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Eviatar Shulman

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POLYVALENT PHILOSOPHY AND SOTERIOLOGY IN EARLY BUDDHISM



Eviatar Shulman

Department of Comparative Religion and Department of Asian Studies
Hebrew University of Jerusalem
Eviatar.shulman@mail.huji.ac.il

The ideas of a “Buddha” or of his “enlightenment” suggest a certain unity and coherence. In accord with the positivist and metaphysical realist attitudes of our times, many assume that a Buddha is defined by his awakening, which is conceived of as a definitive, clear-cut event with specific characteristics. Enlightenment is a “thing,” a recognizable state of mind or change of consciousness, or perhaps a similar kind of process, which may be beyond the grasp of words, but is nevertheless confidently identifiable and ascertainable. Although this state of mind is generally portrayed as a negation—non-duality, non-attachment, the uprooting of ignorance (or *misunderstanding*, *avijjā*), the realization of *impermanence*, pain and *selflessness*—it is still thought to be a positive entity that a Buddha in some way possesses. Based on this univocal phenomenological entity, it is then expected that a unified philosophy will emerge that will reflect it and lead the way to it; although different types of religious practice may direct one to the goal, the goal is one, and one thought system defines it.

It is possible, however, that this approach to enlightenment did not hold true for the earlier stages of Buddhism, which were closer to the time of the founder of the tradition. Perhaps the early Buddhists had no need to pinpoint enlightenment, and felt that it is best pictured in diverse and even conflicting ways. It is questionable whether earlier generations of men and women felt so compelled to arrange reality according to easily graspable facts as we do under the influence of scientific consciousness. This would hold especially true with respect to such elusive and enigmatic ideas like enlightenment and the truths it relates to.

The present contribution to the study of early Buddhist philosophical and contemplative culture aims to open the field of scholarly inquiry to a more dynamic spectrum of understandings than is allowed for in common historical and philosophical accounts. The need for such an approach is called for by the surviving textual record of early Buddhism, which displays a rich and stimulating diversity. A flat, so-called critical, approach identifies conflicting theoretical vectors within the textual tradition and searches for sources of external influence and interpolation. A more sympathetic, but no less critical, view of the materials allows them to speak in a plurality of voices, given that this is what we would expect to find in a thriving and evolving human tradition. We have learned from thinkers like Freud, Jung, and Lévi-Strauss that the most regular human mind is anything but plain and one-dimensional; there is thus no reason to assume that the mind of a Buddha is such. In a tradition

practicing diverse meditative techniques and other spiritual practices, we would expect to find more than one answer about what truth and ultimate truth may be. Perhaps, also, these peoples' tolerance for ambiguity was greater than our own.

The idea of a system that espouses diverse theoretical positions and conceives of the full embodiment of truth as a complex reality that can be thought of in various ways is required in order to make sense of the earliest surviving textual record of Buddhism. There is a wide scholarly consensus that there are three bodies of texts that represent the earliest extant tradition, all of which are found today in the *Sutta-Nipāta* of the *Khuddaka Nikāya*.¹ One of these is the fourth book of the collection, the *Aṭṭhaka*, "The Chapter of Eights" or "The Chapter on the True Meaning." The *Aṭṭhaka* is a collection of sixteen poems that incline toward understanding the true practitioner or the realized adept as an individual who brings about a psychological transformation under which he no longer adheres to any philosophical position and becomes completely non-judgmental. The depth of his non-involvement varies between the poems, but the voice of the collection as a whole can be construed as advancing a "no-view" position.² As an example, we may take the following verses from the *Suddhaṭṭhaka-sutta*, "The Discourse on the one who is in a State of Purity":

788

*passāmi suddham paramam arogam diṭṭhena saṃsuddhi narassa hoti /
etābhijānam paramam ti nātvā suddhānupassīti pacceti nānam //*

I see the highest purity beyond sickness;
For man, utter purity is from views;³
Knowing this as highest,
He who is considered the observer of purity realizes knowledge.

794

*na kappayanti na purekkharonti accantasuddhīti na te vadanti /
ādānagatham gathitam visajja āsam nu kubbanti kuniñci loke //*

They do not construct, do not prefer,
Do not speak of utter purity.
Having untied the knot of taking hold,
They hope for nothing in this world.⁴

795

*sīmātigo brāhmaṇo tassa n'atthi nātvā va disvā va samuggahītam /
na rāgarāgī na virāgaratto tassīdha n'atthī param uggahītan ti //*

For the Brahmin who has crossed the seams,
Having known and seen,
There is nothing he grasps at.
He has no passion, nor does he delight in dispassion,
For him there is nothing here he holds to as the highest.

These verses speak of what appears to be a radical psychological transformation, in which one thoroughly crosses beyond attachment of any kind; even non-attachment is ruled out. This appears as a change of heart and mind that requires no belief in a metaphysical system and no involvement in any philosophical speculation. Since this view is attractive to modern Buddhists, many have assumed this to be a representation of the earliest stage of Buddhism.⁵ Although the collection is by no means univocal and articulates different approaches, the overall inclination of the text is toward the detached and subdued attitude expressed in these verses.⁶

The voice of the *Aṭṭhaka* relates to another text considered to be of similar antiquity, the *Khagga-visāṇa-sutta*, “The Discourse on the Rhinoceros Horn” (*KVS*). This discourse expresses a view of radically strict renunciation; even love is an obstacle:

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*sabbesu bhūtesu nidhāya daṇḍāṃ avihethayaṃ aññataraṃ'pi tesam' /
na puttam iccheyya kuto sahāyaṃ eko care kaggavisāṇakappo //*

Having laid down the stick in relation to all living beings,
without harming even one of them.
Not desiring a son, and certainly not any other company—
He should wander alone, like the horn of a rhinoceros.

36

*samsaggajātassa bhavati sneho⁷ snehanvayaṃ dukkham idaṃ pahoti /
ādīnavaṃ snehajaṃ pekkhamāno eko care khaggacisāṇakappo //*

For whoever has relations, love will arise,
And this suffering follows after love;
Knowing the results of love as danger,
He should walk alone, like the horn of the rhinoceros.

The poetic instruction to wander alone, like the horn of the rhinoceros, is the main image and message of this long poem, which recurs in all its verses but one. The main instruction of the text is practical, with little or no commitment to a psychological or a metaphysical rationale. One could argue both in favor of and against the connection between the *KVS* and the general position of the *Aṭṭhaka*. Both texts are interested in detachment in ways that seem extreme, but the *Aṭṭhaka* would not require, and perhaps would be suspicious of, the strict solitude advocated by the *KVS*.

