

## COMMENTS UPON THE BRAHMAJĀLASUTTA

The *Brahmajālasutta* is the opening *sutta* of the *Dīghanikāya*. As it is the case with similar *suttas*, the *sutta* in question is a "composition", and is therefore made up of different elements arranged together according to a preconceived plan. As a matter of fact, this *sutta* is a model composition. The author or "composer" had in mind to put forward some typically Buddhist teaching, availing himself of some pre-existing elements conveyed by tradition presumably in the shape of shorter and independent *suttas*.

Taking into consideration the already pre-existing elements and the composer's personal contribution, the *Brahmajālasutta* may be divided into four parts: (1) the incident of the *paribbājaka* Suppiya and his disciple Brahmadaṭṭa; (2) the inventory of moral practices; (3) the inventory of harmful and useless opinions; (4) the Buddhist position regarding these views. Let us reflect in succession on every one of them.

### I. THE SUPPIYA INCIDENT

This might very well be called the *Suppiyasutta*, since it could be detached from the whole and stand by itself as an independent *sutta*, and a beautiful one at that. Presumably it existed as an independent *sutta*, and we are obliged to the composer for having preserved it. This element is used by the composer to draw from it the connecting link that is going to give unity to the composition as a whole.

While the Buddha goes on his way between Rājagaha and Nālandā, and when he settles down to spend the night in the royal pleasure-house called *Ambalaṭṭhika*, Suppiya, the wandering mendicant, goes on speaking in dispraise of the Buddha, the *Dhamma* and the *Samgha*, while his disciple Brahmadaṭṭa, holding an opinion in direct contradiction to his master's, goes on speaking in praise of those three. This, together with the Buddha's reaction to it, are going to provide the composer with the connecting link for the composition as a whole. This points also to the intricate and boisterous world of opinions held by *samaṇas* and *brāhmaṇas*, on which a flash of light is going to be thrown by the third part

of the *Brahmajālasutta*. As it is well known, there were in those times a good number of sophists, who under the garb of religious people led a life of wandering mendicants, but spent their energies in useless and very often passionate discussions, neglecting what was essential to their profession, namely the actual practices that would lead them to the attainment of *nibbāna*.

The following morning, before the Buddha made his appearance in the assembly, the *bhikkhus* commented upon the incident of the previous day and uttered their admiration at the equanimity of the Buddha, who was unmoved either by censure or praise, attributing them merely to the different dispositions of men. This expression of admiration finds an echo at the end of the *Brahmajālasutta* in the words uttered by Ānanda (148) <sup>1</sup>.

When the Buddha joined the *bhikkhus* who were thus conversing, he taught them what their attitude ought to be regarding censure or praise. They ought not to feel angry or discontented if someone found fault with the Buddha, the *Dharma* and the *Saṅgha*. They ought merely to deny in all simplicity whatever wrong was untruly attributed to them. On the other hand, they ought not to feel pleased and elated if they were eulogized, but ought to recognize in a simple and unassuming manner whatever good was truly spoken of the Buddha, the *Dharma* and the *Saṅgha*. Such feelings of joy or discontent would become an obstacle or a hindrance (*antarāyo*) for their spiritual development. Furthermore, the feeling of discontent would deprive them of the equanimity required to distinguish objectively between what was false and what was true in relation to reproaches uttered in their respect. Obviously, reproaches could be true only regarding the *Saṅgha* whose members could be imperfect, even as the members of any other human collectivity. The Buddha and the *Dharma* are above reproach for a genuine Buddhist.

## II. THE SĪLAMATTAKA PART

This part commences with a paragraph which connects directly with the subject of praise regarding the Buddha, mentioned in the final stage of the preceding section. Thus cleverly the composer achieves a smooth transition from the first to the second part,

<sup>1</sup> We follow the numeration of paragraphs in the Nālandā Edition of *The Dighanikāya* (1. *Sīlakkhandha Vagga*), Gen. Editor, ВНИКНУ, J. КАС-НУАР, Pāli Publication Board (Bihar Government) 1958. The paragraphs will be indicated by giving the number between round brackets. For the rest, all the quotations from other canonical books will match with the division in volume, pagination, and marginal numbers of the same Nālandā Edition of the *Tiṭṭhaka*.

establishing literary unity between them, and, in this way, integrating them into one narrative. The paragraph in question is,

“Merely of little account, *bhikkhus*, merely this-worldly, referring to mere morality is that of which the common man would speak when uttering the praises of the *Tathāgata*. And what is this...?”<sup>2</sup>

The term *oramattakam*, “merely this-worldly”, used in this context is of great significance. The observance of conventional morality can be the cause of good *kamma* to be enjoyed in successive rebirths, it is a necessary basis for higher achievements —and that is why it is found in the Buddha, who in this context is praised for it—, it can never of itself liberate man from the current of *samsāra*. To proclaim the conditions for this liberation is the main topic of this *sutta*. Liberation consists in escaping from, in transcending, all kinds of feelings and perceptions, which are empirical activities that by their very nature tend to foster samsaric existence.

At the end of every item or groups of items of conventional moral practices, attributing them to the Buddha, we meet with the words,

“Thus, *bhikkhus*, would speak a common man when uttering the praises of the *Tathāgata*” (8, 9, etc.).

Moral practices consist basically of abstentions. Therefore the tone of this part of the *sutta* is predominantly negative, as it is clear from the continual use of the term *paṭivirato*, “abstaining from”, applied to the Buddha regarding everyone of the wrong practices here mentioned. The positive expressions of moral perfection are rather scanty<sup>2</sup>. No one should thereby conclude that Buddhist perfection is made up merely of restrictions and repressions. The Buddhist *bhikkhu*, after the suppression in himself of all evil tendencies, has before his eyes a wide horizon of positive development and spiritual achievements.

The fact that this part, as a whole, is incorporated into almost all the *suttas* of the first volume of the *Dīghanikāya*, proves that this part was already extant, as an independent unity, when the compilation of these discourses took place. We can say more, that this part had an early origin.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. “Gotama the *samaṇa* proceeds full of modesty and compassion, favourably disposed towards the welfare of all beings” (8). “Gotama the *samaṇa*, accepting only what is given, welcoming only what is given, dwells on that account with a self that is pure” (8). “Gotama the *samaṇa* is one who lives the brahma life [celibacy], virtuous, detached from the vulgar practice of sexual intercourse” (8), etc.

This is established by the fact that we do not find here the enunciation of the "five commandments", which later on became usual. There is no explicit reference here to the abstention from intoxicating drinks, which later on became the "fifth commandment".

Another proof of the early origin of this part is found in the mention of only *dhamma* and *vinaya*, not *abhidhamma*, in two contexts. First of all when it is said that the Buddha is "one who speaks in season, a speaker of truth, a speaker of what is profitable, a speaker on *dhamma*, a speaker on *vinaya*, etc." (9). These two are also retailed when specifying that the *samaṇas* and *brāhmaṇas* fall into disputes using wrangling language (18)<sup>3</sup>.

It seems also probable that the first portion of this part, the *Cūlasīla* (7-10), had an earlier and independent existence of its own, as it is quoted fully and alone in several passages of the *Nikāyas*<sup>4</sup>.

This part of the *Brahmajālasutta*, viz. the *Silakkhandha*, is divided by the compilers into three sections. *Cūlasīla*, *Majjhimasīla* and *Mahāsīla*. Such division is warranted by the peculiar characteristics in style of each of the three sections. Moreover, the composer of the *Majjhimasīla* worked on the basis of the *Cūlasīla*, since most of the paragraphs of the former are detailed elaborations of items mentioned in the latter. Thus:

1. The first item, "Gotama, the *samaṇa*, refrains from injury done to living beings" (8) is elaborated in par. 11, where the practice of *ahimsā* is extended to plants, a fact attributable to the great influence that Jainism exercised in the world of the *samaṇas*<sup>5</sup>.

2. "Gotama, the *samaṇa*, takes but one meal [a day], abstaining from food at night, not addicted to unseasonal eating" (10) gets at least a passing reference when we are told that the Buddha refrains from storing up food and drink (12).

3. "Gotama, the *samaṇa*, refrains from dancing shows, singing parties, instrumental concerts, roving shows" (10) is minutely worked out in par. 13-14.

4. "Gotama, the *samaṇa*, refrains from divers ornaments and fineries, such as the wearing of garlands, perfumes and ointments" (10) is particularized in par. 16.

<sup>3</sup> Other passages where such state of affairs is reflected: D II, p. 118, *Mahāparinibbānasutta*, 3, 23, 98; A II, p. 179, *Catukkanipāto*, 18, 10, 2; A IV, *Dasakamipāto*, 10, 3, 10; K I, p. 352, *Suttanipāta*, 3, 6, etc. etc.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. M. I, p. 230, *Cūlahattipadopamasutta*, 7-8; M I, p. 329-330; *Mahātaphāsāṃkhasutta*, 16-17; M III, p. 97-98, *Chabbisodhanasutta*, 5; A II, p. 222-23, *Catukkanipāto*, 20, 8, 6-7.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. *Mahāvaggapāli*, p. 144, *Vaṣṣūpanāyikakkhandha*, 1.

5. "Gotama, the *samaṇa*, abstains from lofty and ample couches" (10) is given a detailed exposition in par. 15.

6. "Gotama, the *samaṇa*, abstains from the practice of being messenger, envoy, go-between" (10) is detailed in par. 19.

The second section of this part, the *Majjhimasīla*, ends with a succinct reference to tricks, divinations, and magical arts. The *Mahāsīla* takes up this topic and gives several catalogues of such practices, characterizing them, in every one of the seven paragraphs, as low arts and crafts, wrong means of livelihood, to which are added, at the end, divers medicinal practices. In all cultures, magic and medicine were intimately related in primitive times.

The *Sīlakkhandha* winds up in the same way as it begun, "This is that of merely little account, *bhikkhus*, merely this-worldly... regarding which a common man would speak when uttering the praises of the Tathāgata" (37).

### III. THE MICCHADITṬHITṬHANĀNI PART

The transition to this part occurs in par. 28,

"There are, *bhikkhus*, just other things profound, difficult to see, difficult to understand, tranquil, excellent, beyond reasoning, subtle, intelligible to the wise, which the Tathāgata proclaims, having realized them by means of superior wisdom, regarding which should speak those who rightly give expression to the truthfult praises of the Tathāgata. And what are those things...?"

After that, the text begins the enumeration of different groups of opinions, held by non-Buddhists, adding in every case that the Buddha rises above them, and teaches the way to escape from them, which is none other than final liberation. Thus, at the end of every group of opinions, we read,

"And, *bhikkhus*, the Tathāgata knows this, 'These points of speculation thus seized, thus grasped, leading to such destiny, result into such kind of rebirth'. This the Tahtāgata knows, and he knows something beyond this. And knowing it, he is not attached to it; and not being attached he has come to know the emancipation regarding his very self (*paccattaññeva*). The Tathagāta, *bhikkhus*, knowing, as the really are, the origin, the cessation, the taste, the danger of sensational feelings, and the escape from them, is emancipated, being free from existential grasping".

