

Sariputta or Kaccāna?
A preliminary study of two early Buddhist
philosophies of mind and meditation

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In a recent edition of this journal (Vol. 11, November 2016), Anālayo has argued against the theory of two early Buddhist paths to liberation, and called on those who disagree to ‘engage seriously with the criticism that has been voiced, rather than ignoring it’ (Anālayo 2016: 41). Although we disagree with Anālayo’s critique of the ‘two path’ thesis, a response to it will have to wait for another occasion. In the present article, we will instead approach the subject of doctrinal difference in early Buddhism from a different, and potentially transformative, perspective. We will argue that the discrepancy between calm and insight is of secondary importance. What preceded this ‘schism’ in thought and practice is far more important: the gradual obscuration, by a non-Buddhist intrusion into the early Saṅgha, of an original philosophy of mind and meditation.

With regard to canonical discourses of early Buddhism, our position is thus that the situation is far more complicated than has hitherto been realised. There is certainly a real and important distinction between calm and insight; but we will argue that all calm-insight soteriologies are philosophically similar, since they are based on the same model of mind, derived from the early Upaniṣads, which was not found in the earliest phase of Buddhist activity. This leads us to conclude that the apparent ubiquity of calm and insight in early Buddhist discourses is an illusion; it is an *impression* created by a very small number of teachings repeated again and again in the canonical Suttas (both in Pali and in parallel collections).

 **JOCBS. 2018(14): 77–107. ©2018 Alexander Wynne**

Our starting point is the question, on what philosophy of mind is early Buddhist soteriology founded? The pragmatic purpose of early Buddhism is clear enough.¹ But early Buddhist teachings frequently stray into the areas of cognition, perception, language and thought, and of the connection between body and mind. It seems to us that not nearly enough attention, in the form of a close conceptual analysis, has been paid to these aspects of early Buddhism. The important questions have been left unsaid, the most challenging and obscure ideas put to one side, and far too much importance assigned to Theravāda exegesis. Here, we will instead place difficulty and peculiarity at the heart of our enquiry. Two concerns are crucial:

1. How is the term *viññāna* to be understood in the early Buddhist teachings? It is usually translated as ‘consciousness’, but we will see that this is only partly true.
2. What is the role of the body in early Buddhist soteriology? This problem is curious. For although mindfulness of the body occupies a central position in early Buddhist meditation, bodily awareness plays no higher role in canonical accounts of calm-insight meditation.

These questions come down to two classical issues in the philosophy of mind: what is the nature of ‘consciousness’, and what is the nature of the mind-body connection? We will claim that different evaluations of these problems are connected to the teachings of two important disciples of the Buddha. One philosophy is associated with the figure of Sāriputta, and thus to the calm-insight tradition; but we believe that this philosophy is a deviation from an earlier understanding of mind, one best articulated by Mahā-Kaccāna, which implies a mindfulness-based soteriology.

1. Embodiment and liberation

According to the theory of calm and insight, the mind must become still and concentrated in order to perceive truth. Liberation occurs more or less entirely in the mind, even if it may entail certain desirable bodily experiences (relaxation, bliss, etc.). This means that the cessation of suffering is a sort of ‘enlightenment’,

¹ See Gombrich (2009: 161ff) on the Buddha’s pragmatism; Bronkhorst (2009: ix) offers the superficial opinion that the Buddha ‘did not teach philosophy as such.’

and some texts even use ‘light imagery’ to describe the Buddha’s liberation; a good example is in the Vinaya *Mahāvagga*, where the Buddha explains his understanding of the Four Noble Truths as ‘a vision into previously unheard ideas: knowledge arose, insight arose, understanding arose, *light arose*.’² But this version of liberation is problematic, since it bypasses other texts which emphasise the bodily aspect of liberation. This can be seen in the conclusion of the *Brahmajāla Sutta*, where the Buddha makes the following claim about his body, almost as a coda to the discourse as a whole:

The body of the Tathāgatha remains, *bhikkhus*, but its connection with ‘being’ (*bhavanetti-*) has been severed. As long as his body remains, gods and men will see him; when the body breaks up, after life has been exhausted, gods and men will not see him.³

One would like to translate the word *bhava* as ‘becoming’, and understand this as an entirely normal statement of liberation: of course the Buddha no longer has a ‘connection with becoming’, for his awakening means he cannot be reborn again. But the subject of the statement is the Buddha’s body, and it makes no sense to talk about a *body* lacking a connection to rebirth. In fact, no matter how one translates the term *bhava*, the meaning is peculiar: a body, rather than the person as a whole, cannot be separated from being, becoming, existence or rebirth. Thus T. W. Rhys Davids’ translation makes no sense: ‘The outward form, brethren, of him who has won the truth, stands before you, but that which binds it to rebirth is cut in twain.’⁴ This translation does not work, for a body or ‘outward form’ cannot be bound to rebirth.

Buddhaghosa similarly interprets the statement in terms of the Buddha’s cultivation of the path: ‘one whose connection to being/becoming has been severed (means) his connection to being/becoming has been severed, by means of the sword of the path of arahantship.’⁵ He thus identifies ‘thirst for being/

² Vin I.11. *pubbe ananussutesu dhammesu cakkhuṃ udapādi nāṇaṃ udapādi paññā udapādi vijjā udapādi āloko udapādi*.

³ D I.46: *ucchinnabhavanettiko bhikkhave tathāgatassa kāyo tiṭṭhati. yāv’assa kāyo ṭhassati, tāva naṃ dakkhinti devamanussā. kāyassa bhedaṃ uddhaṃ jīvitapariyādānā na dakkhinti devamanussā*.

⁴ Rhys Davids (1923: 54).

⁵ Sv I.128: *sā arahattamagga-satthena ucchinnā bhavanetti assā ti ucchinnabhavanettiko*. Reading *arahattamagga* with Be instead of *arahattamagge* in Ee.

becoming' (*bhava-taṇhā*) as the 'rope' or 'connection' (*netti*) which binds.⁶ Hence Buddhaghosa understands the subject of the liberating disconnection as the Buddha himself, not his body, for a body cannot wield the 'sword of arahantship', and only a person as a whole, not the body, can be said to be the subject of thirst. Contrary to Buddhaghosa and Rhys Davids, however, we cannot escape the impression that the Buddha is talking about the somatic implications of his liberated condition. The simile with which the Buddha illustrates his statement seems to confirm this:

It is just like, *bhikkhus*, when a bunch of mangoes is cut off at the stalk: whatever mangoes are connected to the stalk, they all follow the (bunch as it falls).⁷

Just as the mangoes are connected to a mango tree by a stalk, which is severed, so too is the connection of the Buddha's body to 'being/becoming' severed. And just as mangoes remain in a condition disconnected from the mango tree, so too does the Buddha's body remain in a condition disconnected from the 'tree' of being/becoming. This means that the *embodied Buddha* is disconnected from 'being', or becoming, just like mangoes fallen from a tree. But if the body is an integral aspect of the liberated state, it implies that awareness is entangled in embodiment, irreducibly so. Strange as this might seem, exactly this point is made in another mysterious utterance of the Buddha (SN 2.26):

But I do not say, sir, that making an end of suffering occurs without reaching the end of the world. And yet, sir, I declare that the world, its arising, cessation and the way thereto occurs in this very fathom-long 'cadaver' (*kaḷevare*), endowed with perception and mind.⁸

Commenting on this passage, Hamilton (2000: 109) has noted that 'all of the factors of our experience, whatever they may be, are dependent for their existence *as that* on our cognitive apparatus.' This enigmatic statement does

⁶ Sv I.127-28: *idha pana nettisadisatāya bhavataṇhā nettī ti adhippetā.*

⁷ DN I.46: *seyyathāpi bhikkhave ambapiṇḍiyā vaṇṭacchinnāya, yāni kāni ci ambāni vaṇṭūpanibandhanāni, sabbāni tāni tadanvayāni bhavanti.*

⁸ SN I.62: *na kho paṇāhaṃ āvuso appatvā lokassa antakiriyam vadāmi. api khvāhaṃ āvuso imasmīṇi eva vyāmamatte kaḷevare sasaññimhi samanake lokam ca paññapemi lokasamudayam ca lokanirodham ca lokanirodhagāminim ca paṭipadan ti.* See also AN II.48, AN II.50.