It is far more difficult to bridge the gaps between the *Aṭṭhaka* (with or without the *KVS*) and the *Pārāyaṇa-vagga*, “The Chapter on Going Beyond,” which follows it as the fifth and last book of the *Sutta-Nipāta*. I have devoted a separate article to this fascinating, but understudied, text, which appeared in the preceding issue of *Philosophy East & West* (Shulman 2017). There I also discuss the text’s antiquity, which dates from the same period as the *Aṭṭhaka* but is perhaps even earlier. In evident contrast to the *Aṭṭhaka*, the *Pārāyaṇa* is an overtly metaphysical text, focusing on the attempt to overcome the painful reality of birth, old age, and death, which is conceived as a flood (*ogha*) of heavy conditioning. The *Pārāyaṇa* gives voice to the view that one may alter the inevitability of rebirth through a sensitive application of

attention. For example, in answering the student Kappa’s question about an island that he defines as an escape from “the flood” for those plagued by old age and death, the Buddha says:

1094

*akiñcanaṃ anādānaṃ etaṃ dīpaṃ anāparaṃ /
nibbānaṃ iti naṃ brūmi jarāmaccuparikkhayaṃ //*

Being without a thing, without taking anything up,
This is the island, and no other.
I call it *nibbāna*,
The complete extinction of old age and death.

1095

*etaḍ aññāya ye satā diṭṭhadhammābhiniḅbutā /
na te mārasānugā na te mārasa paddhagū’ti //*

Knowing this, the mindful have blown out,
Having seen the truth directly.
They do not go to Māra’s power;
They are not his servants.

Here we find a different voice than in the two other text we examined. The text envisions the Buddha’s liberating attainment as a freedom from the most distinctive feature of human life—death and repeated rebirth. Through attention one may exit the hold of Māra; this is the full “blowing out” of individuality and of all pains of existence.

We have seen examples from the three earliest texts of Buddhism, which each one repeats extensively. Even if we confine ourselves to these verses alone and to the relations between them, we find a spectrum of possible theoretical combinations that cannot be squarely fitted into one position, of the psychological, metaphysical, or practical domain. Rather than attempting to reduce these positions to each other and to view one as more original or authoritative than the others, the present article will investigate the possibility that all are equally genuine and that Buddhism developed precisely in the pregnant space of such theoretical elasticity, in which core religious or philosophical intuitions had room to develop in more than one direction. Without being overly critical and accusing the tradition of manipulation and inconsistency, the central question I wish to raise is how these apparently antithetical traditions can fit together. An answer is readily available if we allow our scholarly analysis to exit the museum-like space of resplendent conceptual clarity and enter the complicated but more intellectually satisfying spheres of phenomenological polyvalence.

Views and Their Transcendence in Early Buddhism

The three philosophical positions we have seen diverge on one particular point. This is whether early Buddhism was characterized by a positive or a negative evaluation

of metaphysics, while the two greater texts of the earliest tradition, the *Pārāyaṇa* and the *Aṭṭhaka*, hold what appear to be opposite views on the matter. It is also important to keep in mind that the intellectual field of Buddhism cannot be confined to these texts, and that they have different sets of relations with other texts of early Buddhism, and mainly with the main bulk of “prose” discourses in “the major four Nikāyas.”⁸ These are considered the backbone of the Buddha’s teachings (or a representation of them), and although they took shape somewhat later than the texts from the *Sutta-Nipāta*, some of their views are surely just as old.

The relation between the texts under discussion and the major four Nikāyas is pertinent to the present inquiry especially with respect to discourses that appear to deny the validity of metaphysical speculation, in a manner that resembles the voice of the *Aṭṭhaka*. This is a theme that has received much attention in scholarship, which has focused on the well-known list of ten unanswered questions or unexplained points.⁹ According to the common take on this theme, the Buddha refuses to answer questions or to support philosophical positions that take an affirmative stance on issues that discuss the nature of the world—whether it is eternal or not and has an end or not—as well as whether the mental and the physical are one or distinct and what happens to the Buddha after he dies. This is commonly interpreted as a downright denial of metaphysical investigation, or as a dismissal of metaphysics or ontology from a practical standpoint.¹⁰ I have shown elsewhere that it is mistaken to take the unexplained points as a dismissal of metaphysics; rather, they betray a great fascination and preoccupation with metaphysics.¹¹ When the theme is looked at carefully, it becomes clear that the crux of the questions concerns the Buddha’s state after death, that is, whether he exists, doesn’t exist, both, or neither. The other questions prove to be elaborations on this one, since the positions about “the world” actually discuss the continuity of the aggregates after death,¹² and the question about the identity or difference of the soul and the body asks whether something may proceed after the body dies.

In relation to all these views, the Buddha does have a clear position, which is that they are mistaken and do not capture reality. Ideas of continuity and discontinuity after death both assume an essential entity in life, regarding which one may speak of its later state. The law of dependent origination and the fundamental insights regarding impermanence and conditionality demonstrate that any such definition would be simplistic, and that one cannot speak of post-mortem states in the language of identity or of complete difference. Regarding the Buddha the problem is even finer, since not only do these positions fail to address the question of continuity or discontinuity, but they cannot express carefully enough the particular situation a realized being will reach after he dies.¹³

This means that the Buddha knows exactly what will happen to him upon his death, and the unanswered questions are a way for him to express this. This state, or non-state, is too subtle to speak of in the language of existence or non-existence, but the Buddha nevertheless confidently knows it. This demonstrates not only that the Buddha does not deny metaphysics, but that he has a *penchant for metaphysics*—he knows precisely what will happen to him after he dies, having an understanding that

is based on a complex insight into the workings of reality that is nothing short of a metaphysical system. Any soteriology the Buddha may offer is couched in this theoretical framework.

