

The Snake Simile Discourse¹

Alagaddūpama Sutta, Majjhima Nikāya 22 (M i.130).²

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[130]³ Thus have I heard. At one time the Bhagavan was staying at Sāvattthī, in the park of Anāthapiṇḍika. During that time a pernicious view⁴ had arisen in a monk named Ariṭṭha, who was formerly a vulture trapper⁵: though the Bhagavan has said the pursuit of pleasure is an obstacle, it doesn't turn out to be an obstacle.⁶

Many monks heard this and wondering if it was true, approached Ariṭṭha, and asked him: 'Is it really true that you profess this view that 'though the Bhagavan has said the pursuit of pleasure is an obstacle, it doesn't turn out to be an obstacle'?

"Yes, monks, that is just what I think."

Then those monks tried to dissuade⁷ Ariṭṭha, they cross-examined, asked for reasons, and went over it together. They said, "don't talk like that, friend Ariṭṭha. Don't slander the Bhagavan; it is not good to slander the Bhagavan. That is not how the Bhagavan would say it. The Bhagavan has explained in many ways that pleasures are enough to create an obstacle when pursued. He has explained that pleasures bring great disappointment, great trouble, and greater disadvantage. Pleasures are like a skeleton, a piece of meat, a firebrand; like charcoal,

¹ Many translators opt for 'water-snake' as a translation of *alagadda*. PED says that in late Sanskrit *alagarda* is a water snake; c.f. Monier-Williams s.v. *alagarda*: "a water-serpent (the black variety of the Cobra de Capello, Coluber Nāga)". However while the cobra is a good swimmer, according to Charpurey's *Snakes of India*, water snakes "... are non-poisonous snakes found usually in or near fresh water" (p.86); and given that the simile depends on the snake being venomous, *water-snake* doesn't fit. PED records the derivation as "unknown"; but c.f. MW. *ala* 'sting in the tail of a scorpion or bee'; *garda* 'crying' (related to *galda* 'speech?').

² I have consulted both the Pali Text Society edition and the *Chaṭṭha-Saṅgāyana* edition.

³ Page numbers in the PTS Pāli edition in square brackets.

⁴ *pāpaka diṭṭhigataṃ*. A good example of the past-participle *gata* used in the sense of 'being'. C.f. n.47.

⁵ *gaddhabādhīpubba* – formerly (*pubba*) a trapper (*bādhī*) of vultures (*gaddha*). Other translators render *bādhī* as killer, but PED has *bāhin* (which in compounds becomes *bādhī*) 'snaring; a trainer', *bādh* 'to force'. This appellation is repeated every time Ariṭṭha's name is mentioned. At S 54.6 (PTS v.314ff.) there is another Ariṭṭha who has gotten rid of sense desires while practising *ānāpānasati*; it's not clear if they are the same person (Buddhaghosa gives no opinion).

⁶ More literally 'those things which the Bhagavan has said are hindrances, when pursued turn out to be insufficient (*alam*) to cause hindrance, that is my understanding of the Dhamma taught by the Bhagavan.' But the Buddha's admonition of Ariṭṭha is all in terms of *kāma* 'pleasure'. *tathāhaṃ bhagavatā dhammaṃ desitaṃ ājānāmi yathā yame antarāyikā dhammā vuttā bhagavatā te paṭisevato nālaṃ antarāyāyā'ti*. *Kāma* is broadly 'sensuous pleasure', however the *bhikkhu saṅgha* and the Buddhist tradition have tended to interpret *kāma* as related to sex. Buddhaghosa (MA ii.105) says in the commentary that having this wrong view "he will pursue desire for property (*vatthukāme paṭisevissati*) and engage in sexual intercourse (*methunasamācāra samācarissati*). At Vin iv.133-6 Ariṭṭha is suspended from the *saṅgha* because he won't give up his wrong view. Commenting on the definitions of *pācittiya* offences (which require a confession) at Vin iv.133-6 Thanissaro says of this "... although the origin story makes clear that it refers at the very least to the sexual act." [*The Buddhist Monastic Code*, chp. 8.7 #68]. I would argue that the punishment suggests the offence in this case, and not the other way around. The sutta only records Ariṭṭha as being dejected, not ejected. Piya (2003) sees the point of the story about Ariṭṭha as being dealing with sexual feelings (p.145)

⁷ *etasmā pāpakā diṭṭhigatā vivecetukāmā* – literally 'from desire to separate [him] from this pernicious view.

a dream; like borrowed goods, the fruit of trees; like an abattoir, a roasting spit; like the head of a snake⁸ – pleasures bring great disappointment, great trouble, and greater disadvantage.”

However despite the efforts of the monks, Ariṭṭha [131] was unmoved, and obstinately maintained his pernicious view. Because they were not able to dissuade Ariṭṭha the monks decided to go and see the Bhagavan. They approached, made their salutations, and sat on one side. Then they told the Bhagavan about Ariṭṭha and his wrong view, and how they had failed to dissuade him.⁹

The Bhagavan said, “go and tell Ariṭṭha that I want to talk to him.” So the monks went to tell Ariṭṭha, and having heard the summons [132] he went to see the Bhagavan. He made his salutations and sat to one side.

The Bhagavan asked him, “is it really true that you have been saying: ‘though the Bhagavan has said the pursuit of pleasure is an obstacle, it doesn’t turn out to be an obstacle?’”

Ariṭṭha replied, “yes, bhante, that is my view.”

“Why do you understand the Dhamma we¹⁰ have taught that way, you stupid man¹¹? Have we not spoken about pleasure as obstacles in many different ways? And how pursuing pleasure is enough to form an obstacle.¹² Pleasures bring great disappointment, great trouble, and greater disadvantage. Pleasures are like a skeleton, a piece of meat, a firebrand; like charcoal, a dream; like borrowed goods, the fruit of trees; like an abattoir, a roasting spit; like the head of a snakes – pleasures bring great disappointment, great trouble, and greater disadvantage. And then failing to understand, you slander us; destroy yourself; and produce great demerit. This will cause painful disappointment for a long time, you foolish man.”

Then the Bhagavan addressed a question to the monks. “Do you think that Ariṭṭha, with this view, will make progress¹³ in this dhamma-vinaya?”

“Could it be so, bhante? No, bhante!” They replied.

Hearing these words Ariṭṭha sat silent and confused, his shoulders drooping and head bowed, overcome with remorse and bewildered.

Seeing the effect on Ariṭṭha, the Bhagavan said to him: “obviously this dejection comes from your own pernicious view, you stupid man. I shall now put a question to the monks.” Then the Bhagavan addressed the monks: “do you also [133] understand in the way that Ariṭṭha has?”

⁸ The ten similes (*upamā*) are in Pāli: *kaṅkalūpamā*, *mamsapesūpamā*, *tiṇukkūpamā*, *aṅgārakāsūpamā*, *supīnakūpamā*, *yācitakūpamā*, *rukkhaphalūpamā*, *asisūnūpamā*, *sattisūlūpamā*, *sappabhanteūpamā*. Of the ten, the first seven are found in full in the *Potaliya Sutta* (M 54.15-21; PTS M i.364.). The full list is repeated at A iii.96.

⁹ The story of Ariṭṭha in the *Vinaya* (Vin ii.25f.) is identical to this point and then begins to diverge. See Appendix 2.

¹⁰ The Bhagavan often uses the third person for himself.

¹¹ *moghapurisa*: *mogha* ‘empty, vain, useless, stupid, foolish’; *purisa* ‘man’.

