Text-critical History is not Exegesis
A Response to Anālayo

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In a recent edition of this journal (2016/11), Anālayo argued against the so-called 'two paths' theory of early Buddhist meditation. Originally formulated by Louis de La Vallée Poussin, and more recently elaborated by Gombrich (1996), this theory claims there were two opposing soteriologies in Indian Buddhism:[1]

> Without being too rash, one may discriminate in the Buddhist sources, both ancient and scholastic, between two opposed theories, the same as the *Bhagavadgītā* distinguishes by the names of *sāṃkhya* and *yoga*: the theory which makes salvation a purely or mainly intellectual achievement, and the theory which makes salvation the goal of ascetic and ecstatic disciplines.
>
> On the one hand we have *prajñā*, 'discrimination between things' (*dharma-pravicaya*); *pratisaṃkhyāna*, discrimination; *vipaśyanā*, 'contemplation'; seeing the four noble truths (s*atyadarśana*); application to the doctrine (compare *dhamma-yoga*, AN III, 355). The ascetic recognises things for what they are (*yathābhūtam*): painful, impermanent, empty, without self; he is disgusted with them; he kills desire and as a result stops the process of acts bringing retribution and of transmigration.

[1] de La Vallée Poussin (1936–7: 189–92), as translated in Gombrich (2005: 133-134).

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> On the other hand, the path of *śamatha*, 'calm': of *samādhi*, 'concentration'; of the *dhyānas* and the *samāpattis*, ecstasies and contemplations; of *bhāvanā*, 'meditation'. By a gradual purification and the gradual suppression of ideas (*saṃkalpa*), this path leads up to a state of unconsciousness – cessation of all forms of thought, *saṃjñāvedayitanirodha* or just *nirodhasamāpatti* – which puts the ascetic in touch with a transcendent reality which is Nirvāṇa (ancient doctrine) or is like Nirvāṇa (Sarvāstivādin scholasticism). In principle, if not in fact, this path has nothing specifically Buddhist about it; 'seeing the truths' has no place in it; speculative understanding (*prajñā*) is not employed in it . . .

Louis de La Vallée Poussin here presents the 'two paths' as a soteriological polarity, consisting of a meditative way focusing on calm (and resulting in the liberated state of 'cessation'), and a way of insight focused on understanding the true nature of things (which avoids calm more or less entirely). Anālayo disagrees with this position, at least with regard to the early literature:

> The point I intend to make is only that the assumption of two conflicting approaches to liberation, the one requiring a mode of intellectual reflection and the other being based solely on ecstatic absorption, does not accurately reflect what emerges from the early discourses. (2016: 39)

We will here respond to Anālayo's arguments against the 'two path' thesis. Before doing so, we must first clarify the nature of the historical problem identified by de La Vallée Poussin. In particular, we must survey three key texts: AN 6.46, SN 12.68 and SN 12.70.

1. What exactly is the 'two path' thesis?

As we have seen, de La Vallée Poussin makes a soteriological distinction between salvation understood as 'the goal of ascetic and ecstatic disciplines', and 'a purely or mainly intellectual' version of salvation. The two path thesis (TPT) says little about the Buddhist path in general: it is concerned, specifically, with the states and practices thought to effect liberation. Whether or not the 'intellectual' path dispenses with absorption *completely*, or allows

for a minimal level of meditation, does not matter. Likewise, it is hardly likely that the path of meditation dispenses entirely with insight, as every Buddhist adept must have a basic Buddhist understanding of things. What matters is whether the path of meditation finally does away with cognition and thought, and whether the way of insight does away with jhānic levels of meditation.

Whether some versions of the insight path include an 'access' level of meditation is likewise beside the point. As has been pointed out by Gombrich (2005: 96), Harivarman's *Satya-siddhi-śāstra* is an insight text (of the Bahuśrutīyas) despite the fact that 'Harivarman accepts a tiny bit of concentration (*samādhi*), but only below the level of the first *jhāna*'.[2] The important point is Harivarman's claim that liberation occurs not in a deeply absorbed state of calm, but rather 'by a process of intellectual analysis (technically known as *paññā*, insight) alone'.[3] One of our concerns here is to establish whether a similar path can be found in the canonical texts.

To put this in simpler terms, we must distinguish between means and ends. We take it for granted that Buddhist spiritual *means* includes a wide range of practices, and the generation of a variety of ethical and spiritual qualities; the Buddhist path is obviously, complex and multifaceted. But the TPT is about *ends*: what is prescribed and/or described, as practice and experience respectively, at the very end of the path.

We therefore understand the TPT as a characterisation of certain trends in early Buddhist soteriology. It does not offer a general theory of early Buddhist meditation, covering the entire path of spiritual development from start to finish; it is concerned neither with the preliminary levels of calm, nor with entry-level 'insight' contemplations. It is, rather, concerned with the specifics of what happens at the higher reaches of the path, as imagined in certain early Buddhist texts. The question is this: are there, in the early texts, rival versions of the trifold Buddhist way of *sīla*, *samādhi* and *paññā*, which ultimately focus on either *samādhi* or *paññā* at the expense of the other? Keeping this question in mind, we will now consider the key texts.

[2] Gombrich (2005: 96 n.2); (de La Vallée Poussin, 1936–7:201–2).
[3] Gombrich (2005: 96).

2. The key texts

I. AN 6.46. The *Mahācunda Sutta* describes two groups of mendicants who criticise or disparage each other (*apasādenti*): 'meditators' (*jhāyī bhikkhū*) and those who 'work out' or are 'applied to' the doctrine (*dhammayogā bhikkhū*). Those who work out the doctrine accuse the meditators of brooding (*pajjhāyanti*).[4] The meditators, on the other hand, accuse those devoted to the doctrine of being 'haughty, arrogant, garrulous, full of chatter, with confused mindfulness, lacking full awareness, lacking absorption, having scattered minds and uncultivated sense-faculties'.[5]

The tone of both critiques is pejorative, and seems to depict a conflict between different spiritual orientations: whereas meditators are criticised for being good-for-nothing idlers, doctrinal experts are criticised for being superficial chatterboxes. Venerable Mahācunda, advising harmony and reconciliation, provides us with more information. He advises those who are applied to the doctrine to esteem the meditators, since they 'touch the deathless dimension with the body';[6] the meditators are likewise advised to esteem those who work out the doctrine, because 'they see, having penetrated the profound words of the doctrine with insight'.[7]

What does it mean to 'touch the deathless dimension with the body', or to 'see, having penetrated the profound words of the doctrine with insight'? Textual parallels suggest that Mahācunda's descriptions indicate divergent soteriologies. With regard to the meditators, a couple of verses from the *Itivuttaka* (It 51) equate the attainment of cessation (*nirodha*) with touching the 'deathless dimension' through the body:

> Understanding the realm of form,
> but not abiding in the formless [realms],
> Released (*vimuccanti*) in cessation (*nirodhe*),
> those people abandon death.

[4] AN III.355: *idha āvuso dhammayogā bhikkhū jhāyī bhikkhū apasādenti ime pana <jhāyino 'mhā jhāyino 'mhā ti jhāyanti pajjhāyanti*.

Be also accuses the meditators of 'musing' (*nijjhāyanti*) and 'mourning' (*avajjhāyanti*/*apajjhāyanti*).

