

Three Cheers for Tanhā

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INTRODUCTION

Anyone acquainted with either the Pāli *suttas* or the Theravāda tradition as a whole, if asked for an opinion on the spiritual status of *tanhā*, usually translated as ‘craving’, would most likely answer along the lines that *tanhā* is entirely antithetical to the Buddhist spiritual quest, the *brahmacariya*, and is almost akin to the Christian notion of ‘original sin’, in the sense that no one is born without it. As the second of the Four Noble Truths tells us, *tanhā* is the cause of *dukkha* or ‘suffering and unsatisfactoriness’, the first Noble Truth, and the cessation of *tanhā*, the third Noble Truth, is synonymous with *nirvāṇa* itself, the very goal of Buddhist practice. *Tanhā* is said to be the ‘seamstress’ that ‘sews one just into this ever-becoming rebirth’.¹ It is that by ‘which this world is smothered, enveloped, tangled like a ball of thread, covered as with a blight, twisted up like a grass-rope, so that it overpasses not *saṃsāra*, the Downfall, the Way of Woe, the Ruin’.² It is likened to an ‘arrow... thickly smeared with poison’.³ Selecting certain passages from the Pāli *suttas*, one can build up a view of *tanhā* as completely unwholesome and anti-spiritual, something that has simply to be negated. Notwithstanding this reprobation of *tanhā*, in this essay I will present a more sympathetic view, a view that highlights the wider implications of *tanhā*, and contends that without it there would be no Buddhist spiritual life – no *brahmacariya* or ‘pursuit of excellence’ – and therefore no Buddhas. [144]

1. THE TERM *TANHĀ*

Tanhā is literally ‘drought’ or ‘thirst’ and, as the *Pali-English Dictionary* informs us, ‘is found mainly in poetry, or in prose passages charged with emotion. It is rarely used in the philosophy or the psychology’. Figuratively, it means ‘craving, hunger for, excitement, the fever of unsatisfied longing’. Given its poetic pedigree, *tanhā* can be said to be a term that appeals more to the imagination than reason, and this may be why it is hardly mentioned in the lists and abstract permutations of the later technical, not to say arid, literature of the Abhidhamma. To those who heard the word from the mouth of the Buddha or one of his disciples, *tanhā* no doubt evoked an acute pathos which the translation ‘craving’ miserably fails to do. To understand *tanhā* as simply one affect among other affects would be a mistake. For example *tanhā*, as we shall see, is a term that has cosmic significance, and is a notion that is best understood metaphorically, as a metaphor that evokes the general condition that all unenlightened beings find themselves in in the world: a state of being characterized by a ‘thirst’ that compels a pursuit for appeasement, the urge to seek out some form of gratification. In other words, *tanhā* is a metaphor for the existential and affective ground underlying the whole of *saṃsāric* existence,⁴ the ground out of which spring the various strivings for satisfaction, fulfilment, and meaning. It can therefore be understood as an attempt to characterize, in a single metaphor, the general condition of unenlightened existence, as well as providing the primary reason why *saṃsāra* is deemed ultimately to be *dukkha* or ‘unsatisfactory’: as *saṃsāra* cannot *fully* quench our ‘thirst’, it must appear to one who fully understands this (i.e. an *ariya*) as *dukkha*.⁵

2. THE COSMOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

In the *Aggañña Sutta*, which is as near as Buddhism comes to having a kind of Genesis, at the end of the ‘devolution’ (*saṃvatta*) cycle of the cosmos,⁶ most beings are said to be reborn in the Ābhassara Brahmā world, where they are said to ‘dwell, mind-made, feeding on delight, self-luminous, moving through the air, glorious’. They remain in this condition for ‘a very long time’. However, all things being impermanent, the ordinary world begins to evolve again, and those self-luminous beings, as a result of their ‘merit’ (*puñña*) running [145] out, tumble down the Buddhist version of the ‘great chain of being’ and eventually hover around the now evolving earth. As the Buddha tells it to Vāsetṭha:

‘At that period, Vāsetṭha, there was just one mass of water, and all was darkness, blinding darkness. Neither moon nor sun appeared, no constellations or stars appeared, night and day were not distinguished, nor months and fortnights, nor years or seasons, and no male and female, beings being reckoned just as beings. And sooner or later, after a very long period, savoury earth spread itself over the waters where those beings were. It looked just like the skin that forms itself over hot milk as it cools. It was the colour of fine ghee or butter, and it was very sweet, like pure wild honey.

‘Then some being of a greedy nature said: “I say, what can this be?” and tasted the savoury earth on his finger. In so doing, he became taken with the flavour, and *taṇhā* arose in him. Then other beings, taking their cue from him, also tasted the stuff with their fingers. They too were taken with the flavour, and *taṇhā* arose in them... And as a result their self-luminance disappeared... the sun and moon appeared, night and day were distinguished, months and fortnights appeared, and the year and its seasons. To that extent the world re-evolved.’ (D ii. 84–85)⁷

The once self-luminous beings continue their ‘fall’, becoming coarser and coarser as they become more and more entangled in the world, until they eventually create the kind of troubled and divided world that surrounds us today, populated by people like us, driven by all sorts of affects. And, as we can see, it is *taṇhā* that replaces the infamous bite of the infamous apple,⁸ causing the world to re-evolve – a kind of Buddhist version of the ‘fall’ – but here the apple is replaced by what seems to be one of those delicious Indian sweets, and the ‘fall’ is only a part of a cycle that endlessly repeats itself. We also notice that *taṇhā* arose not in the mind of a crude, biologically conditioned being, stuck somewhere in the mid-reaches of the *kāma-loka*, but in the mind of a *deva*, a divine ‘self-luminous’ being from the reaches of the *rūpa-loka*.⁹ Elsewhere, the Buddha declares that *taṇhā* is the ‘fuel’ (*upādāna*) that links one life with the next,¹⁰ implying that *taṇhā* is the radical condition for [146] existing anywhere within the Buddhist cosmos, including its higher, more refined reaches. The cosmic significance of *taṇhā* is also witnessed elsewhere. For example, in the *Aṅguttara Nikāya* we have:

‘Bhikkhus, a first beginning of *bhava-taṇhā* cannot be known [*paññāyati*] before which one could say *bhava-taṇhā* did not exist, it has since come to be.’ (A v. 116)

Although this *sutta* mentions *bhava-taṇhā*, which, together with *kāma-taṇhā* and *vibhava-taṇhā* is one of a group of three *taṇhās* mentioned in the *suttas*,¹¹ and not *taṇhā* per se, I think it is rather obvious that *bhava-taṇhā* or the ‘thirst-to-be’, being the most general and basic of the three, is, in fact, *taṇhā* per se. For example, *kāma-taṇhā* is ‘thirsting’ after specifically sensual experiences and is, therefore, an aspect of the more general *bhava-taṇhā*, which is ‘thirsting’ after *any* form of being or experience – it is simply the urge to *be*, or, more correctly, to *become* (*bhava*). If we assume that

existence does not have an inherent Freudian ‘Death Wish’, then the third *taṇhā*, *vibhava-taṇhā* or ‘hirst for non-existence’, is more likely to be the outcome of the continual frustration of *bhava-taṇhā* and *kāma-taṇhā*, and is therefore a secondary and derived state. The fundamental *taṇhā* is therefore *bhava-taṇhā*, which I would understand as being synonymous with *taṇhā* per se.

