

Playing with Fire: The *pratītyasamutpāda* from the Perspective of Vedic Thought

The present paper is an attempt to look at the law of dependent origination (*pratītyasamutpāda*) from the perspective of earlier Vedic thought, rather than that of the Buddhist texts and tradition. This perspective reveals several striking similarities between the Buddha's chain and the Vedic ideas of creation.

These similarities are reflected in the general structure of both processes and, in many instances, in particular notions denoting their stages. I am, nevertheless, well aware that in their specific contexts the Vedic creation and the Buddha's *pratītyasamutpāda* displayed a whole gamut of distinct meanings. I am also aware of the fundamental difference between these two processes: the former (the process of the creation of the world) is regarded as desirable; the latter, which leads to suffering, is not.

In my analysis I shall work with the classical formulation of the *pratītyasamutpāda*, consisting of twelve links. I am aware of the existence of different formulations in the Pāli Canon,¹ but taking all of them into consideration goes beyond the scope of this paper and needs a closer collaboration between Vedic and Buddhist scholars.

I am going to show the most important Vedic equivalents of each link and the main lines along which the Buddha's reasoning may have gone. Since I am not a Buddhologist, I do not attempt to analyze here all the meanings which have been ascribed to these links in Buddhism; I restrict myself to their principal and most general meanings.

I would also like to stress that I am aware that the interpretation of the *pratītyasamutpāda* as a polemic against the Vedic cosmogony tackles only one aspect of this huge problem; as the Buddha said to Ānanda: "This conditioned origination is profound and it appears pro-

¹See Mejer 1994, pp. 136–49.

found”² (*gambhīro cāyam ānanda paṭiccasamuppādo gambhīrāvabhāso ca*). The investigation of all the other questions connected with the understanding of the Buddha’s chain remains within the scope of Buddhology.

Generalities

On the most general level, the Vedic cosmogony and the *pratītyasamutpāda* describe the creation of the conditions for subject-object cognition, the process of this cognition, and its nature, which, in both descriptions, is represented by the image of fire.³

Inspired by Prof. Richard Gombrich’s investigation,⁴ I am inclined to believe that this similarity is neither accidental, nor caused by the Buddha’s inability to free himself from the mental paradigms of his culture. I would rather argue that he formulated the *pratītyasamutpāda* as a polemic against Vedic thought.⁵ Through the identification of the creative process with the process that leads only to suffering, he rejected the Brāhmaṇic way of thinking in a truly spectacular way.

In Vedic cosmogony, the cognitive process is undertaken by the self-cognizing Absolute. The reflexive character of this process is expressed by the word *ātman*, which denotes both the Absolute itself, the conveyor of the cosmogonic process, and the forms assumed by the Absolute in this process: the world, the human being, the inner Self, and finally the fire altar, which expresses those manifestations on the ritual level. The negation of the *ātman*’s existence postulated in the Buddha’s doctrine of *anattā* leads to the conclusion that the whole Vedic cosmogony is based on a false assumption and its acceptance inevitably leads only to suffering.

²D II 55, Gombrich’s translation (in Gombrich 1996, p. 46).

³See Reat 1990, p. 328.

⁴Gombrich 1996; Gombrich 1992, pp. 159–78.

⁵This may have been done not by the Buddha personally, but by the authors who composed the Pāli Canon. In such a case, they would be the ones who disputed with the Veda. Who disputed is less important here than the fact that there was such a dispute.

The character of the similarities between the Vedic creation and the *pratītyasamutpāda* enables us to propose a tentative reconstruction of the line of the Buddha’s argument, which consisted in the redefinition of Brāhmaṇic notions and ideas.⁶ Although the Buddha rejected the existence of the *ātman*, he did not reject the *ātman*’s transformations, but in formulating his *pratītyasamutpāda* he restricted their meaning so as to make them denote the process of human entanglement in empirical existence. This process is deprived of any absolute grounds that could serve as its justification, so the best thing that can be done is to stop it as soon as possible.

A general example could be provided by the famous declaration of the Buddha that in this “fathom-long body” (*vyāmamate kaḷevare*) is the world, its origin, its cessation, and the path which leads to its cessation.⁷ The Sanskrit term *vyāmamātra* appears in ŚB 1.2.5.14 denoting the measure of the altar. It has the shape of a man and is not only the counterpart of the sacrificer but also the manifested counterpart of the Creator (Prajāpati), and his body is understood as being identical with the cosmos within which all the cosmogonic changes take place. If we deny the existence of the Creator, these changes can occur only in a human being.

The Vedic cosmogonic descriptions begin already in the R̥gveda, which constitutes the basis for later Brāhmaṇic philosophy. Both the fundamental model of creation and the characteristic way of describing it were formulated here. Creation is described in metaphors which have many semantic layers and allow for simultaneous expression of all aspects of the creative process understood as the cognitive

⁶See Gombrich 1996, pp. 31ff., 42; Gombrich 1992, pp. 162ff.

⁷S I 62: *api khvāham āvuso imasmiññeva vyāmamate kaḷevare saññimhi samanake lokam ca paññāpemi lokasamudayaṃ ca lokanirodham ca lokanirodhagāminiṃ ca paṭipadan-ti.*

transformations of Agni, fire.⁸ The famous Nāsadiya (RV 10.129) assembles the Ṛgvedic cosmogonic ideas into a general model and introduces a new kind of description which uses not only metaphors but also abstract terminology.⁹

The model of creation proposed by the Nāsadiya constitutes an important starting point for later philosophic speculations. The essentials of the process change neither in ŚB nor in the oldest Upaniṣads. The differences lie mainly in its description. In early ŚB, the cognitive character of the cosmogony is expressed in metaphors, the metaphor of eating food and of the sexual act;¹⁰ in later ŚB and the early Upaniṣads, descriptions using abstract terminology appear more and more frequently, although metaphors are also in use.

It goes beyond the scope of this paper to analyze all the reasons for this continuity in cosmogonic conceptions, but two of them seem to be evident. The first is the Vedic assumption about the basic character of the Ṛgveda: later literature constitutes its commentary, which has to explain the details of Ṛgvedic thought rather than to formulate new metaphysical postulates. The second is the possible repetition, under the guidance of a spiritual teacher, of the mystic experience of Ṛgvedic poets (*kavi ṛṣī*), during which the riddle of the world's creation and existence was solved.

It is possible to find the references to various Vedic texts (RV, ŚB, BU, AU, TU and CU) in the *pratīyasamutpāda*. It seems that the Buddha chose those cosmogonic descriptions which met two conditions: first, they explicitly express the cosmogony as transformations of the *ātman*; second, they preserve their cognitive meaning, even if they are taken out of the Vedic context.¹¹

⁸This is the main thesis of my book "Kosmogonia Rygwedy: Myśl i metafora" ("The Cosmogony of the Ṛgveda: Thought and Metaphor") forthcoming this year (2000).

⁹See Jurewicz 1995a, pp. 141–51, Jurewicz 1995b, pp. 109–28.

¹⁰See Jurewicz 1997, pp. 31–46.