[5] AN III.355: *uddhatā unnaḷā capalā mukharā vikiṇṇavācā muṭṭhassatī asampajānā asamāhitā vibbhantacittā pākaṭindriyā*.

[6] AN III.356: *ye amataṃ dhātuṃ kāyena phusitvā viharanti*.

[7] AN III.356: *ye gambhīraṃ atthapadaṃ paññāya ativijjha passantī ti*.

Understanding the realm of form,
but not abiding in the formless [realms],
Released (*vimuccanti*) in cessation (*nirodhe*),
those people abandon death.

Touching the deathless dimension (*amataṃ dhātuṃ*),
which lacks material substratum,
with the body,
Witnessing the relinquishing of material attachment,
being without defilements,
The Fully Awakened One teaches
the state devoid of grief and defilement.[8]

While the two items *nirodhe* and *amataṃ dhātuṃ* do not stand in apposition, they clearly indicate the same goal. This suggests that for some early Buddhists, 'touching the deathless realm with the body' was the same thing as attaining 'the cessation of perception and feeling' (*saññāvedayitanirodha*).[9]

The position of those 'working out the doctrine' is not so easy to establish. But there seem to be two possibilities: either the statement 'they see, having penetrated the profound words of the doctrine with insight' (*gambhīraṃ atthapadaṃ paññāya ativijjha passanti*) refers to liberating insight, or it denotes doctrinal expertise. Pāli dictionaries support the latter option: the CPD defines *attha-pada* as 'a right or profitable word'; the PED defines it as 'a profitable saying, a word of good sense, text, motto', and the DOP definition is similar, a 'profitable saying; word of good sense'. All suggest that those 'working out the doctrine' were experts in early Buddhist teaching in general.

Despite these definitions, the compound *attha-pada* is surprisingly rare in the Pāli Suttas.[10] Chapter VIII of the *Dhammapada* certainly understands it

[8] It 51 (Ee pp.45-46): *rūpadhātuṃ pariññāya arūpesu asaṇṭhitā / nirodhe ye vimuccanti te janā maccuhāyino / kāyena amataṃ dhātuṃ phassayitvā nirūpadhiṃ / upadhippaṭinissaggaṃ sacchikatvā anāsavo / deseti sammāsambuddho asokaṃ virajaṃ padan ti /*

Reading *rūpadhātuṃ* and *asaṇṭhitā* with Be instead of Ee *rūpadhātu* and *susaṇṭhitā*. See also: It 73 (Ee p.62), Sn 755 (Ee p. 147).

[9] See Wynne (2007: 103).

[10] In what follows, I do not consider the meaning of the term in the relatively late *Jātaka* or *Apadāna*.

in the sense of 'profitable saying'.[11] But apart from this, the term only occurs in the definition of the Dhamma devotees at AN 6.46, and in one other Sutta, AN 4.192, which mentions the wise *bhikkhu* who expounds the *atthapadaṃ* which is 'calm, supreme, beyond the scope of logic, subtle, to be known by the wise'.[12] There can be little doubt that *atthapadaṃ*, here, is a synonym for Nirvana, and means something like 'spiritual purpose'. In this sense *atthapadaṃ* seems more or less equivalent to *amatapadaṃ* (Dhp 21); in both compounds, the term *pada* seems to indicate the metaphorical 'place' of liberation. As the only other prose occurrence of atthapadaṃ is found in AN 6.46, it is likely that it too uses the term as a designation of Nirvana.

This parallel suggests that those 'working out the doctrine' were not merely doctrinal experts, but rather liberated Arahants. Indeed, in other texts the notion of 'penetrating with insight' (*paññāya ... ativijjha*) indicates advanced levels of spiritual understanding. AN 1.112 (Ee I.265) refers to a *bhikkhu* who 'penetrates with insight' the workings of karmic retribution, to such a degree that desire (*chando*) does not recur. Although no comment is made about the path-level at which insight occurs, this teaching is obviously concerned with much more than 'profitable sayings'.

AN 4.186 (Ee II.178) also mentions 'penetrating with insight' in the context of the higher levels of the path. It states that a learned person (*sutavā*) with 'penetrating insight' (*nibbedhika-paññho*) first hears a teaching on the Four Noble Truths, and then 'sees, having penetrated the meaning/purpose (*atthaṃ*) with insight'.[13] Seeing with insight is thus differentiated from simple or 'rote' learning. Yet again, AN 9.4 refers to the mendicant who preaches the Dhamma,[14] and then 'penetrates and sees the profound meaning (*gambhīraṃ atthapadaṃ*) with insight, just as he illumines it'.[15] Once again, doctrinal learning is followed by a higher level of comprehension, apparently liberating.

A few other places are even more suggestive of insight. In the *Piya-jātika Sutta* (MN 70; Ee II.112), *paññāya ativijjha* refers to the Buddha's understanding of things. Even more importantly, in MN 70, MN 95, SN

[11] Dhp 100-02 (Ee p.29).

[12] AN II.190: *tathā hi ayam āyasmā gambhīrañ c'eva atthapadaṃ udāharati santaṃ paṇītaṃ atakkāvacaraṃ nipuṇaṃ paṇḍitavedanīyaṃ*.

[13] e.g. Ee II.178: *idaṃ dukkhan ti sutaṃ hoti, paññāya c'assa atthaṃ ativijjha passati*.

[14] Ee IV.362: *dhammaṃ deseti … brahmacariyaṃ pakāseti*.

[15] Ee IV.361-62: *yathā yathāvuso bhikkhu bhikkhūnaṃ dhammaṃ ... brahmacariyaṃ pakāseti, tathā tathā so tasmiṃ dhamme gambhīraṃ atthapadaṃ paññāya ativijjha passati*.

48.50, SN 48.53 and AN 4.113, the idea of 'penetrating with insight' (*paññāya ativijjha*) occurs in a pair, the other half of which is *kāyena phusitvā* or *kāyena sacchikaroti*.[16] These texts thus set out a calm-insight soteriology, according to which deep states of calm must be complemented by liberating insight. They are the closest counterpart to AN 6.46, a text which seems to undo their calm-insight understanding.

The parallels to the expression *gambhīraṃ atthapadaṃ paññāya ativijjha passati* show that it denotes an advanced level of insight, one which is either liberating or tantamount to it. Only one early text (Dhp VIII) uses the term *atthapada* in a sense which is obviously unrelated to liberating insight. If so, there are good reasons to suppose that the Dhamma-devotees of AN 6.46 were exponents of insight alone, and that the text presents a soteriological distinction between the rival ways of calm and insight.

II. SN 12.68. In the *Kosambī Sutta*, Saviṭṭha asks Musīla whether he 'knows, by himself alone' (*paccattam eva ñāṇaṃ*) each of the links in the twelvefold version of Dependent Origination, in both its arising and cessationist modes; with each query, Saviṭṭha stipulates that this seeing is 'apart from faith, apart from personal preference, apart from oral tradition, apart from reasoned reflection, (and) apart from acceptance of a view after pondering it'.[17] Musīla replies positively to these questions. So when Saviṭṭha asks if Musīla sees that 'Nirvana is the cessation of becoming',[18] and Musīla affirms that he does, Saviṭṭha concludes that he is an *arahant*. By staying silent at this point, Musīla indicates his agreement with Saviṭṭha's conclusion.

