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# THE *DHAMMASAṄGAṆĪ* AND *VIBHAṄGA*

## The Perfectly Awakened Buddha and the First Abhidhammikas

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The *Enumeration of Phenomena* (*Dhammasaṅgaṇī*) and *Analysis* (*Vibhaṅga*) are the first two books of the Pāli Abhidhamma. They are attributed by the tradition to the Buddha (in an account that I will consider briefly in what follows) and, along with the other five books of the Abhidhamma, are considered to be canonical; all seven books comprise the third collection of early Buddhist texts in the Theravāda called the Abhidhamma Piṭaka (the other two *piṭakas*, or genres of Buddhist knowledge, are the Suttanta, the discourses, and the Vinaya, the monastic rules). There are several good summaries of all seven Abhidhamma books, and I will make no attempt to recap their lengthy contents here (see Nyanatiloka 2008). While traditional exegetes did not consider historical questions of development, holding as they did that all of this material came from the Buddha (even if mediated by disciples and other scholars), modern scholars have tended to see the *Enumeration of Phenomena* and *Analysis* as the earliest to emerge. Both texts also have extensive layers of exegesis on them, at both the commentary (*aṭṭhakathā*) and subcommentary (*ṭīkā*) layers, as well as medieval compendia (*saṅgha*) that attempt to synthesize and summarize the Abhidhamma tradition as a whole. The Abhidhamma has been influential throughout Theravāda history, particularly in Burma/Myanmar, where a lively scholarly tradition on it continues to the present day.

In this chapter, I focus on these first two books in order to concentrate on this earliest iteration of what became a long and rich philosophical tradition. My concerns are philosophical rather than historical, and I will read these texts to ask, first, what they themselves tell us they are doing, and second, how their philosophical implications have been understood by traditional and modern scholars. There have been widely divergent views on what this early philosophical tradition is about, ranging from those who see it as an ontological system positing ultimate reals, to those who read it as a system of phenomenological analysis to investigate and transform experience. While I will show the nature of the scholarly arguments for both interpretations, my own view tends to the latter reading, and I demonstrate why. I also offer additional philosophical possibilities that take special notice of the potential contributions suggested by the early Abhidhamma as a modal analysis of experience.

I should note that “Abhidhamma” means the “higher” or “further” Dhamma, or teaching, in that it offers additional development of the basic doctrines of Pāli Buddhism as they are articulated in the suttas, such as the Four Noble Truths, the five aggregates, the twelve-fold

dependent origination, the four foundations of mindfulness, etc. Readers new to Indian Buddhism should become familiar with these core doctrines before attempting to understand Abhidhamma and the interpretation of it that I advance here.

### Some Preliminaries: Matrices and the Fecundity of Lists

The Pāli tradition as represented by Buddhaghosa (the ascribed commentator of the Abhidhamma texts) holds that the Abhidhamma Piṭaka was *discovered* and *taught* by the “Perfectly Awakened Buddha” (*Sammāsambuddha*). It was *discovered* during the fourth week of his awakening as he attained omniscience and sat with unblinking eyes contemplating “endless and immeasurable” methods for interpreting experience.<sup>1</sup> These endless methods (*naya*) became the Abhidhamma texts. But how could he teach endless methods? The *teaching* of them has various accounts, one of which is that the Abhidhamma, being coextensive with the Dhamma itself, was taught when the Wheel of the Dhamma was turned (the suttas contain the same teachings, but in them the teachings are given in the contexts of particular narratives when they are taught to particular interlocutors). Another account, one that suggests that the Abhidhamma can also be conceived as a distinct body of material, has it that the Buddha taught the Abhidhamma to his mother in heaven during a three-month period (where he began to teach her all the lists of phenomena as we see them in the *Dhammasaṅgaṇī*), while also coming down to earth periodically and teaching it to his disciple Venerable Sāriputta. When teaching to Sāriputta, “the foremost disciple renowned for analysis,” he gave the method “much like one gesturing to the ocean that is seen by stretching out one’s hand while standing at the shore.”<sup>2</sup> That is to say, the Buddha initiated through a gesture the oceanic methods of the Abhidhamma to a disciple skilled in analysis who could expand on them. In this reading, the Abhidhamma is the beginning of a series of methods and listings of formulas for analyzing experience that is inherently generative, indeed “endless and immeasurable.” These considerations, while perhaps fanciful from a modern point of view, may be instructive as we begin to interpret the prolixity of lists in this genre of canonical teachings and how we might conceive of them as methods.

Indeed, the Abhidhamma texts consist mostly of lists. A key term for understanding Abhidhamma lists is *mātikā*, matrix, though the use of *mātikā* was by no means exclusive to this genre. A *mātikā* is a table of contents, outline, or listing that can lead to further expository development of the items on it. In both Pāli and English, the word is derived from “mother” and retains the sense of being that from which something further issues (Gethin 1992b, 160–61). Much like a professor jotting down a brief outline of lecture notes which she will then expand in class, a Buddhist teacher would have ready (though without the jotting down since for centuries the tradition was transmitted orally) a list which she could expand via commentary. Of course, this can work conversely: *mātikās* also function as brief (*saṅkitta*) summaries or contractions of teachings that are elsewhere expansive (*vitthāra*), and thus offer the Dhamma in nutshell.

Rupert Gethin has shown that *mātikās* in the Buddhist sources were used not only to flesh out the details of items on the original list, but also to generate further lists. Lists generate other lists until one begins to get a sense of the overall teaching in a highly systematic way. To show this, he starts with the familiar list of the Four Noble Truths. We begin with a list of four items (Suffering, Origin, Ceasing, and the Path), where three of these mention other lists: the Truth of Suffering mentions the five aggregates (form, feeling, perceiving, volitional constructions, and consciousness); the Truth of Origin mentions three types of craving; and the Truth of the Path is, of course, eightfold. Pressing further, each of the aggregates itself subsumes more lists (four kinds of form, three [or six] kinds of feeling, six kinds of perceiving, *et cetera*) and then each of the constituents of the Eightfold Path is parsed by further lists (right view contains

the Four Noble Truths [here the parts contain the whole], right thought is the three wholesome thoughts, right speech is of four kinds, *et cetera*). One could go on. Gethin pursues many of the possible lists (but not all) to which the Four Truths can lead to arrive eventually at all thirty-seven factors of awakening (and even that is an arbitrary stopping place), and an overall sense of core Buddhist teachings.<sup>3</sup>

The utility of lists in an oral culture relying on memory is obvious and often noted. But further, Gethin argues, this capacity of lists to subsume and generate other lists was invaluable for teaching and understanding in a way that goes beyond rote learning because “the lists help one learn the Dhamma with a view to its inner structure and dynamic” and can “act as a kind of flowchart for the composition of a discourse” (Gethin 1992b, 156). The matrices become guidelines or methods for recitation and composition within the oral performative culture in which teachings were taught and known. If any list can lead potentially to all other lists, the Abhidhamma specialist can speak to any feature of the Dhamma and indeed the overall patterns and connections of the entire system. These features lead Buddhaghosa to insist that only Abhidhamma specialists *really* know how to preach the Dhamma, because they do not get muddled.<sup>4</sup>