not merely claim, therefore, that the ‘world’ depends on mind; the dependence is rather on a body and its sense faculties, which include mind. For the present purpose, we note that the peculiar idea of a ‘sentient corpse’ suggests that consciousness, sentience or awareness is inseparable from embodiment, and cannot be reduced to ‘mind’. A similar expression, but with a more regular term for ‘body’, distinguishes the ‘body endowed with sentience’ (*saviññāṇake kāye*) from external ‘objects’ (*bahiddhā ca sabbanimittesu*), both of which are loci for a person’s ‘underlying tendency towards conceit in the terms ‘I’ and ‘mine’, (respectively).⁹

Such texts suggest that body and mind are experientially inseparable. If so, liberation must also affect both body and mind, and meditation should transform both; this would also seem to be the message of the *Brahmajāla Sutta*. And perhaps this should make us wonder: might this understanding of mind and body have anything to do with the early Buddhist practice of bodily mindfulness? Just as important, might there be an early Buddhist philosophy of mind in which awareness is said to be deeply rooted in the body, so that it could even be thought to emerge from it? Although never explained in quite this fashion, a philosophy along these lines is provided by one of the Buddha’s chief disciples, Mahā-Kaccāna, building on foundational Buddhist ideas about cognition.

2. Kaccāna’s philosophy of mind

Our focus on little studied statements about embodiment and experience allows us to read better known Buddhist teachings afresh. Thus we reconsider the early Buddhist account of cognition, as expounded by Mahā-Kaccāna in the *Madhupiṇḍika Sutta* (MPS). Kaccāna’s teaching, an elaboration of a brief teaching of the Buddha, is unparalleled in the Pali Suttas. But his ideas are consistent with standard early Buddhist teachings on mind, cognition and language. The starting point of the narrative is a question put to the Buddha by Daṇḍapāṇi, the Sakyan: ‘What is the ascetic’s teaching, what does he say?’ (*kiṃvādī samaṇo kimakkhāyī ti?*). The Buddha replies as follows:

Teaching in such a way, sir, one abides without quarrel in the world with its gods, Māras and Brahmas, and among people, including its ascetics, brahmins, gods and men, and in such a way that

⁹ See e.g. MN III.18 (*ahaṃkāra-mamaṃkāra-mānānusayā*) and MN III.18-19, MN III.32, 36; SN II.252-53, III.80-81, III.103, III.136-37, III.169-70; AN I.132-34, AN IV.53.

conceptualisations do not lie dormant in that Brahmin who abides disassociated from sensual pleasures, who is free from doubt, his perplexity cut away, devoid of thirst for being and non-being: I teach thus, sir, I speak thus.¹⁰

Kaccāna interprets this enigmatic teaching as follows:

I understand, sir, the meaning of the instruction given by the Blessed One, in brief and without a detailed analysis, in detail as follows. Dependent on the eye and forms arises eye-sentience (*cakkhuvīññānaṃ*), the coming together of all three is contact, from contact there is sensation, what one senses (*vedeti*) one apperceives (*sañjānāti*), what one apperceives one thinks over (*vitakketi*), what one thinks over one conceptually proliferates (*papañceti*), because of which conceptual proliferation, apperception and reckoning (*papañca-saññā-saṅkhā*)¹¹ afflict a person, with regard to (all) forms, of the past, future and present, which can be sensed by the eye.¹²

Although this scheme is unusually subtle and clear, it stands on its own in the Pali discourses. Other Suttanta schemes, based on the same presuppositions, focus on affective rather than cognitive malfunctioning, such as the oft-repeated formula of dependent origination:

And what, *bhikkhus*, is the cessation of suffering? Dependent on the eye and forms arises eye-sentience, the coming together of all three is contact, from contact there is sensation, from sensation thirst. But with the complete cessation and fading away of that thirst,

¹⁰ M I.108: *yathāvādī kho āvuso sadevake loke samārake sabrahmake sassamaṇabrāhmaṇiyā pajāya sadevamanussāya na kenaci loke viggayha tiṭṭhati, yathā ca pana kāmehi viṣaṃyuttaṃ viharantaṃ taṃ brāhmaṇaṃ akathaṃkathiṃ chinnakukkucaṃ bhavābhava vītataṇhaṃ saññā nānuseti, evaṃvādī kho ahaṃ āvuso evamakkhāyī ti.*

¹¹ Ñāṇānanda (1971: 5) interprets *papañca-saññā-saṅkhā* as ‘concepts, reckonings, designations or linguistic conventions characterised by the prolific conceptualising tendency of the mind.’

¹² M I.111-12: *imassa kho ahaṃ āvuso bhagavatā saṅkhittena uddesassa uddiṭṭhassa vitthārena atthaṃ avibhattassa evaṃ vitthārena atthaṃ ājānāmi: cakkhuñ c’ āvuso paṭicca rūpe ca uppajjati cakkhuvīññānaṃ, tiṇṇaṃ saṅgati phasso, phassapaccayā vedanā, yaṃ vedeti taṃ sañjānāti, yaṃ sañjānāti taṃ vitakketi, yaṃ vitakketi taṃ papañceti, yaṃ papañceti tatonidānaṃ purisaṃ papañcasaññāsaṅkhā samudācaranti atītānāgatapaccuppannesu cakkhuvīññeyyesu rūpesu.*

there is the cessation of grasping, from the cessation of grasping
 there is the cessation of becoming, from the cessation of becoming
 there is the cessation of birth, from the cessation of birth old-age,
 death, sorrow, lamentation, pain, depression and tribulation cease.
 Thus is the cessation of this entire mass of suffering. (SN 12.43)¹³

This formula identifies the affective roots of suffering and so offers a solution in line with the Second Noble Truth. Kaccāna's scheme instead focuses on the subtler cognitive aspects of *dukkha*. Importantly, his scheme avoids positing an essential subject of cognition. A person's awareness of objects arises through no volition: one does not attend to or think about objects until the higher, conceptual, phases of consciousness. Hence 'mind' is merely a faculty through which 'mind objects' (*dhamme*) are sensed, rather than a term for an organ or subject of cognition; *manas* in no way resembles what in modern philosophy is termed 'mind'.

The meaning of the term *viññāṇa* is complicated and difficult. It cannot be simply equated with the term 'consciousness', a word which generally indicates being awake and aware as opposed to being asleep, whereas Kaccāna's cognitive process *could* occur to someone who is asleep and experiencing 'mind objects'. Moreover, *viññāṇa* does not refer to active cognition, as the term 'consciousness' does, for the six types of *viññāṇa* (five senses plus 'mind') occur before 'contact' (*phassa*), the starting point of cognition proper. 'Contact' is the point from which different qualities of experience can be felt as 'sensation' (pleasure, pain or neither), and then known and responded to. This means that *viññāṇa* is not a state of awareness which exists prior to its association with an object, and then averts to it. There is no 'simple' or 'essential' *viññāṇa*, in other words, but only particular, irreducible, types of *viññāṇa* which depend on a particular correspondence between object and sense-faculty.

If *viññāṇa* occurs prior to contact, and hence before 'conscious' experience, it must refer to a basic capacity for sentience with which the human 'cadaver' as a whole is endowed; this sentience is distributed through the human body,

¹³ SN II.72: *katamo ca bhikkhave dukkhassa atthaṅgamo? cakkhuñ ca paṭicca rūpe ca uppajjati cakkhuvīññāṇaṃ, tiṇṇaṃ saṅgati phasso, phassapaccayā vedanā, vedanāpaccayā tanhā. tassā yeva tanhāya asesavirāganirodhā upādānanirodho, upādānanirodhā bhavanirodho, bhavanirodhā jātinirodho, jātinirodhā jarāmaraṇaṃ sokaparidevadukkhadomanassupāyā sā nirujjhanti. evaṃ etassa kevalassa dukkhakkhandhassa nirodho hoti. ayaṃ kho bhikkhave dukkhassa atthaṅgamo.*

encompassing the sense faculties and ‘mind’, and only occurs in particular forms, there being no ‘pure’ *viññāṇa*. In relation to this, Davis and Thompson (2014: 589) have usefully referred to the neuroscientific work of Parvizi and Damasio (2001), who have hypothesized ‘a basal, core-level consciousness ... dependent on subcortical structures such as the thalamus and brain-stem, and which occurs independently of the direction of this consciousness to particular objects through selective attention.’¹⁴ The early Buddhist definition of *viññāṇa* seems to be something like this.