This exchange is followed by a similar episode, in which Nārada asks Saviṭṭha to put the same questions to him. Nārada then answers in exactly the same way as Musīla, but when Saviṭṭha concludes that he is an *arahant*, Nārada denies it. He compares his condition to that of a thirsty man who sees the water at the bottom of a well but cannot reach it. His words are revealing: he says that although he has knowledge of water, he cannot 'touch' the water 'with his body'.[19] This is a very strange way of describing thirst; Pāli Suttas

[16] The Ee page references are MN I.480, MN II.173, SN V.227, SN V.230, AN II.115 respectively.

[17] SN II.115: *aññatr' eva āvuso musila saddhāya aññatra ruciyā aññatra anussavā aññatra ākāra-parivitakkā aññatra diṭṭhi-nijjhāna-kkhantiyā …*

[18] SN II.117: *bhavanirodho nibbāna ti*.

[19] SN II.118: *tassa udakan ti hi kho ñāṇaṃ assa, na ca kāyena phusitvā vihareyya*.

do not normally imagine thirst as a person's inability to touch water with the body. Nārada must be speaking metaphorically, and since the notion of 'touching with the body' is associated above all with the formless states (*ye te santā āruppā*) or the eight 'releases' (*vimokkha*s),[20] Nārada must surely be referring to these. The metaphor of a thirsty man suggests that Nārada's 'spiritual thirst' is due to not attaining the formless spheres and their goal, cessation.

It is true that a couple of Suttas speak of touching the *jhāna*s with the body (AN 9.43, 9.45).[21] But these Suttas also call the *jhāna*s 'spheres' (*āyatanaṃ*), and so are almost certainly late adaptations of earlier material; in all the standard Suttanta accounts of the path, the *jhāna*s are not 'spheres' (*āyatana*) of meditation, let alone meditative objects, but rather experiential *states*, of body and mind, through which the meditator passes. On the other hand, the formless meditations are described as 'spheres' in all the standard accounts (e.g. *ākāsānañcāyatanaṃ*). The understanding of the four *jhāna*s as spheres seems to have been adapted from formless meditation, and if so, has nothing to do with the implied meaning of Nārada's metaphor.

In fact, Nārada's cessationist metaphor has obvious connections with the soteriology of the meditators in AN 6.46 (AN III.356: *ye amataṃ dhātuṃ kāyena phusitvā viharanti*). And just as in AN 6.46, Nārada's soteriology is distinguished from an insight soteriology; as Gombrich (2015: 129) has pointed out: 'Nārada … interprets *paññā* in the narrow sense of intellection without a deeper, experiential realisation'. SN 12.68 only differs from AN 6.46 by specifying that liberating insight is focused on the teaching of Dependent Origination. SN 12.68 thus seems to present two soteriologies through contrast: Nārada's meditative/cessationist path versus Musīla's contemplative/intellectual understanding.

III. SN 12.70. In the *Susīma Sutta*, the non-Buddhist wanderer (*paribbājaka*) Susīma ordains as a Buddhist mendicant in Rājagaha and encounters Buddhists who claim to be 'liberated by insight' (*paññā-vimuttā*). This

[20] E.g. MN I.33: *ye te santā vimokhā atikkamma rūpe āruppā, te kāyena phusitvā vihareyyan ti*. AN II.90: *kathañ ca bhikkhave puggalo samaṇa-padumo hoti? idha bhikkhave bhikkhu sammā-diṭṭhiko hoti … pe … sammā-vimutti hoti, aṭṭha vimokhe kāyena phusitvā viharati*. Reading *phusitvā* with Be for Ee *phassitvā* in both texts.

[21] AN IV.451: *yathā yathā ca tad āyatanaṃ tathā tathā naṃ kāyena phusitvā viharati*. Once again reading *phusitvā* with Be for Ee *phassitvā*.

claim is made despite not attaining five of the six higher knowledges (*abhiññā*) which occur after the four *jhāna*s in standard canonical schemes (e.g. of the *Sāmaññaphala Sutta*): supernatural powers, the divine ear, mind-reading, knowledge of past lives and the 'divine eye' by which one sees the ongoing process of karma and rebirth in the world. These 'insight-liberated' *bhikkhu*s also admit they have not 'touched' the formless spheres 'with the body'.

When Susīma asks the Buddha to explain the notion of liberation through insight, the Buddha says that first there is the 'knowledge of the regularity of *dhamma*s' (*dhamma-ṭṭhiti-ñāṇaṃ*) and then 'knowledge of Nirvana' (nibbāne ñāṇaṃ).[22] Apart from the late Paṭisambhidāmagga, the expression *nibbāne ñāṇaṃ* occurs only here in the entire Pāli canon; the expression *dhamma-ṭṭhiti-ñāṇaṃ* occurs elsewhere at SN 12.34, where it is connected with Dependent Origination. This suggests that SN 12.70 is similar to SN 12.68, in that the liberating cognition, of Nirvana is achieved through contemplating Dependent Origination. Indeed, in SN 12.70, after delivering the not-self teaching, the Buddha leads Susīma through the different causal relations of Dependent Origination, in its arising and cessation modes. At each point of the teaching, Susīma assents to the Buddha's query whether he 'sees it or not' (*passatha no*). Susīma also agrees, when asked by the Buddha, that he has attained neither the five higher knowledges nor the formless spheres.

The Buddha's teaching to Susīma seems to be an attempt to demonstrate the nature of 'release through insight'. If so, SN 12.70 must advocate an insight-based soteriology: it suggests that liberation occurs through contemplating doctrinal teachings, without being in an advanced state of meditative absorption. It is perhaps significant that although SN 12.70 focuses on Dependent Origination, it also mentions the not-self teaching. As such, it somewhat resembles the *Dhammacakka-ppavattana Sutta* (SN 56.11, Vin I.13-14 Ee), in which the first five disciples of the Buddha are liberated simply through hearing not-self teachings.

At the least, the deviation of SN 12.70 from the classical scheme of the *Sāmaññaphala Sutta* is striking and significant. Not only do the insight-liberated *bhikkhu*s lack supernatural attainments, they apparently lack *all* the insights which come after the four *jhāna*s. Since the knowledge of causal relations and Nirvana also replaces insight into the Four Noble Truths –

[22] SN II.124: *pubbe kho susīma dhamma-ṭṭhiti-ñāṇaṃ, pacchā nibbāne ñāṇan ti*.

the culminating point of the *Sāmaññaphala Sutta* – the insight-liberated mendicants lack the 'three knowledges' (*tisso vijjā*), and hence are presented as the figureheads of a non-standard soteriology. Although the text does not mention the four *jhāna*s, it seems that the insight-liberated *bhikkhu*s did not follow the way of *jhāna*, as the canonical texts normally present it. And they were certainly not practitioners of formless meditation.

3. Anālayo's arguments (2016)

Since our three texts apparently provide strong support for the TPT, it is somewhat strange that Anālayo (2016) does not mention them. Instead, he makes three other arguments.

