

Chapter 9

Translating *Paṭicca-samuppāda* in Early Buddhism

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This chapter addresses the issue of how to translate the term *paṭicca-samuppāda*, which relies on the use of Prakrit and Sanskrit grammatical forms for which there are no exact English equivalents, and which expresses a core Buddhist concept for which there is no exact philosophical equivalent outside of Buddhist teachings.

Introduction

Among the specialized terms in early Buddhist teachings, *paṭicca-samuppāda* should count as one of the most important, since it designates a concept identified with the *dhamma* itself. The Buddha is reported to have said, “Who sees *paṭicca-samuppāda* sees the *dhamma*; who sees the *dhamma* sees *paṭicca-samuppāda*,”¹ suggesting an internal relationship between *paṭicca-samuppāda* and the teaching (*dhamma*) as a whole. A well-known exchange in the Pāli canon between Ānanda and the Buddha about *paṭicca-samuppāda* further suggests its significance:

1. Spoken by Sāriputta in MN 28, PTS I 191, who attributes the saying to the Buddha: *yo dhammam passati so paṭiccasamuppādam passati*. Anālayo (2011, 198) reports an MĀ parallel to this saying.

“It is wonderful, lord, it is marvelous, how deep and profound is this *paṭicca-samuppāda*, though to me it seems quite plain.”

“Do not say that, Ānanda, do not say that. This *paṭicca-samuppāda* is deep and profound. It is from not understanding and penetrating this *dhamma* that people have become like a tangle of string covered in mold and matted like grass, unable to escape from *samsāra* with its miseries, disasters, and bad destinies.”²

In this exchange, Ānanda’s understanding of *paṭicca-samuppāda* as profound, but nevertheless not difficult for him to understand, suggests a concept of general application. The Buddha’s response, however, implies an understanding of *paṭicca-samuppāda* as a concept with a specific application to the human condition as entangled in suffering (*dukkha*) and the round of rebirth (*samsāra*) due to immersion in craving (*taṇhā*).³ This specific application is spelled out many times in the early Buddhist teachings, in the form of the standard formula of the twelve *nidānas*, from ignorance (*avijjā*) to aging-and-death (*jarā-marana*).

A translation of the term *paṭicca-samuppāda* therefore needs, on the one hand, to communicate a general concept of profound significance that is nevertheless not too difficult to understand and, on the other hand, a concept that when applied to the human condition, in the form of the twelve *nidānas*, reveals the very workings of *samsāra*. These rather demanding criteria have led to a range of translations into English. The entry on *paṭicca-samuppāda* in the pioneering *Pāli-English Dictionary* (PED), for instance, lists: “‘arising on the grounds of (a preceding cause);’ happening by way of cause, working of cause & effect, causal chain of causation;

2. This exchange forms the introduction to the *Mahānidāna-sutta* at DN 15 (PTS II 55), and is also found at SN 12.60 (PTS II 92): *acchariyaṃ bhante abbhutaṃ bhante. yāva gambhīro cāyaṃ bhante paṭiccasamuppādo gambhīrāvabhāso ca atha ca pana me uttānakuttānako viya khāyati’ti. mā hevaṃ ānanda avaca mā hevaṃ ānanda avaca. gambhīro cāyaṃ ānanda paṭiccasamuppādo gambhīrāvabhāso ca. etassa ānanda dhammassa ananubodhā appaṭivedhā evamayaṃ pajā tantākulakajātā kulagaṇṭhikajātā muñjapabbajabhūtā apāyaṃ duggatiṃ vinipātaṃ samsāraṃ nātivattati.*

3. This interpretation relies on the Buddha’s discussion of craving (*taṇhā*) at AN 4: 199 (PTS II 211–113), in it is said that this world has become “like a tangle of string covered in mold and matted like grass, unable to escape from *samsāra* with its miseries, disasters, and bad destinies” through craving.

causal genesis, dependent origination, theory of the twelve causes.”⁴ As we shall see, the authors of PED have provided, first, an accurate literal transcription of the term in their rendering “arising on the grounds of (a preceding cause),” before venturing several more or less domesticated translations. One of these, “dependent origination,” has remained a popular choice among scholars and practitioners seeking a succinct translation, while the related translation “dependent arising” has since become equally popular. The translation “conditioned co-production,” coined by Edward Conze, still retains a loyal following.⁵ Variations on these choices include “dependent co-arising” and “interdependent co-arising,” translations which imply various degrees of commitment to the interpretation of *paṭicca-samuppāda* in terms of interconnectedness.

It might seem as a consequence that any translation of *paṭicca-samuppāda* is no more than a matter either of preference or of ideological commitment. However, in this chapter, I will argue that “dependent arising” is the most exact and appropriate translation of *paṭicca-samuppāda*, at least as the term is used in early Buddhism prior to the development of *Abhidharma*. My argument will depend on two lines of investigation. The first is the analysis of the component words *paṭicca* and *samuppāda* and of their combination in the “syntactical compound” of *paṭicca-samuppāda*. The second line of investigation is into the conceptual metaphors implied by these words, which communicate the concept of causation, or better, how experience works, through metaphors of movement. Additionally, I will show how the early Buddhist discourses illustrate *paṭicca-samuppāda* by means of agricultural comparisons, a consideration that again favors the translation “dependent arising.”

Analyzing the Expression *Paṭicca-samuppāda*

Paṭicca-samuppāda is made up of two words, *paṭicca* and *samuppāda*, together forming a compound;⁶ and while *samuppāda* can be translated

4. PED 394.

5. See, for example, Conze 1953, 48; Conze 1956, 152; and especially Conze 1962, 156f.; Lamotte 1980.

6. The hyphen in *paṭicca-samuppāda* is a convenience to show that the expression is a compound. In Pāli texts it is not usually hyphenated.

straightforwardly, *paṭicca* is more difficult to put into English, being an absolutive that can be translated “because of” as well as “dependent on.” The combined expression *paṭicca-samuppāda* is not straightforward either, since *paṭicca-samuppāda* is a so-called “syntactical compound,” an irregular grammatical construction without parallel in English. Nevertheless, the meaning of *paṭicca-samuppāda* can be completely unpacked through analysis, and this should be the basis on which to decide how to translate it.

The compound expression *paṭicca-samuppāda* is evidently a specialized term, meaning that it refers unambiguously to a particular concept. The words of which the compound is composed, however, have a range of meanings in Pāli, and in order to correctly understand the compound, we need to determine the particular contextual meanings of its component words. To illustrate with a simple parallel: the compound *buddha-vacana* is a Buddhist term composed of two words. While the word *buddha*, on its own, may refer to the Buddha, Śākyamuni, it may also refer to past or future *buddhas*, or indeed to any awakened being, and may in the broadest sense simply be understood as the past participle of the verb *bujjhati*, “understand.”⁷ Likewise, the word *vacana* can mean “speaking” as well as “language” in a more technical sense.⁸ However, the compound term *buddha-vacana* expresses the single concept of “word of the Buddha,”⁹ relying on the specific meanings of *buddha* as Śākyamuni and *vacana* as “utterance.”

The Meaning of the Word *Samuppāda*

The word *samuppāda*, forming the second part of the compound expression *paṭicca-samuppāda*, is an action noun derived from the verbal root *pad*, with the prefixes *sam-* and *ud-*. The root *pad* forms the finite verb *pajjati*, but this is only attested once in the Pāli canon, in an instance Rhys

7. See PED 488, which separates the general from the applied meaning.

8. See PED 592.

9. Buswell and Lopez 2013, *The Princeton Dictionary of Buddhism*, s.v. *buddhavacana*, 155: “those teachings accepted as having been either spoken by the Buddha or spoken with his sanction.”

Davids and Stede describe as “doubtful.”¹⁰ But we can say that the root *pad* means “go,” “go to,”¹¹ and that the prefix *ud-* means “up” or “out.”¹² Hence *uppajjati* means “goes up,” “arises,” and by extension, “comes into being,” “appears,” “is born,” and so forth.¹³ This verb commonly appears in the Pāli canon in analytic descriptions of experience, when it can be translated “arises.” Talking to King Pasenadi of Kosala, for instance, the Buddha is reported to have said: “Three phenomena [namely, greed, hate, and delusion], great king, when they arise (*uppajjamānā*) subjectively for someone, arise (*uppajjanti*) for his harm, suffering, and discomfort.”¹⁴ To give another example, a conversation between the wanderer Poṭṭhapāda and the Buddha is recorded as follows:

“Lord, does perception arise (*uppajjati*) first and knowledge after, or does knowledge arise first and perception after, or do perception and knowledge arise (*uppajjanti*) simultaneously?”