Another generative listing practice useful for both memorization and teaching is to order teachings according to the lists of “twos,” “threes,” “fours,” and so on. Lists by numbers, often in a question-and-answer format, is a very common practice in the suttas, as we see in the “Chanting Together” (Saṅgīti) and “Expanding Tens” (Dasuttara) suttas, and of course in the entire structure of the *Āṅguttara Nikāya*.<sup>5</sup> This provided not only an orderly and systematic teaching, a memory aid, and a collective and performative style of preaching (how many twos can we remember and recite together?), but it also allows one to see new identifications and relationships and to improvise within the terms of the larger system. The “Great Questions” sutta, for example, is the improvisational expansion of the Buddha’s teaching by a pundit nun from Kajaṅgalā. She is asked by lay people to preach on a list of questions about ones, twos, threes, *et cetera*. Claiming that she had heard neither the Buddha nor the monks expand on these particular points, she offers to explain, in detail, how she understands these questions. She expands the lists in a way that uses the numerical schema to discuss core teachings. The lay people honor her for this and she invites them to check her answers with the Buddha, who confirms that he would have answered exactly as she did.<sup>6</sup>

Finally, if we are right in finding the kernel of Abhidhamma practices in some of the sutta literature, another purpose of lists was for the Buddha to teach his disciples the skills to analyze experience from multiple angles and in multiple ways. Such aspectual and modal interrogations of experience are important, both in the contemplative practices he advocates and in teaching. The latter can be shown in “The Many Types of Elements Sutta,” where the Buddha urges his disciples to train to become “learned” (*paṇḍita*) and “inquisitive” (*vīmaṃsaka*). They do so by becoming “skilled” (*kosala*) in the elements, bases, and dependent origination (these fundamental teachings, some discussed in what follows, are not necessary to elaborate here for the purpose at hand). Ānanda takes this to heart so that as the Buddha begins to give numerical listings of the elements, Ānanda asks him, repeatedly, “but venerable sir, is there *another mode of teaching* (*pariyāya*) whereby one can become skilled with the elements?” In each case, the Buddha says yes, and gives a different numerical listing. It is thus through Ānanda’s persistent questions that we get first eighteen elements, then a different listing of how the elements can be described by way of six, and then a different list of six, then yet another list of six, then a breakdown of them into three, then into two.<sup>7</sup> This exercise suggests two main points to bear in mind as we enter this literature. First, lists of phenomena can be variable: there is no single list of the elements because they can be divided up differently according to different methods

of looking at them. Second, there is a valued skill in questioning to arrive at different modes of breaking down and teaching about experience. A skillful inquisitor does not stop with one list.

### *The Enumeration of Phenomena*

This first text of the Abhidhamma Piṭaka, the *Enumeration of Phenomena* (hereafter, *Enumeration*) is structured into three books. Book I begins with a matrix of twenty-two triplets (that is, lists of threes) and one hundred pairs (lists of twos). It then takes up the first list of triplets which are three questions: “which are the good (*kusala*) *dhammas*? Which are the bad (*akusala*) *dhammas*? Which are the indeterminate *dhammas*?”<sup>8</sup> The text itself does not define *dhamma* or *kusala*, but at this stage in the literature, *dhamma* seems to mean “object of experience” that one can observe in contemplative introspection.<sup>9</sup> “Phenomenon” will serve as a translation. For its part, the commentary adds the nuance that these are not essentialist or living entities.<sup>10</sup> As for *kusala*, the commentary defines it as “salutary, blameless, competent, and producing happy results,”<sup>11</sup> a range which I attempt to capture quite generally as “good.” *Akusala*, “bad,” is the opposite of this, and indeterminate are undetermined or neutral.

Answering these three questions of this first matrix takes up half of the entire *Enumeration*, as it proceeds to ask about specific types of moments of awareness (*citta*). For example, it begins by taking up a type of good awareness that is associated with sensual desire and accompanied by joy and knowledge.

What are the good phenomena? On whatever occasion there is the arising of a good awareness of the sensory realm accompanied by joy and knowledge, having as its object a (visual) form, sound, smell, taste, touch, or mental phenomenon, then at that occasion there are: contact, feeling, perceiving, intention, awareness, initial thinking, sustained thinking, joy, pleasure, oneness of mind, faculty of faith, faculty of energy, faculty of mindfulness, faculty of concentration, faculty of wisdom, mental faculty, faculty of happiness, faculty of vitality, right view, right thought, right effort, right mindfulness, right concentration, power of faith, power of energy, power of mindfulness, power of concentration, power of wisdom, power of shame, power of apprehension, non-greed, non-hatred, non-delusion, non-covetousness, non-malice, right view, shame, apprehension, tranquility of body, tranquility of mind, lightness of body, lightness of mind, softness of body, softness of mind, workableness of body, workableness of mind, proficiency of body, proficiency of mind, uprightness of body, uprightness of mind, mindfulness, meta-attention, calmness, insight, exertion, balance, and whatever other dependently-arisen formless *dhammas* occur on that occasion – these are good phenomena.<sup>12</sup>

This particular occasion of experience can include at least these fifty-six phenomena (*dhammas*), though it need not include all of them; elsewhere, these types of *dhammas* are referred to as *cetasikas*, psychological phenomena. The rest of Book I lists the *cetasika dhammas* occurring in various types of good moments of awareness, then in the various occasions of bad moments of awareness, and then in occasions of the indeterminate, and in every case working these classifications of experience through the distinctions that occur in the other triplets and pairs, as well as many others.

There are several things to notice about this first list of fifty-six *dhammas*. First, most of its first few items have precedent in the “One-by-One Sutta,” which describes Sāriputta listing the phenomena he experienced and identified “one by one” during his meditation experiences. His

introspection revealed that, among other phenomena, contact, feeling, perceiving, intention, awareness, initiative, resolve, energy, mindfulness, equanimity, and attention arose, endured, and faded away in his *jhānic* meditation.<sup>13</sup> While initiative (*chando*), decision (*adhimokkho*), and attention (*manasikāro*) enter into these Abhidhamma lists only at the postcanonical level, Sāriputta's observations might be the seed of this method of cataloging the phenomena present through introspective practice.