I. He claims that an intricate interrelation between calm and insight should be taken as standard in the early Buddhist discourses. But this subtlety is played down in later Buddhist scholasticism, whose 'standardizations' led Louis de La Vallée Poussin astray:

> Although such standardization yields neat theoretical presentations, a problem inevitably results from the fact that theoretical accounts can only describe one item at a time. There is therefore an inherent danger that cumulative and interrelated aspects of the path recede to the background, whereas its sequential aspects are foregrounded. This might explain the variations found in path accounts in the early discourses, which could be read to exemplify that a single mode of description fails to do full justice to the complexity of actual practice. With the adoption of a unified and standardized mode of description, the interrelation between tranquillity and insight appears to have to some degree faded out of sight in substantial parts of Buddhist exegetical activity. This development would in turn have fuelled interpretations of the two paths to liberation type, such as those proposed by de La Vallée Poussin and by other scholars who have been influenced by his presentation. However, the position taken by these scholars goes considerably further and results in losing sight of the interrelation between tranquillity and insight to a much stronger degree than do the exegetical traditions. (2016: 40)

Whether or not de La Vallée Poussin and other scholars were influenced by Buddhist scholasticism is beside the point; it does not matter if the TPT was inspired by Vasubandhu, Harivarman or even the Bhagavadgītā. We are only concerned to establish whether the TPT is a reasonable interpretation of at least a few early texts. In this regard, Anālayo's argument can only be regarded as highly dubious. He seems to claim that the higher levels of the Buddhist path *must* inherit foundational levels of calm and insight.

That is to say, Anālayo assumes that the Buddhist path develops a myriad of 'path qualities', which are finally brought to 'fruition' in awakening. But most early models of the path, such as the detailed account in the *Sāmaññaphala Sutta*, do not say explicitly that calm-insight *means*, initially cultivated as 'qualities', are brought to 'fruition' as spiritual *ends*. This is also true in our three texts. While they surely assume all the basic aspects of a *bhikkhu*'s training, their focus on ends – the higher-level practices and mental states which trigger awakening – betrays no notion of 'cumulative and interrelated aspects of the path'. If anything, they tend towards distinguishing the 'qualities' of calm and insight, as we have seen.

Invoking the notion of 'cumulative and interrelated aspects of the path' as the key to understanding the Buddhist path merely begs the question: is a 'cumulative and interrelated' model assumed in the key texts? In other words, there appears to be a serious circularity in Anālayo's thinking. To the question, 'is there a distinction between calm and insight in some early texts?', Anālayo's answer is 'There is no distinction, because there is no distinction between calm and insight in early Buddhist path schemes'. Whereas the universal application of calm-insight is a hypothesis to be proved, Anālayo takes it as a general assumption.

II. Anālayo's second argument claims that insight into the Four Noble Truths, a main feature of the standard early path model, is not 'intellectual':

> [F]rom the time of what tradition regards as the first sermon given by the recently awakened Buddha, engagement with the four noble truths was clearly not presented as an intellectual exercise in reasoned understanding only. Rather, it was considered to involve a prolonged task, expressed with the metaphor of "three turnings". It is only with the completion of this prolonged task that according to the *Dhammacakkappavattana-sutta* and its parallels the Buddha felt qualified to claim he had reached liberation. (2016: 44)

Anālayo argues that different stages are involved in understanding the Truths, beginning at the provisional level of the learner and culminating with realisation through insight. Turning his attention to the Buddha's awakening as described in the *Dhammacakka-ppavattana Sutta*, he further claims that liberating insight into the Four Truths is only a motif, whereas the nature of the insight is quite different:

> Besides, judging from the above passage and its parallels, the four noble truths are not the actual content of the experience of awakening. That is, to describe the realization of awakening with the help of the scheme of the four noble truths does not necessarily imply that such realization takes place in a way that directly involves the formulations employed for describing these four noble truths. In other words, the presentation in the *Dhammacakkappavattana-sutta* and its parallels does not require us to imagine the Buddha at the moment of awakening mentally saying to himself: "This is *dukkha*, this is the arising of *dukkha*…" etc.' (2016: 44)

Anālayo concludes that the path does not culminate in the Four Truths:

> Understood in this way, the four noble truths can fulfil their diagnostic function at the outset of the path, when an initial appreciation of the fact of *dukkha*, its cause, the possibility of its cessation, and the vision of a practical path to this end motivates someone to set out to cultivate the path. They can continue to encapsulate the motivation and deepening insight of the one who walks the path, and they can eventually function as an expression of the arrival at the goal. But they are not the goal itself, just as the finger pointing at the moon is not the moon itself. (2016: 45)

This might seem a sensible way to understand the Buddhist path. And perhaps we should read early accounts, particularly those which culminate in the Four Truths (such as the *Sāmaññaphala Sutta*), through the lens of Anālayo's reading of the *Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta*. If so, the necessity of witnessing (*sacchi-kātabbaṃ*) the third truth (the cessation of suffering, *dukkha-nirodhaṃ*) could be understood to be the true goal of the path.

There are numerous problems with this interpretation, however, in particular, the precise language of the *Sāmaññaphala Sutta*. It states that in order to gain insight into the truths, the *bhikkhu* 'turns his mind' (*cittaṃ abhininnāmeti*) 'towards knowledge of the destruction of the corruptions' (*āsavānaṃ khaya-ñāṇāya*). In the *Kāya-gatā-sati Sutta* (MN 119), the following simile elaborates what is meant by 'turning the mind' towards 'knowledge':

> It is just like a quadrangular lotus pond, on an even plot of land and hemmed in by embankments, full of water, full to the brim, so that crows can drink the water. If a strong man breaks the embankment at any point, would water flow out?
>
> 'Yes, respected sir'
>
> Just so is whoever has developed and cultivated mindfulness of the body. He turns the mind (*cittaṃ abhininnāmeti*) towards the witnessing by higher understanding of whatever phenomenon can be witnessed by higher understanding. He attains the ability to see into this and that (phenomenon), as long as there is the specific objective support.[23]

The insight simile is very clear: penetrating the truth of any object is likened to the inevitability of water flowing out of a pond at whichever point the pond's walls are intentionally breached. The imagery suggests that focusing the mind on an object precedes its complete penetration. If so, the language of the *Sāmaññaphala Sutta*, and its illustration in the *Kāya-gatā-sati Sutta*, indicate that insight into the Four Truths does not 'function as an expression of the arrival at the goal', but was in fact thought to constitute the culmination of the path.

These points might seem tangential to the interpretation of AN 6.46, SN 12.68 and SN 12.70. But they are of central importance. For Anālayo's hermeneutic allows the explicit testimony of the texts to be explained

[23] MN III.96-97: *seyyathāpi same bhūmi-bhāge caturassā pokkharaṇī āḷibaddhā pūrā udakassa sama-tittikā kākapeyyā. tam enaṃ balavā puriso yato yato āḷiṃ muñceyya āgaccheyya udakan ti? evaṃ bhante. evam eva kho bhikkhave yassa kassa ci kāya-gatā sati bhāvitā bahulī-katā, so yassa yassa abhiññā-sacchikaraṇīyassa dhammassa cittaṃ abhininnāmeti abhiññā-sacchikiriyāya, tatra tatr' eva sakkhi-bhavyataṃ pāpuṇāti sati sati āyatane*.

away; and if knowledge of the Noble Truths can be re-imagined as a direct, meditative, realisation of Nirvana, then so too can other insight claims. According to Anālayo, it would be possible to understand the Buddha's reference to the 'knowledge of Nirvana' (*nibbāne ñāṇaṃ*: SN 12.70) as an experiential realisation of Nirvana, despite the text's failure to mention meditation in this connection.