“Poṭṭhapāda, perception arises first and knowledge after; and from the arising of perception there is the arising of knowledge. In this way one knows that in fact my knowledge has arisen (*udapādi*) from that as its causal basis.”¹⁵

10. PED 387, in relation to the occurrence of *pajjati* at AN IV 362 (in both PTS and Be); the PTS text lists variant readings of *paccati*, *pabbati*, and *gacchati*, suggesting uncertainty about the correct reading. DOP III 61 has “probably wrong” for *pajjati* here. According to Bryan Levman (personal communication) there is also a variant reading in a Sinhalese manuscript of *pacchati*, which would represent the regular prakritic phonological development of *prāpsyati*, future tense of *prāpnoti*; cf. Geiger 1994, §150f. This reading seems also to be implied by the commentary on AN IV 362 at AN-a IV 168, which glosses *pajjati* as *pāpunissati*, “will obtain” < *pāpunāti*, “obtains,” equivalent to Sanskrit *prāpsyati* < *prāpnoti*.

11. PED 387; MW 582; cf. *Saddanīti* 480, 32: *pada gatiyaṃ: pajjati*.

12. CPD II 383; DOP I 416.

13. CPD II 515; DOP I 491; just like Sanskrit *utpadyate* MW 180.

14. SN 3: 2, PTS I 70: *tayo kho, mahārāja, purisassa dhammā ajjhantaṃ uppajjamānā uppajjanti abhitāya dukkhāya aphāsuvihārāya*.

15. DN 9, PTS I 185: *saññā nu kho bhante paṭhamam uppajjati pacchā nānaṃ udāhu nānaṃ paṭhamam uppajjati pacchā saññā udāhu saññā ca nānaṃ ca apubbaṃ acarimaṃ uppajjanti'ti. saññā kho poṭṭhapāda paṭhamam uppajjati pacchā nānaṃ saññuppādā ca pana nānuppādo hoti. so evaṃ pajānāti idappaccayā kira me nānaṃ udapādi'ti*.

Many more examples could be cited in which *upajjati* is used in this way with the meaning of “arises.” It should be noted, however, that in all such cases the verb *upajjati* is used metaphorically, since, in the examples given, subjective mental states such as greed, hate, and delusion, or perception and knowledge, do not move vertically upward, but, rather, they “come into existence.” The English “arises” is used metaphorically in exactly the same way. That is to say, the verb *upajjati*, like “arises,” involves a “conceptual metaphor”—a topic to which I will return.

But the verb *upajjati* can also mean “appears.” In a teaching to the monks about how to thrive in the spiritual life, the Buddha is reported to have shared this simile: “It is as if there were a great sal tree grove near a village or town,¹⁶ overgrown with castor oil plants.¹⁷ Some person might appear (*upajjeyya*) wishing for its good, wishing for its welfare, wishing for its safety.”¹⁸ Such a person is not “arising” or “starting to exist” but rather “appearing” in the sense of “emerging into visibility.” This suggests that Pāli *upajjati* is used metaphorically to mean “appear” (in Pāli, *pātubhavati*) in a way that English “arise” is not so used.¹⁹ This reminds us how words as apparently synonymous as *upajjati* and “arises” are nevertheless not semantically identical. The verb *upajjati* is also used to mean “is born”: a verse in the *Dhammapada* reads, “Some are born (*upajjanti*) in a womb,”²⁰ while the English “arises” is not used quite in this way.

Connected to a finite verb, an action noun denotes the abstract action of the verb;²¹ hence, *uppāda* means “arising,” “coming into existence,” “origination,” “appearance,” and so on.²² But the word we are analyzing is *sam-uppāda*. The prefix *sam-* means “with,” “together” (like the Latin prefix *con-*), though it sometimes adds merely an intensive force to the

16. The sal tree (*Shorea robusta*) is common in the Indian subcontinent and valued for its timber.

17. The castor oil plant (*Ricinus communis*) can be an invasive shrub.

18. MN 21, PTS I 124: *seyyathāpi bhikkhave, gāmassa vā nigamassa vā avidūre mahantaṃ sālavanaṃ. tañcassa eḷaṇdehi sañchannaṃ. tassa kocideva puriso upajjeyya atthakāmo hitakāmo yogakkhemakāmo.*

19. Cf. the commentarial gloss Ud-a. 44, *pātubhavanti* *upajjanti* on Ud. 1.1.

20. Dh. 126: *gabbhaṃ eke upajjanti.*

21. See, for instance, Whitney 1889, §1145, 421.

22. CPD II 525, DOP I 496. While the English “arising” is a gerund, a verbal noun comparable to a Pāli action noun, English “origination” is a noun.

main verb, and indeed sometimes seems not add any additional meaning at all.²³ Hence, the PED gives *samuppāda* the same meaning as *uppāda*,²⁴ which suggests we should translate it “arising” and so on.

Some translators, however, render *samuppāda* in the context of *paṭicca-samuppāda* as “co-arising,” “co-origination,” “co-production,” attributing the sense “with” to the prefix *sam-*.²⁵ Peter Harvey justifies this translation by citing the fifth-century CE Theravādin commentator Buddhaghosa, who, in his *Visuddhimagga*, explains the expression *paṭicca-samuppāda* as follows: “Moreover, ‘it arises together with’ (*saha uppajjati*), so it is a co-arising (*sam-uppāda*). Depending on, without rejecting any of, an assembly of conditions, it is a co-arising (*sam-uppāda*) dependent in this way; hence it is “dependent co-arising” (*paṭicca-samuppāda*).”²⁶ However, it is unjustified to explain the meaning of *samuppāda* in the Pāli canon from a commentarial text of many centuries later. In the background of Buddhaghosa’s exegesis of the expression *paṭicca-samuppāda* is a metaphysical interpretation of the twelve *nidānas* as a tightly interlocked set of mutually arising factors, an interpretation that developed long after the canonical discourses.²⁷ Moreover, it is likely that the Theravādin commentators were aware that their exegesis of the expression *paṭicca-samuppāda* was an edifying interpretation rather than a historically reliable guide to the meaning of the compound, since a slightly different exegesis of *samuppāda* in the

23. PED 655: *sam-* is very often merely pleonastic, especially in combination with other prefixes.

24. PED 688; cf. MW 1162 *samutpāda* “rise, origin, production.”

25. Recently by Harvey (2013); and, in an influential work, by Macy (1991, 34).

26. Vism 521. Harvey merely cites this passage: “Something can only arise when its conditions are gathered together (Vism 521). Something arises together with its conditions” (Harvey 2013, 48). Discussed in note 57 in this chapter. Buddhaghosa is not arguing for the idea that reality is an interdependent co-arising, only that any arising phenomenon depends on an assembly of conditions. But there is no evidence that *sam-* has this significance in the Pāli canon itself.

27. This point is also discussed in Schmithausen (1997, 57), in relation to Macy (1991, 34), who also cites Buddhaghosa in support of the translation of *samuppāda* as “co-arising.” Schmithausen also refers to Candrakīrti, who explains *samutpāda* merely as *prādurbhāva*, “arising.” Vasubandhu does likewise (Sangpo and de la Vallée Poussin 2012, 996), emphasizing that the interpretation of *samuppāda* as “co-arising” was not even the consensus among later Indian Buddhist exegetes.

commentary on the *Udāna* states:²⁸ “It is a right-arising (*sam-uppādo*) because it gives rise either rightly (*sammā*) or just by itself (*sayam*).” This exegesis, taking the meaning of *sam-* not to be “with” (*saha*) but “rightly” (*sammā*) or “by itself” (*sayam*), enriches the commentarial interpretation of *paṭicca-samuppāda*, based on the different meanings that can be drawn out of the prefix *sam-*.

In fact, examining the occurrence of the word *samuppāda* in the Pāli canon, it is not possible to identify any specific additional meaning implied by *sam-* to distinguish *samuppāda* from *uppāda*. A couple of citations show this point clearly. First, although the word *samuppāda* does occur in the Pāli canon as an independent word, it is mainly found in compound expressions, where the addition of the prefix *sam-* appears simply to allow ease of pronunciation. It is easier, for instance, to say *paṭicca-samuppāda* than *paṭicc’uppāda* (or, in Sanskrit, *pratītyotpāda*).²⁹ Second, in one discourse we find the verb *uppajjati* followed by *samuppajjati* with exactly the same meaning. The Buddha describes how, just as there are various kinds of wind, “so, in this body, various feelings arise (*uppajjanti*): pleasant feelings arise, painful feelings arise, and neither-pleasant-nor-painful feelings arise.” Then there follows some verses restating the point, including:

Just so, in this body, feelings arise (*samuppajjanti*),
Which arising (*samuppatti*) is pleasant, painful, and neither
painful-nor-pleasant.³⁰

As can readily be seen, the verb *samuppajjanti* here (and its cognate *samuppatti*) is used synonymously with *uppajjanti*. The prefix *sam-* proves useful in that the word *samuppajjanti* fits the constraints of the *śloka* meter better than *uppajjanti*.