¹¹See below on, *viññāna*, *nāmarūpa*, the limitation of the number of the

At the same time, it seems that the Buddha (perhaps for polemical purposes) aimed greatly to simplify the Vedic ideas; the most important result of this is that he let go the cyclical character of the process: the *pratīyasamutpāda* is a simple, linear process.¹² And finally, in formulating the notions which denote the successive links of the chain, he used abstract terminology instead of metaphors (which he made much use of in his own explanations).¹³

We could say then, a bit paradoxically, that in this chain the Buddha extracted the essence of Vedic cosmogony and expressed it in explicit language.

I. *avidyā*

The actual term *avidyā* does not appear in Vedic cosmogony. But the ability to cognize appears in it. Firstly, the pre-creative state of reality is identified with the state of being unknowable: the Ṛgvedic *Nāsadiya* describes it as the state in which neither *sāt* nor *ásat* exists. These notions have both ontological and epistemological meaning, so their negation means not only that neither being nor non-being exists in the pre-creative state but also that it is impossible to assert whether anything exists or does not exist. It is a state of total inexpressibility. Using the Buddha's term, one could call it pre-creative *avidyā*.

Continuing the description of the creation, the Nāsadiya describes the manifestation of the creative power of the Absolute, called *tád ékam*, and then describes the appearance of darkness hidden by itself (*táma āsīt támasā gūḥám*). In the Ṛgveda, darkness symbolizes the states which are characteristic for night, when no activity physical or mental takes place; cognition begins with the *váreṇyaṃ bhárgas* of Savitṛ arousing thoughts (RV 3.62.10). The image of darkness which appears after the image of the creative manifestation should be

āyatanas.

¹²The only exception is the possible repetition of *avidyā* in *trṣṇā*.

¹³See first of all the concepts *trṣṇā* and *upādāna* instead of the image of Agni the fire.

interpreted as expressing the impossibility of cognition.

This inability to cognize is different from the pre-creative one. It is the state in which not every kind of cognition is impossible but only the subject-object one. The two spheres, the hiding and the hidden, mark the future subject-object division. But at this stage of creation both spheres are dark, so still identical, and cognition cannot be performed. Using the Buddha's term, one could call it creative *avidyā*.

The later cosmogonic texts usually do not describe the pre-creative state of unknowableness,¹⁴ but very often depict the second, creative inability to cognize, understanding it as the impossibility of subject-object cognition exactly as inferred from the Nāsadīya description. The most explicit text is BU 1.4.: here the Creator (*ātman*) in the form of man (*puruṣavidha*) realizes his own singularity: he looks around and he does not see anything else but himself, which indicates not only that there existed nothing aside from himself, but also that he was not able to cognize anything other than himself.¹⁵

The idea of the inability to cognize, the result of the absence of anything other than the Creator, is also expressed in the suggestive metaphors of Agni the fire, who because of hunger attacks his Creator (ŚB 2.2.4.1–4), and of Death, identified with hunger, who looks for food (BU 1.2.1).

¹⁴Its description appears in the descriptions of liberation, see for example BU 4.3.23–32.

¹⁵BU 1.4.1: *ātmaivedam agra āsīn puruṣavidhaḥ | so 'nuvīkya nānyad ātmano 'paśyat|*; see also AU 1.1: *ātmā vā idam eka evāgra āsīn nānyat kiṃcana miṣat|*. It seems justified to associate the idea of winking expressed by the root *√miṣ* with the idea of being alive and awake, which in its turn is associated with the possibility of cognition. It also seems probable that the idea of being a not-cognizing *ātman* may constitute one of the meanings of *avidyā*, which is the source of all the successive events inevitably leading to entanglement in the empiric world. This inevitability is also present in the Vedic cosmogony: once *ātman* manifested his inability to cognize, the rest of the creative process became a constant attempt to fill the epistemic and ontological gap which appeared in the perfect and full Absolute.

2. *saṃskāra*

When the Creator asserts the absence of anything other than himself and his inability to cognize, the wish or desire for the presence of “a second” appears in him. In BU 1.2.1 this wish is expressed in the formula *ātmanvī syām*, because “the second” is identical with the Creator; in other words, “the second” is his own *ātman*.¹⁶

This cosmogonic Creator's wish to create the *ātman* is sometimes expressed in ŚB by the subjunctive form of the verb *sam √kṛ* (with or without *abhi*). Here, Prajāpati wants to build himself (*ātmānam*) in the form of a fire altar, which is his body and the cosmos at the same time. He exudes from himself his eating (subjective) and eaten (objective) parts. Then, he devours food with his eating part. Thus, Prajāpati builds himself up (*ātmānam abhisamkaroti*), which is a natural consequence of eating.¹⁷

For instance, in ŚB 6.2.1 Prajāpati, wishing to find his son Agni hidden in the five sacrificial animals, says: “They are Agni. I want to make them myself” (ŚB 6.2.1.5: *ime vā agnir imān evātmānam abhisamkaravai*).¹⁸ He kills the animals, cuts off their heads, puts them on (*upa √dhā*), and throws the torsos into the water. Then he looks for the torsos, calling them himself (*ātman*, ŚB 6.2.1.8: *yam imam ātmānam apsu prāpiplavaṃ tam anvicchāni*). He takes water and earth which was in the contact with the torsos of the animals and builds the bricks. Then he thinks: “If I create my true self in this way, I will become a mortal carcass, with the evil unremoved” (ŚB 6.2.1.9: *yadi vā idam ittham eva sadātmānam abhisamkariṣye martyaḥ kuṇapo'napahatapāpmā*

¹⁶What follows is the description of the creation and formation of the *ātman*, which is, first of all, the cosmos (BU 1.2, BU 1.4, AU), but also the human being, and also the innermost self of the cosmos and the human being (AU). The fact that the presence of “the second” is the necessary condition for subject-object cognition is often stated in BU in its descriptions of liberation, e.g. 4.2.14, 4.3.23–32.

¹⁷See ŚB 7.1.2, 10.4.2 and 6.2.1 analysed below.

¹⁸Eggeling's translation (in Eggeling 1989, Vol. 3, p. 162).

bhaviṣyāmi). He bakes the bricks in the fire and out of the torsos of the animals he builds the altar; the heads he puts under the altar. Thus he reunites the heads of the animals with the torsos in the fire altar which is himself, his own *ātman*, and becomes the fire (ŚB 6.2.1.12: *tato vai prajāpatir agnir abhavat*).

The creation of the second self described in the myth is the creation of the self in the process of eating. Agni's disappearance from Prajāpati's range of view corresponds to the images of the internal void felt by Prajāpati, attested in many places in ŚB, which should be identified with hunger.¹⁹ Prajāpati's desire to find Agni is in fact the desire to eat him. ŚB 6.2.1.15 identifies five animal forms of Agni with food (*anna*).²⁰ The animals are prepared before eating: they are killed and their heads are separated from their torsos. The image of putting on (*upa √dhā*) the heads refers to the act of eating them, through which Prajāpati puts the heads inside himself. It is not necessary to cook them because they are of fiery nature: they have mouths identified in the Veda with fire.²¹ The eating of the fiery heads allows Prajāpati himself to obtain the mouth enabling him to eat food. We may conclude that the image of the cooking of the torsos in the fire symbolizes not only the act of cooking food before it is eaten — lest it be eaten raw, which may cause death — but also the very act of eating food and digesting it in the internal fire of the Creator. Thus, Prajāpati, having eaten the fiery animals, becomes the fire; he confirms his identity with the fire and at the same time he regains himself in his *ātman*.