Second, one should notice that some of the items repeat under different modes. For example, “mindfulness” (*sati*) occurs no fewer than four times: as a faculty, as a power, as “right mindfulness” (that is, one of the Eightfold Path factors), and listed on its own. This might be seen as unnecessarily redundant: should not a single mention of mindfulness (*sati*) be enough? Buddhaghosa resists forcefully the idea that the list is baggy or ill-considered because each of the different groupings and modalities (mindfulness as a power *or* a faculty *or* a path factor) speaks to different aspects or workings of these phenomena. They are like artisans who work in different guilds in which their functions and roles vary: the “same” artisan can work as a carpenter, plumber, *et cetera*, for the king.<sup>14</sup> We might say that mindfulness might be present in a particularly strong way in a particular occasion of this type of experience, whereby it operates as a *faculty* governing the experience as a whole. Or in a different instance of a similar occasion of experience, mindfulness might not function as a ruling faculty but rather as a mild trace of a path factor. These differences suggest that these various classifications of how a phenomenon can present were intended to be captured in the list itself. The modern interpreter Nyanaponika Thera argues similarly that these repetitions under different aspects are not dispensable (as the later summarizations of the tradition suggest) but rather indicate “the different functions and ways of application of a single quality,” and are essentially practical in orientation for the psychological and transformative purposes at the heart of the whole business. He cites a modern psychologist to indicate the importance of this – “in psychology a difference in aspects is a difference in things” – and Nyanaponika explores with great nuance the implications of this aspectual or modal method of analysis.<sup>15</sup>

Another key feature of the list of fifty-six phenomena in this occasion of good awareness is that it ends with an “*et cetera*.”<sup>16</sup> The list is not described as final or complete. Indeed, all lists of phenomena occurring in particular occasions of awareness (bad and indeterminate, too) in this text (and there are a good many) end with “*et cetera*” in this way. Finally, note that by the end of this list, these phenomena are described as “the good phenomena” (*ime dhammā kusalā*). This is important because many of the same items (contact, feeling, perceiving, intention, and so on) will appear again when the text begins to list the varieties of bad and indeterminate moments of awareness;<sup>17</sup> there they will change normative valence and become bad and indeterminate phenomena. Again, this feature has been noted by Nyanaponika, who argues for the importance of these groupings for indicating how items in them are “open” and changeable according to what else occurs on the occasion in which they arise. This builds into the system a resistance to seeing *dhammas* as single, discrete, self-contained units because their functions, intensities, roles, and valences change according to whatever else occurs in the occasion of experience being considered (Nyanaponika 1998, 40–41).

Book II takes up matrices for analyzing form (*rūpa*). Here it is important to note that form is not “matter” in the sense of the physical stuff of the world, rendered in a reductionist attempt to get at atoms, as it is sometimes understood. The text's many matrices defining form labor in much the same vein of enumerations that classify and elaborate it according to single definitions, pairs, triplets, and so on up to lists of eleven. Throughout, *rūpa* consists of *dhammas* occurring always and only with other *dhammas* (of the other four aggregates, often grouped together as that part of our phenomenality associated with naming [*nāma*] experience), and

is analyzed as it is experienced by our six senses, karmic results, and other psychological factors and features of experience. For his part, Buddhaghosa interprets *rūpa* as that part of human phenomenality that is impacted (literally “molested,” *ruppana*) by sensory contact. For example, when we begin to analyze our experience of forms, we find that the “earth element” is experienced in terms of its hardness, how it acts as a foundation, and how it receives other things; and the “water element” is analyzed by its flowing, spreading, accumulating, and so on.<sup>18</sup> This is not a physics of matter and processes that occur “out there” independent of an observer, but rather an analysis of the human experience of them – how they are for us.

Book III is a summary, but instead of reducing or tidying up the numerous analytical matrices and practices in the first two-thirds of the text, it offers yet further matrices and classifications that consider *dhammas* in terms of yet further modalities and aspects. These groupings consider various kinds of phenomena in terms of their association with the causes (*hetu*), conditions (*paccaya*), hindrances (*nīvaraṇa*), fetters (*saṃyojana*), ooziings (*āsava*), views (*diṭṭhi*), forms of clinging (*upādāna*), defilements (*kilesa*), path factors (*magga*), and so on. In other words, it appears that every core teaching, classification, and distinction given in the Suttanta finds a place in the *Enumeration* as a mode of analysis of *dhammas*.

### Analysis

Our second text, *Analysis (Vibhaṅga)*, is structured rather differently than *Enumeration*, but it interacts with it in interesting ways. It consists of eighteen chapters that treat, with great analytical depth, core teachings found in the suttas. These are: aggregates, bases, elements, the Four Truths, the faculties, dependent origination, the four foundations of mindfulness, right striving, the bases for magical power, awakening factors, path factors, the *jhānas*, the immeasurables (that is, the divine abidings), the five moral precepts, the four kinds of discriminating analysis, understanding, miscellaneous items, and an analysis of the “heart of the Dhamma.”<sup>19</sup> These lists function much as we have described previously with the help of Gethin as lists leading to further lists in a highly generative way that can develop one’s understanding of both the intricacies of the details and the overarching structure of the teachings. The lists also develop a modal treatment of experience as it is interpreted by those teachings.

The text is very systematic in that each chapter has three parts: Suttanta Analysis, Abhidhamma Analysis, and Lines of Questioning. The first is an analysis that picks up on classifications and distinctions mentioned in the Suttanta, but according to Buddhaghosa, this is only a partial analysis. The fuller analysis is given in the Abhidhamma Analysis which is more elaborate, looking at the category under analysis from “every side,”<sup>20</sup> by offering matrices of single definitions, pairs, triplets, and so on. The Lines of Questioning will be familiar from the questions of the *Enumeration* beginning with which items are good, which are bad, and which are indeterminate, and going on from there to offer additional matrices of the twenty-two triplets and one hundred pairs used in that text. So in this generative way, *Analysis* puts to creative use for its groups and items the same method that the *Enumeration* uses to treat *dhammas*. Of course, many of the items in *Analysis*’s teachings are themselves *dhammas*.

There is space only for a brief example of the first chapter, the analysis of the aggregates. This offers first a relatively short Suttanta Analysis of each of the five aggregates: form (*rūpa*), feeling (*vedanā*), perceiving (*saññā*), volitional constructions (*saṅkhāra*), and consciousness (*viññāṇa*). The five aggregates doctrine is of paramount importance because it breaks down and groups the entire experience or phenomenality of a human being into these five clusters of phenomena. Beginning with form, the Suttanta Analysis breaks it down further into what is experienced as past, present, and future – according to whether it is experienced subjectively



or by others, whether it is gross or subtle, inferior or superior, and distant or proximate. (Notice that these analyses of *rūpa*, like those in *Enumerations*, do not itemize the physical stuff in the world, but rather list modalities of human experiences with this cluster of phenomena; again, this is because *rūpa* refers not to matter but to one side of our phenomenality.) The Abhidhamma Analysis piles on more analyses according to single ways of describing form, and matrices of pairs, triplets, and up to eevens; the Lines of Questioning runs *rūpa* through the twenty-two triplets and one hundred pairs. Then the chapter takes up feeling, the second of the aggregates, and analyzes it by the same modes in all three parts that it did with the treatment of form. And so on for the other three aggregates.