When translating the expression *paṭicca-samuppāda* in the Pāli canon, it therefore seems inappropriate to use words like “co-arising” or “co-production,” with their connotations of a meaning beyond that

28. Ud-a. 37: *sammā sayameva vā uppādetīti samuppādo*.

29. A point indirectly confirmed by the occurrence of the expression *paṭicc’uppāda* in a *gāthā* at Netti 4, shortened from *paṭiccasamuppāda*, evidently for the sake of fitting into the *ārya* meter.

30. SN 36: 12, PTS IV 218: *kho . . . imasmim kāyasmim vividhā vedanā uppajjanti, sukhāpi vedanā uppajjati, dukkhāpi vedanā uppajjati, adukkhamasukhāpi vedanā uppajjati . . . tathev’imasmim kāyasmim | samuppajjanti vedanā | sukhadukkhasamuppatti | adukkhamasukhā ca yā ||*

of “arising,” as the prefix *sam-* appears in this context not to have the additional force implied by “co-.” Rather, *sam-* appears to be pleonastic, easing pronunciation of the technical compound expression, and *samuppāda* is synonymous with *uppāda*. The concept of *samuppāda* as “co-arising” is specific to the context of later *Abhidhamma*. This point shows the importance of a context-sensitive translation of the concepts implied by Buddhist terms like *paṭicca-samuppāda*.

The Meaning of the Word *Paṭicca*

The word *paṭicca* is an absolutive from the verb *pacceṭi*, which is derived from the verbal root *i*, meaning “go” or “come,” with the prefix *paṭi*, meaning “back” or “against.”³¹ The etymologically exact meaning of *pacceṭi* as “comes back to” is employed in the following example of a *Dhammapada* stanza:

One who does wrong to a blameless man, to one who is
pure and spotless,
the harm comes back to (*pacceṭi*) that fool, like fine dust
thrown against the wind.³²

While the literal sense of *pacceṭi* as a verb of movement meaning “comes back to” is evident in this verse, *pacceṭi* is mainly used in the Pāli canon in a figurative way to mean “depends on,” “relies on,” “believes in,” or “trusts in.” We read for instance of a certain brahman, with superstitious beliefs familiar enough even today: “Now at the time a brahman named Saṅgārava lived in Sāvathī, one who purifies himself with water, who ‘comes back to’ (*pacceṭi*) purification with water, and who dwells devoted to the practice of immersing himself in water morning and evening.”³³ We could nicely trans-

31. In Sanskrit, the absolutive *pratītya* is derived from *pratyeti*, the root *i* with the prefix *prati*.

32. Dh. 125: *yo appadutṭhassa narassa dussati | suddhassa posassa anaṅganassa | tameva bālaṃ pacceṭi pāpaṃ | sukhumo rajo paṭivātaṃva khitto ||* Also at SN 1: 22, PTS I 13; SN 7: 4, PTS I 164; *Sutta-nipāta* V 662; Ja 367, PTS III 203.

33. SN 7: 21, PTS I 182: *tena kho pana samayena saṅgāravo nāma brāhmaṇo sāvathīyaṃ paṭivasati udakasuddhiko, udakena parisuddhiṃ pacceṭi, sāyaṃ pātaṃ udakorohanānuyogamanuyutto viharati*. The Pāli uses the present tense for narrative, where English would more naturally use the imperfect. The verses at *Sutta-nipāta* 788 also use *pacceṭi* in relation to religious purification.

late *pacceṭi* in this context using the English phrasal verb “falls back on,”³⁴ meaning that Saṅgārava “has recourse to,” “relies on,” or “depends on” purification with water.³⁵ To say that Saṅgārava “falls back on” purification with water is to say that he trusts in or believes in the efficacy of that practice. In another example, the Buddha describes the five qualities of a lay-follower who is like an outcaste (*caṇḍāla*), who is impure, like a leper; that person’s third quality is that “he is superstitious and ‘falls back on’ (*pacceṭi*) fortune (*maṅgala*) and not action (*kamma*).”³⁶ This is to say that the poor-quality lay-follower “depends on,” “relies on,” or “trusts in” omens, luck, and fortune for his happiness rather than in doing good and avoiding evil.

We might say that the word *pacceṭi* is used of people whose reasoning is based on, or “falls back on,” some inappropriate view or belief, such as the purificatory efficacy of water, rather than being based on appropriate views and beliefs. Likewise, the verb *pacceṭi* is also used for those whose reasoning is based on speculative views rather than on what they know for themselves. In some verses from the *Sutta-nipāta* the wise ascetic is said not to believe in speculative views:

Letting go of what has been obtained, not grasping,
one does not place dependence on (*nissaya*) even knowledge.
Not siding with one party when among disputants,
one does not “fall back on” (*pacceṭi*) any view at all.³⁷

Once more these verses show how *pacceṭi* means “believes in,” in the sense of “relies on,” “depends on,” though here in the context of views rather than practices.

34. OED s.v. “to fall back on”: “2. *fig.* To have recourse to (something) when other things fail.”

35. In fact, the verbs “rely” and “depend” also originally held meanings connected with verbs of physical movement, though these senses are now obsolete or literary: OED s.v. “rely”: “5.a. *intr.* To rest *on* or *upon* a support (*lit.* and *fig.*). *Obs.*”; OED s.v. “depend” “1.a. *intr.* To hang down, be suspended. (Now chiefly in literary use.)”

36. AN 5: 175, PTS III 206: *koṭūhalamaṅgaliko hoti, maṅgalaṃ pacceṭi no kammaṃ.*

37. *Sutta-nipāta* 800: *attaṃ pabāya anupādīyāno | nāṇe pi so nissayaṃ no karoti | sā ve viyattesu na vaggasārī | ditṭhīm pi so na pacceṭi kiñci.* Norman (2001, 107) likewise translates, “He does not fall back on any view at all,” citing (339) both Nidd I 108 and Pj II 530: *no pacceṭi no paccāgacchati*, “He does not fall back on means he does not come back toward,” where *paccāgacchati* is also a verb of motion, from the root *gam*, “go.”

The word *paṭicca* is the absolutive derived from *pacceṭi*, and in terms of its etymology it ought to express the idea of “having come back to” or “coming back to.”³⁸ In practice, however, we do not find in the Pāli canon any examples of *paṭicca* used as the absolutive of a verb expressing movement. Instead, it appears as the absolutive of the figurative sense of *pacceṭi* as “depends on,” and can be translated as “falling back on” in the sense of “dependent on.” For instance, in the well-known story of Brahmā’s request to the Buddha to teach, the Buddha is reported to have said: “And then, monks, knowing Brahmā’s request, I surveyed the world with Buddha-vision ‘falling back on’ (*paṭicca*) compassion for beings.”³⁹ This means that compassion for beings was the reason or explanation for the Buddha’s surveying the world. In this sense, we can often translate *paṭicca* simply as “because of.”⁴⁰ This is especially apt in the case of a common mode of expression, following some statement: “And because of (*paṭicca*) what was that said?” When the answer has been given, the correlative expression follows, “Because of (*paṭicca*) this was that said.”⁴¹ While a translation using “dependent on” would be perfectly intelligible in English here (such as, “Dependent on what was that said?”), it seems somewhat foreign, when what is being said is, “What is the reason that was said?”

38. The absolutive is here formed with the suffix *-ya*: the form *paṭicca* is from *paṭi+i+(t)ya*, via the phonological changes to consonant clusters typical of Prakrits, while the Sanskrit *pratītya* is more obviously identifiable as an absolutive in *-ya*. The absolutive in Pāli grammar, as in Sanskrit, is an indeclinable verbal derivative used to indicate an action prior to the action of the main verb of the sentence, though absolutive and main verbs have the same agent. The absolutive is extremely common. In the formulaic language of the Pāli discourses, when someone comes to visit the Buddha it is said that *bhāgavantam abhivadetvā ekam antam nisīdi*: “Having greeted the Blessed One, he sat down to one side.” “Having greeted” (*abhivadetvā*) is an absolutive, controlling a subclause (“having greeted the Blessed One”), expressing an action (“having greeted”) prior to the action of the main verb (“sat down”) and with the same agent as it (“he”). It would equally be possible to translate *abhivadetvā* simply as “greeting,” which is a present participle in English: “Greeting the Blessed One, he sat to one side.” Likewise, since we do not have absolutives in English, we can translate the Pāli absolutive *paṭicca* either as an English present participle, “coming back to,” or as a perfect participle clause, “having come back to.”

39. From the episode of Brahmā’s request at, for example, MN 26, PTS II167: *atha kho ahaṃ bhikkhave brahmuno ca ajjhesanaṃ viditvā sattesu ca kārūṇātaṃ paṭicca buddhacakkhunā lokam volokesiṃ*.