The text goes on saying that these are the things that the Tathāgata proclaims, for which he could be praised by those who

praise him truthfully. This is the thought that gives unity to the exposition of the different groups of opinions and at the same time integrates this part into the body of the *sutta*.

A careful examination of the text yields a noteworthy result. Some of the groups seem to be out of place. Is it due to the composer's manipulation of the material he was handling? As a matter of fact, when the *sutta* gives a summary of the *ditthi*s, mention is made only of two big groups of them, namely, those that refer to the remote past (*pubbanta*) of the self and the world, and those dealing with the future destiny (*aparanta*) of the self, as it is clear from the final statement<sup>6</sup>.

"For whosoever *samaṇas* and *brāhmaṇas*, *bhikkhus*, are theorists about the remote past, or theorists about the future, or theorists both about the remote past and the future, who are attached to views regarding both the remote past and the future, give utterance, concerning the remote past and the future, to manifold expressions of their personal inclination in sixty-two ways" (101)<sup>7</sup>.

It is therefore unquestionable that the text originally contemplated two kinds of views and no more, viz. those dealing with the remote past and those dealing with the future. But can all the views entered into this long catalogue be fittingly grouped under those two headings?

Under the heading of the views about the remote past we must allow the following views: the four kinds of eternalism (*sassata-vāda*), which clearly deny any beginning to the self and the world (30-34); the four kinds of views that admit only a relative or partial eternalism (*ekaccasassatavāda*) (38-50); the two kinds of views that propound chance-origination (*adhiccasamuppannavāda*) for the self and the world (67-71). But in between the partially eternalists and the chance-originationists we find two groups whose insertion presents a problem.

<sup>6</sup> For the exact meaning of *pubbanta* and *aparanta*, cf. M II, p. 257, *Cūlasakuludāyisutta*, 4, where *pubbanta* refers to past existences and *aparanta* to the future destiny of beings.

<sup>7</sup> This apportionment of all the views into two general categories is further established in par. 110, 116 and 117. In par. 110, after having enumerated the group of views belonging to the first category, all of them are summarized as belonging to those that theorize about the remote past (*pubbantakappikā*). In par. 116, after referring to the groups of views belonging to the second category, all of them are summarized as belonging to those that theorize about the future destiny (*aparantakappikā*). Similar are the contents of par. 123, 129 and 130 on the one hand, and par. 136, 142 and 143 on the other. In par. 117, summarizing all the sixty-two views, the text speaks of both, those who theorize about the remote past and those who theorize about the future destiny (*pubbantāparantakappikā*). Another reference to the two categories of groups is found in par. 146.

Let us consider in the first place the group of views dealing with the extension of the world, either as being infinite or limited (53-60). Properly speaking, no one would say that these views deal with the remote past of the self and the world. Why should they be included here?

In the second place we are faced with the problem of original inclusion or later addition of the views of the evasionists (*amarā-vikkhepikā*), who for different reason shirk the responsibility of giving a definite answer to several opposite opinions (61-66). Most of these opinions are out of scope when dealing with the remote past of the self and the world. The only group of views that could be admitted here are those that refer to apparitional beings, i. e. beings not born from parents (65), but they occur in between groups of views whose inclusion here is irrelevant and even contradictory. Thus we have the case of those who evade the decision on whether something is right or wrong (62-64). What has this problem to do with the remote past of the self and the world? The rest of the views referred to in this section deal rather with the future destiny of the self, to wit, whether there is another world or not; whether there is any fruit or result of good and bad actions or not; whether the *Tathāgata* exists or does not exist after death (65). Why should these opinions be included among those that discuss the remote past? Do not these views countenance rather the future destiny of the self? Is this not a flagrant case of interpolation?<sup>8</sup>

One might even ask why the opinions dealing with *nibbāna* in this very life (93-99), should be included among those that deal with the future destiny (*aparanta*) of the self, when all other opinions referring to the future destiny speak of the self after death.

The catalogue of *diṭṭhis* contained in the *Brahmajālasutta* does not exhaust all the possible heretical opinions retailed in the *Nikāyas*. It is obvious that the intention of the *sutta* is to include only the views dealing either with the remote past of the self and the world, or with the future destiny of the self. But even though the *sutta* does not give a complete catalogue of heresies, the number sixty-two acquired with the running of time a symbolic value, as if it embraced all possible heresies<sup>9</sup>.

<sup>8</sup> Be it as it may, the only form of the *sutta* made known to us by later tradition is the present one with its 62 kinds of views. Thus we find the name of the *Brahmajālasutta* quoted in S IV, p. 225, *Cittasamyutta*, 3 (*Dutiyaśiḍḍattasutta*), where the number of sixty-two views as contained in it is expressly mentioned.

<sup>9</sup> This occurs, for instance, in the following passages of the *Mahāniddeśa*: 5, 31 (K IV, p. 85); 8, 68 (K IV, p. 147); 10, 86; (K IV, p. 187), while commenting respectively on: *paramam ti diṭṭisu paribbasāno; diṭṭhihi diṭṭhim aviruj-jhamānā; diṭṭhisu ca na nīyati ti*.

In other contexts the reference to this catalogue of heresies is combined with another shorter catalogue of ten heretical views that became stereotyped and which repeats some of the views mentioned in the *Brahmajālasutta*<sup>10</sup>.

### *The eternalists (29-34)*

Four kinds of eternalists are mentioned, they all assert that the world and the self are eternal.

The first group includes those who by their efforts and purity of mind attain to a trance condition, wherein they are able to recall one, two, three, four five, ten, twenty, thirty, forty, fifty, hundred, thousand, one hundred thousand previous births, experiencing the continuity of personality through them, and remembering such details as the name they bore, the family to which they belonged, their caste, their ways of maintenance, the pleasures and pains they experienced, the span of everyone of their previous lives.

This shows the universality of yogic practices to which all, *samaṇas* and *brāhmaṇas*, applied themselves. That this is an exercise in yoga becomes clear from the terms used,

<sup>10</sup> This shorter catalogue enlists the following views: the world is eternal, the world is not eternal, the world is limited, the world is unlimited, the living principle and the body are the same thing the living principle and the body are different things, the *Tathāgata* exists after death, the *Tathāgata* does not exist after death, the *Tathāgata* both neither exists nor does not exist after death. Cf. S. II-III, p. 172, *Vacchagottasamyutta*, 1. Here this shorter catalogue is quoted all by itself. This proves that this catalogue represents an independent tradition of heresies that the compilers were bound to preserve. Furthermore, this catalogue, as quoted in the *Vacchagottasutta* does not contain the refrain, "This is true, any other [view] is false", appended to every one of the views. This must be therefore the oldest traditional form of this catalogue. Once the refrain was appended there was no reason why the compilers should dispense with it. The *Aggivačchagottasutta* of the *Majjhima* (M II, p. 176 ff.) begins with an elaboration on this shorter catalogue of views, but with the said refrain appended to every view. This shorter catalogue is also mentioned in K IV, p. 63, *Mahāniddeśa*, 3, 20; *Ibid.* p. 71-72 (4, 24); *Ibid.* p. 161 (9, 75). In all these cases, the refrain is given; this was to be expected given the later date of the *Mahāniddeśa*. Curiously enough in K IV, p. 174, *Mahāniddeśa*, 9, 82, this shorter catalogue is given without the refrain. The only two views of this shorter catalogue not contained in the *Brahmajālasutta* are: whether the living principle and the body are the same thing or different things. On the other hand, this views must have been a popular topic of discussion all by themselves (Cf. D I, p. 134-135, *Mahālisutta*, 19). The independent traditional transmission of this shorter catalogue is moreover confirmed by the fact that it is mentioned next to the catalogue of views of the *Brahmajālasutta*, in spite of the repetition of a number of views in both the catalogues (Cf. S IV, p. 255, *Cittasamyutta*, 3; K V, p. 173 ff., *Paṭisambhidāmagga*, 1, 2, 5, 53 ff.). This shorter catalogue of views is mentioned together with other groups of views in K IV, p. 42, *Mahāniddeśa*, 2, 12.



“By means of exertion, effort, application, diligence, and mental consideration, they attain to a trance condition of the intellect (*cetosamāhi*), which thus recollected, cleansed, purified, free from blemishes, rid of the depravities (*kilese*), is able to recollect manifold previous existences” (31)<sup>11</sup>.

From a detailed intuitive remembrance of an increasing number of previous existences, the *samaṇa* or *brāhmaṇa* in question comes to the following conclusion,

“Eternal is the self and eternal is the world, unproductive, firm like a mountain top, standing firm like a pillar; and those beings run through births, transmigrate, fall from one state, arise in another state, but all this is just eternal” (31).

Two things are declared here to be eternal, the self and the world. The self here implied is not the one that will be mentioned so often by the words, “this is not mine, this I am not, this is not *my self*”, but just the self rejected by this famous sentence, the self erroneously identified with the empirical factors, the only one that can be experienced as going perpetually through innumerable existences. It is therefore the self of the *sakkāyadiṭṭhi*. By disapproving of this self as a heretical one, the true self is not brought into question.

The world is said to be “unproductive”, firm like a mountain top, standing firm like a pillar”. This seems to imply that the world is permanent in spite of the changes we perceive in it. Pakudha

<sup>11</sup> This trance condition is also mentioned again in the same paragraph, as well as in paragraphs: 32, 33, 44, 48, 54, 55, 56, 68. But there is a significant difference between the first description and all the others, the second description found in par. 31 included. The latter ones say: “By means of exertion, effort, application, diligence, mental consideration, they attain to a trance condition of the intellect which thus recollected...”, the final words found only in the first description being omitted in the rest, viz. “cleansed, purified, free from blemishes, rid of the depravities”. This seems to indicate that these words should also be omitted in the first description. We will have thus a difference between the trance condition attributed in this context to non-Buddhist in the Pāli Canon, and the genuine trance condition of Buddhists in similar contexts, in whose description the words pointed above are never omitted. The omission of those words in the non-Buddhist trance preparatory to the vision of former existences in confirmed in D III, p. 24, *Pāthikasutta*, 40; *Ibid.* p. 25 (42); *Ibid.* p. 26 (44); *Ibid.* p. 27 (46). Therefore the omission of those words in these cases is not fortuitous. Those words exalting the utter purity of the mind are consistently used when describing the trance condition by which a Buddhist *bhikkhu* is able to recall previous existences. This loftier kind of trance condition presupposes in the Pāli Canon the practice of the four *jhānas*, which thus becomes the cause of that extreme purity of mind. Cf. D I, p. 71, *Sāmaññaphalasutta*, 95; D I, p. 180, *Subhasutta*, 35; M I, p. 30, *Bhayabheravasutta*, 21; *Ibid.* p. 233, *Cūlahatthipadopamasutta*, 14; *Ibid.* p. 340; *Mahāssapurāsutta*, 29; etc.

Kaccāyana, one of the six famous heretical teachers, was of this opinion. He maintained that the cosmos was formed by seven categories of beings, which are “uncreated, not made, firm like a mountain top, standing firm like a pillar”. Those seven categories are: earth, water, fire, air, happiness, pain, and the selves<sup>12</sup>. This is a typical non-brahmanic system, where no transcendent principle is contemplated, from which the world would proceed either through creation or emanation, where the multiplicity of selves is taken for granted, and the self is called *jīva*, as is the case with Jainism.

