interlocutors, etc. Examples of differences of practical nature involve the monks carrying sitting-cushions in the Chinese tradition and conducting a retreat in the summer, while their Indian Thesavādin brothers meditate without cushions during the rain-season. The Chinese edition also ignores a sutta such as the *Jīvaka-sutta* of the MN, which allows a monk to eat three types of meat. The reason for the exclusion was the vegetarianism practiced in the Sarvāstivāda, the school whose canon the Chinese *Madhyama-āgama* is a translation from.

[10] This agreement led him to believe that they were both translations of an original Magadhi canon.

believe it fair to claim that with regard to central doctrinal concepts we can regard the materials in the Pali Canon as representative of major Buddhist trends in the last few centuries B.C. By no means am I suggesting that these materials can be seen as an accurate representation of the words of the Buddha. But they are probably not very far off the mark, at least in essence, and can be seen as representative of views held by early generations of Buddhists.

In order to further substantiate my position, my presentation of *paṭiccasammuppāda* in the Pali Canon will discuss only materials contained in the four major Nikāyas.[11] Specifically, I will focus on discourses contained in the most elaborate discussion of dependent-origination in the canon, the *Nidāna-saṃyautta* (NS) of the SN. Although the four major Nikāyas are only one type of Buddhist scripture, they were clearly among the most widely accepted teachings of the tradition. This will afford a clear vision of what was probably a central understanding to many of the early Buddhist communities.[12]

To conclude this stage of the discussion, I wish to make clear that I do not necessarily believe the views I will identify were subscribed to by all the early Buddhist saṅghas. I do believe, however, that they were a major current in the Buddhism of the last few centuries B.C. At the very least, we have here a presentation of the meaning of dependent-origination in the four major Nikāyas of the Pali canon. At most, we are discussing the Buddha's original notion of dependent-origination.

The 12 Links

We will begin our discussion with an examination of *paṭiccasamuppāda* in the Pali suttas. Once we achieve a clear definition of the meaning of dependent-origination in the early Buddhist materials, we will proceed to contextualize our conclusions historically.

The teaching of dependent-origination appears in the Pali Nikāyas most prominently in the context of the 12 links.[13] Although the 12 links are

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[11] The *Dīgha-Nikāya* (DN), *Majjhima-Nikāya* (MN), *Saṃyutta-Nikāya* (SN), and *Aṅguttara-Nikāya* (AN). Both Hamilton (1996) and Harvey (1995) rely on the suttas contained in these four collections, believing them to be early Buddhist traditions.

[12] It is true that there must have been differences between the different traditions of transmission of each of the four Nikāyas (see, for example, Kragh [2006, p. 15 n. 13]). Nonetheless, from the perspective of this study they can be seen as expressing a common doctrine.

[13] The links are not necessarily 12 in number. At times the list is longer (for example MN i54), shorter (for example DN ii55) or re-arranged. For different lists of conditioning found in the Canon see Bucknell (1999), Cox (1993, pp. 124–125), and Schmithausen (2000). See the following note for a more elaborate discussion.

clearly not the oldest formulation of dependent-origination,[14] they will serve as the basis for our discussion, as they have become the standardized form of the teaching. More importantly, the 12 links agree fundamentally with the more archaic expressions of dependent-origination in their basic message: they express the way the mind functions in saṃsāra, the processes of mental conditioning that transmigration consists of.[15] The

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[14] This question has received much attention in scholarly literature. As stated above, the links are not always 12 in number, and their sequence is altered on number of occasions. This points to the fact that they can be understood as a later standardization of the teaching, attempting to give it coherent and unified form. For a more detailed discussion, see Collins (1982, p. 106), who summarizes the work of a number of scholars, and Ronkin (2005, p. 201). Bucknell (1999) addresses the major questions regarding this discussion, and offers a number of interesting suggestions regarding the process by which the formula was synthesized. A quite different analysis of this synthesis is offered by Schmithausen (2000). Following Frauwallner, and basing himself on the Sarvāstivāda *Mahānidāna-sūtra*, Schmithausen discusses three different sequences which serve as the basis for the later arrangement of the 12 links. He believes these three sequences to have been connected by the complier of the *Mahānidāna-sūtra*, so as to form a series of nine *nidāna*s, to which a tenth. *ṣaḍāyatana*, was added for clarification. Later on the series was extended with the use of *saṃskāra* and *avidyā* to form the 12 link formula we are occupied with here. Another interesting related work is Nakamura (1980), who discussed what may be the earliest expressions of the process of mental conditioning described by the 12 links. Nakamura discusses materials from the *Sutta-nipāta*, in which there are fewer links that also exhibit differences in their titles and sequence. Wayman (1971, p. 185) is a dissident voice to this discussion, saying that he is "convinced that the full 12 members have been in Buddhism since earliest times."