It is important to see the similarity between ŚB's description and the Upaniṣadic descriptions presented above: the image of Agni's disappearance, and so of his absence, corresponds to the image in which the *ātman* realizes his singularity, so the absence of any object and the

¹⁹E.g. 3.9.1.1, 10.4.2.2 where Prajāpati feels empty (*rīricāna iva mene*), 7.1.2.1 where the food is flowing out from Prajāpati when he is relaxed.

²⁰In *Tāṇḍyamahābrāhmaṇa* 21.2.1 (in Lévi 1898, p. 25) the creatures run away from Prajāpati fearing that he will eat them.

²¹See for example ŚB 7.1.2.4.

impossibility of its cognition. So it appears that the beginnings of the cosmogony in the Veda could be described in the terms of the *pratītya-samutpāda*: *saṃskāra* arises from *avidyā*.²²

3. *vijñāna*

The term *vijñāna* appears in TU 2 in a significant context. TU 2 describes five *ātman*s called “buckets” (*kośa*): one made of food and liquid (*annarasamaya*), one made of breath (*prāṇamaya*), one made of the mind (*manomaya*), one made of consciousness (*vijñānamaya*), and one made of bliss (*ānandamaya*). What the TU is here presenting is the liberating process during which a human being cognizes and realizes ever deeper layers of himself: all the *ātman*s have the form of man (*puruṣavidha*) — they have the head, the sides/wings, the feet/tail, and the torso. This means that these *ātman*s are also the fire altar and the cosmos, exactly like Prajāpati's *ātman* in ŚB.²³ They also have the same form of man as the *ātman* (Creator) from BU 1.4.

If we reverse the process described in TU (which is justified on Vedic grounds),²⁴ we get the image of the creation of the successive

²²It is worth noticing that in the very image of hunger the ideas of *avidyā* and of *saṃskāra* are present: hunger is both the lack of food and the desire to have it.

²³This identification directs us to the five layers of the fire altar and to the sacrificer's journey along these layers up to heaven, which is performed during the sacrifice. The above description of TU would probably be the first description of liberating activity understood as the act of climbing up, not only within the cosmos, but also within one's own body up to the head (which is identified with heaven), since the successively realized *kośas* are inside the human being.

²⁴Also the description of the four stages of *ātman* (see CU 8.7–12) has this twofold meaning of the liberating and the creative process. In later thought (*smṛti*), the *pralaya*'s order clearly reverses the order of creation. It is also worth noting that there is a great similarity between the order in which the five *ātman*s are realized and the stages of yoga in its later formulation: *āsana* means bodily practice (corresponding to the *ātman annarasamaya*), *prāṇayama* is breath practice (*ātman prāṇāmaya*), *nirodha* is the cessation of mental perception (*ātman manomaya*) and of the *buddhi*'s activity (*ātman*

*ātman*s, that is, of the successive forms of oneself having head, sides/wings, feet/tail, and torso.²⁵ Now the *ātman ānandamaya* symbolizes the pre-creative state,²⁶ the *ātman vijñānamaya* symbolizes

vijñānamaya) which culminates in the realization of the highest reality (*ātman ānandamaya*). The roots of classical yogic ideas seem to be here.

²⁵See ŚB 10.4.2.26, where Prajāpati, having created three worlds identified with the womb and with the *ukhā*, pours himself into them — made of metres, of hymns, of breaths, and of gods — identified with semen (*sa eṣu triṣu lokeṣūkhāyām | yonau reto bhūtam ātmānam asiñcac chandomayaṃ stoma-mayaṃ prāṇamayaṃ devatāmayaṃ*). The three worlds which are the womb and the *ukhā*, should be identified with the eater (the *ukhā* as the belly, that is, something which eats, appears in ŚB 7.5.1.38; in BU 1.4.6 the womb and the mouth and the internal part of hands are identified as those parts of *ātman* which are hairless). The Prajāpati's *ātman* — made of metres, made of hymns, made of breaths, made of gods — is the eaten food. And this very act results in creating the new *ātman* of Prajāpati, which is expressed in forms of the root *sam √kr*: “In the course of a half-moon the first body (*ātman*) was made up, in a further [half-moon] the next [body — *ātman*], in a further one the next — in a year he is made up whole and complete” (translation in Eggeling 1989, Vol. IV, p. 354, *tasyārdhamāse prathama ātmā samaskriyata dāvīyasi paro dāvīyasi paraḥ saṃvatsara eva sarvaḥ kṛtsnaḥ samaskriyata* |). The process of creating a new *ātman* for Prajāpati is identified with the building of the fire altar (ŚB 10.4.2.27); we may presume that his three *ātman*s enumerated above are the three *citis* of the altar corresponding to the earth, the *antarikṣa*, and the sky. One should remember, however, that in the fire altar we have five *citis* (there are two more: one between the *citi* corresponding to the earth and that to the *antarikṣa* and one between the *citi* corresponding to the *antarikṣa* and that to the sky).

²⁶This seems to contradict the claim made above that the pre-creative state is the state of unknowableness. There are, however, many descriptions in the Upaniṣads which identify this state with the state in which cognition is impossible (e.g. BU 4.3.23–32, 4.2.14). As explained there, the impossibility of cognition results from the Absolute's singularity. The idea of this singularity is also present in the notion of *ānanda*, which is also used to denote the bliss gained in the sexual act, during which the unity of the subject and the object is realized (as far as is possible), and this unity may be interpreted in Vedic thought as the state of singularity of the subject: according to BU 1.4.3, when the *ātman* wants to create his “second self” he splits himself into husband and wife and this division is the very creation of “the second”.

the Creator's first manifestation, that of his consciousness;²⁷ the *ātman manomaya* is the appearance of thought and of desire for a second self; the appearance of the *ātman prāṇamaya* and *annarasamaya* is the creation of the second self which is alive and has a body thanks to eating and drinking.

The above description of the cosmogony generally agrees with the cosmogonic descriptions of ŚB, in which Prajāpati, having manifested himself (*ātman vijñānamaya*), wants to create his second self (*ātman manomaya*), and then transforms himself into the eater and the food. Vedic thought identifies the *prāṇa* with fire,²⁸ which is the eater, while *anna* and *rasa* obviously play the role of food.

