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Buddhist state.

And if we return once more to our initial comparison with Marco Polo, we may even — at the expense of piling hypothesis upon hypothesis in a way that rules out any chance of reaching a firm conclusion — push matters yet further. If Marco Polo's epic journey in time brought about an important element in the Renaissance — by establishing the lure of Cathay as the target of European voyages of discovery — then I-ching's journey equally may be seen as part of a chain of causation bringing modernity into being. For, by providing the Buddhist justification for the multiplication and distribution of texts and images through printing, he can be said to have prompted the development of Chinese printing to the point where the widespread use of paper for woodblocks paved the way for the somewhat different technology of the Gutenberg revolution.

And if either man had confined himself solely to a dry and completely unembroidered recitation of his observations — let alone if neither had left their own worlds to venture into the unknown — would the world be the same place today? I started these remarks with the suggestion that Indologists engaged in Buddhist Studies might do well to develop an awareness of the problems that their Sinological counterparts have to face in collaborating with them. I shall end with the suggestion that such collaboration, whatever the difficulties, is still a goal worth pursuing — that we could both do worse than unite, for example, in advising historians of technology. For if my interpretation of the function of the passages I have cited is correct, then Buddhist conceptions of truth might well have played a part in what is still all too often taken to be a purely empirical field of research. Such a united front might well prove useful, for if I might hazard one further, final guess, a Buddhist Studies that remains solely of interest to students of Buddhism, without making any contribution to other fields of study, will remain also vulnerable at best to misunderstanding, at worst to continual institutional obstruction in its development. Surely this is the last thing this Association would wish.

(Paper for the UK Association for Buddhist Studies, 1997)

A CRITICAL EXAMINATION OF ÑĀNAVĪRA THERA'S 'A NOTE ON PAṬICCASAMUPPĀDA'

Part Two

Bhikkhu Bodhi

Saṅkhārā in the PS Formula

14. Let us now turn directly to the Nidāna Saṃyutta to see how the suttas on PS treat the term 'saṅkhārā' in relation to *avijjā* and *viññāna*. As the suttas in this collection that expand upon the stock formula are conveniently few in number, we can take a brief look at each in turn. Of these texts, two establish the two major paradigms for the interpretation of *saṅkhārā*, namely, that formulated in terms of the three doors of volitional action and that formulated in terms of three kammically graded types of volition. Besides these, three additional texts can be found to shed light on the problem. I should stress at once that the Nidāna Saṃyutta incorporates virtually all the shorter discourses of the Buddha dealing with PS and hence should be taken as definitive in its presentation of the meaning and function of the constituent items in the formula.

We will begin with the Bhūmija Sutta, the paradigmatic text for distinguishing *saṅkhārā* by way of the doors of action:

'When there is the body, Ānanda, because of bodily volition there arises internally pleasure and pain. When there is speech, because of verbal volition there arises internally pleasure and pain. When there is the mind, because of mental volition there arises internally pleasure and pain.

'With ignorance as condition, either by oneself, Ānanda, one forms that body-*saṅkhāra* (speech-*saṅkhāra*, mind-*saṅkhāra*) on account of which that pleasure and pain arises internally; or because of others one forms that body-*saṅkhāra* (speech-*saṅkhāra*, mind-*saṅkhāra*) on account of which that pleasure and pain arises internally . . .

'Ignorance is included among these things. But with the remainderless fading away and cessation of ignorance that

body does not exist (that speech does not exist, that mind does not exist) on account of which that pleasure and pain arises internally²⁵.

Here the three *saṅkhārā* that are said to be conditioned by ignorance are explicitly identified with the three types of volition. The sutta employs the term '*manosāṅkhāra*' rather than '*cittasaṅkhāra*', but in the absence of any other exemplification of *cittasaṅkhāra* in the PS context we can take the terms as interchangeable; though such usage is not common it is not totally foreign to the Nikāyas and other instances can be cited of the synonymous use of *citta* and *mano*²⁶.

According to the commentary, this volition is to be understood as *kamma*, and the pleasure and pain that arise internally as *vipākavedanā*, as feelings resulting from that *kamma*. A temporal separation between volition and the resulting pleasure and pain may not be explicitly mentioned in the text, but if we read the above passage against the broader background of the Suttas, we can readily infer that an implicit temporal gap is intended. One sutta in the Aṅguttara Nikāya, on the correlations between *kamma* and its fruit, helps us to understand the process by which *saṅkhārā* function as conditions for the arising of pleasant and painful feeling:

'Here, monks, someone forms an afflictive body-*saṅkhāra*, speech-*saṅkhāra*, mind-*saṅkhāra*. Having done so, he is reborn into an afflictive world. When he is reborn there afflictive contacts contact him, and he experiences feelings that are extremely painful. . . Someone forms a non-afflictive body-*saṅkhāra* (etc.) . . . he is reborn into a non-afflictive world. . . Non-afflictive contacts contact him and

25 S 12:25/II 39-40.

26 See, for example, S I 93, 102; II 231, 271, where *kāya*, *vacī*, *citta* (or *cetas*) are used in a context where one would normally expect *kāya*, *vacī*, *mano*. The Buddha also says: *yañ ca vuccati cittam iti pi mano iti pi viññānam iti pi* (S II 94).

he experiences feelings that are extremely pleasant. . . Someone forms both an afflictive and a non-afflictive body-*saṅkhāra* (etc.) . . . he is reborn into a world that is both afflictive and non-afflictive. Afflictive and non-afflictive contacts contact him, and he experiences feelings that are both painful and pleasant²⁷.

Here the term used is again '*manosāṅkhāra*', and it is clear that the three *saṅkhārā* are primarily of interest because they determine a person's plane of rebirth and the quality of affective experience prevailing in his life. The sutta is not manifestly concerned with PS, but if we examine the sequence of events being described we would find, embedded in it, a segment of the standard PS formula. These events can be represented thus: *saṅkhārā* > rebirth into a world > contact > feeling. From the Mahānidāna Sutta (D 15/II 63) we know that rebirth into any world involves the co-arising of consciousness and name-and-form, and from the latter we can elicit the six sense bases as the condition for contact. This suffices to establish that the above text and the PS formula are defining the same situation, and here it is evident that the *saṅkhārā* serve as condition for the arising of pleasure and pain across the gap of lifetimes.