¹² literally: “Have we not spoken about the hindrances as obstacles in many different ways? And how pursuing them is enough to form an obstacle.”

¹³ *usmīkato* – literally ‘making heat’.

“No, bhante! We understand the Bhagavan to have spoken about pleasures as obstacles in many different ways. And pursuing them is enough to form an obstacle. Pleasures bring great disappointment, great trouble, and greater disadvantage. You have said that pleasures are like a skeleton, a piece of meat etc. And Ariṭṭha is a foolish man who, failing to understand, slanders us; destroys himself; and produces great demerit. He will cause painful disappointment for a long time.

“Good, good, monks, good! You understand the Dhamma taught by me, and the many similes for pleasure, and the danger that Ariṭṭha courts. That he will pursue pleasures without desire, without discerning pleasure, thinking about pleasure: that is impossible.”¹⁴

The Snake Simile

Now, monks, some foolish people¹⁵ memorise Dhamma texts.¹⁶ They memorise them, but they do not test the meaning (*attha*)¹⁷ of the wisdom of the teachings; they do not accept the insights. They learn the Dhamma for winning arguments¹⁸ and for sounding clever.¹⁹ And learning the Dhamma for this purpose doesn't have a positive result. This wrong grasp of things (*dhammā duggahitā*) leads to painful disappointment for a long time.

Suppose someone went about seeking a snake, and found a big one. Grasping it by the coils or tail, the snake would turn around and bite them on the hand, arm or somewhere else. They [134] might suffer death or come close to death,²⁰ because they grasped the snake in the wrong way. The foolish people who memorise the Dhamma for winning arguments and for sounding clever are like the one who grasps the snake in the wrong way.

Now some intelligent people²¹ memorise Dhamma texts. They memorise them, and test the meaning of the wisdom of the teachings; they accept the insights. They don't just learn the Dhamma for winning arguments, or for blurting out quotations. And learning the Dhamma for this purpose has a positive result. This correct grasp of things leads to happiness for a long time.

¹⁴ This is the end of the active role of Ariṭṭha in the text. However in the versions of the story in the *Vinaya*, at Vin ii.25-7 he is subjected to a formal suspension (*ukkhepaniyakamma*) because of his unwillingness to recant; See also Vin iv.133-6. In the *Vinaya* Ariṭṭha's suspension from the order becomes the focus of the whole story.

¹⁵ The text is all in the masculine: he, man, men.

¹⁶ *dhammaṃ pariyāpuṇanti*, followed in the Pāli by a traditional list of text genres: “discourses, chants, exposition, verses, aphorisms, sayings, birth stories, amazing stories, and miscellanie.” (*suttaṃ, geyyaṃ, veyyākaraṇaṃ, gāthāṃ, udānaṃ, itivuttakaṃ, jātakāṃ, abbhutadhammaṃ, vedallaṃ*). The last, *vedallaṃ*, is obscure in meaning.

¹⁷ *atthaṃ* : it could also mean the value or worth of the teachings.

¹⁸ *upārambhānisamsā* – literally: seeking advantage (*ānisamsa*) through blaming (*upārambha*).

¹⁹ *itivādappamokkhānisamsā* – literally: seeking advantage (*ānisamsa*) through discharging (*pamokha*) gossip (*iti*). The word *itivāda* could also mean speaking (*vāda*) quotations (*iti*). The phrase could be translated as “blurting out quotations.”

²⁰ *So tatonidānaṃ maraṇaṃ vā nigaccheyya maraṇamattaṃ vā dukkhaṃ.*

²¹ *kulaputtā* – literally ‘son of a [good] family or clan’. This is difficult to render into contemporary English in a meaningful way. The equivalent ‘well bred’ sounds hopelessly snobbish, and this perhaps reflects on the social milieu of the Pāli texts to some extent. Since here it is the opposite of *moghapurisa* ‘stupid man’, then we can safely substitute ‘intelligent’.

Suppose someone went about seeking a snake, and found a big one. Trapping it with a forked stick²² they would properly restrain it. Having trapped it thus, they would grasp it by the neck, and though it coiled around their limbs they would be safe because they grasped it correctly. The intelligent people who memorise the Dhamma, and test the worth of the wisdom of the teachings, they are like the one who grasps the snake in the right way.

Therefore, you should understand it as I have explained it, and remember it that way. And if you cannot understand the meaning explained by me, then ask me, or perhaps some learned monks, right now.

The Raft

Monks I will teach you the simile of ‘the raft for the purpose of getting across’. Pay attention and listen to what I will say.

“Yes, bhante.” the bhikkhus replied.

The Bhagavan said “Suppose a man is following a stretch of road, and he comes to a great flood.²³ The near bank is dangerous and frightening, the far bank is safe and secure. There is no boat or bridge to cross the water. [135] He thinks ‘what if I were to were to gather grass, wood, sticks and leaves and having woven them into a raft, I should swim, and safely cross to the other side?’ So he makes a raft and crosses the flood. Then once he has crossed over to the far bank he thinks: ‘this raft was very helpful to me in crossing the flood, what if I were to pick it up and carry it on my head or shoulders and go on my way?’”

“What do you think, monks, is this man acting sensibly if he takes the raft with him?”

“No, bhante.”

“What would the sensible thing to do be? Here monks, he has crossed over to the far bank he thinks: ‘this raft was very helpful to me in crossing the flood, now let me haul it up to dry ground, or sink it in the water, and be on my way.’ That, monks, is the sensible way to act towards the raft. Just so, monks, I have taught the Dhamma as like a raft for ferrying, for getting across.²⁴ Monks, through understanding the Dhamma in terms of this parable, you should renounce things, and more-so non-things.”²⁵

²² *ajapada* ‘forked’ literally ‘goat-footed’, i.e. cloven like a goats hoof.

²³ I think the reference here is to a river in flood due to the monsoon rains.

²⁴ Cf. S i.193 “I have taught the path of many aspects for getting across the flood.” (*Oghassa nittharaṇattham, anekavihitam maggam akkhāsi*).

²⁵ The last sentence is problematic. It tells us to reject *dhammā* and more so *adhammā* (both in the plural): *dhammāpi vo pahātabbā pageva adhammā*. The words *dhammā* and *adhammā* have evoked a variety of renderings. MA ii.109 says that ‘*dhamma*’ here means calm and insight (*samatha-vipassanā*), specifically craving for calm and insight, but this does not make a great deal of sense, someone on the other shore has no craving to give up and one cannot abandon the raft before getting across. No modern exegetes seem to accept Buddhaghosa’s suggested interpretation. Horner interpreted the phrase as suggesting that we up morality at the futher shore (see Keown 1992: 93). Horner’s (1954) translation is “you should get rid even of (right) mental objects, all the more of wrong ones.” (p.173-4). Gethin (2008) interprets *dhammā/adhammā* as “good practices and bad practices” (p.161), which echos Buddhaghosa but is less specific. However ‘practice’ is hardly a usual translation for *dhamma* (one might even say it is a mistranslation).

Nānamoli and Bodhi (2001) opt for the “teachings and things contrary to the teachings” which is at least a possible translation. I am doubtful about *dhammā* in the plural being interpreted in the sense of ‘teaching’ (I’ll continue...

return to this). Bodhi's footnote (p. 1209, n.255) acknowledges the ambiguity, and justifies his translation with a pious homily. Thanissaro (2010) does not translate the key terms: "you should let go even of Dhammas, to say nothing of non-Dhammas." The capitalisation implies that he understands 'teachings', as *dhammā* as 'things' is seldom capitalised and he therefore has the same problem as Ñānamoli and Bodhi. Piya (2003) also avoids committing himself: "you should abandon even the dharmas, how much more that which is not dharmas" [sic]; and refers to MA and Bodhi's footnote for an explanation.