And this is only the first chapter of *Analysis* – there are seventeen more. Each chapter deploys somewhat different modalities as are appropriate to it, and anyone with an interest in any of the eighteen teachings would be well served by exploring these chapters that analyze it exhaustively (or exhaustingly, as the case may be). The final chapter, the “Heart of the Dhamma,” circles back to many of the categories the whole text has covered, to ask about further types and classifications of the aggregates, bases, elements, and so on. As in the *Enumeration*’s final book, something that looks like it might summarize winds up elaborating further.

## Philosophical Interpretations

### *Abhidhamma as an Ontology of Ultimate Reals*

To what end, all this analysis? There is a substantial body of scholarship that treats the Pāli Abhidhamma as, at bottom, a metaphysics or ontology of ultimate reality, and in fact we can say that this is the dominant position in both traditional Theravāda scholarship and modern Buddhist studies. To begin with representatives of the latter, contemporary scholars of Buddhist philosophy have not always made much of a distinction between the Pāli Abhidhamma and the Sarvāstivāda Abhidharma on this point, and some have assumed that what holds for the latter also describes the former. For example, Jan Westerhoff asserts that while there emerged different Abhidharma canonical traditions “all were united by a common core of philosophical principles,” which include a notion of “primary existent objects” that are “ultimately real.” Because these ultimately real objects, *dharmas*, are said to have an “intrinsic nature” (*svabhāva*), they “exist no matter what, without depending on the existence of any other dharma or on any conceptualizing mind” (Westerhoff 2013, 130). Other texts make the same move in conflating the Abhidharma/Abhidhamma systems and characterizing them as offering, as *The Princeton Dictionary of Buddhism* puts it in its single entry on both, “an objective, impersonal, and highly technical description of the specific characteristics of *reality*” (my italics) (Buswell and Lopez 2014, 4); when this dictionary turns to the *Enumeration* it treats its purpose in the same vein as “a systematic analysis of all the elements of reality” (241). While Paul Williams distinguishes between the Sarvāstivādin tradition and the Theravāda, and suggests that the latter might be characterized as an “event ontology” rather than a “substance ontology,” he is insistent that Abhidhamma analysis involves “seeing things as they are, and that is a matter of ontology” (Williams and Tribe 2000, 92). For many scholars, the matter is settled.

As we turn to scholars trained within the Pāli tradition, we find a long history of an ontological reading of the Abhidhamma dating at least to the medieval compendium literature, and likely initiated in some of the layers of exegetical tradition that precede it. Far and away the most significant development after the first commentaries is the *Compendium on the Meaning of the Abhidhamma* (*Abhidhammatthasaṅgaha*), attributed to the eleventh-century monk, Ācariya Anuruddha. This text is the most widely known Abhidhamma text and has almost entirely

supplanted the canonical literature in both monastic curricula in Theravāda countries and modern Western scholarship. Indeed, it is this text's system of Abhidhamma that is regularly cited and discussed as *the* Pāli Abhidhamma in textbooks and scholarly works, despite the fact that it differs in several highly significant respects from the canonical literature (a point that is itself seldom noted). For example, textbooks that cite a standard enumeration of Abhidhamma categories of eighty-nine classes of *cittas* and fifty-two *cetasikas* are drawing from the *Compendium* rather than the *Enumeration* or any other canonical listing, where the lists do not correspond exactly with this system.<sup>21</sup>

The *Compendium* owes its reputation in part to its concise and highly systematic presentation of what had grown to be a huge and unruly body of material when we consider not just the seven books of the Abhidhamma but the many layers of commentary and subcommentary that followed in their wake. The *Compendium* is only about fifty pages, making it a handy and useful summary and primer. While this is not the place to compare systematically this text with the *Enumeration*, I can mention several features of it that differ from its canonical predecessor, and these features suggest a far more ontological orientation. As we have seen, the *Enumeration* lists its phenomena always in reference to questions about what occurs in particular *occasions* of momentary awareness; for example, the list we began with previously describes a certain specific type of momentary awareness, an "occasion" in which some combination of fifty-six or more *dharmas* could occur. Other lists describe bad or indeterminate moments of awareness, different occasions of experience. In other words, the text does not attempt a single generic list of items of experience abstracted from the occasions in which they occur. But the *Compendium* tidies all of this up to offer a single abstract list in an arrangement of eighty-nine *cittas* and fifty-two *cetasikas*.

The *Compendium* also adds distinctions not present in the canon, such as a category of "beautiful *cittas*," and a distinction between universally present and occasional *cetasikas*. Further, when we considered the first kind of awareness in the *Enumeration*, we noted that some fifty-six *cetasikas* (and counting) could be present in that particular type of good awareness and that some of the items could be said to be repeating under different aspects (mindfulness, for example, appears four times). In the *Compendium*'s generic list of fifty-two *cetasikas*, all such apparent repetitions have been pruned away, and the list is presented without the possibility that it could be supplemented; it appears to be closed and total. Moreover, even a cursory glance at the two lists reveals that a not insignificant number of the *cetasikas* differ from the lists of *cetasikas* occurring in the *Enumeration*, as for example: the *Compendium* does not list *citta* itself (it may have seemed redundant to treat *citta* as both a *cetasika* and a moment of awareness comprised of *cetasikas*), calm meditation (*samatha*), and *vipassanā*. Faith, mindfulness, energy, and others are listed once *as such*, but not in their aspects as powers and faculties. Among *akusala dharmas*, missing in the *Compendium* but present in the *Enumeration* are wrong thought, wrong effort, wrong concentration, and some of the *dharmas* acting as powers and faculties (such as the power of energy). In addition, the *Compendium* includes items that are not in any of the *Enumeration*'s listings, and came into the Abhidhamma tradition only with the *aṭṭhakathā*, including attention, resolve, initiative, and among bad *cetasikas*, conceit, envy, avarice, rigidity, and sluggishness.<sup>22</sup> Doubtless, the field would benefit from a more sustained comparative treatment of these two texts and the implications of their differences than I can offer here, but I have tried to suggest enough of these differences to suggest that we are quite possibly dealing with different systems.

Of course, some may view these differences as simply the *Compendium*'s more rational, simplified, and elegant rendering of the same basic text. To be sure, it lists many of the *Enumeration*'s distinctions and classifications that may capture its complexity when put into action ramifying these classifications with its basic list of *dharmas*. And we have no standing to require that the "tradition" should adhere to the canonical formulations rather than what



it may consider to be a more concise maturation of it. But the differences in both content and form are significant enough that they suggest that modern scholars may wish to avoid speaking of a *single* Abhidhamma theory, represented by this medieval summary of it. In terms of content, the *Compendium* presents new and different *dhammas* and new distinctions and categories. Perhaps even more significantly, in terms of formal presentation it presents a complete, abstract, “view-from-nowhere” list, and many of the features of the modal quality of presentation (such as how a particular phenomenon occurs under different aspects and operating in different modes, such as powers and faculties) are no longer evident. These formal features suggest not just differences in the details, but a substantial development of the tradition over time away from what appeared as open-ended sets of modal analytical practices to a more reductive, closed, and complete system. The differences and tensions between a total and totalizing system and an open-ended one deserve further scholarly scrutiny.