Given this, we can say that *taṇhā* has cosmic significance. Like the cosmos itself, its beginning is said to unknowable,¹² and it is presented, in this Buddhist ‘Genesis’,¹³ as the primary and affective condition that sets in motion another cycle of the Buddhist cosmos, implying that it is understood to be the primal condition out of which all other affects can be said to develop. *Taṇhā*, from this perspective, can be understood as the all-pervasive and fundamental characteristic of the Buddhist cosmos; its *raison d’être*.

3. TAṆHĀ AS A METAPHOR

In the *sutta* before the one just quoted, what is said of *taṇhā* having no knowable first beginning is also said of ‘spiritual ignorance’ (*avijjā*).¹⁴ Commenting on these two *suttas*, Buddhaghosa asks: ‘But why does the *Bhagavant* [i.e. the Buddha] give the exposition of *saṃsāra* with [*taṇhā* and *avijjā*] as starting [147] points?’ He provides his own answer: ‘Because they are the principal causes of action [*kamman*] that lead to happy and unhappy destinies’.¹⁵ Unlike Christianity and Islam, Buddhism does not posit any particular point in time when the universe first came into being, let alone posit any first cause: the cosmos has no known first beginning. Therefore, even these two ‘principal causes’ of *taṇhā* and *avijjā* are not in any manner *causa sui*, but said to be ‘conditionally connected’ (*idappaccayā*),¹⁶ not otherwise. In other words, they have no independent, autonomous existence. ‘But’, as Buddhaghosa adds, ‘there is a metaphorical [*pariyāya*] way in which [they] can be treated as the root cause [of *saṃsāra*]. What way is that? When [they are] made to serve as a starting point in an exposition of *saṃsāra*’.¹⁷ In other words, they are methodologically foremost in that they represent the basic and general condition of unenlightened, *saṃsāric* existence, as well as being the last *saṃsāric* tendencies to be eroded before attaining Arahantship or complete Buddhahood. In this sense, in one form or another, they characterize the whole of *saṃsāric* existence, from its most primitive and crude depths to its most refined heights. They can, therefore, be said to be there from the very ‘beginning’ through to the final ‘end’ of *saṃsāra*. One could even add that, conjoined, these two are the twin pillars that support the whole edifice of *saṃsāra*. *Taṇhā*, therefore, according to this account, is clearly not some particular affect among other affects, but is best understood as a metaphor – a metaphor that attempts to capture the most pervasive affective characteristic of *saṃsāric* existence. Moreover, if we take these two *suttas* from the *Aṅguttara Nikāya* at face value, it appears that *taṇhā*, as *bhava-taṇhā*, is even more fundamental than *avijjā* or ‘spiritual ignorance’. In the *sutta* dealing with *taṇhā* it is said that *taṇhā* is ‘nourished’ by *avijjā*, which in turn is nourished by the ‘five hindrances’, which are nourished by ‘the three wrong ways of practice’, and so on, whereas in the *sutta* dealing with *avijjā*, it is said that *avijjā* is nourished by ‘the five hindrances’, which are nourished by ‘the three wrong ways of practice’, and so on, making *taṇhā* more fundamental than even *avijjā*. However, both are said to be conditionally dependent, implying that we can understand *taṇhā* and *avijjā* as the affective and cognitive aspects of the one state. In other words, there is a conditional interdependence between affective state and *perceived world* which cannot be experientially [148] separated.¹⁸ To use an image from the *suttas*, they are like two sheaves of reeds stacked together, which depend upon each other for support.¹⁹ The two sheaves of reeds in this case are *nāma-rūpa* or ‘mind and body’ and *viññāṇa* or ‘consciousness’, which implies that ‘consciousness’ or ‘discernment’ (*viññāṇa*) is conditionally dependent upon the affects, and vice

versa – taking *nāma* or ‘mind’ as comprising *vedanā* or ‘feeling-sensation’, *saññā* or ‘apperception’, and the *saṅkhāras* or ‘formative forces’, which is where the affects are found. This interdependence can also be seen elsewhere in the *suttas*, where the Buddha exhorts his *bhikkhus* to cultivate meditative concentration (*samādhi*): ‘A *bhikkhu* who is concentrated knows (*pajānāti*) things as they really are (*yathā-bhūta*)’.²⁰ The state of *samādhi* here being the necessary affective state for ‘transformative insight’ (*paññā*) to arise, which, notwithstanding their interdependence, again intimates the primacy of the affective in relation to the cognitive.

4. DEPENDENT CO-ARISING AND *TANHĀ*

That *tanhā* can be understood as a general condition rather than a specific affect can also be seen in the most common twelve-membered *nidāna* chain of *paṭicca-samuppāda* or ‘dependent co-arising’. Here, it is said that in dependence upon our ‘contact’ (*phassa*) with the world, *vedanā* or ‘feeling-sensation’ arises; in dependence upon *vedanā* there arises *tanhā*; and in dependence upon *tanhā* arises *upādāna* or ‘clinging’, which results in becoming even more bound up in *saṃsāric* activities. However, I do not consider *tanhā* here to refer to a *particular* affect arising in dependence upon ‘feeling-sensation’, but a term for a *general* condition: it is, as Buddhaghosa puts it, a ‘metaphorical’ (*pariyāya*) expression for the primary and general condition of our being in the world, from which spring the manifold affects that arise through our contact with the world.²¹ For example, if a heterosexual man encounters a very attractive woman, this will probably give rise to a pleasurable ‘feeling-sensation’, which in turn can form the condition for the arising of affects such as ‘lust’ (*rāga*), ‘infatuation’ (*pema*), etc. Whereas, if we encounter someone who tells us that we are stupid, then the ‘feeling-sensation’ is more likely to be unpleasant, which in turn can form the condition for the arising of affects such as ‘aversion’ (*paṭigha*) or ‘hatred’ (*dosa*), etc. The response to ‘feeling-[149]sensation’ is going to be a particular affect, and *tanhā* here, as I suggest, is not so much a particular affect, but is best understood metaphorically, as the general condition from which there can arise all manner of affects, including, as we shall see, what Buddhism regards as ‘skilful’ (*kusala*) affects, the kind of affects cultivated in an active spiritual life.