Anālayo's argument brings into sharp focus the fact that too much should not be read into exceptional or unusual texts, such as the *Dhammacakka-ppavattana Sutta*, at the expense of the explicit testimony of foundational texts or passages.[24] The philological or text-critical method should rather draw out the meaning of difficult passages by using closely related textual parallels. This is what we have attempted to do here, in trying to understand the meaning of two key expressions: 'touching with the body', and 'seeing, having penetrated with insight'. Every effort must be made to keep the discussion firmly rooted in what the texts actually say, rather than edge towards what one would like them to say, depending on texts of marginal importance.

III. Anālayo's final argument claims that absorption alone is insufficient for attaining liberation in early Buddhism:

> [A]bsorption attainment, in spite of its undeniable benefits for progress on the path, was not considered to be liberating in and of itself. (2016: 48)

In support of this Anālayo cites the *Brahmajāla Sutta* and AN 6.60 (Ee III.394) as well as their Chinese Āgama counterparts. According to Anālayo, AN 6.60

> shows that absorption attainment needs to be combined with the cultivation of insight, that the temporary aloofness from sensuality gained during such absorbed experience does not suffice to ensure that sensual passion does not overwhelm the mind on a later occasion. (2016: 46)

[24] If Schmithausen's judgement of the *Dhammacakka-ppavattana Sutta* is correct (1981: 203: 'It is not likely that this rather sophisticated and schematic account of the Enlightenment of the Buddha is the original one.'), it would seem to be a dubious text on which to base a general interpretation of calm-insight schemes.

But AN 6.60 does not make any such point. It certainly says that the *jhāna*s alone are not enough, and that a person who attains them might still return to lay life. It does not say, however, that insight is the solution to this problem. The same is true of the *Brahmajāla Sutta*. In mentioning other ascetics and wanderers who attain the four *jhāna*s, and mistake them for Nirvana, it certainly indicates that meditative absorption is not enough. But it does not say what else is required, a gap filled in by Anālayo as follows:

> It is precisely the understanding of the role of craving, as expressed in the second noble truth in particular, that is missing in the case of the absorption attainers described in the *Brahmajāla-sutta* and its parallels. (2016: 48)

It is true that the *Brahmajāla Sutta* has an important section on liberating insight; but this insight is concerned with the rise, fall, satisfaction and danger of the six sense spheres, as well as the release from them.[25] It is not clear that this focus on insight, and critique of *jhāna*, implies a calm-insight soteriology. The text could perhaps be read from the perspective of insight alone, and could possibly support a meditative-cessationist version of the path, along the lines that insight into the danger of 'contact' indicates the need to transcend it through attaining cessation. One could argue, not very convincingly perhaps, that when the *Brahmajāla Sutta* states that a person 'understands what is beyond all these [sense spheres]' (DN I.45: *ayaṃ imehi sabbeh'eva uttaritaraṃ pajānāti*), it is referring to cessation.

To be sure, the *Brahmajāla Sutta* does not expound any version of the Buddhist path; its concerns are metaphysical rather than meditative or soteriological. Hence its significance for the TPT is unclear. We cannot be certain that understanding 'the role of craving, as expressed in the second noble truth in particular', is the insight which complements its critique of absorption.

Thus far, our analysis has not exposed a strong case against the TPT. Anālayo has rather proposed rather general arguments, each unconvincing in their own right. And he has not analyzed the most important texts, an omission which he corrects, however, in his *Early Buddhist Meditation Studies* (2017), towards which we will now turn.

[25] DN I.45: *yato kho bhikkhave bhikkhu channaṃ phassāyatanānaṃ samudayañ ca attha-gamañ ca assādañ ca ādīnavañ ca nissaraṇañ ca yathābhūtaṃ pajānāti, ayaṃ imehi sabbeh'eva uttaritaraṃ pajānāti*.

4. Anālayo's arguments (2017)

Before considering Anālayo's reading of AN 6.46, SN 12.68 and SN 12.70, it must be mentioned in passing that he expands his *ad hominem* critique of Louis de La Vallée Poussin. He does this by claiming that de La Vallée Poussin was influenced by Vasubandhu's *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya*:

> By way of background to his taking up this position, it could be pertinent that 1929 falls within the period in which de La Vallée Poussin must have been working on his remarkable annotated translation of Vasubandhu's *Abhidharmakośa*, published in six volumes from 1923 to 1931. This makes it fairly probable that his approach and thinking were influenced by Buddhist exegesis as expressed by scholars such as Vasubandhu. (2017: 91)

Anālayo further claims that the TPT was not just influenced by Buddhist scholasticism, but is also an Orientalist projection onto the East:

> As far as I can see, the two-paths theory might best be set aside as an erroneous projection of the Western contrast between the thinker and the mystic onto material that does not warrant such an interpretation. Of course, others will not necessarily agree with my assessment. Yet, those who wish to uphold this theory or one of its two main assumptions need to engage seriously with the criticism that has been voiced, rather than ignoring it. (2017: 101)

There is no need to consider these points any further. As explained above, the sources of scholarly influence or inspiration do not matter; we are only concerned with the content of arguments – what is actually said. Rather than speculate whether or not the TPT is an Orientalist fantasy, let us restrict our attention to the texts themselves.

I. AN 6.46. Anālayo claims (2017: 96 n.66) that this text 'does not juxtapose two types of *arahant*s and therefore does not support the two-paths theory'. Instead, the meditators and Dhamma-devotees of AN 6.46 have reached different levels of spiritual attainment:

> The discourse does indeed set meditators (*jhāyin*) in opposition to those who devote themselves to Dharma (*dhammayoga*), but

> of these only the first are reckoned to have actually reached a level of awakening. Whereas the meditators dwell having personally experienced the deathless element, which would imply they must at the very least be stream-enterers, those who devote themselves to Dharma have only reached a wise understanding. This does not imply any level of awakening, let alone turning them all into *arahant*s. (2017: 95-96)

Anālayo reads the disagreement of AN 6.46 as a conflict between those who 'might be liberated' (the meditators, who are 'at the very least stream-enterers') and those who are most definitely not (the devotees of the Dhamma, who 'have only reached a wise understanding'). But, this reading imposes a much later exegetical understanding on the texts: although there are numerous discourses on 'stream entry', virtually all of them relate the attainment either to faith or to doctrinal knowledge.[26] No Pāli Sutta suggests that stream-entry involves touching the deathless element with the body, even temporarily. On the other hand, the idea that a stream-enterer experiences Nirvana briefly, and then spends the rest of the path fulfilling this accomplishment, is an exegetical creation.[27]

With regard to the idea that the monks 'devoted to the Dhamma' merely have a 'wise understanding', Anālayo offers neither an argument nor even a consideration of the relevant terms and texts. Moreover, Anālayo's reading of the text sugegsts that a group of unenlightened monks disparages (*apasādenti*) a group of (nearly) enlightened monks. But this reading of the text is not supported by Mahācunda's meditation. In pointing out that each group should esteem the other, he treats them equally, which could hardly be the case if the levels of spiritual attainment between the groups was different. Read on its own terms, the text *only* makes sense as an attempt to reconcile two parties making rival claims about the goal of the Buddhist path.