[15] All the different lists of conditioning appearing in the Canon are, in my view, based on the same principle of mental conditioning. They describe the manner in which different elements of experience are brought into existence (*samutpāda*) conditioned (*pratītya*) by previous subjective acts. Note, however, that Schmithausen defines the third sequence of the *Mahānidāna-sūtra*, which traces the process of conditioning from *vijñāṇa*, through *nāmarūpa* and *sparśa*, to *vedanā* (links 3–4, 6–7 of the 12 link formula), as involving a "biological-function of mind" (see Schmithausen [1987, p. 37]). He thus defines *vijñāṇa* as the subtle transmigrating consciousness, and *nāmarūpa* as mind-matter coalescing into a "proto-embryo," the material body to which consciousness connects in the womb. Such a reading of *vijñāṇa* and *nāmarūpa* emphasizes the bodily aspect of the conditioning. But these "biological" elements are also conditioned by previous acts of desire. Thus they too are a result of subjective conditioning. Understanding *pratītya-samutpāda* in this way, as an expression of processes of mental conditioning, has the merit of applying to all the different canonical expressions of dependent-origination, including the relevant teachings that were not included in the 12 (or 10) link formula. If this is accepted, we could define mental conditioning, or possibly subjective conditioning, as the underlying intuition of all the early articulations of *pratītya-samutpāda*. The insight of mental conditioning could thus serve as the primary meaning of *pratītya-samutpāda*, and hence the analysis of rebirth would be understood as a particular case of this fundamental insight.

Nidāna-saṃyutta opens with the following words of the Buddha, the standard exposition of the 12 links:[16]

> And what, monks, is dependent-origination? Dependent on (1) ignorance, monks, (2) mental dispositions. Dependent on mental dispositions, (3) consciousness. Dependent on consciousness, (4) name and form. Dependent on name and form, (5) the six bases (of the senses). Dependent on the six bases, (6) contact. Dependent on contact, (7) sensation. Dependent on sensation, (8) thirst. Dependent on thirst, (9) grasping. Dependent on grasping, (10) being. Dependent on being, (11) birth. Dependent on birth, (12) old age and death, sadness, pain, suffering, distress and misery arise. This is the origin of this whole mass of suffering. This, monks, I say is dependent-origination.

> *Katamo ca, bhikkhave, paṭiccasamuppādo? Avijjāpaccayā, bhikkhave, saṅkhārā; saṅkhārapaccayā viññāṇaṃ; viññāṇapaccayā nāmarūpaṃ; nāmarūpapaccayā saḷāyatanaṃ; saḷāyatanapaccayā phasso; phassapaccayā vedanā; vedanāpaccayā taṇhā; taṇhāpaccayā upādānaṃ; upādānapaccayā bhavo; bhavapaccayā jāti jātipaccayā jarāmaraṇaṃ sokaparidevadukkhadomanassupāyāsā sambhavanti. Evam etassa kevalassa dukkhakkhandhassa samudayo hoti. Ayaṃ vuccati, bhikkhave, paṭiccasamuppādo.*[17]

Many issues arise regarding this well-known paragraph. Discarding specific questions concerning the translation, most importantly those concerning the 12 links themselves, it will be valuable to begin our discussion with the way tradition prefers to understand the teaching. According to the traditional reading, the 12 links depict the process of transmigration in saṃsāra over a period of three life-times. The first, a past existence, is expressed in the first two links.

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[16] In order to simplify the discussion I am only referring here to the ascending sequence of the links. I am ignoring its descending counterpart, since achieving a precise definition of its meaning is too complex a project to be achieved in these pages. It involves the thorny question of what we are to make of statements such as "with the cessation of consciousness…" (*viññāṇanirodhā…*). It will suffice to note that the cessation of the conditioning processes formulated in the 12 links is understood to be the end of saṃsāric transmigration and suffering. Another issue of concern was pointed out by Yamada (1980), who discussed the differences between the exposition of the links quoted here, which he terms "the reversal sequence," and their articulation in what he calls "the natural sequence." "The natural sequence" begins with the final link and says that it depends on the preceding one, as an answer to the question "depending on what does X arise?" The answer is "Depending on birth, becoming-old and dying..." The shift from the "natural sequence," which emphasizes a discovery of the workings of human existence, to the more familiar "reversal sequence" quoted here, directs the meaning of the sequence toward a more general and abstract "chain of causation" (pp. 270–273). Although these suggestions are highly interesting with regard to the evolution of Buddhist exegesis and the 12 link formula in particular, I will hereby be discussing the more familiar form of the teaching, as it agrees with the "natural sequence" in its embodiment of the principle of mental conditioning.

[17] For the Pali texts I am relying on the editions of the Pali Text Society and the Chaṭṭa Saṅgayana ones distributed by the Vipassana Research Institute. The English translations are my own.

Depending on ignorance one creates mental dispositions through action, which lead to his or her present rebirth, beginning with consciousness, the third link. Consciousness continues to condition according to a set pattern in which thirst (or desire, *taṇhā*) and grasping (or better—"dependence," *upādāna*) are generated due to attraction and aversion toward pleasant and unpleasant sensation. Grasping will then create being (*bhava*, sometimes translated as becoming[18]), that will lead to future birth, and thus to aging and death, the 11th and 12th links that represent a future life. This, we are told, is how pain is generated.

Whether the 12 links refer to three different lives, as the traditional view holds,[19] or whether they relate only to one life[20] or even to a single instance of perception,[21] whether they were articulated in this same sequence by the Buddha or were later arranged in this way by his disciples, the different views of the 12 links all agree on one major point: They discuss the manner in which the mind conditions saṃsāric experience and existence. The teaching is concerned with an analysis of the workings of the mind, with identifying the different processes of mental conditioning and describing their relations. The 12 links do not deal with how things exist, but with the processes by which the mind operates.