40. OED s.v. “because (of)” *adverb*: “2.a. By reason of, on account of.”

41. *kiñ c’etaṃ paṭicca vuttam? . . . idam etaṃ paṭicca vuttam*.

These examples of *paṭicca* in the sense of “dependent on” imply a person as agent of the main action of the sentence. It is the Buddha who surveyed the world because of (*paṭicca*) compassion. It is some speaker of whom it is asked, “Because of (*paṭicca*) what was that said?” But *paṭicca* is also used in constructions that designate the impersonal dependence of something on something else. These impersonal constructions show the word *paṭicca* used as a philosophical term to designate the concept of the causal dependence of one phenomenon upon another. A paradigmatic example for our purposes is: “Dependent on (*paṭicca*) the eye and visible forms, eye-consciousness arises (*uppajjati*).” This is repeated for ear and sounds, and for the other senses including the mind and its ideas (*dhammas*).⁴² While it is still possible to preserve the sense of a verb of motion by translating *paṭicca* here as “falling back on,” the context shows that *paṭicca* is being used figuratively to mean “dependent on.” It does not appear that the Sanskrit *pratītya* was used to express causal dependence in this way (except of course by Buddhists),⁴³ so perhaps we should consider the use of the word *paṭicca* in the Pāli canon (to mean “causally dependent on”) as a term referring to a specifically Buddhist concept of causation.

The Meaning of the Compound *Paṭicca-samuppāda*

The compound expression *paṭicca-samuppāda* is a term referring to a specific concept. Its component words are likewise used with relation to one among their several meanings, *samuppāda* specifically in the sense of “arising” (“coming into existence”) and *paṭicca* specifically in the sense of “dependent on.” These two words are compounded in such a way as to create a philosophical term whose concept is said to be deep and profound. It is important, therefore, to understand the peculiarities of this compound. It might be noted at the outset that English expressions like “dependent arising” or “conditioned co-production” involve an adjective qualifying a noun. Yet *paṭicca* is not an adjective but an absolute that does not qualify *samuppāda*. Such English expressions as “dependent arising” are more like attempts to render a construction that, in Pāli, has a peculiarly idiomatic flavor, which we might provisionally represent as

42. MN 18, PTS I 111: *cakkhuñcāvuso, paṭicca rūpe ca uppajjati cakkhuviññāṇaṃ.*

43. MW 673 s.v. *pratītya*; Apte 743.

“arising dependent on . . .” The idiomatic nature of the expression can be better understood by analyzing it as what has been called a “syntactical compound,” which essentially allows a sentence concerning abstract causal dependence to be compressed into one compound expression. I will suggest that this compound is best understood as meaning “arising dependent on a causal basis,” though “dependent arising” remains a convenient two-word rendering.

Compounds in Pāli, as in Sanskrit, comprise individual words put together in grammatical relationships that would otherwise be expressed by inflections. For instance, the Buddha is described as *vijjā-caraṇa-sampanno*,⁴⁴ literally, “wisdom-conduct-endowed,” that is, “endowed with wisdom and conduct.”⁴⁵ Compounds such as *paṭicca-samuppāda*, comprising an absolute and a noun, have been described by Western scholars as “syntactical compounds,”⁴⁶ since they contain words compounded together that can only be understood in terms of some implied syntactical relationship, meaning that they can be unpacked to form a sentence. They are not unusual in Pāli but are nonetheless strange and have been described as “irregular” and “anomalous.”⁴⁷ If in fact *paṭicca-samuppāda* is a strange, irregular syntactical compound, the convenient English rendering “dependent arising” may be misleading. To understand the meaning of the expression *paṭicca-samuppāda*, some grammatical analysis is required.

Hans Hendriksen has explained that we should understand compounds like *paṭicca-samuppāda* as having developed from a combination of

44. From the common formula of praise (*vandanā*) of the Buddha, found, for example, at DN 2, PTS I 49, and *passim*. The hyphens merely indicate for convenience the individual words of the compound.

45. As the commentaries put it, *vijjācaraṇasampannoti vijjāhi ca caraṇena ca sammanāgato*, “‘wisdom-conduct-endowed’ means endowed with the wisdoms and with conduct”: the compound as a whole is a *tatpuruṣa* (determinative) containing a *dvandva* (coordinative). The various kinds of Pāli compounds are discussed in Collins (2006, 129ff.).

46. Discussed by Norman (1993); Norman also discusses other kinds of syntactical compounds besides those containing an absolute and a noun, such as *ehi-passiko*: this compound contains two verbs in the imperative tense (*ehi*, “come!” and *passa*, “see!”) plus a suffix (*-ika*) expressing connection: the *dhamma* is “suitable to come and see” (DOP I 553).

47. By both Wackernagel and Whitney, cited in Norman (1993, 218).

a verb and an absolutive in a grammatical relationship with it.⁴⁸ Hendriksen takes as his example the syntactical compound *viceyya-dāna*, “giving with forethought,”⁴⁹ consisting of an absolutive *viceyya*, “discriminating,” “having considered,”⁵⁰ and a noun *dāna*, “giving,” and he explains that we should understand this compound as having been derived from a sentence such as *viceyya dadāti*, “discriminating, he gives,” “he gives with forethought.” Norman gives a complementary explanation, deriving the syntax of *viceyya-dāna* from a sentence such as *viceyya dānaṃ dadāti*, “having considered, he gives a gift.”⁵¹

Likewise, we should understand *paṭicca-samuppāda* as deriving from a sentence whose form would be *paccayaṃ paṭicca uppajjati dhammaṃ*, “dependent on a causal basis a phenomenon arises.” We can in fact easily find representative examples of such sentences in Pāli texts, where both causal bases and arisings are specified, for instance:

1. *cakkhuñ ca paṭicca rūpe ca uppajjati cakkhu-viññānaṃ*, “dependent on the eye and forms arises eye-consciousness”;⁵²
2. *phassanānattaṃ paṭicca uppajjati vedanānānattaṃ*, “dependent on a diversity of contacts arises a diversity of feelings”;⁵³
3. *ime pañca kāmagaṇe paṭicca uppajjati sukhaṃ somanassaṃ*, “dependent on these five kinds of sense-pleasure arise pleasure and happiness.”⁵⁴

In each of these cases, the absolutive *paṭicca*, “dependent on,” takes a grammatical object or objects (in the accusative case), such as “the eye and forms,” “a diversity of contacts,” and “these five strands of sense-pleasure”;

48. Hendriksen (1944, 157); also discussed in Norman (1993, 219).

49. For example, at SN 1: 33, PTS I 21: *viceyya-dānaṃ sugatappasatthaṃ*, “Giving with forethought is praised by the Perfect One.”

50. See PED 616 s.v. *vicinati*. See also Collins (2006, 137): “a gift (given) after consideration.”

51. Norman 1993, 219.

52. For instance, at MN 18, PTS I 111.

53. For instance, at SN 14: 4, PTS II 141.

54. For instance, at MN 13, PTS M I 85.

these are causal bases (*paccayas*). In each of these sentences, the absolutive *paṭicca* has the same agent or grammatical subject (in the nominative case) as that of the main verb of the sentence, *uppajjati*: hence, it is eye-consciousness that arises and is dependent on the eye and forms; it is the diversity of feelings that arises and is dependent on the diversity of contacts; it is pleasure and happiness that arise dependent on these five strands of sense-pleasure. Hence, eye-consciousness, the diversity of feelings and these five strands of sense-pleasure are examples of arising (*samuppāda*).

In short, *paṭicca-samuppāda* compresses into a syntactical compound the syntax of a sentence, such that we should understand it to mean “arising (something arises) dependent on (something that is a causal basis).”⁵⁵ It is difficult to know how exactly to render this expression in English, which has neither absolutes nor syntactical compounds. The expression “dependent arising” is useful for its brevity, but “arising dependent on a causal basis” conveys more exactly what *paṭicca-samuppāda* means.