In consideration of all this, a useful translation of *viññāṇa* would be something like ‘pre-noetic transitive sentience’.¹⁵ What *we* call ‘consciousness’ in modern parlance is, for Kaccāna, a complex of cognitive events, faculties and abilities which occur from ‘contact’ onwards, all of which arise from the basic forms of pre-noetic transitive consciousness. This means that for Kaccāna, the feeling or sense of being a subject of cognition is an *emergent* state of consciousness defined by the ability to apperceive, verbalise, ideate and intend, and is quite different from *viññāṇa*. Importantly, this understanding of *viññāṇa* goes some way towards explaining the idea of a ‘body endowed with sentience’, and perhaps also provides a conceptual basis for the Buddha’s claim that his ‘body’ has lost its connection to ‘being’. Sentience, cognition and consciousness are all embodied, deeply so.

3. Bare cognition?

Kaccāna has nothing to say about meditation in the MPS. But his analysis has meditative implications, for he identifies the higher ‘waves’ of cognitive

¹⁴ Davis and Thompson’s attempt to formulate a philosophy of mind based on the five aggregates is useful, but the skeleton nature of the list of five aggregates means that the gaps must be filled in from elsewhere. From a text-critical perspective, it is incorrect to utilise the *Mahāhatthipadopama Sutta* (MN 28) to this end; we will show below that its philosophy of mind is different from Kaccāna’s, and hence from that implied by the five aggregates. Davis and Thompson (2014: 589) thus refer to *manasikāra* as ‘a kind of universal attention necessary for any moment of consciousness.’ This is incorrect: *manasikāra* is usually said to be employed correctly or incorrectly (*yoniso/ayoniso*), e.g. in the *Sabbāsava Sutta* (MN 2), the implication being that it refers to what Thompson and Davis term ‘selective attention’, i.e. the volitional application of attention to objects.

¹⁵ For a similar definition of *viññāṇa* as ‘not full cognition, but bare sensation, a sort of anoeitic sentience’ see E. R. Sarathchandra, *Buddhist Psychology of Perception* (Colombo: The Ceylon University Press, 1958: 4), as cited in Jayatilleke (1963: 434).

functioning as that which must be resolved if suffering is to cease; the Buddha's brief teaching also mentions 'conceptual proliferation, apperception and reckoning' as the problems which beset a person. But how can conceptualization be resolved? After his encounter with the Sakyan Daṇḍapāṇi, the Buddha returns to the banyan park in the evening, and in addressing the *bhikkhus* of Kapilavatthu makes a further point relevant to our enquiry:

The source from which conceptual proliferation, apperception and reckoning afflict a person, if it is not delighted in, approved of or clung to, is precisely the end of the latent tendencies towards passion (and: repulsion, view, doubt, conceit, passion for being, ignorance etc.); it is here that these evil, unskilful states cease without remainder.¹⁶

The Buddha here presents the way to liberation as a matter of attending to the source of cognition in a particular manner. This suggests, in Buddhist terms, adopting an attitude of equanimity towards the different elements of simple experience. The 'source' (*nidānaṃ*) of conceptual proliferation and so on is not defined, but in early Buddhist terms must be equivalent with 'sensation', 'contact' or perhaps even 'pre-noetic sentience' (*viññāṇa*). Spiritual practices are not stated, but the teaching at least suggests that in the final analysis a radically simplified awareness is required. Might this imply the practice of mindfulness as 'bare cognition'?

Whether or not mindfulness is a kind of 'bare cognition' or 'bare attention' has attracted some recent scholarly attention. Sharf (2015), Dreyfus (2013), Anālayo (2017: 25-26) and Bodhi (2013) have all argued against the idea that mindfulness, in the canonical teachings, is a sort of 'present-centered awareness in which each thought, feeling or sensation that arises in the attentional field is acknowledged and accepted as it is.'¹⁷ For Bhikkhu Bodhi, the message of the *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta* is that 'the meditator not only observes phenomena but interprets the presentational field in a way that sets arisen phenomena in a meaningful context' (2011: 22). Bodhi also claims that the eightfold path teaches

¹⁶ MN I.111: *yatonidānaṃ bhikkhu purisaṃ papañcasaññāsāṅkhā samudācaranti, ettha ce n' atthi abhinanditabbaṃ abhivaditabbaṃ ajjhositabbaṃ, es' ev' anto rāgānusayānaṃ [...] etth' ete pāpakā akusalā dhammā aparisesā nirujjhantī ti.*

¹⁷ Bishop et al. (20004: 232), 'Mindfulness: A Proposed Definition', *Clinical Psychology, Science and Practice* 11: 230-41, as cited in Dreyfus (2013: 43).

a meditator to ‘evaluate mental qualities and intended deeds, make judgments about them, and engage in purposeful action’ (Bodhi 2011: 26). The gist of these recent studies is that mindfulness is *not* a ‘non-judgmental, non-discursive attending to the here-and-now’ (Sharf 2015: 472) that could be termed ‘bare cognition’. According to Schulman (2010: 419),

The awareness that *sati-paṭṭhāna* attempts to develop is not neutral, certainly not “naked,” but rather one that has been thoroughly habituated according to Buddhist intuitions of truth.

These critiques present us with a considerable problem. In the MPS conceptualization is a major aspect of suffering that must be transcended, perhaps by attending to simple experience. But according to recent studies, conceptualization, discrimination and judgement are intrinsic aspects of mindfulness practice; specifically Buddhist notions, of a metaphysical or ethical character (impermanence, compassion, etc.), must not be forgotten on the path. Mindfulness would thus seem to require the inculcation of certain ideas; one must substitute one type of thought for another. But if so, how can a person be freed from the conceptualizations which the MPS says ‘assail’ him? Have we misunderstood Kaccāna and the Buddha?

It is more likely that Sharf et al. have *misunderstood* mindfulness by focusing almost entirely on the *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta*. We believe that this text, despite the overwhelming amount of attention it continues to attract, is still poorly understood, and in great need of a close conceptual and historical analysis. This is not our purpose, however. Here, we would rather focus on a lacuna in the works of Sharf et al., by drawing attention to other early Buddhist teachings and perspectives on mindfulness, in particular, those of a non-discursive nature. Bhikkhu Bodhi is partly right when he notes that

[i]n certain types of mindfulness practice, conceptualization and discursive thought may be suspended in favour of non-conceptual observation, but there is little evidence in the Pāli Canon and its commentaries that mindfulness *by its very nature* is devoid of conceptualization.’ (2011: 28).

The first part of this statement is correct, but the second part is misconceived: while non-conceptuality is an obvious aspect of early Buddhist teaching, these teachings do not present mindfulness as a *thing* or *mental quality* which

has a particular *nature*, and which a person *has* or *uses*. This essentialised understanding of mindfulness is distinctly Abhidhammic, but quite alien to the early teachings, which focus on the *bhikkhu* who abides or practices *mindfully*, and who could therefore be said to be *mindful*. In other words adjectives (*sato*, *satimā*, *sampajāno* etc.), rather than nouns, dominate the canonical accounts of mindfulness. The vital question is not what mindfulness essentially *is*, or whether 'mindfulness' consists of a broad range of practices, but what the mindful meditator *does* and *how* he is liberated, that is to say, *how* his path culminates in Nirvana. Considered from this perspective, some vitally important early teachings relate mindfulness practice to non-conceptual states of meditation; that is to say, the practice of mindfulness as bare cognition occupies the decisive stages of the path, rather than calm-insight practices.