We get an intimation that *tanhā* can give rise to skilful affects in a version of *paṭicca-samuppāda* found in the *Mahānidāna Sutta* of the *Dīgha Nikāya*. Here it is said that ‘*tanhā* conditions searching’ (*pariyesanā*), which in turn conditions ‘acquisition’ (*lābha*), and so on ending with ‘the taking up of stick and sword, quarrels, disputes, arguments, strife, abuse, lying and other evil and unskilful states’.²² The *sutta* then goes on to say that ‘*tanhā* is the cause, the reason, the origin, the condition for all searching (*pariyesanā*)’. However, elsewhere, it is clear that all searching does not necessarily lead to ‘lying and other evil and unskilful states’. For example in the *Majjhima Nikāya*, the *Ariyapariyesanā Sutta* tells us there is a ‘noble search’ (*ariyā pariyesanā*) as well as an ‘ignoble search’ (*anariyā pariyesanā*). The noble search corresponds to Gotama’s going forth, when, ‘while still young, a black-haired young man endowed with the blessing of youth, in the prime of life, though my mother and father wished otherwise and wept with tearful faces, I shaved off my hair and beard, put on the yellow robe, and went forth from the home life into homelessness... seeking the supreme state of sublime peace’.²³ If ‘*tanhā* is the cause, the reason, the origin, the condition for all searching (*pariyesanā*)’, can we not say that this noble search (*ariyā pariyesanā*) also has its origin in *tanhā*? If *tanhā* is, as I have said, simply a metaphor that sums up the state we find ourselves in in the world, a state of seeking we know not what, what other basic condition would this noble search spring from?

In this *sutta*, the Buddha mentions that, before his enlightenment, he too was caught up in the ignoble search. The switch from the ignoble to the noble search came about as a result of his

reflecting on his experience of the unsatisfactoriness of his former searching, i.e. the ignoble search, which led him to set out in search of something more spiritually worthy and meaningful, i.e. the noble search, by means of which he discovered the ‘supreme state of sublime peace’, Nibbāna. Although the *sutta* tells us that he went forth in search of ‘the unaging, unailing, deathless, sorrowless, and undefiled supreme security [150] from bondage, Nibbāna’, I think we must assume that when he set out on this noble search he did not *know* if there were such a state as *nirvāṇa* to be attained; he did not *know* if he would find an answer. We only know this as a result of his noble search. From this episode, we can say that the Buddha-to-be was a human being who, because of his *taṇhā* – his urge for satisfaction – sought to gratify this urge through the ignoble search, seeking satisfaction, security, happiness, fulfillment in those things which cannot provide real satisfaction (in the *sutta* they are said to be ‘Wife and children... men and women slaves, goats and sheep... gold and silver,’ etc.). The result of searching for happiness and meaning in these areas was that his *taṇhā* was not appeased: he experienced dissatisfaction and frustration (*dukkha*), which led him to reflect more deeply on life. His reflections led him to try another way of life to satisfy his longing – to appease his *taṇhā* – by setting out on the *brahmacariya* or ‘life in pursuit of excellence’: he left home, became a *samaṇa*, studied under various teachers, attained what they had attained, was still not satisfied, became an ascetic, nearly killed himself in the process, and eventually went off on his own and finally attained what he was searching for – *nirvāṇa*. Reading the text in this way, it is clear that although *taṇhā* is the urge that leads to the ignoble search, it can also be understood as the urge that leads to the noble search as well, and the eventual attainment of *nirvāṇa*. The shift from the ignoble to the noble search is not a matter of restraining *taṇhā*, or of attempting to annihilate it, but arises as a consequence of reflection: reflecting on the fact that the life one is leading leaves one’s basic desire for fulfillment (*taṇhā*) unsatisfied. *Taṇhā* remains to goad one onto a new search, to look for new possibilities.²⁴ Therefore, we can say that because Gotama’s *taṇhā* remained unsatisfied, and his reflections led him to see that the worldly life is inherently unsatisfactory, when he saw the Fourth Sight²⁵ he was able to respond to the religious ideal the wandering mendicant symbolized, and ‘went forth from home into the homeless life’ as a *samaṇa*, the pursuit of which eventually led to him becoming a Buddha, an ‘Awakened One’.²⁶ *Taṇhā*, therefore, can be understood as the basis from which both the ignoble and the noble search can spring. The cause of the shift from the ignoble to the noble search is a matter of seeing that the life one is leading, although it may have its pleasures and moments of happiness and fulfillment, leaves one’s basic [151] existential state (*taṇhā*) untouched. Only the noble search can affect that more basic existential condition.

5. SKILFUL AND UNSKILFUL *TANHĀ*

Although, as I have said, the common and accepted traditional view of *taṇhā* is of a state antithetical to the Buddhist spiritual life, there are some rarely commented-upon passages which indicate that *taṇhā* also has a more wholesome aspect.

In the *Aṅguttara Nikāya* we have the statement: ‘he abandons *taṇhā* by means of *taṇhā*’.²⁷ But as to what this statement might imply, the *sutta* itself provides only a hint, and is in need of exegesis. Fortunately, the commentary provides some:

Based on the present craving (*taṇhā*) [i.e., desire for becoming an Arahant], he gives up previous craving that was the root-cause of [one’s involvement in] the cycle of rebirth. Now [it may be asked] whether such present craving [for Arahantship] is wholesome (*kusala*) or unwholesome (*akusala*)? – It is unwholesome. – Should it be pursued or not? – It should be

pursued (*sevitabbā*). – Does it drag one into rebirth (*paṭisandhiṃ ākaḍḍhati*) or not? – It does not drag one into rebirth.²⁸

As Nyanaponika adds at the end of this quote, ‘Such permissible (*sevitabbā*) craving is abandoned when its object is attained’. In other words, the ‘desire for becoming an Arahant’, which is identified here as ‘present *taṇhā*’, is abandoned only when one attains Arahantship. However, it seems rather odd that although this ‘present *taṇhā*’, which Nyanaponika understands as the ‘desire for becoming an Arahant’, ‘should be pursued’ and ‘does not drag one into rebirth’, nevertheless it is regarded by the commentator as unskillful (*akusala*). How can the desire to become an Arahant be ‘unwholesome’ (*akusala*)? Perhaps the commentator has in mind a similar theme found in the *Samyutta Nikāya*, where *chanda* or ‘desire to do’ replaces *taṇhā*, and which makes the matter a little clearer. There the brahmin Uṇṇābha asks Ānanda:

‘What is it, master Ānanda, for which the ‘life of excellence’ (*brahmacariya*) is lived under the recluse Gotama?’ [152]