The last paragraph of the above quotation from the Bhūmija Sutta expresses obliquely the converse side of the relationship. Here, when the Buddha states that with the cessation of ignorance, body, speech and mind no longer serve as conditions for pleasure and pain to arise internally, what is meant is that these doors of action cease to be instruments for generating *saṅkhārā*, actions with the power to produce re-becoming. When ignorance is eliminated, volition no longer functions as *saṅkhārā*, as a constructive power that builds up new edifices of personal existence in future lives. The actions of the arahant, whether performed by body, speech or mind, are *khīṇabīja*, 'with seed destroyed' (Ratana Sutta, Sn 235); they are incapable of ripening in the future, and hence no longer serve as conditions for

27 A II 230-2; see too M I 389.

pleasure and pain to arise.

15. The second major paradigm for understanding the *saṅkhārā* factor in PS, and its relations to *avijjā* and *viññāṇa*, grades the *saṅkhārā* according to their ethical quality, which in turn indicates the type of rebirth they produce. This paradigm is delineated in the following passage:

'Bhikkhus, if a person immersed in ignorance forms a meritorious *saṅkhāra*, consciousness goes on towards merit. If he forms a demeritorious *saṅkhāra*, consciousness goes on towards demerit. If he forms an imperturbable *saṅkhāra*, consciousness goes on towards the imperturbable'²⁸.

Once again it is obvious that we must understand *saṅkhārā* as volition (*cetanā*). And once again it is not so obvious that the relationship between *saṅkhārā* and consciousness may be a causal one operating across different lives. The commentary to the sutta explains that the phrase 'consciousness goes on towards merit' can be understood in two complementary ways: (i) the kammically active consciousness associated with the volition 'goes on towards' meritorious *kamma*, i.e., it accumulates merit; and (ii) the consciousness resulting from the merit 'goes on towards' the result of merit, i.e., it reaps the fruit of that merit. The same principle of interpretation applies to the other two cases — the demeritorious and the imperturbable. Thus the point of the passage, as understood from the traditional perspective, may be paraphrased thus: A meritorious volition infuses consciousness with a meritorious quality and thereby steers consciousness towards rebirth in a realm resulting from merit; a demeritorious volition infuses consciousness with a demeritorious quality and thereby steers consciousness towards rebirth in a realm resulting from demerit; an imperturbable volition infuses consciousness with an imperturbable quality (*āneñja*) and thereby steers consciousness towards

28 S 12:51/II 82: *Avijjāgato 'yaṃ bhikkhave purisa-puggalo puññaṃ ce saṅkhāraṃ abhisāṅkharoti puññūpagaṃ hoti viññāṇaṃ, apuññaṃ ce saṅkhāraṃ abhisāṅkharoti apuññūpagaṃ hoti viññāṇaṃ, āneñjaṃ ce saṅkhāraṃ abhisāṅkharoti āneñjūpagaṃ hoti viññāṇaṃ.*

rebirth in an imperturbable realm, i.e., a realm corresponding to the fourth *jhāna* or the formless meditative attainments.

Ñānavīra himself rejects this interpretation of the passage. He writes (§15):

... Nothing in the Sutta suggests that *puññūpaga viññāṇa* is anything other than the meritorious consciousness of one who is determining or intending merit. (When merit is intended by an individual he is conscious of his world as 'world-for-doing-merit-in', and consciousness has thus 'arrived at merit'.)

My reading of this passage differs from that of Ñānavīra. Even if we disregard the commentarial explanation sketched above and focus solely on the text, we would find that the structure of the sutta itself suggests that a *kamma-vipāka* relationship is intended by the link between *saṅkhārā* and *viññāṇa*. For the sutta continues: When a bhikkhu has abandoned ignorance and aroused knowledge, he does not form any of the three types of *saṅkhārā*. Thereby he reaches arahantship, and when his body breaks up with the ending of his life, he attains Parinibbāna. Thus 'all that is felt, not being delighted in, will become cool right here, and bodily elements only will remain'. Hence in its structure the sutta establishes a contrast between the ignorant worldling and the arahant. The worldling, by fashioning meritorious, demeritorious and imperturbable volitions, projects his consciousness into a new existence, setting in motion once again the entire cycle of birth and death. The arahant cuts off ignorance and stops forming *saṅkhārā*, thus ending the projection of consciousness and the consequent renewal of the cycle.

This conclusion can draw further support from a study of how the word '*upaga*' is used in the Suttas. Ñānavīra's rendering 'has arrived at' is actually an error: the word functions not as a past participle (that would be *upagata*) but as a suffix signifying present action. Hence I render it 'goes on towards'. In contexts similar to the one cited above (though perhaps not in all contexts) '*upaga*' most commonly denotes movement towards the fruition of one's past *kamma* — movement fulfilled by the process of rebirth. Consider the stock passage on the exercise of the divine eye:

'With the divine eye, which is purified and superhuman, he sees beings passing away and being reborn, inferior and superior, beautiful and ugly, fortunate and unfortunate, and he understands how beings go on in accordance with their *kamma*' (*yathākammūpage satte pajānāti*)²⁹.

Then consider the *Āneñjasappāya Sutta*, on a bhikkhu who practises the 'imperturbable meditations' without reaching arahantship: 'With the break-up of the body, after death, it is possible that his consciousness, evolving on, may go on towards the imperturbable'³⁰. Note that the last expression (*viññāṇam āneñjūpagam*) in the Pāli is identical with the expression found in the *Nidāna Saṃyutta* sutta cited above, and here, clearly, a transition from one life to another is involved.