This is of course not a new discovery. It is implied in an etymological analysis of *pratītya-samutpāda* found commonly in Indian Buddhist texts, for instance, by Vasubandhu:

So, what is the meaning of the word *pratītyasamutpāda*? *Prati* means “meeting with” (*prāpti*), *i* means “go” (*gati*). *Pratītya*

55. Further examples of syntactical compounds with absolutes as their first members are *avecca-pasāda*, and *uddissa-kata*. The word *avecca*, the first member of *avecca-pasāda*, is an absolutive meaning “having gone into,” that is, “understanding,” taking an object in the locative case, while the second member is a noun, *pasāda*, meaning “confidence,” from the verb *pasīdati*. This quality is a characteristic of the stream-entrant, who is said to be “a noble disciple who, having “gone into the Buddha, is endowed with confidence” (*ariyasāvako buddhe aveccappasādena samannāgato hoti*, at e.g., SN 12: 41, PTS II 70; the noble disciple also has perfect faith in the *dhamma* and *saṅgha*). This syntactical compound is usually translated “perfect confidence.” The word *uddissa*, the first part of the compound *uddissa-kata*, is an absolutive from *uddisati*, “points to,” “assigns,” and so on; the second part, *kata*, is the past participle of *karoti*, “make,” “do”; hence, *uddissa-kata* means “what has been made (*kata*) having been assigned (*uddissa*) (to someone).” The person to whom the food has been assigned (in the genitive case) is implied by the absolutive. This syntactical compound is usually translated “specially prepared” (in reference to food); for instance, in the *Vinaya*, the Buddha makes the rule: “monks, you should not knowingly eat meat that has been specially prepared” (*na bhikkhave jānaṃ uddissa-kataṃ maṃsaṃ paribhuñjitabbaṃ*, Mv 6.31.14 PTS Vin I 237; AN 8: 12 PTS IV 187).

means “having met with” (*prāpya*) because of a change of the meaning of the verbal root [i.e., *i*, “go”] by the force of the prefix [i.e., *prati*]. *Pad* means “existence” (*sattā*); preceded by the prefixes *sam* and *ud*, *samutpāda* means “appearance” (*prādurbhāva*). Therefore *pratīyasamutpāda* means “origination” (*samudbhava*) “having met with its causal basis” (*pratyaya*).⁵⁶

We see that Vasubandhu explains the compound as a whole by unpacking the syntactical relationship of the absolutive *pratīya* as “having met with (its causal basis)” to the action noun *samutpāda*, “arising.”⁵⁷

Likewise, Buddhaghosa unpacks the grammar of *paṭicca-samuppāda* to emphasize how it is a meaningful expression only if the agent of the absolutive *paṭicca* is the same as the agent of the action noun *samuppāda*:

the word “dependent on . . .” (*paṭicca*) is grammatically meaningful when it is used in reference to an agent shared [with a verb] and in reference to its occurring at a time prior [to the verbal action]. For example, “Dependent on the eye and visual forms, eye-consciousness arises.”⁵⁸

Buddhaghosa appeals here implicitly to the Sanskrit grammarian Pāṇini,⁵⁹ but it seems reasonable to suppose that the early Buddhists likewise

56. *Bhāṣya* on ADK 3.28, Prahlad Pradhan 1975, 138: *atha pratīyasamutpāda iti kaḥ padārthaḥ | pratiḥ prāptyartha eti gatyarthaḥ | upasargaśeṇa dbātvarthaparīṇāmāt prāpyeti yo 'rthaḥ so 'rthaḥ pratīyati | padīḥ sattārtham samutpūvaḥ prādurbhāvārthaḥ | tena prātyayaṃ prāpya samudbhavaḥ pratīyasamutpādaḥ*. Similar analyses are found in Nāgārjuna, Candrakīrti, and so on: discussed in Hopkins (1983, 165); MacDonald (2015, 18–20); cf. Kardas (2015).

57. Although I am not thereby suggesting that we should etymologize the Pāli *paṭicca* as *pappuyya*, from *pāpuṇāti*. Rather, Ud-a. 37 glosses *paṭicca* as *paṭigantvā* (“moving back on”), and likewise at Vism 521 Buddhaghosa glosses *paṭicco* as *paṭimukhamito* (“gone against”): the Pāli tradition prefers to gloss *paṭicca* with verbs of movement.

58. Vism 519–520: *paṭiccasaddo ca panāyaṃ samāne kattari pubbakāle payujjamaṇo atthasiddhikaro hoti. seyyathidaṃ, cakkhuṇca paṭicca rūpe ca uppajjati cakkhuvīññānaṃ ti* [SN 12: 43]; Buddhaghosa goes on to argue that for this reason *samuppāda* cannot mean an abstract “mere arising” (*uppāda-mattam*), since such an abstract term would not have a grammatical agent.

59. Explained in Pind (1989, 50).

understood the grammar of the syntactical compound *paṭicca-samuppāda* to imply that that which “arises” is the same as that which is “dependent on” some causal basis. This implies that *samuppāda* must be understood to mean “arising (of a phenomenon),” so that *paṭicca-samuppāda* should be understood as implying “(a phenomenon’s) arising dependent on (a causal basis).”

We can now appreciate how the authors of PED managed a nice literal translation of *paṭicca-samuppāda* with “arising on the grounds of (a preceding cause).” Even more exactly, we should translate *paṭicca-samuppāda* as “(a phenomenon’s) arising dependent on (a causal basis).” This is hardly an elegant translation, while “dependent arising” is quite neat.

The Term *Paṭicca-samuppāda* and the Concept of Causation

The investigation of how to translate *paṭicca-samuppāda* in the Pāli canon could end at this point, with some clarity about the grammar of its construction and hence how to translate it as a term referring to a particular concept. My conclusion is that *paṭicca-samuppāda* means “dependent arising” and that it refers to a specific concept of causation. However, this raises the question of whether this concept of causation is adequately communicated simply by rendering *paṭicca-samuppāda* as “dependent arising.” Even if one were to gloss “dependent arising” as “(a phenomenon’s) arising dependent on (a causal basis),” it is not self-evident what concept of causation is implied. The concept to which the term *paṭicca-samuppāda* refers is not necessarily identical to our modern concepts of causation, which have developed in the course of centuries of Western philosophical and scientific endeavor and reflect quite different concerns to those of early Buddhism.

Causation, far from being a simple fact about the world as we encounter it, belongs rather to the range of culturally inherited concepts we habitually employ to make sense of facts. A comparison could be made with the concept of time. The presupposition of time as involving a cyclical structure, on both cosmic and individual levels, is a concept by which ancient Buddhists understood events in their experience.⁶⁰ By contrast, the concept of time as linear dominates in Western culture. It might be said that it is only by applying the concept of cyclical time to experience does

60. Discussed, for example, in Bronkhorst (2007, 69–71).

the Buddhist doctrine of rebirth become properly intelligible. Likewise, the term *paṭicca-samuppāda* refers to a concept of causation by which the early Buddhists could make intelligible how experience works, a concept that differs from modern Western concepts of causation, specifically that of causation as linear and mechanical, exemplified by one billiard ball causing another to move.

While the full exposition of this specifically Buddhist conception of causation would go beyond a discussion of translation issues, nevertheless I want to argue that the very term *paṭicca-samuppāda* gives expression to the basic concept of causation to which it refers. It does so by expressing in metaphorical terms the concept of a phenomenon coming into existence only when another phenomenon necessary for its coming into existence is present. This is what is meant by “arising dependent on a causal basis,” and the expression *paṭicca-samuppāda* evokes specific metaphors to communicate this particular concept of causation.

Conceptual Metaphor in Early Buddhist Doctrine

Hence I now propose to explore how *paṭicca-samuppāda* implies a “conceptual metaphor” in which verbs of movement stand for the concept of causation. To speak of “metaphor” here is not merely to identify a figure of speech designed to transfer one kind of meaning to another context for the sake of literary color or imaginative insight; rather, it is to identify what Lakoff and Johnson describe as “conceptual metaphors” by which our ordinary ways of understanding and communicating involve the unconscious but analyzable transfer of meaning from one conceptual domain to another.⁶¹ For instance, the English word “arise” is quite normally used in its literal sense to mean “get up” but also metaphorically to mean “come into existence.”⁶² When we say, for instance, that the Buddha’s teaching “arose” in a particular intellectual context, we mean that it started to exist under the causal influence of its situation, not that it moved upward. The word “arose” expresses a natural process of causation through the metaphor

61. Lakoff and Johnson (1980). Jurewicz 2004 and 2008 are pioneering studies of conceptual metaphor in the Vedas.

62. OED s.v. “arise” *v.*: “I. To get up from sitting, lying, repose . . . III. To spring up, come above ground, into the world, into existence.”

of upward motion. Following Lakoff and Johnson's lead, I will denote this conceptual metaphor, through the use of small capitals, as NATURAL CAUSATION IS UPWARD MOVEMENT.⁶³ Actually, such a metaphor is an ordinary, unconscious way in which we express ourselves in English, so that it is completely implicit in the way that we think and speak—so much so that it may not be immediately obvious that a metaphor is involved. Thus, inviting the reader to turn toward the hidden conceptual metaphors of language, I will argue that *paṭicca-samuppāda* presents the concept of natural causation through a metaphor of movement.

The Pāli language is most likely an artificial literary language developed to preserve the Buddha's teachings,⁶⁴ and for this reason it does not record the conceptual metaphors used in the ordinary speech of the Buddha's time. However, early Buddhist teachings themselves furnish examples of more deliberate conceptual metaphor; for example:

1. *Nibbāna*, referring to the *summum bonum* of the Buddhist spiritual life, means the “going out” of a fire, and is used as a metaphor for the ending of all psychological afflictions.⁶⁵
2. *Taṇhā* means “thirst,” used as a metaphor for “desire.”⁶⁶ The psychological experience of desire is conceived of by comparison with the physiological experience of thirst.