‘For the sake of abandoning ‘desire to do’ (*chanda*), brahmin, the life of excellence is lived under the Exalted One.’ (S v. 271ff.)²⁹

When asked whether there is any practice for abandoning this *chanda*, Ānanda replies that *chanda* is to be abandoned by developing the four *iddhi-pādas* or ‘paths to power’, the first of which is *chanda-samādhī* or ‘concentration of will’.³⁰ Uṇṇābha retorts: ‘That he should get rid of one *chanda* by means of another *chanda* is an impossible thing’. Ānanda then asks Uṇṇābha whether, before setting out to visit him, he had the *chanda* to visit him, and when he arrived at the Park, whether that *chanda* was not now abated? Uṇṇābha agrees that this is the case:

‘Very well then, brahmin. That monk who is [an] Arahant, in whom the āsavas are destroyed, who has reached perfection, done what had to be done, laid down the burden, reached the highest good, who has outworn the fetters of becoming and is freed by perfect knowledge (*sammā-d-aññā*) – that *chanda* which he previously had to attain Arahantship, now that Arahantship is won, that appropriate (*tajja*) *chanda* is appeased (*paṭippassaddha*).’

The *chanda* to be ‘abandoned’ (*pahāna*), which, interestingly, the commentator construes as *taṇhā*,³¹ is to be abandoned by means of developing the ‘appropriate’ *chanda*, which, here, is the *chanda* or ‘desire’ for Arahantship. And, as the text tells us, this ‘appropriate’ *chanda* is not said to be simply negated at the attainment of Arahantship, but is said to be ‘appeased’, or, we could say, satisfied and fulfilled. All that is negated is the possibility of *chanda* having aims and objects whose pursuit would lead to frustration and unsatisfactoriness (*dukkha*).³² Using this model, we can therefore fill out the statement ‘he abandons *taṇhā* by means of *taṇhā*’: *taṇhā*, whose aims and objects are within *saṃsāra*, is to be abandoned by developing ‘appropriate’ (*tajja*) *taṇhā*, which is a form of *taṇhā* that can become ‘appeased’ as its aim is Arahantship. But what form would this appropriate *taṇhā* take? Although there are no such terms in the *suttas* as ‘thirsting after Arahantship’ (*arahatta-taṇhā*), or ‘thirsting after the Dhamma’ (*dhamma-taṇhā*),³³ the notion that *taṇhā* can have Arahantship as its aim is found in the post-canonical *Nettipakaraṇa*:³⁴ [153]

There are two kinds of *taṇhā*: skilful (*kusala*) and unskillful (*akusala*). Unskillful *taṇhā* leads to *saṃsāra*, skilful *taṇhā* is for abandoning, which leads to diminishing [of *saṃsāric* activities]. [87]³⁵

As the text goes on to tell us, quoting a passage from the *Majjhima Nikāya*, such skilful *taṇhā* is synonymous with an ‘eager desire (*pihā*) to enter the peaceful sphere that the *ariyas*, who having

realized it by themselves, dwell in'.³⁶ Thus, having 'liberation of mind' (*ceto-vimutti*) due to the 'fading away of [unskilful] desire' (*rāga-virāga*) as its object, such *taṇhā* is skilful,³⁷ and, in the manner of *chanda*, can therefore be said to be eventually 'appeased'.

The Pāli commentator, Buddhaghosa, also understands *taṇhā* as having a wholesome aspect:

just as... [a] cow, through her *taṇhā* for cold water, starts drinking cold water, which gives her satisfaction and allays her torment, so the worldly man in the grip of *bhava-taṇhā* performs actions of various kinds beginning with abstention from killing living beings. This leads to happy destinies and gives satisfaction because it is free from the burning defilements and, by bringing him to a happy destiny, allays the torment of suffering [that would be experienced] in those unhappy destinies.³⁸

Buddhaghosa points out that the spiritually ignorant person is like a thirsty cow who tries to slake her thirst by drinking hot water, 'which gives no satisfaction', and represents unskilful action leading to continual frustration and sorrow (*dukkha*). Given these examples, we can therefore say that 'getting rid of *taṇhā* by means of *taṇhā*' implies that *taṇhā* can only be 'appeased' by becoming *skilful*, by 'thirsting' after those things that, from the Buddhist point of view, can actually bring real satisfaction. In other words, *taṇhā*, as the general condition of unenlightened existence, can only be 'appeased' by taking up the Buddhist *brahmacariya* or 'pursuit of excellence', whose goal is *nirvāṇa*.

It is also interesting to note that two affects closely related to *taṇhā* – *rāga* and *kāma* – also have this twofold aspect.³⁹ For example, we have the terms *dhmma-rāga* or 'desire for the Dhamma',⁴⁰ and *dhmma-kāma* or 'love of the Dhamma',⁴¹ both of which are understood as *kusala* affects to be developed. Yet *rāga* is listed as one of the three *akusala-mūlas* or 'roots of unskilfulness' from which other secondary unskilful affects are said to develop, and [154] is, as far as I am aware – at least in the Theravāda tradition – always considered an *akusala* affect, as is *kāma*. *Rāga* and *kāma*, therefore, like *taṇhā* and *chanda*, can also be said to have their *kusala* and *akusala* aspects, their *ariya* and *anariya* aspects, and, when their objects are 'appropriate', can be said to form part of the affective aspect of the Buddhist path, and eventually find satisfaction. However, if, as I have argued, *taṇhā* is not simply an affect among other affects, but is best understood as the affective ground out of which all the affects can be said to spring, then these *kusala* forms of *chanda*, *rāga*, and *kāma* can be said to be the affective expressions of *kusala taṇhā*.

Another interesting distinction made in the *suttas*, which also has relevance here, is that between the *āmisā* or 'carnal' affects and the *dhmma* or 'spiritual' affects.⁴² For example, there is both a 'carnal' or 'unregenerate' and a 'spiritual' or 'regenerate' form of 'longing' (*esanā*), 'searching' (*pariyesanā*), 'enjoyment' (*bhoga*), 'compassion' (*anukampā*), 'generosity' (*cāga*), 'prosperity' (*vuḍḍhi*), 'favour' (*anuggaha*), 'sharing' (*saṃvibhāga*), 'worship' (*pūjā*), 'power' (*iddhi*), etc. Although no examples are given to illustrate this distinction, I would conjecture that, for example in the case of 'longing' (*esanā*), as we have already have the distinction between the 'ignoble search' (*anariyā pariyesanā*) and the 'spiritual search' (*ariyā pariyesanā*), 'longing' in its *āmisā* form would be for material objects and pleasures, whereas 'longing' in its *dhmma* form would have spiritual objects in mind. Therefore, as we have a whole list of affects having a *kusala*, or *ariya*, or *dhmma* form, as well as an *akusala*, or *anariya*, or *āmisā* form, it can be said that neither *taṇhā*, *rāga*, *kāma*, *pihā*, *esanā*, *pariyesanā* nor *chanda* are *intrinsically* unskilful, ignoble, or unregenerate, but it is the objects sought after that determine whether they are either skilful or