We thus see that in the two main models for the *saṅkhārā* factor of PS presented by the *Nidāna Saṃyutta*, the term signifies volitional activity, and its bearing on consciousness and feeling is that of kammic cause for a fruit generally maturing in a subsequent life. We should further stress that these two models are neither mutually exclusive nor do they concern different material. Rather, they structure the same material — kammically potent volitions — along different lines depending on the perspective adopted: either door of action or ethical quality.

16. Besides these two major models, the *Nidāna Saṃyutta* contains two short suttas that help illuminate the role of *saṅkhārā* in the PS formula. We may begin with the following:

'Bhikkhus, if there is lust, delight, craving for solid food (or any other of the four types of nutriment), consciousness becomes grounded in that and comes to growth. When consciousness is grounded and comes to growth, there is a descent of name-and-form. When there is a descent of name-and-form, there is growth of *saṅkhārā*. When there is

29 E.g. M I 183.

30 M II 262. I follow the Burmese-script ed., which reads *āneñja* where the PTS ed. reads *ānañja*; the meaning is the same.

growth of *saṅkhārā*, there is the production of re-becoming in the future. When there is the production of re-becoming in the future, there is future birth, ageing and death' (*āyatim punabbhavābhiniḥbatti*)³¹.

Here we can see that *saṅkhārā* are responsible for bringing about 're-becoming in the future', that is, for generating rebirth. The structure of the sutta is similar to that of the *Bhava Sutta* quoted above (pp.13-14), but here three existences are implied. The first is the existence in which there is craving for food. This craving, accompanied by ignorance, grounds consciousness in its attachment to nutriment. Consciousness — here the kammically active consciousness — is the seed arisen in the old existence that sprouts forth as a new existence, causing a 'descent' of name-and-form into the womb (*nāmarūpassa avakkanti*). Within the second existence the new being, on reaching maturity, engages in volitional activity, which brings on 'the growth of *saṅkhārā*' (*saṅkhārānam vuddhi*). These *saṅkhārā* in turn, enveloped by ignorance and craving, initiate the production of still another existence, the third of the series. This existence (like all others) commences with birth and terminates in ageing and death.

17. Next, let us look at one short sutta in the *Nidāna Saṃyutta* which explicitly mentions neither *avijjā* nor *saṅkhārā* but refers to them obliquely:

'What one wills, and what one plans, and what lies latent within — this is a support for the continuance of consciousness. When there is a support, there is a grounding of consciousness. When consciousness is grounded and comes to growth, there is the production of re-becoming in the future. When there is the production of re-becoming in the future, future birth, ageing and death, sorrow, lamentation, pain, displeasure and despair arise. Such is the origin of this whole mass of suffering'³².

31 S 12:64/II 101.

32 S 12:23/II 65. The PTS ed. has mistakenly omitted 'jāti' from the passage.

In this sutta, *saṅkhārā* are referred to elliptically by the expression 'yam ceteti', 'what one wills', and 'yam pakappeti', 'what one plans' ('pakappeti' is a rare term, apparently synonymous with 'ceteti'). The expression 'yam anuseti', 'what lies latent within', points to the *anusaya*, the latent tendencies, which other texts tell us include the latent tendency of ignorance (*avijjā-nusaya*) and the latent tendency of lust or craving (*rāgānusaya*)³³. Thus the sutta is stating that when one forms volitions on the basis of ignorance and craving, these volitions become the support which grounds consciousness and establishes it in a new existence. Once consciousness becomes so established, it sets in motion the entire production of a new existence, beginning with birth and ending with death, accompanied by all its attendant suffering.

The text which immediately follows the aforementioned sutta in the Nidāna Saṃyutta (S 12:39) begins identically as far as 'and comes to growth', then it continues with 'there is a descent of name-and-form' and the rest of the standard series. This shows that in the PS context 'the descent of name-and-form' (*nāma-rūpassa avakkanti*) is effectively synonymous with 'the production of re-becoming in the future' (*āyatim punabbhavābhini-batti*). Both signify the unfolding of the rebirth process once consciousness has gained a foothold in the new existence.

18. The above analysis should be sufficient to establish with reasonable certainty that the term '*saṅkhārā*' in the PS formula denotes nothing other than volition (*cetanā*), and that volition enters into the formula because it is the factor primarily responsible for 'grounding' consciousness in the round of repeated becoming and for driving it into a new form of existence in the future. When this much is recognised, it becomes unnecessary for me to say anything about the continuation of Nāṇavīra's Note on PS from §18 to the end. This convoluted discussion rests upon his assumption that the term '*saṅkhārā*' in the PS formula comprises all the varieties of *saṅkhārā* spoken of in the Suttas, that is, all

33 See M I 109-10, 393, etc.

things that other things depend on. By adopting this thesis he finds himself obliged to explain how such things as the in-and-out breaths, etc., can be said to be conditioned by ignorance and to be conditions for consciousness. The explanation he devises may be ingenious, but as it receives no confirmation from the Suttas themselves, we can conclude that his account does not correctly represent the Buddha's intention in expounding the teaching of PS.

19. At this point we can pull together the main threads of our discussion. We have seen that the alternative, 'more satisfactory approach' to PS that Nāṇavīra proposes rests on two planks: one is his interpretation of the nexus of *bhava*, *jāti* and *jarāmaraṇa*, and the other his interpretation of the nexus of *avijjā*, *saṅkhārā* and *viññāna*. The first hinges on ascribing to all three terms meanings that cannot be substantiated by the texts. The second involves a merging of two contexts that the texts rigorously keep separate, namely, the PS context and the definition of the three *saṅkhārā* stated in connection with the attainment of the cessation of perception and feeling (found in the Cūḷavedalla Sutta). This error leads Nāṇavīra to assign to the term *saṅkhārā* in the PS context a much wider meaning than the texts allow. It also induces him to overlook various passages from the Suttas that clearly show that *saṅkhārā* in the PS formula must always be understood as volitional activities, considered principally by way of their role in projecting consciousness into a new existence in the future.

