Language, Conscious Experience and the Self in Early Buddhism
A Cross-cultural Interdisciplinary Study

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Abstract

To what degree is ordinary conscious experience shaped and mediated by linguistic and conceptual factors? How does this mediation influence human functioning? This article attempts to reconstruct impressive, but unsystematically presented early Buddhist ideas regarding these matters. It takes as its starting point the paradoxical statement in the *Rohitassa Sutta* concerning the world found in the body endowed with apperception (*sasaññimhi*) and mind (*samanake*). The first part of the article examines the early Buddhist concept of apperception (*saññā*). Particular attention is given to its connection with language, and to the way it contributes to arising of the notion of Self (*attā*) as "being" (*satto*), speaker (*vado*) and experiencer (*vedeyyo*). In order better to make sense of these ideas, the article employs a cross-cultural interdisciplinary approach, drawing from what appear to be analogous ideas in Western philosophy of language and cognitive science. The article also discusses the relation of the five *khandha*-s to the individual who takes them to be "Self" and the issues of agency and subjectivity. The early Buddhist ideas explored in this article constitute a conceptual framework necessary for making sense of several key meditative and soteriological concepts. Detailed discussion of these concepts will be taken up in a future paper.

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Introduction

In recent decades, critical research in the field of early Buddhist studies has brought significant progress, leading to a possibility of re-examining the early Buddhist teachings. The approach which interprets early Buddhism according to a paradigm developed by the later, commentarial tradition of Theravāda is no longer taken for granted and is being challenged regarding many aspects. However, there are still several problematic issues which are yet to receive a fully satisfactory explanation. A proper understanding of several difficult early Buddhist concepts is impossible without taking into account their philosophical background. As Alexander Wynne (2010: 166) aptly observes, although "early Buddhist teachings were not presented in the form of a philosophical system, they are at least philosophically grounded." The image that begins to emerge from recent scholarly research is that early Buddhism was far from being a primitive doctrine, quite the opposite in fact. Richard Gombrich (2009: vii), goes as far as to state that "the Buddha was one of the most brilliant and original thinkers of all time" while Wynne (2015b: 240) states that "The Buddha would seem to occupy a remarkable position in the history of philosophy". The impressive philosophical and psychological views of early Buddhism are, however, not systematically presented and often not even explicitly expounded. They function as a form of an implicit backdrop to early Buddhist soteriological and meditative teachings. Of particular importance are the ideas concerning the role of language in human cognition and its influence on the structure of conscious experience. They will be the central focus of this article. These ideas constitute a theoretical framework necessary for understanding several central teachings of early Buddhism, including the concept of unconstructed cognition, the notion of the cessation of the "world of human experience" and the idea of ineffability of the state of a liberated person. These issues, however, will become the focus of a future study.

Methodological remarks: the value of cross-cultural interdisciplinary approach

Reconstructing early Buddhist doctrine is in a way similar to solving a puzzle, or an equation with several variables. What I mean by this analogy is that it is not possible simply to recover early Buddhist doctrine by reading it in a straightforward way from Buddhist texts, or by simply adding up data collected by acts of successive readings until it forms a complete picture. As Christian

Coseru (2012: 31) points out: "philology continues to command the study of Buddhist philosophy. The philological approach relies on the principle that texts can (be made to) speak for themselves" This would imply the relative simplicity and straightforwardness of early Buddhist doctrine. If that were the case, then the ancient Pāli speaker (when it was still used as a spoken language) would have no problems understanding the meaning of the teachings in the Nikāyas, being much more predisposed to this task than any modern scholar of early Buddhism. That would imply that their meaning is self-evident, and all one needs to do is to understand the passage linguistically. However, the Buddha himself was convinced that almost no-one in his generation would be able to understand (*ājāneyyuṃ*)[1] him!

This is due to the fact of early Buddhist teaching being inherently difficult to see and awaken to (*duddaso duranubodho*), being subtle (*nipuṇo*) and deep (*gambhīro*),[2] but also due to its unsystematic presentation in the Nikāyas and the fact that it is often far from being unambiguous, relying on metaphor and apophatic or paradoxical language. To continue with a mathematical analogy, one may have to attempt at some point to substitute an "*x*" for a certain value and see how it fits. Does it solve the interpretative problems? Does it allow us to harmonize seemingly discrepant concepts and make sense of the enigmatic ones? Of course, this substitution of "*x*" is far from being arbitrary, as the earlier philological work has already greatly narrowed down the range of possible "*x*-s" which may be taken into consideration.

It is due to the above-mentioned specifics of early Buddhist teachings that a cross-tradition comparative approach regarding philosophical, psychological and meditative issues is particularly useful. While the post-canonical Abhidhamma and the commentarial tradition are not of much help in this regard, comparisons with non-Theravāda philosophical traditions, both Eastern and Western, can be helpful. For example, as Harvey (1995: 217) rightly points out, "Because a Sutta is among those collected by the Theravādins does not mean that they must therefore have the best interpretation of it!". There are a limited number of positions and ways of thinking a human mind can assume regarding major philosophical problems. These have appeared in various forms in the history of

[1] MN 26/i 168: *Ahañceva kho pana dhammaṃ deseyyaṃ, pare ca me na ājāneyyuṃ, so mamassa kilamatho, sā mamassa vihesā*

[2] MN 26/i 167: *Adhigato kho myāyaṃ dhammo gambhīro duddaso duranubodho santo paṇīto atakkāvacaro nipuṇo paṇḍitavedanīyo.*

philosophy, both Western and Eastern. One must take into account the possibility of congenial ways of thinking emerging in diverse cultural contexts, even if they have been arrived at by different means. Once the purely philological approach has narrowed down the range of possibilities of interpreting certain enigmatic fragments and has given us a somewhat general picture of a philosophical position functioning as its implicit backdrop, one can then draw from other philosophical traditions to make sense of it, or to show that such a way of thinking is actually possible at all and has its parallels.

Often the early Buddhist idea hinted at by the critical reconstruction may seem inherently impossible when viewed against the backdrop of the orthodox paradigm; it may even defy to a large extent common-sense, ordinary views about reality and psychology. Yet all the textual evidence often points to exactly such an idea. Should it then be taken at its face value or discarded? Someone operating within the confines of a stereotypical paradigm may not realize that certain ideas are actually possible at all and may have been described either by other philosophical traditions or modern cognitive science. This may lead him to ignore stubbornly textual evidence which does not fit his preconceived schemes, which he tries to force on the early texts, or to assume that some crucial information is missing. This type of comparative study helps to make sense of some particularly difficult aspects, as philosophers from other traditions have often systematically presented and thoroughly explained positions and views bearing similarity to the early Buddhist ones. Coseru (2012: 32) summarizes the value of this approach:

> Indeed, as some of the most valuable contributions to the study of Buddhist philosophy have shown, one can draw extensively from Western philosophical sources and remain faithful to a historical author without couching one's interpretations as Tillemans puts it "in the same problematic or obscure language that is the author's".

Further philological work can then show that when seen against the backdrop of such a philosophical background, many enigmatic concepts finally make sense and supposed discrepancies are in fact explained away. It's almost as if early Buddhism was too brilliant for its own era, too brilliant for the commentarial tradition of Theravāda, and it is only with the help of other ways of thinking, with other forms of knowledge accumulated over the history of mankind, that we are beginning to catch up with its brilliance.

Therefore many scholars rely on such cross-tradition comparative studies. For example, Sue Hamilton's excellent work is an example of drawing from the Kantian model of transcendental idealism in order to make sense of early Buddhist concepts.[3] Wynne (2015b: 240) notices that "similar developments […] in Western philosophy, have only been reached in the modern age in the works of Hume, Kant, the logical positivists, Wittgenstein". An emerging trend in early Buddhist scholarship is seeing parallels with Nāgārjuna Madhyamaka.[4] Harvey (1995: 217) also mentions some similarities with the Yogācāra school. To put it in other words, these scholars were able to make sense of certain enigmatic concepts of early Buddhism because they came with a prior perspective of looking at certain philosophical problems gained through the study of other philosophic traditions. It is doubtful whether they would be able to gain such a perspective at all simply by reading the Nikāyas, even if they do indeed represent such a perspective. This is because of the unsystematic, often insufficient presentation, or the merely implicit way in which these teachings function as a sort of backdrop to other ideas.

Cross-cultural comparative study is not the only tool which can be used to make sense of particularly difficult early Buddhist concepts. Buddhism in general has a strong psychological angle, being interested in the workings of the human mind, seeing it as the source of suffering, but also of happiness. Recent decades have seen the spectacular development and progress of cognitive science, which in comparison to traditional, mainstream psychology is much more grounded in natural sciences: neuroscience, studies of artificial intelligence, evolutionary biology and genetics. Cognitive science has brought true qualitative progress regarding human psychology, particularly when compared to the more old-fashioned, unverifiable, "humanistic" forms, such as Freudian psychoanalysis. Cognitive science is greatly interested in the issues of human consciousness, cognition, insight, selfhood, agency and embodiment – all of which are also central to Buddhism. Buddhism challenges many commonly held psychological notions, and so does cognitive psychology (these common-sense notions are labelled as "folk-psychology "). Human psychology has not changed since the time of the Buddha. All this opens up the possibility of a fruitful interdisciplinary study. Johannes Bronkhorst was one of the first scholars to realize the value of such an approach. As he (2012: 73) has pointed out, it is based on an

[3] Hamilton, 1999: 76.

[4] Hamilton, 1996: 56; Wynne, 2015:218, 219, 222; Ronkin, 2005:16; Harvey, 1995:196.

assumption that certain central claims of the early Buddhist texts are true and concern psychological states and processes which though unusual should not be in conflict with established rules of natural sciences or psychology. In their paper, Jake H. Davis and Evan Thompson (2013: 585-597) show the benefits of such an interdisciplinary approach and attempt to "lay the groundwork for a cross-cultural cognitive science". Tse-fu Kuan (2008) is yet another scholar who has relied on psychological analysis when dealing with the problems of early Buddhism.