unskillful, noble or ignoble, generate or unregenerate. Given this, we could say that there are four conditions of *taṇhā*: (1) as the affective ground of existence, or simply *taṇhā* per se, which is ethically neutral, but which, as the methodological starting point, can give rise both to skillful and to unskillful affects; (2) unskillful *taṇhā*, when it is the general condition for the arising of unskillful affects; (3) skillful *taṇhā*, when it is the general condition for the arising of skillful affects; (4) the ‘appeasement’ of *taṇhā*, or, we could say, the ‘quenching’ or even ‘satiation’ of *taṇhā*, which is *nirvāṇa*.⁴³ *Taṇhā* per se is simply the general condition out of which [155] all kinds of affects, both skillful and unskillful, can arise. When those affects are skillful, we can say that the general condition out of which they arise is skillful; when unskillful, the general condition is unskillful. Given that Buddhist doctrine teaches that all things come to be only in dependence upon conditions, and that, as I see it, *taṇhā* per se has no ethical apriority, this raises the interesting question as to the conditions under which *taṇhā* can be said to become either skillful or unskillful.

In the section on ‘*Taṇhā* as metaphor’, we saw that besides *taṇhā*, *avijjā* or ‘spiritual ignorance’ also had no knowable or perceptible ‘first beginning’. Further, according to Buddhaghosa, *taṇhā* and *avijjā*, ‘being the principle causes of action (*kamman*)’, ‘can be treated as the root cause [of *saṃsāra*]’, and, methodologically, can therefore be ‘made to serve as the starting point in an exposition of *saṃsāra*’ – which, like *taṇhā* and *avijjā*, has no knowable beginning. As *taṇhā* and *avijjā* are so fundamental and are so inextricably linked – one cannot have one without the other – within the individual they can be understood as the basic affective and cognitive aspects that inform experience, which implies that how one sees and understands one’s self and the world is influenced by one’s affective state, and one’s affective state is in turn influenced by the way one sees and understands one’s self and the world. As we saw above, according to Buddhaghosa, they are ‘conditionally connected’ (*idappaccayā*). Yet if *taṇhā* can be skillful as well as unskillful, and skillful activity is spiritual activity, then ‘spiritual ignorance’ (*avijjā*) cannot be the cognitive counterpart of skillful *taṇhā*, whose object is *nirvāṇa*. The cognitive counterpart of skillful *taṇhā* must be something like ‘right-view’ (*sammā-diṭṭhi*), the first member of the Noble Eightfold Path. Further, if *taṇhā* per se has no knowable beginning, and is simply the general condition that all beings find themselves in in the world, it would be rather absurd to hold them all culpable for being in a condition of *taṇhā*. And, as ‘spiritual ignorance’ (*avijjā*) is *taṇhā*’s beginningless cognitive counterpart, then beings cannot be held ultimately responsible for being born in the condition of ‘spiritual ignorance’ either, implying that ‘spiritual ignorance’ is also an ethically neutral state. To do otherwise would be to hold all beings culpable for not being born fully fledged Buddhas from that ‘unknowable beginning’, which is clearly ridicu-[156]lous. Given this, we can draw up a correspondence between the various forms of *taṇhā* and their cognitive counterparts:

<i>taṇhā</i> per se.....	<i>avijjā</i> or ‘spiritual ignorance’
unskillful <i>taṇhā</i>	<i>micchā-diṭṭhi</i> or ‘wrong-view’
skillful <i>taṇhā</i>	<i>sammā-diṭṭhi</i> or ‘right-view’
<i>taṇhā</i> ‘appeased’.....	<i>viññā</i> or ‘wisdom’ (i.e. <i>nirvāṇa</i>)

The question as to how *taṇhā* can become either skillful or unskillful can therefore be linked to the question as to how ‘wrong-views’ and ‘right-views’ arise. However, as this list of correspondences is not found as such in the Pāli tradition, I will put this question into a simplified evolutionary setting so as to provide an alternative perspective.

6. *TANHĀ* IN AN EVOLUTIONARY SETTING

As *taṇhā* per se is the general existential condition we find ourselves in, it is the source from which spring the various means of seeking some form of gratification and purpose in life. Using Buddhist traditional terms, we can see this search for gratification as expressive of the two ‘root’ affects of *rāga* or ‘desire’ in general, and *dosa* or ‘aversion’, the former being the basic response to that which appears attractive, the latter to what appears threatening. Together with their cognitive aspect, *moha* or ‘bewilderment’, these form the three *akusala-mūlas* or ‘unskilful-roots’ of existence. Although Buddhism is concerned solely with the spiritual life, and these unskilful-roots are always regarded ethically as hindrances to the individual’s spiritual development, in their cruder forms they are also regarded as hindrances to civilized society itself. Notwithstanding this, for the purposes of this illustration, I will transfer them from their traditional conception and view them from the perspective of a non-moral evolutionary setting, as the most general and basic natural forces that were *necessary* for the evolution and survival of early man: *rāga* as the urge to acquire the necessities for survival; *dosa* as the aggressive drive needed when one is acquiring those necessities in a contest with others, as well as to defend one’s possessions and family/tribe against aggressors. As *moha* is the dimness of the bewildered mind in relation to the truth of the spiritual life, it is simply the general state of mind that the other affects inhabit. In early man it would be a state of mind with very limited horizons: [157] eating, copulating, hunting, basic co-operation with other members of the tribe and, in moments of quiet consciousness, perhaps the first glimmerings of ‘why?’ The view that simply satisfying basic needs will ever quench *taṇhā* would be in Buddhist terms a *micchā-diṭṭhi* or ‘wrong-view’. But because *taṇhā* cannot be fully satisfied with such basic needs, some will eventually experience this state of affairs as unsatisfactory (*dukkha*), and will therefore seek out more satisfying ways of living – other views on life – which can lead, eventually, at least in some instances, to the emergence of more developed and civilized societies. As life in such a society, at least for some, is not so dominated by the ends of pure survival and satisfying basic needs, there will arise the necessary freedom for more co-operative and cultivated social interaction to arise, providing the necessary conditions for a wider range of more purely human and cultivated responses and affects to emerge. Such a progression is compatible with the general Buddhist doctrine of *paṭicca-samuppāda*: affects arise in dependence upon conditions. Therefore, within such conditions, more developed and civilized affects can emerge – including those which Buddhism would regard as being to some degree *kusala* – as well as their interrelated cognitive counterparts expressed in such cultural forms as literature, philosophy, art, religion, etc. Some of these forms would embody, to some degree, what Buddhism would recognize as ‘mundane’ (*lokiya*) *sammā-diṭṭhi* or ‘right-view’, in that they would ‘understand that it is good to be generous, make offerings and sacrifices; that both good and evil actions will bear fruit and have consequences; that there is this world and the other world’, etc.,⁴⁴ views that are found in most civilized cultures. Such a state of affairs can arise out of the fact that man is driven by his ‘thirst’ for satisfaction and meaning in life, and that, as long as he has not seen the way to satisfy his deeper longings, in other words, as long as ‘right-view’ has not arisen, he will continually experience dissatisfaction (*dukkha*), which, in turn, is the primary condition for the search to continue.