Richard Gombrich (1996) has weighed in with support for translating 'teachings' and 'non-teachings' however: "The Buddha concludes that his *dhammā*, his teachings are to be let go of, let alone *adhammā*. The occasion for this whole discourse is given by Ariṭṭha, who obstinately declared that he understood the Buddha's teaching in a certain [wrong] sense." (p.24). The argument that *dhammā* in the last sentence is not the *dhamma* referred to in the earlier parts of the passage Gombrich declares to be "sheer scholastic literalism" (p.24), but I have been unable to locate another passage in which the Buddha uses *dhammā* in the plural to describe his teachings. Gombrich comments on the irony of taking literally a text preaching against literalism (p.22), with the implication that Ariṭṭha – to whom he emphasises the sutta was directed – is guilty of literalism, or of clinging to the Dhamma. Ariṭṭha was guilty of stubbornly refusing to relinquish a completely wrong interpretation. He is not a literalist, but a fudger – his problem is that he does not take the Buddha's injunction literally enough! That the simile of grasping the snake at the wrong end, which immediately precedes the raft simile, applies to Ariṭṭha we cannot doubt – he has misunderstood the teaching. The simile of the raft appears to be talking about something entirely different, and unrelated to Ariṭṭha. I am inclined to agree with Keown who speculates that the sutta is a composite of originally separate sections (p.96).

Jonardon Ganeri has attempted to problematise the idea of abandoning the teachings – basing his discussion solely on Ñānamoli and Bodhi's translation. Firstly he says that if we take *dhammā* to mean teachings then the teachings only have instrumental value (p.132). Ironically this is not really a problem from a Buddhist point of view. His other argument, which relies on interpreting the Buddha's word as 'Truth' is that for one on the other side "truth ceases altogether to be something of value" (p.132). Again this is not really an issue for Buddhism as truth as expressed in language is always provisional. The 'Truth' (if there is such a thing) is experiential, and on experiencing bodhi and vimutti one does not need provisional truth anymore. Ganeri seems to misunderstand the pragmatic way Buddhism values truth – truth is whatever is helpful. This is epitomised in two now clichéd passages: in the *Kesamutti Sutta* (A i.188ff) where the Buddha tells the Kālāma people to trust their own experience in determining right and wrong conduct; and at Vin ii.10 where the Buddha tells his aunt Mahāpajāpatī that the Dhamma is whatever conducive to nibbāna.

If we accept Ñānamoli and Bodhi's 'teachings and things contrary to the teachings' then we must state the standard caveat, which is that one only abandons the teachings *after* reaching the further shore. Too often this passage is used to attack doctrine being applied on this shore, or in the flood. There is no suggestion but that we absolutely need the raft until we are safely on the other side.

Thus from various reputable scholars we get the full range of possibilities for translating *dhammā*: 'teaching, morality, things, mental objects'.

This parable is also examined in depth by Keown (1992), where he points out that this is the *only* mention of abandoning the raft (p.95) and that in other texts "it is made perfectly clear that *sīla* along with *samādhi* and *paññā* are part of the further shore and are not left behind on the near side after enlightenment." (p.95). As Keown points out that in some texts the further shore *is* morality (e.g. A v.232, and v.252f). I would add that this idea that one abandons the Dhamma after enlightenment is flatly contradicted in the *Gāraṇa Sutta* "I will reverence, pay my respects, and dwell in subordination to that very thing [i.e. *dhamma*] to which I have fully-awakened" (*Yamñūnāhaṃ yvāyaṃ dhammo mayā abhisambuddho tameva dhammaṃ sakkatvā garuṃ katvā upanissāya vihareyyanti*) S i.139. The Buddha himself does not give up on *Dhamma*, why should anyone else? This militates against interpreting *dhammā* as 'teachings'. Keown's tentative translation is "...good things (*dhammā*) must be left behind, much more so evil things (*adhammā*)" though he affirms the ambiguity. However Keown notes that in other places where *dhammā* and *adhammā* are contrasted they seem to mean good things and bad things (p.101). He concludes that the simile has two purposes: 1. to affirm that the *dhamma* is for the purpose of salvation and no other purpose (this being the main point of the first part of the *Alagaddūpama Sutta*); and 2. that we must not become emotionally attached to particular doctrines, practices, teachings or philosophical views, and that none should assume a disproportionate status. But that things which are unambiguously evil must certainly be rejected (p.102). Keown is at least thorough and pays attention to the text, and tries to take the text on its own terms.

Despite this plethora of interpretations I have yet another. In light of the following discussion in the text of things which exist (*sati*) or don't exist (*asati*), under my heading 'Torment', I suggest that *dhammā* here is 'things' (that exist) and *adhammā* is 'non-things' (things that don't exist). That is to say we must abandon attachment to what we have, and to what we wish to have.

No single view of this simile appears to be unproblematic.

Six Speculative Views

There are these six speculative views, monks: an uneducated worldling untrained in the Dhamma the Noble Ones, doesn't see the Noble Dhamma of the Noble Ones, they don't see the Dhamma of the True Individuals: They understand:

1. this form is mine, I am this form, this form is myself.²⁶
2. this sensation is mine, I am this sensation, this sensation is myself.
3. this apperception²⁷ is mine, I am this apperception, this apperception is myself.
4. this volition is mine, I am this volition, this volition is myself.
5. that which is seen, heard, felt²⁸, cognised; sought, obtained, or reflected on by the mind – this is mine, I am this, this is myself.
6. As the world, so myself:²⁹ I will exist after death; permanent, constant, eternal; I will not change for the worse; I will remain forever – they think *this* is mine, I am this, this is myself.³⁰

The educated Noble disciple trained in the Dhamma the Noble Ones, sees the Noble Dhamma of the Noble Ones, and sees the Dhamma of the True Individuals: They understand:

1. this form is not mine, I am not this form, this form is not myself.
2. this sensation is not mine, I am not this sensation, this sensation is not myself.
3. this apperception is not mine, I am not this apperception, this apperception is not myself.
4. this volition is not mine, I am not this volition, this volition is not myself.
5. that which is seen, heard, felt, cognised; sought, obtained, or reflected on by the mind – this is not mine, I am not this, this is not myself.
6. As the world, so myself: I will exist after death; permanent, constant, eternal; I will not change for the worse; [136] I will remain forever – they think *this* is not mine, I am not this, this is not myself

Thus understanding they are not tormented (*paritassati*³¹) by the non-existent (*asati*).

²⁶ The text literally: “he regards forms: this is not mine, I am not this, this is not myself.” (*rūpaṃ etam mama, eso 'ham-amsi, eso me attā ti samanupassati*) then repeats for each *khandha*. What *attā* refers to is a moot point. I have chosen to translate it simply as a reflexive pronoun. Of course it may refer to the Vedic *ātman*, or to some other permanently existing metaphysical self, but I have begun to doubt this. At present I lean towards seeing as the empirical self – the experience of being a self.

²⁷ Apperception is an uncommon word. It is perception with recognition, or as the OED puts it “compare (a perception) with previously held ideas so as to extract meaning from it.”