It will be claimed here that it is only when viewed against such a backdrop that the problematic ideas make full sense. Then philological analysis may perhaps allow us to elucidate their meaning further and explain what at first sight appear to be irreconcilable discrepancies. The price for such a deconstruction will be relatively small, requiring one to consider certain later developments and interpretations belonging to the commentarial tradition of Theravāda as inadequate. This should however not be a surprise to anyone aware of the current state of research in the field of early Buddhist studies. As critical scholars, including Ñāṇananda[5], Waldron[6], Wynne[7] and Noa Ronkin[8] have observed, these later developments in many ways represent a fundamental shift away from early Buddhist views.

Ultimately, the solutions proposed in this article must be seen as an invitation to a new way of thinking about some central issues of early Buddhism: a new way of thinking that helps make sense of certain enigmatic concepts, which harmonizes the seemingly discrepant passages and presents early Buddhism as a very impressive doctrine that deserves much greater appreciation than it currently receives.

[5] Ñāṇananda masterfully shows severe limitations of Buddhaghosa's commentarial interpretations in his works, e.g. 2012: 7, 10, 53, 65, 67.

[6] cf. Waldron, 2005:54: "analysis of mind in terms of dharmas inadvertently created a host of systemic problems."

[7] Wynne, 2010: 165-166: "this philosophy is incompatible with the philosophy of reductionistic realism later outlined in the various Abhidharmas."

[8] Ronkin, 2005: 250: "post- canonical Abhidhamma projects a philosophy of substantiality without substance, or rather smuggles substantiality into process metaphysics. But such an enterprise is, first, at odds with the earliest Buddhist teaching and, second, suffers from several grave weaknesses."

The "world" in the fathom-long body

Several early Buddhist texts contain a specific idea of the "world" (*loko*) defined in terms of elements constituting the human cognitive apparatus and their respective objects. According to the *Lokāyatika Sutta* (AN 9.38/iv 430) in the discipline (*vinaya*) of the Noble One (*ariyassa*), five strands of sensuality (*pañca kāmaguṇā*) are said (*vuccati*) to be the world (*loko*). The *Lokapañhā Sutta* (SN 35.82/iv 52) defines the world as that which breaks up (*lujjatī*), which is further defined as the six senses, their respective objects and consciousness, contact and whatever is experienced/felt as pleasant or painful having this contact as its condition. The *Samiddhilokapañha Sutta* (SN 35.68/iv 39-40) states that the world or concept of the world (*lokapaññatti*) can only exist (*atthi*) to such an extent that there are the six sense bases and *dhamma*-s to be cognized by their respective forms of consciousness (e.g *cakkhuviññāṇaviññātabbā dhammā*). It is worth noticing that the world and concept of the world are mentioned in such a way, as if there was little if any difference between the two, as if to suggest that what one has access to is a "concept of the world" and not the world in itself.

Particularly interesting, however, are the statements which highlight the interrelation of this specific world and human cognitive factors. The *Rohitassa Sutta* (SN 2.26/i 61)[9] speaks about the world situated in the fathom-long body (*kaḷevare*) which is endowed with perception and mind/intellect (*sasaññimhi samanake*). The *Lokantagamana Sutta* (SN 35.116/iv 93) states that "In the discipline of the Noble One, that is called 'world' (*loka*) by which in the world (*lokasmiṃ*) one comes to perceive the world (*lokasaññī*) and […]is thinking oneself to be the world (*lokamānī*)"[10] to use the translation of Gombrich (2006: 94), who was right to point out the ambiguity of this phrase and the fact that the "term *loka-saññi* does not tell us whether there really is a world 'out there' or not". The peculiarity of the idea conveyed by this text has also not escaped the attention of other scholars. Ñāṇananda (2012: 81) has noticed that "the world is what our senses present it to us to be." Katz (1979: 55) has

[9] The same text is also found in the *Catukka Nipāta* of the *Aṅguttara Nikāya* in two *Rohitassa Suttas* (AN 4.45/ii 47) and (AN 4.46/ii 49). SN 2.26 has a somewhat more abrupt start with words *ekamantaṃ ṭhito kho rohitasso* (Rohitassa, standing on one side) while *Aṅguttara* versions start with information about the Buddha living in Sāvatthi and the usual exchange of greetings. AN 4.46 has the Buddha retelling the same story to his disciples.

[10] SN 35.116/iv 95: *Yena kho, āvuso, lokasmiṃ lokasaññī hoti lokamānī - ayam vuccati ariyassa vinaye loko.*

stated that "'the world' means our experience of the world […] lived world". Harvey (1995: 87-88) speaks of "the internal world generated by cognition interpreting", Hamilton (1999: 83) comments that "what we mean by 'the world' is not other than experience". Waldron (2003: 162) notes that "The 'world' (*loka*) […] was a way of speaking about "the experienced world", while Wynne (2015a: 30) writes, "A person's very world of experience and not just particular experiences in that world depend on the workings of the mind". Coseru (2012: 67) aptly summarizes:

> What is meant by 'world' in this context, however, is not an independent domain of physical entities and relations, but the 'phenomenal world of perception' (*lokasaṃjñā*) that depends on the conceptual and proliferating activities of the mind.

It is very important to realize that this does not imply metaphysical idealism, only the impossibility of experiencing and expressing the world without the medium of cognitive and linguistic factors. The very possibility of the world or its concept is provided by the functioning of cognitive and linguistic factors. Once they are no longer present, one can no longer experience the world or speak about it. One cannot go beyond that, as we are not granted an objective, transcendent perspective *sub specie aeternitatis* which would allow us to make statements about the nature of reality. The mind is not granted an absolute status, being itself dependent on other factors.[11] Therefore Ñāṇananda (2012: 81) is correct when emphasizing the fact that "the world is not purely a projection of the mind in the sense of a thoroughgoing idealism; only, it is a phenomenon which the empirical consciousness cannot get behind, as it is itself committed to it". Katz (1979: 55) points out that simply "any talk about the world apart from someone's lived experience of the world is impossible […] and that there could be no coherent notion of 'the world' as the *a priori* of human experience". Waldron (2003:162) and Wynne[12] also rightly emphasize the non-idealistic nature of the early Buddhist view.

[11] cf. Ronkin, 2005: 247: "Fundamental to this framework are the notions of dependency on conditions, impermanence and the indeterminacy of knowledge and language. It is a metaphysics that undermines the very epistemology from which it stems."

[12] Wynne, 2015b: 222-223: "although a metaphysician might try to push beyond the phenomenal limits of language and knowledge, the endeavour is meaningless and to be avoided. No idealistic step is taken to say that cognitive construction is all there is, and thus that the world consists of mind only"

There is always value in examining the parallel versions of Pāli texts, particularly in the case of such unusual and enigmatic statements. Anālayo (2017:199) rightly highlights the importance of such an approach:

> For those who wish to distinguish between earlier and later strata among the early discourses, a consultation of the extant parallel versions is in my view an indispensable requirement. Comparative study can show what the common core is among various versions of a text and what the differences are between them, thereby providing clear evidence as a basis for identification of what is early and what is later.

The *Rohitassa Sutta* has Chinese parallels at SĀ 1307/ T 99.1307 and in SĀ 2 306/T 100.306.[13] Both texts speak of the margin of the world 世界邊 (*shì jiè biān*) where one does not get born 生 (*shēng*), age 老 (*lǎo*), or die 死 (*sǐ*). SĀ 1307 has no parallel for *na cavati na upapajjati*, while SĀ 2 306 renders it as 不沒不出 (*bù mò bù chū*). SĀ 1307 also contains a whole portion of text which is absent in the Pāli version. It speaks of the world in terms of five *khandha*-s 五受陰 (*wǔ shòu yīn*), and contains the formula of the noble eightfold path 八聖道 (*bā shèng dào*) as a way leading to the end of the world.

Interestingly, the parallel versions differ with respect to the crucial phrase: *byāmamatte kaḷevare sasaññimhi samanake.* SĀ 1307 only speaks of 一尋之身 (*yī xún zhī shēn*), while SĀ 2 306 does not have anything corresponding to it. It is very easy here to fall into a trap of translating it as a body 身 (*shēn*) endowed with 尋 (*xún*), where 尋 would correspond to *sasaññimhi samanake.* 尋 is often used to translate *vitakka* (thought/thinking), particularly in modern translations. The meaning would be thus "a body endowed with thought", which would somewhat roughly convey the idea of the Pāli phrase which speaks of the body and its cognitive factors. However, 尋 was also in ancient times in China a unit of measure roughly corresponding to a fathom and consisted of eight 尺 (*chǐ*). So, the meaning of the parallel version is "one fathom long body" and it does not say anything at all about its cognitive factors. The Āgama text thus speaks only about the fathom long body in which the world etc. is found, but nothing about the way this body is cognizant. What can we make of this difference? If the focus on *sasaññimhi samanake* represented the tendency to development

[13] Their interesting feature is that they translate the name "Rohitassa" according to its meaning as 赤馬 (chì mǎ - red horse), not rendering it phonetically as is often the case.

in the Theravāda as compared to Sarvāstivāda, of which the *Saṃyuktāgama* is representative, then this could signify the lateness of the text. But this is not the case, and as we shall see, the full implications of passages like this have been fully realized only by modern scholars. So perhaps the lack of mention of *sasañ̃imhi samanake* is not that significant and does not necessarily point to the relative lateness of the Pāli version.