20. To round off this portion of my critique, I would like to take a quick look at a short sutta in the Nidāna Saṃyutta — a terse and syntactically tricky text — that confirms the three-life interpretation of PS almost as explicitly as one might wish. Our text — the Bālapaṇḍita Sutta — opens thus:

'Bhikkhus, for the fool, hindered by ignorance and fettered by craving, this body has thereby been obtained. Hence there is this body and external name-and-form: thus this dyad. Dependent on the dyad there is contact. There are just six sense bases, contacted through which — or through a certain one of them — the fool experiences pleasure and pain.'

Exactly the same thing is said regarding the wise man. The Buddha then asks the monks to state the difference between the two, and when the monks defer, the Master continues:

'For the fool, hindered by ignorance and fettered by craving, this body has been obtained. But for the fool that ignorance has not been abandoned and that craving has not been eliminated. Why not? Because the fool has not lived the holy life for the complete destruction of suffering. Therefore, with the break-up of the body, the fool is one who goes on to (another) body. Being one who goes on to (another) body, he is not freed from birth, from ageing and death, from sorrow, lamentation, pain, grief and despair; he is not freed from suffering, I say³⁴.

The wise man, in contrast, having lived the holy life to the full, has abandoned ignorance and eliminated craving. Thus with the break-up of the body he is not one who goes on to another body, and thus he is freed from birth, ageing, death, etc.; he is freed from all kinds of suffering.

Having been included in the Nidāna Saṃyutta, this sutta must be an exemplification of PS, otherwise it would have had no place in that collection. And we can detect, with minor variants and elisions, the main factors of the classical formula. Yet not only are three lifetimes explicitly depicted, but we also find two basic exegetical tools of the Commentaries already well pre-figured: the three links (*tisandhi*) and the four groups (*catu-sankhepa*)³⁵. The first group — the causal factors of the past life — are the ignorance and craving that brought both the fool and the wise man into the present existence; though *sankhārā* are not mentioned, they are implied by the mention of ignorance. The first link — that between past causes and present results — connects past ignorance and craving with 'this body'. This, obviously, is a conscious body (*saviññānaka kāya*), implying *viññāna*. The text mentions the remaining factors of the present resultant

34 S 12:19/II 23-4.

35 See Vism XVII, 288-9.

group: *nāmarūpa*, *saḷāyatana*, *phassa*, *vedanā*. Then in the case of the fool, a link takes place between the present resultant group — epitomised by the experience of pleasure and pain — and the present causal group productive of a future life. This group is represented by the present *avijjā* and *taṇhā* that the fool has not discarded. We also know, despite the elision, that *taṇhā* will lead to *upādāna* and a fresh surge of volitional activity motivated by clinging (the *kammabhava* of the Commentaries).

Because of his *avijjā* and *taṇhā* the fool 'goes on to another body' (*kāyūpago hoti*) — note that here we meet once again the word *upaga* which I discussed above (§15), again in connection with the rebirth process. The 'going on to (another) body' can be seen as loosely corresponding to *punabbhavābhinibbatti*, which is followed by birth, ageing and death, etc. These last factors are the fourth group, future effects, linked to the third group, the present-life causes. Thus in this short sutta, which fills out the bare-bones standard formula with some strips of flesh, however lean, we can discern the exegetical tools of the Commentaries already starting to take shape.

In Defence of Tradition

21. Now we can return to the opening section of Nānavīra's 'A Note on Paṭiccasamuppāda' and examine his criticisms of the traditional interpretation.

In §3 he argues against the commentarial view that *vedanā* in the standard PS formula must be restricted to *kammavipāka*. For proof to the contrary he appeals to the Sivaka Sutta (S 36:21/IV 230-1), in which the Buddha mentions eight causes of bodily pain, of which only the last is *kammavipāka*. On the traditional interpretation, Nānavīra says, this would limit the application of PS to certain bodily feelings but would exclude other types of feeling. Such a view, he holds, is contradicted by the Buddha's unrestricted declaration that pleasure and pain are dependently arisen (*paṭiccasamuppānam kho āvuso sukhadukkhāṃ vuttāṃ bhagavatā*; S II 38).

This objection in no way overturns the traditional view of dependent arising. It should first be pointed out that the notion of PS has a twofold significance, as Nānavīra himself recognises in

his Note (§18). The notion refers both to a structural principle, i.e. the principle that things arise in dependence on conditions, and it refers to various exemplifications of that structural principle, the most common being the twelvefold formula. Once we call attention to this distinction, the traditional interpretation is easily vindicated: All feelings are dependently arisen insofar as they arise from conditions, principally from contact along with such conditions as sense faculty, object, consciousness, etc. This, however, does not require that all feelings be included in the *vedanā* factor of the standard PS formula. Without violating the structural principle that all feeling is dependently arisen, the Commentaries can consistently confine this factor to the feelings that result from previous *kamma*.

While recognising that the Pāli Commentaries do restrict *vedanā* in the standard PS formula to *vipākavedanā*, we might suggest another line of interpretation different from the commentarial one, a line which is less narrow yet still respects the view that the PS formula describes a process extending over successive lives. On this view, rather than insist that the *vedanā* link be understood literally and exclusively as specific resultant feelings born of specific past *kamma*, we might instead hold that the *vedanā* link should be understood as the result of past *kamma* only in the more general sense that the capacity for experiencing feeling is a consequence of obtaining a sentient organism through the force of past *kamma*³⁶. That is, it is past *kamma*, accompanied by ignorance and craving, that brought into being the present sentient organism equipped with its six sense bases through which feeling is experienced. If this view is adopted, we can hold that the capacity for experiencing feeling — the obtaining of a psycho-physical organism (*nāmarūpa*) with its six sense bases (*saḷāyatana*) — is the product of past *kamma*, but we need not hold that every feeling comprised in the *vedanā* link is the fruit of a particular past *kamma*. The predominant feeling-tone of a given existence will be a direct result of specific

kamma, but it would not necessarily follow that every passively experienced feeling is actual *vipāka*. This would allow us to include all feeling within the standard PS formula without deviating from the governing principle of the traditional interpretation that the five links, from consciousness through feeling, are fruits of past *kamma*. Although the Commentaries do take the hard line that feeling in the PS formula is *kamma-vipāka* in the strict sense, this 'softer' interpretation is in no way contradicted by the Suttas. Both approaches, however, concur in holding that the five above-mentioned factors in any given life result from the ignorance, craving and volitional activity of the previous life.