The eightfold path is a simple but useful guide. Although 'right mindfulness' (*sammā-sati*) is grounded in understanding, morality, and ethical introspection (i.e. the path from 'right view' to 'right effort'), it also precedes the *jhānas*, states in which conceptual thought is abandoned and which culminate in 'the complete purification of equanimity and mindfulness' (*upekkhāsati-pārisuddhiṃ*). The classical account of the four *jhānas* is, of course, found in the *Sāmaññaphala Sutta*, a text which certainly grounds the path in Buddhist ideas, values and judgements. But at its higher levels it mentions only two practices prior to the *jhānas*: 'guarding the senses' (*indriya-samvara*) and maintaining 'mindfulness and clear awareness' during mundane daily activities (*sati-sampajañña*). The latter is described as follows:

The *bhikkhu* is **fully attentive** when going forward or back, when looking forward or backwards, when bending or stretching, when holding his outer robe, bowl and robe, when eating, drinking, chewing or tasting, when defecating or urinating, when going, standing, sitting, sleeping, waking, speaking or being quiet.¹⁸

This seems to be a close fit to Sharf's definition of 'bare attention' as 'a sort of non-judgmental, non-discursive attending to the here-and-now'. Moreover, the practice is positioned at an advanced point of the path, after moral judgements

¹⁸ DN I.70: *bhikkhu abhikkante paṭikkante sampajānakārī hoti, ālokite vilokite sampajānakārī hoti, sammāñjite pasārīte sampajānakārī hoti, saṃghāṭipattacīvaradhāraṇe sampajānakārī hoti, asite pīte khāyite sāyite sampajānakārī hoti, uccārapassāvakamme sampajānakārī hoti, gate thite nisinne sutte jāgarite bhāsīte tuṅhībhāve sampajānakārī hoti.*

have been cultivated and internalised; being habitual, one could say that ethical and even metaphysical ideas need no longer occupy the thoughts of the *bhikkhu*. Other teachings describe the culmination of the path as a state of bare cognition, for example the *Paramatṭhaka Sutta* (*Sutta-nipāta* IV: *Aṭṭhakavagga*, 5):

For whom, right here, there is no inclination towards either ‘extreme’ - for being or non-being, in this world or yonder - for him, after contemplating grasping at doctrines, there are no attachments.

He does not construct even the subtlest apperception with regard to what is seen, heard or thought; how would one conceptualise that Brahmin in this world, who does not appropriate a view?

They do not fabricate, they do not prefer, they do not accept any doctrines. The Brahmin cannot be inferred through virtue or vows, such a person has gone to the far shore and does not fall back (on anything).¹⁹

In the *Aṭṭhakavagga* the motif of ‘what is seen, heard or thought’ stands for cognition in its simplest form. The idea of not constructing an ‘apperception’ (or conceptualisation, *saññā*), with regard to ‘what is seen etc.’ thus indicates attending to the bare ‘stuff’ of experience. Although commonly ignored in the study of early Buddhism, this source is of tremendous significance: we believe that the *Aṭṭhaka-* and *Pārāyana-vaggas* (Sn IV-V) are *the key to understanding early Buddhism*.

This simple and brief survey shows that ‘bare cognition’, as a sort of passive awareness, is an important aspect of early Buddhist teachings. The recent failure to register the understanding of mindfulness as ‘bare cognition’ is based primarily on a misuse of sources, but is also due to a confusion of spiritual means and ends, and to assigning far too much explanatory

¹⁹ Sn 801-03. *yassūbhayante pañidhīdha n’atthi, bhavābhavāya idha vā huraṃ vā / nivesanā tassa na santi keci, dhammesu niccheyya samuggahītaṃ // 801 // tassīdha diṭṭhe va sute mute vā, pakappitā n’atthi añū pi saññā / taṃ brāhmaṇaṃ diṭṭhim anādiyānaṃ, kenīdha lokasmiṃ vikappayeyya // 802 // na kappayanti na purekkharonti, dhammā pi tesam na paṭicchitāse / na brāhmaṇo silavatena neyyo, pārāṃgato na pacceti tādī ti // 803 //*

Reading *samuggahītaṃ* in 801 with Be, rather than *samuggahītā* in Ee; compare Sn 785, 837, and 907.

significance to Theravāda exegesis. The latter is especially misconceived, for an abundance of recent research has painted a very different view of early Buddhist speculation.²⁰ While the seeds of the Theravāda position are certainly contained in the Pali discourses, in the next sections (4 & 5) we will see that these 'seeds' are a minor, and relatively late, formulation within early Buddhism; even in this preliminary study, we have identified a very different understanding of *viññāṇa*, and of the mind-body connection, than is normally read into early Buddhism. So we believe that bare cognition makes sense given Kaccāna's analysis of consciousness, and of the Buddha's implied spiritual method in the MPS. But can this understanding - of sentience, consciousness, the body and mindfulness - be equated with, or even fitted into, a calm-insight soteriology? This does not seem possible.

4. Sāriputta and the calm-insight tradition

The calm-insight ideal, as formulated in the Pali discourses, has no place for bare cognition at the higher reaches of the path, and does not attribute any essential importance to the cultivation of mindfulness, in the sense of bare cognition, i.e. as a passive awareness of sensory stimuli. This can be seen in the *Sāmaññaphala Sutta* (DN 2), the conceptual core of the early calm-insight tradition. It describes the state which occurs after the fourth stage of meditation (*catuttham jhānam*), and which directly precedes insight, as follows:

When his mind (*citte*) is thus concentrated, purified (*parisuddhe*), cleansed (*pariyodāte*), without blemish, devoid of defilement, supple, workable, still, and in a state of imperturbability, the (*bhikkhu*) directs and turns (it) towards the knowledge of the destruction of the corruptions.²¹

So the 'mind' (*cittam*), a state of lucidly pure consciousness, can apparently be *turned* towards specific objects to be fully known, at a higher level than ordinary. The *Sāmaññaphala Sutta* also identifies this 'mind' as the subject of the liberating experience:

²⁰ Especially Hamilton (1996, 2000), Gombrich (1996, 2009), Wynne (2007, 2015) and Polak (2011).

²¹ DN I.83: *so evaṃ samāhite citte parisuddhe pariyodāte anaṅgaṇe vigatūpakkilese mudubhūte kammaniye thite ānejjappatte, āsavānaṃ khayaññāyā cittam abhinīharati abhininnāmeti.*

When the (*bhikkhu*) knows and sees thus, his mind is freed from the corruptions of sensual pleasure, becoming, and ignorance. When (it) is released, there is the knowledge ‘(it is) released’,²² and he understands: ‘birth is exhausted, the holy life has been lived, done is what had to be done, nothing more is required for the state thus.’²³

The ‘purification’ and ‘turning’ of the mind towards a pre-ordained end is a basic presupposition of both insight and calm approaches to liberation. The only difference between calm and insight lies in what is to be done to the mind once it has been sufficiently prepared: whether to apply it to pure ideas, or whether to purify it into complete inactivity, to the point of attaining the ‘cessation of sensation and perception’ (*saññāvedayita-nirodha*), also called the ‘deathless element’ (*amatā dhātu*).²⁴ In some insight texts, meditation is not even mentioned. This ‘dry insight’²⁵ approach can be seen in the account of Sāriputta’s liberation in the *Dīghanakha Sutta* (MN 74):

At that time venerable Sāriputta was stood right behind the Blessed One, fanning him. He then had this thought: ‘The Blessed One, apparently, advises the abandoning of all of these phenomena through understanding, the Blessed One, apparently, advises the relinquishing of all of these phenomena through understanding’. While he was reflecting (*paṭisañcikkhato*) thus, the mind (*cittaṃ*) of venerable Sāriputta was released from the corruptions without grasping.²⁶

²² On the expression *vimuttasmim vimuttam* see Schmithausen (1981: 205 n.20).

²³ DN I.84: *tassa evaṃ jānato evaṃ passato, kāmasavā pi cittaṃ vimuccati, bhavāsavā pi cittaṃ vimuccati, avijjāsavā pi cittaṃ vimuccati, vimuttasmim vimuttam iti ñāṇaṃ hoti, khīṇā jāti vusitaṃ brahmacariyaṃ kataṃ karaṇīyaṃ nāparaṃ itthattāyā ti pajānāti.*

²⁴ On the identification of cessation and the ‘deathless element’, see Wynne (2007: 119).

²⁵ See Gombrich (1996: 125) on the expression *sukkha-vipassaka*, ‘dry intuiters’, which is found in the commentaries, not the canon.