The difference regarding the same aspect can also be found in the parallel version to the *Lokantagamana Sutta*, the SĀ 234/ T ii 056c12. The parallel to the Pāli passage *yena kho, āvuso, lokasmiṃ lokasañ̃ī hoti lokamānī — ayaṃ vuccati ariyassa vinaye loko* says: 若世間, 世間名、世間覺、世間言辭、世間語說，此等皆入世間數. Just as in SĀ 1307, we find no 想 (*xiǎng*) which usually in the Āgamas corresponds to the Pāli *saññā/saññīn/sañjānāti.* Instead it speaks of 名 (*míng* - naming/calling/expressing/describing), 覺 (*jué* - being conscious of/thinking), 言辭 (*yán cí* - what one says/utterance), 語說 (*yǔ shuō* - language). However, as Hamilton (1996: 55-56) points out, in classical Sanskrit one of the meanings of *saṃjñā*, (Pāli *saññā*) is "name". The original of the *Saṃyuktāgama* was apparently written in Sanskrit[14], so perhaps its translator, Guṇabhadra, decided to render this meaning by 名. Our suspicion is confirmed by examination of the surviving fragment of the Sanskrit original from the Turfan mound SHT 6 1404 + 1411 (Vorl.Nr X 318+X345).[15] It is seriously damaged and only small parts of it are readable:

> loko lo]ka iti [saṃkhyāṃ gaccha]ti śrotraṃ ghrāṇaṃ jih[v]ā kāya
> manasa[ṃ] [lo]kasya lokasaṃjñ[ā] bha[va](ti) lo

Indeed we find *lokasaṃjñ[ā]* corresponding to *lokasañ̃ī*, which must have been translated to 世間名. *loko lo]ka iti [saṃkhyāṃ gaccha]ti* was certainly translated as 入世間數 (*rù shì jiān shù*), with 數 (*shù* - lit. number/count) being the translation of *saṃkhyāṃ.*

Grammatically the Chinese text generally corresponds to the Pāli version[16]. 世間覺 can definitely be considered as corresponding to *lokamānī* and 世間名 to *lokasañ̃ī*. However, 世間言辭 and 世間語說 have no direct parallel in the *Lokantagamana Sutta*. Perhaps they can be seen as paralleling the Pāli terms

[14] De Jong, 1981:108, cf. Kuan, 2008: 4, fn. 11.

[15] Wille (1989: 120), I am grateful to Bhikkhuni Dhammadinnā for pointing out the existence of this fragment.

[16] I am grateful to Weijen Teng for this remark.

lokasamaññā (designation of the world), *lokanirutti* (linguistic expression of the world), *lokavohāra* (common ways of speaking of the world) and *lokapaññatti* (concept of the world) which are found in the *Poṭṭhapāda Sutta* (DN 9/i 202).

As we shall see, in early Buddhist teaching the role that language plays in human cognition was considered very important. Thus these texts speak not only of the subjective world of human conscious experience but of the world of human language as well. The Nikāyas seems to suggest that supposedly objective elements of reality cannot be separated from their subjective experience and linguistic concepts, almost to the point of considering them synonymous.[17] Waldron (2003: 162) rightly notes that "one of the chief conditions giving rise to our human experience of the world is language". And this is the aspect I would particularly like to focus upon below: how the interplay of *saññā* and language conditions the arising of the "world" of human experience and how it ultimately results in our suffering.

Apperception and language

The early Buddhist concept of apperception (*saññā*) has already received much attention from scholars. The complexity of its working and the difficulty of properly translating this term are highlighted by the many renderings of *saññā* offered by modern scholars. Thus, Johansson rendered it as "idea"[18]. Harvey, who has done an extensive analysis of the role of *saññā*, suggests that is should be translated as cognition, a "mental process which labels, categorizes and classifies sense-objects"[19]; this is an act of "recognition based on first having learnt or assigned the identifying feature of a thing"[20] which also cognizes general features possessed by a number of items. Its function is also that of interpretation, a type of interpretation that can occur automatically.[21] Bronkhorst (1993: 49) translates *saṃjñā* as "ideation", while Gombrich (2009:145) as "apperception". Gethin (2001: 41-42), commenting on the role of *saññā* in Abhidhamma, points out that its capacity of labelling or marking must be understood as playing a major role in the psychology of memory. A good summary and discussion of various

[17] cf. Wynne, 2015a: 61: "a nominal theory of reality according to which existence and time are equivalent to words and thoughts".

[18] Johansson 1979: 93.

[19] Harvey, 1995: 141.

[20] Harvey, 1995: 142.

[21] Harvey, 1995: 143.

renderings of *saññā* by other scholars can be found in Kuan (2008: 13-17), who himself simply uses the Pāli term untranslated for the purpose of his book. This is the approach that I will also be adopting, due to the difficulties with arriving at a proper and definite translation of the term.

As noted above, the Āgamas mostly use 想 as corresponding to Pāli *saññā.* It seems to be a particularly good choice, as Chinese 想 carries with it a very strong subjective tone thus properly rendering the nature of *saññā* as conceptually mediated experience and being far from a neutral, transparent looking glass. Another interesting feature is that the Āgamas use 相 (*xiàng*) as corresponding to Pāli *nimitta*, the main characteristic feature of the object which is apprehended by *saññā* in order to recognize it and identify it. 想 and 相 not only look similar, but are also pronounced similarly with the only difference being the tone. Anālayo comments on some potential confusion which may have resulted from it mostly with regard to translating *animitto samādhi* in the parallel versions (Anālayo, 2011: 274-275 fn. 54; 2011: 686, fn. 15; 2012: 331, fn. 13).

A particularly detailed and thorough analysis of the functions of *saññā* has been provided by Sue Hamilton (1996: 53-62). She concludes that *saññā*:

> represents the processes of apperceiving and conceptualising, where apperceiving refers to the identificatory process that takes place on receiving incoming sensory data and conceptualising refers to the process of bringing to mind any abstract images, conceptions, ideas and so on which are not co-temporal with incoming sensory data.[22]

Of particular significance for our purpose are the passages showing the role of *saññā* as a potential point of vulnerability in the cognitive process prone to distortion and introduction of delusion.[23] Some suttas speak of *saññā* as giving rise to a *papañcasaññāsaṅkhā* (the *Madhupiṇḍika Sutta*), or *papañcasaṅkhā* (the *Aṭṭhakavagga*, verse 874 and 916). The *Adantāgutta Sutta* (SN 35.77/ iv 71) speaks of *papañcasaññā*. These terms seem to refer to the same negative cognitive process entangling human beings in the net of suffering. The compound *papañcasaññāsaṅkhā*, as well as the verb *papañceti* itself, is not easy and obvious to translate. According to Ñāṇananda (2016: 257), the term *papañcasaññāsaṅkhā* can be rendered as "reckonings born of prolific perceptions". Kuan (2008*:* 18) translates it as "apperception and naming [

[22] Hamilton, 1996: 62.

[23] e.g. Kuan, 2008:22: "the sequence from *sañjānāti* onwards is liable to criticism."

associated with] conceptual proliferation", Wynne (2010: 131) as "conceptual diffuseness or proliferation", Levman (2017a: 28) as "proliferation-perception-naming". Gombrich (2009: 150) renders *papañca* as "conceptualizing".[24]

It is at this stage that language, through its interplay with other cognitive factors, starts to play an absolutely crucial part in the process of development of cognitive distortion.[25] This issue is unfortunately rarely presented or understood properly. Ñāṇananda (2016: 257) must be given particular credit for highlighting this aspect in his pioneering work, where he notes that "*papañcasaññāsaṇkhā* has a relevance to the question of language and modes of linguistic usages" and that this is connected with "certain peculiarities inherent in the linguistic medium" ultimately leading to investing originally conventional concepts like the label "I" with an objective character.[26] Hamilton's analysis of the term stands out as particularly valuable, as she is able to draw from her understanding of both Western and Eastern philosophy (Kant and Nāgārjuna, respectively) in order to make sense of how the early Buddhist teachings show our experience to be mediated and constructed by cognitive and linguistic factors.

Drawing attention to the fact that in Sanskrit *prapañca* means "manifoldness", Hamilton suggests that Pāli *papañceti* should be translated as "one causes to become manifold" (Hamilton, 1996: 56). As a result of *papañca*, and "seeing things as manifold one is attributing independent existence to them, and to oneself as perceiver".[27] What has language got to do with it? As Hamilton has rightly noted, *saññā* is connected to language, as one of its aspects is naming. Language brings with it the manifoldness of names, their variety and diversity, and most importantly sharp delineations, as every word is clearly distinct and separated from other words. Thus if we perceive reality based on the categories of language, we are sharpening the delineations in order to clarify things, giving boundaries. "In becoming known […] things are reified, the experience becomes more and more clearly defined and identifiable, *making manifold and naming* what one is experiencing".[28] The fact that language plays an important role as a cognitive factor shaping our ordinary experience is also raised by

[24] Gombrich, 2009: 150: "The very act of conceptualizing, the Buddha held thus involves some inaccuracy. His term for it was *papañca*."

[25] cf. Gombrich, 2009:145: "Therefore *saññā* is the application of language to one's experience. This is, however, where the Buddha saw a big problem."

[26] cf. Ñāṇananda, 2012: 6.

[27] Hamilton, 1996: 57.

[28] Hamilton, 2000: 76.