To call *taṇhā* and *nibbāna* “conceptual metaphors” is to identify the origins of abstract ideas, such as “quenching psychological afflictions” or “psychological desire for personal satisfaction,” through familiar experiences such as “the going out of a fire” or “thirst.” A characteristic of these familiar examples is that both *nibbāna* and *taṇhā* evidently soon became technical terms in Buddhist doctrine, used without reference to their metaphorical origins. For instance, the Buddha is reported to have said, “I have removed

63. Explored in Lakoff and Johnson (1999, 213).

64. See Hinüber (1983); Norman (1983); cf. Gombrich, “Introduction: What Is Pāli,” in Geiger (1994).

65. Discussed more fully in Gombrich (1996, 65f.); and s.v. *nibbāna* in Levman (2016).

66. DOP II 276 s.v. *taṇhā* “1. thirst, craving (for food or drink); 2. (a general) craving; strong desire.” “Thirst” for “desire” is, strictly speaking, metonymy rather than metaphor, since “thirst,” being a kind of desire, shares the same conceptual domain.

the arrow of *taṇhā*,⁶⁷ which is a badly mixed metaphor if *taṇhā* is understood literally as “thirst,” but makes more sense if *taṇhā* is understood to mean “psychological desire.”⁶⁸ Indeed, an awareness of the conceptual metaphors implied in technical terms helps us to understand their original significance, making their use as terms more intelligible. Likewise, I will show that *paṭicca-samuppāda* implies a conceptual metaphor, and that this metaphor illustrates the concept to which the term refers.

Conceptual Metaphor in the Expression *Paṭicca-samuppāda*

We saw earlier that *uppāda* is used in regard to the “arising” of mental states such as greed, hate, or delusion, even though mental states do not actually move. Likewise, in the statement “Seeing the arising (*uppāda*) of the sense spheres the mind is rightly liberated,”⁶⁹ we do not suppose that anyone sees the sense spheres moving upward but rather that they see how they start to exist. In such examples, “arising” is a *metaphor* for “starting to exist.” It is a *conceptual metaphor* in both English and in Indic languages such as Pāli and Sanskrit, in that “arising” seems to be a way in which human beings think about and express the concept of “starting to exist.”⁷⁰

Given that “arising” is a conceptual metaphor for “starting to exist,” it might seem that we could just as well translate *uppāda* as “origination,” which also means “starting to exist.” However, if we were to translate *uppāda* in this way, we would translate only the *conceptual domain* (that of EXISTENCE) of the meaning of *uppāda*, and not the *source domain* (that of MOVEMENT) of the conceptual metaphor STARTING-TO-EXIST IS ARISING. By translating *uppāda* as “origination,” we would thereby bypass the metaphor through which the concept “starting to exist” is given a more accessible and less conceptual expression in the metaphor of “arising.”

The early Buddhists were at least implicitly aware that *uppāda* was a metaphor, as is evident in the following passage in which *uppāda* is set alongside other words expressing the concept of existence through various metaphors:

67. MN 105, PTS II 105: *taṃ me taṇhā-sallaṃ pahīnaṃ*.

68. Gombrich 2009, 222 n.1.

69. AN 6: 55, PTS III 378: *disvā āyatanuppādaṃ, sammā cittaṃ vimuccati*.

70. OED s.v. arising “1.b.: springing up, origination.”

Monks, the arising (*uppāda*), standing (*ṭhiti*), production (*abhinibbatti*), and appearance (*pātubhāva*) of material form [and feeling, perception, formations, and consciousness]—this is the arising of suffering, the standing of illnesses, the appearance of aging and death.⁷¹

In this passage, which is repeated elsewhere for the four material elements,⁷² the concept of “existence” is illustrated by means of four related but distinct metaphors:

1. *uppāda*, “arising,” a metaphor for “starting to exist”;
2. *ṭhiti*,⁷³ “standing,” a metaphor for “continuing to exist”;
3. *abhinibbatti*,⁷⁴ “production,” a metaphor for “being brought into existence”; and
4. *pātubhāva*,⁷⁵ “appearance,” a metaphor for “manifesting in existence.”

Here we see that *uppāda* expresses the concept of existence through a metaphor of arising, alongside other words that express nearly the same concept through metaphors of standing, producing, and appearing, in this way making more accessible and vivid the point that the constituents of experience are unreliable because they do not exist unconditionally.⁷⁶

With this passage in mind, it becomes understandable how *samuppāda* in *paṭicca-samuppāda* has been translated as “production” and “orig-

71. SN 22: 30, PTS III 31–32: *yo, bhikkhave, rūpassa [vedanāya, saññāya, saṅkhārānaṃ, viññānaṃ] uppādo ṭhiti abhinibbatti pātubhāvo, dukkhasseso uppādo rogānaṃ ṭhiti jarāmaṇassa pātubhāvo. dukkhasseso uppādo rogānaṃ ṭhiti jarāmaṇassa pātubhāvo.*

72. SN 14: 36, PTS II 175: *yo, bhikkhave, pathaviḍhātuyā uppādo ṭhiti abhinibbatti pātubhāvo, dukkhasseso uppādo rogānaṃ ṭhiti jarāmaṇassa pātubhāvo.*

73. From the verb *tiṭṭhati*, “stands,” “remains.”

74. From the verb *vattati*, “turns,” with the prefixes *abhi*, “toward,” and *nir*, “out.”

75. From the verb *bhavati*, “becomes,” with the prefix *pātu*, “open.”

76. The same passage describes the “stopping” (*nirodha*), “pacifying” (*vūpasama*) and “setting” (*atthaṅgama*) of the constituents of experience as the cessation of suffering, the pacifying of illnesses and the setting of aging and death; three action nouns as metaphors for “ceasing to exist.”

ination” as well as “arising.” The word “production” expresses the concept of “starting to exist” through the metaphor of “bringing forth,”⁷⁷ while the word “origination,” as shown earlier, expresses the concept of “starting to exist” in a nonmetaphorical way.⁷⁸ Yet, since the Pāli *uppāda* is clearly differentiated from words that express the concept “starting to exist” through other metaphors, it is more appropriate to translate *samuppāda* as “arising” in preference to “origination” or “production,” as preserving the conceptual metaphor that may have been implied. In addition, I discussed earlier how the Pāli *uppāda* is used in the senses of “appearing” and of “birth.” This suggests that we should also consider *samuppāda* to imply some secondary conceptual metaphors. My discussion of *samuppāda* can be summarized as follows:

samuppāda = *sam* (“together,” but here pleonastic) + *ud* (“up,” “out”) + *pad* (“go”) = *uppāda* (“arising”) from *uppajjati* (“arises”) implies a conceptual metaphor in terms of:

STARTING-TO-EXIST IS
origination

MOVEMENT-UP
arising

MOVEMENT-INTO-VISIBILITY:
appearing

BEING-BORN: birth, genesis⁷⁹

Lakoff and Johnson point out, however, that when we speak in English of something arising, this implies that this existence-as-upward-motion is a natural effect—the *effect* of a *cause*.⁸⁰ We might say, for instance, “joy

77. OED s.v. “production”: “1a.: The action or an act of producing, making, or causing anything; generation or creation of something.”

78. OED s.v. “origination”: “1a.: coming into existence, commencement, beginning (in reference to cause or source); rise, origin.”

79. Hence the PED translation of *paṭicca-samuppāda* as “causal genesis”; cf. OED s.v. “birth”: “2. *fig.* Of things: Origin, origination, commencement of existence, beginning.” OED s.v. “genesis”: “4. The origin or mode of formation of something.”

80. We might speculate at this point on the pervasiveness of causality, or the principle of causation—that every effect has a cause—in human thinking. This principle certainly appears to be assumed in the early Buddhist discourses, and *paṭicca-samuppāda* would

arises”; the cause of this joy may not be made explicit, in which case the causal source of the arising may be taken to be its situation; for instance, meditation. Likewise in the Pāli discourses, we often find the statement: “A Realized One arises (*uppajjati*) in the world, a worthy one, a perfectly and completely awakened one . . .”⁸¹ The implied causal source of this arising of Buddhas is the situation of humanity in the world, together with the aspiration and resolution of bodhisattas (Buddhas-to-be), since Buddhas do not spring into existence without a cause.

Now, in the expression *paṭicca-samuppāda*, a phenomenon’s “arising” is explicitly related to its cause by the word *paṭicca*, another verb of motion expressing the idea of “falling back on” or, very literally, “moving against.” Let us consider our paradigmatic Pāli sentence: “‘moving against’ (*paṭicca*) the eye and visual forms, eye-consciousness arises (*uppajjati*).” To say that eye-consciousness “arises” is to imply a causal situation in which it comes into existence as an effect, and this situation is made explicit through *paṭicca*, expressing a relationship to a cause as a source against which consciousness moves upward or arises, namely, the eye and visual forms.