The Jain system may also be said to hold the opinion of eternalism. In the *Tattvārthasūtra* (v, 29) we are told that “what is real (*sat*, represented in our text by *atthi*) is that in which inhere: origination, decay, and permanence”<sup>13</sup>.

Eternalism seems to be also at the bottom of the Sāṃkhya doctrine of *satkāryavāda*, according to which nothing new is ever created<sup>14</sup>. The opinion that the self (*puruṣa*) and the world, as

<sup>12</sup> D I, p. 49, *Sāmaññaphalasutta*, 25; See also M II, p. 216, *Sandakasutta*, 6.

<sup>13</sup> *Utpādavyayadhrauvayayuktam sat*. MOHAN LAL MEHTA, in his *Outlines of Jaina Philosophy*, Bangalore 1954, p. 23, comments upon this saying, “When a substance, conscious or unconscious, originates without leaving its own nature, it is called origination. As for instance, jar originates from clay without leaving the nature of clay. Decay is the name of leaving the former mode. As for example, clay leaves its former mode when it becomes a jar. Permanence is the essential characteristic of a substance which remains unchanged in both the conditions, viz., origination and decay. It is neither created nor destroyed. It is eternal. It is changeless. As for instance, the essential nature of clay remains unchanged among its various modes”. He says a little before, “The Jainas hold that Existence is all inclusive. If you say that it is nothing but pure Consciousness, you commit a blunder. If you describe it as Pure Matter, you are guilty. It is neither sheer consciousness nor pure matter, consciousness and non-consciousness both of them are included in it”. (*Ibid.*, p. 23). We are aware that Jainism is not eternalism pure and simple, since it admits not only the eternity and unchangeability of substance, but also its changes. But its position as to the eternity of substance, amidst its changes, makes it liable to be catalogued by early Buddhism as eternalism, or at least as semi-eternalism. Cf. “The general natures are always everlasting; and are not analysable. Other common natures to all substances are the fact of being in one sense permanent, uncreate, and indestructible (*nitya sāmānya svabhāva*); and the fact of being in another sense perishable (*anītya sāmānya svabhāva*); gold may perish as a ring, but it is always something somewhere”. HERBERT WARREN, *Jainism*, Bombay 1968, p. 16.

<sup>14</sup> JACOBI'S remark in this connection is interesting, “its [pre-classical Sāṃkhya's] original dogma of ‘*satkāryavāda*’ or the continual reality of the products *sub specie aeternitatis* was more allied to the contemporary doctrine of the indestructibility but qualitative indefiniteness of matter, rather than to the Vedantic ‘*satkāryavāda*’ with which it came to be later identified”. S. K. BELVARKAR, *History of Indian Philosophy*, Vol. II, Poona 1927, p. 417. This may point to a non-brahmanic origin of *Sāṃkhya*.

nature (*prakṛiti*) are such as described here is expressed in the *Sāṃkhyakārikā*<sup>15</sup>.

We find in the Pāli Canon other expressions of "eternalism"<sup>16</sup>. Early Buddhism reacted against the two extremes of eternalism or immutable reality of the world (*atthi*) and non-reality of the world (*natthi*) with the doctrine of conditional existence.

The first three kinds of eternalism do not offer any substantial difference between themselves, the distinction being merely based on the number of previous existences that the adept is able to recall. The fourth group is specifically different from the rest. Here the advocate of eternalism bases his conviction on reasoning,

"Here, *bhikkhus*, a certain *samaṇa* or *brāhmaṇa* is one given to reasoning and mental speculation. He utters the following, which is a product of his reasoning, pervaded by mental speculation, and has become his own opinion, namely, 'eternal is the self, etc.'" (34).

It is a pity that the author should not have cared to recount the arguments afforded by the eternalists of his time. It would have enabled us to identify, without doubt, the system in question.

### *Semi-eternalism* (38-50)

This section deals with those who are on the one hand (*ekacca*) eternalists and on the other hand (*ekacca*, in Sanskrit the correlative of *ekatra* is *aparatra*) non eternalists, regarding the self and the world. Four groups are included in this section.

1. According to the first group, the whole process starts when at the end of a world period beings are reborn for the most part (*yebhuyyena*) — which seems to be rather optimistic, since it supposes that most men die in possession of such good *kamma* as to make them worthy of such good destiny — in the realm of the "Radiant-Gods" (*Abhassarā*). They reside there with a body made of mind, feeding on thrilling joy, shining with their own light, mo-

<sup>15</sup> From H. T. COLEBROOKE, *The Sāṃkhya Kārikā*, Bombay 1887, we can glean the following testimonies: "Soul [*puruṣa* = the self] is neither a production nor productive" (p. 22); "There is nothing prior to nature [*prakṛiti*] whence follows its non-production, and it is without cause" (p. 54-55); "A discrete principle is mutable, nature immutable" (p. 55); "A discrete principle is mergent; the indiscrete, immergent (indisoluble), being eternal" (p. 55); "The properties of non-causality, constancy, and the rest [immutability] are common to soul and nature [*puruṣa* and *prakṛiti*]" (p. 64).

<sup>16</sup> For other expressions of eternalism, see M I, p. 13, *Sabbāsavasutta*, 6, where, a little before (p. 12) we find the expression *natthi me attā*, or the doctrine of *anattavāda*, branded as a heresy!; S II-III, p. 414, *Diṅḥhisāmyutta*, 1; *Ibid.*, p. 416-417 (*sutta* 3); *Ibid.*, p. 423 (*sutta* 8). In all these passages the self in question is the self erroneously identified with the *khandhas*.

ving in the sky, dwelling in beauty (or auspiciousness). Such conception of spiritual beings is rather primitive; they are not properly speaking "spirits", even though their condition is idealized, they are still made of rarefied matter. The details given point to a kind of gods heirs to the astral gods of primitive religion. The whole set-up betrays a conception of the dissolution of the world, that by later patterns is rather crude, more mythological than philosophical, since it supposes the persistence of the "heavens", where those gods move shining and enjoying themselves, once the world comes to an end.

After a very long lapse of time, the world begins to evolve anew. The first thing to appear is the paradise of Brahmā (*Brahmavi-māna*). This seems to be a more genuinely Buddhist conception of the *Brahmaloka*, which had doubtless originated in brahmanism and is accepted already in the *Upaniṣads*<sup>17</sup>. The whole passage is written with a manifest sense of humour, tending to disparage the belief that the heaven of Brahma is something permanent.

After a long time, because the span of life of a being dwelling as an *Ābhassara* god comes naturally to an end, or by reason of the exhaustion of his good *kamma*, that being falls from that glorious state and comes to the palace of Brahmā. He is the first to come, and he continues dwelling there in the same state of bliss and radiance he previously had. Then he has a wish that other beings should also come there. There is a reference here to some mythological accounts of creation, in which the Supreme Being is made to give expression to such a wish<sup>18</sup>. Then other beings happen to fall from the realm of the *Ābhassara* gods and appear in the palace of Brahmā for the very same reason as the first one. The first come falls under the illusion that his wish had a creative power, being thus liable to the fallacy of "*post hoc ergo propter hoc*". He thinks, "I am Brahmā, the great Brahmā, the Supreme One, unsurpassed, all-pervading, the Ruler, the Lord, the Maker, the Creator, the best, the procreator, the powerful one, the Father of all that are and are to be" (42).

On the other hand, the beings that came after him get a similar illusion regarding the first come, considering him as the Supreme Being and considering themselves as created by him. Why? "Because we saw him here as the one who had come first to existence (*upapanno*), while we came to existence (*upapannā*) after him" (42). The reasoning seems to be absurd, inasfar as it admits

<sup>17</sup> For instance, *Kaṭṭha Up.*, I, ii, 17; I, iii, 16; *Praśna Up.*, I, 16; *Muṇḍaka Up.*, I, ii, 6. The last passage speaks of the *Brahmaloka* as the reward for sacrificial offerings, a clear indication of its mythological origin.

<sup>18</sup> See for instance *Bṛihadāraṇyaka Up.*, 4, 4, with a hint to sexual dualism, known to other mythologies. Cf. J. C. FROELICH, *Animismes*, Paris 1962, p. 66 ff.

that the Creator himself is produced (*upappanno*), but the author wanted in the first place to teach that there is no existing being that is permanent, when he also is subject to the laws of rebirth, Brahmā, the creator of the hindus, included. All the same, the author is ready to grant that the being holding the delusive rank of Brahmā is of longer life, more glorious and of greater power than those who came into existence after him.

When the others are reborn in this world, it may happen that, by means of the yogic trance already discussed, are able to remember their previous existence in the palace of Brahmā and only that. They recollect Brahmā as possessing all the attributes enumerated above and come to the conclusion that he is "permanent, steadfast, eternal, unchangeable by nature, to last like that for ever and ever", while they experience themselves as "impermanent, unstable, ephemeral, subject by nature to rebirth". That is how some come to the conclusion that the self and the world are partially eternal and partially non-eternal. Here too, the self in question is the self of the *sakkāyadiṭṭhi*, identified with the factors of existence. It is implicitly denied that such a self be eternal. Nothing is said of the true self as different from the factors of rebirth<sup>19</sup>.

In the second group the process begins with the gods "Corrupted by pleasure" (*Khiddāpadosikā*), who dwell immersed in laughter, amusement and sexual pleasures. These gods, as well as the following ones (*Manopadosikā*) belong to popular mythology wherein the gods have lost their pristine superiority and are conceived also as being bad even from the point of view of genuine religion<sup>20</sup>.

These gods "Corrupted by pleasure" lose their awareness as a result of their debauchery and are reborn in the world of men. They may happen to renounce the world and through the practice of yoga they may come to remember their previous existence and only that. They think they fell from that state owing to their excesses, and experience themselves as "impermanent, unsteady,

<sup>19</sup> We find the same story about the origin of the idea of Brahmā and the *Brahmanimāna* in D III, p. 23 ff., *Pāthikasutta*, 38 ff. The question is treated there from the point of view of the first beginning (*aggaññam*) of things as professed by certain *samaṇas* and *brāhmaṇas* who admitted a creator god, Brahmā. There is a literal correspondence between the passages in both the *suttas*. A certain dependence of the *Pāthikasutta* on the *Micchādiṭṭhiṭṭhānāni* part of the *Brahmajālasutta* is evident from the words of the *Pāthikasutta*, *aggaññāṇ'cā'ham pajānāmi...* (*Ibid.*, p. 23).

<sup>20</sup> Jains, for instance, divide beings into four classes, according to their respective conditions of rebirth: those reborn in hell (*nārakī*); those reborn below human level (*tyryaṅc*); those reborn as men (*manuṣya*); and those reborn as *devatā*, who may be gods and demons. Cf. MRS. SINCLAIR STEVENSON, *The Heart of Jainism*, New Delhi 1970, p. 97.

ephemeral, subject by nature to rebirth", while they falsely consider the other gods, not addicted to such practices, as "permanent, steadfast, eternal, unchangeable by nature, to last like that for ever and ever". This is again to be set on the Buddhist background that considers the gods, Brahmā included, as being impermanent<sup>21</sup>.