BU 4.4.5 supports the cosmogonic interpretation of the reversed process described in TU 2. This lesson gives important evidence for the understanding of *vijñāna* in Buddhism as the transmigrating element, the analysis of which goes beyond the scope of this article. The term *vijñānamaya* appears here after the description of the dead and (at the same time) liberated *ātman* and is used exactly in the same order as in TU: the *ātman brahman* is made of consciousness, made of mind, made of breath, made of eye, made of ear, made of earth, made of water, made of space.²⁹ Finally, it appears that the *ātman* is made of the whole cosmos, so we should presume that BU 4.4.5 describes the return of the *ātman* to the world after his death/liberation and his repeated cosmogenesis, in which the *ātman brahman* mentioned in the beginning corresponds with the *ātman ānandamaya* in TU.³⁰

²⁷*Vijñāna* is the highest cognitive power in the human being, e.g. BU 2.4.5: *ātmā vā are draṣṭavyaḥ śrotavyo mantavyo nididhyāsitavyo maitreyi | ātmano vā are darśanena śravaṇena matyā vijñānenedaṃ sarvaṃ viditam* |.

²⁸See note 57.

²⁹*sa vā ayam ātmā brahma vijñānamayo manomayaḥ prāṇamayaś cakṣurmayah śrotamayaḥ pṛthivīmaya āpomayo vāyumaya ākāśamayas tejomayo 'tejomayaḥ kāmamayo 'kāmamayaḥ krodhamayo 'krodhamayo dharmamayo 'dharmamayaḥ sarvamayaḥ | tad yad etad idaṃmayo 'domaya itil* |.

³⁰See also BU 4.4.22: *ātman vijñānamaya* in the space of the heart, being

Assuming that the *vijñāna* link corresponds to this stage of the Vedic cosmogony in which the Creator manifests his consciousness, it is important to notice that in the Brāhmaṇic ideas of creation the manifestation of the consciousness is cyclically repeated. The creation of the world is the process of the *ātman*'s realization of his inability to cognize, of his wish to cognize himself, and of his cognitive power. This power once again displays its inability to cognize, its wish to cognize, and its cognitive act, and so forth. In other words, the process is the constant manifestation of the *ātman* as the object of cognition, as the will to cognize the object, and as the subject performing the cognition.

We may then assume that the *avidyā* link refers to all the states of ignorance (objective states) which manifest themselves in the cosmogony. So the *saṃskāra* link refers to all the acts of the creative will to dispel ignorance, and the *vijñāna* link refers to all the subjective manifestations which realize this will. This means that the sequence *avidyā* — *saṃskāra* — *vijñāna* can be used to express the whole Vedic creation.³¹

sarvasya vaṣṭi sarvasyeśānaḥ sarvasyādhipatiḥ; a very similar (but later) description to the *śuṣupti* state in MāU (5–6): *yatra supto ... na kañcana svapnaṃ paśyati ... eṣa sarveśvaraḥ | eṣa sarvajñaḥ | eṣo'ntaryāmī* |, which makes a synthesis of TU's (*sarvajña*) and CU's (*svapnaṃ na paśyati*) descriptions of the third stage of the *ātman*. In BU 3.9.28.7 *brahman* is both *vijñāna* and *ānanda*.

It should be added that the cosmogonic scheme which agrees with the reversed process of TU is continued by the later descriptions (later Upaniṣads, *smṛti* and classical *sāṃkhya*), where the first manifestation of the Absolute (*smṛti*) and of the *prakṛti* (*sāṃkhya*) is the *buddhi*, identified with the *vijñāna* in KU 1.3.9. There are other similarities between the *buddhi* and the *vijñāna*: the most important function of the *buddhi* are discernment and decision making (*adhyavasāya*); the idea of discernment is also present in the root *√jñā*. *Buddhi* (as the *vijñāna*) is also the highest human cognitive power.

³¹See *nāmarūpa*, *śaḍāyatana*, *trṣṇā*. The mechanism is the same, although the Buddha in his description used different terms. If *avidyā* referred to the pre-creative state, it could have an ontological meaning (like the terms *asat* or *anṛta*), i. e. asserting the non-existence of any pre-creative reality.

The miserable situation of the *ātman* can be seen very clearly now: it not only does not exist, but, what is more, it cyclically repeats its false cognition and postulates its own existence. Put in the terms of the first three links of the *pratīyasamutpāda*, the Vedic cosmogony reveals its absurdity.

4. *nāmarūpa*³²

In Vedic cosmogony, the act of giving a name and a form marks the final formation of the Creator's *ātman*. The idea probably goes back to the *jātakarman* ceremony, in the course of which the father accepted his son and gave him a name. By accepting the son, he confirmed his own identity with him, by giving him a name he took him out of the unnamed, unshaped chaos and finally created him.³³ The same process can be observed in creation: according to the famous passage from BU 1.4.7, the *ātman*, having given name and form to the created world, enters it "up to the nail tips".³⁴ Thus, being the subject (or we could say, being the *vijñāna*), he recognizes his own identity with the object and finally shapes it. At the same time and by this very act he continues the process of his own creation as the subject: within the cosmos, he equips himself with the cognitive instruments facilitating his further cognition.³⁵ As the father lives in his son, so the *ātman* undertakes

³²The Vedic sources of this link are known to Buddhologists, see Frauwallner 1990, Vol. 1, pp. 216ff.

³³In ŚB 6.1.3 Prajāpati gives names to Agni in order to make him *apahata-pāpman*, "without evil"; *pāpman* is identified with death (*mṛtyu*, see for example ŚB 10.4.4.1, 11.1.6.8), and death symbolizes the pre-creative state.

³⁴This means that the *ātman* and the cosmos have the same *puruṣavidha* shape (*taddhedam tarhy avyākṛtam āsīt | tan nāmarūpābhyām eva vyākriyata ... sa eṣa iha praviṣṭa ā nakhāgrebhyah* |). The idea of the *nāmarūpa* appears also in ŚB 6.1.3, ŚB 11.2.3, CU 6.1–4. The Creator enters the world after its division into name and form also in ŚB 6.1.3. In ŚB 11.2.3.1–6 and in CU 6.3.2–4 the entrance of the Creator into the world takes place at the very moment of its division into name and form.

³⁵According to the BU 1.4.7, the *ātman* takes up cognitive activity within the created cosmos, giving names to his cognitive powers: *prāṇann eva prāṇo*

cognition in his named and formed self.³⁶

But self-expression through name and form does not merely enable the Creator to continue self-cognition. At the same time, he hides himself and — as if divided into the different names and forms — loses the ability to be seen as a whole.³⁷ Thus the act of giving name and form also makes cognition impossible, or at least difficult.

I think that this very fact could have been an important reason for the Buddha's choosing the term *nāmarūpa* to denote an organism in

nāma bhavati vadan vāk paśyaṃś cakṣuḥ śṛṇvañ śrotram manvāno manaḥ | tāny asyaitāni karmanāmāny eva | In ŚB's metaphor of eating, the giving of name and form is the creation of food and its devouring, which results in creating the eater.

³⁶This whole idea can also be expressed in ŚB's metaphor of eating: the eater, having created his own body, enters it. On the one hand, it means that the eater eats the created body and thus makes it his own (confirms his own identity with it). On the other hand he lives in the new body acquired thanks to the act of eating it, see ŚB 6.2.1, quoted above.