My discussion of this issue in my book *Rethinking the Buddha: Early Buddhist Philosophy as Meditative Perception* (Shulman 2014) concentrated mainly on the *Aggīvacchagotta-sutta*, which is more patently metaphysical in scope. Yet it is important to see that the denial of these philosophical views is framed within a theoretical context that accepts the reality of transmigration even in texts that supposedly incline to a non-metaphysical approach to Buddhist teachings. In the *Cūḷamāluṅkyāputta-sutta*, which introduces the famous simile of the arrow, supposedly the *locus classicus* for the Buddha's eschewal of metaphysics, the Buddha explains that holding on to views is dangerous since it binds one to rebirth:

A life of true renunciation (*brahmacāryavāso*) is not possible with the view “the world is eternal” or “the world is non-eternal.” When either of these views exists, there are birth, old age, and death, as well as sorrow, misery, pain, discontent, and pressure.¹⁴

Holding a view will cause one to continue in the rounds of rebirth, that is, to be (re-)born, then again to die, and to experience diverse types of suffering in the midst. But why must this be true? The logic of this statement calls for further analysis, but ultimately is based on the teaching of dependent origination (*paṭicca-samuppāda*) as expressed by the twelve links: craving (*taṇhā*) conditions attachment (*upādāna*), which in turn conditions becoming (*bhava*), birth (*jāti*), old age, and death (*jarāmaraṇa*).

When we keep in mind that the philosophical views about “the world” actually concern the idea of personal continuity after death, we see that in espousing any one of the ten views, there is grasping at selfhood and personal identity, and therefore that one will be reborn in accord with one's acts of attachment and appropriation. The same is true for all the other views the Buddha will not endorse: when one is born in relation to one's physical and mental acts of attachment, the philosophical position one is committed to will determine future rebirth. In the *Aggīvacchagotta-sutta*, another text that is built on the negation of the “unanswered questions,” this is why the Buddha says that he cannot speak of his state after death in terms of existence or non-existence; since he has quit grasping at the aggregates, there is now nothing he may be known by, both in the present and, more importantly, after he dies. He explains to Vacchagotta why he is like a fire that has blown out:

That form, Vaccha, by which the Tathāgata is known or may be known, for the Tathāgata is forsaken, its root severed, made like an uprooted palm tree, eradicated *with no future arising*. The Tathāgata, Vaccha, liberated from being understood in terms of form,¹⁵ is deep, unfathomable and difficult to penetrate, like the ocean—“to be reborn” does not apply; “not to be reborn” does not apply; “to be reborn and not to be reborn” does not apply; “not to be reborn and not to not be reborn” does not apply.¹⁶

Here we see the explicit link between non-grasping and the stopping of rebirth; the aggregates are forsaken and therefore will not arise again. In the *Brahmajāla-sutta*,

the paradigmatic discourse on the relinquishing of mistaken views, the Buddha again connects between the holding of views and one's future rebirth. After each set of views he outlines (or caricatures), he says:

This, monks, the Tathāgata knows—these philosophical tenets being held in this way, being regarded as paramount, this is their future rebirth, their afterlife destination.¹⁷

Given his insight into the workings of karma, which the Buddha is thought to have attained as the second knowledge on the night of his enlightenment,¹⁸ the Buddha knows by what logic people move on after they die and can see how people are reborn, in this case in line with their philosophies. In the *Brahmajāla-sutta*, the Buddha's dismissal of the sixty-two views is linked to his understanding that philosophical questions are more subtle than what words can express; the Buddha is presented as one who has the ability to opt out of intellectual paradoxes and to choose quiet or "fading away" (*nibbuti*).¹⁹ Positively, his insight is related to the identification of "dependent origination" (*paṭiccasamuppāda*), that is, in this context, to his insight into how transmigration works. The condemned sixty-two views are all said to be "nothing but the feeling, that is, the worry and struggle, of those distinguished brahmins and ascetics who do not know or see, who are immersed in craving."²⁰ Since views are an anxious type of "feeling" (*vedanā*), the seventh link of dependent origination, they are then said to be "conditioned by contact" (*phassa-paccayā*), that is, by the sixth link, so that these deluded philosophers are, once again, said to be reborn in accordance with their philosophical views:

All these [philosophers who hold the sixty-two mistaken views] experience feeling after having experienced sensual contact through each of the six bases of sense. Dependent on feelings, desire arises; dependent on desire, grasping; dependent on grasping, becoming; dependent on becoming, birth; and dependent on birth, old age and death, as well as sorrow, misery, pain, discontent, and pressure.²¹

This passage is based on the standard presentation of the twelve links of dependent origination, which explain here how birth and death are conditioned by desire. It should be clear that this passage resonates with the ones from the *Cūḷamāluṅkyāputta-sutta* and the *Aggivaḥchagotta-sutta*, quoted above; all demonstrate how philosophical views determine rebirth in a way that any wise man would want to avoid.

The Buddha's wisdom is itself so deep that understanding the limits of philosophical speculation allows him to let go and to transform his mind. This psychological transformation, however, is a metaphysical accomplishment, since it allows him to exit the rounds of rebirth altogether:

Having severed the route to (further) becoming, the body of the Tathāgata remains. So long as it will remain, gods and men will see him. Later, after the breaking up of his body and the extinction of his life force, gods and men will see him no longer.²²

Obviously, the intention here is that after the Buddha dies, "gods and men will see him no longer" in a different way than this would happen after the death of a regular

human being; he will not be seen any longer since he has quit holding to philosophical views. This dismissal of philosophy, however, is placed in an elaborate and evident metaphysical context.

This short analysis has shown that there is good reason to connect the ten unanswered questions and the patently metaphysical thought of the *Pārāyaṇa*, rather than emphasizing their more superficial connection to the psychological instruction of the *Aṭṭhaka*. This does not mean, however, that the *Aṭṭhaka* is an anomaly in early Buddhist thought; the move toward a psychological transformation that is less committed to a metaphysical picture was surely an active ideological vector of the tradition. Such an approach is evident in the very cultivation of a state of mind that comes to terms with the empirical reality of impermanence and conditionality. In fact, we can identify a continuum here, between (1) certain discourses within the *Aṭṭhaka* that display no explicit interest in metaphysics and the issue of rebirth on the far side, together with the *Khagga-visāṇa-sutta*; (2) other discourses in the *Aṭṭhaka* that suggest an engagement with metaphysics, as well as the *Cūlamālunkhāyaputta-sutta*, in a more moderate position, together with the less metaphysical discourses of the *Pārāyaṇa* and texts like the *Dīghanakha-sutta* of the *Majjhima Nikāya*;²³ (3) the discourses that discuss the “unanswered questions” and the *Brahmajāla-sutta* that are evidently metaphysical but at the same time avoid philosophy; and (4) the bolder metaphysical texts from the *Pārāyaṇa* that express no interest in avoiding philosophy (see table no. 1).