Gombrich[29], Waldron[30], Ronkin[31] and Bronkhorst[32]. The *Nibbedhika Sutta* (AN 6.63/iii 413) states that *saññā* results in an expression in common language since one expresses (*voharati*) according to the way he perceives (*sañjānāti*).[33] This suggests that effability is inherent to the nature of *saññā*. Much more original and radical is the verse found in an identical form in the *Addhā Sutta* (Iti 63/i 54) and in the *Samiddhi Sutta* (SN 1.20/i 18) which states that beings (*sattā*) perceive in terms of what can be declared/expressed (*akkheyyasaññino*), and thus are established (*patiṭṭhitā*) in the expressible (*akkheyyasmiṃ*), and due to having no complete understanding (*apariññāya*) of what can be declared/expressed they become captured by death (*maccuno*).[34] It is important to note that there is a group of suttas (e.g. the *Atthirāga Sutta* 12.64/ii 101) expressing the concept of liberation in terms of the non-establishment of consciousness (*appatiṭṭhitaṃ viññāṇaṃ*). Conversely, if one has a full understanding of what can be expressed, one does not conceive of a declarer/speaker (*akkhātār*) i.e. "the Self". One can also indirectly infer that this fundamental error concerns the misunderstanding of what should not be expressed, a point raised in many other suttas. The significance of the message of the *Addhā Sutta* cannot be overstated. It not only explicitly states that our experience is mediated by our language, but also points out that it is due to misunderstanding language and its use that one

[29] Gombrich, 2009 :149: "To sum up, the Buddha concluded not merely that languages were conventional, but that it was inherently impossible for any language to capture reality. We have to express our cognitions through language, using *saññā*, but that imposes on experiences linguistic categories which cannot do justice to its fluidity."

[30] Waldron, 2003:162: "One of the chief conditions giving rise to our human experience of the world is language, since most moments of awareness are *already* heavily mediated by linguistic categories."

[31] Ronkin, 2005: 245: "The Buddha, however, unveils not only the dominance of language and conceptual thought, but also their inherent insufficiency and inadequacy. […] Whatever we can know is part of the activity of language, but language, by its very nature, undermines certified knowledge."

[32] Bronkhorst, 2016: 15: "Language becomes in this way one of the most important factors, if not the most important factor, contributing to the fact that ordinary awareness is interpreted awareness. Experiments show that language influences perception already at pre-conscious and non-linguistic levels."

[33] AN 6.63/iii 413: *Vohāravepakkaṃ, bhikkhave, saññāṃ vadāmi. Yathā yathā naṃ sañjānāti, tathā tathā voharati, evaṃ saññī ahosinti.*

[34] Iti 63/i 54: *Akkheyyaṃ apariññāya, yogam āyanti maccuno. Akkheyyañca pariññāya akkhātāraṃ na maññati.*

creates "Self-delusion", which results in falling under the dominion of death.[35] The power of language is confirmed by the *Nāma Sutta* (SN 1.61/i 39) which states that name conquers all (*sabbaṃ addhabhavi*[36]), and has everything under its power so that no being is free from conditioning by a name (cf. Levman, 2017a: 37).

Language and its misuse: a cross-cultural perspective

This type of realization does not emerge in the West until the linguistic paradigm shift which is typical of the twentieth century philosophy of language. It is in particular associated with the thought of Ludwig Wittgenstein, in both its earlier and later phase. In his *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* (TLP 5.6) Wittgenstein went so far so as to say that "The limits of language mean the limits of my world". Roughly at the same time, Edward Sapir and Benjamin Lee Whorf were developing their own theory of language. Whorf (1940: 229-31) wrote that "We dissect nature along lines laid down by our native language […] the world is presented in a kaleidoscope flux of impressions which has to be organized by our minds—and this means largely by the linguistic systems of our minds." Sapir (1929: 69), in a similar vein has written that "The fact of the matter is that the 'real world' is to a large extent unconsciously built upon the language habits of the group".

Sapir and Whorf are usually associated with linguistic relativism, a belief that different linguistic groups perceive the world differently due to differences in languages that they use. This element of their theories has perhaps been overemphasized and has not survived well, although in recent years there has been some research showing small differences of perception between users of different languages.[37] Such an approach would also be difficult to harmonize with the early Buddhist universalist approach. However, the basic claim of Wittgenstein, Sapir and Whorf that language in general (such as perhaps an innate Chomskian proto-language) shapes our perception and thinking to a great

[35] This very important text seems not to have received the attention it deserves. Credit must be given to Ñāṇananda (2012: 81-82) for being probably the first scholar to highlight its significance, although he focuses on its slightly different aspect. Among the exceptions is also Levman (2017a:31), who however refers to it in different context: that the Buddha's "teachings had to be correctly understood in the first place, before liberation could be achieved and conceivings and language transcended." Also cf. Bronkhorst (1984).

[36] The translation of the verb *addhabhavi* appears to be far from clear and settled, however.

[37] cf. Boroditsky, 2003: 917–21.

extent and its structures are inherently built into our cognitive apparatus (as opposed to beings who do not use language, e.g. animals), brings us very close to the early Buddhist view.

This more general version has lasted well. Contemporary philosopher of the mind, John Searle (2001*:* 156) states that "our main way of dividing things up is in the language. Our concept of reality is a matter of our linguistic categories." Madison (1988: 13) expresses this idea from a more humanistic, postmodern perspective: "Language is not just the 'expression' of experience; it is experience; it is experience which comes to know, acknowledge itself".

Wittgenstein's thought has yet another significant feature bringing it close to early Buddhism. As David Blair (2010: 33) observes, for Wittgenstein, language – both the words and the formal structures that determine how they are used – is not only the vehicle of thought, but often the source of our "diseases of thinking". And the main disease of thinking is, according to Wittgenstein (BB 143), that "which always looks for (and finds) what would be called a mental state from which all our acts spring, as from a reservoir." In other words, the Self. Actually "there is no such thing as the subject that thinks or entertains ideas."[38] Therefore he can state that "philosophy is a battle against the bewitchment of our intelligence by means of language."[39] But is it possible to provide a more in-depth explanation of the mechanism by which misunderstanding of language brings about self-delusion, using early Buddhist texts and concepts? Kuan (2008: 22) has stated that "conceptual proliferation based on subjective experiences stems from a deep-rooted sense of ego."

That is certainly true, but it raises a further question: how does this deep-rooted sense of ego arise? Or are its origins simply unconceivable? In order to uproot the Self-delusion, one should perhaps understand its origination. As we shall see, the key to understanding this issue lies in the dynamic interplay of language, *saññā*, memory and conscious experience. There are additional interesting passages in the Nikāyas that cast some light on this issue. In order to make sense of them and fully draw out their implications it will be very helpful to consider certain parallels with Western philosophies of the mind and recent developments in cognitive science.

[38] TP 5.631.
[39] PI §109.

Verse 916 of the *Aṭṭhakavagga* states that the root (*mūlaṃ*) of *papañcasaṅkhā* is (the notion) "I am a thinker" (*mantā asmīti*).[40] A look at the scheme of the cognitive process given in the *Madhupiṇḍika Sutta* shows that *papañcasaññāsaṅkhā* should be distinguished from the process rendered by the verb *papañceti*, being its result.[41] So, it seems that the notion of Self is in itself a product of this manifoldization (if we are to use Hamilton's reading), giving in turn rise to a cognitive delusion of a higher level. This is confirmed by the very interesting *Yavakalāpī Sutta* (SN 35.248/iv 201), the last sutta of the Saḷāyatana Saṃyutta. In it the thoughts *asmī* ("I am"), *ayam aham asmī* ("I am that"), *bhavissāmi* ("I will be") are labelled as *papañcita, maññita, iñjita, phandita* (respectively: a manifestation (manifoldization, a conceptualization, a movement, a palpitation) and *māna* (conceit). So it is the process rendered by the verb *papañceti* that introduces the basic form of self-delusion which then gets complicated into higher level cognitive distortions. And according to the scheme of cognitive process given in the *Madhupiṇḍika Sutta, papañceti* directly precedes *papañcasaññāsaṅkhā*, but is itself preceded by *saññā and vitakka.* Therefore what one is conscious of, that one also complicates, conceives, manifoldizes. The *Ambaṭṭha Sutta* (DN 3/i 87) conveys a message that the structure of *saññā* can itself undergo change, reflecting the changes occurring over time in language, knowledge and memory. The text confirms *saññā's* connection with language, as it states that people now perceive (*sañjānanti*) *pisāca*-s *as pisāca*-s but in the past perceived them as "black ones" (*kaṇhā*).[42] *Saññā* is succeeded in the cognitive chain by *vitakka* – thought. All the evidence in the Nikāyas suggests that *vitakka* is a verbal type of thought, a type of silent talking to oneself. The *Cūḷavedalla Sutta* states that it is considered to be an activity of speech (*vacīsaṅkhāro*).[43] This early Buddhist understanding coincides with Wittgenstein's (PI §329) remark in the *Philosophical Investigations* that "the language is itself the vehicle of thought". The content of *saññā* is therefore expressible verbally, due to its linguistically mediated nature. What one is conscious of, one can express in speech or by engaging in inner acts of silent talking to oneself.