It is true that the doctrine of the 12 links has important ontological implications. It is based on a metaphysics which seems to believe that objects—real objects!—are conditioned by consciousness. Such an understanding is implied by the fact that form (*rūpa*) and the objects of the senses, the "external" side of links four and five, are conditioned by mental dispositions and consciousness (links two and three).[22] The same metaphysics is

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[18] The term *bhava* could probably best be translated as "birth," although in a different sense from the one implied by the eleventh link (*jāti*). *Bhava* probably means a state of existence, a rebirth as a creature in any one of the different realms. Such a reading of *bhava* has been suggested by numerous scholars, among them Lamotte (1988, p. 38), and Williams (1974, p. 59). For a more extensive discussion of the possible meanings of the term, see Schmithausen (2000, pp. 52–53).

[19] Nyantiloka (1971, pp. 156, who relies on Buddhaghoṣa). Collins (1982, pp. 203–205) relates to different classifications of the 12 links into three distinct life-times. Wayman (1980, pp. 286–291) gives different rendering of the teaching according to periods of one, two or three lifetimes. Tradition is forced to the view of different lifetimes by the rebirths implied by links three and 11. Yamada (1980, p. 272) has shown this to be a result of the change from the "natural" to the "reversal" sequence of the links (see note 14 above). Schmithausen (2000, p. 45) makes the insightful remark that the theory of three rebirths implied by the 12 links is actually an unintended consequence of the combination of three discrete, archaic conditioning sequences. See note 14 for a further discussion of this view. Modern authors often prefer to view these different "births" metaphorically.

[20] Harvey (1995, pp. 134–137, 159).

[21] Nyanatiloka (1971) argues against such a view in his introduction to the 12 links. Yamada (1980, p. 271) believes the "natural sequence" of the links to work simultaneously rather than gradually. According to Cox (1993, pp. 133–134), this view was popular in early Sarvāstivāda thought. Schmithausen (1997, p. 15) referrs to the Theravādin Abhidhamma's development of this theory.

[22] Bucknell (1999, pp. 320–326) conducts an elaborate discussion of the term *nāma-rūpa*, basing himself on work done by other scholars. He reaches the conclusion that the term refers to the objects of the six senses, rather than a meaning of the like of "mind-and-body." If his suggestion is accepted, this would strengthen my claim regarding the nature of the ontological implications expressed by the 12 links. Based on the *Mahānidāna-sūtra*, Schmithausen (2000, pp. 62–62, 73–75) argues that understanding *nāmarūpa* as referring to the actual perceptual process is mistaken for the early materials, but accepts it as relevant to the 12 links formula.

expressed in the enigmatic move from link nine to ten, where grasping conditions being. The point is that one is reborn in direct relation to acts of attachment conducted during his or her previous life/lives. These forms of conditioning undermine the realistic ontology normally attributed to early Buddhism.[23] It may be argued in response that the Buddha is speaking only about experience, in complete disregard for the way objects "really" exist. But such an argument demands too heavy a distinction between mental objects and the non-mental world they represent. It also ignores the metaphysics implied by the theory of karma,[24] of special relevance to our discussion because of the traditional connection between karma and the 12 links.[25] Such an interpretation also fails to take into account concepts like *manomaya* ("the mind made body"[26]) along with the other supernatural powers ascribed to the religious adept, and disregards the religious context from which the Buddha emerged.[27]

These intuitions regarding the nature of the relation between mental conditioning and the objective world suggest that the mind has power over objects beyond what we normally believe. They suggest that ontology is secondary to experience. What we *are*, including the material aspects of our being, is conditioned primarily, if not only, by our previous subjective maneuvers. But these conjectures, although revealing much about underlying Buddhist inclinations, are not really what the 12 links formula is about. The 12 links are an explanation of mental conditioning, an analysis of subjective existence. They do not deal directly with the manner in which all things exist. The ontological implications are no more than an offshoot of the discussion, possibly an echo of the Upaniṣadic notions regarding the relations between the Self and the cosmos (see Section "Dependent - Origination Contextualized" below).

So far, what I have been saying about the 12 links is not very new. The fact that they deal with subjective existence rather than external reality should come as no surprise. The important question for our discussion is whether the 12 links can be understood as a private case of a more general principle which recognizes that "all

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[23] Gombrich (1996, p. 4), Hamilton (1996, pp. xxviii–xxix).

[24] Besides the theory itself, according to which what happens in life is a product of intention, karma is an adaptation of two principles, both heavily laden with metaphysics: (1) The early Vedic theory of sacrificial action, as the constitutive principle of the universe, and (2) The Vedic conception of cosmic relations (*bandhu*s), now transformed into the relation between a moral subjective actions and their fruition in reality. The relevance of the first point to understanding the Buddhist theory of karma is generally acknowledged in scholarly literature. The second clearly deserves a separate analysis.

[25] Cox (1993, pp. 121–123) has argued that we need not necessarily assume that the connection made between karma and dependent-origination was original. Nonetheless, at least in regard to the 12 link formula, as it is presented here, these two central concepts are naturally connected.

[26] For a discussion of *manomaya* see Hamilton (1996, ch. 7), as well as Harvey (1995, ch. 8).