The idea is not to reduce one position to another, but to see that a meaningful continuum exists and that each poet, thinker, or practitioner could find room for him/

Table 1

No Metaphysics		All Metaphysics		
			Cūlamālunkhāya (MN)	
			Brahmajāla (DN)	
AV:				PV:
Kāma				Ajita
Duṭṭhaṭṭha		Gūhaṭṭhaka (AV)		Tissa Metteya
Suddhaṭṭha		Jarā (AV)		Dhotaka
Pāsūra	Paramaṭṭhaka (AV)	Purābheda (AV)		Hemaka
Māgandiya	Tissametteya (AV)	Kalahavivāda (AV)		Todeyya
Cūla-viyuha	Udaya (PV)	Dīghanakha (MN)		
Mahā-viyuha	Posāla (PV)	Upasīva (PV)		Bhadravuddha
Tuvaṭṭhaka				Mogharāja
Attadaṇḍa				Piṅgiya
Sāriputta				

AV = *Aṭṭhaka*; DN = *Dīgha Nikāya*; MN = *Majjhima Nikāya*; PV = *Pārāyaṇa-vagga*

herself anywhere along it. Such a multiplicity of views would be precisely what we would expect to encounter within a particular historical and cultural context. Before investigating the consequences of this approach for understanding early Buddhist philosophical culture in its historical setting, it is valuable to see that this plurality and complexity is just as evident in the soteriological understandings within the early tradition.

Polyvalent Soteriology in the Sutta-Nipāta

This is by no means the first study to posit that early Buddhism expounded a diversity of approaches to liberation. An important statement in this regard was Louis de La Vallée-Poussin's seminal 1936–1937 article "Musīla et Nārada," which spoke of two paradigmatic approaches to liberation, one intellectual and the other mystical. This formulation continued to influence landmark contributions such as Schmithausen's 1981 attempt to sort out the different maps of liberation in the Nikāyas and to discuss their possible relations.²⁴ The inclination of these types of analyses, however, has been to assume that there is one original and authentic liberating event, so that others either derive from it or are alien to it. In the present, confined context, there can be no hope of surveying these broad fields of scholarly enterprise and of discussing the relations between the theories of awakening and their development. It is nonetheless important to see that in the earliest existent Buddhist texts that are under discussion here, we can already identify a rich variety of understandings of liberation, and that this should not necessarily be seen as a problem. It would only be natural for a tradition cultivating diverse techniques of contemplation and philosophical visions to shape a rich and variegated map of liberation(s). This is not only because different people experience different types of liberating moments at different times, but also because the idea of liberation itself is perhaps not as finite as we would tend to assume. Bliss can probably have different shades and hues. Even if there is a definitive moment of liberation, it should not be regarded as static, and could be described in different ways.

Here we will only briefly look at this diversity as it finds expression in the *Aṭṭhaka* and the *Pārāyaṇa*. What we will examine here is but a sample, which should be taken as one possible assemblage of pictures of liberation; others would be no less valid. A good place to start would be the following verse that ends the *Māgandiya-sutta*:

847

*saññāvirattassa na santi ganthā paññāvimuttassa na santi mohā /
saññañ ca ditṭhiñ ca ye aggahesuṃ te ghaṭṭayantā vicaranti loka ti //*

For him who is free of perception there are no more ties.
For him who is liberated through wisdom, no more confusions;
Those who hold on to perceptions and views
Walk this earth violently

This poet speaks of a liberated state beyond perception. This could be interpreted in different ways. One direction would fit the lighter:

893

*sakāyane cāpi daḥhaṃ vadāno kam ettha bālo ti paraṃ daheyya /
sayam eva so medhakam āvaheyya paraṃ vadaṃ bālaṃ asuddhidhammaṃ //*

He who boasts of his own path
And thereby would regard another as stupid—
By speaking of another as impure and dumb,
Would breed conflict for himself.

894

*vinicchaye thatvā sayam pamāya udhhaṃ so lokasmiṃ vivādam eti /
hitvāna sabbāni vinicchayāni na medhakam kurute jantu loka ti //*

Standing upon some firm resolution,
Regarding himself as the highest, he argues with people.
He who has left all resolutions behind,
Never makes conflict in the world.

A number of the poems in the *Atthaka* appear to regard the peace of holding no position and refraining from argument as a sufficient religious attainment.²⁵ The end of perception could also be interpreted as expressing a more abysmal quiet, such as when in verse 872 the Buddha speaks positively of a state in which “with no forms coming into being, one does not experience sensory contact.”²⁶

Verses of this sort speak more strongly about a complete suppression of perception, although the Buddha’s subsequent explanations seem more subtle:

874

*na saññasaññī na visaññasaññī no’pi asaññī na vibhūtasaññī /
evaṃ sametassa vibhoti rūpaṃ saññānidānā hi papañcasaṃkhā //*

He does not perceive perceptions, does not perceive
no-perceptions, is not without perceptions,
And does not perceive what does not exist.
For one who attains this, form does not come into being;
The multiplying of *papañca* is rooted in perception.

Luis Gomez (1976, pp. 142–144) interprets this as the stopping of “apperception,” although one could argue that in order to really put an end to such cognitive processes, one would have to eradicate all conscious experience whatsoever. This idea finds relatively elaborate expression in the *Pārāyaṇa*. For example:

1055

*yaṃ kiñci sampajānāsi uddhaṃ addho tiriyaṃ cāpi majjhe /
etesu nandiṃ ca nivesanaṃ ca panujja viññāṇaṃ bhava na tiṭṭhe //*

Anything you are aware of—
Above, below, across or in between—
Having dispelled all investment in and pleasure toward these things,
Consciousness will not be situated in existence.

In his instruction to Upasīva, the Buddha again speaks about liberation from perception, in a way that could recall the annihilation of consciousness:

1071

*sabbesu kāmesu yo vītarāgo ākiñcaññaṃ nissito hitvamaññaṃ /
saññāvimokkhe parame vimutto tiṭṭhe nu so tattha anānuyāyī //*

He who has no passion in relation to all pleasures,
Who relies on nothingness, having discarded (everything) else,
Liberated in the highest liberation from perception;
He remains that way without proceeding any further.