All this, however, is contingent. Buddhism has no notion of any divinely ordained and necessary progress up through the ‘Great Chain of Being’, or any of its modern secular counterparts (there are no fatherly Buddhas looking after us). Apart from natural forces, the main factors in the nexus of conditions within which human development and progress can be said to happen are [158] the all-too-fickle human desires and aspirations. Thus the greater freedom offered by more civilized societies also gives the opportunity for base unskilful affects to arise, which create various

unwholesome ideologies such as fascism, racialism, despotism, and express themselves in religious bigotry and intolerance, etc. Therefore at times and for various reasons, the crude and atavistic urges – primitive *rāga* and *dosa* – erupt under conditions such as war and social strife, and, in the process, being framed in rationalized ideologies, become much more destructive and inhuman than the *rāga* and *dosa* counterparts found among the ‘beasts’. As long as *moha* or ‘bewilderment’ is still present, all kinds of ‘wrong-views’ can emerge, and where there are ‘wrong-views’ there is the possibility of falling victim to these atavistic urges. Nevertheless, all things being contingent, the more civilized affects can be seen as arising in dependence upon the more primitive urges: the fact that the more basic urges cannot fully satisfy *taṇhā* will inevitably result in the arising of *dukkha*, and as long as there is *dukkha* there is the possibility that man will keep searching for something more. As long as some keep searching, there is the possibility that one will find something. And, of course, there is also the possibility that some who start the search will give up and decide that it is all just human vanity, and settle into some materialistic or nihilistic creed, as did some contemporaries of the Buddha. The greater freedom offered by civilized society offers a greater range of objects to respond to and, therefore, a correspondingly greater potential for the development of more peculiarly human and even spiritual affects and institutions to emerge. As no form of existence short of *nirvāṇa* can quench our ‘thirst’, some will find even the most civilized and cultured forms of life, including the accepted religious forms, to be *dukkha*, and will therefore venture out on the Ariyan Quest (*ariyā pariyesanā*) and search for that which, according to Buddhism, will finally quench our ‘thirst’: *nirvāṇa*. Yet without the initial attempts of primitive *rāga* and *dosa* to find security and satisfaction, civilization as we know it would not have arisen, and the very conditions necessary for spiritual development in the Buddhist sense would not have arisen. After all, without *taṇhā* there would be no existential *Angst* (*dukkha*), and without existential *Angst* there would be no search for an answer to the human predicament, and without such a search there would be no Buddhas. [159]

7. THE TELEOLOGY OF *TANHĀ*

As we have seen, Buddhism envisages the universe as characterized by the metaphor of *taṇhā*, the thirst or urge to find happiness, well-being, satisfaction, meaning, or whatever else one wants to call it. As the Buddhist universe is always a universe of beings – there being no time when there are no beings of some form around – *taṇhā* is simply a term that symbolizes the condition we find ourselves in in the world, a general state of wanting we know not what. And as there is no such notion as original sin in Buddhism, we are not to blame for being in this condition (at least not ‘originally’): the general condition of *taṇhā* is just the way things are, and no one can be said to have created it as such. This universe of beings, characterized by *taṇhā*, is what we might call the subjective aspect of existence. But Buddhism also posits a universal law, which is understood to exist independently of beings, including Buddhas.⁴⁵ This is the law of *paṭicca-samuppāda*, or ‘conditioned co-arising’. All the Buddhas do is simply reveal what is there, and make it known.⁴⁶ The most concise expression of this law of conditioned co-arising states that whatever comes into being does so only in dependence upon conditions, conditions which themselves only exist by way of other conditions, etc. and when the conditions change, whatever came to be ceases to exist. Therefore we can say that this universal law of conditioned co-arising represents the universe in its objective aspect, in the sense that it is how the universe is independent of how we might feel about it, or want it to be.

Seeing *taṇhā* and the law of conditioned co-arising as the subjective and objective aspects of existence, we can say it is the coming together of these two aspects that creates human existence as

we know and see it. However, such a universe cannot be said to manifest any kind of teleology: there is no preordained end for which it can be said to exist, towards which we must inevitably roll. There is no providential force that ultimately guarantees our future welfare. Nevertheless, it could be argued that although this is the case, this universe is structured in such a way that it can be said to favour spiritual evolution, even though it cannot guarantee that it will happen. This comes about because, from the Buddhist perspective, human beings will only find real satisfaction, fulfilment and meaning in their lives by venturing upon something like the Buddhist spiritual path. The reason for this is simply that [160] such fulfilment and meaning only come to be in dependence upon certain conditions, those conditions being what the Buddhist spiritual path is. The Buddhist spiritual path is nothing other than the application of the universal law of conditioned co-arising as a guide to the kind of actions that will lead to fulfilment and meaning. Therefore our *taṇhā* will *only* be fully appeased by following some such path of skilful action. If we act with self-centred greed, ill-will, seek no more than sensual satisfaction, then, according to the nature of the way things are, although we might find a certain amount of satisfaction, we will eventually run into continual frustration (*dukkha*). This is just the way things are. The universe, therefore, although it manifests no providence, can, nevertheless, be said to ‘favour’ the spiritual life in the sense that it is *only* by leading such a life that one will eventually become a fulfilled human being, or, further, what Buddhism calls an Awakened human being, a Buddha, even though there is no power or force in the universe that can guarantee that such will happen. Notwithstanding this, given the vast incalculable vistas of time that Buddhist cosmology presents to us, and that beings grounded in *taṇhā* will continually ferret for ultimate satisfaction and meaning within a universe whose nature is best described as ‘conditioned co-arising’, then it becomes a statistical probability that some being will find *nirvāṇa*, that some being will become a Buddha, and reveal the way to the rest of us. Yet for such to come about, all we need posit are these two aspects: the subjective aspect of *taṇhā* per se inherent in all beings, and a universe whose objective aspect is revealed in the doctrine of ‘conditioned co-arising’.