[26] E.g. SN 12.42 (Ee II.69), where someone endowed with the limbs of stream-attainment is said to be endowed with 'knowledge-based faith' (*avecca-ppasādena samannāgato*) in the Buddha, Dhamma and Sangha. But at SN 22.122 (Ee III.168), the fruit of stream-entry results from understanding the impermanence of the five aggregates (*…bhikkhu ime pañcupādānakkhandhe aniccato dukkhato … pe ... anattato yoniso manasi karonto sotāpattiphalaṃ sacchikareyyā ti*).

[27] See Visuddhimagga XXII, on the cognition of Nirvana as the knowledge of the path of stream-entry. In the 'reviewing' stage of the attainment, the stream-enterer is able to contemplate the cognition of Nirvana as follows: 'He reviews the deathless Nirvana, 'I have penetrated this phenomenon as an object'.' (Ee p.676: *ayaṃ me dhammo ārammaṇato paṭividdho ti amataṃ nibbānaṃ paccavekkhati*).

II. SN 12.68. As we have seen, in denying that he is an *arahant*, Nārada compares his condition to that of a thirsty man who can see but not 'touch' the water at the bottom of a well. Anālayo (2017: 95) explains the situation as follows:

> In all versions the monk Nārada employs the simile of seeing water that one is unable to reach physically to illustrate that, even though one has already seen the goal, one therefore need not have fully reached it. In other words, the simile conveys that he has reached a stage of awakening that falls short of being arahantship. This conclusion finds confirmation in the commentary, which reports that Nārada was a non-returner. Thus this discourse is about the difference between one who has already experienced Nirvāṇa when attaining a lower level of awakening, a trainee (*sekha*), and an arahant who has reached full awakening. In sum, the difference between the monks Nārada and Musīla is not one of different paths, but only concerns different levels of the path.

This explanation is again based on later exegesis. The notion that Nārada is a non-returner (*anāgāmin*) is derived from the commentary; we have already dealt with the anachronistic idea that a person can experience Nirvana at a 'lower level of awakening'. Moreover, the simile of the man who has the knowledge '(there is) water', but who cannot 'abide having touched it with his body' (*na ca kāyena phusitvā vihareyya*),[28] has no relation to the canonical texts on the 'non-returner', which simply state that the latter has a 'residue of clinging' (*sati vā upādisese anāgāmitā*).

Although Anālayo's explanation of Nārada's simile in SN 12.68 relies on later sources, the canonical Suttas contain enough parallels to deduce its meaning. We have seen that Nārada's words are derived from the specific context of formless meditation; this evidence, rather than the notion of experiencing the goal without fully reaching it, is the key to understanding the text's meaning. We have also seen that Musīla's position is apparently one of insight without meditation, and yet Anālayo merely says that Musīla is 'an arahant who has reached full awakening'.

[28] See n.19 above.

III. SN 12.70. According to Anālayo, the *Susīma Sutta* and its parallels do not support the notion of 'dry insight':

> None of them supports the idea that a purely intellectual approach could lead to full awakening, without having cultivated a level of tranquillity that at the very least borders on absorption attainment. (2017: 94)

Arguing that 'even those versions that do not stipulate absorption attainment do clearly refer to meditation practice', Anālayo points out that according to the (Mūla-) Sarvāstivādin accounts, the insight-liberated monks did some meditation:

> SĀ 347 at T II 97c2 clearly indicates that they meditated, as they reached liberation after having dwelled alone and in seclusion, with single-minded attention and being established in diligence … According to the *Vibhāṣā*s, they attained liberation based on what appears to be access concentration. (2017: 94 n.63)

As already explained, the TPT is concerned with what happens at the higher reaches of practices. The attainment of low levels of meditation, including 'access concentration', are not directly relevant to it. What really matters is soteriological *ends* rather than spiritual *means*, and on this point the Sarvāstivādin tradition offers an insight soteriology effectively devoid of meditation. It is thus more explicit than the Pāli text and its Mahāsāṅghika version. On the latter, Anālayo points out that

> in a discourse quotation in the Mahāsāṅghika Vinaya, T 1425 at T XXII 363a14, the arahants deny that they attained supernormal powers or the immaterial attainments and then explain that they are liberated by wisdom. This leaves open that they could have attained absorption. (2017: 94 n.63)

This is somewhat of an understatement, for in the Mahāsāṅghika account, as in the Pāli text, much more is at stake than the attainment of 'supernormal powers' and 'the immaterial attainments'. As Bhikkhu Bodhi has pointed out, in the Mahāsāṅghika account Susīma inquires

> not about all five super-knowledges, but only about the divine eye that sees how beings pass away and take rebirth according

> to their kamma, and about the recollection of past lives — the last two of these super-knowledges, given here in inverse order from S 12: 70 – as well as about the peaceful formless emancipations. (2007: 65)

More so than the Pāli Sutta, then, the Mahāsāṅghika version of SN 12.70 focuses on the insight-liberated monks' lack of the three knowledges (*tisso vijjā*), the culminating insights of the jhānic path: the remembrance of one's past lives, the divine eye (by which to see the process of karma and rebirth in the world) and insight into the Four Noble Truths. By the standards of canonical Buddhist discourses, both the Mahāsāṅghika and the Theravādin accounts attribute a strikingly peculiar soteriology to the insight-liberated monks. Viewed from this perspective, Susīma's failure to ask the insight-liberated monks if they have attained the *jhāna*s is not that strange. Indeed, Bhikkhu Bodhi claims that Susīma overlooks the *jhāna*s simply because of

> the need to draw forth answers that would contradict orthodox doctrine, which upheld the secure place of *jhāna* in the structure of the Buddhist path; and it deftly hints that these monks did not have the *jhāna*s … by passing over this issue in silence, they discreetly imply that they do not attain the *jhāna*s at all. (2007: 63)

> The issue is left daintily alone, as though it were too sensitive to be touched upon. Perhaps the stock definition of the path factor of right concentration in terms of the four *jhāna*s, and the role of the *jhāna*s in the standard description of the gradual training of the monk, occupied niches too hallowed within the canonical collection for the Theravāda tradition to ever consider altering the received heritage of *sutta*s in a way that might explicitly state such attainments are dispensable. (2007: 62)

Bhikkhu Bodhi offers a compelling version of the argument from silence: the failure of the two key sources – Mahāsāṅghika and Theravāda – to mention *jhāna* was because of deference to old tradition. But there can be little doubt about the import of the text. Within the broad Theravādin/Sthavira tradition, the insight-liberated monks' lack of *jhāna* was taken for granted. The Pāli commentary defines the insight-liberated monks as 'dry insight practitioners,

devoid of *jhāna*, released merely through insight alone',[29] whereas in the extant (Mūla-)Sarvāstivādin sources, as we have seen, the Buddha says that the insight-liberated monks' liberation is based on 'access concentration'.[30]

The old Sthavira interpretation of the text is makes good sense. While the Pāli text and its Mahāsāṅghika counterpart both imply the lack of *jhāna* without actually stating it, the Buddha's teaching to Susīma clarifies the matter. As we have seen, the Buddha puts the very same questions to Susīma as Susīma had put to the insight-liberated monks, prior to which he guides Susīma through the Not-Self teaching and the doctrine of Dependent Origination. In other words, when the Buddha explains the way of liberation by insight, meditation plays no role in it. Just as in SN 12.68, the insight portions of the texts are crucial in any interpretation; strangely, however, Anālayo has nothing to say about them.