²⁶ MN I.500-01: *tena kho pana samayena āyasmā sāriputto bhagavato piṭṭhito ṭhito hoti, bhagavantaṃ vījamāno. atha kho āyasmato sāriputtassa etad ahoṣi: tesam tesam kira no bhagavā dhammānaṃ abhiññā pahānaṃ āha, tesam tesam kira no sugato dhammānaṃ abhiññā paṭinissaggam āhā ti. iti h’ idam āyasmato sāriputtassa paṭisañcikkhato anupādāya āsavehi cittaṃ vimucci.*

The ‘phenomena’ contemplated by Sāriputta are mentioned immediately prior to this: a person’s experience of the three types of feeling (pleasant, painful and neither).

Sāriputta is, of course, the exemplar of the Abhidhamma tradition and hence the insight approach. But early Buddhist composers, at least in the Pali tradition, made exaggerated insight claims on his behalf. In the Vinaya account of Buddhist beginnings, venerable Assaji, one of the first five disciples, explains the essence of the Buddha's teaching to Sāriputta as follows:

And then venerable Assaji uttered this Dhamma teaching to Sāriputta, the wanderer: 'Those phenomena which originate from a cause, the Tathāgata teaches their cause, and their cessation; the great ascetic teaches thus.' And then, having heard this Dhamma teaching, the spotless, untainted insight into Dhamma (*dhamma-cakkhu*) arose in Sāriputta, the wanderer: 'whatever has the nature of arising, all that has the nature of cessation.'²⁷

In this Vinaya narrative, the attainment of 'insight into Dhamma' is usually preliminary; when it occurs for venerable Koṇḍañña and the four other first disciples, it is followed up by insight proper, after they have heard further not-self teachings (Vin I.11-14). But things are different with Sāriputta. When he meets Moggallāna shortly after his encounter with Assaji, he claims to be liberated:

'Your faculties are tranquil, sir, the colour of your skin is pure and clear. Perhaps you have attained the immortal?'

'Yes, sir, I have attained the immortal (*amataṃ adhigato*).'²⁸

This is exactly the same language used by the Buddha when he tries to convince the five *bhikkhus* of his own awakening:

The Tathāgata is an arahant, *bhikkhus*, (and) fully awakened: focus your hearing, *bhikkhus*, the immortal has been attained (*amataṃ adhigataṃ*), I will instruct (you), I will teach the Dhamma.²⁹

²⁷ Vin I.40: *atha kho āyasmā assaji sārīputtassa paribbājakassa imaṃ dhammapariyāyaṃ abhāsi: ye dhammā hetuppabhavā, tesaṃ hetuṃ tathāgato āha, tesaṃ ca yo nirodho, evaṃvādī mahāsamaṇo ti. atha kho sārīputtassa paribbājakassa imaṃ dhammapariyāyaṃ sutvā virajaṃ vītamalaṃ dhammacakkhuṃ udapādi: yaṃ kiñci samudayadhammaṃ, sabbaṃ taṃ nirodhadhammaṃ ti.*

²⁸ Vin I.41: *vippasannāni kho te āvuso indriyāni parisuddho chavivaṇṇo pariyodāto. kacci nu tvaṃ āvuso amataṃ adhigato ti. ām' āvuso amataṃ adhigato ti.*

²⁹ Vin I.9: *arahaṃ bhikkhave tathāgato sammāsambuddho, odahatha bhikkhave sotaṃ,*

This Vinaya account, and the *Dīghanakha Sutta*, lie towards one end of a soteriological spectrum, ranging from pure insight at one end to pure meditation at the other, with the *Sāmaññaphala Sutta* providing the conceptual centre of gravity, with its balance of calm and insight, in the middle. Towards the meditative end of the spectrum, a rather different account of Sāriputta's liberation is found in the *Anupada Sutta* (MN 111).³⁰ This text first states that Sāriputta spent 'half a month gaining insight into phenomena, in stages' (MN III.25: *sāriputto bhikkhave aḍḍhamāsaṃ anupadadhammavipassanaṃ vipassati*), before going through all the meditative states from the first *jhāna* to the 'sphere of nothingness'. Within each of these states, Sāriputta practices insight meditation as follows:

Here, *bhikkhus*, Sāriputta, separated from sensual desire and unskilful states, passed his time having attained the first *jhāna*, a state of joy and bliss born from seclusion, possessing reasoning and reflection. The phenomena which (occur) in the first *jhāna* - reasoning, reflection, joy, bliss, oneness of mind, contact, sensation, apperception, volition, consciousness, will, determination, energy, mindfulness, equanimity and attention - these phenomena were noted, in stages.

These phenomena were known as they arose, as they endured, and then as they faded away. He understood thus: 'Thus, apparently, these phenomena, having not been, come into being, having come into being, they disappear'. Neither attracted nor averse to these phenomena, independent, unbound, detached and released (from them), he abided with an unrestricted mind, and understood: 'There is a higher release'. Through focusing on this (idea), he became (certain) 'there is (a higher release)'.³¹

amatam adhigataṃ ahaṃ anusāsāmi ahaṃ dhammaṃ desemi.

³⁰ On this text, see Schmithausen (1981: 231-32).

³¹ MN III.25: *idha bhikkhave sāriputto vivicca'eva kāmehi vivicca akusalehi dhammehi savitakkaṃ savicāraṃ vivekaṃ pītisukhaṃ paṭhamajjhānaṃ upasampajja viharati. ye ca paṭhamajjhāne dhammā, vitakko ca vicāro ca pīti ca sukhañ ca cittekaggatā ca phasso vedanā saññā cetanā cittaṃ chando adhimokkho viriyaṃ sati upekhā manasikāro, tyāssa dhammā anupada-vavatthitā honti, tyāssa dhammā viditā uppajjanti, viditā upaṭṭhahanti, viditā abbatthaṃ gacchanti. so evaṃ pajānāti: evaṃ kira 'me dhammā ahutvā sambhonti, hutvā paṭiventī ti. so tesu dhammesu anupāyo anapāyo anissito apaṭibaddho vippamutto viṣaṃyutto vimariyādikatena*

It is hard to escape the feeling that this is a relatively late account, which applies Sāriputta's insight into 'rise and fall', as stated in the Vinaya, to a new, meditative, understanding. Sāriputta's insights are said to occur in all meditative states up to and including 'nothingness'. But since no phenomena occur in the 'sphere of neither perception nor non-perception', and since thought is thus rendered impossible within it, Sāriputta's contemplation occurs after emerging from it:

Having emerged, mindful, from that attainment (of 'neither perception nor non-perception'), he saw into those phenomena which had passed away, ceased, altered (as follows): 'Thus, apparently, these phenomena, having not been, they come into being, having come into being, they disappear'.³²

The text then returns to the same formula of Sāriputta realising there is a higher release, before moving on to the final attainment of the 'cessation of perception and sensation'. Sāriputta is liberated:

Having transcended the 'sphere of neither perception nor non-perception', Sāriputta abided having attained the cessation of perception and sensation. And having seen with insight, his corruptions were destroyed (*paññāya c' assa disvā āsavā parikkhīṇā honti*). He emerged mindful from that state, and saw into those phenomena which had passed away, ceased, altered, (as follows): 'Thus, apparently, these phenomena, having not been, they come into being, having come into being, they disappear'. Neither attracted nor averse to these phenomena, independent, unbound, detached and released (from them), he abided with an unrestricted mind, and understood: 'There is no higher release' (*so n' atthi uttari nissaraṇan ti pajānāti*). Through focusing on this (idea), he became certain 'there is no (higher release)'.³³

cetasā viharati. so atthi uttari nissaraṇan ti pajānāti. tabbahulīkāra atthi t' ev' assa hoti.