22. In the next section (§4) Nānavīra warns us that 'there is a more serious difficulty regarding feeling' posed by the traditional interpretation. He refers to a sutta (A 3:61/I 176) in which, he says, three types of feeling — *somanassa* (joy), *domanassa* (sadness) and *upekkhā* (equanimity) — 'are included in *vedanā*, in the specific context of the PS formulation'. These three feelings, he continues, necessarily involve *cetanā*, intention or volition, as intrinsic in their structure, and therefore the Commentary must either exclude them from *vedanā* in the PS formulation or else must regard them as *vipāka*. Both horns of this dilemma, Nānavīra contends, are untenable: the former, because it contradicts the sutta (which, he says, includes them under *vedanā* in the PS context); the latter, because reflection establishes that these feelings involve *cetanā* and thus cannot be *vipāka*.

The Pāli Commentaries, which adopt the Abhidhamma classification of feeling, hold that *somanassa*, *domanassa* and *upekkhā* — in the present context — are kammically active rather than resultant feelings. This would exclude them from the *vedanā* factor of the PS formulation, which Nānavīra claims contradicts the sutta under discussion. But if we turn to the sutta itself, as he himself urges, we will find that the section dealing with these three types of feeling does *not* have any discoverable connection with PS, and it is perplexing that Nānavīra should assert it does. PS is introduced later in the sutta, but the section where these three types of feeling are mentioned is not related to any formulation of PS at all. The entire passage reads as follows:

36 In this connection, see the passage from S 12:19 quoted just above.

"These eighteen mental examinations, monks, are the Dhamma taught by me . . . not to be denied by wise recluses and brahmins". Such has been said. And with reference to what was this said? Having seen a form with the eye, one examines a form that is a basis for joy, one examines a form that is a basis for sadness, one examines a form that is a basis for equanimity. (The same is repeated for the other five senses.) It is with reference to this that it was said: "These eighteen mental examinations, monks, are the Dhamma taught by me . . . not to be denied by wise recluses and brahmins"³⁷.

And that is it. Thus 'the more serious difficulty regarding feeling' that Nāṇavīra sees in the commentarial interpretation turns out to be no difficulty at all, but only his own strangely careless misreading of the passage.

23. In the same paragraph he derides the commentarial notion that *nāmarūpa* in the PS formulation is *vipāka*. He points out that *nāma* includes *cetanā*, volition or intention, and this leads the Commentary to speak of *vipākacetanā*: 'But the Buddha has said (A 6:63/III 415) that *kamma* is *cetanā* (action is intention), and the notion of *vipākacetanā*, consequently, is a plain self-contradiction'.

Here again the commentarial position can easily be defended. The Buddha's full statement should be considered first:

'It is volition, monks, that I call *kamma*. Having willed (or intended), one does *kamma* by body, speech or mind'³⁸.

The Buddha's utterance does not establish a mathematical equivalence between *cetanā* and *kamma* such that every instance of volition must be considered *kamma*. As the second part of his

37 It is possible that Nāṇavīra was misled here by the word '*paṭicca*', which in this context does not refer to *paṭiccasamuppāda* at all, but has the meaning 'with reference to' or 'because of' and refers to the reason for the Buddha's statement.

38 *Cetanā 'haṃ bhikkhave kammaṃ vadāmi; cetayitvā kammaṃ karoti kāyena vācāya manasā.*

statement shows, his words mean that *cetanā* is the decisive factor in action, that which motivates action and confers upon action the ethical significance intrinsic to the idea of *kamma*. This implies that the ethical evaluation of a deed is to be based on the *cetanā* from which it springs, so that a deed has no kammic efficacy apart from the *cetanā* to which it gives expression. This statement does not imply that *cetanā* (in the non-arahant) is always and invariably *kamma*.

In order to see that the notion of *vipākacetanā* is not self-contradictory nor even unintelligible, we need only consider the statements occasionally found in the Suttas about *nāmarūpa* descending into the womb or taking shape in the womb (e.g. D II 63; also §17 above). It is undeniable that the *nāmarūpa* that 'descends' into the womb is the result of past *kamma*, hence *vipāka*. Yet this *nāma* includes *cetanā*, and thus that *cetanā* too must be *vipāka*. Further, the Suttas establish that *cetanā*, as the chief factor in the fourth aggregate (the *saṅkhārakkhandha*), is present on every occasion of experience. A significant portion of experience is *vipāka*, and thus the *cetanā* intrinsic to this experience must also be *vipāka*. When one experiences feeling as the result of past *kamma*, the *cetanā* co-existing with that feeling must be *vipāka* too. The Commentaries squarely confront the problem of *cetanā* in resultant states of consciousness and explain how this *cetanā* can perform the distinct function of *cetanā* without constituting *kamma* in the common sense of the word. (See Atthasālinī, pp.87-8; *The Expositor* (PTS trans.), pp.116-17.)

The Problem of Time

24. The main reason for Nāṇavīra's dissatisfaction with the traditional interpretation of PS emerges in §7 of his Note. The traditional view regards the PS formula as describing a sequence spread over three lives, hence as involving succession in time. For Nāṇavīra this view closes off the prospect of an immediate ascertainment that one has reached the end of suffering. He argues that since I cannot see my past life or my future life, the three-life interpretation of PS removes a significant part of the formula from my immediate sphere of vision. Thus, PS becomes 'something that, in part at least, must be taken on trust'. But

because PS is designed to show the prospect for a present solution to the present problem of of existential anxiety, it must describe a situation that pertains entirely to the present. Hence Nānavīra rejects the view of PS as a description of the rebirth process and instead takes it to define an ever-present existential structure of the unenlightened consciousness.