[27] Jurewicz (2000) has discussed the relations between the terms which constitute the 12 links and their origins in Vedic theories of creation and sacrifice. She makes a convincing case for understanding the Buddhist teaching as an adaptation of Vedic principles connected with the sacrifice. Although she too believes the focus of the Buddha's articulation to be cognitive, her views strongly support the idea that the early teaching of *pratītya-samutpāda* possessed deep ontological implications. For a fuller analysis of Jurewicz's position see below, Section Dependent-Origination Contextualized.

that is—exists in dependence.'' We are concerned with the meaning of the abstract formula quoted above, as well as with the meaning of the term *idappaccayatā*.

I am arguing that the abstract formula of dependent-origination deals exclusively with the process encapsulated in the 12 links. When the Buddha says ''When this is, that is, etc.,'' he is speaking *only* of mental conditioning, and is saying absolutely nothing about existence per se. The most significant evidence for this fact is that the phrase ''*imasmiṃ sati idaṃ hoti*…'' never occurs detached from the articulation of the 12 links, save one occurrence which I will relate to below.

Let us examine a standard appearance of the abstract formula. In the *Dasa-bala-sutta* of the *Nidāna-Saṃyutta*, the Buddha says: ''*Imasmiṃ sati idaṃ hoti... yad idaṃ avijjā paccayā…*'' (When this is, that is… *That is*: depending on ignorance…). The abstract formula is followed by *yad idaṃ*, followed by the standard articulation of the 12 links. If the *yad idaṃ* meant ''for example'' or ''such as,'' we could accept the view that the 12 links are a private case of a general principle of conditionality. But it clearly does not. What it does express is more akin to ''that is,'' or even more precisely ''that which is.'' Hence it should be clear that the abstract formula relates precisely and only to the mutual conditioning of the 12 links. This is in fact exactly what it says:

> ''When this (i.e. ignorance, etc.) is, that (i.e. mental dispositions, etc.) is. Once this (again—ignorance, etc.) arises, that arises. When this is not, that is not. Once this ceases, that ceases.''

> *Imasmiṃ sati idaṃ hoti, imass' uppādā, idaṃ uppajjati.*
> *Imasmiṃ asati, idaṃ na hoti, imassa nirodhā idaṃ nirujjhati*

There is no reason to believe that dependent-origination originally discussed anything but mental conditioning. This is evident in the words of the Buddha in the classic exposition of the 12 links quoted above: ''And what, monks, is dependent-origination?'' (*katamo ca, bhikkhave, paṭiccasamuppādo?*) he asks. The answer is a teaching of the 12 links: ''Dependent on ignorance, monks…'' The 12 links *are paṭiccasamuppāda*. As I said earlier, there is one case in which the abstract formula appears without the 12 links, in the *Cūḷasakuludāyi-sutta* (MN ii32). But this occurrence is unable to alter our conclusions. The context in which the formula appears involves a discussion regarding recollection of past lives, an issue closely related to what the 12 links are about. The Buddha is again speaking about the process of karmic mental conditioning.

The same conclusions reached in regard to the abstract formula apply to the term *idappaccayatā* as well.[28]

An oft-quoted passage regarding dependent-origination, usually understood as an example of dependent arising referring to all phenomena, appears in the

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[28] The *Paccaya-sutta* of the NS (SN II. 25) shows that *idappaccayatā* relates to the 12 links. In the *Ariyapariyesanā-sutta* (MN i167), when the Buddha hesitates before teaching the dharma, he expresses his doubt that people will penetrate *idappaccayatā*, which he equates with *paṭiccasamuppāda*. In this case there is again no reason to believe the Buddha is speaking of anything but mental conditioning.

Paccaya-sutta (SN II.25). There the Buddha says "Monks, I will teach you dependent-origination and dependently-arisen phenomena" (*paṭicca-samuppādañca vo bhikkhave desessāmi paṭiccasamuppanne ca dhamme*). "Dependently-arisen phenomena (*paṭiccasamuppanne dhammā*)" are presumably any possible object. But in fact, rather than explaining how "phenomena" are "dependently-arisen", the *sutta* continues with the Buddha teaching the 12 links. He next gives an interesting description of each of the links as "impermanent, compounded, dependently-arisen, characterized by waning, by fading, by stopping, by destruction" (*aniccaṃ saṅkhātaṃ paṭiccasamuppannaṃ khayadhammaṃ vayadhammaṃ virāgadhammaṃ nirodhadhammaṃ*). The connection between being dependently-arisen (*paṭicccasamuppanna*) and being impermanent (*anicca*) and compounded (*saṅkhāta*) is again emphasized in SN III. 97–100 and SN IV.211–214. In the first case the context relates again to a number of the 12 links. The second case relates first to the body, and then to the sixth link (*phassa*).

These last cases point to the fact that when the Buddha refers to phenomena as dependently-arisen he is referring only to objects created by the process of conditioning encapsulated by the 12 links. Admittedly, in SN IV.211 he speaks of the body. But the body is no more than a product of attachment, a material expression of the process of conditioning whose major locus is experience. This is another case which points to the ontological implications of the 12 links, but which is still in accord with the hypothesis that dependent-origination deals only with mental conditioning and the phenomenal aspects affected by it.

