



University of  
St Andrews

St Andrews Encyclopaedia of Theology  
**Dependent Arising**

Dhivan Thomas Jones


First published: 14 March 2024

<https://www.saet.ac.uk/Buddhism/DependentArising>

### **Citation**

Jones, Dhivan Thomas. 2024. 'Dependent Arising', *St Andrews Encyclopaedia of Theology*. Edited by Brendan N. Wolfe et al. <https://www.saet.ac.uk/Buddhism/DependentArising> Accessed: 14 June 2026

### **Copyright information**

Copyright © [Dhivan Thomas Jones](#)  [CC BY-NC](#)

ISSN 2753-3492

# Dependent Arising

*Dhivan Thomas Jones*

This article takes a broadly historical approach, discussing aspects of a topic that is important in each and every phase of the Buddhist tradition. Dependent arising (*pratītya-samutpāda*) is a key conceptual formulation of the truth (*dharma*) to which the Buddha is said to have awakened, and the Buddha is said to have gained Awakening by discovering it. This discovery is recounted in the form of a standard formula, which continues to be the prevalent expression of dependent arising, with a short abstract summary of conditionality, followed by twelve causal factors (*nidānas*) from ignorance to ageing-and-death, in natural and contrary order of arising and ceasing. ‘The Discourse on the Analysis of Dependent Arising’ gives important definitions of each of the *nidānas*, and though early Buddhist texts do not preserve an unambiguous explanation of the standard formula as a whole, a close look at discourses about dependent arising show it taught by the Buddha as a method of meditative investigation for the sake of gaining liberating insight, and also as a doctrine communicating a ‘middle way’ between existence and non-existence, as well as ‘great emptiness’ – the absence of an essential self in experience.

The article then turns, via the image of the Wheel of Life, to the later three-life interpretation of dependent arising as a response to the teaching needs of the tradition as it developed in the centuries after the Buddha’s *parinirvāṇa*. It is anachronistic to read this three-life interpretation back into the early discourses. There are in fact competing versions of this interpretation, in Theravāda and Sarvāstivāda traditions. There are also a range of interpretations of dependent arising among contemporary Theravādins, suggesting that, although it has become the orthodox view, the three-life interpretation has always been disputed. An alternative interpretation of the twelve *nidānas*, made in various ways by exegetes old and new, applies the teaching specifically to the working of the mind in the present moment. I consider how the principle of conditionality is not a quasi-scientific theory that applies to everything, but a philosophical principle that applies primarily to experience. This leads to the interpretation of conditionality in the philosophy of Nāgārjuna, which rediscovers features of the early teaching. The article ends with a section on ‘transcendental dependent arising’, concerning the conditionality of stages of the path to Awakening, and a section weighing up how contemporary interpretations of dependent arising as an ecological principle of interdependence might relate to the original meaning of dependent arising.

**Keywords:** Dependent arising, Pratītya-Samutpāda, Twelve nidānas, Conditionality, Emptiness, Interdependence, Ecology, The Buddha

# Table of contents

- 1 The importance of dependent arising
- 2 Dependent arising and the Buddha's Awakening
- 3 The standard formula of dependent arising
  - 3.1 The analysis of the *nidānas*
  - 3.2 Interpreting the standard formula
- 4 Dependent arising as method and doctrine
  - 4.1 Dependent arising as a method of investigation
  - 4.2 Dependent arising as a 'middle way' and as emptiness
- 5 The three-life interpretation of dependent arising
  - 5.1 The image of the 'Wheel of Life'
  - 5.2 Abhidharma interpretations of dependent arising
    - 5.2.1 Buddhaghosa and the Theravāda tradition
    - 5.2.2 Vasubandhu and the Sarvāstivāda interpretation
- 6 Other interpretations of dependent arising
  - 6.1 Present moment interpretations
  - 6.2 Contemporary interpretations
- 7 Dependent arising and conditionality
- 8 Transcendental dependent arising
- 9 Interdependence and ecology

# 1 The importance of dependent arising

The Sanskrit expression *pratītya-samutpāda* has been translated ‘causal genesis’, ‘conditioned co-production’ and ‘dependent origination’, but it is preferable to translate it ‘dependent arising’ (Jones 2021; Anālayo 2022: 1137). It is a key conceptual formulation of the truth (*dharma*) to which the Buddha is said to have awakened, for the Buddha is reported to have said:

‘Who sees dependent arising sees the Dharma; who sees the Dharma sees dependent arising’. (*Majjhima-nikāya* [MN] 28 [PTS I 191], *Madhyama Āgama* [MĀ] 30 [T I 467], *Śālistamba Sūtra* [Reat 1993: 27])