Robert Morrison is the author of *Nietzsche and Buddhism: A Study in Nihilism and Ironic Affinities*, Oxford University Press, 1997.

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Abbreviations

A	<i>Aṅguttara Nikāya</i>
D	<i>Dīgha Nikāya</i>
M	<i>Majjhima Nikāya</i>
PED	<i>Pali-English Dictionary</i>
S	<i>Saṃyutta Nikāya</i>
Vism	<i>Visuddhimagga</i>

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Notes

¹ A iii.399–400. NB I have re-translated some of the sutta material referred to in this paper.

² A ii.209–10.

³ M ii.259–60.

⁴ I use the word ‘ground’ here in the sense of a ‘primary condition’, or ‘fundamental principle’ that attempts to characterize life in general. If one takes one of Flew’s definitions of metaphysics, as ‘an attempt to characterize existence or reality as a whole’ (*A Dictionary of Philosophy*, London, 1979), then we could say that *tanhā* is a metaphysical notion in this sense – a metaphysical metaphor.

⁵ In the sense of *saṅkhāra-dukkhatā*, or ‘existential unsatisfactoriness’.

⁶ In Buddhist cosmology, the universe continually cycles through immense aeons (*kappas*) of ‘devolution’ (*saṃvatta*) and ‘evolution’ (*vivatta*).

⁷ An almost identical account of this *sutta* is found outside the Pāli tradition in the *Mahāvastu* (iii. 339).

⁸ What kind of fruit the fruit of the ‘Tree of Knowledge’ actually is is not mentioned in Genesis. Tradition has taken it to be an apple, but some scholars believe it more likely to be a fig.

⁹ *Saṃsāra* is divided into three levels: 1) *kāma-loka*, or ‘realm of sensual desire’, which is sub-divided into various realms. At the bottom are the hell realms, then, rising up through the *kāma-loka*, the realms of the *petas* or ‘hungry ghosts’, animals, humans, and at the top the six *deva* realms. Here, although there are male *devas* and female *devīs*, only in the lower two realms does copulation take place. In the higher four gratification is achieved simply through acts such as smiling or looking at each other; 2) *rūpa-loka* or ‘realm of form’, which is sub-divided into seventeen levels, the beings in each being progressively more refined. Here there is no sexual distinction; 3) *arūpa-loka*, or ‘realm of no form’, a rather mysterious realm sub-divided into the four planes of the *arūpa-jhānas*, i.e. the realms of ‘infinite-space’, ‘infinite-consciousness’, ‘nothingness’, and ‘neither-perception-nor-non-perception’.

¹⁰ S iv.400.

¹¹ See D iii.216.

¹² See S iii.149, where it is said: ‘Inconceivable, *bhikkhus*, is the beginning of *samsāra*. For beings hindered by spiritual ignorance (*avijjā*) and fettered by *taṇhā*, who go the round of births, the beginning [of *samsāra*] cannot be known’.

¹³ Some Buddhist scholars would say that this account should not be taken seriously as Buddhist cosmology, it being no more than a Buddhist tongue-in-cheek satire of certain Brāhmanical beliefs (e.g. see Gombrich (1992) and Collins (1993). However that may be, from what is said we can take it that the Buddhists understand *taṇhā* as having cosmic significance.

¹⁴ A v.113ff.

¹⁵ Vism 525. Note that *taṇhā* here is said to lead to ‘happy destinies’ as well as unhappy ones.

¹⁶ A v.116.

¹⁷ Vism 525.

¹⁸ Although *avijjā* does literally mean ‘lack of knowledge’ (*vijjā*) in the sense of knowledge about the true nature of things, following Matilal, I would understand *avijjā* to imply the holding of ‘views’ (*ditṭhis*). As Matilal says, “the Sanskrit term *avidyā* (Pāli: *avijjā*), although grammatically negative ... does not [necessarily] mean negation (or absence or lack) of anything. For it is well known in Sanskrit grammar that the negative particle in a Sanskrit compound does not always express simple negation or absence” [Matilal (1985), pp.321–22]. Using Patāñjali’s discussion of the semantic problem of the negative compound *a-brāhmaṇa* (‘not-a-brāhmaṇa’), he goes on to suggest that as ‘*vidyā* means knowledge of reality, or ultimate knowledge, or simply, knowledge, *avidyā* [may be best understood as] something that is liable to be mistaken as such’. In other words, *avidyā* is not simply a lack of knowledge, but *thinking one has knowledge when one has not*. *Avijjā* therefore implies having views and opinions about things which are not in accordance with the true nature of things. In his *Abhidharmakośabhāṣyam*, Vasubandhu says that ‘*Avidyā* is a separate *dharmma*’ and is ‘not a mere negation’. For example, ‘*Ṛta* or *satya* is truth; non-truth (*anṛta*) is speech contrary to true speech’ [Pruden (1988–90), pp.419–20].

¹⁹ S ii.114.

²⁰ S iii.13; v.414.

²¹ Buddhaghosa’s commentary on this *sutta* does indeed make a distinction here between *vaṭṭa-mūlabhūtā purima-taṇhā* or ‘primary *taṇhā* which is the root of *samsāra*’, and *samudācāra-taṇhā* or ‘*taṇhā* in action’ [see footnote in Rhys Davids’ translation]. However, my point is that it is always a particular affect such as ‘lust’ or ‘aversion’ that arises at this point, not *taṇhā*, even in the form of ‘*taṇhā* in action’. One could say that ‘lust’ is a particular form of ‘*taṇhā* in action’, but this is just saying that ‘*taṇhā* in action’ is always some particular affect, that all the affects are expressions of *taṇhā* per se.

²² D ii.58f.

²³ M i.163. Although one cannot take these more or less stock phrases too seriously as actual, literal happenings, nevertheless it is interesting to note here that: 1) a ‘black-haired young man endowed with the blessing of youth’ is not how I would describe a married twenty-nine year old; 2) there is no mention of the Buddha’s wife and child; 3) he refers to his ‘mother’ [*mātā*] and not his step-mother (Mahāpajāpati, who later became a *bhikkhunī*): according to other accounts, his mother (Māyā) died shortly after giving birth to the Buddha-to-be.

²⁴ It could, and sometimes does, also lead some who despair at finding any meaning in life, to commit suicide in the hope of becoming totally extinct. This is the third kind of *taṇhā*: the ‘desire for annihilation’ (*vibhava-tāṇha*).

²⁵ The account of the Four Sights is found at D ii,21–30. The first Three Sights are of an old man, a sick man, a dead man, and represent *dukkha*. The Fourth Sight is of a ‘religious mendicant’ (*paribbājika*), symbolizing the spiritual life, the way to the cessation of *dukkha*.