The association with utter, final quiet is raised through the reference to the question of whether after death the adept proceeds from the state he attains or remains there forever.²⁷

Similar questions arise in numerous poems in the *Aṭṭhaka* and the *Pārāyaṇa*, such as the following verses after the ones we read above in the *Kalahavivāda*. The interest in quitting rebirth in itself is taken by certain poems of the *Pārāyaṇa* as a sufficient soteriological attainment:

1048

*saṃkhāya lokasmiṃ parovarāni yass'īñjitaṃ nathi kuhiṃci loke /
santo vidhūmo anigho nirāso atāri so jātijaraṃ'ti brūmī'ti //*

He for whom, having understood high and low,
There are no vacillations anywhere in the world,
Quiet, "smokeless," passionless, having no wishes;
Him I call one who has crossed birth and old age.

This seems like an achievement obtainable in regular consciousness, although the case could also be made that such descriptions in the *Pārāyaṇa-vagga* are only stepping-stones in the direction of the complete end of all consciousness, given the prevalence of this theme in the text.²⁸ Another verse that suggests an accomplishment in this life is the following:

1056

*evaṃ vihārī sato appamatto bhikkhu caraṃ hitvā mamāyitāni /
jātijaraṃ sokapiddavaṃ ca idheva vidvā pajaheyya dukkhaṃ //*

Abiding in this way, mindful, aware,
The monk who goes about
Having relinquished anything "mine,"
Will destroy the pain of birth and old age, of sorrow and distress—
Here, knowing, in this very life.

This verse could fit any of the approaches to liberation we have seen—in life or beyond it, with or without "perception" or "consciousness." Paradoxically, perhaps, it comes immediately after the statement about the end of consciousness in verse 1055, which we read earlier.

We could continue this reading almost indefinitely and question the relation between the different formulations of liberation. Given that these are poetic expressions of enlightenment, we may also wish to reflect on the idea that in some or all of

these verses different positions are meant to be recalled. We encounter a rich multiplicity of ideas about enlightenment, and it appears that the authors of these texts felt no need for the different positions they expressed to be reduced to each other. Rather, a pregnant interpretive space about liberation is deliberately cultivated. A final demonstration is the following:

1086–1087

*idha diṭṭhasutamutaviññātesu piyarupesu hemaka /
chandarāgavinodanaṃ nibbānapadam accutaṃ //
etad aññāya ye satā diṭṭhadhammābhiniḅbutā /
upasantā ca te sadā tiṇṇā loka visattikan ti //*

Hemaka, the mindful ones who have understood
The stable place of *nibbāna*, the dispelling of desire and passion
Toward pleasing forms here,
Whether seen, heard, thought or cognized,
Have completely blown out, seeing the truth directly.
Always quiet, they have crossed attachment to the world.

Again, this is a verse that opens up more questions than it answers. Even without beginning to conceive of the relations between the *Aṭṭhaka* and the *Pārāyaṇa* and the theories of liberation in the other texts of the *Sutta-piṭaka*, we have encountered a plethora of views regarding liberation. In the final section of this article I wish to examine the significance of this diversity, as well as the pluralistic attitude of the philosophical picture analyzed above, for the understanding of early Buddhist contemplative culture in its historical setting.

Polyvalent Philosophy and Soteriology in Their Historical Setting

In concluding this essay I begin to conceptualize a position regarding the way early Buddhist philosophy should be treated, given the diversity of the tradition. Conceptual consistency may be a need of the scholar or of the modern philosopher, but if the tradition proceeds in multiple, less compatible theoretical vectors, another intellectual attitude may be called for. One can provide careful analyses for specific terms and phrases, in the hope of obtaining more secure readings of the texts, but there is no reason to assume that such precise meanings were always intended, and that the more poetic and aesthetic reflection on liberation is not an inherent part of the tradition's self-understanding.

We have seen that the earliest Buddhist texts at our disposal articulate different philosophical positions. The distinction is most evident in their tolerance for metaphysical speculation, especially for the ideas of karma and rebirth: the *Pārāyaṇa* is founded on what the *Aṭṭhaka* denies and what the *Khagga-visāṇa-sutta* is uninterested in. These texts also advance a diversity of understandings or pictures of liberation. Even though each corpus has its own clear theoretical inclination, it is important not to over-emphasize the distinction between the texts and to observe the continuities between them. For one thing, neither of these corpuses is unitary; we find poems

in the *Aṭṭhaka* that speak of realization as relating to the theme of rebirth,²⁹ and discourses in the *Pārāyaṇa* that place a far lighter emphasis on this position, if at all.³⁰ Each poem within each corpus will also highlight other aspects of both the practices it recommends and the theoretical framework it relates to. For example, some poems direct their audience more clearly toward the realms of meditation practice,³¹ some are more conversant with conventional Buddhist categories,³² and although the practices that the poets outline resonate with each other, each poem focuses on different aspects of the instruction.

Another facet of continuity between the traditions is the remarkable interest they show in detachment. These three texts all express little sympathy for the regular actions and thought structures of people in society. They feel that what defines a sage is that he derives no pleasure from the experiences of the senses and does not follow the lead of his desires and passions. He strives toward states of deep inner peace, which are at times categorically distinct from the experience of normal, waking consciousness. The *Aṭṭhaka* and *Pārāyaṇa* can thus be seen as espousing different theoretical perspectives on the same existential position and on similar forms of religious cultivation. One corpus sees the practice of detachment as an end in itself, as the realization of *santi* and *nibbāna*; the other places this practice in the metaphysical framework of dealing with the reality of rebirth. Both approaches are legitimate interpretations of a similar intuition.

Although the connections between the traditions are important, we must also come to terms with the diversity between them. In this respect, it is valuable to relate the understanding regarding the flexible character of early Buddhist thought and practice to the broader themes of Indian religion of the day. This will allow us to see that the specific question regarding the character of early Buddhism is a private, microcosmic case of problems in the general macrocosm of Indian religion. When we look at contemporary scholarly positions on this subject, we once again encounter a question whether continuity or discontinuity should be taken as the main feature of historical reality. This time the question involves the relation between the brahmanical, Vedic tradition that revolves around sacrifice on the one hand, and the renunciate śramaṇic tradition to which Buddhism belongs on the other.