Dependent arising may be summarized as the teaching that phenomena (*dharmas*) arise on causes and conditions, and cease when their causes and conditions cease. As this summary suggests, dependent arising can also be called ‘conditionality’ (*idaṃ-pratyayatā*). But the summary needs qualification. Since the nineteenth century, Buddhist modernists and scholars have presented the Buddhist teaching as akin to a scientific law of natural causation (Lopez 2008: 21; Rhys Davids and Rhys Davids 1910: 42), an interpretation which has more to do with making Buddhism relevant for modern westerners than with the ways in which the Buddhist tradition has discussed dependent arising. For the Buddha and much of the subsequent tradition, the teaching of dependent arising concerns the way that experience in cyclic existence (*saṃsāra*) works, and how cyclic existence may be ended.

This teaching is not easy to understand. An exchange between the Buddha and Ānanda, his attendant, indicates the profundity of dependent arising:

Venerable Ānanda came up to the Blessed One, greeted him and sat to one side. Then while sitting to one side venerable Ānanda said this:

‘It is wonderful, good sir, it is marvellous, how deep and profound is this dependent arising, though to me it seems quite plain.’

‘Do not say that, Ānanda, do not say that. This dependent arising is deep and profound. It is from not understanding and penetrating this dharma that people have become like a tangle of string covered in mould and matted like grass, unable to escape from *saṃsāra* with its miseries, disasters and bad destinies.’ (*Dīgha-nikāya* 15 [PTS II 55], cf. *Dīgha-āgama* 13 [T I 60b], MĀ 97 [T I 578b])

This exchange suggests that the concept of dependent arising may seem straightforward and clear, but that this appearance is misleading, while its meaning and implications go deep into the human predicament, here characterized in negative terms as a rotten tangle.

Another quotation, from a purported autobiographical account of the Buddha's Awakening, the Sanskrit *Mahāvastu* (Mvu), conveys why dependent arising is hard to understand:

While abiding at the root of the Goatherd's Banyan Tree, the Blessed One considered the world:

'The Dharma to which I have awakened is profound, excellent, subtle, hard to comprehend, beyond the sphere of reason, to be experienced by the wise, opposed to the whole of ordinary experience. But humanity is ensconced in pleasure, ensconced in enjoyment, ensconced in delight. For humanity, ensconced in pleasure, enjoyment and delight, this topic is hard to see, namely, conditionality and dependent arising, the renunciation of all attachment, the cutting off of states of existence through the calming of all formative forces, the ending of craving, the removal of compulsion, cessation, nirvana. If I were to teach this to others, they would not recognise it, and that would be tiresome for me. Why should I not dwell alone and keep silence in the forest grove?' (Mvu III 313–4 [Marciniak 2019]; cf. MN 26 [PTS I 167])

Dependent arising and conditionality are 'hard to see' because they are part of the awakened perspective of a Buddha. To learn to 'see' dependent arising is therefore tantamount to gaining Awakening.

## 2 Dependent arising and the Buddha's Awakening

For this reason, in some accounts the Buddha's Awakening itself is depicted as the discovery or realization of dependent arising, placing it at the symbolic heart of the Buddhist teaching (*Lalitavistara* Ch. 22 [Tripathi 1987: 286–289], *Buddhacarita* 13.49–85, *Nidānakathā* [PTS J I 75]). Here I quote again from the *Mahāvastu*:

Then, monks, the Bodhisattva – not frightened, unafraid, free of hair-raising fear – in the last part of the night, in the first flush of the dawn, at the welcome ending of darkness, awakened to the unexcelled perfect complete Awakening through an insight that was gained in a single moment of thought, an insight that always and everywhere has to be entirely known, attained, awoken to and fully understood by whoever is that person who is the true person, the great person [...] a perfect one who is steadfast and mindful, who is intelligent and insightful.

Namely: This is suffering. This is the origin of suffering. This is the cessation of suffering. This is the path of practice that leads to the cessation of suffering. These are the pollutants (*āsravas*). This is the origin of the pollutants. This is the cessation of the pollutants. This is the path of practice that leads to the cessation of the pollutants. Here the pollutants completely and without remainder cease, are allayed, and being relinquished disappear.

That is to say: When this exists, that becomes. When this does not exist, that does not become. From the arising of this, that arises. From the ceasing of this, that ceases.

It is also said: With ignorance as condition, there are formative forces. With formative forces as condition, there is consciousness. With consciousness as condition, there is name-and-form. With name-and-form as condition, there are the six sense spheres. With the six sense spheres as condition, there is contact. With contact as condition, there is feeling. With feeling as condition, there is craving. With craving as condition, there is appropriation. With appropriation as condition, there is continued existence. With continued existence as condition, there is birth. With birth as condition, ageing-and-death, grief, sorrow, pain, misery and despair come to be. In this way there is the arising of the whole great mass of unsatisfactoriness.