The examination of the suttas on PS that we have undertaken above has confirmed that the usual twelve-term formula applies to a succession of lives. This conclusion must take priority over all deductive arguments against temporal succession in PS. The Buddha's Teaching certainly does show us the way to release from existential anxiety. Since such anxiety, or agitation (*paritassanā*), depends on clinging, and clinging involves the taking of things to be 'mine', 'what I am', 'my self', the elimination of clinging will bring the eradication of anxiety. The Buddha offers a method of contemplation that focuses on things as *anattā*, as 'not mine', 'not I', 'not my self'. Realisation of the characteristic of *anattā* removes clinging, and with the elimination of clinging anxiety is removed, including existential anxiety over our inevitable ageing and death. This, however, is not the situation being described by the PS formula, and to read the one in terms of the other is to engage in an unjustifiable confounding of distinct frames of reference.

25. From his criticism of the three-life interpretation of PS it appears that Nānavīra entertains a mistaken conception of what it would mean to see PS within the framework of three lives. He writes (§7):

Now it is evident that the twelve items, *avijjā* to *jarāmaraṇa*, cannot, if the traditional interpretation is correct, all be seen at once; for they are spread over three successive existences. I may, for example, see present *viññāna* to *vedanā*, but I cannot *now* see the *kamma* of the *past* existence — *avijjā* and *saṅkhārā* — that (according to the traditional interpretation) was the cause of these present things. Or I may see *taṇhā* and so on, but I cannot *now* see the *jāti* and *jarāmarāṇa* that will result from these things in the *next* existence.

In Nānavīra's view, on the traditional interpretation, in order to see PS properly I would have to be able to see the *avijjā* and *saṅkhārā* of my past life that brought about this present existence, and I would also have to be able to see the birth, ageing and death I will undergo in a future existence as a result of my present craving. Since such direct perception of the past and future is not, according to the Suttas, an integral part of every noble disciple's range of knowledge, he concludes that the traditional interpretation is unacceptable.

Reflection would show that the consequences that Nānavīra draws do not necessarily follow from the three-life interpretation. To meet his argument, let us first remember that the Commentaries do not treat the twelvefold formula of PS as a rigid series whose factors are assigned to tightly segregated time-frames. The formula is regarded, rather, as an expository device spread over three lives in order to demonstrate the self-sustaining internal dynamics of saṃsāric becoming. The situation defined by the formula is in actuality not a simple linear sequence, but a more complex process by which ignorance, craving and clinging in unison generate renewed becoming in a direction determined by the *saṅkhārā*, the kammically potent volitional activity. Any new existence begins with the simultaneous arising of *viññāna* and *nāmarūpa*, culminating in birth, the full manifestation of the five aggregates. With these aggregates as the basis, ignorance, craving and clinging, again working in unison, generate a fresh store of *kamma* productive of still another becoming, and so the process goes on until ignorance and craving are eliminated.

Hence to see and understand PS within the framework of the three-life interpretation is not a matter of running back mentally into the past to recollect the specific causes in the past life that brought about the present existence, nor of running ahead mentally into the next life to see the future effects of the present causal factors. To see PS effectively is, rather, to see that ignorance, craving and clinging have the inherent power to generate renewed becoming, and then to understand, on this basis, that present existence must have been brought to pass through the ignorance, craving and clinging of the past existence, while any uneradicated ignorance, craving and clinging will engender a new

existence in the future. Although the application of the PS formula involves temporal extension over a succession of lives, what one sees with immediate vision is not the connection between *particular events* in the past, present and future, but conditional relationships obtaining between *types of phenomena*: that phenomena of a given type B arise in necessary dependence on phenomena of type A, that phenomena of a given type C arise in necessary dependence on phenomena of type B.

Of these relationships, the most important is the connection between craving and re-becoming. Craving, underlaid by ignorance and fortified by clinging, is the force that originates new existence and thereby keeps the wheel of Samsāra in motion. This is already implied by the stock formula of the second Noble Truth: 'And what, monks, is the origin of suffering? It is craving, which produces re-becoming (*tanhā ponobhavikā*). . .'. The essential insight disclosed by the PS formula is that any given state of existence has arisen through prior craving, and that uneradicated craving has the inherent power to generate new becoming. Once this single principle is penetrated, the entire twelvefold series follows as a matter of course.

26. Nāṇavīra implicitly attempts to marshal support for his non-temporal interpretation of PS by quoting as the epigraph to his 'A Note on Paṭiccasamuppāda' the following excerpt from the Cūlasakuludāyī Sutta:

'But, Udāyi, let be the past, let be the future, I shall set you forth the Teaching: "When there is this, that is; with arising of this, that arises; when there is not this, that is not; with cessation of this, that ceases"³⁹.

Here, apparently, the Buddha proposes the abstract principle of conditionality as an alternative to teachings about temporal matters relating to the past and future. Since in other suttas the statement of the abstract principle is immediately followed by the entire twelve-term formula, the conclusion seems to follow that

39. M 79/II 32.

any application of temporal distinctions to PS, particularly the attempt to see it as extending to the past and future, would be a violation of the Buddha's intention.