[40] Sn 916: *Mūlaṃ papañcasaṅkhāya, (iti bhagavā) Mantā asmīti sabbam uparundhe.*

[41] MN 18/i 112: *yaṃ papañceti tatonidānaṃ purisaṃ papañcasaññāsaṅkhā samudācaranti*

[42] DN 3/i 93: *etarahi manussā pisāce 'pisācā' ti sañjānanti; evam eva kho, ambaṭṭha, tena samayena manussā pisāce 'kaṇhā'ti sañjānanti.*

[43] MN 44/i 301: *vitakkavicārā vacīsaṅkhāro.*

The fact that ordinary conscious experience involves simplification and conceptualization of sense input may be considered an important evolutionary adaptation. Evolution promotes efficiency and survival. In order to be efficient, one has no time to contemplate the complexity of reality in its original rich form. A form of simplification and stereotyping is needed, ignoring all unnecessary details. A crucial breakthrough in this regard seems to be brought by the development of language. Language can however be thought to function in different ways: either as a purely pragmatic tool for solving problems or as a representation of reality, its mirror image. A consideration of the two major phases of Wittgenstein's philosophy is especially relevant here. In the first phase, as presented in his *Tractatus*, he believed that the structure of an ideal language corresponds perfectly to the structure of reality. The meaning of the sentence is the state of things which it pictorially represents. Wittgenstein's later philosophy moved on from the conception of an isomorphic relation between language and the world to a much more pragmatic notion of language as a tool. According to this new understanding, language in its original and natural form was never meant to serve as an isomorphic representation of the structure of reality. Sentences and words did not possess any ultimate, objective meaning gained by direct and fixed reference to the objects they signified. They were instead tools used in human communities, and their meaning could only be reconstructed in the context of the social situation in which they were used, a "language game" being part of "the form of life".[44] Wittgenstein (PI §2) considers a hypothetical situation when the word "Slab" is actually a command for a worker to give a slab, effectively meaning: "give me the Slab", thus belonging to a particular context of social interaction and not meant to simply signify any slab. The meaning of the word "Slab" is not, however, according to Wittgenstein constituted by the inner, psychological intention of the man speaking it, but by the public context in which it is used, thus "one man calls out the words as orders, the other acts according to them."[45]

Even better to understand this difference between two usages of language, let us consider the statement: "I am hungry." When seen according to the early, semantic theory of Wittgenstein, it can be dissected by analysis into parts which possess a meaning independent of any context and isomorphically correspond

[44] This accords with Ñāṇananda's (2012: 6) observation that "language has an essential public quality about it".

[45] BB p. 77.

to objective elements of reality. Thus, there is a Self ("I") which exists ("am") and has an inner experience of hunger. According to the later Wittgensteinian concept of language, this statement should never be removed from the social context in which it functions, nor be dissected into atomic, meaningful elements. So, it can actually mean: "Bring me food," or "You should not hold it against me that I am not working well today (because I have not eaten well)," or "This is a sensitive subject I don't want to talk about, so let's change the subject of our conversation to food!". The dynamic and labile nature of *saññā* reflects the changes brought by the introduction of language. New forms of *saññā* are introduced, and as Bronkhorst (2012: 12) rightly notes, the learning of language facilitates the formation of representations. Interestingly, Bronkhorst does not make a direct connection with specific early Buddhist cognitive or philosophical concepts or terms, presenting these reflections purely as a psychological theory.

In early Buddhism there seems to have been an awareness that the natural use of language is pragmatic. If this even concerns the *dhamma*, seen as a "raft" to be used and left behind, then it applies even more to the ordinary usage of language. There is a recognition of the changeable, conventional nature of language, as attested by the Buddha's critique of adherence (*abhiniveso*) to any local way of speaking/expression (*janapadaniruttiyā*) and overstepping of ordinary designation (*samaññāya*) expressed in the *Araṇavibhaṅga Sutta* (MN 139/iii 237).

As Levman (2017a: 49) and Ronkin (2005: 245) rightly observe, the words cannot directly "correspond" to reality due to their inherent inadequacy. Gombrich (2009: 149) points out that "the Buddha concluded not merely that languages were conventional, but that it was inherently impossible for any language to capture reality." However, due to the incorporation of categories of language into the cognitive structure of *saññā*, human thinking undergoes a change. Language becomes engraved into the structure of cognition, resulting in a "linguistification of human experience" (Waldron, 2003: 163).

This is however not its original, pragmatic form, but rather its elements are taken out of their original holistic context of a language game and form of life, and are dissected into single meaningful units which then become associated with the objects they are meant to signify. As a further act of cognitive simplification and distortion it makes human functioning more efficient, allowing for better filtering of sense data as well as their storage, first as memory, then as symbolic narratives.

Self and the narrative

The tendency to seek for objective correlates of the elements of language appears to be a natural tendency of the human mind. Ñāṇananda (2016: 231) rightly speaks of the "hypostasizing character of grammar", of grammatical structure investing words with life. At the next stage, language may come to be seen as essential in itself; some of its words may be considered to carry the essence of the thing they signify in their sound and their repetition may subsequently be believed to have magical power. Despite the Buddha's warning, the pragmatic understanding of the role of language is lost on the Theravādins.[46] The Abhidhamma system is somewhat akin to the early phase of Wittgensteinian thought: there is an isomorphism between language and reality. The basic and ultimate constituents of reality can be properly rendered by language; there is nothing ineffable about them, as even Nibbāna itself is now a *dhamma*, an object.[47] This is an example of a reification of the elements of language, its hypostatizing. Another example of this process can be observed in Western metaphysics. In Aristotle's thought, nouns often correspond to metaphysical "substances", adjectives can represent a "substantial form" or an "accidental property". Abstract and general terms tend to be reified as universals. At some point in the history of Theravāda, Pāli started to be considered a holy language and some of its words were even considered to have arisen spontaneously as if due to some cosmic necessity, as Levman (2017a: 45-49) convincingly shows in his recent paper. This can all be considered forms of *papañca*. What does all this have to do with the arising of self-delusion? Personal pronouns are of course a natural and necessary part of language, functioning as part of pragmatic language games and forms of life, thus being necessary for efficient communication and problem solving. However, the natural tendency to seek objective, real correlates of the elements of language also affects the personal pronouns.[48] This stage is described by the *Sabbāsava Sutta* (MN 2/i 8). According to the sutta, the one who applies the mind unwisely (*ayoniso manasi karoti*) engages in the following forms of self-reflexive thinking regarding the time that has passed (*atītam addhānaṃ*):

[46] For an accurate critique of Theravāda commentarial views regarding language, cf. Ñāṇananda, 2012: 7, 43.

[47] cf. Ñāṇananda, 2016: 13: "They conceived Nibbāna as something existing out there in its own right."

[48] cf. Ñāṇananda, 2012:50: "By establishing a correspondence between the grammar of language and the grammar of nature, he sets about weaving networks of 'papañca'".

"Was I?" (*ahosiṃ nu kho ahaṃ*), "What was I?" (*kiṃ nu kho ahosiṃ*), "How was I?" (*kathaṃ nu kho ahosiṃ*), "Having been what, what did I become?" (*kiṃ hutvā kiṃ ahosiṃ nu kho ahaṃ*). The same types of questions are then repeated with regard to the future (*anāgatam addhānaṃ*) starting with "Will I be?" (*bhavissāmi nu kho ahaṃ*).

Finally, one is doubtful (*kathaṃkathī*) inwardly/self-reflexively (*ajjhattaṃ*) in similar ways regarding the present time (*paccuppannam addhānaṃ*), starting with "Am I?" (*ahaṃ nu kho smi*). The final two types of reflexions are: "This being (*satto*) has come (*āgato*) from where? (*kuto*)" and "Where (*kuhiṃ*) will it be (*bhavissatī*) going? (*gāmī*)".

Due to such unwise mentation (*ayoniso manasikaroto*) one of the six views (*diṭṭhi*), arises to such a person as true (*saccato*) and firm (*thetato*): "Self (*attā*) exists (*atthi*) for me (*me*)", "Self doesn't exist (*natthi*) for me". "I perceive Self with Self" (*attanā va attānaṃ sañjānāmī*), "I perceive not-Self with Self" (*attanā va anattānaṃ sañjānāmī*), "I perceive Self with not-Self" (*anattanā va attānaṃ sañjānāmī*), and "It is this Self of mine (*yo me ayaṃ attā*) the Speaker and Feeler (*vado vedeyyo*)[49] (that) experiences (*paṭisaṃvedeti*) here and there (*tatra tatra*) the result (*vipākaṃ*) of good and bad actions (*kalyāṇapāpakānaṃ kammānaṃ*); but this self of mine is permanent (*nicco*), everlasting (*dhuvo*), eternal (*sassato*), does not have a changeable nature (*avipariṇāmadhammo*), and it will last (*ṭhassati*) forever (*sassatisamaṃ*)".

The *Sabbāsava Sutta* is an extremely important text. Read together with texts such as the *Yavakalāpī Sutta*, the *Madhupiṇḍika Sutta* and the *Addhā Sutta*, it provides an in-depth explanation of the mechanism of the gradual arising of Self-view. The terms *papañceti* or *papañcasaññāsaṅkhā* are not explicitly used in the *Sabbāsava Sutta*. It is clear, however, that the text explains in greater detail the arising of the very same misconception connected to personal pronouns which is labelled in the *Madhupiṇḍika Sutta* as *papañcasaññāsaṅkhā*. The process starts with a simple act of searching for the objectively existing correlate of the personal pronoun "I".[50] A very important step of the process is the introduction of the notion of "the Self" which exists in the past and future. This is yet another aspect of language which contributes to the development

[49] For an interesting discussion of the term see: Wijesekera, O. H. de A., "Pali 'Vado Vedeyyo' and Upanisadic 'Avāki Anādaraḥ'", *University of Ceylon Review* vol. III, No.2, 1945, pp. 89-95.

[50] cf. Levman 2017(b): 8: "It is simply an artifact of our dualistic linguistic structure which, in asking a question about an agent, assumes that such must exist, as the word exists to which it presumably refers."

of the notion of Self. Language of course allows referring to the future and the past, as it is a very useful pragmatic function which improves its efficiency. In the context of the arising of the Self-view this feature allows the creation of an illusion of continuity of the Self by projecting it beyond the present moment. This ability will later become an important source of internal discourse, worries, plans and endless returning to past events**.** Therefore the *Madhupiṇḍika Sutta* states that *papañcasaññāsaṅkhā* assail and beset (*samudācaranti*) a man with regard to the *dhamma*-s that are past, future and presently arisen. While the first step consisted of simply asserting the existence of Self in time, in the second one this Self is constructed as possessing certain qualities, being in certain states, bearing certain attributes, e.g. "What was I?" (*kiṃ nu kho ahosiṃ*). Thus, the concept of a being (*satto*) is introduced. Later, the continuity of a thus constructed being can be extended beyond a particular life/existence: "this being (*satto*) has come (*āgato*) from where (*kuto*)?" "Where (*kuhiṃ*) will it be (*bhavissatī*) going (*gāmī*)?"