Another discourse we should consider is the *Mahāhatthipadopama-sutta* (MN i184). In this sutta the Buddha defines the five aggregates as dependently-arisen. He does so after he has emphasized their composite and impermanent nature, including an explanation of the material aspect of the *rūpa* aggregate based on the four elements. In the process he goes so far as to say that this material aspect is external (*bāhirā*). He continues by saying that:

> Whoever sees dependent-origination sees the *dhamma*, and whoever sees the *dhamma* sees dependent-origination. Dependently arisen indeed are these five aggregates of clinging.[29] The desire toward, inclining toward, basing oneself on, and craving for these five aggregates of clinging, is the arising of suffering. The stopping and quitting of desire and passion toward these five aggregates is the cessation of suffering.
>
> *yo paṭiccasamuppādaṃ passati so dhammaṃ passati, yo dhammaṃ passati so paṭiccasamuppādaṃ passatīti. paṭiccasamuppannā kho pan' ime yadidaṃ pañc' upādānakkhandhā. Yo imesu pañcas' upāadānakkhandhesu chando ālayo anusayo ajjhosānaṃ so dukkhasamudayo, yo imesu pañcas'upādānakkhandhesu chandarāgavinayo chandarāgapahānaṃ so dukkhanirodho.*

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[29] The ontological implications discussed above suggest that the *upādāna-kkhandā* are not "the aggregates affected by clinging," but rather "the aggregates caused by clinging," or more simply "the aggregates of clinging."

The beginning of this paragraph is a classic quote on the importance of dependent-origination, here equated with the heart of the Buddha's teachings. But again, it expresses only the method by which saṃsāric experience is brought into existence. The object under discussion is the five aggregates, which are clearly conditioned by the 12 links. By saying that *bhava* is conditioned by *upādāna*, the 12 links state that rebirth is caused by the attachments of this life. The aggregates come into being in relation to clinging, and are therefore characterized as dependently-arisen.

The examples quoted—rare occurrences in which "phenomena" are said to be dependently-arisen—make clear that dependent-origination is not a teaching which characterizes all objects. The Buddha seems *not* to have said that all things arise dependent on their conditioning. In fact, he may have condemned such a statement an unhealthy speculative view. When the Buddha did describe something as dependently-arisen, he was referring only to phenomenal aspects of saṃsāric experience. Another point worth noting is that saying that something is *paṭiccasamuppanna* supplements the fact that it is impermanent and compounded. Phenomenal aspects such as the aggregates arise conditioned by grasping, and are therefore of impure and of a passing nature. Hence they will lead to pain and are not to be regarded as self.

A similar reading of the 12 links in the early suttas, anticipating the major thrust of the discussion conducted so far, has been presented by Collett Cox (1993). Cox traces the path by which Sarvāstivada Abhidharma philosophers came to understand dependent-origination as an abstract theory of causation. Well aware of the dangers of reading later doctrinal developments into earlier articulations of Buddhist insight, Cox defines the shifts in meaning the doctrine of causality underwent, from the early suttas through the earlier stages of Sarvāstivāda Abhidharma. In the early suttas, she claims, *paṭiccasamuppāda* does not function as an abstract theory of causation. Rather, it focuses on the way human suffering is produced and the manner by which it may be terminated. Later on Buddhist philosophers developed this early insight into a full-fledged model of causality. Cox does not specifically address the question I have been concerned with here—whether *pratītya-samutpāda* relates to all things, rather than dealing exclusively with mental phenomena. Nonetheless, the suggestions I have been making fit well with the manner in which she portrays the developments undergone by of the concept of dependent-origination: originally a purely psychological insight, eventually an abstract philosophical principle.

As I said earlier, the teaching of dependent-origination does have ontological implications. But although the view of reality it implies is stimulating, we should be careful not to over-emphasize the point. First, this compelling statement does not seem to be given much emphasis in the scriptures. Second, that the Buddha is talking about anything more than experience still needs to be shown. Most importantly, although this view is interesting philosophically, its true context is psychological. What I wish to stress for now is that if the Nikāya suttas refer at all to "things" being

dependent-arisings—and there is serious doubt that they do—they are not saying that things depend on other things, or even that everything is conditioned. They certainly are not saying that ''everything'' depends on everything else.[30] What they may be saying is that the things we encounter are brought into ontological existence because we grasp at them. Or rather, because we grasp at our selves.

The Middle Path

In order to further substantiate our understanding that dependent-origination deals only with subjective existence, it would be worthwhile to recall another important aspect of the teaching. Dependent-origination functions as the Buddhist definition of the Middle path. In order to tread the middle path, one must avoid the extremes of eternalism (*sassata*) and extinction (*uccheda*). The point of interest for our concerns is that both the extremes represent a mistaken conception of the self. In this respect, the 12 links express the early Buddhist vision of the center: no Self/self exists, and the idea that the self is completely void is also mistaken. By offering the notion of mental conditioning portrayed by the 12 links, the Buddhist tradition supplies a positive articulation of the functioning of experience devoid of an essential gravitational center. We see again that dependent-origination is concerned with the workings of subjectivity, not with existence in general.