The exposition of the third group follows a similar development of thought, having as the starting point the gods called "Corrupted in mind" (*Manopadosikā*). These gods are given to an excessive sense of envy for one another, as a result of which they spoil the minds of one another, and therefore, exhausted in mind and body fall from that condition and are reborn in the world<sup>22</sup>.

Those of the fourth group build their opinion on reasoning and mental investigation coming to hold the opinion that "this that is called eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, *this self*, is impermanent, unsteady, not lasting for ever, changeable by nature"; while "this that is called intelligence, mind, intellect (*cittam, mano, viññānam*), *this self*, is permanent, steadfast, eternal, unchangeable by nature, and will stay like this for ever and ever"<sup>23</sup>.

We could not wish for a clearer testimony as to what kind of self the heretics have in mind here. The *perishable self* in this case, is identified with the senses and the body, of which so often the Pāli Canon says that they are the non-self (*anattā*), or that "This is not mine, this I am not, this is not my self". The *imperishable self* is here identified by the heretics with "consciousness", a thing that early Buddhism absolutely disavowed, with the very same formulas just indicated.

This must have been a common opinion among the most refined philosophers of those times, and the Buddha is often introduced combating it, even among his *bhikkhus*, who found it hard to understand<sup>24</sup>.

<sup>21</sup> The passage of the gods "Corrupted by Pleasure" occurs also in D III, p. 25-26, *Pāthikasutta*, 42. There is again an exact literal correspondence between both the passages, but in the *Pāthikasutta* the problem discussed refers also to the beginning of things, recognising the eternity of those gods who are not "Corrupted by Pleasure". Nevertheless, this opinion, even as the previous one, is not expressly qualified as "semi-eternalism". The paragraph indicated above occurs also here.

<sup>22</sup> In D III, p. 26-27, *Pāthikasutta*, 43-44, we find the same description of the gods "Corrupted in Mind", and how those who fell from that state consider the gods not "Corrupted in Mind" eternal, while the beginning of things is attributed to individuals falling from that group of gods and being reincarnated as men. For the rest, we find here the same features found in the other two passages already mentioned.

<sup>23</sup> S. II, p. 80, *Nidānasam'yutta*, 61 (*Assutavāsutta*) attributes this opinion to the unlearned common man, who feeling disgust for the body, accepts what is called *citta, mano, viññāna*, as his very self.

<sup>24</sup> *Viññāna* is one of the existential factors (*khandhas*), and is often said to be *anattā* (non-self), or it is said of it, "This is not mine, this I am not,

The expression "this self" is significant. The true self, the *Tat-hāgata*, is in no way a subject of designation<sup>25</sup>.

### *The extensionists (53-58)*

This section deals with opinions bearing on the extension of the world, and does not explicitly say anything of the self. The first three groups come to their conclusion as a result of a yogic trance in which they perceive the world as limited in extension, or as unlimited, or as both as limited and unlimited. Every one of the two last opinions brands the preceding ones as being false, even as the fourth will do with all the others.

The third opinion is interesting inasmuch as it shows that its holders do not transgress the principle of non-contradiction, since for them the world is both limited and unlimited at the same time, but not in the same respect. It seems therefore that this should apply also to other similar cases. This people declare that the world is vertically limited, i. e., in the upwards and downwards directions, but unlimited across. One may ask why other combinations were not possible. This may be ascribed either to arbitrary thinking, or, otherwise, this opinion could be grounded on a definite cosmological conception that prevented those people from saying, for instance, that the world could also be vertically unlimited and limited across. Perhaps these people thought of this world as limited above by the various heavens; and below, by the different hells.

The first opinion admits what we might call the thesis; the second, admits the antithesis and rejects the thesis; the third, makes a synthesis of both and rejects both the thesis and the antithesis as separate options; the fourth, is a direct negation of the previously established synthesis through certain kind of reasoning which is left unexplained, coming finally to the conclusion that the world is "neither limited nor unlimited". Perhaps these people had recourse to the logical device of "*reductio ad absurdum*" so dear to sophists, a device which, on the other hand, became so common in

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this is not my self". About the reluctance to see *viññāna* as non-self, see S IV, p. 151-152, *Saḷāyatanaśāmyutta*, 234. Sati's opinion that *viññāna* is something permanent that passes on from one existence to another is disowned by the Buddha, with very strong language, in M I, p. 315 ff., *Mahātaṇhāsakaḥaya-sutta*, 1 ff.

<sup>25</sup> See, for instance, K I, p. 26, *Dhammapada*, 12-13; K II, p. 255, *Thera-gāthā*, 1, 92. More explicitly: D II, p. 51, *Mahānidānasutta*, 22-23, and *Ibid.*, p. 54-55 par. 32; K I, p. 384, *Suttanipāta*, 3, 12, 348; K I, p. 219, *Itivuttaka*, 3, 14; K I, *Suttanipāta*, 5, 7, 98-99.

later Buddhist thought, and whose beginnings one can detect in the Pāli Canon<sup>26</sup>.

Two anomalies can be observed in this section. The first one is in the fact that it speaks only of the world, while the eternalists, the semi-eternalists, and the chance-originationists speak both of the world and the self. In this respect, the *Pañcattayasutta* of the *Majjhima*<sup>27</sup> seems to be more faithful to what may have been the original source of both catalogues of opinions. It speaks of both, the self and the world as being limited, unlimited, both, neither.

The second anomaly is in the fact that, taken on its face value, this opinion does not concern itself with the remote past, but, since the *Pañcattayasutta*, inserts also this opinion in the *pubbanta* category, it must have been included there from the beginning. This may be explained in the sense that the nature of a thing is original or primeval.

#### *The evasionists (61-66)*

The evasionists are people who on a question being put to them recoil from giving a definite answer, be it affirmative, or negative, or both affirmative and negative, or both neither affirmative nor negative. Here, too, four groups are included.

The first group consists of people who, faced with the question whether something is good or evil, find themselves ignorant about it and, therefore, in danger of uttering some untruth, which would be a cause of distress for themselves and such distress would turn in their case into a "spiritual" impediment (*antarāyo*).

The unacceptability of their position cannot consist in the fear of falling into a spiritual impediment, since at the beginning of the *sutta* the *bhikkhus* have been told not to be elated by the praises uttered in their favour, or displeased by the censures passed in their regard, because that would turn into a spiritual impediment (*antarāyo*) for them (5). This kind of evasionists cannot be blamed either if in some isolated case they shun giving a definite answer for want of certainty. Rather, their position is to be disapproved because they profess a universal agnosticism about what is right or wrong<sup>28</sup>. These people's minds are smothered under the grip of a universal doubt regarding what is good and what is evil. Doubt has always a paralyzing effect<sup>29</sup>. And Buddha's *dharma* is often described as eliminating all doubt<sup>30</sup>.

<sup>26</sup> Cf. S II-III, p. 331 ff., *Bhikkhusamyutta*, 85 (*Yamakasutta*), and 86 (*Anurāhasutta*).

<sup>27</sup> M III, p. 21 ff.

<sup>28</sup> Cf. A IV, p. 253, *Dasakanipāto*, 10, 4, 4.

<sup>29</sup> About the paralyzing effect of doubt, cf. M I, p. 137, *Cetokhilasutta*, 2, while the opposite condition is described at *Ibid.*, 4. *Vicikicchā* ("perplexity")



The second group of evasionists, faced with the same problem, show themselves undecided for fear of developing certain evil states that would give rise to *upādāna*, "clinging", and this would also turn unto an "impediment". Their position, therefore, is similar to that of the previous group.

Those of the third group, confronted with the same problem, remain undecided because of the fear of being argued by more competent or clever men, and this would again become a cause of distress, which would result again into a spiritual impediment. There is no essential difference between this group and the previous ones.

The evasionists of the fourth group remain undecided regarding the following problems: whether or not, there is another world; whether or not, there are apparitional beings; whether or not, there is fruit and result of good and bad actions; whether or not the *Tathāgata* exists after death. They stay undecided as to the answer to be given to these problems owing to their dullness and stupidity. They are to blame for different reasons.

In the first place, not to believe in another world and to deny the fruit and result of good and bad actions is to be an all out heretic<sup>31</sup>. Buddhism admits the possibility of birth without parents, that is to say as an apparitional being (*opapātiko*) in a happy state, never to come back again, and to attain *nibbāna* there<sup>32</sup>.

It is well known that orthodox Buddhism also refused to answer the questions whether the *Tathāgata*: "exists after death, does not exist after death, both exists and does not exist after death, both neither exists nor does not exist after death"<sup>33</sup>. The diffe-

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is a *samyojana*, "one of the fetters" (M I, p. 14, *Sabbāsavasutta*, 8), and a *nīvaraṇa*, "one of the hindrances" (M I, p. 190, *Vammīkasutta*, 3), and on its part *vicikicchā* proceeds from *kaṃkhā* ("doubt") *Kaṃkhāto uppajjati vicikicchā* (M I, p. 319, *Mahātanhāsamkhayasutta*, 6).

<sup>30</sup> Thus the perfect man is one who has crossed over all doubt, as in K I, p. 371, *Suttanpāta*, 1, 1, 17; *Ibid.*, p. 284 (1, 5, 86). When Pokkharasāti had the intuition of the *Dhamma* he is called *tiṇṇaviccikiccheco vigatakathān-katho* (D I, p. 95, *Ambaṭṭhasutta*, 46), etc.

<sup>31</sup> Such is Ajita Kesambala's opinion as described in D I, p. 48, *Sāmaññaphalasutta*, 22, "There is, O king, no such thing as charity, or sacrifice, or offering. There is no fruit or maturing of good and bad *kamma*. There are no such things as this world, or another world. There is neither father nor mother, nor apparitional beings..."

<sup>32</sup> Cf. M I, p. 45, *Ākaṃkheyyasutta*, 2; M II, p. 118, *Mahāmālukyasutta*, 5, etc. Buddhism admits the possibility of *opapātikā* beings, being born spontaneously, even in this world, acknowledging four ways for the production of living beings: from an egg, from a womb, from moisture, and spontaneously (D III, p. 179, *Samgīṭisutta*, 17, and more explicitly M I, p. 103-104, *Mahāsīhanādasutta*, 12).

<sup>33</sup> See, for instance, A III, p. 204-205. *Sattakanipāto*, 6, 1; S IV, p. 330-331, *Abyākatasaṃyutta*, 3, 4, etc.

rence between these two positions — the Buddhist and the heretical one here described — is that the heretics implicitly admit the possibility of any of those four ways of existence or non existence being predicated of the *Tathāgata* after death, existence — and by contrast non existence — having for them an empirical basis, while the *Tathāgata* after death transcends all experience and, therefore, no empirical category is applicable to him<sup>34</sup>

The members of this fourth group of evasionists reflect exactly the same frame of mind as that of Sañjaya Belatthaputta, one of the famous six heretical teachers introduced in the *Sāmaññaphalasutta*<sup>35</sup>. As a matter of fact, the interpolator, in this case, had only to quote literally Sañjaya's opinion, since this paragraph reproduces exactly the passage of the *Sāmaññaphalasutta* just quoted.