According to the *Sabbāsava Sutta,* the ability to engage in inner speech seems to play a crucial role in the development of Self-delusion. As with the other aspects of language, this one too seemed originally to perform a neutral and purely pragmatic function. It is possible to point out the benefits of engaging in inner speech from an evolutionary perspective. The ability to use language is a higher-level development which sets us aside from other animals, but as such it must also be quite challenging for our cognitive system. By silently talking to ourselves we can constantly practise this crucial ability, so that in time of need it can be used efficiently. Our success depends to a great extent on our ability to successfully use language in public situations in order to persuade our interlocutors. Secondly, when we examine our inner speech, we find out that it is far from being chaotic as it seems to follow certain patterns. We often engage in inner, imaginary dialogue with people that we know, as if in anticipation of potential real-life events as a form of rehearsing them. The other pattern is constituted by returning to some important conversations from the past and re-enacting them in a better, improved way. This can be seen as an important adaptive mechanism improving our efficiency in using language in public situations for the purpose of persuading our interlocutors. As Mercier and Sperber (2011: 57) convincingly show, its real function is argumentative, as it serves to "devise and evaluate arguments intended to persuade" which also explains our confirmation bias. It actually "falls short of delivering rational beliefs and rational decisions

reliably, […] it may even be detrimental to rationality."[51] But just as with other aspects of language, this one too can go wrong and turn against us.

It is only recently that Western thought has started to develop similar concepts. They can be generally described as concepts of the narrative self. Emile Benveniste was one of the pioneers of this way of thinking. In his seminal article *Subjectivity in language*, he (Benveniste, 1971: 224) has stated that "It is in and through language that man constitutes himself as a subject, because the language alone establishes the concept of "ego" in reality." The category of person, both in language and outside of it, is created by the establishment of subjectivity in language (Benveniste, 1971: 227). Language does not merely constitute "Self/I", but at the same time also establishes its dualistic relation with "you/that", because:

> Consciousness of self is only possible if it is experienced by contrast. […] *"I"* posits another person, the one who, being, as he is, is completely exterior to "me" (Benveniste, 1971: 225).

Several other scholars have been developing the concept of the narrative self after Benveniste. In Madison's (1988: 12-13) concept, the "I" is not a speaking subject, as it exists only as a spoken subject of its own living discourse, posited in and by means of it. Such a "Self" is not something that is given, it is achieved by means of language as the unity of an ongoing narrative (Madison, 1988: 13). This notion corresponds to the situation described in the *Sabbāsava Sutta*.

While Benveniste and Madison were developing the concept of the narrative self from the perspective of humanistic, postmodern hermeneutics, the more analytic approach of cognitive science arrives at a similar conclusion from a slightly different angle. Thus Daniel Dennett (1992: 103) speaks of "The Self as a Center of Narrative Gravity", being a "fictional character at the center of autobiography".[52] In *Philosophical Foundations of Neuroscience*, Bennett and Hacker (2003: 331) state that:

> The notion of "self" is an aberration. There is no such thing as "self" … the confusion stems from inserting a space in the reflexive pronoun "myself," "yourself," "ourselves" to yield the aberrant expressions "my self," "your self" and "our selves". Having opened up an illicit space, we then fall into it.

[51] Mercier and Sperber, 2011: 71.
[52] Dennett, 1992: 114.

Morin (2007: 117) has suggested that self-awareness relies to a large extent on inner speech, by which he means "the activity of silently talking to oneself". He goes on to argue that "one becomes self-aware when one engages in self-talk (higher order thought) about one's current mental states and personal characteristics". This again seems to correspond well to the forms of unwise attention described in the *Sabbāsava Sutta*. Thus the intrusion of language into our ordinary experience may warp it to such an extent that it is not even possible to conceive its original state. The hypostazing of a grammatical structure of language contributes to our experience of reality as a plurality of distinct, sharply delineated entities existing in time. We have seen how language facilitates the introduction of "Self" as a protagonist of a narrative, and "Self" can only constitute itself in contrast to "non-Self".[53] There is however one significant feature that distinguishes these scholars from the early Buddhist perspective. They seem to be entirely oblivious to the negative consequences of the establishment of this "narrative self" and of course are unaware of any possibility of its abolition.

According to the *Sabbāsava Sutta*, the final step of cognitive delusion is constituted by the introduction of the Subject who is the speaker and feeler (*vado vedeyyo*) (that) experiences (*paṭisaṃvedeti*) the results of action. In order to properly understand the nature of this cognitive mistake, we must first turn to a very fundamental question: since the autobiographical Self does not really exist, who is the one who actually undergoes delusion, the real speaker, knower, experiencer, seeker for liberation?

Reductionism, khandha-s and the human being

This problem is nicely summed up by Walpola Rahula (1959: 42):

> There is another popular question: If there is no Self, no Ātman, who realizes nirvāṇa? Before we go on to nirvāṇa, let us ask the question: Who thinks now, if there is no Self?

The typical answer that one often finds in Buddhist literature is that the person is a set of five *khandha*-s which are in a state of constant flux. Such a theory

[53] cf. Ñāṇananda, 2012:10: "direct relationship between the ego and the non-ego. […] is an oversimplification of facts characteristic of the realm of language as well as of our ways of thought."

has severe limitations, however. The five *khandha*-s were not originally meant to provide a "comprehensive analysis of what a human being is comprised of" (Hamilton, 2000: 27), "an analysis of man as object" (Gethin, 1986: 49), but rather as Wynne (2009: 65) puts it, represent an "experiential understanding". As he rightly remarks:

> the five aggregates are aspects of a person that can be observed. Since a person is made up of many things that cannot be observed in this way, it would seem that the list of five aggregates was devised precisely in order that a person could contemplate his phenomenal nature.[54]

Wynne (2009: 77) attributes a type of thinking, which sees the person as made up of five aggregates and nothing more, to a reductionistic tendency in the history of Buddhist thought which contributed to the replacement of the original not-self teaching by the no-self doctrine. Apparently its original aim was to address the problem of personal identity by questioning the identification with phenomenal being (Wynne, 2010: 113). The reductionist account of a human being as five *khandha*-s fails to explain the way it functions.

The two *Gaddulabaddha Sutta*-s (SN 22.99-100/iii 149-152) of the *Khandha Saṃyutta* contain similes which appear to be relevant to this issue. The first of the Suttas talks about a person who sees the five aggregates in terms of self (*attato samanupassati*), in a number of different ways. That person runs around (*anuparidhāvati*) or "revolves" (*anuparivattati*) around the five aggregates, just like a person tied to a stake (*khīle*) or post (*thambhe*) by a leather strap (*gaddulabaddho*).

In the second of the Suttas, the person who identifies with the aggregates as himself (*eso 'ham asmi* etc.), whatever act he does, he does it in respect of the five aggregates; this is just like the man bound by a leather strap to a post – whether walking, standing, sitting or lying down he does so towards the post. The second *Gaddulabaddha Sutta* ends with a simile of a painter (*rajako*) or a decorator (*cittakārako*) who using various dyes would fashion (*abhinimmineyya*) a shape of a man or woman complete in all features (*sabbaṅgapaccaṅgiṃ*) on a well-polished board, wall or strip of cloth. Likewise, the only thing that an unlearned ordinary person causes to come ino being (*abhinibbatteti*) are the five *khandha*-s.

[54] Wynne, 2009:65.

It is interesting to consider these similes as conveying the idea that an individual is not reducible to the five *khandha*-s. A stake or a pillar is distinct from the one who is bound to them, and a painted figure is different from an artist who has fashioned it. We shall return to these similes below, as they seem to carry additional information which can be seen as relevant with regard to the model of cognitive delusion we will be discussing.

Conscious experience and its misinterpretation: a perspective from cognitive science

The *khandha*-s represent various aspects of the subjective, conscious experience of a human being. Therefore, taking the *khandha*-s to be Self seems to imply that a human being considers his phenomenal conscious experience (or some of its elements) to be the seat of true subjectivity and agency. This corresponds to the commonly held, seemingly obvious view that consciousness is the "place" where thinking, cognizing and decision making occur. However, a human being is much more than his conscious experience and is not reducible to it in any way. According to the new developments in the field of cognitive science, the true role and nature of conscious experience proves to be quite different from that originally assumed. Taking these developments into account will help us to make better sense of the early Buddhist explanation of the arising of Self-view.