There exist different definitions of the extreme positions of *sassata* and *uccheda*.[31] The *Brahmajāla-sutta* (DN i,13) defines *sassata* as a mistaken view that ''the self and the world are eternal,''[32] produced by an ability to recall past lives in meditation or by logical analysis. *Uccheda* consists of the belief that personal existence is completely annihilated at the end of life.[33] A more pragmatic definition of the extremes appears in the *Acelakassapa-sutta* (SN ii 20), which believes that the idea that the one who acts (*so karoti*) is the same as the one who experiences the result of the act (*so paṭisaṃvedayati*) is a case of eternalism. The idea that the two are completely distinct amounts to

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[30] This point has been emphasized by Schmithausen (1997, pp. 13–14, 2000, pp. 43–44). In Schmithausen (1997, p. 13) he explicitly states that he believes that the theory of inter-connectedness of all elements was a later development, connected mainly to Hua-yen Buddhism.

[31] An important case is the oft-quoted *Kaccānagotta-sutta* which names the extremes *atthita* and *natthita*, usually translated as 'existence' and 'non-existence'. It can be shown that these terms refer to *sassata* and *uccheda*, and should not be understood to imply abstract notions of existence and non-existence. The key to this reading is that the sutta defines the view *atta me* (''my self'') as the root of the erroneous extremes. Bhikku Bodhi (2000, p. 734, n. 29) too believes the *Kaccānagotta-sutta* to be discussing the extremes of *sassata* and *uccheda*.

[32] ''…*sassataṃ attānañca lokañca paññapenti*.'' *Loka* (''the world'') here should be understood as the world of experience. See Harvey (1995, p. 79), Hamilton (1996, pp. xxvi–xxviii).

[33] The discussion here of the *Brahmajāla-sutta* is only a very rough outline of its colorful expression. The sutta devotes four different views to *sassata*, followed by four more to *ekacca-sassta* (''partial-eternalism''). Many of the other views it presents deal with *sassata* implicitly. The sutta discusses *Uccheda* in views 51–57.

extinction. In a similar context, the *Timbaruka-sutta* (SN ii 23) defines *sassata* as the belief that feeling (*vedanā*) and feeler (*so vedayati*) are one. *Uccheda* means that feeler and feeling are distinct.[34]

These few examples should suffice in order to show that the conceptual definition of the middle path in the early teachings deals with the nature of the self. *Sassata* addresses a belief in the true existence of such a self as an essential entity continuous over time. *Uccheda* believes in the true existence of the self as well, but thinks it will be annihilated at the end of this life, or at the end of an act. It also tends toward a denial of moral responsibility. Although there is much more to gain from a more comprehensive analysis of the two extremes, their basic meanings are quite clear: they express a misunderstanding of the nature of the self. In many cases, the 12 links appear after the Buddha states that ''avoiding both extremes *the Tathāgata teaches* a doctrine abiding by the middle.''[35] This tells us that dependent-origination is intended to be a solution to the problem of the Self.

The point that the 12 links serve as a definition of the nature of experience devoid of a true self is widely accepted.[36] As an exposition of the middle it aims to explain experience without a self. It should be emphasized that this is all that dependent-origination was initially—an explanation of the way the mind conditions its own experience in saṃsāra. It wishes to explain the middle position between self and lack of self, that are both incoherent according to the Buddhist view. The extremes are not concerned with abstract notions of existence. What the middle path means in the context of early Buddhism, as it is articulated by the concept of *paṭiccasamuppāda*, is that there exists no true self, but that moral agency nonetheless produces real results.

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[34] Both these last two suttas conduct their discussion in relation to the question whether suffering is caused by self or by another. The first implies eternalism, the second extinction. The Buddha solves the apparent contradiction with the help of the 12 links. The *Timbaruka-sutta* does not say ''*sassata*'' and ''*uccheda*'' explicitly, but calls both the views it expresses ''extremes'' (*ante*). Its formulation of the extreme positions—as the sameness or difference of *vedanā* and *so vedayati*—is more complex than the other definitions referred to, which are clear in defining *sassata* and *uccheda* in relation to the temporal continuity of the subjective element. The *Timbaruka-sutta* continues the discussion conducted in the *Acelakassapa-sutta*, and I suggest reading its formulation in light of it. The point seems to be that understanding ''the feeler and the feeling'' as either same or different demands a substantial and essential subjective agent, a self. One should note the difference in the understanding of suffering as not arising from self or other between these two suttas and Nāgārjuna's *Mūlamadhyamaka-kārikā* 1.1 and 12.1.

[35] *Ubhe ante anupagamma majjhena tathāgato dhammaṃ deseti.*

[36] Collins (1982, ch. 2, especially pp. 103–110), Gethin (1998, pp. 140–146), Gombrich (1988, p. 63), Piyadassi Thera (1959, pp. 37–42), Rahula (1974 [1959], ch. 6), Ronkin (2005, pp. 194–198).