Scholars such as Patrick Olivelle ([1993] 2004) or, earlier, Jan Heesterman (1985),³³ emphasized unity and continuity and regarded the practices of renunciation as an internal development within the Brahmanical schools. Heesterman positions the origin of renunciation in the figure of the Brahmin, who by his very being is situated on the threshold between this world and the worlds beyond. Olivelle presents a more detailed analysis of the developments that gave rise to the ideal of renunciation within the contours of Brahmanical learning. In his study on the rise of the *āśrama* system, Olivelle shows that renunciation was a way to commit oneself more fully to the logic of Brahmanical sacrifice. Under the dramatic economic, political, and social changes that took place between the sixth and fourth centuries B.C.,³⁴ which included processes of urbanization that put a new emphasis on the place of the individual, new religious ideals crystallized. These ideals highlighted the goal of *mokṣa* and counseled a transcendence of the traditional cycles of sacrifice that were

practiced by the householder; for this, one was to leave home and fully engage with religious truth. This was a new theology or world order, which responded to the shifting realities of the day.³⁵

Recently, this picture has been challenged by Johannes Bronkhorst (2007), who feels that the two central religious traditions represent distinct cultures, while the home base of the *śramaṇa* traditions was in the area he calls “Greater Magadha.” The dominant religious conceptualization in the latter’s cultural sphere reflects the impulse to come to terms with one’s karma; renunciation developed as part of the attempt to put an end to the powerful conditioning that leads one to experience more and more pain. According to Bronkhorst, the idea of karma was tangential to the earlier stages of the Brahmanic tradition into which it later infiltrated. There were thus two dominant traditions that originally existed apart from each other. Although this position has certain problems,³⁶ it does justice to the great difference between the theoretical frameworks of the two approaches: the world-affirming ritual of Vedic sacrifice, and the negative approach of severe asceticism advocated by certain renunciate traditions. Bronkhorst sees Buddhism as an elaboration and adaptation of the latter’s religious paradigm.³⁷

Scholarship awaits a new synthesis that may help decide whether we are speaking of one or two original religious cultures. In the meantime it seems that the picture is only gaining complexity. Recently, Geoffrey Samuel (2008) offered what can be seen as an extension of Bronkhorst’s approach. Samuel also speaks of “two worlds and their interactions,”³⁸ “the Vedic-derived world associated with the Kuru and Pañcāla kingdoms, and the non-Vedic world of the Central Ganges and northern Deccan.” In actuality, the reality Samuel describes is more complicated. First, he emphasizes that both centers shared a common cultural heritage and that they were mixtures of different populations. Second, he makes valuable distinctions within each of the central traditions. Samuel speaks of two main Brahmanical hubs, one in Kuru-Pañcāla and another in Kosala-Videha, which were founded on different mythologies and emphasized distinct ideals. In the Kosala-Videha pattern, great value was placed on the notion of *dharma-rāja* (“the king of dharma”), a ruler that is strongly associated with ideals of both wisdom and renunciation, while the Kuru-Pañcāla revolves around the more familiar logic of sacrifice.³⁹ According to Samuel, the *śramaṇa* traditions developed another type of religious ideology that circulated in the area, while Buddhism and Jainism were also successful at incorporating elements of indigenous folk religion, which worshiped local deities, primarily *yakṣas*. Samuel’s analysis thus points to a plurality of traditions that were in continual interaction.

This brief sketch of the understanding of ancient Indian religion is obviously not meant to exhaust the subject. Nonetheless, the diversity of opinion regarding “historical reality” in this case may be beyond pure chance. Perhaps the theoretical diversity can be seen as an expression of one that was lived and cultivated on the ground. It should be clear that the same questions regarding the unity or plurality of Indian religion are raised in relation to each one of the central traditions, which are, once again, not unitary in any way.

When the leading scholarly perceptions of ancient India disagree whether historical reality should be seen in terms of a unified, bifurcated, or more diversified tradition, there is reason to doubt that the practitioners of these traditions had a monolithic, unitary experience. On the ground there were probably multiple meditative techniques that were being practiced, diverse behavioral norms being cultivated, and numerous philosophical understandings that served to explain and direct them. Buddhists naturally drew from this vast pool and used their teachings to help them evaluate what was meaningful or superfluous. What distinguished “Buddhist” practitioners from other students of Indian religion was probably not a fully evolved doctrinal creed, but the general alignment of being the Buddha’s direct or derived students. What was meant by this alignment was subject to discussion, as we find in the early Buddhist texts, diverse approaches to the question of what a Buddha or his enlightenment exactly may be.

We have seen that earliest Buddhism—to the extent that it has been recorded—can be taken at the same time as a unified, bifurcated, or diversified tradition, as is true with ancient Indian religion as a whole. In fact, these approaches may be found in the study of any historical tradition; the events of a time can be taken to be part of an organic whole or to relate to two or more central trends. More interestingly, this multifaceted historical reality is relevant not only when traditions are observed from the outside, but also when they are lived from within—here, too, we should find different, competing, mutually stimulating positions that revolve around shared assumptions and understandings. They can thus be broken down and taken as distinct cultural patterns, or may be seen to be part of a unitary tradition that expresses itself in diverse ways.

Discussions of the philosophy of history agree that history is not merely a sequence of objective facts, but more a reliable arrangement of materials. The historian must use interpretive schemes and identify the causal patterns he deems significant according to a logic he defines. Objective facts are not only what happened, but what the historian chooses to emphasize, and they are objective in the sense that they relate in meaningful ways to other sets of facts. History is thus also a story, although not a random or purely subjective one; it is a reasonable account, which is informed by the historian’s own positions that emerge from the present.⁴⁰

The view of history that emerges from our discussion fits this picture well—events or trends can be interpreted in terms of unity, duality, or diversity, and in a sense all views are equally realistic.⁴¹ History should not be thought of only as an objective sequence of clearly self-fashioned events that occurred in their own unique stations of place and time. Rather, time is more complex, and participates of itself in different structures that overlap and resonate with each other. Events are not self-contained, but are carved out of a larger picture as part of numerous possible matrixes. Not only can historical events be employed in different interpretive strategies, but the strategies themselves can be integrated and seen as true even when they contradict each other. This does not mean that “anything goes,” but that we should expect more than one truth to be true, more than one picture to be realistic. The very outlook of the historian should be able to view history according to different patterns of vision.

This is not the place to develop this theoretical picture of history.⁴² It is, however, interesting to observe that Indian and Buddhist history act in a manner that is congruent with the Indian and Buddhist view of reality. These are philosophical traditions that harbor strong notions of anti-essentialism; they see so-called objective things as both more, and less, than themselves, but almost never as just plain objects. If there is a relation between the way these people thought and the way they structured their cultural world, it would seem natural that their experience was more flexible than classical, objectivist standards of history are used to measuring.