The full conceptual metaphor involved is laid bare by considering the causal source implied by *paṭicca*, expressed by the word *paccaya*. This is an action noun from *pacceti*, hence etymologically a “moving-against.” But, as in Sanskrit, action nouns in Pāli are also used to designate concretely the thing in which the verbal action appears,⁸² hence a *paccaya* is something moved against, that is, a “support” or “basis.”⁸³ Outside philosophical discourse concerned with causation, the word *paccaya* is used to mean “support” as in “requisite”: the *paccayas* for a monastic are robes, bowl, lodgings, and medicines, according to the metaphor of a physical support for a necessity.⁸⁴ But within philosophical discourse, a *paccaya* is a “cause” or “condition” expressed in terms of the metaphor of a basis or source

be unintelligible without it. Moreover, at SN 22: 62 and elsewhere, the Buddha is reported to severely censure those *samaṇas* who deny causality, though this censure generally concerns the denial of the efficacy of *kamma*.

81. For example, DN 2 PTS I 37: *tathāgato loke uppajjati arahaṃ sammāsambuddho*.

82. Whitney 1889, §1145, 422.

83. PED 384.

84. For example, Mil. 339: *paccaya-sammissita-sīlaṃ*, “virtuous conduct dependent on the [monastic] supports.” In the Pāli canon itself the word used is *parikkhāra*, “requisites.”

of movement.⁸⁵ Hence we find: “Moving against (*paṭicca*) whatever basis (*paccaya*) it arises (*uppajjati*), consciousness is reckoned accordingly.”⁸⁶ This example illustrates nicely the full metaphor of NATURAL CAUSATION IS UPWARD MOVEMENT, consisting of various elements:⁸⁷

upward motion (arising, <i>uppāda</i>)	→	natural causation
upward moving phenomenon		
(e.g., consciousness)	→	a natural effect
original location (basis, <i>paccaya</i>)	→	situation taken as a
		natural cause

To say that consciousness arises from a basis or source is to say metaphorically that a certain situation is the cause of consciousness. In this case, the general philosophical claim is that consciousness is caused by the senses together with their objects.

This leaves the question of how exactly to understand the conceptual metaphor implied by *paṭicca* in the expression *paṭicca-samuppāda*. As we have seen, *pacceṭi* is a verb of motion, which can sometimes be translated “falls back on,” in a nonmetaphorical way. But we have also seen that the word *paṭicca* is used in the sense of “because of,” as when it is said that the Buddha surveyed the world “because of” (*paṭicca*) compassion. This usage conveys the conceptual metaphor REASONS ARE MOVEMENTS, which is also intelligible in English, in that we might say, “the Buddha’s teaching goes back to his compassion” to express the idea that “the Buddha’s teaching exists because of his compassion,” or we might say “calm comes from meditation” to express the idea that “calm exists because of meditation.” In this connection, the Pāli *paṭicca* is often glossed in the commentaries by *āgamma*,⁸⁸ the absolutive from *āgacchati*, “comes.”⁸⁹

85. I have generally previously translated *paccaya* as “causal basis” rather than “condition,” first because “causal basis” preserves a connection with the conceptual metaphor implied by the Pāli *paccaya*, and second because the word “condition” in English is itself a metaphor for cause drawn from the language of agreements (from Latin *condicio*).

86. MN 38 PTS I 259: *yaññadeva paccayaṃ paṭicca uppajjati viññānaṃ tena teneva saṅkhaṃ gacchati*.

87. Adapted from Lakoff and Johnson (1999, 213).

88. For instance, in Ud-a. 429, on Ud. 8: 8: *paṭicca nissāya āgamma paccayaṃ katvā*: “‘Dependent on’ means ‘relying on,’ ‘owing to,’ ‘placing on a basis.’” I discuss *nissāya* later.

89. DOP I 280 s.v. *āgacchati*.

The verb *pacceṭi* is also used to express belief or trust, as in the Brahman who *pacceṭi*, “goes back to,” “believes in,” purification through water. In this case, the English phrase “falls back on” gives similar expression to a belief or trust, embodying the metaphor BELIEFS ARE MOVEMENTS.⁹⁰ *Paṭicca* is also glossed in the commentaries by *nissāya*, the absolutive from *nissayati*, which means “leans on,” from the root *si* “lean,” “lie” (Sanskrit *śri*), with the prefix *ni-*, “down,” “back.”⁹¹ The connection between *pacceṭi* and the verb *nissayati* is evident in a verse from the *Sutta-nipāta*:

So a monk should really not “lean on” (*nissayeyya*) the seen,
the heard or the thought, or on virtue and vows.⁹²

To say that the monk should not “lean on” experience is to say that he should not place his trust in how things appear, according to the metaphor of BELIEFS ARE MOVEMENTS.

There does not seem to be a particularly exact English equivalent to these Pāli words expressing reasons and beliefs in terms of movement. Instead, the absolutive *nissāya* tends to be translated “dependent on,” “relying on,”⁹³ phrases expressing an attitude of trust; while the absolutive *āgama* is translated “owing to,” “in reference to,”⁹⁴ phrases that convey a reason or explanation. Turning now to our paradigmatic sentence, “dependent on (*paṭicca*) the eye and visual forms arises eye-consciousness,” it is apparent that the relation of eye-consciousness (*cakkhu-viññāna*) to eye (*cakkhu*) and visual forms (*rūpā*) is impersonal; *paṭicca* expresses the idea neither of a reason nor of a belief, since the eye and visual forms do not constitute a person, but only constituents of experience. Rather, *paṭicca*

90. It is interesting to note that Sanskrit *pratyaya* also takes the meaning “belief,” “trust” (MW 673), according to a conceptual metaphor of BELIEFS ARE MOVEMENTS; PED 384 gives the same meaning for *paccaya* but does not cite canonical sources.

91. DOP II 626 s.v. *nissayati*.

92. SN 798: *tasmā hi diṭṭham va sutam mutam vā | silabbatam bhikkhu na nissayeyya* || (*nissayeyya* is the optative of *nissayati*). In the verses from the *Sutta-nipāta* cited earlier, note 37 in this chapter, the action noun *nissaya*, that is, “leaning on” (with *karoti*, “makes,” “places”), is used in exactly the same way as *pacceṭi*.

93. DOP II 627 s.v. *nissayati*: “1.(i) depending on, relying on; using as one’s support.” *Nissāya* is also used in the sense of “(ii) because of, for the sake of,” which, like *paṭicca*, expresses the concept of a reason.

94. DOP I 281 s.v. *āgacchati*.

cooperates in the expression of impersonal, natural causation within the philosophical discourse of early Buddhist doctrine. It is striking in this regard that the word *nissāya*, for all that it is similar in both etymology and usage to *paṭicca*, is not used impersonally in Pāli and did not become a technical term in philosophical discourse.⁹⁵

Just as there does not appear to be an exact equivalent in English for Pāli words like *nissāya* and *āgamma*, expressing beliefs and reasons in terms of movement, so there is no exact equivalent for *paṭicca*, expressing causal relatedness as movement.⁹⁶ We saw, however, that we can use the English phrase “dependent on” to express the sense of “trusting in” implied by *paṭicca* and *nissāya*, and likewise we can use the phrase “dependent on” to express the sense of causal relatedness in *paṭicca*. The English phrase “dependent on” is in fact used very often to express the relation of an effect with a cause in the impersonal language of natural causation: we might say “consciousness is dependent on the sense and their objects” to express how the senses and their objects as cause relate to consciousness as effect. The adjective “dependent” means “hanging down,”⁹⁷ which is not quite a “moving-against,” but it is used metaphorically to express the concept of something’s “having its existence conditioned by something else.”⁹⁸ Hence the English phrase “dependent on” offers a close analogy to *paṭicca*, even though the idea of an arising which is dependent on something else is a mixed metaphor, since something “moving up” cannot at the same time be “hanging down.”

95. Instead it became a term in monastic *saṅgha* discourse to describe the relationship of a junior monk to a senior: DOP II 628 s.v. *nissāya*: “2. in (formal) dependence . . . having as mentor.”

96. It would seem that the Chinese translators of the early Buddhism faced a similar problem when they came to render *paṭicca-samuppāda*. The standard translation is 緣起 (*yuánqǐ*), 緣 (*yuán*) meaning cause or reason, and 起 (*qǐ*) rise or start. Hence the Chinese translation of *samuppāda* as *qǐ* was able to preserve the metaphor of upward movement, while that of *paṭicca* as *yuán* rendered the concept rather than the metaphor.