³⁷This idea is present for example in ŚB 6.1.3, where the act of giving names to Agni and his assuming forms adequate to the names results in its being impossible to recognize Agni as a whole: only his different forms are visible (ŚB 6.1.3.19: *so'yaṃ kumāro rūpāny anuprāviśan na vā agniṃ kumāram iva paśyanty etāny evāsyā rūpāni paśyanty etāni hi rūpāny anuprāviśat |*). Similarly, in BU 1.4.7 the division of the *ātman* into name and form causes it to become imperceptible as a whole: *yathā kṣuraḥ kṣuradhāne 'vahitaḥ syād viśvaṃbharo vā viśvaṃbharakulāye | taṃ na paśyanti | akṛtsno'hi saḥ | ... sa yo 'ta ekaikam upāste na sa veda | akṛtsno hy eṣo 'ta ekaikena bhavati | ātmety evopāsīta | atra hy ete sarva ekaṃ bhavanti |* It should be noted that in BU 1.4 the description of the creative division into name and form appears after the description of *ātman*'s division into male and female parts, so the order is different from that in the Buddha's chain, where *nāmarūpa* appears before *ṣaḍāyatana*. Likewise, ŚB's description of Agni, divided into name and form, appears before the whole story of creation which was interpreted as a description of the beginnings of creation. I would explain this as the Buddha's attempt to gather different Vedic descriptions in one general, simple scheme in which the cognitive character of the concepts is the most important. The main line of both schemes is the same: the creation of the subject is followed by the creation of the object no matter what it is called (the *ātman* who is as great as a man and a woman embracing each other or the *ātman* who is divided into names and forms).

which *viññāna* settles. If we reject the *ātman*, who, giving himself name and form, performs the cognitive process, the division of consciousness into name and form has only the negative value of an act which hinders cognition. As such, it fits very well into the *pratītyasamutpāda* understood as the chain of events which drive a human being into deeper and deeper ignorance about himself.³⁸

5. *ṣaḍāyatana*, 6. *sparśa*, 7. *vedanā*

The cognitive character of the next three links of the *pratītyasamutpāda* (*ṣaḍāyatana*, *sparśa*, *vedanā*) is obvious,³⁹ but it is worth noticing that they also concur with the stages of the Vedic cosmogony.

The appearance of the subjective and objective powers during creation takes place in the act of the *ātman*'s division into name and form. It is also metaphorically described by BU 1.4.3: the *ātman*, led by the desire for its second self, becomes as great as a man and a woman embracing each other. Then it divides itself into husband (subject) and wife (object), who join together in the sexual act, which symbolizes the cognitive union of subject and object.⁴⁰

From this perspective, it is also important that the term *āyatana* appears in the cosmogonic descriptions of AU. This Upaniṣad begins with a description of the *ātman*'s lonely existence before creation. It realizes its cosmogonic will and creates the worlds and their eight guardians (*lokapāla*), also called deities (*devatā*). These guardians are born in the process of heating the cosmic man, who is split into

³⁸The image of the Creator's manifestation in name and form is one of the most explicit Vedic images expressing the cognitive character of creation. This could also be an important reason for the Buddha's choosing the term *nāmarūpa*.

³⁹See Oldenberg 1994, pp. 222ff., Frauwallner 1990, Vol. 1, pp. 218ff.

⁴⁰BU 1.4.3. *sa haitāvān āsa yathā strīpumāṃsau sampariṣvaktau | sa imam evātmānaṃ dvedhāpatayat | tataḥ patīś ca patnī cābhavatām | ... tāṃ samabhavat | tato manuṣyā ajāyanta |* The fact that in the sexual union of the subject and the object the Creator unites with his female part is confirmed in ŚB 6.1.2.1: *so 'gninā pṛthivīm mithunaṃ samabhavat*, see also ŚB 6.1.2.2–9.

cognitive instruments which are the source of their cognitive power, and out of which their respective guardians are finally born. Thus, each *lokapāla* becomes the highest cognitive manifestation governing the respective cognitive power and instrument (e.g. the sun governs the eyesight and the eye).⁴¹ But in order to exist they need an object: they are in danger of dying and they ask the *ātman*: “Find us a dwelling in which we can establish ourselves and eat food”⁴² (AU 1.2.1: *āyatanam naḥ prajānīhi yasmin pratiṣṭhitā annam adāma*). The *ātman* brings them a cow and a horse, but they are rejected by the guardians, who finally accept a man. So *ātman* tells them: “Enter, each into your respective abode”⁴³ (AU 1.2.3: *yathāyatanam praviśata*). And the guardians enter the man in the inverse order of the creative process.⁴⁴

Thus *āyatana* in AU is the abode of the highest subjective powers dwelling in the cosmos and in a human being (*puruṣa*), governing the cognitive powers and instruments. At the same time, each *āyatana* becomes the object of cognition of these cognitive powers and instruments (e.g. the eye cognizes the sun through eyesight). So their appearance in AU has the same meaning as the appearance of the six

⁴¹*mukha* — *vāc* — *agni*, *nāsike* — *prāṇa* — *vāyu*, *akṣiṇī* — *caḥṣus* — *āditya*, *karṇau* — *śrotra* — *diśas*, *tvāc* — *lomāni* — *ośadhi-vanaspatayaḥ*, *hṛdaya* — *manas* — *candramas*, *nābhi* — *apāna* — *mṛtyu*, *śiśna* — *retas* — *āpas*. Note the similarity between the creative process and other Vedic cosmogonic descriptions analysed here, and at the same time the similarity with the links of the *pratītyasamutpāda*. The *ātman*, having realized its cognitive incapacity (in ŚB’s expressions the lack of food and its own hunger, the *avidyā* link) creates its cosmic manifestation in the form of man (*ātmānam puruṣavidham*), in which it settles the highest subjective power (the *viñāna* link preceded by the will to create — *saṃskāra*).

⁴²Olivelle’s translation (in Olivelle 1998, p. 317).

⁴³Olivelle’s translation (in Olivelle 1998, p. 317).

⁴⁴*agni* — *vāc* — *mukha*, *vāyu* — *prāṇa* — *nāsike*, *āditya* — *caḥṣus* — *akṣiṇī*, *diśas* — *śrotra* — *karṇau*, *ośadhi-vanaspatayaḥ* — *lomāni* — *tvāc*, *candramas* — *manas* — *hṛdaya*, *mṛtyu* — *apāna* — *nābhi*, *āpas* — *retas* — *śiśna*. This is the final formation of the *ātman*’s self, corresponding to the final creation of the fire altar and cosmos in ŚB and BU and the *nāmarūpa* link in the *pratītyasamutpāda*. AU sees it also as the creation of the human being.

abodes in the *pratītyasamutpāda*: the manifestation of the subjective powers and their objects.⁴⁵

As far as *vedanā* is concerned, the convergence of Vedic cosmogony and the Buddha’s chain is not so clear, although one may indicate possible paths of exploration. The meaning of *vedanā* as the emotional reaction to contact directs us to BU 1.4.2-3, where the lack of “the second” means the lack of possibility of experiencing negative (fear) or positive (joy) feelings towards an object. The creation of “the second” will create the possibility of experiencing these feelings.