Perhaps the *Compendium*'s most significant ontological move is the use of language that was not present in the *Enumeration* but that came to be used and then invested with ontological significance in later exegetical layers. Two critical terms in this regard are *paramattha* (ultimate meaning) and *sabhāva* (the particular nature of a thing). Neither is present in the *Enumeration* or *Analysis*.<sup>23</sup> We can begin with *paramattha*. The *Compendium* frames its project in terms of listing the four main types of phenomena from an “ultimate” standpoint: *citta*, *cetasika*, *rūpa*, and *nibbāna*, which then receive further elaboration as they come to structure the whole system. In earlier commentarial literature, *paramattha* just meant a kind of ultimate, analytic, “furthest-sense” *language*, but there is reason to believe that by this medieval text (and likely much before in the *īkā* literature), it had come to refer to ultimate *reality* – the things or events that really exist. We have traveled considerably from the early usage of *dhamma* as merely an object of experience. The *Compendium* says that “in this way the Tathāgatas reveal what is ultimate as four: awareness, psychological phenomena, form, and *nibbāna*.”<sup>24</sup> This assertion suggests that Tathāgathas are not just speaking in furthest-sense language, but rather are revealing ultimate reality. The text also speaks of *paramattha* in terms of *what exists* when it contrasts *dhammas*, such as form and feeling, with what is not found to exist in this sense, such as earth and mountains.<sup>25</sup> This suggests a distinction about how our concepts capture what really exists, and the terms that capture what really exists are *dhammas* like *rūpa* and *vedanā*. It now becomes possible to refer to “ultimate *dhammas*” (*paramatthadhamma*) as the commentaries on the *Compendium* go on to do.<sup>26</sup> In his commentary on the *Compendium*, modern interpreter Ledi Sayadaw takes himself to be offering “an explanation of the ultimate” (Sayadaw 1913–1914, 129; see Braun 2015, 20–21). The ontological interpretation is of course a very powerful religious and philosophical claim: the Buddha, in this highest form of his teaching, declared and revealed in the most direct terms *what really exists*.

Another crucial term in the ontological shift is *sabhāva*, which is not mentioned by any of the canonical Abhidhamma texts. It enters the Pāli tradition in the *aṭṭhakathā* as referring to the particularity or specific characteristic a thing has that makes it different from other things, and it can be used very broadly in this way. But after Buddhaghosa, the term *sabhāva* came to be freighted with maximalist ontological significance to mean the “intrinsic nature” of something (much as the Sanskrit term *svabhāva* came to be understood by the Madhyamaka critics of the Abhidharma traditions). Further, *dhamma* comes to be identified with *sabhāva*, so *dhammas* come to be that which have their own, intrinsic nature.<sup>27</sup> While the *Compendium* is terse enough to not always be entirely clear about what it means by such terms, it does indicate that all of the fifty-two *cetasikas*, for example, are established “by way of their particular nature.”<sup>28</sup> The project has come to involve listing phenomena according to their intrinsic natures, and so we come to find modern accounts that speak of *dhammas* as “things in themselves, ultimates.”<sup>29</sup> Whereas

the *Enumeration* began to list phenomena that can occur in particular occasions of awareness and that must be analyzed in a modal way, the *Compendium* simply lists the bare phenomena themselves, recruiting the notion of *paramattha* to indicate ultimacy and the notion of *sabhāva* to indicate an intrinsic nature.

Y. Karunadasa characterizes the “*dhamma* theory” that has at this point emerged in strongly ontological terms, although he acknowledges that this theory was “not precisely articulated” in the canonical texts.<sup>30</sup> Combined with the ontological sense of *paramattha*, the theory is now seen to be positing “ultimate existents” that can be said to have “objective existence,” and the *ṭīkās* begin to speak of “ultimate intrinsic realities” (*paramatthasabhāva*).<sup>31</sup> A *dhamma* now represents “a fact having an objective counterpart” and “an actual datum of objective experience” (Karunadasa 1996, 18). For Karunadasa, *dhammas* are the “ultimate irreducible data” of cognition and objective existence, and the “ultimate elements of existence”; they are “not amenable to further analysis” (Karunadasa 1996, 5). He further suggests that the tradition can be considered a kind of “critical realism” in that it “recognizes the distinctness of the world from the experiencing subject” and that “the *dhammas* do not exist in dependence on the operation of the mind” (Karunadasa 1996, 28). While I think that much of this language considerably overstates what we actually see in the literature (especially the idea that the *dhammas* are somehow independent of experience and not amenable to further analysis), I think he is right to say that the *ṭīkā* literature, as represented here primarily by the *Compendium*, has generated an ontology of ultimate reals as the highest teaching that is the Abhidhamma.

### ***Abhidhamma as Endless Phenomenological Analysis***

While the preponderance of tradition and scholarly weight falls on the side of the ontological reading, we can identify an entirely different set of choices going as far back as the *aṭṭhakathā* (the earliest postcanonical exegetical layer that we have). This material – codified in the fifth century, likely by a team of scholars headed by Buddhaghosa – emphasizes not ontology but analysis in its reading of the *Enumeration* and *Analysis*. Before turning to Buddhaghosa’s reading of the Abhidhamma, it may be useful to recap several features of the canonical texts themselves that suggest that assuming them to be fundamentally ontological in nature and purpose may be misleading.

As we have seen, Abhidhamma matrices, which generate other lists to expound the teaching and its structures, continue ever more finely grained analyses and questioning “from all sides” in what *Analysis* calls the Abhidhamma Analysis. I hope that even in my brief synopses of both books, it is clear that analysis begets analysis without ever landing on a final, single, ultimate list of phenomena as the point or outcome of all the many modes of analysis these books deploy. The point rather seems to be to generate analyses that consider and reconsider teachings about experience in a modal and aspectual way. I have also mentioned the practical nature of these methods of analyzing in contemplative practice experience. They were used not to canvass all of psychological life and the material world, but rather to examine further the particular teachings the Buddha gave in the suttas to observe and change one’s experience for therapeutic and soteriological purposes.

The distinction between conventional teachings and ultimate teachings occurs first in the *Kathāvatthu* (and is not mentioned in any of the other six canonical books) and then is picked up at the *aṭṭhakathā* layer, where it refers not to different kinds of truth or reality, but to different registers of the Buddha’s teachings. In the *Kathāvatthu* the distinction can be read not as describing ultimate reality per se, but as indicating how one *arrives* at different terms: “does one arrive at ‘person’ by means of the furthest-sense, by what is realized?”<sup>32</sup> The answer is no,

because “person” does not survive the analytic dismantling of it into parts, such as the aggregates, so it is not a *paramattha* term. By contrast, the technical language of the Abhidhamma, such as aggregates, *dhammas*, form, feeling, *et cetera*, are arrived at via furthest-sense (*paramattha*) analysis. (This does not entail, however, that any mention of “person” (*puggala*) is inappropriate,<sup>33</sup> at least not when we consider that an entire book of the Abhidhamma, the *Puggalapaññatti*, explores the nature of the person, and not just reductively, but also socially, morally, in terms of progress, and so on).