²⁸ *mutta* related to *mati* ‘thought’, but followed in the list by *viññāta*, so I follow PED’s suggestion that ‘felt’ may be more appropriate here.

²⁹ *so loko so attā*. What is meant by *loka* here? My suggestion is that it is the experiential world. The wrong view is that the experience of being a self, of having a point of view, is the same as actually *being* a self.

³⁰ See Appendix 3.

³¹ Other translators opt for ‘anxiety’, but I think this fails to capture the intensity of the situation.

Torment

That said, one of the monks asked the Bhagavan: “could one be tormented by something externally (*bahiddhā*) non-existing (*asati*)?”³²

“You could, monk,” replied the Bhagavan. “Suppose one thought like this: ‘it was mine, [now] it is not mine; it might be mine, but I can’t get it.’ They are upset and miserable; distressed and depressed.³³ They are tormented by something externally non-existing.”³⁴

“But, bhante, could one be untormented by something externally non-existing?”

“You could bhikkhu,” replied the Bhagavan. “Suppose one did not think like this: ‘it was mine, [now] it is not mine; it might be mine, but I can’t get it.’ They aren’t upset or miserable; nor distressed or depressed. They are not tormented by something externally non-existing.”

“So, bhante, is it possible to be tormented by something internally (*ajjhattam*) non-existing?”

“It is possible, monk,” replied the Bhagavan. “If one had this view: ‘as the world, so myself: I will exist after death; permanent, constant, eternal; I will remain forever.’ Hearing the teaching of the Tathāgata or one of his disciples for the uprooting of the obstinate, prejudicial bias for speculative views on permanence³⁵; for pacifying all volitions; for the rejection of all foundations; for the destruction of craving; for the cessation of passions; for extinguishing [greed, hatred and delusion]³⁶ they think: ‘I will definitely be destroyed, I will perish, I will cease to exist!’ They are upset and miserable; distressed and depressed. They are tormented by something internally non-existing.”

“But if one did not have that view, and heard the teaching, then they would *not* think “‘I will surely be destroyed, I will perish, I will cease to exist!’ They are not upset and miserable; distressed and depressed. They are not tormented by something externally non-existing.”

Graspable Properties

“That possession you might take hold of which is permanent, constant, eternal; not changing for the worse; remaining forever. Can you see it, monks?”

“No, bhante.”

“Good, monks, I don’t see it either.”

³² *siyā nu kho, bhante, bahiddhā asati paritassanā’ū?* This optative form of $\sqrt{as} - siyā$ – can be 1st, 2nd and 3rd person. *Bahiddhā* is an adverb. Syntax and the context show that it must refer to the locative case present-participle *asati* ‘in the externally non-existing’ rather than the main (past-participle) verb *paritassana* ‘externally tormented’ since the signs of both internal and external are the same (see the next paragraph).

³³ More literally: They grieve, are weary, lament, beat their breast, wail, and appear bewildered. *So socati kilamati paridevati urattāliṃ kandati sammohaṃ āpajjati.*

³⁴ i.e. something that they do not possess. Note here that the thing desired is not non-existent (*asati*) in the absolute sense, but is merely something lost, or out of reach.

³⁵ *diṭṭhiṭṭhānādhiṭṭhānapariyutṭhānābhinivesānusayānaṃ samugghātāya*

³⁶ i.e. *nibbāna*

“Do you see an eternalistic view which you might take hold of, that would *not* lead to grief, lamenting, misery, dejection, and trouble?”³⁷

“No, bhante.”

“Good, monks, I don’t see it either.” [138]

“There being a self, might there be what belongs to my self?”³⁸

“Yes, bhante.”

“Or, there being what belongs to my self, might there be my self?”

“Yes, bhante.”

“Not truly or reliably finding self or what belongs to it,³⁹ then isn’t this speculative view – ‘as the world, so myself: I will exist after death; permanent, constant, eternal; I will remain forever’ – the height of foolishness?

“Could it not be the height of foolishness?”

Permanent or Impermanent

“What do you think, monks, is form permanent or impermanent?”

“Impermanent, bhante.”

“The impermanent, is that disappointing [dukkha] or satisfying [sukha]?”

“Disappointing, bhante.”

“That which is impermanent, disappointing, and unreliable, is it wise⁴⁰ to see that in terms of ‘this is mine, I am this, this is my self’?”

“No, bhante.”

“What do you think, monks are sensation, apperception, volitions and consciousness permanent or impermanent?”

“The impermanent, is that disappointing or satisfying?”

“Disappointing, bhante.”

“That which is impermanent, disappointing, and unreliable, is it wise to see that in terms of ‘this is mine, I am this, this is my self’?”

“No, bhante.”

Liberation

“Therefore, monks any form, sensation, apperception, volition or consciousness – past, present or future; inside or outside; [139] coarse or subtle; rejected or exalted; which is

³⁷ *sokaparidevadukkhadomanassupāyāsa.*

³⁸ *attani vā bhikkhave sati attaniyaṃ me ti assā ti?*

³⁹ The translation of this sentence is discussed by Peter Harvey 1995, p.24ff. He confirms that *saccato thetato* should be translated as adverbs ‘truly, reliably’. Harvey discusses the implications of a self not being apprehended: “... it can thus be said that, while an empirical self exists... no metaphysical Self can be apprehended... for ‘Self’ is dependent on a sense of ‘I am’, and this can *only* arise by clinging to the [khandhas] which are not-self.” (p.33)

⁴⁰ *kalla* ‘sound, healthy, clever, proper’.

distant or present – all form⁴¹ sensation, apperception, volition or consciousness, seen with true wisdom, just as it is, should be regarded thus: ‘this is not mine, I am not this, this is not my self.’”

Seeing things this way, monks, the well-informed disciple of the noble-ones is fed up (*nibbindati*) with form, sensation, apperception, volition and consciousness; and being fed up, they turn away from passion. With the waning of passion, they are released, and know that they are free. They know: “rebirth is exhausted; the holy-life is fulfilled; what should be done, is done; no more coming here.⁴²” Such a monk is called “one who has removed the obstacle; one who has filled his trench;⁴³ one who has removed the sting; unobstructed; a noble who’s fight is over;⁴⁴ who has put down his burden and been unharnessed.⁴⁵

‘He is ‘one who has removed the obstacle’ because he has abandoned spiritual ignorance, destroyed the roots, destroyed the base, made [rebirth] unviable, it cannot arise in the future.

‘He is ‘one who has filled his trenches’ because he has rejected the cycle of birth leading to rebirth, destroyed the roots etc.

He is ‘one who has removed the sting, because he has abandoned craving...’

He is ‘unobstructed’ because he has abandoned the five fetters (*saṃyojana*) which bind him to the *kāmaloka*⁴⁶...

He is ‘a noble who’s fight is over; who has put down his burden and been unharnessed’ because he has rejected the ‘I am conceit’ (*asmimāno*)... destroyed the roots, destroyed the base, made [rebirth] unviable, it cannot arise in the future. [140]

The Tathāgata, or One like that⁴⁷

The gods, with Indra, Brahmā, Prajāpati, seeking the monk whose heart is thus released (*evaṃ vimuttacittam*), [thinking] ‘this is the basis of the consciousness of one like that’⁴⁸, do not find him. Why?

⁴¹ *sabbaṃ rūpam* – the form here is singular, which suggests form in the abstract rather than concrete sense of particular ‘forms’.