It is also worth noticing that the root \sqrt{vid} appears in the cosmogonic context at CU 8.12.4-5. This Upaniṣad describes the liberation of the *ātman* through the process of realization of the four states and then the cognitive return of the liberated *ātman* into the world, which means his repeated creation. Here the root \sqrt{vid} denotes the *ātman*’s consciousness of the will to perform subject-object cognition.⁴⁶

⁴⁵See Schayer 1988, p. 114. The difference lies in the number of the abodes, of which AU enumerates eight. Five abodes in AU (*mukha*, *nāsike*, *akṣiṇī*, *karṇau*, *tvāc*) agree with the abodes enumerated by the Buddha, the sixth is the heart (*hṛdaya*), which in the Buddha’s chain is replaced by the mind (*manas*, connected with the heart also in AU). The last two (*nābhi*, *śiśna*) have cognitive meaning only in the Vedic context, so it is not surprising that they do not appear in the *pratītyasamutpāda*.

⁴⁶*atha yatra itad ākāśam anuviṣaṇam caḥṣuḥ sa cāḥṣuṣaḥ puruṣo darśanāya caḥṣuḥ | atha yo vededaṃ jighrāṇīti sa ātmā gandhāya ghrāṇam | atha yo vededaṃ abhivivāharāṇīti sa ātmābhivivāhārāya vāk | atha yo vededaṃ śṛṇavāṇīti sa ātmā śṛavanāya śrotram | (4) atha yo vededaṃ manvāṇīti sa ātmā | mano’sya daivam caḥṣuḥ |* The image of sight dispersed in space refers to the Ṛgvedic images of the cosmogonic sunrise which creates the possibility of seeing and cognizing: *ākāśa* is the space which is brightened by the rising sun; *cāḥṣuṣaḥ puruṣaḥ* is *ātman* — the Creator of the world identified with the sun, who manifests himself in the form of a golden man standing in the space between the earth and the sky, marking the path of the rising sun and constituting the cosmic pillar (*skambha*). It is he who is aware of his will to perform subject-object cognition.

One possible Vedic source of *vedanā* as the effect of *sparśa* on the philological level seems to be BU 3.2.9, where the causative of \sqrt{vid} is used to

If we posit that the Buddha referred to this image in formulating the *vedanā* link, it is important to notice the difference between the description of CU and the *pratītyasamutpāda*: in CU the consciousness of the subject-object cognition precedes the act, whereas in the Buddha's chain, it comes after the act. On the other hand, we might argue that the next link in the *pratītyasamutpāda* is *trṣṇā*, which is the craving for continued subject-object acts, so it is possible to claim that here too *vedanā* precedes the successive subject-object acts.

8. *trṣṇā*, 9. *upādāna*

The process of Vedic cosmogony can be further expressed in the next two links of the *pratītyasamutpāda*, *trṣṇā* and *upādāna*.

After the final creation of the cosmos, human beings become the next manifestation of the Creator's subjective power. This is clearly seen in the Ṛgvedic Nāsadīya, according to which the Creator (*tād ēkam*) manifests itself as the cosmos (*ābhū*) and then divides into the subjective part, constituted by the poets (*kavāyas*), and the objective part, constituted by the world cognized by the poets. Next, Nāsadīya describes the poets' union with the world as they extend the ray (*raśmī*). This image (apart from its other meanings) symbolizes the act of releasing semen and the poets' sexual union with the world.⁴⁷ This in turn symbolizes the poets' cognitive act, as the very essence of their activity is the cognition and naming of reality. At the same time, the sexual character of the metaphor strengthens the similarity of the act it

denote the act of recognizing tactile contact (*tvāg vai grahaḥ | sa sparśenātogrāheṇa gṛhītaḥ | tvacā hi sparśān vedayate* |).

⁴⁷See Jurewicz 1995a, pp. 145–14; Jurewicz 1995b, pp. 120–24. BU 1.4.4, having presented a description of the birth of the human beings from the first sexual act between husband and wife, does not describe their creation but the creation of different masculine parts of the *ātman*, which — led by sexual craving, we can presume — looks for the appropriate feminine parts in order to join with them sexually: *sā gaurabhavad vṛṣabha itaraḥ | tāṃ sam evābhavat | tato gāvo'jāyanta | vaḍavetarābhavad aśvavṛṣa itaraḥ | gardabhītaraḥ gardabha itaraḥ | tāṃ sam evābhavat | tata ekaśapham ajāyata* | and so forth.

expresses to the act expressed by the links of *trṣṇā*: craving for another person constitutes the basis of sexual activity.⁴⁸

It is important to notice here that the poets' activity realizes on the microcosmic scale the cosmogonic activity of the Absolute.⁴⁹ This fact sheds an interesting light on the division of the *pratītyasamutpāda* into two shorter chains, one of which begins with *avidyā* and the other with *trṣṇā*, as proposed in the commentary on the *Udānavarga*.⁵⁰ The Vedic material justifies the division of the *pratītyasamutpāda* in this way, which further supports the thesis that the Buddha was referring to Vedic data when he formulated his chain.⁵¹

The references are more distinct here than may at first appear. The Buddha in his descriptions of *trṣṇā* very often refers to the image of fire.⁵² I think that the reason why he does so is not only because the metaphor of fire is particularly expressive, but also because something more lies behind it: here he is referring to the Vedic image of creation as performed by human subjects.

Now we have to go back to the Ṛgvedic image of the poets pervad-

⁴⁸This reflects the cyclical character of Vedic cosmogony: the appearance of the poets precedes the manifestation of semen and desire in the Creator (a typically sexual image), and the poets repeat the Creator's activity.

⁴⁹This may also be expressed in the terminology of the *pratītyasamutpāda*: the poets meet an unknown object (symbolized in the Ṛgveda mainly by a rock or the night), which corresponds to the image expressed in the *pratītyasamutpāda* as *avidyā*; then they assume the subjective form (*viññāna*), which is probably preceded by the will to get the object (*saṃskāra*; the presence of this will is guaranteed by the sexual metaphor used to describe the poets' activity). The next stage is the recognition of the object and its creation (*nāmarūpa*). This correspondence with the *pratītyasamutpāda* is especially clear at BU 1.4.4. The idea that man repeats the Absolute's creative activity is also present in the interpretation of the ritual in ŚB which is the step-by-step repetition of the cosmogony of Prajāpati.

⁵⁰See Mejer 1996, p. 124.

⁵¹My interpretation is different from that of Frauwallner (1990, Vol. 1, p. 220), who postulated that the two shorter chains came first and were then superficially joined together.

⁵²See Oldenberg 1994, pp. 223–24.

ing the dark object with their ray. In other hymns of the R̥gveda, the poets (called *kavī,ṛṣi* or fathers) are depicted as inflamed with internal heat (*tāpas*) and they burn the rock, which symbolizes the object that they recognize. They are often identified with specific families of poets, especially with Aṅgirasas — the sons of Agni.⁵³

What is more, in the R̥gveda forms of the root $\sqrt{trṣ}$, from which the noun *trṣṇā* is derived, denote the fire's activity.⁵⁴ It may be assumed that in formulating the *trṣṇā* link, the Buddha was also referring to the fiery activity of the poets burning the world in the cosmogonic act of cognition. In his chain, their activity is deprived of its positive dimension and is identified only with the negative aspect of fire, which in its insatiability digests, and thus destroys, itself and the world around it.