It is also said: From the cessation of ignorance, there is the cessation of formative forces. From the cessation of formative forces, there is the cessation of consciousness. From the cessation of consciousness, there is the cessation of name-and-form. From the cessation of name-and-form, there is the cessation of the six sense spheres. From the cessation of the six sense spheres, there is the cessation of contact. From the cessation of contact, there is the cessation of feeling. From the cessation of feeling, there is the cessation of craving. From the cessation of craving, there is the cessation of appropriation. From the cessation of appropriation, there is the cessation of continued existence. From the cessation of continued existence, there is the cessation of birth. From the cessation of birth, ageing-and-death, grief, sorrow, pain, misery and despair cease. In this way there is the cessation of this whole great mass of suffering. (Mvu II 284–285 [Marciniak 2020])

As is readily apparent, dependent arising is represented here in a formulaic way, which will in fact become a standard formula of dependent arising in the Buddhist tradition. In this case, the Buddha is said to have rehearsed the formula in the third part of the night of his Awakening, alongside a review of the four truths and the pollutants (*āsravas*).

In most of the surviving canonical discourses and *vinaya* accounts, however, the discovery of dependent arising is placed in the weeks *after* the Awakening (Lamotte 1980: 120–121). Only a few canonical discourses, as above, depict the Buddha as discovering dependent arising *before* the Awakening (Lamotte 1980: 121–123). In the *Nāgaropama Sūtra* ('The Discourse on the Simile of the City'), preserved in Sanskrit in the *Nidāna Saṃyukta* (NS), the Buddha tells the story of his discovery of dependent arising like this:

Thus have I heard. On one occasion, the Blessed One was living near Śrāvastī, in Jeta's Grove, in Anāṭhapiṇḍada's Park. There the Blessed One addressed the monks:

'Monks, before my unsurpassed perfect, complete Awakening, while I was unawakened, while meditating alone in secluded solitude, a train of thought arose in my mind: "Alas, how

this world has fallen into difficulty, in that it is born, it ages, it dies, it passes away and re-  
arises, but these living beings do not understand as it really is the escape from ageing-and-  
death to the supreme.” Then this occurred to me: “When there is what does ageing-and-  
death exist? And likewise, with what as a basis is there ageing-and-death?” And while I  
was paying careful attention to what is actually the case, the realization arose: When there  
is birth, ageing-and-death exists; and likewise, with birth as a basis there is ageing-and-  
death.’ (NS 5 [Chung and Fukita 2020: 94–95]; cf. *Samyutta Nikāya* [SN] 12: 65 [PTS II  
104–107] (Bodhi 2000) and *Samyukta-āgama* 287 [T II 80b24]).

The Bodhisattva goes on to enquire into the causal basis (*pratyaya*) of birth, finding it to be  
continued existence (*bhava*), and goes on to discover the remaining *nidānas*.

It is likely that these accounts of the Buddha’s discovery of dependent arising before,  
during, and after his Awakening are all literary products of a mature phase of the teaching,  
rather than historical accounts. Perhaps the Buddha himself formulated these stories to  
dramatize his own Awakening process, or perhaps they were the work of early Buddhists,  
finding narrative expression for the exemplary life of the founder. What they all show,  
however, is the central importance of dependent arising in giving expression to Awakening.

### 3 The standard formula of dependent arising

As the preceding suggests, dependent arising is not a theory about the world, but a  
teaching about the arising and ceasing of suffering (*duḥkha*), meaning, the imperfection  
and difficulty of the human condition, objectified as the beginningless cycle of rebirth  
(*saṃsāra*). This teaching is both explanatory and soteriological: it explains the arising  
and ceasing of unsatisfactoriness, and conveys how an understanding of this is a form of  
liberating insight.

As the quotation from the *Mahāvastu* above indicates, the Buddhist tradition has  
preserved the teaching of dependent arising in the form of a formula, preserved in different  
transmission lineages of early Buddhist texts and in all later traditions. Although there are  
many shorter and longer variants on this formula in early Buddhist literature, this one has  
become the standard one (Bucknell 1999; Schmithausen 2000). It begins with a summary  
formula:

*asmim satīdaṃ bhavati, asyoṭpadād idam utpadyate*  
*asmim asaṭīdaṃ na bhavati, asya nirodhād idam nirudhyate*

This being, that becomes; from the arising of this, that arises.

This not being, that does not become; from the ceasing of this, that ceases.