For Buddhaghosa, *paramattha* teachings are given in a register that is technical and analytical – language in the “furthest sense.” This is contrasted with the Buddha’s more ordinary language that is given in conventional (*sammuti*) or customary (*voḥara*) teachings. He is insistent that the distinction refers to different types of the Buddha’s language (*bhāsā*) and teachings (*desanā*), and not to different kinds of truth (*sacca*).<sup>34</sup> One would not say that ultimate language is true and conventional language is false, because both refer to the Buddha’s teachings and are thus (for him) both incontrovertibly and unqualifiedly true. It is not an ontological distinction, and the mention of *paramattha* is not an occasion to describe reality. It may seem like a short step to say that something that cannot be analyzed further is what actually exists, but this is precisely what the canonical materials, and Buddhaghosa, nowhere say (and indeed, they never grant that these categories cannot be analyzed further).

Buddhaghosa mentions *sabhāva* but does not imbue it with ontological significance, and he uses the term quite broadly. For example, he describes the different *sabhāvas* or particularities of each of the decaying corpses in the “meditations on the disgusting” in the *Visuddhimagga*. When he does so, he is not mounting an argument that these different types of decaying corpses are final units of analysis and thus ultimate reals; rather, this is part of a contemplative practice identifying particular features of a meditation object. *Dhammas*, too, can be defined in terms of their particularities because it can be useful to define a thing by its specific characteristic, as we see here: “*dhammas* have particularities (*sabhāva*); alternatively, *dhammas* are brought about by conditions, or *dhammas* are brought about by their particularities.”<sup>35</sup> The word *dhamma* can be understood in terms of *sabhāva*, but for him, it does not mean “essence” or “intrinsic nature,” but only a thing’s *particularity* whereby it can be defined as different than something else. The claim that *dhammas* can be “brought about” by either their own particularities or *by conditions* itself rules out that they are self-existent, *sui generis* phenomena. It says that they can be understood or grasped by either their particularities or by how they are conditioned by other phenomena. Further, Buddhaghosa emphasizes that *dhammas* are “empty.” Discussing the “Section on Emptiness” (*suññatavaro*) in the *Enumeration*, he says this:

“These are just *dhammas*” is mentioned to show that, due to their emptiness, “they are only *dhammas*, without essence, without a leader.” Therefore, the meaning is to be understood in this way: on an occasion that the first main good awareness arises in the realm of sense desires, on that occasion fifty-six *dhammas* arise by virtue of being constituents of that awareness, in the sense of their particularities.<sup>36</sup>

*Dhammas* have particularities but are without essences due to their emptiness. Of course, emptiness as a mode of analysis had long been part of the canonical Abhidhamma and the *Paṭisambhidāmagga* (which explicitly discusses the “emptiness of *sabhāva*” in the case of each of the five aggregates), and Buddhaghosa follows suit.<sup>37</sup>

While Buddhaghosa’s interpretation of these two terms, *paramattha* and *sabhāva*, begins to show that he reads the tradition differently than do his successors, there are other features of his

interpretation relevant to the point. As we have seen, he reads the Abhidhamma texts as an “endless and immeasurable” series of methods and practices that begin to give room for the Buddha’s active and dynamic omniscient practices of knowing things without obstacle. He identifies his school of commentary as the Vibhajjavāda, which among other things entails that one steers clear from launching one’s own view and instead “takes up the meaning of a text and then returns again to that meaning by explaining it with different methods (*pariyāya*).”<sup>38</sup> We have already had occasion to note the “Many Types of Elements Sutta,” in which training in being inquisitive about multiple modes of teaching and numerous lists is a fundamental skill for a teacher; the “Many Types of Feeling Sutta” does similar work with feeling (*vedanā*), showing that this *dhamma* may be sliced and diced variously and is hardly irreducible (see Heim 2021). This is the spirit and style in which Buddhaghosa read the canonical texts and carried out his own analyses in the *Visuddhimagga*. I have elsewhere argued that when we take the time to work through Buddhaghosa’s theory of scripture and the interpretative practices he engages in, we see him articulating a view of the Abhidhamma Piṭaka as a kind of “phenomenological analysis,” a modal examination of experience through methods designed to explore experience and change it (Heim 2018; Heim and Ram-Prasad 2018). He is not engaged in metaphysical or epistemological arguments.

Among modern scholars, as may be apparent, Nyanaponika Thera shares much of this view in an elegant and insightful discussion focusing on the *Enumeration*. He describes the canonical Abhidhamma as a whole as a phenomenology in that it deals with “phenomena, that is, with the world of internal and external experience,” which he contrasts with “ontology, or metaphysics, that inquires into the existence and nature of an essence, or ultimate principle, underlying the phenomenal world” (Nyanaponika 1998, 190). He modulates this to some extent, however, by suggesting that the practices of analysis in the Abhidhamma do in fact aim at contributing to “ontological problems,” namely that it shows that in reality there no abiding essence to be found in the world of experience (Nyanaponika 1998, 21); and he does slip back into talking about “reality” from time to time (though he is careful to say that it deals with “actuality from an exclusively ethical and psychological viewpoint and with a definite practical purpose”) (Nyanaponika 1998, 2, 46). Notably, Bhikkhu Bodhi, in his introduction to Nyanaponika’s book, modulates the phenomenological reading further, and works it back to ontology, asserting that “the Abhidhamma draws up a list of ontological actualities” and does in fact discriminate between what is real and what is only apparently real (Nyanaponika 1998, xvi – xviii). It is important to many that the Abhidhamma be seen to be the Buddha offering an account of ultimate reality, the way things really are.

My own reading is to take seriously the possibility that the intellectual purpose of the canonical Abhidhamma is to offer a complex set of analytic practices and methods that allow the practitioner to explore the many – perhaps infinite – facets of experience without ever landing on a final, single, essential list of the contents or aspects of it. The lists aim not to arrive at a single, irreducible account of the nature of our experience, but rather to engage in the methods that would resist such a final account (and in this sense, the later tradition contravenes this spirit). The lists do not seek to provide an account of reality, even the reality of experience, but rather to provide methods and practices of analysis as part of the contemplative and analytical purpose to inquire into and transform experience. This is philosophy of a different sort than metaphysical assertion and argument. It is a practice of exploring and transforming experience within the therapeutic and soteriological aims of Buddhist dogma.

