The Concept of Kamma in Buddhist Philosophy
by G. H. Sasaki
(Hamburg)

I

In this article, I have examined one of the most vehemently debated questions in connection with Buddhist Philosophy, i.e. whether or not there is an inconsistency between the theories of anatā (not-self[1]) and kamma (action[2]). Dr. M. Falk refers to this problem also saying that the real antinomy is ātman-karman. *(Nairatmya and Karman*, Indian Historical Quarterly, 1940, p. 429–64).

When we consider the thought of kamma in Oriental Philosophy as indicating a continuum after death or the law of causality between good and evil actions, such a way of thinking has never been indigenous to Oriental Philosophy. This has many elements in common with the thought of transmigration, which had prevailed ever since the Orphic Order or Pythagorean philosophy. As compared with Buddhist thinking, however, the latter referred transmigration to its ethical meaning.

In the Orient, as we shall discover to the contrary, transmigration had never been restricted to its ethical meaning, but had been much more deeply considered from the religious viewpoint, and this is the theoretical construction which has been presented here in detail. Since Buddhism began with clarifying wisdom towards the reality of the worldly beings, it is naturally true that the Buddhistic theories are founded not only upon the investigation of human beings, but also upon objective reality binding those human beings.

II

In this respect, some scholars admit of an incongruity between nonself (anatā) and action (kamma) in doctrine, while others say that the Buddha preached his dhamma by adopting the kamma doctrine prevailing at that time because of the mental tendencies, spiritual aspirations, and general behaviour characteristic of the people.

Concerning the importance of the historical background with respect to the kamma-doctrine's introduction into Buddhism, little need be said here.

However, by taking the further development of the Abhidhamma theories into consideration, we shall find a more deeply underlying relation between the two theories.
Now, the concept corresponding to "substance" and in use in the Pāli canon is the five-aggregates (khandha)\(^1\). The five aggregates are transitory and not real, as properly understood. A substance as five aggregates in reality is merely a stream of thought. It contains nothing permanent or substantial; it is nothing but non-self (anattā). This definition of five aggregates takes away the presupposition of a deep-rooted, permanent entity, and shows that there is nothing in the world which we can cling to as real and permanent. If there is no permanent entity in the world, such as creator, substance, or agent of action, etc. then who is it that performs action and receives its results? Or does the non-self receive the results of his own action? This is meaningless. Such a conception has no meaning apart from a specifically formulated theory of kamma, having developed in the Abhidhamma-philosophy ever since the very beginning of the introduction of the kamma doctrine into early Buddhism. And what then is the specifically formulated concept of kamma?

In the Nikāya it is stated thus: "So then you say that body is not the self; that feeling is not the self. ... Then what self can those acts affect which are not self-wrought?"\(^2\)

As this passage indicates, the question, "If kamma from the Buddhist point of view should take place, then what is the substance of this kamma?" has been answered by saying that "The five aggregates are non-self". That is to say that "what" has been answered by "how", but not by a substance of some sort. The question as to the incongruity between the non-self and kamma-doctrines has never been answered in the true sense of the word, but only by the reiteration of the meaning of non-self, as it is. If this is the case, what bearing does this argument have upon the unique relationship between the anattā and kamma doctrines?

We have the same argument concerning the incongruity between them in the Milindapañha, which says that if these five aggregates should not transfer to another world, or, that they should not transfer as they are, then does not transmigration take place? In response to this question, Nāgasena replies by saying:

"Thus, O King! These five aggregates do not come into existence, and also the natural aggregates do not go to another world. Relying on these

---

\(^1\) The word aggregates or khandha (Skt. skandha) the group of bodily and psychical states which are immediate with us and are divided into five classes: 1) rūpa (the four elements, the body, the senses; the so-called sense data), 2) vedanā (feeling), 3) saññā (conceptual knowledge), 4) sañkhāra (synthetic mental states and functioning of sense-affections), 5) viññāna (consciousness). Samyutta Nikāya Vol. III. 86 etc. Za-agon Vol. II. 13 (Taishō-Zō-Kyō II. 13. c; SN. 22, 48 (Vol. III, p. 47).

\(^2\) SN. Vol. III. pp. 103—104 "Iti kira bho rūpam anattā, vedanā, saññā, sañkhārā, viññānam anattā annattakatāni kammāni katamattānam phusissanti".

186
five aggregates, the beings are born in the motherwomb in their qualification of good and evil, just like the shadow in the round mirror"3.

In this answer it is implied that if substance or the five aggregates should be admitted, evil would necessitate evil, and good necessitate good without the merit of religious purification whatever, and thus the basic reason for religious practice would be denied. If this were so, Nāgasena refutes the affirmation of substance with respect to transmigration as it would end in negation of moral values. The negation of moral values would be contrary to the right view of life, which is repeatedly preached by the Buddha. Thus the relation between the two doctrines, anattā and kamma, is to be interpreted positively rather than negatively4.

III

Those who affirm that the Buddhist view is non-self (anattā) are more or less incorrect if they are referring merely to the negative standpoint, in which one may consider the non-self as having no positive contents, "in vain" and "non-real" alone; but they are quite correct if the implication of non-self has reached a much more positive standpoint in which both doctrines, i.e. anattā and kamma, will be co-related, integrated, and positively interpreted.

It is to be noted that such an implication has found expression in the following passage in the Milindapañha:

"O Great King! These five aggregates do neither transfer to another world, nor do the five aggregates take place in themselves. By kamma, good and evil, shall sentient beings be born in the womb, depending upon these five aggregates just like the image in the mirror"5.