This conclusion, however, would be premature, and if we turn to the sutta from which the quotation has been extracted we would see that the conclusion is actually unwarranted. In the sutta the non-Buddhist wanderer Sakuludāyī tells the Buddha that recently one famous teacher had been claiming omniscience, but when he approached this teacher — who turns out to have been the Jain leader Nigaṇṭha Nātaputta — and asked him a question about the past, the teacher had tried to evade the question, to turn the discussion aside, and became angry and resentful. He expresses the trust that the Buddha is skilled in such matters. The Buddha then says: 'One who can recollect his previous births back for many aeons might engage with me in a fruitful discussion about matters pertaining to the past, while one who has knowledge of the passing away and rebirth of beings might engage with me in a fruitful discussion about matters pertaining to the future'. Then, since Udāyī has neither such knowledge, at this point the Buddha states: 'But, Udāyī, let be the past, let be the future', and he cites the abstract principle of conditionality. Thus the purport of the Buddha's statement, read as a whole, is that without such super-knowledges of the past and the future, there is no point discussing specific empirical factual matters concerning the past and the future. The Buddha's dismissal of these issues by no means implies that the twelve-fold formula of dependent arising should not be understood as defining the conditional structure of Samsāra. It must also be remembered that their discussion takes place with a non-Buddhist ascetic who has not yet gained confidence in the Buddha. It would thus not have been appropriate for the Buddha to reveal to him profound matters that could be penetrated only by one of mature wisdom.

Nāṇavīra tries to buttress his non-temporal interpretation of PS with a brief quotation from the Mahātaṇhāsāṅkhaya Sutta. In that sutta, at the end of a long catechism that explores the twelvefold series of PS in both the order of origination and the order of cessation, the Buddha says to the monks:

I have presented you, monks, with this Dhamma that is visible (*sandiṭṭhika*), immediate (*akālika*), inviting one to come and see, leading onwards, to be personally realised by the wise⁴⁰.

Ñāṇavīra supposes that 'this Dhamma' refers to *paṭiccasamuppāda*, and that the description of it as *akālika* must mean that the entire formula defines a non-temporal configuration of factors.

If we turn to the sutta from which the quotation comes, we would find that Ñāṇavīra's supposition is directly contradicted by the sequel to the statement on which he bases his thesis. In that sequel (M I 265-70), the Buddha proceeds to illustrate the abstract terms of the PS formula, first with an account of the life process of the blind worldling who is swept up in the forward cycle of origination, and then with an account of the noble disciple, who brings the cycle to a stop. Here temporal succession is in evidence throughout the exposition. The life process begins with conception in the womb (elsewhere expressed as 'the descent of consciousness' into the womb and the 'taking shape of name-and-form' in the womb — D II 63). After the period of gestation comes birth, emergence from the mother's womb, followed in turn by: the gradual maturation of the sense faculties (= the six sense bases), exposure to the five cords of sensual pleasure (= contact), intoxication with pleasant feelings (= feeling), seeking delight in feelings (= craving). Then come clinging, becoming, birth, and ageing and death. Here a sequence of two lives is explicitly defined, while the past life is implied by the *gandhabba*, cited as one of the conditions for conception of the embryo to occur. The *gandhabba* or 'spirit', other texts indicate (see M II 157), is the stream of consciousness of a deceased person coming from the preceding life, and this factor is just as essential to conception as the sexual union of the parents, which it must utilise as its vehicle for entering the womb.

In the contrasting passage on the wise disciple, we see how an individual who has taken birth through the same past causes

40 M 38/I 265.

goes forth as a monk in the Buddha's dispensation, undertakes the training, and breaks the link between feeling and craving. Thereby he puts an end to the future renewal of the cycle of becoming. By extinguishing 'delight in feelings', a manifestation of craving, he terminates clinging, becoming, birth, ageing and death, and thereby arrives at the cessation of the entire mass of suffering. Thus here, in the very sutta from which the description of PS as 'timeless' is drawn, we see the sequence of PS factors illustrated in a way that indubitably involves temporal succession.

27. In order to determine what the word *akālika* means in relation to PS, we need to take a careful look at its contextual usage in the suttas on PS. Such suttas are rare, but in the Nidāna Saṃyutta we find one text that can help resolve this problem for us. In this sutta, the Buddha enumerates forty-four 'cases of knowledge' arranged into eleven tetrads. There is knowledge of each factor of PS from *jarāmaraṇa* back to *saṅkhārā*, each defined according to the standard definitions; then there is knowledge of its origination through its condition, of its cessation through the cessation of its condition, and of the Noble Eightfold Path as the way to cessation. With respect to each tetrad, the Buddha says (taking the first as an example):

'When the noble disciple understands thus ageing-and-death, its origin, its cessation, and the way leading to its cessation, this is his knowledge of the principle (or law: *dhamme nāṇa*). By means of this principle which is seen, understood, *akālika*, attained, fathomed, he applies the method to the past and the future. When he does so, he knows: "Whatever recluses and brahmins in the past understood ageing-and-death (etc.), all understood them as I do now; whatever recluses and brahmins in the future will understand ageing-and-death (etc.), all will understand them as I do now". This is his knowledge of the consequence (*anvaye nāṇa*)⁴¹.

41 S 12:33/II 56-9.

If we consider the word *akālika* as employed here, the meaning cannot be 'non-temporal' in the sense either that the items conjoined by the conditioning relationship occur simultaneously or that they altogether transcend temporal differentiation. For the same sutta defines birth and death with the stock formulas — 'birth' into any of the orders of beings, etc., 'death' as the passing away from any of the orders of beings, etc. (see §7 above). Surely these events, birth and death, cannot be either simultaneous or extra-temporal. But the word *akālika* is here set in correlation with a series of words signifying knowledge, and this gives us the key to its meaning. Taken in context, the word qualifies, not the factors such as birth and death themselves, but the principle (*dhamma*) that is seen and understood. The point made by calling the principle *akālika* is that this principle is known and seen *immediately*, that is, that the conditional relationship between any two terms is known directly with perceptual certainty⁴². Such immediate knowledge is contrasted with knowledge of the consequence, or inferential knowledge, by which the disciple does not grasp a principle by immediate insight but by reflection on what the principle entails.