One more thing is important here. The state of primal creative ignorance is often expressed by the image of hunger, which in turn is identified with Agni.⁵⁵ It appears then that the beginnings of creation were

⁵³See for example RV 3.31, 4.1–3, 9.97.39, 10.109.4, 10.169.2. Aṅgirasas as sons of Agni: RV 1.71.8. Agni himself is called Aṅgiras (see for example RV 1.31.1, 1.127.2, 6.11.3, 10.92.15) and *kavī* (e.g. RV 1.149.3, 4.15.3, 5.15.1, 6.7.1).

⁵⁴The covetous burning identified with devouring is so characteristic a feature of the fire that it becomes the basis for comparisons: RV 10.113.8 *raddhām vṛtrām āhīm indrasya hānmanāgnīr nā jāmbhais trṣv ānnam āvayat* || Agni as *tātṛṣṇā* RV 1.31.7, 2.4.6, 6.15.5 *ā yó ghrṇé nā tātṛṣṇā ajārah*, while he burns the trees and the bush RV 1.58.2,4, 7.3.4, 10.91.7. See also RV 4.7.11 *trṣú yád ānnā trṣúnā vavākṣa trṣúm dūtām kṛṇute yahvó agnīh | vātasya melīm sacate nijūrvann āsúm nā vājayate hinvé árvā* ||, RV 1.140.3 *trṣucyút*, RV 4.4.1 *trṣvīm anu prásitīm drūnāno*. The second meaning of the forms of the root $\sqrt{trṣ}$ is the state caused by the influence of the warmth: thirst (RV 1.85.11, 1.116.9, 1.173.11, 1.175.6, 5.57.1, 7.33.5, 7.69.6, 7.89.4, 7.103.3, 9.79.3), lack of water (RV 4.19.7), sweating (RV 1.105.7). In RV 8.79.5 form of the root $\sqrt{trṣ}$ refers to mental desire (*arthīno yānti céd ártham gāchān id dadúšo rātīm | vavrjyús trṣyataḥ kāmam* ||).

⁵⁵See above, *saṃskāra*. Compare the void experienced by Prajāpati expressed in ŚB by the forms of the root \sqrt{ric} , see also ŚB 2.2.4, BU 1.2. It has already been noted that the state of primal ignorance is also identified with death. It is interesting to compare this state with what Gombrich (1996, p. 78) says about Māra: “Buddhist Māra at the same time represents desire, and the life he is

also understood in the Veda as the manifestation of fire, exactly like the poets' creative activity.⁵⁶ From the Vedic perspective, the *pratītya-samutpāda*'s division into two shorter chains, starting from *avidyā* and *trṣṇā*, is fully justified.

The identity of the poets' activity and the beginnings of creation results from the basic Vedic assumption that cosmogony is the manifestation of Agni, the fire, who, out of the darkness symbolizing the pre-creative state of ignorance, emerges in creative enkindling and generates the conditions of cognition: light which reveals shapes and speech that enables their naming and recognition.⁵⁷ When Agni the fire fully

urging is the life in the world, performing the fire sacrifice (*aggihutta*). In the Veda, death appears in the beginnings of cosmogony and, identified with hunger and Agni, comprises desire. I would wonder, then, whether *aggihutta* should be taken in its narrow, ritual meaning; it may be better to understand it as referring to fire as the metaphysical principle of cosmogony and life.

⁵⁶In RV *trṣṇā* is joined with the *nirṛti* symbolizing the pre-creative state (1.38.6 *mó śú nah párá-parā nirṛtir durhánā vadhīt | padīṣṭā trṣṇayā sahā* ||) or with the enemies of the Aryans (RV 1.130.8) symbolizing the same (because they are dark (e.g. RV 1.130.8), they are asleep (RV 4.51.3), they are not able to cognize (e.g. RV 3.18.2), to speak in a proper way (e.g. RV 3.34.10), or to perform sacrifices (e.g. RV 7.6.3)).

⁵⁷This idea goes back to RV (e.g. the idea of *apām nāpāt*) and is developed in later Vedic thought. Prajāpati's *ātman* is created in the process of burning (\sqrt{tap}) and has the form of the fire altar; the confirmation of the Creator's identity with fire constitutes the last act of the cosmogony. In ŚB 2.2.4 creation is the act of blowing out the fire identified with *prāṇa*. In ŚB 10.5.3 the transformations of the *manas* end with the manifestation of fire. There are also evident proofs that the idea of the Upaniṣadic *ātman* goes back to the idea of fire, for instance the identification of Agni and *ātman* with *prāṇa* and the wind (already in RV 1.34.7, 7.87.2) and with the sun (RV 1.115.1, 1.163.6). In RV 1.73.2 Agni is compared to the *ātman*. The Upaniṣadic evidence also attests the fiery nature of the *ātman*, who in the creative process transforms through burning (BU 1.4, AU \sqrt{tap}) and congealing under the influence of the warmth (AB \sqrt{murch}). See also BU 1.4.7, where the *ātman* divided into names and forms is compared to the fire hidden in its nest (note 37), and also CU 3.13.7–8, where the means of cognition of the *ātman* are the means of cognition of the fire: *tasyaiṣā dṛṣṭiḥ | (7) yatraitad asmiñ śarīre saṃsparśenoṣṇimānaṃ vijānti | tasyaiṣā śrutir yatraitat karṇāv apiḡhṛya*

manifests his blazing *ātman* in the cosmos, creation is taken up by the burning poets. Through them Agni burns in the world he created. He burns voraciously and constantly needs fuel in order to exist. And this constant, voracious devouring of the fuel and its digesting are expressed by *upādāna*. The meaning of this word is both “fuel” and “grasping”.⁵⁸ The first evokes the fire metaphor with its concrete meaning of burning fuel and eating food; the second is more abstract and refers to cognitive activity. So it encompasses the activity of Agni as described in the Veda.

10. *bhava*, 11. *jāti*, 12. *jarāmaraṇa*

The last three links of the *pratītyasamutpāda* evidently may refer to the activity of fire which may come into being, be born, and die because it burns the fuel. This is how the Buddha interpreted it.⁵⁹

In the Vedic formulation, it is the constant cognitive craving of the fiery Absolute which guarantees the coming into existence (*bhava*) of the creation. This is also expressed by the Vedic metaphors for subject-object contact: the metaphor of sexual union and the metaphor of eating, actions which result in a new existence or assure the continuation of the existence achieved so far.⁶⁰

Some similarities between the last three links of the *pratītyasamutpāda* and the Vedic cosmogony may also be seen in AU, where the *ātman*, having created the cosmos and man (*puruṣa*), opens the top of the head and is born in it, in order to recognize that it is he who is man

ninadam iva nadathur ivāgner iva jvalata upaśṛṇoti |

⁵⁸See Gombrich 1996, pp. 48, 67–69; also, Oldenberg 1994, pp. 223–24

⁵⁹See Oldenberg 1994, pp. 223–24.