This explanation given by Nāgasena implies that there is no valid reality in any way but for the five aggregates, and that it is not due to a substance which can transmigrate, but only to the nature of kamma. That there is no substance by which transmigration will be possible has been repeatedly argued, as above stated. However, what is meant by the idea that transmigration depends upon the nature of kamma, instead of depending upon substance? What are the positive components? The image in the  

3 Milindapañha, Siamese Edition, p. 120. (There is no trace of this in the Royal Asiatic Society Edition).
"Evam Eva kho Mahārājā nāpi ime pañcakkhandhā uppajjanti imeṇeva pañcakkhandhān upanissaya katakusalākusalakkhaṇena adāsamaṇḍale chāyā vīya satto mātukucchiyam patisamkhādhayatiti".
5 Milindapañha, Siamese Edition, p. 120.
mirror is nothing but sentient beings themselves, nothing but the five aggregates which are transitory and unreal. The subject of the image has already been characterized by the term rujati or "to be decayed". The mirror in this simile corresponds to the "womb" of the mother. Thus the explanation which ended with an emphasis upon the not-self theory in relation to transmigration has come to mean that the five aggregates depend upon the five aggregates and come into existence in "the womb of the mother". In other words, "energy forces (sankhâra) observe only energy forces". We may well say then that "the five aggregates observe only the five aggregates".

This explanation, however, refers only to the possibility of substance in relation to transmigration, but not to the positive determination of the relation between the anattâ and kamma doctrines.

Therefore, we must direct our attention to the carefully formulated expression "by kamma" in the above quoted passage. It is not only due to the five aggregates but also according to kamma that birth takes place in the womb of the mother. Here we have two important factors: 1. "depending upon" the five aggregates, and 2. "according to" kamma. The first of these concerns the relation between the not-self and transmigration. This has already been explained. An examination of the evidence relevant to this first factor forces one to make a negative formulation, that is to say, the question "What is the substance of transmigration?" was answered by the postulation of the not-self doctrine: "There is only the five-aggregates" (and no valid reality as substance). This seems to be reduced to the following argument; we may say that the "what" had been answered by the "how". In this case, there was no argument on substance whatever, but only the way of transmigration of sentient beings.

On the contrary to all this, the second factor, "by kamma", seems to point out the positive and effective relation between the not-self and action doctrines. This effective relation between both becomes clear if certain very elemental considerations concerning the nature of questions in Buddhist Philosophy be noted. Before entering into the discussion on the

---

6 Rûpa among the five aggregates is derived from the root rûp, to form, to figure, to mould. The Buddhist modified this term to ruj, to break to pieces. It means the impermanent nature of things. The Buddhist uses this word in varied modifications: — "ruppanato rûpa!"; "ruppanatthena rûpa!"; "ruppayati ti rûpa!". Since we have the original designation in SN. Vol. III. p. 86: "ruppate ti lasmâ rûpa! ti vuccali!", we may say that the Buddhistic etymology of this word has already appeared a long time ago. Chinese equivalents for the Pāli rûpa are [3][4].


[3] 色
[4] 所礙
implication of "by kamma", let us see what is meant by formulations such as "what", "how", and "by what" from the Buddhistic point of view.

IV

As pointed out by many scholars, it is not really true that the chief object of the Buddha's preaching was to realize complete cessation of all impurities and to attain the realization of Nirvāṇa. It is for this reason that the Buddhistic question refers only to practical problems, but not to the fixed, unchangeable, and ultimate essence. This is especially true of the philosophy of the Prajñāpāramitā-Sūtras, where we very often come across the expression and refutation of dualistic conceptions. This explains why Buddhistic inquiries do not assume the formula "what is it?" and thus prefer the formula "how is it?". It was in this manner that the query concerning a transmigrating substance was answered and explained, i.e. by indicating the transference by kamma.

Nevertheless, in order to explain the meaning proper of the question "how", the essential to be exemplified by "what" must become much more distinctive to a certain extent. The explanation or description can only be meaningful when the essential becomes revealed and described. A mere description without the essential or subject, for all its merits, is quite inadequate in accounting for the fact or question itself. This is only because without the subject, there is no description of it. Hence, in order to describe anything, the subject should be implicitly contained or manifested through a medium of some sort. To explain or to describe means in its part the manifestation of a subject in some way. The subject will at least manifest itself in this manner so far as it concerns the description.

What the five aggregates themselves reflect on themselves by kamma should not only explain why they are devoid of any real entity, but also the ground of which they are a non-entity, or by what and through what they are said to be a non-entity. Without grounding of the non-reality or non-self doctrine, the question as to the substance of transmigration is

---

2 It is certainly true that the Buddha referred only to Nirvāṇa and not to metaphysical problems. But it is not simple because metaphysical problems go far beyond analytical discriminative knowledge. Analytical knowledge should be applied to the true nature of worldly things, though confined to the specific Buddhist meaning. In other words, analytical knowledge should be directed towards anattā, dukkha, and anicca (impermanence, painfulness, and not-self of all sentient beings). The negation of metaphysical problems is to place analytical knowledge within its own limits so as not to have it go beyond its own capacity. It is for this reason that we may often find the "how" manner of questioning rather than the "what" which leads one to discriminative analysis only. It is true that in later Buddhism, such as the Prajñāpāramitā doctrine, we can come across such expressions as "katham" rather than "kim", however, even when "kim" is used, it is used in the implicit sense implied in Prima Essentia in quiry. But in this article, I would like to insist that "by what" is much more positive than the more proper "how" of the later Mahāyāna Buddhism.

3 Cf. my article "The concept of Jhāna and Prajñā", The Annual Report of the Otani University No. 6. 1953
only accidentally answered and inadequate to explain completely sub-
stance itself. That the answer was meant to demonstrate not only the not-
self doctrine, is at once apparent by the expression "by kamma" 
(kammena), as the former can be tested by the latter. We may therefore 
say that the substance of transmigration has not only been affirmed 
accidentally from the viewpoint of not-self in the answer, but also more 
implicitly from the viewpoint of the kamma doctrine in order to ground 
the not-self doctrine in its nature. In order that the five aggregates may 
reflect the five aggregates (as an image in a mirror), they can not do so 
but for "through" or "by" kamma. Hence, the explanation by the not-self 
document must be preceded by that of the kamma doctrine, i.e. we may say 
that "how" should be preceded by "by what".