In the introduction to this third part of the *Brahmajālasutta* we specified the reasons for our persuasion that the whole section about the evasionists is out of place and might, therefore, be an interpolation.

The probability of this section being an interpolation increases when we consider that the difference between the first three groups of evasionists is minimal and not very originally marked. In the paragraph that describes the fourth group of evasionists sixteen different subjects of opinion are inserted *en bloc* against the system followed throughout this section of the *Brahmajālasutta*.

Regarding this, the *Pañcattayasutta* may be able to clarify matters. It distinguishes four kinds of opinions regarding the *pubbanta* aspect of the self and the world in what concerns eternalism or non eternalism. The world and the self are considered successively as eternal, non-eternal, both as eternal and non-eternal, both as neither eternal nor non-eternal<sup>36</sup>.

The eternalists appear explicitly mentioned in both the *suttas*; the semi-eternalists of the *Brahmajālasutta* correspond with those of the *Pañcattayasutta* that profess the self and the world to be both eternal and non-eternal; the chance-originationists of the *Brahmajālasutta*, to be soon discussed, seem to coincide with those of the *Pañcattayasutta* that profess the self and the world to be non-

<sup>34</sup> Cf. S IV, p. 323-324, *Abyākatasamyutta*, 1, where the Buddha is reported to have said, "That material form (that sensational feeling..., that perception..., that consciousness...) by which one trying to define the *Tathāgata* would define him has been abandoned, cut from the very root, as a palm tree with its base destroyed, reduced to nothing, unable to sprout in the future. Free from denomination of material form (of sensational feeling... of perception... of consciousness), the *Tathāgata* is profound, immeasurable, unfathomable —even as a big ocean— so as to be impossible to say of him: the *Tathāgata* exists after death, the *Tathāgata* does not exist after death, etc."

<sup>35</sup> D I, p. 51, *Sāmaññaphalasutta*, 31.

<sup>36</sup> M III, p. 25, *Pañcattayasutta*, 7.

eternal. The only category explicitly mentioned in the *Pañcattaya-sutta* and absent from the *Brahmajālasutta* is that which considers the self and the world to be "neither eternal nor non-eternal". Was this category removed by the composer or author of the *Brahmajālasutta*, or previously by the compiler of the catalogue of views, to make room for such evasionists as seem to be out of place here?

If that is so, the interpolator must have been moved to make such substitution by the wish to make the catalogue of opinions as complete as possible. He could not conceive of any such catalogue without any mention of the *akiriyāvāda*<sup>37</sup>, the greatest heresy in moral matters, and of the famous "unanswered questions" (*abyākatā pañhā*), which refer to the *Tathāgata* after death<sup>38</sup>.

The whole trend of the *pubbanta* section of the *Brahmajālasutta* would postulate here the distinction of groups coming to the conclusion that the world and the self are "neither eternal nor non-eternal", either through a yogic trance or through reasoning. That is precisely the pattern followed regarding all the other categories of theorists in this *pubbanta* section.

#### *The chance-originationists (67-71)*

These opinions certainly belong to those that discuss the remote past (*pubbanta*), and by their position contribute to confirm the interpolation of the previous ones.

Two groups are incorporated in this section: one, basing their opinion on yogic experience; and another, proceeding on reasoning. Again we must stay unsatisfied as to the reasons given to prove that the world and the self came into existence by chance-origination.

The yogic experience is based on the fact that the man in question was before being reborn here on earth one of the gods called "Unconscious beings" (*Asaññasattā*). On getting the first idea, because the *kamma* that had caused such condition was exhausted, the man in question fell from that state and was reborn here. Then he renounces the world, and by means of mental exertion he is able to recall his previous existence. He can obviously recall only the uprising of that idea and how he was then conscious of beginning to be without any apparent reason. Therefore he concludes that he was the result of chance-origination: "I who before was not, now am in existence, without [previously] being,

<sup>37</sup> To this heretical opinion refers more explicitly the lack of decision of the first three kinds of evasionists as to what is good and what is evil, as well as some of the points mentioned in the fourth group.

<sup>38</sup> Cf. S IV, p. 321 ff., *Abyākatasaṃyutta*. A III, p. 204, *Sattakanipāto*, 6, 1, etc.

I have come (*pariṇato*) to be". And since the existence of the self is framed within the existence of the world around, he comes to the conclusion that the self and the world have a fortuitous origination, not due to a previous cause<sup>39</sup>.

This opposes the Buddhist basic principle that nothing happens without a cause. This principle is stated in various ways: *imasmim sati idam hoti, imass'uppadā idam uppajjati* ("this being, that [also] is; by the production of this, that is [also] produced") — which is the principle that presides over the activity of the chain of causation<sup>40</sup>; — *yam karoti tena upapajjati* ("whatever a man does, according to that he rises again") — which is the principle that presides over the working of *kamma*<sup>41</sup>; — and the most universal principle, *hetusamupannā dhammā* ("all things arise from a cause")<sup>42</sup>.

Thus we come to the end of the section wherein the opinions (*anuditṭhi*) regarding the remote past or "ultimate beginnings", as T. W. Rhys Davids puts it, are catalogued. We proceed now to describe the second section dealing with the opinions relating to the future destiny (*aparanta*) of the self.

#### *The views propounding a conscious self after death (75-77)*

We meet in the first place with the views maintaining that the self after death (*param marañā*) is unimpaired (*arogo*) and conscious or perceiving (*saññi*). A thing worth noticing is the use of *param marañā*, without being preceded by the words *kayassa bhedā*, thus forming the complete formula so often used in the Canon, *kayassa bhedā param marañā*<sup>43</sup>. Is this not a sign that the material used here by the composer is older than those passages which contain the complete formula? If the formula had been already in vogue, the original compiler of this catalogue instinctively would have made use of it.

Such conscious destiny of the self after death is conceived by different people in sixteen different ways: as provided with form

<sup>39</sup> In the *Pāthikasutta*, 46 (D III, p. 27-28), we find also the beginning of things explained by some heretics having the "Unconscious Beings" as the starting point, following the same process, and described with the same words. This time the opinion is branded as chance-originationism, with the same technical term as employed in the *Brahmajālasutta* (*adhiccasamuppana*).

<sup>40</sup> Cf. M II, p. 256, *Cūlasakuludāyisutta*, 4; M III, p. 126, *Bahudhātusutta*, 4, etc.

<sup>41</sup> Cf. A IV, p. 339, *Dasakanipāto*, 21, 6, where the complete wording is, *bhūtā bhūtassa upapatti hoti, yam karoti tena upapajjati*, "the arising of a being takes place from a being, whatever a man does, according to that he rises again".

<sup>42</sup> A III, p. 140, *Chakkanipāto*, 9, 11.

<sup>43</sup> Cf. D I, p. 122, *Kuṭadantasutta*, 26; M I, p. 104, *Mahāsihanādasutta*, 13-14 (repeated six times); M I, p. 47, *Ākamkheyyasutta*, 3, etc. etc.

(*rūpī*); as devoid of form (*arūpī*); as both having and not having form (*rūpī ca arūpī ca*); as both neither having form nor being devoid of it (*nevarūpī nārūpī*); as limited (*antavā*); as unlimited (*anantavā*); as being both limited and unlimited (*antavā ca anantavā ca*); as being both neither limited nor unlimited (*nevantavā nānantavā*); as having a uniform consciousness (*ekattasaññī*); as having diversified modes of consciousness (*nānattasaññī*); as having limited consciousness (*parittasaññī*); as having immeasurable consciousness (*appamāṇasaññī*); as being absolutely happy (*ekantasukhī*); as being absolutely miserable (*ekantadukkī*); as being both happy and miserable (*sukhadukkī*); as being both neither happy nor miserable (*adukkhamasukhī*).

We may divide this catalogue into four parts. The first refers to material form or its absence; the second, to the self being limited or unlimited; the third, distinguishes between four possible kinds of consciousness of the self after death; the fourth, to the happiness or misery of the self after death.

One might ask whether other possible combinations were not possible, such as: the consciousness of the self after death being both limited and immeasurable, and both homogeneous and diversified. Of course, such combinations would not be possible at one and the same time, but would require successive changes from a limited consciousness to an immeasurable one and the other way round; as well as from an homogeneous consciousness to a diversified one and *vice versa*. The holders of this opinions contemplated perhaps a final and permanent condition, not liable to change, for the self after death. The possibilities of the consciousness of the self after death being "neither limited nor immeasurable" or "neither homogeneous nor diversified" are likely left unmentioned because they seem to deny all empirical consciousness, which is the one that the heretics have in view.

Be it as it may, the dyads: uniform consciousness and diversified consciousness, limited consciousness and immeasurable consciousness seem to be the only traditional ones, since they are the only ones recurring in the *Pañcattayasutta*.

The *Pañcattayasutta* mentions only the following possibilities for a conscious and unimpaired self after death: as having form, as having no form, both as having form and not having form, both as neither having form nor being deprived of it; as having a uniform consciousness, as having diversified modes of consciousness, as having limited consciousness, as having immeasurable consciousness<sup>44</sup>.

Nothing is said in the *Pañcattayasutta* of the conscious self after death being limited, unlimited, both, neither; or as being

<sup>44</sup> M III, p. 22, *Pañcattayasutta*, 2.

absolutely happy, absolutely miserable, both happy and miserable, both neither happy nor miserable. For the rest, both the catalogues coincide.

On the other hand, the *Pañcattayasutta* includes among the opinions regarding the remote past (*pubbanta*) the possibilities of the self having a uniform consciousness, or diversified forms of consciousness, and of having a limited consciousness, or an immeasurable consciousness. The possibilities of the self being absolutely happy, absolutely miserable, both happy and miserable, both neither happy nor miserable, are included in the *Pañcattayasutta* among the opinions related to the past (*pubbanta*), not among the opinions related to the future (*aparanta*)<sup>45</sup>. It is our impression that the composer of the *Pañcattayasutta*, in its present form, is rather unsystematic as compared with the composer of the *Brahmajālasutta*<sup>46</sup>.

Furthermore, the *Pañcattayasutta* informs us, in this context, that according to some, an immeasurable and imperturbable consciousness, which seems to be the ideal for the heretics, is attained when one goes beyond the meditative devices (*kaṣiṇas*). Some agree that an immeasurable and imperturbable consciousness is attained with the sixth *vimokkha*. This is not enough for the Buddha. All these states are still something mentally compounded, and therefore material. The ideal to be achieved is in the stopping of all mental constructions, transcending thereby what is empirical<sup>47</sup>.

<sup>45</sup> M III, p. 25-26, *Pañcattayasutta*, 7.