⁴² *nāparam itthattāya* – PED “being here (in this world), in the present state of becoming, this (earthly) state. Clearly it refers to rebirth in this world.

⁴³ See appendix 1. Below in the text the image is connected to having rejected repeated rebirth (*ponobbhaviko jātisaṃsāro pahīno*).

⁴⁴ *pannaddhajo* – literally ‘flag lowered’.

⁴⁵ These epithets could be understood as separate, but are treated together below. This is one of those passages where translators often translate the commentary rather than the text.

⁴⁶ The first five of the ten fetters: 1. personality-view (*sakkāyadiṭṭhi*), 2. sceptical doubt (*vicikacchā*), 3. devotion to rites and rituals (*sīlabbata-parāmāso*), 4. craving for pleasure (*kāmacchando* or *kāmarāga*), and 5. illwill (*vyāpada*). The word *orambhāgiya* ‘bound to the *kāmaloka*’ is literally ‘being a share of the lower’. The other fetters are 6. craving for form (*rūparāga*), 7. craving for the formless (*arūparāga*), 8. conceit (*māna*), restlessness (*uddhacca*), and 10. spiritual ignorance (*avijja*).

⁴⁷ Though often translated as ‘thus-gone’, it is common for *-gata* as a suffix to mean ‘being, being like’, c.f. n.4. *Tathā* - is a modal adverbial form of the 3rd person personal pronoun – *tad* – and means ‘that way, thus, so’. So to say someone is *tathāgata* is to say they are ‘in that state’, which is to say it described the awakened. The context shows that here *tathāgata* is being used generally for anyone who is liberated, and does not mean only the Buddha.

“Even in the present existence⁴⁹ I declare that the one in that state cannot be found.⁵⁰ Some toilers and priests⁵¹ wrongly, vainly and falsely slandered without cause like this: ‘The toiler Gotama is a nihilist; he teaches the annihilation, destruction, cutting off of an existent being.’ But I don’t talk like that. My teaching is always⁵² about suffering and the cessation of suffering.”

“If others abuse one like that, defame, annoy and vex them, the one like that does not feel malice, or dejection; they are not discontented. If others honour, pay respects, worship and revere the one like that, there is no elation, happiness or joy, they just think ‘this isn’t personal, it’s just actions being done to the five khandhas.’”⁵³

“Monks, you should be like that if anyone praises or blames you.”⁵⁴

“Therefore, monks, you should abandon what is not yours; that will be for your happiness for a long time. Form is not yours and should be abandoned; sensations are not yours and should be abandoned; apperceptions are not yours and should be abandoned; volitions are not yours and should be abandoned; cognitions not yours and should be abandoned, that will be for your happiness for a long time.”

“What do you think, monks? If someone took and burned grass, wood, sticks and leaves from the Jeta Grove as he pleased, would you think: ‘he is burning us?’”

“No bhante.”

“Why?”

“For us, bhante, there is no self or what belongs to self”.

⁴⁸ i.e. one who’s heart (*citta*) is released (*vimutta*). We need to be a little wary of the translation ‘heart’, for *citta*. Heart and mind are both included.

⁴⁹ *diṭṭhe va dhamme* is a Pāli idiom, sometimes also translated as ‘here and now’. I think here it means ‘even before the person dies.’

⁵⁰ This is discussed in depth in Norman *Death and the Tathāgata* who suggests that “...the word ‘tathāgata’, with reference to a being, means non-existent... How could I speak of one who has destroyed the *āsavas* as a being or a individual... For in a sense a being does not exist.” (p.258) C.f. *Vajirā Sutta* (S 5:10; S i.136) What makes you resort to belief in ‘a being’ Māra? A heap of mere fabrication, a being is not found here. (*Kiṃ nu sattoti paccesi, māra diṭṭhigataṃ nu te; / Suddhasankhārapuñjoyaṃ, nayidha sattupalabbhati*).

⁵¹ *samaṇa-brāhmaṇa*. *Samaṇa* is Sanskrit *śramaṇa* from the root √*śram* ‘to toil, be weary’. A *śramaṇa* is ‘one who toils’. Ascetic has slightly the wrong connotation, because the Buddha is addressed as *samaṇo*; though many of the *śramaṇa* community were ascetics.

⁵² *pubbe cā etarahi* literally ‘formerly and now’. Emphasised with *eva* ‘only’.

⁵³ Literally: “those types of actions are done to this which has been fully understood” (*yaṃ kho idaṃ pubbe pariññātaṃ tattha me evarūpā kāraṇā karīyantī’ti*). The Pāli is very difficult to understand. MA 2.118 glosses *yaṃ kho idaṃ pubbe pariññātaṃ* as ‘these five khandhas understood formerly through the three understandings (i.e. *tevijja*) under the Bodhi Tree’ (*idaṃ khandhapañcakam pubbe bodhimaṇḍe tīhi pariññāhi pariññātaṃ*). Horner’s literal rendering is confusing: “This that was formerly thoroughly known, such kind of duties are to be done by me to it. (p.180). Bodhi & Nāṇamoli achieve better English with: “they perform such services as these towards that which earlier was fully understood” (p.234; p.1212, n.269.). The phrase *tattha me evarūpā* is understood by MA as *tatha ime evarūpā*, and Horner notes (looking to the next paragraph) that *me* “must be wrong” (p.180, n.10). However Gethin notes (p.287) that the PTS editor, Trenckner, has silently emended the next paragraph so that *tatha me evarūpā* becomes *tatha no evarūpā* (a change not supported by Burmese mss.) This changes the sense from ‘these kinds of actions’ to ‘the kinds of actions done by me’, so it is likely that Horner has this the wrong way around: *ime* is correct, and *no* is incorrect.

⁵⁴ This paragraph reproduces the former but substitutes ‘you’ for ‘tathāgata’. See also n. 43.

“That’s right, monks. You abandon what is not yours – form, sensations, [141] apperceptions, volitions, and cognitions – and that will be for your happiness for a long time.”

The Monks

“This dhamma is well expressed by me, clearly laid bare and explained, and because of this these bhikkhus are worthy (*arahanta*), have cut off the influxes (*khīṇāsava*), have reached perfection (*vusitavanta*), and done what needs to be done (*katakaraṇīya*), have laid down their burdens (*ohitabhāra*), have reached the ideal (*anuppattasadattha*), the fetters binding them to becoming are broken (*parikkīṇa-bhava-saṃyojana*), they have perfect knowledge (*sammādañña*), they are freed (*vimutta*), and for them there is no round (*vaṭṭa*) [of rebirth].”

“Because of this *dhamma* there are monks who have overcome the five fetters⁵⁵ which bind them to the *kāmaloka*, they will have an apparitional birth and will attain *parinibbāna* without returning to this world.”

“Because of this *dhamma* there are monks who have broken the three fetters,⁵⁶ and attenuated greed, hatred and delusion (*rāga-dosa-moha*) and will return only once more before they make an end to disappointment.”

“Because of this *dhamma* there are monks who have broken the three fetters and become stream-entrants (*sotāpanna*), [142] they will not be reborn in states of torment (*avinipātadhammā*) but are restrained with *sambodhi* as their aim (*sambodhiparāyana*).”

“Because of this *dhamma* there are monks who live righteously and faithfully with *sambodhi* as their aim.”

“And there are some who love me and have faith in me and are all bound for heaven (*saggaparāyana*).”

This is what the Bhagavan said. The monks were delighted and rejoiced in the Bhagavan’s words.