V

That which is said to transmigrate, the human being, would be impos-
sible to describe merely as having no validity, no reality and no self 
without any medium whatever; it would only be possible "through" or 
"by" kamma, as it is. The non-selfness, though it actually indicates the 
character of the human being, can not be immediately manifested, actually 
grasped, and only through kamma as such can it reveal itself to man. This 
is simply because "by what" must be given precedence to "how" as above 
mentioned.

Thus, we may say that in the formula of argument we can already dis-
cover a close connection, integration, and cognity between the two doc-
trines of anatta and kamma. Thus kamma has come to carry the positive 
meaning and to play the role through which the not-self doctrine can be 
expressed.

This fact is so important that it may be worth our while to indicate 
precisely how kamma carries the positive role. Now, concerning the fact 
that kamma itself is not a real entity, nothing need be said. Kamma is a 
function which always continues to exist. That kamma continues to exist 
uninterruptedly does not mean to continue indefinitely in time. The reason 
for this is that the limit in time is one of the categories to be applied to a 
real entity. Nevertheless in so far as kamma is recognized as a non-entity 
real, such a limit in time would also be impossible to apply to kamma. 
That kamma is a non-entity real means that it transcends the limits of 
time and space.

In the Milindapañha it is said: "When the continuum can not be inter-
rupted, it is impossible to point out that these kammās exist here and 
there". The meaning is that it is impossible to indicate that the kamma 
be uninterrupted and that they are unindicable in space; in other words, 
kamma transcends any definition of time and space whatever. In these circum-

---

10 Milindapañha, p. 120 (Siamese Ed.).
stances, we have to admit that the karmic continuum does not present an
indefinite continuation in time, but in view of the fact that *kamma* is non-
entity in its nature, we are entitled to expect from it a concrete, functional
situation. In other words, there is no real subject behind *kamma*.

Subject, in Buddhism, is not a selfsame permanent entity, but merely a
transitory state of karmic continuum. Not only the subject, which accepts
the result of *kamma*, but also *kamma* itself is not some sort of permanent
substantial reality, which the subject will receive. Subject and object, agent\textsuperscript{11} and action, are each in a phase of karmic continuum. They are
not parts of a valid entity in an endless series which we choose to regard
as a karmic continuum. In this case, the subject or agent receiving the
result of *kamma* is to be called the karmic receiver (*dāyādāt*).\textsuperscript{12}

VI

These considerations make it evident that when discussing the problem
of karmic continuum, we must be perfectly clear about the meaning of
“continuum”, since it has not the meaning of infiniteness and indeterminate-
ness in time and space. This consideration suggests that “continuum” is only
to be realized within one’s own self. Consequently, although “continuum”
in the sense of a substantiality must be discarded, “continuum” in the sense
of non-substantiality, or some other word denoting self-realization must be
retained.

At this point the *Milindapañha* explains “continuum” thus:

“Just so, O King, is the continuum of a person or thing maintained. One
comes into being, another passes away, and it is like a thing that has no
preceding, no succeeding existence. Thus neither as the same nor as
another does a man go on to the last phase of his self-consciousness”\textsuperscript{13}.

This passage indicates that it is impossible to grasp this “continuum”
by such concepts as “*uppajjati*”, “*nirujjhati*”, “*apubbânti*”, “*acariyânti*”, etc.;
and that, despite this, “continuum” is to be the object of consciousness. In
other words, these two facts are reduced to the following effect: “Continu-
um can not become a subject of consciousness as a real entity, whereas
it is alone an object itself. This meaning is formulated thus: “Continuum”
can be objectified by itself, but can not be subjectified at all.

What is meant by this?

\textsuperscript{11} According to the Indian tradition, Agent (*kārta*) is that factor which makes
proximate instruments operate for an effect. This notion of Agent coincides in
greater extent with that of the Vedānta philosophy. According to the inner faculty
of Agent, a threefold Agency is depicted in *Gītā* (XVIII/26–28). Cf. Ram Shankar
Bhattacharya, “Kinds of Agents as depicted by *Pāṇini*”, “Vāk”, Number 3,
December 1953, Deccan College, Poona, India.

\textsuperscript{12} *Kathāvatthu* p. 552 says that *kamma* and its accumulation are not different. See
also MN Vol. I. p. 390.

\textsuperscript{13} *Milindapañha* p. 40 (Trenckner) T. W. Rhys and Hardy render this differently.
On the phrase “no preceding (*apubbânti*) and no succeeding existence”, see Dr.
Morris’s note on p. 101 of the Pāli Text Society’s Journal, 1887, and the passages
he quotes there.
Generally speaking, the object of consciousness is naturally not the subject of consciousness. Even if this were the case, the conception of object need not necessarily presuppose a concept of the substance of consciousness as a reality. The concept of continuum is just something to be experienced within ourselves. Paradoxically speaking, it is to be objectified, and yet without a substantiality which is to be objectified in any way. And that it can not become a subject means, as in the case of the essential nature of *kamma*, to have no limit in time and space.\(^{14}\)

"It has come to be included in the consciousness", as quoted in the above passage does not mean that the consciousness is like a storeroom in which something can be kept; the correct meaning is that it is to be considered as a formal unity or a phenomenal unity, in so far as it is concluded in the consciousness or it is experienced in ourselves. It is not in itself a real entity.