⁶⁰What is more, it is the very cognitive act directed to an object which assures the existence of the subject which *ex definitione* is the cognizing entity: at the moment when the cognition is interrupted, it ceases to be the subject. The fulfilment of self-cognition and the disappearance of the desire for it to continue means the end of the world, just as for the Buddha the disappearance of craving means the end of the process realized in all the links of the *pratītyasamutpāda*.

and the cosmos (AU 1.3.12–13). Then AU describes three births of the *ātman* in human beings: inside a woman at the moment of conception, during the physical birth, and at death (AU 2). Thus, the *ātman* exists in the world before its birth and its death: its *bhava* precedes its *jāti* and *jarāmaraṇa*.

Describing the existence of the *ātman* in the form of an embryo inside the womb, AU several times uses the causative form of the verb $\sqrt{bhū}$ in order to denote that his life is supported by his mother. It is not impossible that the term *bhava* in the Buddha’s chain refers to this very image.⁶¹ The possible references to this part of AU could be confirmed by another, later Buddhist interpretation of the *pratītyasamutpāda*, according to which these three last links describe the existence that follows the existence described in links 3–9 (*viññāna — upādāna*).

In its description of the three births of the *ātman*, AU stresses the reflexive character of this act, which is understood as the *ātman*’s self-transformations. The *ātman* existing in man as his semen is at the same time the father — the giver of semen, and the semen itself — the potential offspring. The *ātman*, fed by its pregnant mother, becomes identical with her, so it is its own mother. This reflexive character is also present in the description of the *ātman*’s dying.⁶²

According to AU, the *ātman* is nourished by the pregnant woman in her womb: “For the continuance of these worlds, for it is in this way that these worlds continue”⁶³ (*eṣāṃ lokānāṃ saṃtatya evaṃ saṃtatā*

⁶¹AU 2.1.2–3: *sāsyaitam ātmānam atra gataṃ bhāvayati* (2) | *sā bhāvayitrī bhāvayitavyā bhavati* | *taṃ strī garbhaṃ bibharti* | *so’gra eva kumāraṃ janmano’gre’dhi bhāvayati* | *sa yat kumāraṃ janmano’gre’dhi bhāvayati ātmānam eva tad bhāvayati* | (3)

⁶²*puruṣe ha vā ayam ādīto garbho bhavati yad etad retaḥ* | *tad etad sarvebhyo’ṅgebhyas tejaḥ saṃbhūtam ātmany evātmānaṃ bibharti* | (2.1.1) | *tat strīyā ātmabhūyaṃ gacchati yathā svam aṅgaṃ tathā* | *tasmād enāṃ na hinasti* | (2.1.2.) | *so ‘syāyam ātmā puṇyebhyaḥ karmabhyaḥ pratidhīyate* | *athāsyāyam itara ātmā kṛtakṛtyo vayo gataḥ praiti* | *sa itaḥ prayann eva punar jāyate* | *tad asya trītya janma* | (2.1.4).

⁶³Translation by Olivelle (1998, p. 321).

hīme lokāḥ). This immediately makes one think of the idea of the *dharmasamtāna* which appears in the explanations of the *pratītyasamutpāda*.⁶⁴ The difference is crucial: in the Vedic cosmogony *lokānām samtāna* is realized thanks to the self-transformations of the *ātman*; in the *pratītyasamutpāda*, the *ātman* does not exist; there are only changes.⁶⁵

It is surely significant that the *locus classicus* for the exposition of the *pratītyasamutpāda* is called the Mahānidānasutta. The word *nidāna* appears in the cosmogonic context in RV 10.130.3: “What was the prototype, what was the counterpart and what was the connection between them?” (*kāsīt pramā pratimā kiṃ nidānam*). In ŚB 11.1.6.3 *pratimā* is the cosmos identified with the fire altar, in ŚB 11.1.8.3 *pratimā* is sacrifice.⁶⁶ The *pramā* is Prajāpati, the Creator, the *nidāna*, the link between the Creator and the creation: their identity. Thus *pramā* and *pratimā* resolve themselves into *nidāna* which guarantees and expresses their identity.

Nidāna, denoting the ontological connection between different levels and forms of beings, also refers to the epistemology: it also gives the explanation of this connection.⁶⁷ I presume that this is the first meaning of *nidāna* in the title of the Buddha’s sermon. It is really “a great explanation”: there is no *ātman*, the *nidāna* of the cosmogony. The negation of the ontological *nidāna* constitutes the Buddha’s *mahānidāna*.

I would like to propose a mental experiment here. The Buddha preached at least some of his sermons to educated people, well versed in Brāhmaṇic thought, who were familiar with the concepts and the general idea of the Vedic cosmogony. To them, all the terms used in the *pratītyasamutpāda* had a definite meaning and they evoked definite associations. Let us imagine the Buddha enumerating all the stages of

⁶⁴Mejor 1996, p. 122.

⁶⁵See Gombrich 1996, p. 62.

⁶⁶Smith 1989, pp. 73–75.

⁶⁷Smith 1989, p. 79.

the Vedic cosmogony only to conclude: “That’s right, this is how the whole process develops. However, the only problem is that no one undergoes a transformation here!” From the didactic point of view, it was a brilliant strategy. The act of cutting off the *ātman* — or rather, given his fiery nature, the act of blowing him out — deprives all the hitherto well-defined concepts of their meanings and challenges the infallibility of all their associations, exposing the meaninglessness, absurdity even, of all the cosmogonic developments they express.

The similarities between the Vedic cosmogony and the *pratītyasamutpāda* which I have been trying to show are too evident to be pure coincidence. If we agree with the thesis that the Buddha in formulating the *pratītyasamutpāda* was referring to Vedic cosmogony, his chain should be treated as the general model for Vedic cosmogony but negating its metaphysical, cognitive, and moral sense. To apply the doctrine of *anattā* here would be to deny the *ātman* as the metaphysical basis of all cosmogonic transformations as well as its final forms as they successively appear in the stages of the process. This deprives the Vedic cosmogony of its positive meaning as the successful activity of the Absolute and presents it as a chain of absurd, meaningless changes which could only result in the repeated death of anyone who would reproduce this cosmogonic process in ritual activity and everyday life.

And since fire is the intrinsic character of the *ātman*, *nirvāna* can mean not only the liberating recognition of the *ātman*’s absence, but also the refutation of the whole of Vedic metaphysics, which postulates that fire underlies, conditions, and manifests itself in the cosmogony.

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ABBREVIATIONS

AB	Aitareya Upaniṣad
BU	Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad
CU	Chāndogya Upaniṣad
D	Dīgha Nikāya
KU	Kaṭha Upaniṣad
MāU	Māndūkya Upaniṣad
RV	Ṛgveda
S	Samyutta Nikāya
ŚB	Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa
TU	Taittirīya Upaniṣad

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