Dependent-Origination Contextualized

> "What do you think, Rahula, is the eye permanent or impermanent?"
>
> "Impermanent, sir."
>
> "And what is impermanent - is it joy or pain?"
>
> "Pain, sir."
>
> "And is what is impermanent, pain, and characterized by change worthy of being viewed as 'this is mine, this is what I am, this is my self."
>
> "Not at all, sir."[37]

This quote form the *Cūḷarahulovāda-sutta* of the MN is an example of the most common expression of the teaching of the *anatta* doctrine in the Nikāyas. As has been pointed out by a number of scholars, it makes little sense, if any at all, unless it is understood in light of the Upaniṣadic doctrine of the *ātman*.[38] There is clearly no logical necessity that whatever is impermanent must be pain, and that whatever is pain not be the self. The fact that the toothache I suffered from last week was impermanent is of much joy to me, and this doesn't at all convince me that it had nothing to do with my self. Quite the contrary, actually. But if the Self (capital S!) is defined as permanent bliss, then this most central teaching begins to make sense. If Self means only permanence and joy, then the factors of the personality cannot be regarded as the Self since they are associated with change and pain. Therefore the empirical self has no clear point of reference. This conclusion—that the teaching of non-selfhood makes sense only in relation to the Upaniṣadic concept of the *ātman*—is understood to apply also to another important exposition of the *anatta* doctrine in the Nikāyas, i.e., the argument about lack of control over the aggregates.[39]

When these observations regarding the *anatta* doctrine are joined to the conclusions reached in this study regarding *paṭiccasamuppāda*, a remarkably clear picture begins to emerge. The Buddha of the Nikāyas teaches a doctrine that is based on an analysis of the Self/self. He is seen to be an integral part of the spiritual community of his day, a community in search of the deathless essence of subjectivity. The Buddha was unique in this religious milieu in that his search for the Self discovered only mental conditioning. He reached the firm conviction that such a Self is an impossibility. This impossibility probably

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[37] *Taṃ kiṃ maññasi, Rāhula? Cakkhuṃ niccaṃ vā anniccaṃ vā ti? Aniccaṃ bhante. Yaṃ panāniccaṃ, dukkhaṃ vā taṃ sukhaṃ vā ti? Dukkhaṃ bhante. Yaṃ panāniccaṃ dukkhaṃ vipariṇāmadhammaṃ, kallan nu taṃ samanupassituṃ: etaṃ mama, eso 'ham asmi, eso me attā ti? No h' etaṃ bhante.*

[38] Gombrich (1996, pp. 14–17), Vetter (1988, pp. 38–41), Collins (1982, p. 97).

[39] See the references in the previous footnote. The argument about lack of control states that if the aggregates were the self one would have complete control of them. This argument often supplements the exposition of the *anatta* doctrine based on the "three marks" (impermanence, suffering, and not-self). Personally, I find this argument convincing even without reference to the Upaniṣadic *ātman*.

led him to the conclusion that more empirical forms of subjectivity are based in error as well.[40] With the discovery of mental conditioning the Buddha also realized that ascetic nihilistic tendencies taught by rival spiritual teachers of his day misunderstood the functioning of moral agency. Hence he "taught a teaching abiding by the middle," as systematized by the 12 links.

The Buddha appears as a seeker growing out of both the Brahmanic and the ascetic traditions of his day. The unique place the Buddha occupied in the changing tradition is reflected in the doctrine of *pratītya-samutpāda* as it has been defined above. The teaching deals with the nature of subjectivity, as an integral part of the search for the *ātman*. Denying such a subjective essence, the Buddhist teaching addresses embodied mental conditioning. Nonetheless, the Upaniṣadic intuitions regarding the relations between the *ātman* and the cosmos are maintained in the doctrine of dependent-origination. These are the ontological implications of *pratītya-samutpāda* that suggest that the objective aspects of experience result from subjective motion.

Recently Joanna Jurewicz (2000) has discussed the Vedic antecedents of the *pratītya-samutpāda* doctrine. Following the lead of Gombrich (1996), Jurewicz reads the Buddha's formulation of the doctrine as an adaptation of Vedic cosmological theories of creation, translating them into an analysis of "the process of human entanglement in empirical existence" (p. 79). She believes *pratītya-samutpāda* to be a polemic against Vedic thought, identifying the cosmic creative process as a personal creation of suffering. Jurewicz goes on to reveal the relations between the terms used by the Buddha in the 12 links and their Vedic origins.

The analysis of *pratītya-samutpāda* in this paper fits well with Jurewicz's reading of the doctrine, albeit with a different understanding of its ontological purport. Again the Buddha is seen as a thinker and teacher interested mainly in subjectivity. He was part of a tradition that attempted a new reading of the Vedas: translating the language of sacrifice into the language of meditation, and defining existence as a reflection of the Self.[41]

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[40] This point may be debated. Harvey (1995) has argued that the Nikāyas do not argue against the empirical self. Rather, the teachings should be understood as a magnification of this self to the point of realization. Although I do not wish to side with Harvey's view on this matter, it must be admitted that this question is more complex than the one relating to the essential Self, which the Buddha clearly argued against.