Some one may object and say, "In the classification of mental factors, the Abhidhamma Philosophy assumes a realistic orientation in such a way that each mental factor corresponds to each of the real entities". But after more detailed consideration, we shall come to understand that all the factors within a single moment of consciousness do not last a moment. That is to say, the mental factors are far from being self-contained units. From this we can guess the highly dynamic nature of the processes going on within a single moment of consciousness. The consciousness is the ground (*vatthu*, Skt. *vastu*) where the mental factors take motion and only so far; it is not a substance as a real entity.\(^{15}\) If one is going to affirm the doctrine of a real substance underlying *samsāra*, that known real must not be identified with a substance as given with intuitive immediacy, but with an indirectly inferred substance. The *Mahāyāna-karma-siddhi-sāstra* puts it in this way; "The substance (of the six consciousnesses) is only the resulting consciousness. This is because the verification of conscious-

---

\(^{14}\) The concept of *kamma* has come to be referred to as a "continuum" (*santati*, Skt. *santāna*) in Buddhist Philosophy. Dr. S. Dasgupta says, "It is curious that though all dharmas were regarded as changing, the fact that they were all strictly momentary (*kaśyapi*, i. e. existing only for a moment) was not emphasized in early Pāli literature". (*A History of Indian Philosophy*, Vol. I, p. 161). But the epistemology of Pāli Buddhism is to be distinguished from the salvation theory which it expounds. We may discover passages referring to Nirvāṇa as a reality (*sabbhāva*). In this instance, the meaning of "reality" is far from the realistic view, and it purposes only to deny the wrong view with respect to Nirvāṇa, i. e. the negation of Nirvāṇa. Cf. *Paramāthamanjusī*, Vol. III, p. 200 (Siamese Edition).

Dhammapālas’s *Paramāthamanjusī* Vol. III. p. 232: *hetuphalappabhanda-saṅkhātassa saṅkhānassa avicchitaṁ* *saṁvata uppadhanaṁ sassa pañcayappannaṁ* *saṁvata uppadhanaṁ sassa pañcayappannaṁ*.


\(^{15}\) Brahmacari Govinda’s *"Abhidhammaṭṭha-saṅgaha*" p. 114: "Denn Bewußtsein selbst ist als Widerspruchszerscheinung ein stetig sich erneuerndes Beharren-wollen und in jeder Phase in diesem Punkte mit den vorhergehenden identisch".
ness takes place by inference only". If this be the case, then such an inferred unseen concept must be denied by the Buddhist as an illusory concept arrived at by logical methods only. It is merely an abstraction, its only reality is that of a constructed concept.

All these considerations indicate that the "continuum" and "consciousness" do not represent the Prima Essentia, but only a fleeting moment of the world, and that both do not stand alone, but in relation one to the another.

The "continuum", we are told, is represented as a subject in our consciousness, but only so far as it is included in, or goes on to the last phase of consciousness. Since the consciousness is deprived of entity, the continuum also is a non-substantial.

**VII**

The clue to the method by which the positive or most adequate theory is selected from the problems of the relation between anattā and transmigration should now be obvious. It has been noted that the question as to the substance of transmigration was answered by the karmic continuum. It is of course obvious that the implication of that answer is the doctrine of anattā. But such a doctrine needs the so-called medium of the kamma doctrine, which has the capacity to include the relation leading to a constructive formulation of the anattā-doctrine and also the hidden implications.

But the concept of kamma in this answer is meant that the basic initial question is answered in the affirmative, and therefore the anattā-doctrine is to be interpreted as affirmative.

In the entire foregoing analysis, therefore, we called attention to the implication of the kamma concept answer. This combination of anattā and kamma occurs because it is impossible to formulate the philosophy of self-negation (anattā) in a positive way without making some assertions as to the nature of this concept, as will be seen below.

The formula "transitoriness, painfulness, not-self", are very often repeated in the Pāli canon or Nikāya. Many scholars, who have dealt with this formula, have attempted to elicit from it the Buddhistic viewpoint as Pessimism. Those scholars, who expected to find in it a key to the positive

---

16 Daijō-jōgo-ron, Taishō XXXI, 785 a-fl.
17 Rhys Davids points out the incongruity between the kamma and anattā doctrines as does La Vallée Poussin: "Even in the days of the Buddha, there were heretics who insisted on the consistency between both". Early Buddhism, p. 77. See also: SN. 22, 82, 14-15 (Vol. III, p. 103-104; Zo-agon II, 26 (Taishō II, 15a).
interpretation of a way of life in Buddhism, have been disappointed and
have condemned it as incongruous and pessimistic. This formula, however,
could not anticipate that the illustration in a series would give rise to such
a pessimism. This fact has already been seen in the concept of anatā\textsuperscript{18}. 
"Not-self" is not only meant to demonstrate one of the three aspects, but
also to indicate that together with the other two aspects (painfulness and
transitoriness) the not-self implies the absolute, ultimate essence, i. e. the
Śūnyatā (Non-Substantiality) of Mahāyāna Philosophy.

Nevertheless, we can not deny that such a word as "not-self" must have
a negative sense of some sort. For this reason, the full definition of a
negation-concept in Buddhism must now be dealt with.

Generally speaking, the concept of negation is to be analysed as
follows\textsuperscript{19}.

1. The negation of the possibility of existence.

We can find no such negation in the Buddhist canon. It means the im­
possibility of being or existence like the horn of a hare\textsuperscript{20}.

2. The positive negation.

This is the case of Buddhist epistemology. In Buddhist epistemology it
is emphasized that object (ālaṁbana) and subject (viññāna) must be mutual­
ly integrated, that they can not stand separately, but must exist in
relation to other elements. In this case we speak of "nothing" in such a
way as "without the object" or "without the subject". These expressions
mean that the object without the subject or the subject without the object
can not formulate the concrete situation of cognition. The fact of cognition
centers in the epistemic correlation between the subject and the object. This
may be called the positive negation i. e. the lack of one of the elements
which would make concrete cognition possible.