5. Conclusions

This study does not support Anālayo's claim that the idea of 'two conflicting approaches to liberation … does not accurately reflect what emerges from the early discourses'. Instead it seems highly likely that a distinction between calm and insight emerged, at some point, in at least one corner of the early Buddhist Saṅgha. There were 'insight practitioners' who barely meditated – 'insight meditation' would seem to be a contradiction in terms – and there were meditators who followed a mystical-cessationist path to liberation. The difference was serious, although it is difficult to guess its extent; we only know there were varying levels of disagreement. From the rather gentle exchange of opinion between Musīla and Nārada, to the antagonistic debate between meditators and Dhamma-devotees, mediated by Mahācunda, the fissures in the early tradition are not difficult to make out.

The debate focuses on a spiritual polarity: the practice of formless meditation leading to cessation, on the one hand, and insight alone on the other. The four *jhāna*s are not mentioned in the three most important texts on the debate, an absence most strongly apparent in SN 12.70. We must therefore ask, once more, did the debate bypass the *jhāna*s completely? Or can the *jhāna*s, even in a limited form, be attributed to the insight side of the debate, thus forming a

[29] Spk II.126: *mayaṃ nijjhānakā sukkhavipassakā paññāmatten'eva vimuttā* ti.

[30] Bhikkhu Bodhi (2007: 68): 'Those monks first exhausted the influxes based on the access to the jhāna, and afterwards aroused the basic *jhāna*.'

neat calm-insight position in line with the general early Buddhist position? The reasons against this are as follows:

> In AN 6.46, the Dhamma-devotees are presented as non-meditators; having 'confused mindfulness, lacking full awareness, lacking absorption, having scattered minds', it is difficult to assign any serious meditation to their insight soteriology.
>
> SN 12.68 only makes sense if a soteriological distinction is being drawn; the questions Nārada puts to Musīla must therefore indicate Musīla's path of doctrinal contemplation, not meditation, in contrast with Nārada's cessationist soteriology.
>
> In SN 12.70, the general deviation from the 'three-knowledge' scheme indicates a non-jhānic path, leading to 'release by insight'. The position that insight is effected by doctrinal understanding is made clear in the exchange between the Buddha and Susīma, in particular, through the point that a knowledge of causality precedes the knowledge of Nirvana.

Far from presuming the idea that insight is mediated by *jhāna*, these three texts betray an insight focus utterly removed from jhānic themes and concerns. Nothing in them indicates a general calm-insight position, nor even a minimal *jhāna* soteriology similar to those found in such texts as the *Aṭṭhakanāgara*, *Mahāmāluṅkya* or *Jhāna Sutta*s (MN 52, MN 64, AN 9.36).[31] Instead, the *jhāna*s are simply bypassed in our three TPT texts; they seem not to have been a concern of what we could call the insight and meditation schools.

There is little reason to believe that the jhānic path, or some version of it, lies hidden in the shadows of AN 6.46, SN 12.68 and SN 12.70. The most natural reading of these texts is that some early Buddhists had diverged from an older jhānic soteriology. Those who offer a calm-insight reading of the texts must therefore assume the burden of proof, and provide reasonable arguments showing that *jhāna*, although not mentioned, can be assumed. Anālayo's arguments do not seem to meet this burden of proof; they rely on an anachronistic application of later Buddhist ideas, and a rather general argument from silence (the failure of the three texts to mention *jhāna* is taken

[31] On these texts see Schmithausen (1981: 223-30).

to imply its presence). Beside this, there are a few methodological problems with Anālayo's arguments:

1. **Playing the man, not the ball.** This sporting metaphor refers to the use of psychological tactics to undermine one's opponent ('gamesmanship'), rather than concentrating purely on the game at hand. It is an apt description of Anālayo's *ad hominem* attacks on Louis de la Vallée Poussin. Rather than deal with the academic problem identified by de La Vallée Poussin (the 'ball'), Anālayo prefers to 'play the man', by suggesting that de La Vallée Poussin was influenced by Vasubandhu, or is guilty of Orientalism.

   Personal criticism demeans academic endeavour. One might as well say that Western converts to Buddhism are not sufficiently objective to study Buddhism academically. Of course, such a point would be absurd.

2. **Ignoring modern scholarship in disagreement with his own ideas**. Reflecting on the TPT, Anālayo (2016: 41) makes the reasonable point that those 'who wish to uphold this theory or one of its two main assumptions need to engage seriously with the criticism that has been voiced, rather than ignoring it.' This is sensible and commendable, but Anālayo unfortunately fails to follow his own advice. The arguments made here have already been made, albeit more briefly, in Wynne (2007: 102-04). Other important works are bypassed: Gombrich (1996) is not taken seriously, and Schmithausen's study (1981) of early path schemes is more or less ignored, as is Bhikkhu Bodhi's tentative support for the TPT (2007). By ignoring alternative points of view, Anālayo makes a one-dimensional case that ultimately harms his own analysis.

3. **Circularity**. To prove the ubiquity of the calm-insight paradigm in early Buddhist discourses, Anālayo refers to two texts (AN 6.60 and the *Brahmajāla Sutta*). But both texts lack calm-insight schemes. Anālayo's argument seems to be that calm-insight is universally applicable not because of what the texts say, but simply because calm-insight must be universally applicable.

   Anālayo similarly claims that distinguishing between calm and insight ignores the subtle 'interrelation between tranquillity and insight' that the Buddhist path implies. Once again, the argument seems to be that calm-insight is universally applicable because calm-insight is universally applicable; what the texts actually say is ignored.

4. **Failing to take the texts seriously at their word**. Anālayo claims that the standard account of insight into the Four Noble Truths is a motif for the meditative realisation of Nirvana. In other words, the texts are not to be taken seriously at their word: although the *Sāmaññaphala Sutta* talks of 'turning the mind towards knowledge', and the *Kāya-gatā-sati Sutta* explains this idea with quite precise similes, Anālayo believes that his own interpretation of the *Dhamma-cakka-ppavattana Sutta* is to be preferred instead. Dissenting voices are again overlooked.[32]

5. **Relying on later Buddhist scholasticism**. Anālayo assumes that the meditators of AN 6.46 are at least stream-enterers, but this idea is based on a later Buddhist notion of stream-entry, one unknown to the canonical discourses. Similarly, his assertion that Nārada (in SN 12.70) is a 'non-returner' (*anāgāmin*) is based on the Pāli commentary; the idea of experiencing but not fully realising Nirvana also belongs to later exegesis. Rather than studying the many internal parallels which actually help clarify what these texts mean, Anālayo prefers to read relatively late schemes, anachronistically, into them.