One of the most important realizations of modern cognitive science is that higher level information processing occurs simultaneously on multiple parallel levels, which entails the unconscious nature of such processing. The processing capacity of consciousness is simply too small to face this task. Modularity must be considered to be one of the most important features of the human cognitive system. Cognition does not happen according to an "all or nothing" principle; there are many parallel, simultaneous processes occurring to a large extent independently of one another. As long as they all function properly, their end result gives an impression of a single, uniform cognitive process. However, the evidence from psychopathology and various experiments show that particular modules can stop functioning while the other ones continue their operation. This results in various forms of dissociation of cognitive functions and elements of conscious experience which according to common sense should be impossible. (An example is "blindsight", which implies a sharp dissociation between visual performance and conscious visual awareness). The non-conscious processing modules seem to be somewhat disjointed and unable to directly communicate

with each other. Their output is however processed into a unified, conceptually mediated form characteristic of conscious experience. This involves the object-subject structure and a certain unity of apperception (to use the Kantian term). Only in such form can the content of conscious experience become integrated into a coherent Self-narrative. Thus it is through the medium of conscious experience that a human individual can represent himself in a way that allows him to make sense of his own functioning. Unlike the preconscious data, the information that is consciously experienced can be used in various ways by the individual. It may become the object of introspection, can be stored in memory, can be expressed by speech or movements of the body, can be reflected upon or evaluated and may be used as a basis for long term planning and action guidance. Cognitive models of consciousness, such as Bernard Baars' "Global Workspace Theory" (GWT), describe this feature of consciousness using the term "global availability" and connect it with functioning of working memory. As Baars (2003) puts it, "consciousness in the metaphor resembles a bright spot on the stage of immediate memory, directed there by a spotlight of attention, under executive guidance. The rest of the theater is dark and unconscious." Described in functional terms of GWT, consciousness is "a sort of global workspace, whose contents can be broadcast to the system as a whole".[55] The information that has become conscious can then be subject to further evaluation and processing by the other non-conscious modules. Thus the initial idea or impulse to act can be reflected upon, modified or rejected

Using the model of GWT, Baars and Franklin (2007: 958) explain the role of conscious experience in human cognition:

> GWT postulates that human cognition is implemented by a multitude of relatively small, special purpose processes, almost always unconscious. Although that may seem commonplace today, the idea of widely distributed specialized processing in the brain was highly controversial at the time it was proposed. Processing coalitions compete for access to a global workspace (and subjectively into consciousness, assessed behaviourally by accurate reports). This limited capacity global workspace serves to broadcast the message from the winning coalition to all the unconscious processors, in order to recruit resources to join in handling novel and high-priority input, and in solving current problems.

[55] Baars, 1998: 42.

This vision is in contrast with the reductionistic Abdhidhammic theories of the mind which fail to explain several crucial aspects of the functioning of human cognition. Gethin (1998: 211) summarizes how the mind functions according to Abdhidhamma: "a collection of at least eight *dharma*s (consciousness and associated mental factors) arises for a moment and then falls away to be immediately followed by the next combination of consciousness and associated mental factors. Each combination is conscious of just one object". As Waldron (2003: 87) points out, "Abhidharma theory cannot fully account for all the unmanifest factors "bound along" (*anubandhu*) in the mental stream that virtually constitute individual samsaric existence" as it emphasizes synchronic discourse at the expanse of the diachronic one. Sean M. Smith (2017) has pointed out, in his yet unpublished paper, *The Dynamics of the Subliminal Mind in Theravada Buddhism*, which was presented at the IABS conference in Toronto (2017), that the canonical account found in the Therāvada Abdhidhamma commentarial literature has some "inherent philosophical problems", as it fails to account for multiple forms of consciousness which operate simultaneously, not serially.

Of fundamental importance for our discussion is the distinction between actual active cognitive processing of data and the mode of conscious awareness resultant from this process. The two should be in no way consider synonymous. While we have access to consciously experienced phenomenal content, we do not have access to the actual cognitive process which has produced this content. One can only describe it functionally by focusing on its role and effects, or perhaps speak about the physical mechanism serving as its basis. It is however impossible to describe this process in terms connected with first-person phenomenal conscious experience.

Thoughts, ideas and insights do not actually originate or get consciously produced in the field of awareness. They ultimately find their way to consciousness (often suddenly and unexpectedly) but they have been produced outside of it, by non-conscious cognitive processes. As Dijksterhuis, Aarts and Smith (2005: 81-82) summarize, "consciousness can only deal with a very small percentage of all incoming information. All the rest is processed without awareness"; "thought when defined as producing meaningful associative consciousness, happens unconsciously". As ground-breaking research by Libet and Wegner shows, the real acts of will resulting in bodily movements and decision making also do not originate from the field of awareness.[56]

[56] cf. Libet, 1999: 49; Wegner, 2002: 97.

What modern cognitive science suggests, is that the actual neural readiness potential (RP) to act precedes by micro-moments the conscious awareness of the will. The latter merely provides a feeling of agency which is incorporated into a unified Self-narrative in order to provide a sense of meaning to one's own actions. A common sense assumption that by acts of conscious inner speech we are "thinking" in the sense of consciously solving some cognitive problems, gaining insights or producing knowledge must be considered naïve. I have already reviewed the argument by Mercier and Sperber that the original function of inner speech is argumentative, being a form of preparation for public situations. Inner speech also contributes to a narrative through which Self becomes established.

Consciousness is therefore not the actual locus of creating ideas, making acts of will, active cognizing, i.e. the activities constitutive of human agency and subjectivity. However, we have no direct conscious access to these activities. It is only the content of phenomenal consciousness that is available to various modules throughout the cognitive system, which in themselves are non-conscious and disjointed from one another. Phenomenal, conscious experience is also a form of self-representation through which an individual can make sense of his own activities. To use a metaphor, it is a sort of a mirror in which we can reflect ourselves. However, this mirror seems to have a severely limited field of view, failing to reflect many crucial elements of our being and functioning. Furthermore, this mirror does not offer a faithful reflection, but rather a highly warped one. The phenomenal content of conscious experience has a highly processed, synthetic form. I have already discussed the extent to which conscious experience is mediated by conceptual and linguistic factors. All these factors contribute to the arising of Self-view. In misinterpreting the nature and content of his conscious experience, a human individual falls prey to his own intelligence, which works by simplifying, making inferences, looking for regularities, seeing the world in terms of objects, subjects and agents. As we have seen, all this is to a great extent facilitated by the acquisition of language and its misuse. This finally results in misapplying the notions of subjectivity and agency to a sphere which is actually devoid of them. The individual starts to identify with a mental entity, the non-existent centre of an internal narrative. Its thinking, cognitive processes and acts of will originate and are brought about in the stream of consciousness. This entity seems to be inhabiting and controlling the body, but is distinct from it as well as from other beings.

This, however, is a delusion, as the actual locus of agency and subjectivity lies in a sentient, intelligent body. By that, I do not want to say that our "true and ultimate" identity is limited to the body, or that the body is "the Self". Instead it is better simply to ask about what is in us which makes decisions, solves cognitive problems, undergoes illusions and wants to be liberated. All these processes, constitutive of our agency and subjectivity, are to various degrees focalized and originate within the human body, often in a non-conscious way. The term "individual" in itself must be considered a conventional linguistic designation as there is no corresponding monadic entity separated from its surroundings by fixed boundaries. On the contrary, as modern natural science tells us, the body is interconnected with the environment through a constant flow of energy and circulation of matter, although it maintains a degree of independence and distinctiveness. According to externalism, a branch of thinking within modern cognitive science, "certain forms of human cognizing include […] loops that […] cris-cross the boundaries of brain, body, and world. The local mechanisms of mind, if this is correct, are not all in the head. Cognition leaks out into body and world."[57]

It is interesting to consider the possibility of interpreting early Buddhist texts according to the model I have described above. The *khandha*-s are the elements and aspects constituting the "world" of our subjective, phenomenal experience. It is only through this medium that ordinary individuals may know themselves. According to the *Khajjanīya Sutta* (SN 22.79/iii 87), all the *khandha*-s are made up/constructed (*saṅkhata*). The metaphor of a warped, distorting mirror with severely limited field of view that I have considered above seems pertinent with regard to *khandha*-mediated experience. Therefore taking the *khandha*-s to be self may mean much more than just seeing stability where there are only impermanent and dynamic processes. In early Buddhist terms, due to unwise application of the mind (*ayoniso manasikaroto*), an individual perceives the *khandha*-s as the Self. In harmony with my model, this may mean that a person identifies with the elements of his phenomenal experience. I have suggested that due to its misinterpretation one sees it as a locus of identity, agency and subjectivity. This seems to correspond to the early Buddhist account of the Self as the Speaker and Feeler (*vado vedeyyo*), who experiences (*paṭisaṃvedeti*) and establishes itself through the internal narrative. As I have discussed, this is greatly facilitated by "linguistification" of our experience. Early Buddhist texts

[57] Clark, 2008: xviii.

convey this message using the concepts of *saññā* and *papañcasaññāsaṇkhā.* The potential for misinterpreting the *khandha*-s as Self is perhaps suggested by the simile in the second *Gaddulabaddha Sutta* which compares the *khandha*-s to an image of a man or woman, "complete in all its parts". This simile may perhaps be also interpreted as corresponding to the idea in cognitive science that phenomenal, conscious experience serves as our means of self-representation.

I have considered the idea that the actual processes constitutive of our agency and subjectivity are to a large extent focalized in our body, and are not describable in terms connected with phenomenal experience. It is possible to read early Buddhist texts as suggesting modes of functioning and cognizing that need not be reduced to or analysed in terms of the *khandha*-s. Many fragments describe human cognition using the concept of *citta.* One perhaps should not automatically assume that they should be read as implying a certain combination of the *khandha*-s. The relation of *citta* to the *khandha*-s is not made clear in the Nikāyas and may be open to unorthodox interpretations. This is of particular concern with reference to awakened individuals. The *Vāhana Sutta* (AN 10.81/v 151) states that the Tathāgata dwells by means of dissociated mind (*vimariyādīkatena cetasā*), set free (*nissaṭo*), dissociated (*visaṃyutto*) and liberated (*vippamutto*) from all the five *khandha*-s. The *Mūlapariyāya Sutta* (MN 1/i 1) contrasts the mode of cognition of an awakened person (the arahant and the Tathāgata) with that of an ignorant ordinary individual (*assutavā puthujjano*). While an ordinary person apperceives reality (*sañjānāti*), an awakened being uses a different, perfect mode of cognition, rendered by the verb *abhijānāti* (usually translated as "directly knows", but literally referring to "super-knowledge").