3. The logical negation.

This is the negation by which the clinging to denial or affirmation is to
be removed completely. The Buddhist proposition, "All things are not­
self", would seemingly be a negation of the part of the entire fact, which
includes another part not to be denied but to be affirmed as real. But with
the Buddhist our clinging to such discriminative way of thinking as denial or

\textsuperscript{18} Cf. G. H. Sasaki; "On the ‘Three Aspects’ in Pāli Buddhism" (Sanso ni

\textsuperscript{19} This positive relation between anatā, kamma, and paticca-samuppāda had
already been implied in the Nikāya in such passages as: SN. 12, 37 (Vol. II, p.
64–65), Zō-agon XII, 13 (Taishō II, 84 ff.). Ibid. 12, 24, 8 (Vol. II, p. 33). Ibid. 12,
25, 1 (Vol. II, p. 38), Zō-agon CIV (Taishō II, 93c).

\textsuperscript{20} Stcherbatsky, Buddhist Logic, Vol. I, p. 382: "It would be natural to sur­
mise that negative knowledge must be the product of absence of reality. Such is
the view of many philosophic schools in India and in the West. But this is an error".
affirmation should be completely excluded. Hence, no positive provision is made for the constructive construction. It is only the clinging which is to be denied. If we understand by the formula "all is not self" its replacement by some other thing excluding the self, this non-self will not be different from the thing replaced. If we understand it as simple non-existence, then it is a negation in the literal sense of the word. Hence, according to the Buddhist view, "nothing" is neither the lack of anything nor an entity separate from the non-self itself. Thus what is actually provided in these arguments is neither a simple negation nor a proposition of something, but a negation of both the denial and the affirmation on which the clinging to logically discriminative knowledge would be based.

What this analysis of negation has thus-far overlooked is that there is more to negation than its three modes as above summarized. We might say that such a negation can be called negation through *kamma* or through *kamma* or through realizing the conformity between *kamma* and *anattā*.

4. The realized negation, or the negation arrived at through the realization of the congruity between *kamma* and *anattā*.

This is the mode of negation which implies the fact that "not-self" should be considered as a positive factor rather than as a negative entity.

What then is this positive entity just mentioned? It is nothing other than *karma* in its nature.21

VIII

This fact that the positive entity is nothing other than *karma* becomes clear if certain logical inferences concerning the meaning of "negation" are noted. In order that this clarification be made, we had best begin by distinguishing the Buddhistic thesis from the judgement formulation proper.

Now, the Buddhist proposition, "All things are not-self", would seemingly be a case of the infinite judgement; "S is non-A". In this judgement, however, only A is completely excluded, that is, the possibility of all other realms, such as B, C, D, etc. are implied in non-A. Hence, the judgment does not become absolutely established since no positive provision is made for the remaining realms, B, C, D, etc; consequently, when it is said that "All things are not-self" then not-self should be considered as different from infinite judgement. Though similar in form, the Buddhist formula and infinite judgement must be distinguished.

When we said, "All things are not-self", the concept "not-self" or "is not self" never implies an entity which could be considered as existing in

21 Mahāyāna thinkers lay stress especially upon the relation between *karma* and *pratītyasamutpāda*: Nāgārjuna: *Madhyamaka-Sāstra*, VIII; Chandrakīrti: *Prasannapadā Madhyamakavṛtti*, VIII, p. 180—191, ed. par Louis de La Vallée Poussin, 1913; Etienne Lamotte: *Le traité de l'acte de Vasubandhu, Kar-\n
reality to the exclusion of the "self" itself. With the Buddhist, even if the
extension of not-self, i.e. B, C, D, etc. might be conceived besides the self
in itself, then, it should be nothing but a being of some sort, which is
denied by the Buddhist as having a permanent entity. According to the
Buddhist view, there is nothing at all, which is included in the unlimited,
infinite extension, excluding the "self".

This is just because, as far as the not-self, in its turn, should exist in
reality, could it be considered also as a real entity or valid "self"; but the
non-self as conceived in this manner is also to be denied in every way
(just as in the case of the "self"). From these considerations it will become
clear that the Buddhistic proposition, "All things are not-self" is to be
distinguished from both the negative judgement, which is based upon the
affirmation of "self" in some way, and the infinite judgement, which does
not make the positive provision whatever for the remaining realms, such
as B, C, D, etc. The infinite judgement makes no positive, determined
provision for any remainder at all. Hence, the infinite judgement does not
become absolute or established in any way. And then the judgement of
negation, in its turn, would be impossible without the presupposition of a
"substance" of some sort.

Thus, it goes without saying that the Buddhistic judgement, "All things
are not-self", must be more than a philosophical one; it is a practical, even
an immediately apprehended factor. The not-self does not mean a separate
reality at all (as it would in the case of an infinite judgement), since a
separate reality, as we mentioned repeatedly, in any sense of the word is
denied by the Buddhists. Not-self would have no reality and hence no
validity.

In any event, certain things are clear. There is no negative meaning or
factor in the nature of "non-self" \(^22\), which constitutes the fundamental
component of the Buddhist doctrine. And we may go further to say that

---

\(^{22}\) The Chinese term wu\(^8\) or fei\(^9\) is equivalent to the Pāli "a" or "ni". Those
terms have the same meaning, there being no distinction between them in so far
as it concerns the Chinese version of the Pāli Nikāya. The Sanskrit prefix "nir"
indicates a more stronger meaning than "a". Sometimes the prefix "nir" illustrates
a quasi-explosive function of dispersion. (R. Heimann: The Significance of
Prefixes in Sanskrit Philosophical Terminology, 1951, p. 54).