⁵⁵ see note 46.

⁵⁶ see note 46.

Appendix 1: Saṃkiṇṇaparikho⁵⁷

Used as an epithet for someone who is liberated. Other translators read it as "one who has filled his trench" or variations on that theme. Nyanaponika links this explanation to a commentarial story (AA iii.263).

The spelling conventions are confused between *-parikha* and *-parikkha*, but the former seems to be correct and means 'trench, ditch, moat', and possibly 'furrow'. The word *saṃkiṇṇa* a past-participle from *saṃkirati* (S. *saṃ-√kṛ*) usually means 'mixed, blended; impure', but appears here to mean 'filled' because it clearly relates to the destruction or removal of a trench.

The commentary on this passage (MA 2.115) says:

Having been encircled because of being reborn again and again, is called 'having a ditch in place'. Because his [ditch] is filled and scattered: 'whose trench is filled' is said.⁵⁸

Note here that *saṃkiṇṇattā* is an abstract noun in *-tta*, in the ablative, and therefore literally means 'from filled-in-ness'. Note that *vikiṇṇa* and *saṃkiṇṇa* are being equated (or perhaps contrasted?) here, though *vikiṇṇa* definitely means scattered (from S. *vi-√kṛ*). The simile is repeated at A iii.84 and commented on at AA iii.263:

'trench filled': i.e. in the state of having filled and destroyed the ditch of saṃsāra.⁵⁹

Where *ṭhito* is a pleonastic finite verb 'abides'. (*so dudo ṭhito*). The *Alagaddūpama Sutta* itself comments on the epithet a few paragraphs on, saying: "he is 'one who has filled his trenches' because he has rejected the cycle of birth leading to rebirth (*ponobbhaviko jātisamsāro pahīno*)." Which confirms the overall picture.

Perhaps the underlying image is that someone going continually around the cycles of rebirth is like a draught animal harnessed to a pole, going around and around driving a millstone, gradually wearing a circular furrow in the ground? One who is liberated is freed from that labour. One of the other epithets is *visaṃyutto* 'unharnessed', though the two aren't necessarily linked.

However in the commentary at AA iii.263 all of the epithets are woven into a story about a warrior (*yodha*) from a city of peace (*khemanagaram*) who destroys a city of thieves (*coranagaram*) in order to preserve the peace and one of his actions is this:

The warrior destroying breaking⁶⁰ the trench, destroying the rampart [of the city], is like one who breaks (*bhindanto*) the accumulation of kamma, having destroyed (*vikitvā*) the trench of the cycle of births.⁶¹

⁵⁷ My thanks to members of *The Pali Collective* (<http://groups.yahoo.com/group/Pali/>) for help unravelling this.

⁵⁸ *So hi punappunam uppattikarānavasena parikkhipitvā ṭhitattā parikkhā'ti vuccati, ten'esa tassā saṃkiṇṇattā vikiṇṇattā saṃkiṇṇaparikkho'ti vutto.*

⁵⁹ *Saṃkiṇṇaparikho'ti saṃsāraparikhā saṃkiritvā vināsetvā ṭhito.*

Two aspects are here but we can see that, as above where *vikiṇṇa* and *saṃkiṇṇa* are equated, that commentator is using the gerund form *vikitvā* as a gloss for *saṃkiṇṇa* in the text. The commentator makes the image a military one, which plausibly links all of the epithets, so perhaps my agricultural image is incorrect.

In any case we can now see why a liberated person might be described as "someone who has filled their trench."

⁶⁰ In commentarial Pāli these present participles (*bhindanto* 'breaking') often have a nominal sense as here.

⁶¹ *so yodho pākāraṃ bhindanto parikhaṃ viya kammābhisaṅkhāraṃ bhindanto jātisaṃsāraparikhaṃ vikitvā.*

Appendix 2: Ariṭṭha in the Vinaya

Vinaya ii.25-7: ‘A judgement of suspension for an unrenounced pernicious view.’
Pāpikāya diṭṭhiyā appaṭinissagge ukkhepanīyakammaṃ

... unable to dissuade Ariṭṭha the monks went to see the Buddha, and related the story to him. And the Bhagavan on the basis of that story caused a gathering of the monks, and asked Ariṭṭha about his pernicious view.⁶² Ariṭṭha confirmed the story. Then the Buddha admonished Ariṭṭha, calling him stupid (*moghapurisa*) and reminding him about the various similes for the Dhamma.⁶³”

“Having rebuked Ariṭṭha and talked about the Dhamma the Bhagavan addressed the monks: “because of this, monks, the *saṅgha* should make a judgement of suspension [*ukkhepanīkamma*] for the unrenounced pernicious view of Ariṭṭha – he does not live [*asambhoga*] with the *saṅgha*. And do it this way – first reprove the monk, then remind him [of the rules], then [consider] that an offense has been committed, and at this point a learned and competent monk should announce it to the *saṅgha*. This is the motion (*ñatti*)”

“Listen to me honoured gathering: Ariṭṭha the bhikkhu, formerly a trapper of vultures has this kind of pernicious view – “though the Bhagavan has said the pursuit of pleasure is an obstacle, it doesn’t turn out to be an obstacle” – the *saṅgha* should make a judgement of suspension for the unrenounced pernicious view of Ariṭṭha – he does not live [*asambhoga*⁶⁴] with the *saṅgha*.

“[The judgement is made against Ariṭṭha in identical terms] let him not live with the *saṅgha*. Let him be silent, and do not acknowledge if he speaks. [Repeated twice more].”

“The *saṅgha* has carried out the judgement of suspension against Ariṭṭha... the *saṅgha* accept by remaining silent, so I understand.”

Monks, let it be known in dwellings everywhere.

⁶² In the sutta the text tells how the Buddha responded to the story by sending a monk to summon Ariṭṭha, here the *saṅgha* itself is summoned – this I think reflects the normative values of settled monastics.

⁶³ This section is identical to M i.132.

⁶⁴ *sambhoga* – ‘to live, or eat together’.

Appendix 3 The world is myself.

yampi tam diṭṭhiṭṭhānaṃ: so loko so attā, so pecca bhvissāmi nicco dhuvo sassato avipariṇamadhammo, sassatisanaṃ tatheva ṭhassāmī ti tampi: etaṃ mama, eso 'ham asmim, so me attā ti samanupassati.

There is also the ideology: ‘as the world, so myself: I will exist after death; permanent, constant, eternal; I will not change for the worse; I will remain forever’ – they think *this* is mine, I am this, this is myself.

The wrong view here is like the one which is expressed to today by saying “all is one”, i.e. that really we are all just aspects of a single ultimately real entity, which may be called God, or Godhead, or even just ‘the Universe’. The view is refuted later in the sutta by the passage

“What do you think, monks? If someone took and burned grass, wood, sticks and leaves from the Jeta Grove as he pleased, would you think: ‘he is burning us?’”

“No bhante.”

“Why?”

“For us, bhante, there is no self or what belongs to self”.

“That’s right, monks. You abandon what is not yours – form, sensations, apperceptions, volitions, and cognitions – and that will be for your happiness for a long time.”

We are not “all one”, the world isn’t myself because we don’t all have exactly the same experience. With empathy I can imagine what you experience, and to some extent invoke the same experience in myself (to the extent that human emotions are generic), but this is not the same thing as really experiencing the sensations experienced by another.