²⁶ Notwithstanding what the first Noble Truth tells us, i.e. that the cause of *dukkha* or ‘suffering and unsatisfactoriness’ is *taṇhā*, I would say that it is not *taṇhā per se* that is the primary cause of this *dukkha*, but the way one is attempting to satisfy one’s *taṇhā*. In other words, as the noble search represents the fourth Noble Truth, the way leading to the cessation of *dukkha*, then the primary cause of *dukkha* is the leading of the ignoble life, which is not simply *taṇhā*, but the expression of *taṇhā* conjoined with ‘wrong-views’ (*micchā-diṭṭhis*). If, as I have argued, *taṇhā* is also the affective ground out of which the noble search springs, which we could say would be *taṇhā* conjoined with ‘right-views’ (*sammā-diṭṭhis*), then *taṇhā per se* is not the cause of *dukkha*, but only *taṇhā* conjoined with ‘wrong-views’.

²⁷ A ii.146: *taṇhaṃ nissāya taṇhaṃ pajahati*.

²⁸ Nyanaponika (1970), fn.64.

²⁹ Mrs. Rhys Davids draws attention to this passage as an important example of the way in which the notion of ‘extinction of desire’ needs qualifying (1920, p.222f.). *Chanda* means ‘impulse, excitement; intention, resolution, will; desire for, wish for, delight in’ (PED), and, as Mrs. Rhys Davids also points out, is often a synonym of *taṇhā*.

³⁰ See also, M i.480 and ii.173 for *chanda* as the necessary ‘will’ to strive and attain *paññā*. As the PED says of *iddhi*: ‘there is no single word in English for *iddhi*, as the idea is unknown in Europe. The main sense seems to be “potency”.’

³¹ See footnote 4 in Woodward’s translation, and also Rhys Davids’ note on *chanda* in Aung, (1910), p.244.

³² A similar example with ‘action’ (*kamman*) is found at A i.236. There the Buddha says that there are three causes for the arising of action: non-greed, non-hatred, and non-confusion. Such action is said to be skilful (*kusala*) and results in happiness (*sukha*), but it is also said to bring about the ‘cessation of action’ (*kamma-nirodha*). To understand what this ‘cessation of action’ means, one has to look elsewhere. For example, the *Mahācattārīsaka Sutta* also informs us that there are three kinds of action, but here the three kinds form an ethical hierarchy: at the bottom there is ‘wrong action’ (*micchā-kammanta*) followed by two levels of ‘right action’ (*sammā-kammanta*). There is ‘right action’ which is ‘affected by the biases’ (*sa-āsava*), ‘involved in [creating] merit’ (*puññā-bhāgiya*), and ‘ripens in future rebecoming’ (*upadhi-vepakka*); and there is ‘right action’ that is ‘noble’ (*ariya*), ‘without the biases’ (*anāsava*), and ‘beyond the mundane world’ (*lokuttara*) (M iii.74). This latter kind of action is not karmic, and will therefore not produce effects that will ripen within *saṃsāra*. As the Buddha is said to be in full ‘possession of all skilful states’ (M ii.116), we can assume that the cessation of action implies only the cessation of unskilful actions, as well as those skilful actions ‘involved in [creating] merit’, etc., but which form the necessary basis for the arising of the third kind of skilful action, upon which such karmic skilful action ceases.

³³ At D ii.58, we do find the term *dhamma-taṇhā*, but here it means ‘thirsting after mental states’ as it is in a list of six *taṇhās*, each connected with the objects of the six senses. It is also listed in this latter sense in the first book of the Abhidhamma Piṭaka, the *Dhammasaṅgani*, among the *akusala-dhammas* (1059).

³⁴ The ‘Guide-treatise’, translated from the Pāli by Ñāṇamoli as *The Guide*. It is not so much a commentary on the *suttas*, but a ‘guide’ for commentators on how to interpret the *suttas*. It was probably written around the second or first centuries BCE.

³⁵ As the *Anguttara Nikāya* explains, the compound term ‘leads to diminishing’ (*apacayagāmin*) stands for the practice of the ten precepts of skilful action, e.g. abstention from harming living beings, sexual misconduct, lying, slanderous speech, bitter speech, idle babbling, coveting, ill-will, and the only ‘positive’ precept, cultivating ‘right-view’ (*sammā-diṭṭhi*) (v.276–7).

³⁶ M iii.218. See also M i.303–4, which adds that one then sets up an eager desire (*pihā*) for ‘unsurpassed emancipation’ (*anuttara vimokha*).

³⁷ Netti 87.

³⁸ Vism 525. The ‘happy destinies’ (*sugatis*) refer to future lives in some *deva-lokas* or ‘heavenly worlds’.

³⁹ *Rāga* means ‘love, affection, vehement desire for, interest in, desire for’, etc; *kāma* means ‘desire for, longing after, love (especially sexual love or sensuality), affection’ etc.

⁴⁰ A iv.423; v.345.

⁴¹ A v.24, 27, 90, 201; Sn 92.

⁴² See A i.93ff. and *Itivuttaka* 98. *Āmisa* means: ‘1. originally raw meat; hence prevailing notion of ‘raw, unprepared, uncultivated’... 2. ‘fleshy, of the flesh’ (as opposed to mind or spirit), hence material, physical; generally in opposition to dhamma’ (PED) – *dhamma*, in this context, being concerned with the spiritual life.

⁴³ *Nirvāṇa* can also mean ‘quenched’. See PED under *nibbuta*.

⁴⁴ M iii.72. This is ‘right-view with biases [*āsavas*]’, which does not seem to have *nirvāṇa* as its goal, but is instead a means of creating the necessary ‘merit’ (*puñña*), or one could say ‘conditions’, for a better and happier life in the future to arise, whether in this life or the next. As ‘right-view with taints’ also includes the acknowledgement that there are ‘good and virtuous recluses and brahmins in the world who have realized for themselves by direct knowledge and declare this world and the other world’, a view that obviously includes non-Buddhist recluses, one could see this as the Buddhist view of the ideal society, which upholds the doctrine of *kamman* and the importance of the spiritual life. These would be the ideal conditions for those who seek out ‘right-view without biases’, which is ‘transcendental’ (*lokuttara*) and Ariyan, and has *nirvāṇa* as its goal.

⁴⁵ ‘*Bhikkhus*, whether there be an appearance or non-appearance of a Tathāgata, this determination of nature (*dhammatṭhitatā*), this orderliness of nature (*dhamma-niyāmatā*) prevails: the relatedness of this to that (*idappaccayatā*)’. (S ii.25)

⁴⁶ As the Dhammapada has it ‘The Tathāgatas only declare the Way; you yourselves must strive’ (276). Ultimately, one cannot rely upon tradition, sacred or otherwise, but only one’s own efforts.