97. From the French *dépendre*, “to hang down.”

98. OED s.v. dependent: “1. Hanging down . . . 2.a. That depends *on* something else; having its existence contingent on, or conditioned by, the existence of something else.”

In this section I have tried to indicate the importance of conceptual metaphor for an understanding of the expression *paṭicca-samuppāda*. I have suggested that “arising” is the most suitable translation of *samuppāda*, preserving the conceptual metaphor of NATURAL CAUSATION IS UPWARD MOVEMENT evident in the Pāli. Likewise I suggest that “dependent on” is the most suitable translation of *paṭicca*, even though it is not exact. However, it does preserve some sense of metaphor, unlike an alternative translation of *paṭicca* as “conditioned,” which attempts to render the concept of causal relatedness without recourse to metaphors of movement.⁹⁹

Conclusion: Causation and Organic Growth

I would like to finish this chapter on translating *paṭicca-samuppāda* with a consideration of the need for a translation that is down-to-earth. One can imagine the Buddha, having gained awakening, wondering how to express his newfound insights, so subtle and rare, in the language of his day. While certain concepts and metaphors were available in his religious and philosophical culture, his awakening was, so it is believed, something new and original in the experience of humankind, demanding new formulations as well as reformulations of the old. Such a scenario might explain the novel concept of *paṭicca-samuppāda*, apparently not otherwise found in the language of ancient India. Of course, ancient Indians, like human beings all over the world, had observed and described causation in the world around them, but the concept of dependent arising was an invitation into the systematic description and investigation of how experience works, how *dukkha* arises, and how it can be brought to an end. The natural and impersonal working of causation in experience is the conceptual key to the Buddha’s teaching.

And yet this concept is formulated in language that is intimately related to ordinary human experience. To say that a phenomenon arises dependent on some causal basis allows the concept of causation to be easily imagined, even though the impersonal causation of human experience

99. And cf. note 85 in this chapter.

is in practice difficult to understand. One way in which this concept of causation can be imagined is in terms of a simple visual representation of the meaning of *paṭicca-samuppāda*, taking into account the implied conceptual metaphor UPWARD MOVEMENT IS NATURAL CAUSATION:

origination = arising
from = dependent on
a cause = a basis

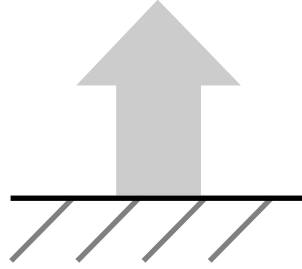


Figure 9.1. *paṭicca-samuppāda* as conceptual metaphor.

I am not suggesting that such a visual representation is anywhere implied in early Buddhist accounts of *paṭicca-samuppāda*; only that someone with a visual imagination, hearing the conceptual metaphor implied by the Pāli expression, might easily think of it in such a form.

However, although no such visual representation of *paṭicca-samuppāda* is found in early Buddhist accounts, it is in fact implied by illustrations of the working of dependent arising in terms of organic growth. These illustrations were evidently supposed to help early Buddhists to imagine what was meant by dependent arising. Some stanzas attributed to the *bhikkhunī* Selā do this most clearly. Replying to Māra, who has asked her if she knows anything about where her body has come from, its fate, and purpose, she says:

This body was not made by myself, this pain¹⁰⁰ was not
 made by another.

It has come to be dependent on (*paṭicca*) a cause, and ceases
 from the cause's breakup.

100. *agha*, “evil, sin, pain, distress” (DOP I 16), but probably figuratively the body: “This body (*kāya*) should be viewed as impermanent, as suffering, as a disease, as a boil, as an arrow, as a pain (*agha*), as an illness, as other, as decaying, as empty, as without self” (MN 74 PTS I 500).

As a particular seed grows when sown in a field,
 Owing to (*āgamma*) both good earth as well as to moisture,
 So the constituents, elements, and six sense-realms
 Have come to be dependent on a cause and cease from the
 cause's breakup.¹⁰¹

Here, dependent arising is illustrated by the growth of a seed when the causes and conditions for that growth are present. In another example of an agricultural comparison for the workings of dependent arising, consciousness itself is compared to a seed, which grows in the presence of certain causal conditions: “Karma is the field, consciousness is the seed, craving is the moisture. For beings obstructed by ignorance and fettered by craving, consciousness is established in an inferior realm. In this way there is future production of renewed existence.”¹⁰² This comparison of consciousness to a seed is further developed in another discourse:

The four continuities of consciousness should be seen as being like the element of earth. Passion and delight should be seen as being like the element of water. Consciousness should be seen as being like the five kinds of seeds. Consciousness, while it continues to exist, might continue to exist while being involved with form; having form as a basis and a ground and sprinkled with delight, it might come to increase, growth, and expansion.¹⁰³

101. SN 5: 9 PTS I 134: *nayidaṃ attakataṃ bimbaṃ | nayidaṃ parakataṃ aghaṃ | hetuṃ paṭicca sambhūtaṃ | hetubhaṅgā nirujjhati || yathā aññataraṃ bijaṃ | khetto vuttaṃ virūhati | pathavīrasañcāgamma | sinehañca tadūbhayaṃ || evaṃ khandhā ca dhātuyo | cha ca āyatanā ime | hetuṃ paṭicca sambhūtā | hetubhaṅgā nirujjhare ||*

102. AN 3: 76 PTS I 223: *kammaṃ khettaṃ viññānaṃ bijaṃ taṇhā snebo. avijjānīvaranānaṃ sattānaṃ taṇhāsanyojanānaṃ hīnāya dhātuyā viññānaṃ patitṭhitaṃ evaṃ āyatīṃ punabbhavābhiniḅbatti hoti.* This is repeated for rebirth in a “middle” (*majjhima*) realm and a “superior” (*pañña*) realm. Cf. AN 3: 77.

103. SN 22: 54 PTS III 54–55: *seyyathāpi bhikkhave pathavidhātu evaṃ catasso viññānatṭhitiyo datṭhabbā. seyyathāpi bhikkhave āpodhātu evaṃ nandirāgo datṭhabbo. seyyathāpi bhikkhave pañca bijajātāni evaṃ viññānaṃ sāvāraṃ datṭhabbaṃ. rūpūpayaṃ bhikkhave viññānaṃ tiṭṭhamānaṃ tiṭṭheyya rūpārammaṇaṃ rūpappatitṭhaṃ nandūpasecanaṃ vuddhiṃ virūlhiṃ vepullaṃ āpajjeyya.* This passage is repeated with form (*rūpa*) replaced by feeling (*vedanā*), perception (*saññā*), and formations (*saṅkhārā*).

The comparison of the workings of experience to the natural growth and development of plants, as would have been familiar to ancient Indian agriculturalists, is given fullest expression not in the Pāli discourses but in the Rice-Stalk Discourse (*Śālistamba Sūtra*), which is usually regarded as an early Mahāyāna scripture. Here, objective (*bahya*) dependent arising is explained in terms of the causes and conditions for the growth of stalk and fruit from a seed, while subjective (*ādhyātmika*) dependent arising is explained in terms of the twelve *nidānas* from ignorance to aging-and-death and of the six elements.¹⁰⁴ That is to say, the same concept of dependent arising applies objectively to plants and subjectively to experience.

We see then that the language used by early Buddhists to explain how experience works is not a form of discourse that is remote from ordinary life but is rather drawn from the familiar workings of nature. The following visual representation is designed to suggest this familiarity while clearly communicating exactly the same concept as the more abstract visual representation suggested earlier:

origination = arising
from = dependent on
a cause = a basis

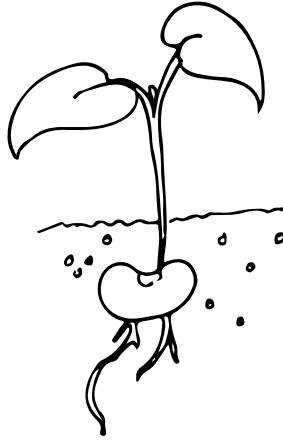


Figure 9.2. *paṭicca-samuppāda* represented as organic growth.

If it is indeed true that the language of *paṭicca-samuppāda* would have been accessible to its first listeners, and that the concept of causation that it expresses was constructed out of familiar metaphors, then our translation into English ought likewise to be at home in ordinary language. Hence, I contend, we should prefer the translation “dependent arising” over such

104. See Reat (1993, esp. 34ff.).

translations such as “dependent origination” or “conditioned co-production,” which belong to the jargon of Buddhism rather than to the soil of life.¹⁰⁵ The translation “dependent arising” best suggests the naturalistic concept of causation to which the term *paṭicca-samuppāda* refers, in its own cultural context, as is illustrated through comparisons to organic growth.

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105. Indeed, “dependent origination” and especially “conditioned co-production” are rather good examples of what Paul Griffiths (1981) has called “Buddhist Hybrid English.”

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