³² MN III.28: *so tāya samāpattiyā sato vuṭṭhahitvā, ye dhammā atītā niruddhā vipariṇatā te dhamme samanupassati: evaṃ kira 'me dhammā ahutvā sambhonti, hutvā pativedentī ti.*

³³ MN III.29: *sāriputto sabbaso nevasaññānāsaññāyatanam samatikkamma saññāvedayitanirodham upasampajja viharati. paññāya c' assa disvā āsavā parikkhīṇā honti. so tāya samāpattiyā sato vuṭṭhahati, so tāya samāpattiyā sato vuṭṭhahitvā ye dhammā atītā niruddhā vipariṇatā te dhamme samanupassati: evaṃ kira 'me dhammā ahutvā sambhonti, hutvā pativedentī ti.*

Although Sāriputta must emerge from cessation in order to contemplate phenomena, and gain insight, a vague, unspecified, form of insight said to occur in cessation itself: ‘having seen with insight...’. This text thus points out that insight meditation is impossible in cessation (and in neither perception nor non-perception), and yet claims that a sort of insight (*paññā*) occurs in it. This makes no sense, and the pericope *paññāya c’assa disvā, āsavā parikkhīṇā honti* is best viewed as an addition, made to adapt the idea of cessation to the insight ideal. Path accounts which culminate in cessation thus suggest, essentially, a purely meditative or concentrative type of liberation.³⁴

5. A typology of calm-insight soteriologies

The three accounts of Sāriputta’s liberation provide a rough guide to the dominant calm-insight trends in early Buddhism. This can be seen in the following typology, which is based on accounts of what happens at the higher, decisive, stages of the path, in particular the states which immediately precede liberation:

1. Pure insight, e.g. the *Dīghanakha Sutta* and Vinaya Mahāvagga, where liberating insight is instantaneous and meditation does not figure directly.
2. Meditation plus insight i), e.g. the *Aṭṭhakanāgara Sutta* (MN 52), where insight occurs at different levels of meditation, as in the *Anupada Sutta*, but leads to liberation directly.
3. Meditation plus insight ii), e.g. the *Sāmaññaphala Sutta*, where insight occurs at the end of a meditative progression culminating in the 4th *jhāna*.

so tesu dhammesu anupāyo anapāyo anissito appaṭibaddho vipparamutto visamṃyutto vimariyādīkatena cetasā viharati. so n’atthi uttarim nissaraṇan ti pajānāti. tabbahulikārā n’atthi t’ev’assa hoti.

³⁴ On *paññāya c’assa disvā...*, see Schmithausen (1981: 216-17).

4. Meditation plus insight iii), e.g. the *Anupada Sutta*, where insight occurs at different levels of meditation, but only to direct an adept onwards towards a final state of concentration, in which liberation occurs.
5. Pure Meditation, e.g. the Nivāpa (MN 25) or *Mahācunda Suttas* (AN 6.46), which focus on the attainment of the ‘cessation of perception and sensation’ or the ‘deathless element’, and have no interest in or are outright hostile to insight practice.

This typology shows that calm and insight can sometimes stand in almost complete opposition: reducing the mind to a state no thought or experience is quite different from having experience and contemplating its true nature. But this difference is not our present focus: we are attempting to understand if there is any room for a mindfulness-based soteriology within these calm-insight schemes. And the results seem negative. Despite our initial enquiry into embodiment and cognition, nothing like bare cognition, bodily mindfulness or passive awareness plays anything more than a preparatory role in the dominant Suttanta formulations of calm and/or insight.

We thus seem to have identified a major conceptual difference in early Buddhist teaching. According to Kaccāna, a person’s normal waking state of consciousness, and the normal exercise of one’s cognitive powers, are *constructions* that *emerge* from simple, transitive, sentience. The soteriological solution to this problem, we suspect, on the basis of the MPS and a few other important texts, is for cognitive conditioning to be *deconstructed* through the practice of *bare cognition*. On the other hand, calm-insight soteriologies instead suggest that *highly constructed* states of consciousness should be *harnessed*, intensely, and then *applied* to a pre-ordained end. Whereas calm-insight soteriologies *require* carefully constructed states of consciousness, Kaccāna’s teaching implies the mindful *dissolution* of all such forms of cognitive conditioning.

Kaccāna

The experience of ‘mind’ or ‘consciousness’ is constructed/conditioned.

Implications: conditioning must be undone, ‘consciousness’ must be deconstructed, through paying mindful attention to the sensory and somatic roots of experience.

Sāriputta and the calm-insight tradition(s)

The experience of ‘mind’ or ‘consciousness’ must be conditioned in a certain way.

Proper conditioning allows either for a higher form of knowledge, or a state of non-experience, both of which were believed (probably by different Buddhists) to be liberating.

6. Sāriputta’s philosophy of mind

We seem to have detected an apparent dichotomy within early Buddhist thought and practice. Kaccāna’s philosophy seems to have been discarded, or was unknown, by whoever formulated the calm-insight soteriologies. But if so, what is the philosophical basis of these calm-insight soteriologies? We do not have to look very far for an answer. Curiously, the Pali discourses contain a philosophy of mind different from Kaccāna’s, but related most prominently to Sāriputta and in close conceptual agreement with the calm-insight ideal. In the *Mahāvedalla Sutta* (MN 43), in response to the questions of Mahā-Koṭṭhita, Sāriputta presents *viññāṇa* almost as an organ of perception, or even an essential subject of experience:

‘One perceives (*viñānāti*), one perceives’, sir, therefore (it) is called ‘perception’ (*viññāṇan ti*). And what does one perceive? One perceives ‘pleasure’, one perceives ‘pain’, one perceives ‘neither pleasure nor pain’.³⁵

³⁵ MN 1.292: *viñānāti viñānāti ti kho āvuso tasmā viññāṇan ti vuccati. kiñ ca viñānāti? sukhan ti pi viñānāti, dukkhan ti pi viñānāti, adukkha-m-asukhan ti pi viñānāti.*

A virtually identical statement is made about ‘sensation’ (*vedanā*) soon afterwards: *vedanā* is so called because ‘one senses pleasure, one senses pain, one senses neither pleasure nor pain’.³⁶ The only difference between the definitions is the use of the quotation mark *ti* in the definition of *viññāṇa*: whereas *viññāṇa* is involved in the awareness of ‘pleasure’ (*sukhan ti*), *vedanā* is involved in the awareness of just pleasure (*sukham*). The lack of the quotation mark in the definition of *vedanā* indicates a simpler mode of awareness, perhaps even a mere registering of sensory *qualia*; its presence in the definition of *viññāṇa* instead suggests a knowledge of what is happening. Whatever the case, *viññāṇa* is a factor involved in cognition after ‘contact’, not before it as in Kaccāna’s philosophy, and seems to correspond to a person’s sense of being the observer of experience.³⁷ A similar idea is formulated in the *Mahā-hatthipadopama Sutta* (MN 28):

But when, sir, a person’s eye is not impaired, and external visible forms come into its range, and there is an appropriate act of attention (*samannāhāro*), thus the appearance of that type of consciousness comes to be.³⁸

There can be little doubt about the meaning of this teaching, since the verb *samannāharati* is equivalent to the verb *manasi-karoti* in numerous Suttas.³⁹ Both refer, unmistakably, to volitional or ‘selectional’ acts of attention. A similar volitional direction of attention or ‘consciousness’ (*viññāṇa*) is mentioned in the soteriological scheme of the *Dhātuvibhaṅga Sutta* (MN 140). After outlining a non-self contemplation of the six elements, the Buddha states that the resultant state of ‘purified’ consciousness allows a person to comprehend experience accurately:

And then only consciousness (*viññāṇam*) remains, purified (*parisuddham*) and cleansed (*pariyodātam*), by which one knows

³⁶ MN I.293. vedeti vedetī ti kho āvuso tasmā vedanā ti vuccati. kiñ ca vedeti? sukham pi vedeti dukkham pi vedeti adukkha-m-asukham pi vedeti.

³⁷ Hamilton (2016: 55) has noted that the ‘discrimination between feelings according to pleasure, pain and their absence is also mentioned in the *Satipaṭṭhāna Suttas*, but there it is mentioned as part of the process of attaining insight rather than as a brief definition of the function of *viññāṇa*: the cognitive verb used is *pajānāti* rather than *vijānāti*.’

³⁸ MN I.190: *yato ca kho āvuso ajjhattikañ c’ eva cakkhum aparibhinnaṃ hoti bāhirā ca rūpā āpātham āgacchanti tajo ca samannāhāro hoti, evaṃ tajjassa viññāṇabhāgassa pātubhāvo hoti.*

³⁹ E.g. DN II.204-5, MN I.325, MN I.446, SN I.112, SN I.190, AN II.116 etc.

something: one perceives pleasure, one perceives pain, one perceives neither pleasure nor pain.⁴⁰

The understanding of a consciousness (*viññāṇa*) in this insight teaching restates, at a higher level of consciousness or perception, exactly the same understanding of cognition stated by Sāriputta in the *Mahāvedalla Sutta*. In both discourses, ‘mind’ or ‘consciousness’ (*viññāṇa*) perceives the qualities of sensation (*vedanā*). Moreover, the understanding of a ‘purified’ consciousness in the *Dhātuvibhaṅga Sutta*, which can be directed towards the knowledge of objects, is similar to the idea of a ‘purified’ mind (*citta*), which in the *Sāmaññaphala Sutta* is said to be directed towards insight. Both texts use the same vocabulary to indicate that intentional awareness can be ‘purified’ (*parisuddha*) and ‘cleansed’ (*pariyodāta*).