<sup>46</sup> The *Pañcattayasutta* as it is now extant, is a later composition based on an original *Pañcattayasutta* with which the present *Pañcattayasutta* begins. The original *Pañcattayasutta* contemplated only the views bearing on the future destiny (*aparanta*) of man. That is why in the present *Pañcattayasutta* we discover the anomaly of the *aparanta* views being treated before the *pubbanta* views, when the logical sequence seems to postulate an inverse order. The original *Pañcattayasutta* ended with par. 6, "And, *bhikkhus*, whatever *samaṇas* and *brāhmaṇas* theorists about the future destiny of man (*aparanta-kappikā*), given to having views about the future destiny of man, express in various ways opinions concerning the future destiny of man, all of them give expression precisely to these five positions, or any of them". The *aparanta* views are the only ones classified in groups of five and three as postulated by the title of the *sutta*. No effort is made to classify in such a way the opinions about the remote past. These views were added by the composer of the latter *Pañcattayasutta*, with a mere mention of them, without elaborating on them separately, as it is done in the original *Pañcattayasutta*. It is with reference to the *aparanta* views that the composer seems to proceed rather unsystematically, as we say in the text. For the rest, the overall teaching of the composer of the *Pañcattayasutta* is similar to that of the *Brahmajālasutta*. We shall speak later on of the problem why the original *Pancattayasutta*, as embedded in the present *sutta*, mentions the views on *nibbāna* in this very life, without discussing them in detail, as done with the rest of the *aparanta* views.

<sup>47</sup> M III, p. 22, *Pañcattayasutta*, 2.

*The views propounding an unconscious self after death (78-80)*

These opinions propound for the self a destiny after death in which the self, being unimpaired (*arogo*) and unconscious, may be also: provided with form, without form, both having form and not having it, both neither having form nor not having it; limited, both limited and unlimited, both neither limited nor unlimited.

The *Pañcattayasutta* mentions only four possibilities for the unconscious self after death: having form, not having form, both having and not having form, both neither having nor not having form.

The question of the self being happy, or miserable, or both, or neither, does not arise here. Is it because happiness and misery imply consciousness and are impossible without it?

On the other hand, the *Pañcattayasutta* indicates the reason why these people opt for an unconscious self after death. They deem consciousness to be "an ill, an abcess, a dart, while the peaceful, state, the excellent thing is what is called unconsciousness". Following this train of thought it must be said that the unconscious self is only happy, albeit in a negative way. For the Buddha, this state of mere unconsciousness does not lead anywhere on the way to spiritual maturity, being, moreover, something mentally compounded that ought to be surpassed<sup>48</sup>.

It is to be noted that neither the *Brahmajālasutta* nor the *Pañcattayasutta* refer to any opinion propounding a self after death both conscious and unconscious. The reason might be that this would require a change of condition from consciousness to unconsciousness and back, while we are dealing here with a final and stable condition of the self after death.

*The views propounding a self after death both neither conscious nor unconscious (81-83)*

According to opinions that admit an unimpaired self, neither conscious nor unconscious, this kind of self may be: with form, without form, both with form and without it, both neither with form nor without it; limited, unlimited, both limited and unlimited, both neither limited nor unlimited. Again the possibilities of this kind of self being happy, unhappy, both, neither, are not contemplated.

On the other hand, it cannot be denied that this condition has a certain remnant of consciousness. Why? This condition corresponds with the seventh *vimokkha*, which reaches to the sphere of neither consciousness nor unconsciousness (*nevasaññānāsaññāyatanaṃ*), but such sphere is followed by the eight *vimokkha*, the

<sup>48</sup> M III, p. 23, *Pañcattayasutta*, 3.

most perfect one, in which, once the sphere of neither consciousness nor unconsciousness is transcended in every way (*sabbaso*), one attains to cessation of perception and feeling (*saññāvedayītanīrodha*)<sup>49</sup>.

The *Pañcattayasutta* mentions the reason why these people aspire to have a self after death which is neither conscious nor unconscious: "Perception is an ill, an abcess, a dart; lack of perception is complete confusion (*sammoha*), while the peaceful state, the excellent thing is what is called neither consciousness nor unconsciousness".

The *Pañcattayasutta* adds that those who opine that this sphere of neither consciousness nor unconsciousness can be attained merely through the activities of the senses and the intellect, commit a blunder; all those activities go in the opposite direction. It is why the *semaṇas* and *brāhmaṇas* who distinguish in this sphere of neither consciousness nor unconsciousness is attained<sup>50</sup>. That is why the *samaṇas* and *brāhmaṇas* who distinguish in this sphere of neither consciousness nor unconsciousness, between consciousness that is an ill, and unconsciousness that is utter confusion, think of it as being a complex condition, while in reality we are faced here with a subtle (*sukhuma*) condition, free from any mental composition.

The *Pañcattayasutta* mentions again for the conscious and unconscious self after death only four possibilities: having form, not having it, both having form and not having it, both neither having form nor not having it. Since such was the case also regarding the conscious self after death, as well as regarding the unconscious self after death, we may presume that the traditional material handed down by the original *Pañcattayasutta* is older than the one conveyed by the *Brahmajālasutta*. If all the possibilities mentioned by the *Brahmajālasutta* were mentioned from the beginning, there is no reason why the author of the original *Pañcattayasutta* should have left them unmentioned.

#### *The annihilationists (84-92)*

The text goes on giving the catalogue of views that propound the "cutting off, the destruction, the cessation from existence (*vibhava*) of the existing being (*sato satassa*)".

The first annihilationists mentioned in the catalogue are out and out materialists, for whom the human self is material (*rūpī*), and a mere composite of the four basic elements (*cātumahābhūti-*

<sup>49</sup> For a summary description of the *vimokkhas*, cf. M II p. 236, *Mahāsakuladāyisutta*, 14.

<sup>50</sup> M. III, p. 24, *Pañcattayasutta*, 4.



ko)<sup>51</sup>. This self disintegrates after death, bringing about thereby the annihilation of man. We meet in this section with the two elements of the later on well known formula *kayassa bheda param maraṇā*, but the two elements are still separated.

The second group of annihilationists are still materialists, but admit a twofold self in man, the first of which coincides with the one just mentioned, while the second is still material, but in a subtler way. These people, over and above the self accepted by the previous group, admit also another self, unknown to the others, which is "divine, material, belonging to the sensuous plane, nourished with food that is swallowed". It is by the annihilation of this self that the annihilation of man is completed.

The matter in question is awkwardly expressed,

"To him [the preceding annihilationist] another annihilationist speaks thus: '*this self* which you proclaim certainly exists, I do not say that it does not exist; but certainly, friend, merely by that [by the annihilation of that] *this self* is not utterly extirpated. There exists, friend, *another self* divine, material, belonging to the sensuous plane, nourished by food that is swallowed. This [self] you do not know, you do not see; I know it, I see it. Inasmuch, friend, as *this self* is definitely cut off, perishes, at the dissolution of the body, it does not exist beyond death, it is certainly by that, friend, that *this self* is utterly extirpated'. In this way, some people profess the cutting off, the destruction, the cessation from existence of the existent being".

If we are to make some sense out of this passage, we will have to admit that the first *this self* refers to the self as conceived by the first group of annihilationists, which is different from *another self* admitted by this second group. This *another self* is referred to by the third *this self*. But the second and the fourth *this self* seem to refer to man's reality as a whole, which comprehends two different levels of existence. Therefore, the sense of the last part of the passage will be as follows: "Inasmuch, friend, as *this self* [divinely material admitted by us] is definitely cut off, perishes at the dissolution of the body, and does not exist after death, it is certainly by that [by the dissolution of *this self* admitted by

<sup>51</sup> The antiquity of this opinion is warranted by the absence of *ākāsa* from the enumeration of the basic elements. In the opinion of Ajita Kesakambala, man is said to be a composite of four elements, but even then, the sensorial faculties (*indriyāni*) seem to be made of *ākāsa* as their material cause, since in the same way as every one of the other elements of the human body merge at death into the primeval mass of the corresponding element, so too, the faculties merge into the *ākāsa*. This seems to be an implicit avowal of the existence of five elements. D I, p. 48, *Sāmaññaphala-sutta*, 22.

us], friend, that *this self* [man as a whole] is utterly extirpated". Unless we attribute two different meanings to the first and the second *this self*, the statement of this last part of the passage will be a meaningless tautology. The same confusing way of expressing things is betrayed in the descriptions of annihilationists that follow.

It is therefore clear that the term *attā* (self) is used in the passage under consideration as an ambiguous term. Sometimes it refers to a constituent part of man's reality, while other times it stand for man's reality as a whole. Consequently, the advocates of this opinion think of man as having two levels of reality, and for them the annihilation of man implies the annihilation of both.

Besides, the *kāmāvacara* or sensuous plane, is properly speaking a divine, not a human, plane, otherwise called the *devaloka*, where the gods so called dwell. Therefore, it would be more logical to say that the divinely material part of man goes to the *kāmāvacara* world there to perish after a lapse of time. But the promoters of this view seem to imply that even this part of man perishes at the dissolution of the body. Will it not be a case of misrepresentation? What is otherwise the sense of admitting a reality in man that never dwells in its proper sphere?

The third group of annihilationists are also on the whole materialists, but they admit a third self, made of a still more refined matter than the second self accepted by the previous group.

The third group of annihilationists are also on the whole materialists, but they admit a third self which is made of a still more refined matter than the second self with which those of the second group stay satisfied. These people avow the existence and annihilation after death of the self peculiar to the second group, adding on their own that man's annihilation is not thereby complete. There is another self in man which is "divine, material, made of mind-stuff, endowed both with major and minor limbs<sup>52</sup>, not deprived of its senses"<sup>53</sup>. Only with the annihilation of this self can the annihilation of man (again *this self*) be perfectly completed. We are not explicitly told that the members of this third group acknowledge the self peculiar to the first group. But since it is impossible to think that they would ignore the body in man, we may presume that they admit it. This means that every subsequent group agrees to the existence of "all the selves" admitted by the previous ones.

<sup>52</sup> *Sabbamāgappaccāṅgī*. The major limbs (*aṅga*) are six, viz, the trunk, the head, the arms, the legs. The minor limbs (*paccāṅga*) are such as: the forehead, nose, chin, fingers, ears, etc.

<sup>53</sup> *Ahīnindriyo*, a negative expression equivalent to "in possession of all its senses or powers", equivalent also, we suppose, to the term "*arogo*" of the eternalists.

The fourth group of annihilationists are not materialists in the way all the preceding ones are. Besides all the previously mentioned selves, they admit another self which transcends material form, but they do not thereby rise to the level that we would call strictly speaking "spiritual". Using *sāṃkhya* terminology we would say that this people have in mind a superior self that is as yet on the side of *prakṛiti*. The same applies to all the rest.

These people believe in an additional self which "having surpassed in every way all perceptions of material form, by the disappearance of perceptions of resistance, by not calling to mind perceptions of difference, [conscious] that space is infinite reaches up to the sphere of the infinitude of space"<sup>54</sup>. The annihilation of man is complete only with the annihilation of this self after death.

The words describing this kind of self are used also to describe the fourth *vimokkha* ("exercise in deliverance"). It might be objected that his cannot be properly called a "self", being as it is only a stage of perfection of the adept towards perfect and supreme deliverance. But this way of expressing things is in line with what the Pāli Canon thinks of non-Buddhist sects. According to early Buddhism, the basic heresy of all non-Buddhists is the *sakkāyaditṭhi*, which consists in identifying the self (*attā*), not only with the factors of existence (*khandhas*), but also with all conditions even of great perfection that may lead to final deliverance, but are still within the realm of what is empirical. Of every one of these conditions will be asserted: "This is not mine, this I am not, this is not my self"<sup>55</sup>.