Exactly the same conclusion regarding the meaning of *akālika* would follow if we return to the passage from M I 265 quoted above (see §26) and examine it more closely in context. We would then see that the Buddha does *not* link the statement that the Dhamma is *sandiṭṭhiko akāliko* to the formulation of PS in any way that suggests the factors or their relationships are non-temporal. The statement does not even follow immediately upon the catechism on PS. Rather, after questioning the monks in detail about the PS formula, the Buddha asks them whether they would speak as they do (i.e., affirming the connections established

42 It might even be maintained that the word *akālika* here functions as an 'adverb of manner' qualifying the following past participle *pattena*. The word would then define the way in which the disciple understands the teaching: he has 'attained' (i.e., understood) dependent arising immediately. The use of the instrumental case to signify adverbs of manner is well attested in Pāli.

by the formula) merely out of respect for him as their Teacher; the monks answer in the negative. He then asks, 'Isn't it the case that you speak only of what you have known for yourselves, seen for yourselves, understood for yourselves?'⁴³ To this the monks reply, 'Yes, venerable sir'. At this point the Buddha says: 'I have presented you, monks, with this Dhamma that is visible, immediate, . . . to be personally realised by the wise'. Each of the terms of this stock formula conveys, from a slightly different angle, the same essential idea: that the Dhamma is something that is fully accessible to cognition, that it can be seen directly, immediately, personally, indubitably. These terms highlight, not the intrinsic character of the Dhamma, but its relation to our capacity for knowledge and understanding. They are all epistemological in import, concerned with how the Dhamma is to be known, not with the temporal status of the known. Again, the conclusion is established: The Dhamma (inclusive of PS) is *akālika* because it is to be known immediately by direct inspection, not by inference or by faith in the word of another.

Thus, although birth and death may be separated by seventy or eighty years, one ascertains immediately that death occurs in dependence on birth and cannot occur if there is no birth. Similarly, although the ignorance and *sāṅkhārā* that bring about the descent of consciousness into the womb are separated from that consciousness by a gap of lifetimes, one ascertains immediately that the descent of consciousness into the womb has come about through ignorance and *sāṅkhārā*. And again, although future becoming, birth, and ageing and death are separated from present craving and clinging by a gap of lifetimes, one ascertains immediately that if craving and clinging persist until the end of the lifespan, they will bring about re-conception, and hence engender a

43 *Nanu bhikkhave yad tumhākaṃ sāmāṃ nātaṃ diṭṭhaṃ viditaṃ tad eva tumhe vadethā ti*. It should be noted that the three past participles used here all appear in the sutta passage on the forty-four cases of knowledge; all that is missing is *akālikena pattena*, but the sense of this is supplied by the declaration to follow, i.e., that the Dhamma is *akālika*.

future cycle of becoming. It is in this sense that the Buddha declares PS to be *sandiṭṭhika, akālika* — 'directly visible, immediate' — not in the sense that the terms of the formula have nothing to do with time or temporal succession.

The Knowledge of Final Deliverance

28. I will conclude this critique by highlighting one particularly disquieting consequence entailed by Nāṇavīra's assertion that PS has nothing to do with rebirth, with temporal succession, or with *kamma* and its fruit. Now the Suttas indicate that the arahants know that they have terminated the succession of births; this is their knowledge and vision of final deliverance (*vimuttiñāna-dassana*). Everywhere in the texts we see that when they attain liberation, they exclaim: 'Destroyed is birth, the holy life has been lived, what had to be done has been done, there is no more (coming back) to this world', or: 'This is my last birth; now there is no more re-becoming'. These statements, found throughout the Canon, indicate that the arahants know for themselves that they are liberated from the round of rebirths.

Investigation of the texts will also show that the ground for the arahant's assurance regarding his liberation is his knowledge of PS, particularly in the sequence of cessation. By seeing in himself the destruction of the *āsavas*, the 'cankers' of sensual craving, craving for becoming, and ignorance, the arahant knows that the entire series of factors mentioned in PS has come to an end: ignorance, craving, clinging and kammically potent volitional activities have ended in this present life, and no more compound of the five aggregates, subject to birth and death, will arise in the future. Perhaps the clearest example of this is the Kalāra Sutta (S 12:32/II 51-3). When the Buddha asks Venerable Sāriputta how he can declare 'Destroyed is birth', he replies in terms of the destruction of its cause, *bhava*, and the Buddha's questioning leads him back along the chain of conditions to *vedanā*, for which he no longer has any craving.

Since knowledge of PS in its aspect of cessation is the basis for the arahant's knowledge that he has destroyed birth and faces no more re-becoming in the future, if this formula does not describe the conditional structure of Samsāra it is difficult to see

how the arahant could have definite knowledge that he has reached the end of Samsāra. If arahants have to accept it on trust from the Buddha that Samsāra exists and can be terminated (as Nāṇavīra would hold of those arahants who lack knowledge of past births), then those arahants would also have to accept it on trust from the Buddha that they have attained release from Samsāra. Such a denouement to the entire quest for the Deathless would be far from satisfactory indeed.

29. It seems that Nāṇavīra, in his eagerness to guarantee an immediate solution to the present problem of existential anxiety, has arrived at that solution by closing off the door to a direct ascertainment that one has solved the existential problem that the Suttas regard as paramount, namely, the *beginningless* problem of our *beginningless* bondage to Samsāra. Fortunately, however, the Suttas confirm that the noble disciple does have direct knowledge that all beings bound by ignorance and craving dwell within beginningless Samsāra, and that the destruction of ignorance brings cessation of becoming, Nibbāna. Consider how Sāriputta explains the faculty of understanding (and I stress that this is the faculty of *understanding* (*paññīndriya*), not the faculty of faith):

'When, lord, a noble disciple has faith, is energetic, has set up mindfulness and has a concentrated mind, it can be expected that he will understand thus: "This Samsāra is without discoverable beginning; no first point can be discerned of beings roaming and wandering on, obstructed by ignorance and fettered by craving. But with the remainderless fading away and ceasing of ignorance, a mass of darkness, this is the peaceful state, this is the sublime state: the stilling of all formations, the relinquishing of all acquisitions, the destruction of craving, dispassion, cessation, Nibbāna". That understanding, lord, is his faculty of understanding⁴⁴.

The Buddha not only applauds this statement with the words 'Sādhu, sādhu!' but to certify its truth he repeats Sāriputta's words in full.

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