As I have suggested above, processes constitutive of our agency and subjectivity are focalized within the human body, which is not a monadic entity separated from the environment by rigid barriers. Perhaps a similar notion is suggested by the early Buddhist texts describing a meditator contemplating body (*kāyānupassī*) with regard to the body (*kāye*), not only inwardly (*ajjhattaṃ*) but also externally (*bahiddhā*), or both inside and outside (*ajjhattabahiddhā*).[58] Instead of reducing the individual to a combination of the five *khandha*-s, the early texts seemed to have a much more holistic view according to which the human being is often described as a body (*kāya*) – the individual who

[58] MN 20/I 56: *bahiddhā vā kāye kāyānupassī viharati, ajjhattabahiddhā vā kāye kāyānupassī viharati*. With regard to this fragment, Ñāṇananda (2016: 606) comments that "the aim is to break down the dichotomy between one's own and another's."

experiences through the six senses including the mind (cf. Kuan 2008: 100). Sometimes one finds the phrase "conscious/sentient body" (*saviññāṇaka kāya*), which as Kuan (2008: 102) and Hamilton (1996: 102) rightly point out should not imply any duality of two different principles, but rather implies that the human body is inherently sentient. One can also think of the Buddha's statement in the *Rohitassa Sutta* where he speaks of the world to be found in the conscious (*sasaññī*) body (*kaḷevaro*) endowed with mind (*samanako*).

Self-consciousness, psychological time and suffering

Falling prey to Self-delusion is not just a matter of holding a mistaken theoretical view, as it has profound consequences for the functioning of the human being. Instead of seeing ourselves as we really are, we start to cognize and act as if our true identity were that of "Self". To preserve its continuity we engage in constant inner speech, due to the fact that "'I' does not exist outside language, outside discourse; it is created and maintained in language and in discourse."[59] I have considered the idea that there are aspects of our being in the world and cognizing it which do not necessarily require the medium of verbal thoughts or phenomenal consciousness. But fearing what we perceive to be our supposed annihilation, we interrupt the flow of life trying to experience it through the medium of Self and thought.

However, it seems that maintaining the presence of Self-consciousness is taxing for the individual. Early Buddhist texts consider ordinary phenomenal experience expressed in terms of the five *khandha*-s to be synonymous with suffering (*dukkha*). For an ignorant individual, such experience entails Self-consciousness since he identifies with the *khandha*-s. The whole process wears us down, takes us away from the present and enforces an artificial dichotomy between what we consider to be our identity and our environment. In the pursuit of what we perceive to be our self-safety lies inevitable suffering, as the environment cannot be fully controlled. Due to the fact that Self is constituted in language and discourse, we often interweave views and beliefs into its structure, thus making them something intimate, turning them into objects of clinging. The fact that early Buddhist texts lay so much emphasis on views and rituals as a source of clinging is truly an innovative and outstanding feature which distinguishes Buddhism from other premodern doctrines, both Eastern and Western.

[59] Anderson, 1997: 219.

There appears to be a correlation between the presence of self-reflexive consciousness, and subjective awareness of psychological time. This relation has been explored by several scholars employing a phenomenological approach. As Zahavi (2011: 71-72) points out, "a mere succession of synchronically unified but isolated momentary points of experience cannot explain and account for our experience of duration. To actually perceive an object as enduring over time, the successive phases of consciousness must somehow be united". Drawing from Husserl, he proposes that the "unity of the stream of consciousness is constituted by inner time-consciousness." Therefore, we can say that the psychological sense of time is inherent to the very structure of conscious experience. Thompson (2011: 159) points out that it is also connected with Self, as "our implicit awareness of our experiences as flowing in time—is most fundamentally the pre-reflective self-awareness of the stream of consciousness". Zahavi (2011: 59) speaks of "experiential core self" "defined as the very subjectivity of experience, and is not taken to be something that exists independently" (2011: 60). This would suggest that phenomenal experience is inherently connected with Self-consciousness and awareness of the passage of time.

It seems that self-reflexive consciousness and subjective awareness of psychological time are also positively correlated with psychological suffering.[60] When we suffer psychologically, the flow of time seems unbearably long to us. However, at the same time there is a strong presence of Self-awareness. Paradoxically, in the moments of happiness "the Self" is manifested weakly and there is no sense of the dragging of time. That is because just as a second is the unit of measure of physical time, so every act of self-reflective conscious experience provides us with the sense of the passage of time. The more self-referential acts of Self-consciousness, the less happiness and more dragging of psychological time. The other resultant aspect is the misunderstanding of the nature of pleasure. Thinking that we are "Self" we cannot properly understand that the very nature of pleasurable moments is the absence from them of the draining presence of Self-awareness. I have considered the possibility of modes of functioning and cognizing not expressible in terms of phenomenal, Self-

[60] cf. Csikszentmihalyi, 1990: 71: "Self-consciousness disappears, and the sense of time becomes distorted. An activity that produces such experiences is so gratifying that people are willing to do it for its own sake." This correlation of course lies at the heart of Csikszentmihalyi's well known concept of "flow", but he was by no means the first to notice or discover it. He has been, however, probably the first to elaborate it into a detailed theory and popularize it in mainstream psychology.

conscious experience. Perhaps this is the key to interpreting the paradoxical statement that the fact of nothing being experienced (*n' atthi vedayitaṃ*) may be considered pleasant (*sukhaṃ*).[61] Misunderstanding the nature of pleasure, we try to relive the moments we have found pleasant, but try to experience them through the medium of Self. Of course, this is doomed to failure, as the very introduction of Self-conscious experience takes away what was originally actually pleasant in these moments.

Secondly, we mistakenly associate the pleasurable nature of those moments with the object or activity that allowed us be rid of the Self-awareness by allowing us to forget about ourselves and not notice the lack of Self-awareness and sense of time. This drags us into a pursuit which is doomed to failure and entails suffering.[62] This explanation has been suggested by Bronkhorst (2012: 147) as part of his theory of absorption:

> Many situations, then, are pleasurable because we experience them in a state of absorption […] The source of pleasure in these cases is the state of absorption and not those particular situations themselves. This means that many of the aims we pursue in life, guided as we are by our memory traces, are fundamentally misguided.

Bronkhorst has suggested that absorption is pleasurable due to a drop in bodily tension. Regarding this issue my model may be harmonized with that of Bronkhorst, by suggesting that absorption equals lack of self-reflexive consciousness, and this in turn relieves much of the strain and tension from the body. His very apt observation was also that absorption does not leave behind any memory traces.[63] According to my model, that is due to the way declarable, explicit memory is associated with self-reflexive phenomenal conscious experience. When due to absorption this type of consciousness dissolves, that state cannot become incorporated into the structure of our declarative memory.

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[61] AN 9.34/iv 415: "*kiṃ pan' ettha, āvuso sāriputta, sukhaṃ yad ettha natthi vedayitan"ti? "Etad eva khv ettha, āvuso, sukhaṃ yad ettha natthi vedayitaṃ…*

[62] The *Samiddhi Sutta* (SN 1.20/i 9) states that sensual pleasures (*kāmā*) have a temporal nature (*kālikā*). Perhaps the sutta is not just a general allusion to the fact that they are fleeting or time consuming (as translated by Bhikkhu Bodhi) but hints at this deeper psychological meaning.

[63] Bronkhorst, 2012: 141: "memory trace produced by absorption does not primarily record the state of absorption but rather the object or event experienced in that state."

The metaphor of hardware and software used in modern cognitive science can be really useful to explain our situation. The sentient body with its intelligence can be compared to hardware. This hardware can however function in various ways, depending on the software which controls its resources. The Self-delusion is a sort of software, or rather a virus. A virus, whether computer or biological, has no inherent life or will of its own and is completely passive outside the system of a potential host. It is just a code. But due to what in informatics is called a vulnerability in the system of its host, it can become infected, making it function in a different way and actually actively replicate the virus in its own system and spread it on to others. The mutual interrelation of conscious experience, language and intelligence is one of the points of vulnerability, and human culture is the medium by which the virus spreads. One must seriously consider the possibility of vulnerability to Self-delusion being an evolutionary adaptation, however surprising it may sound. Evolution promotes traits that are conducive to survival and replication, and Self-delusion certainly makes us more competitive in the crazy race of natural selection. The human species has been able to dominate the world due to an egoistic drive which is greatly enhanced by the illusion of Self.

It is doubtful whether a society of enlightened beings would be interested in maintaining its existence and continuity at all costs. Therefore, it could be that the inclination to develop Self-delusion is hardwired into our cognitive structure on the genetic level. This would also explain why it is so difficult to break the spell and destroy this fundamental ignorance.

However, if the Self is not an inherent part of our being, it perhaps can be removed from our system, just like software or a virus. The hardware that we are can perhaps also run in a way that is much more natural and does not result in self-inflicted suffering. But how to undo the results of such a severe cognitive error? That is of course the goal of Buddhism, its true *raison d' être*. The psychological and philosophical ideas that we have been discussing in the present article will also prove relevant for understanding several crucial soteriological concepts of early Buddhism. This in particular concerns the idea of unconstructed cognition and the apophatic and paradoxical elements of the early Buddhist doctrine connected with the notion of cessation (*nirodha*). These issues will be discussed in a future study.

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All citations of the Āgama texts refer to the Taishō edition (in) Chinese Buddhist Electronic Text Association (CBETA). CBETA Chinese Electronic Tripiṭaka.

Abbreviations

AN	*Aṅguttara Nikaya*
BB	*Blue Book*
DN	*Dīgha Nikāya*
Iti	*Itivuttaka*
MN	*Majjhima Nikāya*
PI	*Philosophical Investigations*
SĀ	*Saṃyukta-āgama*
SHT	*Sanskrithandschriften aus den Turfanfunden. Teil 6*
SN	*Saṃyutta Nikāya*
Sn	*Sutta Nipāta*
T	Taishō edition (CBETA)
TLP	*Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*
Ud	*Udāna*
Vism	*Visuddhimagga*

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