We thus see that in the *Mahāvedalla*, *Mahāhatthipadopama* and *Dhātuvibhaṅga Suttas*, the term *viññāṇa* stands for ‘consciousness’ or ‘mind’, and is used in a manner similar to Descartes: *viññāṇa* is that through which intentional moments of awareness are enacted. But according to Kaccāna, a person’s *conscious experience* emerges in a gradual process of conditioning. While *viññāṇa* here plays a foundational role as transitive sentience, it does not correspond to what we call ‘consciousness’; the latter is, for Kaccāna, a complex of cognitive abilities and functions which depend on a cognitive process which begins with the arising of simple transitive sentience (*viññāṇa*).

7. Conflation and misunderstanding

We have seen that Sharf has criticised the ‘bare cognition’ focus of modern therapeutic applications of mindfulness as a simplification of tradition. He also claims that ‘this notion of mindfulness as bare attention would seem tied to a view of the mind as a sort of *tabula rasa* or clear mirror that passively registers raw sensations prior to any recognition, judgment, or response.’ (Sharf 2015: 474). By this Sharf means that the idea of bare cognition presumes a particular philosophy of mind, one in which the ‘recognition of and response to an object is logically and/or temporally preceded by an unconstructed or “pure” impression of said object’ (Sharf 2015: 474). Sharf has further argued that the idea of non-conceptual cognition is at odds with Theravāda Abhidhamma:

⁴⁰ MN III.242: *athāparaṃ viññāṇaṃ yeva avasissati parisuddhaṃ pariyodātaṃ, tena viññāṇena kiñci jānāti. sukhan ti pi vijānāti, dukkhan ti pi vijānāti, adukkha-m-asukhan ti pi vijānāti.*

In Theravāda abhidharma, consciousness and the object of consciousness emerge codependently and are hence phenomenologically inextricable ... objects of experience appear not upon a preexistent *tabula rasa*, but rather within a cognitive matrix that includes affective and discursive dispositions occasioned by one's past activity (*karma*). The elimination of these attendant dispositions does not yield "non-conceptual awareness" so much as the cessation of consciousness itself. (Sharf 2015: 474-75)

These points have very little value for the understanding of early Buddhism. The standard early Buddhist position differs from Sharf's Abhidhammic understanding: the general position of the canonical discourses is that affective and discursive dispositions can and should be eliminated, without the cessation of consciousness. In fact the philosophy of Kaccāna does not view the mind 'as a sort of *tabula rasa* or clear mirror' which registers pure impressions received from the senses. The *tabula rasa* model of mind corresponds neither to the standard Suttanta account of 'contact', nor to Kaccāna's exposition of it, but is close to Sāriputta's philosophy. Although Sharf does not realise it, his critique of 'privileged access' is applicable to the teachings in which *viññāṇa* is imagined as an organ of perception (e.g. in the *Mahāvedalla*, *Mahāhatthipadopama Suttas* etc.).

Sharf's misreading of early Buddhist philosophies of mind and meditation is based on a conflation of sources. First, it is a mistake to conflate the Suttanta and Abhidhamma portions of the Tipiṭaka; the two belong to quite different periods of thought. But it is also a mistake to treat the Pali Suttas as a homogeneous whole, since this blurs the boundaries between very different ideas. This mistake is at least understandable, since reliable scholars of early Buddhism have not yet been able to disentangle the philosophies of Kaccāna and Sāriputta.⁴¹ And there is certainly some merit to the idea that the canonical discourses forms a homogeneous whole, which can be attributed to the historical Buddha.⁴² But this position should be balanced by a sensitivity to conceptual difference; text-critical study should *expect* to find different ideas in the early discourses, given the very long period over which they were gathered.

⁴¹ Hamilton (1996: 88-89), Jayatilleke (1963: 433-36).

⁴² In this respect, the recent study of Sujato and Brahmali (2015) stands out for its clarity, thoroughness and insight.

Of course, the problem of conflation in early Buddhism goes much further than the attribution of different ideas to the figures of Kaccāna and Sāriputta. A variety of ideas were collected and preserved as teachings of the historical Buddha. With regard to the present context, we might ask, how did these different ideas come about? How did different early Buddhists come to adhere to different philosophies? The *Mahāvedalla Sutta* helps us understand the situation better, through the following question put to Sāriputta by venerable Koṭṭhita:

The five sense faculties, sir, have different objects (*nānā-visayāni*) and different areas of activity (*nānā-gocarāni*), (and) do not experience each others' areas of activity and objects, namely, the faculties of vision, hearing, smelling, tasting and touching. Of these five sense faculties, sir, which have different objects and different areas of activity, (and are) not experiencing each others' areas of activity and objects - what is (their) resort, and what experiences (all) their areas of activity and objects?⁴³

The answer, replies Sāriputta, is mind: 'mind (*mano*) is the resort, mind experiences (all) their areas of activity and objects.' (*mano paṭisaraṇaṃ, mano ca nesaṃ gocara-visayaṃ paccanubhoṭī ti*). Sharf has noted that this answer addresses what in modern philosophy is called the 'binding problem', that is, the fact of the 'synthetic unity of apperception or cognitive binding' in which there is a 'semblance of a unified and integrated phenomenal domain' (Sharf 2018: 5). As Sharf points out, this asymmetry between 'mind' and the other five six faculties – mind as a sense faculty standing over and above the other sense faculties – 'turns out to be crucial for the Buddhist analysis of mind and cognition, and the Ābhidharmikas develop it at length' (Sharf 2018: 6).

Sharf is correct to note that this asymmetry 'seems to have been introduced in later texts such as the *Mahāvedalla* and early commentarial works' (Sharf 2018: 6). But in further stating that this idea renders 'the Buddhist model of distributed cognition intelligible' (Sharf 2018: 6), he implies that a Cartesian philosophy

⁴³ M I.295. *pañc' imāni āvuso indriyāni nānāvisayāni nānāgocarāni, na añña-m-aññassa gocara-visayaṃ paccanubhonti, seyyathīdaṃ cakkhundriyaṃ sotindriyaṃ ghānindriyaṃ jivhindriyaṃ kāyindriyaṃ. imesaṃ kho āvuso pañcannaṃ indriyānaṃ nānāvisayānaṃ nānāgocarānaṃ, na añña-m-aññassa gocaravisayaṃ paccanubhontānaṃ, kiṃ paṭisaraṇaṃ ko ca nesaṃ gocaravisayaṃ paccanubhoṭī ti?*

of mind was required to fill in the mistakes, or lacunae, in an earlier Buddhist account of cognition. In fact the *Mahāvedalla Sutta*'s solution to the 'binding problem' is susceptible to the problem of privileged access, the *tabula rasa* model of mind he himself critiques. Moreover, Kaccāna's idea that the six types of sense contact undergo the same process of cognitive conditioning explains the binding problem, without the need for 'mind', as a sort of disembodied person watching the 'film' of sense data.

These observations emphasise the fact that the question 'who' or 'what' experiences sense objects is a very peculiar Buddhist question to ask. It seems to assume a type of essentialism alien to the early Buddhist tradition. But a very similar approach is attributed to the *bhikkhu* Sāti in the *Mahā-taṇhā-saṅkhaya Sutta* (MN 38). Sāti believed, erroneously, in 'consciousness' (*viññāṇa*) as a transmigrating substance, and essential subject of experience:⁴⁴ 'that which speaks, feels, (and) experiences the result of good and bad karma, here and there'.⁴⁵ As pointed out elsewhere in this volume of JOCBS, Sāti's reification of consciousness is probably due to an Upaniṣadic influence.