In Sanskrit Buddhism the nihsvabhāva\(^{10}\) has a general logical meaning, as well
as a psychologico-eschatological significance. In the Chinese Buddhism, the prefix
"nir" holds fast to a psychologico-eschatological significance. We must draw our
attention to the fact in Pāli Buddhism there is no equivalent term for
nihsvabhāva, while in the Mahāyāna Buddhism the negative prefix of svabhāva
is almost all "nir", i.e. "nihsvabhāva". The other negative prefix "a" in connec-
tion to svabhāva is very rarely found in the Texts of Vijñānavāda school. (Cf. My
article "The problem of Lakkhaṇattaya", Journal of Philosophical Studies, Kyōto
University. Nr. 332.)
the positive something implied means that man knows himself as being bound by \textit{kamma}. Not-self reveals itself to man only because he is conscious of \textit{kamma}. The fact that man knows himself as being bound by \textit{kamma} performs a much more positive function than just negatively understanding it deterministically. In other words, \textit{not-self}, in revealing itself to man, takes on the form of \textit{kamma}.

Although we are conscious of this fact, the process is not such a simple intuitive conception that the \textit{not-self} directly reveals itself.

How is it possible that it reveals itself in \textit{kamma}?

There is only one effective answer to this question. This can best be obtained from the consideration of \textit{kamma} in relation to Buddhistic psychology or mentality.

\textbf{IX}

Psychologically speaking, the essence of \textit{kamma} is said to be \textit{“thinking” (cetanā)}\textsuperscript{23}. \textit{“Cetanā”} is derived from two root forms, \textit{“cint”} and \textit{“cit”}, of which the former plays the most significant part in the psychology of Pāli Buddhism, the latter in the Sarvastivāda School. \textit{“Cetanā”} (thinking) as designated by \textit{“to think”} is never a hypothetically formulated entity whatever, as it has been repeatedly argued. If it were a hypothetical entity, it should be merely a form of consciousness only. In the \textit{Dhammapada Atthakathā}, Buddhaghosa says: “Seven or eight minds, though in one group, can not take place in only one moment. When coming into existence, they take place one by one; when going out, they go out one by one”\textsuperscript{24}. Each of them are subject to the law of appearing-disappearing separately, but not together in a group. And further, \textit{“cetanā”} is not merely \textit{“thinking”} proper, but much more a function, especially when regarded as \textit{“to think”}, \textit{“intend to do”}, and \textit{“to occupy”}. In the \textit{Samyutta Nikāya}, it is said: “That which we think, and that which we intend to do, and that which we all are occupied with — this becomes an object for the persistence of consciousness”\textsuperscript{25}.

What, then, is meant by \textit{“cetanā”} being a function without being a real unity?

It may be useful for the consideration of \textit{“function with no real entity”} to know some of the meanings in which the psychological illustration is used in Pāli Buddhism. Such a specific explanation refers to the fourteen

\textsuperscript{23} Sylvain Lévi translates his \textit{cetanā} by \textit{“la pensée pure"}, which seems to be inadequate from the standpoint of activity of \textit{karma}. See \textit{Mahāyāna-Sūtrālāmākāra}, p. 32.

\textsuperscript{24} \textit{Dhammapada-Atthakathā} Vol. 1, part 2, p. 304. The Pāli \textit{“uppajati”} in the text line 13 should correctly be read \textit{“niruddhati"}. This \textit{kārikā} X (aho 37) XXVII in the \textit{Dhammapada} has been quoted in the \textit{Mahāyānasamparigraha-śāstra}, and interpreted from the standpoint of the Vijñāna School. See G. Sasaki’s Edition \textit{Mahāyānasamparigraha-śāstra} p. 34.

\textsuperscript{25} SN. 12, 38—9 (Vol. II. p. 65)
modes of functional minds. We have only to explain this "function with no reality" along the theory of the fourteen modes of functional minds. These modes denote a circle, to fulfil all of which constitutes a psychological process, beginning with the subconscious (bhavaṅga) and ending in the same. The subconscious is one of these modes and is considered to make the continuum of all minds possible. As far as it concerns a function, it may be understood as a reality making possible the unification of all minds, just as latter Buddhism established "impressions" (vāsanā) as a theory for that purpose.

The subconscious (bhavaṅga) is an unreal factor acting upon the other mental factors. Though not "real", bhavaṅga is actual in so far as it is presently active. It is the potency or potentiality of a situation, comprising its unmanifested possibilities. That is to say, this potentiality is the co-determining factor of what may be called the fourteen mental modes, or subject-object as considered Buddhistically.

The subconsciousness situation is just a result of function but not a functional mind in itself. It has all the functional minds as an object merely. Although the fourteen modes of functional minds are mental functions, those should be different from that of epistemological discrimination between subject and object. This is because, according to the Buddhistic view, there is no dichotomy such as subject and object, and therefore, to be known is the same as to be. In other words, the fourteen modes of functional minds are nothing but the forms, in which both subject and object should be represented as they are. Even though we should presuppose something as a real entity underlying the functional minds, then it is only one of the objects and not a real subjective entity in any way.

Thus, we must realize that in the conception of the subconscious (bhavaṅga) the supposed objective reality or real entity of being, in itself, is not admitted. The polarization maintained by metaphysical dualists, as subject and object in a dualistic separation, should be replaced by the Buddhistic bi-polar or multi-polar subject-object distinction in a perspective which, as a matter of fact, is usually achieved through those fourteen modes of functional minds. The function of these minds is to externalize, to objectify. The function of these minds does not impose arbitrary forms on the object; rather, its art consists in specifying in what way objective entities are formed dependently of the modes of functional minds.

At any rate, even the subconsciousness "bhavaṅga" in the fourteen modes of mind is not anything to be conceived as a real entity whatever.


Such are the consequences of initiating inquiry by analyzing the problem of the relation between kamma and anatta, and by following this analysis step by step to its solution. Namely, this analysis of minds leads us to the relevant fact that kamma is not founded upon any substantial reality as it was the same in the case of cetanā, the essential nature of kamma.