Thus the text goes on describing three more groups of annihilationists, each of them adding a further self to the previous ones, which is to be annihilated if the annihilation of man is to be complete. Every one of the new selves agrees in description with one of the remaining *vimokkhas*. The striking fact is that the last *vimokkha* is not mentioned at all. We shall point out the reason for it later on.

We find again the reason the annihilationists put forward to justify their opinion in the *Pañcattayasutta*. They blame their opponents for being attached to existence, and ridicule them for thinking: "After death we shall become this or that", comparing

<sup>54</sup> This self belongs already to the third kind of self described in the *Poṭṭhapādasutta*, which is said to be not grossly material (*arupī*) and made of perception (*saññā*). D I, p. 156, *Poṭṭhapādasutta*, 14.

<sup>55</sup> About the *vimokkhas*, the last one excepted, being thus excluded from being identified with the self, cf. K V, p. 152, *Paṭisambhidāmagga*, 1, 2, 1, 2; also M III, p. 329, *Dhātuvibhaṅgasutta*, 19, where these *vimokkhas*, excepting the last one, are considered to be something compounded, and therefore impermanent, and therefore not the self; and finally, M III, p. 107-108, *Sappurisasutta*, 12, where it is stated that conceit can feed on the *vimokkhas*, excepting the last one.

them to merchants planning their bargains by the corresponding exchange of goods. Latent in their mentality is the thought that existence is an ill, to which no attachment is due. But the Buddha replies that the annihilationists themselves fall a prey to attachment. Their apparent detachment is in reality an inverse kind of attachment, since they aspire to annihilation out of fear and loathing of the existential aggregate. That keeps them revolving within the cycle of transmigration as if they were dogs tied by a leash to a strong post, doomed to run around the post without ever becoming free. All this fear and loathing are also mental constructions, while liberation consists in transcending all kinds of mental constructions<sup>56</sup>.

*The views propounding the attainment of nibbāna in this very life (93-99)*

Regarding the *last end* — this is the literal translation of *aparanta* — the text introduces now those who maintain that *nibbāna* is to be attained in this very life. The inclusion of these views in this section is confirmed by the *Pañcattayasutta*, which also mentions the attainment of *nibbāna* in this very life among the *aparanta* views<sup>57</sup>. Beyond the attainment of *nibbāna*, man has nothing else to aspire to, since he has reached the end of existence. The term used in this context is precisely *paramadiṭṭhadhammanibbāna*, i. e. “the highest of final *nibbāna* in this very life”.

Five different views are mentioned in this section.

Those of the first group are again thorough materialists. “Inasmuch as this self, endowed and fully provided with the five objects of sense, finds its enjoyment [in them], by this very fact, friend, this self has doubtless attained to the highest *nibbāna* in this very life”. These people think that *nibbāna* consists in the full enjoyment of sensual pleasures. The rest of the views are not materialist in this crude way, but they are not thoroughly spiritualist in the strict sense of the word. The first and second *jhānas* produce a kind of rapture or intense joy (*pīty*) which is still sensuous. The third *jhāna* produces happiness (*sukha*), which is a *nirāmisa* or non-sensuous experience, but is as yet an empirical emotion. Even the fourth *jhāna* produces a *feeling* (*vedanā*) of complete equanimity, which is beyond happiness and unhappiness. The true *attā* is beyond all feelings and empirical experiences and untouched by them<sup>58</sup>.

<sup>56</sup> M III, p. 24-25, *Pañcattayasutta*, 5.

<sup>57</sup> M III, p. 21, *Pañcattayasutta*, 1.

<sup>58</sup> We have based this analysis of the result of the *jhānas* on M III, p. 27-28, *Pañcattayasutta*, 10-12. The negative result of the first and second *jhānas* is the suppression of *domanassa*. See note 60 below.

Those of the second group are described as follows,

“There is certainly, friend, such a self as the one you mention, I do not say that it does not exist; but this self does not attain by this very fact [of giving itself to full sensual enjoyment] the highest *nibbāna* in this very life. What is the reason for that? Sensual pleasures, friend, are impermanent, painful, changeable by nature. Owing to their changeability and mutability there arise: grief, lamentation, pain, mental uneasiness an trouble”.

The text draws then the conclusion that the highest *nibbāna* in this very life consists in putting away all sensual pleasures and evil dispositions and entering into the first *jhāna*.

The third, fourth and fifth groups of heretics described in this section make the highest *nibbāna* in this very life consist in the practice of the second, third and fourth *jhānas* respectively.

These views are heretical not because they advance the possibility to attain *nibbāna* in this very life — this is a thoroughly Buddhist view<sup>59</sup>, — but because they make *nibbāna* consist in something that falls short of it, even if it be the fourth *jhāna*<sup>60</sup>,

<sup>59</sup> *Anattasaññī asmimānasamugghātam pāpuṇāti diṭṭheva dhamme nibbānaṃ*. K I, p. 105, *Udāna*, 4, 1, 4. Obviously that was the case with the Buddha himself. Cf. also D I, p. 73-74, *Sāmaññaphalasutta*, 99-100; D I, p. 133, *Mahālisutta*, 15, etc.

<sup>60</sup> This is explicitly stated in M III, p. 29, *Pañcattayasutta*, 13, “But in this case, *bhikkhus*, some *samaṇa* or *brāhmaṇa*, by giving up all views concerning the remote past, by giving up all views concerning the future destiny, by not applying himself to sensual pleasures, by transcending non-sensuous happiness, by transcending all feelings of neither happiness nor unhappiness, he fully sees, ‘I am pacified, I am allayed (lit. nirvanized = *nibbuto*), without any existential grasping’”. According to this, one has to leave behind the pleasures of the senses, in order to enter into the first *jhāna*. From the first *jhāna* the adept proceeds to the second one. In the first and second *jhānas* the adept experiences a thrilling joy (*pīti*), which is yet *sensuous*, if not *sensual*, feeling it in his own body. The difference between the first two *jhānas* being that in the first *jhāna* that thrilling joy is accompanied by mental consideration and intellectual analysis, which disappear in the second *jhāna*. By transcending that thrilling joy, the adept enters into the third *jhāna*, in which he experiences a happiness (*sukha*) that is *nirāmisa* (lit. non-fleshy), i. e. neither sensual nor sensuous, and which we might call “purely intellectual”. By transcending even this kind of happiness, the adept establishes himself in a complete equanimity, beyond all feelings of happiness and unhappiness, and that is precisely the fourth *jhāna*. But in order to see intuitively that he is *nirvanized*, the adept has to transcend even that experience of utter equanimity. The text indicates that some people erroneously think that they are *nirvanized*, when they declare themselves to be such with a feeling of conceit. The intuition that saves must needs be rid of all conceit. This is indicated in what follows after the words above quoted.

and obviously because they identify the *attā* or self with what is empirical, designating it by the expression "this self"<sup>61</sup>.

#### IV. THE SPECIFIC MESSAGE OF THE BRAHMAJĀLASUTTA

Now we come to examine the position of early Buddhism regarding all the views so far described. This we consider to be the main contribution of the composer of this *suttanta*, and the message that, above all, he intended to convey.

The composer of the *Brahmajālasutta* explains this position in a paragraph which is repeated after the description of every type of views, and which sets the knowledge of the Buddha in contrast with the knowledge of the sponsors of all these views. And it is by reason of this knowledge that the *Tathāgata* will be rightly praised, not by reason of the high moral practices which he preaches and puts into practice. These moral practices have been specified in the second part of the *suttanta*. As we have already pointed out, this means that Buddhism is not a system of mere observances (*silabbata*), but a system of liberation, leading to the highest aim, *nibbāna*, which is beyond moral good and evil with their sequels of merit and demerit, of rewards and punishments<sup>62</sup>. This is precisely Buddha's position as set forth in this *suttanta*. According to Buddha, the sponsors of these opinions, to which they are attached, identifying them with their very self, are entangled in what is empirical, not being able to transcend it and be liberated.

Such is the import of the paragraph just alluded to, which has already been quoted and is appended to every description of the different positions included in this catalogue of views. We reproduce the paragraph for the convenience of the reader:

<sup>61</sup> The first part of the *Pañcattayasutta*, which we have called the original *Pañcattayasutta*, does not dwell upon the opinion that makes the end of man (*aparanta*) consist in attaining *nibbāna* in this very life, even though this opinion is mentioned in the first paragraph of the *sutta* together with the other *aparanta* views. Since all the other *aparanta* views are severally described and commented, we may presume that this opinion was also originally described and commented. The reason for the omission seems to be that the composer of the extant *Pañcattayasutta* needed the description of the four *jhānas* in the closing section of the *suttanta*. Cf. M III, p. 27ff., *Pañcattayasutta*, 10-13.

<sup>62</sup> Thus in the *Rathavinātasutta* of M I, p. 192 ff., the degrees of perfection are specified in due order, and compared to relay-chariots which are successively left aside in order to make use of the following one, until the adept reaches to utter *nibbāna* without existential attachment. That mere ethical observance is not enough and ought to be transcended is often indicated. Cf. K I, p. 302, *Suttanipāta*, 2, 1, 10; *Ibid.*, p. 393 (4, 5, 33); *Ibid.*, p. 398 (4, 9, 74), etc. etc. All the same, ethical observance is a requisite for perfection. Cf. M I, p. 44, *Ākaṅkheyyasutta*, 2-3.

“And, *bhikkhus*, the *Tathāgata* knows this, ‘These points of speculation thus seized, thus grasped, leading to such destiny result into such kind of rebirth’. This the *Tathāgata* knows, and he knows something beyond this. And knowing it he is not attached to it; and not being attached, he has come to know emancipation regarding his very self (*peccattaññeva*). The *Tathāgata*, *bhikkhus*, knowing, as they really are, the origin, the cessation, the taste, the danger of sensational feelings, and the escape from them, is emancipated, being freed from existential grasping”.

This line of thought is further elaborated by the composer of the *Brahmajālasutta* (105-144), and, very fittingly, he has inserted his elaboration before the two last paragraphs of what probably was the original *Jālasutta*. It is asserted there that all speculators about the remote past and the future destiny of man and the world are included in the catalogue of views given, as fishes are entrapped in a net (147). There follows a simile of a skilful fisherman, who making use of a net, drags all the fish of a small pond (148), thus insisting, in a conclusive manner, in the completeness of the catalogue.

After carefully analyzing the text of the *suttanta* under study we come to the conclusion that paragraph 146 came, in what we call the original *Jālasutta*, immediately after paragraph 102. It is clear, first of all, that there is not a perfect logical sequence between paragraphs 145 and 146; and secondly, that paragraph 146 fits in perfectly well after paragraph 102, both of them beginning with the same words, viz. *ye hi keci, bhikkhave...*

After 146 there comes a paragraph that seems to be entirely out of place. The only affinity between paragraph 147 and the preceding one being in the simile employed. It speaks of a stalk of a bunch of mangoes being cut, so that *all the mangoes* hanging on the stalk go with it. This runs parallel to *all the fish* being caught within the net cast in a pond and sweeping through it.