Compare this wrong view with the *Brahmajāla Sutta* (DN 1) [The eternalist] says “myself and the world are eternal, barren, straight, steadfast like a pillar. Beings go through the rounds of rebirth, rising and falling, remaining [the same] forever.”⁶⁵ This kind of view is a result of mistaking the significance of remembering past lives, or can be a purely speculative. Bodhi (2007) relates some variations of eternalist views to various ideologies such as Advaita-Vedanta (p.17), but these ideologies are much later than the texts and it’s not clear that they are relevant to interpreting either the *Brahmajāla* or *Alagaddūpama*. It is

⁶⁵ *so evamāha – sassato attā ca loko ca vañjho kūṭṭho esikaṭṭhāyīṭṭhito; te ca sattā sandhāvanti saṃsaranti cavanti upapajjanti, atthitveva sassatisamaṃ.* Compare this with the *Rohitassa Sutta*: “Is there a way, by going [around] to know or see the end of the world where there is no birth, aging, death, falling [from heaven], rebirth [on earth].” (SN 2.26, PTS S i.61; also AN 4.45, PTS A ii.47). I conjecture that Rohitassa may have a view of rebirth consistent with the early Vedic model in which one cycles endlessly around between heaven and earth, between rising and falling – c.f. Jurewicz (2004, 2006); and Obeyesekere (2002). Rohitassa may well be asking whether *saṃsāra* naturally exhausts itself, and the Buddha’s reply is that it does not, but requires some intervention. C.f. the *Brahmanimantanika Sutta* (MN 49) where a Brahmā called Baka (Heron, with the figurative meaning of ‘cheat, deceiver’ c.f. Monier-Williams s.v. *baka*) declares beyond this [the same cycle] there is no escaping (*natthaññaṃ uttari nissaraṇanti*).

interesting that the view in *Brahmajāla* is not exclusively assigned to Brahmins, nor is it associated with the words *ātman* or *brahman* or indeed any other distinctive terminology of the Brahmins. So while it is true that the Brahmanical belief in *ātman* is considered a *sassatavāda* by Buddhists, there is no reason to think, from the Pāli texts, that this was the only *sassatavāda* current at the time

Both K.R. Norman and Richard Gombrich have interpreted the sixth wrong view as a definite reference to the upaniṣads. So Norman for instance:

The idea that the world and the *ātman* (= *brahman*) are the same is found in the Upaniṣads, and it is possible to find actual verbal echoes of the Upaniṣads in this passage, e.g. *eṣa ma ātmā* (CU 3.14.3-4), and *yathākratur asmiṃl loke puruṣo bhavati tathetaḥ pretya bhavati sa kratum kurvīta ... etaṃ itaḥ pretyābhisambhavitāsmīti* (CU 3.14.1, 4).⁶⁶

In the passage Norman cites Pāli *so me attā* ‘this is my self’ is not really an echo of *eṣa ma ātmā* ‘this self of mine’. Not only is the context very different, but the two fragments are saying something entirely different! Nor do I see an obvious connection between the Pāli passage and CU 3.14.1 and 4. I think this becomes clear when the verse CU 3.14.4 is taken as a whole:

All actions, all desires, all smells, all tastes, all this, is contained unspoken and untroubled. This *ātman* of mine in my heart, this is *brahman*. Departing here I will become that [i.e. *brahman*], [Think this] he has no doubts. This is what Śāṅḍilyaḥ said.⁶⁷

Everything is contained in the heart, the *ātman* lies within the heart, and it is *brahman*. I can’t see the connection here except in a very general way – the passage does not demonstrate a parallel. Norman also introduces the term world-*attā* which as far as I know is not a traditional term. My understanding is not that the world has an *ātman*, but rather that the self has or is a reflection of the macrocosmic *brahman*. That is *ātman* is a subset of *brahman*; *brahman* is the superset, the over-arching reality. So while we might speak of an individual manifestation of *brahman*, an individual-Brahman (i.e. the *ātman*), I am less certain of the validity of the concept of a world-*ātman*. In any case we don’t find the term in Pāli, here or elsewhere. In fact the most serious objection to the notion that this is an echo of the Upaniṣads is the absence of the this term *brahman*, which is in fact not unequivocally found in the neuter in the whole Pāli canon – a puzzle if the Buddha was aware of the Upaniṣadic teachings, since *brahman* is central to them! Neither Norman nor Gombrich address this in relation to the sixth wrong view.

⁶⁶ I have amended the style of Norman’s citations.

⁶⁷ *sarvakarmā sarvakāmaḥ sarvagandhaḥ sarvarasaḥ sarvam idam abhyatto 'vākyanādarah | eṣa ma ātmā antarhrdaye | etad brahma | etaṃ itaḥ pretyābhisambhavitā smīti yasya syād addhā na vicikitsā asti | iti ha smāha śāṅḍilyaḥ śāṅḍilyaḥ ||* CU 3.14.4.

Gombrich says that Norman has showed that our passage must be a “satirical allusion” to CU, but I think Norman’s point is that it is a critique and refutation, rather than a satire. Gombrich then produces a series of Upaniṣad quotes which apparently relate to the Pāli. Related to the sixth wrong view [that I shall be eternal after death] is BU 4.4.23 of which Gombrich cites “*eṣa nityo mahimā brāhmaṇasya*” (i.e. ‘this eternal greatness of the Brahmin’) and notes “the *brāhmaṇa* here being one who has realized his identity with brahman.”. He also cites BU 4.4.20 *aja ātmā mahān dhruvaḥ* which is a partial quote: ‘It should be seen as one, immeasurable and stable, The unborn *ātman* is pure, beyond space, is great and stable.’⁶⁸ Gombrich appears to be saying that since the Brahmins had an eternalist view (which his and Norman’s quotes do establish) that this is what the *Alagaddūpama Sutta* is talking about. I do not agree that the connection is established by the passages cited. However both Norman and Gombrich appear to have overlooked a far more obvious connection between the Pāli and BU 4.4.22 (and given that Gombrich cites vs. 20 and 23 this is surprising).

Desiring [the unborn self] as their world, reouncers wander. Knowing it, the ancients did not desire offspring, for the thought, “what is offspring to us, when *this self is our realm* (*ayaṃ ātma ayaṃ loka*).⁶⁹

The form here is very nearly identical to the Pāli, though I note that *ātman* and *loka* have been transposed. The wanderer (*pravrajino*) seeks the *ātman* which is in the space within his heat, which is not affected by actions, and lord of all (*sarvasyādhipatiḥ*). Desire for sons, wealth, ‘worlds’ is just desire. The *ātman* they seek is unseizable, indestructible, and does not suffer. At BU 4.4.25 the self is described as unborn, unageing, undying, immortal, fearless *brahman*.⁷⁰ Seeing the *ātman* in himself, he sees the *ātman* as everything.⁷¹

Here we can a more coherent explanation of why anyone would think the world was their self. In fact the Upaniṣadic teaching is that in realising the *ātman* it becomes one’s world (*loka*), it becomes everything (*sarvaṃ*). So the Pāli text is not a very clear reflection of the Sanskrit.

Note also the way that the Buddha refutes the view by referring to the burning of leaves. BU 4.4.22 ends by saying that “*it is not burned* by what is done or undone”.⁷² The words for burning are different however the Pāli uses *ḍahati* (Sanskrit *dahati*), the Sanskrit *tapati*.

I do not disagree with Norman or Gombrich’s conclusions, only find that the case is not made by the textual citations they make.