It appears that this step by step procedure can lead us to the following explicit state: the discovery by analysis of the basic theoretical root of the activity of kamma, which has no real entity whatever.

This kamma (action) is considered not merely as non-substantiality, but also as activity, which is dynamic rather than static. As it is said in the Visuddhimagga by Buddhaghosa:

“For the activities are causes through commission of deeds, not because they are existent or non-existent”.27

We may interpret the term “saṅkhāra” (activities) as kamma, as it is properly well known.

“Kamma” will become a cause just at the time when it has taken place or has come into activity, and not merely by its own existence in itself. If kamma could exist alone and produce a result, then in the very moment of existence a result should have been produced in advance. In the above passage it is implied that kamma is not to be conceived of as a permanent entity at all, which might lead one to negate the activity of kamma. The reason for this is that, generally speaking, the permanent entity is nothing but a concept as superimposed over a real entity, which had already been rejected by the Buddhist, and that, accordingly, kamma should be the negation of such permanent entity, i.e. it should have an active meaning or activity of some sort. In order to clarify this meaning, we may call our attention to the following passages in the Suttanipāta. It is said thus: “The person is Brahmāṇa not owing to his birth (jāti); he is also non-Brahmana not owing to his birth. He is Brahmāṇa owing to his kamma (acting). He is also non-Brahmana owing to his kamma”.28

The meaning of this passage is this, that the variation of birth or character does not depend upon an a priori condition, but just upon kamma a posteriori. It can possibly be reduced to the “Ordnung” or acting by which each sentient being may exist as he is. This “Ordnung” is nothing but kamma itself, as distinguished from birth (jāti). Consequently, such a conception of kamma does not indicate any determining factor whatever; even more, it represents activity as making possible the transcendence of transmigration. The kamma is not passively determined, but always creates itself positively, since it is nothing but the “Ordnung” of active behaviour.

---

27 Visuddhimagga, Vol. II, p. 556. “Katattā yeva hi saṅkhārā attano phalassa paccayā honti, na vijjamānati avijjamānati vā”. The saṅkhāra should be interpreted as kamma according to the traditional connotation in the Pāli commentaries.

28 Suttanipāta 650 (PTS).
There is good *kamma*, there is bad *kamma*, and as the wheel of life moves on, the old *kamma* is exhausted and again fresh *kamma* is created. We would like to say that *kamma* is the man, that is, *kamma* is his own action.  

Nothing is more important, therefore, than to realize that *kamma* constitutes the self-consciousness of activity by itself, with a specific theory appropriate to itself and different from the analytical method appropriate to the Sarvastivāda School, which entertains an idea-continuum, that is, a concept of "non-intimation" (*avijñāpti*).  

All these considerations lead to the following conclusion:  

The basic concept of *kamma* in relation to *anattā* has two references, the one a prescriptive reference by way of theoretical reasoning to non-substantiality, the other an empirical cognitive reference by way of the ethical postulates of activity. It is the former of these two references which corresponds to the non-substantiality of *anattā*: it is the latter which is in compliance with the postulate for the positiveness of *anattā* (not-self).

Thus, the two references of *kamma* have come to correspond to those of the *anattā* concept. This fact indicates that both concepts of *kamma* and *anattā* are actually a genuine unity: *kamma*, in turn, usually finds itself involved in the experience of not-self, which could, as we have seen, not appear but through *kamma*: *kamma* is first of all tested in *anattā*;
Kamma is not separated from not-self (anattā), but it is the categorical form of not-self. Therefore, we may say that the kamma-concept may be postulated, but nothing else. The thought of not-self can then be interpreted as effectively as the concept of kamma.

Let us examine this genuine relation between both by quoting several passages from the original texts. In the Visuddhimagga, Buddhaghosa says:

“So fruit is not in kamma or out of it; kamma is devoid of (fruit). Nor is the fruit in kamma to be found, but it is kamma and nought else. By which the fruit is reproduced.”

The meaning of this passage is this, that kamma does not merely mean “to act” without being conscious of the ground upon which kamma can rest, as really it is. This kamma is to be founded upon the non-substanci-

ality or not-self. The paradoxical expression, “Nor is the fruit in kamma to be found, but it is kamma and nought else” vindicates the fact that the ground of kamma should be deeply related to the not-self conception.

Kamma is the field, where the not-self reveals itself to man. Not-self reveals itself to man only because he is conscious of kamma.

There is a congruity between both kamma and anattd; not only that, but the self-consciousness of kamma takes place simultaneously with that of anattd. Therefore, it may be added that just like the not-self transcends essentially over the time-level, just so should kamma be even more over the time-level. The conception of both kamma and anattd refers to one and the same fact, differently viewed.

With respect to the relation between kamma and time, we have in the Visuddhimagga the following passage:

“There is no separate division of matter set up by kamma, such as past, and so on, by way of continuity. But such a division is to be understood as giving support to matter set up by the caloric order, by nutriment, by consciousness.

The time conception is to be attributed to the things, such as forms (rupani) set up by kamma, but not to kamma itself. This vindicates the

---

33 Tathā na anto kammassā vipāko upalabbi, / bahiddhā pi na kammassā na kammāṁ tattha vijjati, / phalena suñāṁ tam kammāṁ phalaṁ kammena vijjati, / kammāṁ ca kho upādāya tato nibbatti phalam. //
34 The paradoxical expression is made possible on the basis of the anattd doctrine, which rests upon the concept of continuum (santāna). "evam kammappaccaya vipāko vipakappaccayā kammam ti anādikālikattā kammavipākasantānāssa pubbā koti na paññāyati", Paramatthamāṇijusā by Dhammapāla. Vol. III, p. 442 (Siamese Ed.)
statement that kamma is beyond the time-level. It is generally believed that kamma of the past determines the way of existence of all things. Strictly speaking, however, the determination of all things in the present is accomplished through the forms (rupa) only and not through the characteristic nature of kamma. It is simply because kamma itself is timeless and beyond the time-level. In Buddhist Philosophy we can discover the theory of the momentariness of time, such as the past, present, and future. This explains why such a theory of momentariness is often repeated, and why kamma is here considered as timeless. The reason for this is that the momentariness of time may be reduced to the timelessness of kamma on the one side, and the timelessness of kamma, in turn, may be reduced to that of anatta on the other. As we have seen before, kamma is nothing other than the plane where the timeless anatta will reveal itself to man.