[41] A good example of this principle is *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* 1.4.17: "This is his completeness: the mind is his self, speech his wife, breath his offspring, the eye his human wealth—for he finds it by his eye, the ear his divineness—for he hears of it with his ear. His self is his sacrificial action, for he performs sacrificial action with his self. This is the fivefold sacrifice: the animal is fivefold, man is fivefold, all this, anything whatsoever is fivefold. Whoever knows this obtains all this world." …*tasyo kṛtsnatā/ mana evāsyātmā/ vāg jāyā/ prāṇaḥ prajā/ cakṣurmanuṣaṃ vittaṃ/ cakṣuṣā hi tad vindate/ śrotraṃ daivam/ śrotreṇa hi tac chṛṇoti/ ātmaivasya karma/ ātmanā hi karma karoti/ sa eṣa pāṅkto yajñaḥ/ pāṅktaḥ paśuḥ/ pāṅktaḥ puruṣaḥ/ pāṅktam idaṃ sarvaṃ yad idaṃ kiṃ ca/ tad idaṃ sarvaṃ āpnoti ya evaṃ veda//*

The emerging tradition believed the Self to be the deep root of existence, and taught that the one who understands its relation to existence gains all he desires.[42] The Buddha participated in the move from cosmological metaphysics to subjectivity, but differed from his fellow-seekers by regarding the Self as a painful fantasy. Knowledge of the Self, rather than being the pinnacle of human achievement, is a sure route to saṃsāric suffering. He believed that what the Brahmanic ṛṣis viewed as cosmic connections could be better expressed in a description of human psychology. The Buddha was both an integral part of, and a significant break from the Vedic-Upaniṣadic spiritual tradition.[43] We see in his formulation of *pratītya-samutpāda* an acceptance of the new inclination to define existence in terms of subjectivity, together with a denial of the truth of any subjective essence.

The Vedic meanings carried by the 12 links suggest, once again, that the ontological implications of the Buddha's theory of dependence described things as being dependent on subjectivity, not as dependent on other things. In this context, conditionality means being conditioned by consciousness, not by abstract notions of the relation between cause and effect. This statement can go so far as to say that the objective aspects of experience are constituted by consciousness, conditioned by, or existing in relation to subjectivity. This is a radical statement, but clearly different from the one which believes all "things" to be "causally conditioned." Note that this understanding of the significance of the Vedic meanings the 12 links are impregnated by diverges from Jurewicz's view that the Buddha denied any ontological import to *pratītya-samutpāda*.[44] Rather, as I suggested above, the early formulation of the 12 links possesses deep ontological implications. These implications are intimately related to—one could better say conditioned by—the Vedic cosmological background that underlies the Buddhist formulation of the 12 links, as revealed by Jurewicz, together with the Upaniṣadic notions regarding the relation between Self and cosmos.

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[42] See the quote in the preceding footnote, and specifically the statement at its end, a common expression of the *Upaniṣads*: "Whoever knows this obtains all this world" (*tad idaṃ sarvaṃ āpṇoti ya evaṃ veda*). See also, a little earlier in the text, *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* 1.4.17

[43] An Upaniṣadic teaching more in line with Brahmanic metaphysics and very similar to the Buddhist principle of mental conditioning is chap. 7 of the *Chāndogya Upaniṣad*. In this *Upaniṣad*, most significantly in 7.26, we find an expression of the process by which different mental qualities emerge from the *ātman*, in a manner highly reminiscent of the Buddhist notions of mental conditioning. This *Upaniṣad* attests to the fact that the relation between Buddhist and Brahmanic notions of causality are multi-dimensional. It also supports the claim that the Buddha was both an integral part of the spiritual community of his day and an innovative and revolutionary teacher. I thank Keren Arbel for bringing this *Upaniṣad* to my attention.

[44] See, for example, p. 100: "The negation of the ontological *nidāna* constitutes the Buddha's *mahānidāna*."

Note that Jurewicz's interpretation of *pratītya-samutpāda* probably tells us much about the Buddha, but less about his disciples.[45] The Vedic meanings of the terms the Buddha used to describe mental conditioning may have resonated deeply in the ears and hearts of his students. Two hundred years later (to pick an arbitrary figure), after Buddhism developed mainly within its own confines, probably much less was left of that resonance. For the generations of Buddhist that followed the Buddha, *avidyā, saṃskāra* and *upādāna* contained presumably mainly cognitive meanings, as they do today. We can assume that the subjective aspect of the teaching was strengthened the more it was practiced, as Buddhism was defining its self-identity by distancing itself from Brahmanic teachings.

Conclusions

In conclusion I would like to sketch the basic outline of the argument. Dependent-origination was initially the sets of causal links (most familiar to us as 12), nothing more. More precisely it was the notion of mental conditioning these links employ. Nowhere in the Pali suttas of the major four nikāyas is there found, to my knowledge, a passage that should cause us to think otherwise. The insight of dependent-origination expresses the Buddha's analysis of the dynamics of subjectivity, an endeavor arising from the search for Self-knowledge, the like of which we find in the *Upaniṣads*. Dependent-origination was concerned with subjectivity, but extended beyond the mental to intimations regarding the relation between consciousness and the world it encounters. The understanding of *pratītya-samutpāda* popular today as a general principle of causality relating to all things proves to be a result of later doctrinal developments. The formulation of dependent-origination allowed the Buddha both to participate in and to distinguish himself from the spiritual traditions of his day.

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[45] Jurewicz bases herself exclusively on the canonical formulation of the 12 links. Nakamura (1980) has discussed texts from the *Pārāyana-vagga* of the *Sutta-nipāta*, which he believes are possibly the oldest Buddhist materials at our disposal. He suggests that these teachings express earlier notions of dependent-originations than the ones captured by the 12 links. It is interesting to note that the terms appearing in Nakamura's discussion are of a definitive psychological nature, and can probably not be as easily integrated with Vedic notions of cosmology. Although this does not effect Jurewicz's analysis, it reinforces the view that the gravitational center of the Buddha's teaching was human psychology.

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