The *Mahā-vedalla Sutta* shows that a subtler form of Upaniṣadic influence had a more profound and far reaching effect in the early Saṅgha. Apart from Sāti's crude and obvious attempt to bring the Upaniṣadic self into early Buddhism, it seems that others began to think in Upaniṣadic terms. Early Buddhists were having Upaniṣadic thoughts, asking Upaniṣadic questions, and providing neo-Upaniṣadic answers. Although Sāriputta's *viññāṇa* is not technically a 'self', it performs the cognitive function of the Upaniṣadic self: it senses and experiences, functions which Sāti also attributes to *viññāṇa*. Hence Sāti represents the tip of an iceberg, an outlier whose thesis engulfed, and then transformed, early Buddhist thought and practice. It seems that Sāriputta was used as a more acceptable cipher to introduce alien notions into early Buddhism; these ideas, acceptable because they do not actually assert a self, were conflated with an earlier doctrine of cognition, and from this conflation the calm-insight tradition was born.

⁴⁴ MN I.256: *tathāhaṃ bhagavatā dhammaṃ desitaṃ ājānāmi, yathā tad ev' idaṃ viññāṇaṃ sandhāvati saṃsarati anaññan ti*. 'As I understand the Dhamma taught by the Blessed One, it is the very same consciousness which transmigrates, and not another'.

⁴⁵ MN I.258: *yvāyaṃ bhante vado vedeyyo tatra tatra kalyāṇapāpakānaṃ kammānaṃ vipākaṃ paṭisaṃvedetī ti*.

8. Two philosophies of mind, two ideals of meditation

We have seen that there are two fundamentally distinct understandings of ‘consciousness’ or ‘mind’, and two related soteriologies, in the early Buddhist discourses. It is difficult to see how they could be reconciled, for both suggest different outcomes towards the end of the Buddhist path. According to our reading of Kaccāna, liberation requires mindfulness in the sense of bare cognition; but according to our reading of Sāriputta, liberation is attained by minimising experience to its most refined state, which confers the ability to see ideas clearly, or to comprehend the refined contents of this state, or else to jump into a state of non-experience.

We have pointed out that Sāriputta’s philosophy is similar to Sāti’s Upaniṣadic understanding of ‘consciousness’; both reify the complex process of perception into an essential subject of experience. To this we can add that some of the basic Buddhist ideas about calm and insight resemble Upaniṣadic ideas about liberation. It has been pointed out elsewhere that the notion of ‘cessation’ (*saññā-vedayita-nirodha*) is little more than a Buddhist version of the Upaniṣadic *brahman*.⁴⁶ But it is not just ‘cessation’ that is an Upaniṣadic idea in Buddhist garb. The calm-insight ideal is stated in the pre-Buddhist *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* account of gaining a liberating insight into the ultimate reality, when the mind is calm:

Therefore knowing this (teaching), having become calm (*chānto*), tamed, quiet, patient (and) absorbed (*samāhito*), he sees (*paśyati*) the self in the self, he sees the self as everything.⁴⁷

The vocabulary of this early Upaniṣadic account of calm and insight is the same as that found in early Buddhist teachings: being calm (*chānto*) or concentrated (*samāhito*), is said to lead to insight (*paśyati*). All this implies that the Upaniṣadic influence on early Buddhism was profound, and transformed an earlier understanding of mind and meditation. It is difficult to know exactly when this transformation took place. But if Frauwallner (1956: 67) is correct in stating that the Vinaya Mahāvagga ‘must have been composed shortly before or after the second council’, the Upaniṣadic impact must have been well underway within 50-100 years after the Buddha’s death. In support of this, it

⁴⁶ See Wynne 2007, especially pp.118-19.

⁴⁷ BU IV.4.23: *tasmād evaṃvic chānto dānta uparatas titikṣuḥ samāhito bhūtvātmany evātmānaṃ paśyati sarvaṃ ātmānaṃ paśyati*.

can be further pointed out that many of the texts related to the calm-insight ideal contain late elements:

The *Aṭṭhakanāgara Sutta* (MN 52) is set after the Buddha's death, and mentions the town of Pāṭaliputta, which did not exist in his lifetime (according to the early discourses).

Sharf (2018: 5) has noted that the *Mahāvedalla Sutta* is 'technical' and 'likely belongs to a relatively late strata of the Suttapiṭaka'.

The teachings of the *Mahāhatthipadopama*, *Aṭṭhakanāgara* and *Mahāvedalla Suttas* are not attributed to the Buddha.

There is no parallel to the *Anupada Sutta* in the Chinese corpus of canonical Buddhist texts, an indication of lateness (Anālayo 2011: 635). The 'insight' vocabulary of this text is also unusual.

The *Mahāhatthipadopama Sutta* (MN 28) contains 'reductionistic' elements which appear to be a no-self development of the original not-self analysis of the five aggregates. (Wynne, 2010: 158-59)

Schmithausen (1981: 203-05) has highlighted logical problems in the theory of liberating insight into the Four Noble Truths, and the same pattern applied to the corruptions.

Much critical work remains, of course. How should we imagine the early Buddhist path in its entirety, if not in terms of calm and insight? Is there a relationship between bare cognition and *jhāna*, and if so what is it? And what is the exact relationship between bare cognition, non-conceptuality and specifically Buddhist ideas and sentiments demanded on the *bhikkhu*'s path? We will return to these questions in future studies. Here, we will finally note that we are not arguing against calm and insight *per se*. Both have an important role to play in the Buddhist path. Our argument is against interpreting the fourth *jhāna* as a state of inner concentration, and against interpreting insight or understanding as knowledge of a particular object. We instead argue that Kaccāna's philosophy suggests mindfulness as bare cognition or (passive awareness), and that just this is meant by the expression *upekhā-sati-pārisuddhi* (in the fourth *jhāna*). Hence the fourth *jhāna* was originally understood to be quite different from the concentrative ideal of trying to confine the mind within a box, as suggested in the Dharmaguptaka version of the *Ambaṭṭha Sutta*:

It is just like a private room that has been plastered inside and outside, and whose door has been firmly shut and locked, with no wind or dust [entering]. Inside a lamp has been lit, which nobody touches or agitates. The flame of that lamp rises quietly and without perturbation.⁴⁸

We claim that such formulas are not integral to the original description of the state, but were added afterwards, under the influence of Sāriputta's philosophy, when absorption was reimagined as inner concentration. Likewise, we are not arguing against the necessity of understanding at the higher stages of the path, but merely point out that the notion of directing the mind towards a pre-ordained object to be known was not the original way of understanding insight.

Most of the Suttanta accounts of the path can in fact be separated from these calm-insight additions, and quite easily. Unfortunately, however, critical attention has hitherto been focused mostly on the calm-insight conclusions to the path, rather than the practices leading up to them. It is from this perspective that Gethin has claimed (2004: 217-18) there is 'a broadly consistent and definite theory of meditation practice ... a clear and definite theory, a proper acknowledgement and appreciation of which is lacking in much of the scholarly discussion of early Buddhist meditation'. But Gethin's 'clear and definite' theory is simply a version of a sort of insight meditation hardly mentioned in the canonical discourses:

the method of developing insight (*vipassanā*) is to direct the perfect mindfulness, stillness and lucidity that has been cultivated in the *jhānas* ... to the contemplation ... of 'reality'—reality in the sense of the ways things are, or, perhaps better, the way things work. This involves watching dhammas—the mental and physical qualities that constitute our experience of the world. The meditator is instructed to watch the rise and fall of dhammas and see them as impermanent (*anicca*), suffering (*dukkha*), and not self (*anattā*). (Gethin, 2004: 215)

In the early Pali discourses, this version of insight is stated in the *Anupada Sutta*, a late text, as we have seen.⁴⁹ Focusing on such texts and similar passages

⁴⁸ Anālayo (2017: 79).

⁴⁹ Similar accounts are found in a few related texts, e.g. the *Mahāmlūkya Sutta* (MN 64), AN 4.124/126, AN 9.36.

results in a selective account of the Buddhist path, and hence a distorted understanding of early Buddhist thought in general. In reality, the absence of a ‘proper acknowledgement and appreciation’ of early Buddhist thought and practice is a failure of those works which do not see that early Buddhist texts are heterogeneous. Thus we conclude by noting that contrary to Anālayo, the theory of two early Buddhist paths to liberation has not been ‘successfully refuted’ and should not ‘be set aside’ (2016: 41). We claim, rather, that the situation is far more complicated and problematic than has previously been realised. The debate is really only just beginning.

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