X

As we have seen above, the strongest relation of necessary connection between any two concepts, such as kamma and anatta, is that of logical implication. This is a case of the striking characteristic of the epistemological analytical systematization, the kamma concept has been classified in detail.

But the important point from the religious bearing on the analytical classification, however, is that the analysis should not restrict itself to kamma, but points even more to "not-self". The analysis of kamma does not mean a merely conceptual designation, but much more the revelation of "not-self" in the karmic formulation. In other words, the analysis of kamma presupposes the anatta assumption, which can not reveal itself but through kamma or karmic analysis. The not-self doctrine underlies the karmic analysis. The positive counter-part of "not-self" is "self". The positive basis of this negation is, however, not the "self", but the kamma, through which "not-self" reveals itself and on which there is "not-self".

This congruity is according to the Buddhist understanding which is different from the merely ethical meaning of the non-Buddhistic schools.

35 Dhammapāla says: "kammam atitam eva kammasamutthānassa rūpassa pacca-ya ti". Paramatthhamaijusā, Vol. III, p. 433. In this passage we should draw our attention to the phrase, "kammasamutthānassa rūpassa pacca-yāti". The time concepts, such as present, past, future, will be recognised as attributes subjected to the things themselves (rupāni), and yet kamma itself does neither determine the time, nor is it determined by it. Kamma determines the things in themselves which have resulted from the kamma-function alone, while it is itself beyond the time-level.


[14] 業等起色

202
It is of course certain that the concept of *kamma* has been introduced from non-Buddhist schools into Buddhist Philosophy. However, it has been done in a different sense in that the former articulated *kamma* in its ethical aspect only, whereas the latter did so in its own philosophical aspect or in its necessary relation to the not-self doctrine, which is indigenous to Buddhism\(^{37}\).

Our conclusions may now be summarized.

First, a distinction must be drawn between the infinite judgement and the Buddhist proposition "All things are not-self", though similar in form. Second, the positive entity, which is not involved in the infinite judgement, is nothing other than *kamma*. Third, *kamma* is not separated from not-self, but it is the categorical form of not-self.

These two doctrines were not preached from the philosophical point of view only. Therefore, more important than the admission of incongruity between the two doctrines is the fact that both are concentrated in the experience of the person as a genuine unity. It is only the human being who is able to involve both concepts of *kamma* and *anattā* as a genuine unity.

Certainly, these conclusions, if true, are important for the history of Buddhist Philosophy in the meaning that the strong necessary connection between both *kamma* and *anattā* would not require any medium between them whatever, whereas the Sarvástivāda School has constructed the concept of *avijñāpiti* (non-information) in that direction\(^{38}\). Not only the Sarvástivāda School, but also most of the other Buddhist schools, such as Sāutrāntika, Yogācāra, etc. have considered concepts corresponding to "*avijñāpiti*", while Pāli Buddhism has no such equivalent concept, but instead lays its emphasis upon the congruity between *kamma* and *anattā*.

This I take to be its fundamental character, which would indicate its difference, not only from the thoughts of the non-Buddhist Schools, but also those of almost all the others schools of Buddhism.

---

\(^{37}\) The Buddhist formula "*Khīnā jāti vusitaṁ brahma-cariyaṁ katam karatīyam nāparam itthattāyati*" [14] (DN. Vol. I, p. 84) indicates the state of enlightenment in Pāli Buddhism. The *brahma-cariya* in this formula means not only the ethical core but also the Buddhistic nirvāṇa transcended beyond the worldly good and evil. Hence, Buddhaghosa, commentator of this text, explains the *itthattāya* from two kinds of etymological meaning, such as the ablative and dative case. Both cases represent the attainment of ethical merits, which are dependent upon the not-self doctrine. See Sumangalavilāsīnī, I, p. 226.

\(^{38}\) The fundamental indication of "*avijñāpiti*" is provided in the *Abhidharmakośa* Chapter I, 8b (Taishō, XX, IX, 3a).
It is not our business at present to make a detailed statement and a comparative estimate of Oriental and Western achievements in this branch of thought. We leave this to more competent hands. We can not leave without notice of a remarkable characteristic, as well as a great difference, in a specific problem of epistemological logic, between Pāli Buddhism and the Sarvāstivāda School or later Mahāyāna Buddhism.

All the methods in the methodology of comparative study are well known. Many books have been published on this subject. But what needs to be done at the outset is to find out what indigenous items and methods are to be chosen and used. This is indispensible towards overcoming the difficulties in the scholarly examination of the original texts. This paper presents a systematically arranged way of thinking in respect to the relation between *kamma* and *anattā*. In exact text-research, the so-called difficulty experienced in comparative philosophical study is ascribed to the Oriental way of thinking and its terminology. This paper provides a step towards clarification in this direction.

---

[99] The concepts corresponding to *vijñāpiti* in the Sarvāstivāda school are (Sammitiya School), (Mahāsāṅgika), (an unknown school), (Śānarājakesa). The conceptions of *cetanā* as the core of *kamma* are not so different with respect to the interpretation, but vary according to kāya and vag-kamma. The concept corresponding to *avijñāpiti* is not found in the *Nikaya*. Hence, it will make the consideration between *kamma* and *anattā* more adequate, as has been done here. See Abhidharmanayānusāra-sastra by Sāghabhadra (Taishō, XXIX, 625c).