⁶⁸ *ekadhaivānudraṣṭavyam etad apramayaṃ dhruvam | virajaḥ para ākāsād aja ātmā mahān dhruvaḥ*

⁶⁹ I’ve undone the sandhi to make the point more clear. *Etam eva pravrajino lokam icchantāḥ pravrajanti | etaddha sma vai tat pūrva viddhāṃsaḥ prajāṃ na ālamayante | kiṃ prajāyā kirśyāmo yeṣāṃ no ‘yamātmāyaṃ loka itī.*

⁷⁰ *sa vā eṣa mahān aja ātmājaro ‘maro ‘mrto ‘bhayo brahma | abhayaṃ vai brahma | abhayaṃ hi vai brahma bhavati ya evaṃ veda*

⁷¹ *bhūtvātmāny evātmānaṃ paśyati | sarvaṃ ātmānaṃ paśyati |*

⁷² *ubhe u haivaiṣa etē tarita naina kṛtākṛte tapataḥ.*

I want to begin by looking at the claim that ‘the world’ and *ātman* are linked in the Upaniṣads. In the cited text at least *brahman* is related to *idaṃ sarvaṃ* ‘all this’ or ‘this whole, this universe’ which is generally speaking the world as ‘creation’. For instance at RV 10.90.2

The puruṣa is only this whole
 That which has been and is to come,
 He is the ruler of immortality
 When he grows beyond everything through food.⁷³

The puruṣa here is the cosmic man from which the world is created through his sacrifice. *Puruṣa* is frequently a synonym for *ātman*, possibly because *ātman* can also mean ‘body’, and is used this way in BU. However I have been unable to locate a specific instance of an Upaniṣad equating *loka* and *ātman*.

Looking more closely at the phrase ‘*idaṃ sarvaṃ*’ Scharwzchild (1960, p.11) cites a very useful classification of aspects of totality from Brøndal:

1. Completeness (Latin *totus*) meaning whole, all.
2. Universality (Latin *omnis*) all.
3. iterative or distributive (Latin *quisque*) every, each.
4. generality (Latin *quisquam*) any.

Semantic changes occur in many Indo-European languages with regard to terms for ‘all’. In particular “...adjectives of completeness tend to used gradually to express universality, and later may become iterative, or be reduced to a vague general meaning” (p.11). We’ve seen this in the case of Sanskrit *sarva/viśva* and precisely this happened in Pāli. While there are other words for the various aspects of totality, the word ‘*sabba*’ is common, and used in at least the first three of Brøndal’s senses. This is reflected in the PED definition of *sabba*: “whole, entire, all, every”. (PED s.v. *sabba*), and is also reflected in the various translations of the *Sabba Sutta*. In order to demonstrate this we could look at the *Sabba* section of the *Samyutta Nikāya* (SN 35:23-32). In the *Sabba Sutta* *sabba* is used as a substantive: *sabbaṃ* meaning ‘the whole’, ‘The All’, or ‘everything’. It is also used in this sense in SN 35.24-27. However in SN 35.28 it is used in the sense of ‘all of X’ Brøndal’s sense 2: for example “everything is burning” (*sabbaṃ ādittaṃ*) where ‘everything’ means ‘all of the sense organs, objects, and consciousnesses’; and in SN35.30 *sabbamaññita* means all conceivings. In the sequence SN 35.43-52 *sabba* is used in the sense of each or every Brøndal’s sense 3: e.g. each

⁷³ *puruṣa evédāṃ sárvaṃ*
yád bhūtám yác ca bháviyam
utámṛ tatvásyésāno
yád ánnenātiróhati

thing is subject to birth (*sabbaṃ-jātidhamma*), or each thing is to be fully understood (*abhiññāpariññeyyaṃ*).

Gonda distinguishes *idam sarvaṃ* and *sarvaṃ* in the *Śatapatha-brāhmaṇa*: “The former expression denotes ‘the totality of objects that are here, within the sphere of horizon of the author that are mundane or phenomenal, which often, but not necessarily means ‘this (the) universe’ ... *Sarvaṃ* without *idam*, on the other hand, denotes an unspecified and undivided totality that is not restricted to things mundane or phenomenal” (1982, p4-5)⁷⁴. I think this distinction might have been lost in the Pāli critique.

I want to begin by looking at the claim that ‘the world’ and *ātman* are linked in the Upaniṣads. In the cited text at least *brahman* is related to *idaṃ sarvaṃ* ‘all this’ or ‘this whole, this universe’ which is generally speaking the world as ‘creation’. For instance at RV 10.90.2

The puruṣa is only this whole
That which has been and is to come,
He is the ruler of immortality
When he grows beyond everything through food.⁷⁵

The puruṣa here is the cosmic man from which the world is created through his sacrifice. *Puruṣa* is frequently a synonym for *ātman*, possibly because *ātman* can also mean ‘body’, and is used this way in BU. However I have been unable to locate a specific instance of an Upaniṣad equating *loka* and *ātman*.

Looking more closely at the phrase ‘*idaṃ sarvaṃ*’ Scharwzchild (1960, p.11) cites a very useful classification of aspects of totality from Brøndal:

5. Completeness (Latin *totus*) meaning whole, all.
6. Universality (Latin *omnis*) all.
7. iterative or distributive (Latin *quisque*) every, each.
8. generality (Latin *quisquam*) any.

Semantic changes occur in many Indo-European languages with regard to terms for ‘all’. In particular “...adjectives of completeness tend to used gradually to express universality,

⁷⁴ The equivalent phrase in Pāli *idaṃ sabbaṃ* does not occur in the Canon, but is found in the Pāli histories: Att 70, Dhat 60, Ras 79, Sah 43.

⁷⁵ *puruṣa evédāṃ sárvaṃ*
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and later may become iterative, or be reduced to a vague general meaning” (p.11). We’ve seen this in the case of Sanskrit *sarva/viśva* and precisely this happened in Pāli. While there are other words for the various aspects of totality, the word ‘*sabba*’ is common, and used in at least the first three of Brøndal’s senses. This is reflected in the PED definition of *sabba*: “whole, entire, all, every”. (PED s.v. *sabba*), and is also reflected in the various translations of the *Sabba Sutta*. In order to demonstrate this we could look at the *Sabba* section of the *Samyutta Nikāya* (SN 35:23-32). In the *Sabba Sutta* *sabba* is used as a substantive: *sabbaṃ* meaning ‘the whole’, ‘The All’, or ‘everything’. It is also used in this sense in SN 35.24-27. However in SN 35.28 it is used in the sense of ‘all of X’ Brøndal’s sense 2: for example “everything is burning” (*sabbaṃ ādittaṃ*) where ‘everything’ means ‘all of the sense organs, objects, and consciousnesses’; and in SN35.30 *sabbamaññita* means all conceivings. In the sequence SN 35.43-52 *sabba* is used in the sense of each or every Brøndal’s sense 3: e.g. each thing is subject to birth (*sabbaṃ-jātidhamma*), or each thing is to be fully understood (*abhiññāpariññeyyaṃ*).

Gonda distinguishes *idam sarvam* and *sarvam* in the *Śatapatha-brāhmaṇa*: “The former expression denotes ‘the totality of objects that are here, within the sphere of horizon of the author that are mundane or phenomenal, which often, but not necessarily means ‘this (the) universe’... *Sarvam* without *idam*, on the other hand, denotes an unspecified and undivided totality that is not restricted to things mundane or phenomenal” (1982, p4-5)⁷⁶. I think this distinction might have been lost in the Pāli critique.

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