***

Some of these methodological failures are more serious than others. Perhaps academic progress can be made even when the objectivity of its practitioners is undermined, or when contemporary scholarship is ignored, or even when circular argumentation is deployed. But progress is surely impossible when the explicit statements of the texts are bypassed in favour of one's own preferred ideas; this problem is exacerbated by following the lead of later Buddhist scholasticism. Both are serious failures of text-critical history, which can only hinder, rather than help, the academic understanding of early Buddhism. Rather strangely, however, Anālayo believes his own arguments are an unqualified success:

> As far as I can see, the two paths theory has by now been successfully refuted and might best be set aside as an erroneous projection of the Western contrast between the thinker and the mystic onto material that does not warrant such an interpretation. (2016: 41)

The notion that academic debates can be settled once and for all, even by those fully involved in the debate, is surely misconceived. Instead, progress

[32] See n.19 above for Schmithausen's comments on the *Dhammacakka-ppavattana Sutta*.

in text-historical research occurs gradually, through the invisible hand of uncoordinated academic endeavour. The process is haphazard and open to much trial and error; mistakes occur, wrong turns are taken and better perspectives gain the upper hand gradually. Above all, final judgements are mostly an illusion in intellectual history: one never knows exactly what lies around the corner – the new evidence that might be found, the new arguments that could be made.

Arguments are the bread and butter of text-critical history, the discipline most relevant to the study of early Buddhism. But Anālayo's case against the TPT, followed by his judgement that the debate is settled, go against the grain of normal academic procedure. Why is this? The problem perhaps is possibly due to the distinction between exegesis and history being unwittingly blurred. Whereas exegetes naturally prefer tradition to remain unchallenged, historians deal in arguments and uncertainty. Indeed, historical doubt inevitably invites an strong exegetical response, and this might explain Anālayo's response to the TPT: casting aspersion on the intellectual proclivities of others; reading one's own conclusions into texts which lack them; ignoring other perspectives which challenge one's own ideas; failing to take one's sources seriously, at their own word; and, most seriously of all, relying on commentarial and scholastic perspectives: all of this signals an approach which is more exegetical than philological.. The overall effect is to seal off what tradition regards as sacred – the homogeneity of the canonical discourses on the Buddhist path – while at the same time attempting to shut down debate.

It is to be hoped that the points made here show that the 'two path' thesis is in urgent need of further consideration. By now it should be clear that the calm-insight debate sits along a serious faultline in early Buddhist thought. The problem at hand could be defined as the 'soteriological question': at the decisive moment of the path, what triggers awakening? Is the mendicant in a state of mindfulness and full awareness of things, or deeply absorbed in concentration? Is the mendicant conscious or not, or perhaps even mindful without being conscious? Is insight a knowledge of ideas, or a cognition of Nirvana (a transcendental object), or even a trans-conceptual understanding of cognition itself? Does the liberating cognition, whatever its nature, require absorption, and if so, is the state of absorption consistent with mindfulness?

The early Buddhist discourses offer a variety of perspectives on these problems, a situation best explained if the discourses emerged over the course of an extended period of speculation involving numerous minds. The homogeneity of the Tipiṭaka is an illusion. Indeed, the texts are far more diverse than what the

'two path' thesis suggests: the 'two paths' of AN 6.46, SN 12.68 and SN 12.70 are really three, four, five and more. Insight and concentration, the polarities studied here, in fact stand at opposite ends of a broad soteriological spectrum:[33]

1. Pure insight, e.g. the *Dīghanakha Sutta* and Vinaya Mahāvagga, where liberating insight is instantaneous and meditation does not figure directly.

2. Meditation plus insight i), e.g. the *Aṭṭhakanāgara Sutta* (MN 52), where insight occurs at different levels of meditation, as in the *Anupada Sutta*, but leads to liberation directly.

3. Meditation plus insight ii), e.g. the *Sāmaññaphala Sutta*, where insight occurs at the end of a meditative progression culminating in the 4th *jhāna*.

4. Meditation plus insight iii), e.g. the *Anupada Sutta*, where insight occurs at different levels of meditation, but only to direct an adept onwards towards a final state of concentration, in which liberation occurs.

5. Pure Meditation, e.g. the Nivāpa (MN 25) or *Mahācunda Suttas* (AN 6.46), which focus on the attainment of the 'cessation of perception and sensation' or the 'deathless element', and have no interest in or are outright hostile to insight practice.

Even if the historical Buddha was skilled in the means of communication, wisely adapting his ethics or meditations to those he encountered along the way, so many spiritual possibilities can hardly go back to a single person. For there is barely any connection between knowing ideas while in a non-absorbed state, and touching the immortal reality while in a deep meditative trance. Different Buddhist teachers, traditions and centres must have emerged over the course of the first century of the Buddhist era; such variety was the inevitable product of

[33] For this scheme and comments on it, see Wynne (2018: 94-95).

a dynamic speculative community, with no appointed leader, expanding within the rapidly changing society of northern India in the 4th century BC.

One influential factor almost certainly came from without: the path of formless meditation, leading to the goal of cessation, was probably formulated under the influence of early Brahminic thought. Thus the idea of attaining final liberation (*parinibbāyati*) into the 'Nirvana-realm' at death, stated in a few Suttas, is very similar to the Upaniṣadic notion that release is a dissolution into *brahman* at death.[34] Perhaps insight alone was a reaction to this neo-Upaniṣadic tendency. More radically, perhaps even the very idea of calm-insight was itself due to the early Brahminic influence, for the basic model is stated in the pre-Buddhist *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad*.[35] If so, it is possible that the calm-insight ideal supplanted an earlier, mindfulness-based soteriology.[36]

These reflections suggest that the early Buddhist discourses are a complicated and varied collection belonging to a very specific historical period. The attempt to impose an order on them, indeed an order derived from later tradition, is surely misconceived. Anālayo is not alone in following this approach, for the application of later exegesis to the study of early Buddhism is widespread.[37] It might also be a trend which will further develop in the future, as the academic study of Buddhism grows at Theravāda monastic universities, and as more 'Western' monastics turn their attention to academic studies. At this point in time, then, it is crucial that a firm effort is made to distinguish text-critical history from exegesis. Both approaches are valuable in their own right, of course, and the broad field of Buddhist Studies would benefit if both perspectives could inform each other. But this would only work if the distinction between them is closely observed.

In recent years, Anālayo has been at the forefront of the comparative study of the Pāli canon and its Chinese Āgama parallels. This important development is to be welcomed, and could potentially be of great benefit to the study of early Buddhism in the years to come. The problems we have noted here only concern certain aspects of Anālayo's study of early Buddhist thought and practice. In particular, we should note that if exegetical thinking is unwittingly smuggled into Buddhist Studies, and if modern studies are cherry-picked towards a desired end, little progress will be made in understanding intellectual history.

[34] See Wynne (2015: 92-93) on Ud V.5 (Ee 55-56) and Ud VIII.1 (Ee 80-81).
[35] Wynne (2018: 102).
[36] Wynne (2018: 102-05).
[37] See e.g. Wynne (2018: 104) on Gethin (2004: 215).

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Pali citations are taken from the PTS (Ee) editions; Be refers to the Burmese Chaṭṭhasaṅgāyana of the Vipassana Research Institute (electronic edition). Pali citations in the footnotes are numbered according to the volume and page numbers of Ee; the numbering of individual Suttas, as mentioned in the main body of text, follows the method of SuttaCental (https://suttacentral.net/).

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