Returning to the more standard discussion of Buddhist thought with which we began, we find that the complexity and heterogeneity of early Buddhism is underscored and the dynamic character of its development is brought to light. When the early Buddhist tradition is viewed in this way—as a spectrum of approaches that revolve around a central position—a new picture of ancient Indian Buddhist asceticism emerges. Rather than taking these texts as realistic photographs of crystallized doctrinal ideas, we may see them as creative expressions or gazes within an ideational climate, in which different practitioners made room for themselves *to experiment* with the ideals of their tradition. Different men and women that cultivated this basic point of view found unique places to situate themselves inside this cultural world and chose specific moments to express their excitement, contentment, frustrations, and insights.⁴³ The traditions under discussion thus appear not as distinct “creeds,” “systems,” or “philosophies” with clearly defined and reliable attributes, but as looser structures that can be worked with—or better, worked in—in order to create compelling, personally meaningful, visions of truth. Although the *suttas* of the major four Nikāyas present more formalized and sharply crafted meditative practices, philosophical structures, and liberating experiences, the diversity they contain regarding all these topics is itself evidence for the role of experimentation and religious pluralism in the developmental stages of the tradition.

How this understanding relates to the pan-Indian question regarding the origins of Indian renunciate traditions is an open question. But something about the way this question should be approached has been said: according to our analysis, the earliest recorded forms of Buddhism do not only reflect fully elaborate doctrinal positions that one had to adopt and execute in a highly specified way. Early Buddhism was not one “thing”; if there ever was “an original form of Buddhism” it may have been quite heterogenic. This multiplicity is perhaps most evident in the enigmatic question regarding rebirth and the consequences of contemplative practice in the afterlife. We could see the logic of experimentation as a creative force behind the emergence of more clearly defined patterns of thought that grew to define the Buddhist tradition. Here, tradition is innovative by definition.

If this is true, the understanding regarding the earliest recorded forms of Buddhism may be a case study for other *śramaṇa* traditions of ancient India; all explore the nature of detachment and are in search of the correct theoretical framework in which to place it. Theory will then inform practice, which will create new theory in turn, following further experimentation. Eventually relatively fixed borders and gravitational centers will emerge. Until then, a tradition allows its boundaries and

conceptual categories to continue expanding and shifting, at times even moving in and out of the streams that we would normally see as relating to “other” religious traditions. In any case, it is not by chance that the idea of rebirth emerged as such a powerful religious framework for Indian philosophy. Rather than being a later development, it was in the air all along, at times receiving more explicit articulation, at others lingering in the margins or hiding between the lines.

Notes

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- 1 – For background on this collection and its place in the early canon, see Shulman [2012] 2013.
- 2 – For a discussion of the importance of this position for the intellectual map of early Buddhism, see Collins 1982, chap. 3; Fuller 2005; and Webster 2005.
- 3 – *Diṭṭhena*, literally “from what is / has been seen.” All translations from the Pāli are my own.
- 4 – In the *Aṭṭhaka* and the *Pārāyaṇa*, *loke*, “in this world,” works at times as not much more than a meter filler.
- 5 – E.g., Nakamura ([1980] 1989, pp. 57–60), as well as the discussion of “pre-canonical Buddhism” in Lindtner 1997. See the criticism of this idea with specific relation to the *Khagga-visāṇa-sutta* in Salomon and Glass 2000, pp. 15–16.
- 6 – I have given fuller attention to the *Aṭṭhaka* in Shulman [2012] 2013. See Vetter 1988 for an interesting attempt to sort out the different voices of the collection. See Norman 1992 for a balanced approach to the *Aṭṭhaka*’s place in the development of Buddhism.
- 7 – PTS gives *sneho* in the singular; other editions normally opt for *snehā* in the plural—“affections.”
- 8 – The *Sutta-piṭaka* has five collections (Nikāyas), the fifth of which is an anthology of miscellaneous texts that are all written in verse (see Shulman [2012] 2013); the other four Nikāyas are written for the most part in repetitive prose.
- 9 – E.g., Edgerton 1959; Hamilton 1996, pp. xxiv–xxv); and Ronkin 2005, pp. 4–5). For a helpful consideration of earlier scholarly approaches to the “unexplained points,” see Robinson 1972.
- 10 – For an example of the latter reading, see Robinson 1972.

- 11 – Shulman 2014, sec. 2.1.
- 12 – For specific passages that treat “the world” (*loka*) as related to the aggregates or to lived, subjective experience, see SN (*Samyutta-Nikāya*) IV.39–41, 53; SN II.73–74; see also Gethin 1986, pp. 42–50; Harvey 1995, p. 79; and Hamilton 1996, pp. xxvi–xxviii.
- 13 – Collins (1982, pp. 131–138) and Gethin (1998, pp. 66–68) read the unanswered questions as mistaken since these are “linguistically ill-formed.” This is a helpful reading but one that still does not come to terms with the metaphysical implications of the doctrine. In a forthcoming article on “The Buddha’s Death as a Literary Event” I give more elaborate attention to this problem.
- 14 – *Majjhima Nikāya* I.430: ‘*Sassato loko’ti Māluṅkyāputta diṭṭhiyā sati braamacāryavāso abhavissāti evaṃ no. ‘Asassato loko’ti Māluṅkyāputta diṭṭhiyā sati braamacāryavāso abhavissāti evampi no. ‘Sassato loko’ti Māluṅkyāputta diṭṭhiyā sati ‘asassato loko’ti vā diṭṭhiyā sati atth’eva jāti atthi jarā atthi maraṇaṃ santi sokaparidevadukkhadomanassupāyāsā.*
- 15 – Or, reading *rūpasaṅkhayavimutto*, “liberated from the destruction of form.”
- 16 – *Evameva kho, vaccha, yena rūpena tathāgataṃ paññāpayamāno paññāpeyya taṃ rūpaṃ tathāgatassa pahīnaṃ ucchinnamūlaṃ tālavatthukataṃ anabhāvakataṃ āyatiṃ anuppādadhammaṃ. Rūpasaṅkhāvimutto kho, vaccha, tathāgato gambhīro appameyyo duppariyogāho—seyyathāpi mahāsamuddo upapajjatīti na upeti, na upapajjatīti na upeti, upapajjati ca na ca upapajjatīti na upeti, neva upapajjati na na upapajjatīti na upeti.* (The emphasis is mine. The same statement is then repeated regarding the other four aggregates.)
- 17 – *Dīgha Nikāya* I.16: *Tayidaṃ, bhikkhave, tathāgato pajānāti—‘ime diṭṭhiṭṭhānā evaṃgahitā evaṃparāmaṭṭhā evaṃgatikā bhavanti evaṃabhisamparāyā’ti.*
- 18 – E.g., *Majjhima Nikāya* I.22–23.
- 19 – This last quote continues with the Buddha saying: “The Tathāgata knows this and he knows what is beyond it. And he does not hold on to this knowledge. Not holding on to it he experiences utter peace (*nibbuti*) for himself” (*tañca tathāgato pajānāti, tato ca uttaritaraṃ pajānāti; tañca pajānanaṃ na parāmasati, aparāmasato cassa paccattaññeva nibbuti veditā*). Although the use of *vedanā* in what follows raises some questions and seems like an interpolation, the conclusion of the passage is also interesting, since the Buddha speaks of his liberation (*vimutti*) as related to no (future) arising (*anupāda*): “Knowing truly the arising, passing away, taste, danger, and refuge of feelings, the Tathāgata, monks, is liberated with no future arising (*anupāda-vimutto*)” (*Vedanānaṃ samudayañca atthaṅgamañca assādañca ādīnavañca nissaraṇaṃ yathābhūtaṃ veditvā anupādāvimutto, bhikkhave, tathāgato*).
- 20 – *Dīgha Nikāya* I.41: . . . *tesaṃ bhavataṃ samaṇabrāhmaṇānaṃ ajānataṃ apasataṃ vedayitaṃ taṇhāgatānaṃ paritassitavipphanditaṃ eva.*