Paragraph 148 justifies the title given to the *suttanta*, this title, *Brahmajālasutta*, preserves the title of one of the main components of the *suttanta*, which we have called the *Jālasutta*, magnifying it,

“Having thus spoken, the venerable Ānanda said this to Blessed One, ‘Marvellous is this, Lord, and wonderful. What name, Lord, has this exposition of the Doctrine?’ [Buddha replied]: ‘Henceforward, Ānanda, you may call this exposition of the Doctrine: the Net of Spiritual Advantage, and the Net of the Doctrine, and the Excellent Net (*Brahmajāla*), and the Net of Opinions, and the Unsurpassed Victory in Battle”.

This grandiloquent finale seems to be an original creation of the composer of the *suttanta*, who in this way showed his satisfaction for having achieved a masterpiece. If the title *Jālasutta* existed beforehand he might have called it very fittingly the *Mahā-jālasutta* following in the footsteps of many other compositions of the *Digha* and *Majjhima Nikāyas*.

We come now to the specific message of the *suttanta*, conveyed in the often repeated paragraph twice quoted above: "And, *bhikkhus*, the *Tathāgata* knows this...", and further elaborated in between the end of the complete catalogue of views and the paragraph that speaks of the title to be given to the *suttanta*.

He begins by sayings of every one of the opinions exposed,

"This opinion of those venerable ones, *samaṇas* and *brāhmaṇas*, ignorant and blind, is something founded on sensations, something which is only longing and agitation for them who are caught in craving" (105-117).

Those attached to the views described above, do not transcend what is empirical, and cannot attain to mental peace, least of all to the supreme peace of *nibbāna*.

Furthermore, he says of every one of those opinions that it has sensorial contact (*phassa*) as its cause (118-130). This has the same import as the preceding statement.

He confirms what he has just said by a negative expression which is again appended to the enunciation of every one of the groups of speculators, "It is impossible that they should experience such sensations without sensorial contact" (131-134).

Then he winds up his treatment of the question by asserting of all and everyone of the groups of heretics,

"All of them experience sensations owing to their continual contact with the six spheres of sense; owing to sensations [arises] in them craving; owing to craving, clinging to existence; owing to clinging to existence, becoming; owing to becoming, birth; owing to birth, old age and death, grief, lamentation, pain, mental uneasiness and trouble" (144).

The final conclusion is, therefore, that those addicted to any speculative opinion on the self and the world, based of sensations and growing out of them, will never be free from *saṃsāra*. Their attachment to existence makes them victims of uninterrupted transmigration.

This passage gives us the *paṭiccasamuppāda* formula in an incomplete form. The links here stated are: the spheres of sense (*phassāyatana*, otherwise called *saḷāyatana*), sensorial contact (*phassa*), sensations (*vedanā*), craving (*taṇhā*), becoming (*bhava*),



birth (*jāti*), old age and death, grief, lamentation, etc. (*jarāmaraṇa sokaparideva*, etc.)<sup>63</sup>.

Finally, we find the following application of the doctrine to the individual *bhikkhu*, who can share in the superior knowledge of the *Tathāgata* proclaimed in this *suttanta*,

"In as far as, *bhikkhus*, a *bhikkhu* knows according to truth the arising and disappearance of the six spheres of sensorial contact, their taste and the way to escape from them, this [*bhikkhu*] knows far more than all these theorists" (145).

### THE ANATTAVĀDA IN THE BRAHMAJĀLASUTTA

It is an opinion commonly held that primitive Buddhism maintains the absence in man of any *attā* or self. This we called the doctrine of absolute *anattā*.

Now, the inadmissibility of all the opinions exposed in this *suttanta* lies not in their assertion of a self in man, but in identifying such a self with empirical factors, while we shall be told time and again of these factors, "This is not mine, this I am not, this is not *my self*"; and of everyone of them and all together, that they are *anattā*, i. e. "the non-self". This we call the doctrine of relative *anattā*. This is the doctrine preached by early Buddhism.

The true self has nothing to do, ontologically speaking, with anything empirical. The identification of the self in man with the empirical factors constitutes the *sakkāyaditṭhi*, i. e. the heretical view (*ditṭhi*) that takes the existential aggregate (*sakkāya*) to be the self of man. This is the fundamental heresy that early Buddhism discovers at the root of all heresies. It is, therefore, at the root of all the heresies or views catalogued in this *suttanta*.

That such is the self of all heresies concerning the remote past or the future destiny is clear from the fact that in every heresy the self is something describable in one way or other or whose destiny can somehow or other be described, while the true self can in no way be described<sup>64</sup>.

Thus we are told that the eternalists come to their conclusion through seeing in trance an ever greater number of previous existences. But in such circumstances they do not see *the self*, they see the empirical factors produced in the different transmigrational stages, and they identify such factors with their self. The same applies to the semi-eternalists, who identify the self with what is

<sup>63</sup> The complete formula, as given in S II-III, p. 3, *Nidānasaṃyutta*, 1, has twelve links: *avijjā*, *saṃkhārā*, *viññāṇa*, *nāmarūpa*, *salāyatana*, *phassa*, *vedanā*, *taṇhā*, *upādāna*, *bhava*, *jāti*, *jarāmarana* etc.

<sup>64</sup> See n. 25 above.

a product of a samsaric process. Of the same type is the self of the chance-originationists. All the remaining heretics attribute to the self a definite set of empirical characteristics, like consciousness — empirical consciousness — or lack of it, form or lack of it, finitude or infinitude, happiness or misery, or other characteristics which may indicate a relative escape from what is empirical but without entirely transcending it. The only way to transcend experience is to attain the eighth *vimokkha*, but it is symptomatic that none of the heretics is made to believe in a self that has attained to that.

By the same token, the composer of the *suttanta* affirms that all these theories and their contents have as their root sensorial contact, and are impossible without it. That is why the holders of such theories are caught in the net of transmigration, without being able to free themselves — their selves — from it, while the *Tathāgata* “knowing as they really are, the origin, the cessation, the taste, the danger of feelings or sensations, and the escape from them, is emancipated, being free from existential grasping”, and this emancipation is such “regarding his very self” (*paccattaññeva*).

And let us note that if early Buddhism denies true selfhood to what has come down through transmigrational stages, whose beginning no one is able to point out, denies as well that the true self is annihilated, as propounded by the annihilationists,

“When I do not teach so, when I do not say so, those reverend *samaṇas* and *brāhmaṇas*, untruly, falsely, mendaciously, baselessly calumniate me saying, ‘Gotama the *samaṇa* is a nihilist, he teaches annihilation, destruction, the perishing of the existing being’. Both previously and at present, I teach pain and the cessation of pain”<sup>65</sup>.

What has been transmigrating through a beginningless cycle of existences according to eternalists, and what is annihilated after death according to annihilationists is a self that the advocates of such theories identify with the factors of existence. The true self is out of scope in all the theories discussed in this *suttanta*. The only one not identified with those factors is the *Tathāgata*, which in certain context stands for the true self<sup>66</sup>.

That all the heresies about the remote past and the future destiny refer to the self erroneously identified with the empirical factors is clearly expressed in the *Saṃyutta*. After saying that the factors of existence (*khandhas*) are *anattā*, i. e. the non-self, and that what is non-self ought to be seen, as it really is, by means of

<sup>65</sup> M I, p. 185, *Alagaddūpamasutta*, 16.

<sup>66</sup> Cf. A. B. KEITH, *Buddhist Philosophy*, Varanasi 1963, p. 61-62. Cf. also, S II-III, p. 331 ff., *Khandhasaṃyutta*, 85; M I, p. 185, *Alagaddūpamasutta*, 16.

superior wisdom, as, "This is not mine, this I am not, this is not my self", the text continues,

"Thus in the case of one who sees this as it really is, by means of superior wisdom, there are no views regarding the remote past. And there being no views regarding the remote past, there are no views regarding the future destiny. There being no views regarding the future destiny, there is neither obstinacy nor selfish appropriation. There being neither obstinacy nor selfish appropriation, the mind detaches itself, emancipates itself regarding material form, regarding feeling, regarding perception, regarding the inner complexes, regarding consciousness, for the not taking up again of the *āsavas*. From emancipation [results] stability; from stability, satisfaction; owing to satisfaction he is not troubled. Not being troubled, he attains *nibbāna* as regards his very self (*paccattaññeva parinibbāyati*), etc."<sup>67</sup>.

## CONCLUSIONS

The conclusions to be drawn from this our study are the following:

1. This *suttanta* does not offer the doctrine of the Buddha as he himself preached it; it is a composition very artistically accomplished by putting together what may have been shorter independent *suttas*, which may be called: *Suppiyasutta*, *Mahāsīlasutta*, and *Jālasutta*.

2. The purpose of the composition is to set forth the difference between genuine Buddhism and other systems. Buddhism is not a system of mere observances, but a system of liberation. It is a system in which the self is not identified with the empirical factors, which, for this very reason, should be discarded.

<sup>67</sup> S II-III, p. 277, *Khandhasaṃyutta*, 46. Taking as a starting point the famous dictum, "This is not mine, this I am not, this is not my self", the *Paṭisambhīdāmagga*, 1, 2, 6, 89 (K V, p. 187) applies rather artificially the mentality of the heretics to three different categories of views in the following way. "This is mine" is applied to the *pubbanta* views; "This I am" is applied to the *aparanta* views; and "This is my self" is applied to the twentyfold heresy resulting from the application to the five *khandhas* of the four heretical ways of thinking: this is the self, this is something belonging to the self, this is the self, this is something belonging to the self, this is in the self, the self is in this. This originally independent catalogue of views is technically called, *visativatthukā attānudiṭṭhi*. The *pubbanta* and *aparanta* views are also mentioned at the side of this *visativatthukā attānudiṭṭhi* in K IV, p. 42, *Mahāniddeśa*, 2, 12. Cf. above n. 10.

3. What we have called *Mahāsīlasutta* is a product of progressive elaboration, that is why we have given it that name and not merely *Sīlasutta*.

4. Paragraphs 61-66 are clear interpolations, since they do not deal with the topic in question, this being the views that consider the remote past (*pubbantānuditt̥hi*).

5. What originally comes, with all certainty, from the composer of this *suttanta* is the clever way in which he compounds the pre-existing elements in a masterpiece of literary unity; beginning with the way Buddha reacted to praise and abuse, connecting then with those matters for which the unlearned would commend the Buddha, and ending with the matters for which he should be rightly praised.

6. The paragraphs that in all certainty can be attributed to the composer of the *suttanta* are: 7 (*Appamattakam̐ kho pane-tam...*); the statement of every item of morality being practised by the Buddha, with the phrase following every item (...*iti vā hi, bhikkhave...*); 28 (*Atthi, bhikkave, aññe dhammā...*); 36-37, repeated under numbers: 51-52, 59-60, 72-73, 103-104, and 66, 80, 92, where the same is included with the abbreviation "pe" (*peyyālam*); in all these cases, the second par. being an adaptation to the locus of par. 28; 105-145, where the specific message of the *suttanta* is set forth in an iterative way very apt for memorizing; and finally, par. 148.

Bilbao

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