Part of how I have arrived at this view is that I find much of the modern ontological account unconvincing, either as a reasonable account of the canonical texts or in terms of how it could work philosophically. We may begin with some of the textual considerations. If the *Enumeration* was attempting to arrive at a final list of irreducible *dhammas*, why did it not simply and clearly state, at some point, what these are? Given that it emerged in the ancient Indian context

in which sophisticated ontological systems were ubiquitous, including other traditions of Buddhist thought, why did it not avail itself of such ontological terminology? For that matter, why not define *dhamma* in terms that would make clear that it is an element of ultimate reality, instead of assiduously avoiding language that could be (and later was) construed in ontological ways (*sabhāva*, *paramattha*)? It was either innocent of such ideas, or it deliberately avoided them. If we are to be persuaded that the later medieval tradition seamlessly represents the canonical tradition, we need to see how exactly this works in a treatment that first reckons with the obvious differences in the texts.

Philosophically, I find some of the readings we have explored about *dhammas* either undefended or incoherent. We can begin with widespread slippage in the secondary scholarship that begins by noting that the *dhammas* are objects of experience as they are conveyed by core teachings, but then slides into asserting that they refer to elements of reality, without ever explaining why this must be. It is worth recalling that the original matrices provided lists of *doctrines*, and doctrines are always *practices* – the Four Noble Truths is a *practice* of diagnosing experience and understanding its conditions; the five aggregates is a *practice* of dismantling the idea of person; dependent origination is a *practice* of understanding mutual causes and conditions in analyzing experience. The items that come to be treated as *dhammas* are taken from these lists of practices: things like feeling, perceiving, mindfulness, path factors, and so on. These come to be objects of experience in introspective methods designed to recognize them “one by one,” to see their conditionality, and to transform the practitioner’s phenomenality.

This makes it most unclear what it would mean to say that *dhammas* exist, as we saw previously, “objectively” or that they exist “no matter what, without depending on the existence of any other dharma or on any conceptualizing mind” as “impersonal,” untethered “from any experiencing subject.” Nor is it clear how *dhammas* can be “irreducible” or “not amenable to further analysis” when the canonical texts can always be counted on to provide another list that analyzes, in another mode, each of the phenomena it takes up – elements can be eighteen, or six, or a different six, or a still different six, or three, or two; feelings can be carved up variously and reconsidered by lists of two, three, five, six, eighteen, thirty-six, one hundred and eight, and so on (Heim 2021). Rather, the question is: where, exactly, do these analyses end? How do we find a stopping point that is not arbitrary? I think Gethin is closer to the mark when he notes the danger that comes from breaking things up into parts in that “we might then take the parts as real and begin to reify the world again, if in a different way.”

It seems to me that the early Abhidhamma authors sought to avoid precisely this same danger through the elaboration of the various *mātikās*. Try to grasp the world of the *Dhammasaṅgaṇī*, of the *Paṭṭhāna*, and it runs through one’s fingers.<sup>39</sup>

He goes on to emphasize the use of the *mātikās* in “practical psychology,” in a system “primarily concerned to distinguish states and processes of mind on the basis of actual observation.” And he is right, I think, to note that one often encounters details that are beautiful and profound (though other tasks at hand have precluded space for me to begin to do justice to these).

Finally, I remain deeply intrigued by the philosophical potential of a modal and aspectual exploration of experience. I am persuaded by Buddhaghosa and Nyanaponika Thera that proliferating groupings and classifications of phenomena can help resist essentialist accounts of what we experience. Our feelings and sensations and moral dispositions do seem, phenomenologically, to be open and changeable in their workings, valences, and intensities to whatever else occurs with them in any given occasion of awareness. Is “pleasure” (to take at random just one *dhamma* explored in the matrices) really the *same* thing in every instance in which it occurs?



Do “right view” and “right thought” (to take two more) have single uninflected unchanging natures across all moments of experience in which they might occur? The abstractions that we use to get at our experience – whether we are talking about the solidity we experience in the things we touch or the hedonic impact we encounter when we feel – are always going to be at some remove from the singular particularity of our actual moments of experience. But it could be that those abstractions do a more useful job of describing experience when they are subjected to numerous, perhaps even endless, modes of inquisitive analysis that classify and reclassify, divide and redivide, consider and reconsider, than when they aim to land on a single, final, highly abstract, essentialist, objective, and ultimate “own nature” that they must be.

The early Abhidhamma texts teach us that the philosophy of experience can be an “endless and immeasurable” application of methods useful for taking up concrete moments of experience. This suggests more of a process of analytic work than a final description of reality. Scholars of the early Western phenomenological tradition might see affinities in their approach and this repeated application of phenomenological questions that remain open to further analysis. In the Buddhist tradition, however, this philosophy as practice is, of course, ultimately therapeutic as its methods provide programmatic ways to examine and then fundamentally change the patterns of experience.

### Notes

- 1 See *Atthasālinī* (As) 14–17 (Tin and Rhys Davids 1976, 16) for the details in this paragraph; see also Heim (2018, 40–44, 154–63) on the authorship and teaching of the Abhidhamma as Buddhaghosa understood these. “Endless and immeasurable” is *ananto aparimāṇo*. While all translations are my own unless otherwise noted, I also cite the available English translation. All abbreviations follow the Pāli Text Society.
- 2 As 16 (Tin and Rhys Davids 1976, 20): *Evam sammāsambuddhe nayaṃ dente paṭisambhidāppattassa aggasāvakaṃsa velante thatvā hatthaṃ pasāretvā dassitasamuddasadiṣaṃ nayadānaṃ hoti*.
- 3 Gethin 1992b, 150–56. My translations are slightly different than Gethin’s, most notably, “perceiving” for *saññā* instead of “recognition” (though he is of course right that it involves identifying and naming what one perceives).
- 4 *Atthasālinī* 29 (Tin and Rhys Davids 1976, 37).
- 5 There is substantial scholarship discussing the origins of the Abhidhamma in terms of suttas that are similar to, or precursors for, some of what we see in the Abhidhamma Piṭaka; for some of it see Anālayo (2014) and Cousins (2015). Both are also very helpful on the oral and performative aspects of these practices.
- 6 A v.54–59 (Bodhi 2012, 1376–79). This the second of two suttas called Mahāpañhā. At the conclusion of Kijaṅgalā’s teaching, the Buddha calls her “*paṇḍitā*,” a learned pundit.
- 7 Bahudhātuka Sutta (M iii.61–67; Ñānamoli and Bodhi 1995, 925–30). Briefly, the eighteen elements (*dhātu*) are each of the six senses (mind is a sense) parsed into three components of sensing; the first six elements are: earth, water, fire, air, space, and consciousness; the next six are: pleasure, pain, joy, distress, equanimity, and ignorance; the next six are: sensual desire, renunciation, ill will, non-ill will, cruelty, and non-cruelty; the three are sense-sphere, form-sphere, and formless-sphere elements; the two are: conditioned and unconditioned. Another sutta that refuses to settle on a single list of phenomena (in its case, feeling) so we get lists of two, three, five, sixteen, thirty-six, and one hundred and eight (“The Many Types of Feeling Sutta,” Bahuvēdanīya Sutta at M i.396–400; cf. S iv.223–28, 231–32 see Heim 2021).
- 8 Dhs 1: [*katame*] *kusalā dhammā akusalā dhammā abyākātā dhammā* (Rhys Davids 1975, 1–2).
- 9 In the suttas, *dhammas* in this technical sense are phenomena observed in meditation, as in the Mahāsātipaṭṭhāna Sutta (D ii.290) and the Anupada Sutta (discussed in what follows).
- 10 As 38: *nissattaniḥjīvatā* (Tin and Rhys Davids 1976, 49).
- 11 As 38: *ārogyaanavajjachekasukhavipākesu* (Tin and Rhys Davids 1976, 48).
- 12 Dhs 8–9 (Rhys Davids 1975, 1–5).
- 13 Anupada Sutta, M iii.25–29 (Ñānamoli and Bodhi 1995, 899–902).