- 21 – *Dīgha Nikāya* 1.45: *Sabbe te chahi phassāyatanehi phussa phussa paṭisaṃvedenti tesam vedanāpaccayā taṇhā, taṇhāpaccayā upādānaṃ, upādānapaccayā bhavo, bhavapaccayā jāti, jātipaccayā jarāmarāṇaṃ sokaparidevadukkhadomanassupāyāsā sambhavanti.*
- 22 – *Dīgha Nikāya* 1.46: *Ucchinnabhavanettiko, bhikkhave, tathāgatassa kāyo tiṭṭhati. Yāvassa kāyo ṭhassati, tāva naṃ dakkhanti devamanussā. Kāyassa bheda uddhaṃ jīvitapariyādānā na naṃ dakkhanti devamanussā.*
- 23 – The *Dīghanakha* is less explicitly metaphysical, but its description of liberation at the end speaks of a quitting of rebirth in the familiar formula: “Birth is destroyed, the holy life has been lived, what had to be done has been done, there is no more return to this world again” (*khīṇā jāti vusitaṃ brahmacariyaṃ kataṃ karaṇīyaṃ nāparaṃ itthattāyāti*).
- 24 – Among the many studies that address this issue, see Vetter 1988, Crangle 1994, Gombrich 1996, Bronkhorst 2009, Wynne 2007, and Shulman 2010, 2014.
- 25 – Among these would be the *Pasūra-sutta*, *Cūḷaviyūha-sutta*, and *Mahāvīyūha-sutta*.
- 26 – *rūpe vibhūte na phusanti phassā*. This statement appears in the complex *Kalahavivāda-sutta*; see Shulman [2012] 2013, pp. 397–400.
- 27 – For a more elaborate consideration of this verse and the whole discourse with Upasīva, see Shulman 2017, as well as Gomez 1976, pp. 142–144.
- 28 – See, e.g., in the discourses with Ajita, verse 1037, and with Upasīva, verse 1073.
- 29 – Regarding the *Aṭṭhaka*’s treatment of rebirth, see Shulman [2012] 2013, pp. 365–369.
- 30 – E.g., in the discourses with Posāla and Udaya.
- 31 – E.g., in the *Pārāyaṇa* the poems with Posāla, Udaya, and Upasīva seem to converse with meditative instructions more explicitly.
- 32 – This theme is important to Vetter 1990.
- 33 – In his paper “Brahmin, Ritual, Renouncer,” first published in 1964 (see Heesterman 1985, chap. 2).
- 34 – These are described in section 2.2 of Olivelle’s book, pp. 55–58.
- 35 – See esp. section 2.3 of Olivelle’s book.
- 36 – Bronkhorst’s claim that the doctrine of karma is extrinsic to the earlier layers of Brahmanical texts is particularly questionable. See Tull 1989 and Wynne 2011.
- 37 – For Bronkhorst’s cursory discussion of Buddhism, see page 52 of his book.
- 38 – This is the title of chapter 3 of Samuel’s book.

- 39 – Meaningful distinctions between these two centers have also been discussed by Black 2007, pp. 13–15, based on earlier work by Patrick Olivelle and Michael Witzel.
- 40 – I cannot expand here on the complexities that arise from this view of the philosophy of history. My presentation is informed by studies such as Collingwood 1946; Carr 1962; Goldstein 1976; Walsh 1951; Wilkins 1978; and Grumley 1989, chap. 7.
- 41 – This is a somewhat Kantian view of history, although in his view of history Kant was nothing of a Kantian but rather envisioned a highly rational, objectivist historical process that can be seen as a precursor of Hegel. See Collingwood 1946, pp. 93–104; Walsh 1951, chap. 6; and Fukuyama 1992, pp. 55–70.
- 42 – One place that I have found an interesting expression of similar ideas is in Hui-zinga (1959, esp. pp. 58, 69, 74–76), who questions the application of structural regularity to history, with specific reference to the differentiation between historical phases. These ideas also echo Popper’s (1972) criticism of what he calls “historicism,” in the sense of history as an attempt to describe in holistic and totalistic terms the processes that determined the life of the whole of society. I do not necessarily agree with Popper’s wholesale denial of “totalism,” but I join his criticism of the effort to describe the events of a time as a uniform process that proceeds linearly in a specific direction. Finally, Collingwood (1946, esp. pp. 231–249), drawing from Kant, has spoken of the *a priori* innate idea of history, which is furnished by the data identified and discussed by the historian. He says (p. 247): “historical thinking is an original and fundamental activity of the human mind, or, as Descartes might have said, that the idea of the past is an ‘innate’ idea. Historical thinking is that activity of the imagination by which we endeavor to provide this innate idea with detailed content.”
- 43 – The poems of the *Theragāthā* and *Therīgāthā* fit particularly well with this approach to the early Buddhist texts. They reflect personal experiences that generally have not been made to conform to the conventional expressions of Buddhist doctrine. Or, better, the conventions of Buddhists scholasticism are only one of the voices that contribute to these poets’ experiences.

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