- 14 As 135–136 (Tin and Rhys Davids 1976, 178–80). Gethin discusses the implications of listing the “same” phenomena as powers and faculties (1992a, 143).
- 15 Nyanaponika (1998, 88–89; 37–41), citing James Ward. These are points he emphasizes throughout ch. IV. “Modal” and “aspectual” are my terms, however.
- 16 *Ye vā pana tasmim samaye aññepi ath paṭiccasamuppannā arūpino dhammā*: that is, literally, “and whatever other dependently-arisen formless *dhammas* occur on that occasion” (Dhs 8, 75, 87, *et cetera*).
- 17 As, for example, Dhs 75, 87.
- 18 *Visuddhimagga* XI.93, 96. Gethin makes the same point about *rūpa*: the analyses of *rūpa* “focus on the physical world as experienced by a sentient being” (1986, 36). See also Heim and Ram-Prasad (2018) for a systematic demonstration of what Buddhaghosa (and I think the Abhidhamma on which he is relying) means by *nāma* and *rūpa*.
- 19 The *Vibhaṅga* is translated by U. Thiṭṭila (1969), and his introduction provides a useful overview.
- 20 As 2–3 (Tin and Rhys Davids 1976, 4–5).
- 21 It is standard to cite the *Compendium*’s system, as for example, Williams and Tribe (2000, 90–91), Gethin (1998, 210–15), Lamotte (1988, 594–97), and Nyanatiloka (2008, Appendix II); following Nyanatiloka, the system is given in charts in appendices in Nāṇamoli’s translation of the *Visuddhimagga* (Nāṇamoli 1999), even though the *Visuddhimagga* itself nowhere articulates it as such.
- 22 Compare Dhs 8 and Dhs 75 to the *Compendium*’s chapter II. The latter’s main commentary (the *Abhidhammatthavibhāvinī*) occasionally notes a discrepancy between the *Enumeration* and the *Compendium*, as for example, the way that the “heart base” (*hadayaavatthu*) is not mentioned in the former but warrants listing among *rūpa dhammas* by the *Compendium* since it is “in accordance with the scriptural tradition and reasonable” (Wijeratne and Gethin 2007, 221).
- 23 It is surprising the extent to which scholars read these terms back into the canonical texts, however (as, for example, Nyanatiloka 2008, 16).
- 24 *Saṅgaha* VI.65; Wijeratne and Gethin 2007, 255. My translation.
- 25 *Saṅgaha* VIII.42; Wijeratne and Gethin 2007, 322.
- 26 For example, *Abhidhammatthavibhāvinī* §2 (see Wijeratne and Gethin 2007, 7) and Ledi Sayadaw’s *Paramatthadīpanī* 332.
- 27 Karunadasa (1996, 15 and 42n37), citing the *Abhidhamma Mūlaṭīkā* (121): *dhammo ti sabhāvo*.
- 28 *Saṅgaha* III.1; Wijeratne and Gethin (2007, 88).
- 29 U. Thiṭṭila (1969, xxv). This kind of reading comes to be read back into the canonical texts, as in this instance.
- 30 Karunadasa (1996, 2). Noa Ronkin, who frames the Pāli Abhidhamma in strongly metaphysical and ontological terms, also acknowledges, drawing on Gethin, that the canonical tradition did not posit irreducible elements and is more open-ended than is usually recognized (2005, 109).
- 31 Karunadasa (1996, 19 citing the *Abhidhammārthasaṅgraha-sannaya*); the use of *paramatthasabhāva* is also found in the *Vibhaṅga-Mūlaṭīkā* and the *Mahāṭīkā* on the *Visuddhimagga*.
- 32 Kvu 1: *puggalo upalabbhati saccikaṭṭhparamatthenāti*.
- 33 Many scholars assume that this distinction about language is really about reality: Karunadasa says that the passage denies “the reality of a person” (1996, 11), and that this concerns “two levels of reality” (1996, 12). Ledi Sayadaw asserts that from the standpoint of ultimate reality, the notion of a personal entity is “just an erroneous view” (1913–1914, 129).
- 34 *Papañcasūdanī* i.137 and *Manorathapūraṇi* i.94. See Heim (2018, 85–94) for translations and discussions of the relevant passages from Buddhaghosa.
- 35 As 39: *Attano pana sabhāvaṃ dhārentīti dhammā. Dhāriyanti vā paccayehi, dhāriyanti vā yathāsabhāvatoti dhammā*. It is not easy to translate *dhārenti* and *dhāriyanti* – to wear, have, possess, bear, bring.
- 36 As 155: *Dhammāve ete dhammamattā asārā aparīṇāyākatī imissā suññatāya dīpanatthaṃ vuttā. Tasmā evamettha atho vedītabbo – yasmim samaye kāmāvacaraṃ paṭhamaṃ mahākusalacittaṃ uppajjati, tasmim samaye cittaṅgavasena uppunnā atirekapaṇṇāsadhammā sabhāvaṭṭhena dhammā eva honti*; this is on Dhs 121.
- 37 *Paṭisambhidāmagga* II.178 (*sabhāvena suññaṃ*). For a translation of its chapter on emptiness see Nāṇamoli (1982, 356–61). The *Paṭisambhidāmagga* is an Abhidhamma-like text that was placed in the Suttanta Piṭaka; Buddhaghosa relies on it heavily. For another example of Buddhaghosa noting the emptiness of *dhammas*, note how he sees the twelve parts of dependent origination as empty in *Vism* XVII.273 and 283.

- 38 Vism XVII.25 and *Sammohavinodaṇī* 130: *atthaṃ saṅgāhentena tamevatthaṃ punarāvattetvā aparehipi pariyaṅantarehi niddisantenā.*
- 39 Gethin (1992b, 165). It should be noted that Gethin from time to time slides into a metaphysical treatment of *dhammas* and the whole system; as for example, *dhammas* are physical and mental events that are “the way things are” and very much like “atoms” (1998, 209).

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