This formula, discussed further in [section 7](#), may be said to summarize the relationships between causal factors in experience. The standard formula of dependent arising next lists twelve *nidānas* – ‘causes’, ‘sources’, ‘causal factors’ or ‘links’ – first in order of arising and then in order of ceasing. These twelve *nidānas* form a series or structure of causal bases or conditions (*pratyayas*), also called ‘causes’ (*hetus*) and ‘origins’ (*samudayas*): (1) ignorance > (2) formative forces > (3) consciousness > (4) name-and-form > (5) six sense spheres > (6) contact > (7) feeling > (8) craving > (9) appropriation > (10) continued existence > (11) birth > (12) ageing-and-death. While the twelve *nidānas* formula would appear to be a mnemonic, it represents the ongoing structure of unawakened experience in *saṃsāra*. The last item in the series, ageing-and-death, is also a synechoche for suffering as a whole. With the ceasing, stopping or ending (*nirodha*) of (1) ignorance (*avidyā*), with the realizing of wisdom (*vidyā*), the series of causal conditions ceases, and suffering as a whole comes to an end (Sopa 1986).

### 3.1 The analysis of the *nidānas*

The twelve *nidānas* are defined in the *Pratītyasamutpādvibhaṅga Sūtra* (‘Analysis of Dependent Arising’) (NS 16 [Chung and Fukita 2020: 155–163], cf. SN 12: 2 [PTS II 2–4] and versions in Sanskrit, Chinese and Tibetan) (Mejor 1997; Choong 2000: 159–169). This discourse was so highly valued among Buddhists that it was inscribed on bricks found at Nālanda in a votive *stūpa* (Chung 2017), and on gold plates found in Java (Skilling 2015: 31–32). The analysis has the Buddha gives definitions for each of the *nidānas*. In the following, I quote from both Pāli and Sanskrit versions of the discourse, and then add a further gloss on translation and interpretation issues.

The factor of (1) IGNORANCE (*avidyā*) is defined at length in the Sanskrit version as:

(i) Unawareness (*ajñāna*) of the past and the future, (ii) unawareness of the inner and the outer, (iii) unawareness of actions and results, (iv) unawareness of the Buddha, of the Dharma, of the Sangha, (v) unawareness of unsatisfactoriness, of arising, cessation or path, (vi) unawareness of causation and of phenomena that have arisen from causes, (vii) unawareness of what is wholesome and unwholesome, of what is blameworthy and impeccable, of what is to be practised and not to be practised, of what is inferior and superior, of what is dark and bright, of dependently-arisen phenomena and their counterparts. (viii) Further, there is the non-penetration as is actually the case of the six spheres of sensory contact. (ix) In regard to whatever is unawareness of what is actually the case, non-seeing, non-comprehension, darkness, confusion, blind ignorance – this is what is called ignorance.

Ignorance is essentially unawareness of dependent arising as the truth of how experience works. It is not itself uncaused, but is said to be supported by ‘unwise attention’ and by the four pollutants (*āsravas*).

(2) The FORMATIVE FORCES (*saṃskārāḥ*) are defined quite simply in both versions:

There are three formative forces: bodily, verbal, and mental formative forces.

Physical, verbal, and mental experience depends on inherited and habitual patterns of action, speech and thought (past *karmas*). What we think of as someone's 'personality' is a dynamic assembly of such patterns. Formative forces manifest and continue through planning and intending as well as through actions (present *karmas*). On the causal basis of ignorance and formative forces arises (3) CONSCIOUSNESS (*vijñāna*):

There are six groups of consciousness: visual, auditory, nose-, tongue-, body- and mind-consciousness.

While 'consciousness' here refers to the dynamism of cognitive activities, and not just the fact of conscious awareness, it is nevertheless always associated with the six senses and is dependently arisen. The Buddhist conception of consciousness is more dynamic than the mere presence of reflexive awareness. Any moment of consciousness is imprinted with the impressions of formative forces, that is, with past actions (*karmas*).

Dependent on consciousness arises (4) NAME-AND-FORM (*nāma-rūpa*), although some discourses present these two factors as each arising dependent on the other. Name-and-form is a complex phenomenon. NAME is defined in two ways in (i) Pāli and (ii) Sanskrit versions of the discourse:

(i) Feeling, perception, intention, contact and attention.

(ii) The four constituents (*skandhas*) that do not have physical form: the constituents of feelings, perceptions, formative forces, and consciousness.

While FORM is defined more simply in both versions:

The four great elements [earth, water, fire and air], and the physical form that is dependent on the four great elements.

The first definition of name points to the functioning of the mind, while the second definition draws on the Buddha's analysis of the person as consisting in five constituents (*skandhas*). The concept of name-and-form is pre-Buddhist: in the Vedic tradition it refers to the universe which manifests from the creative power of Brahman (Reat 1987). In the Buddhist tradition, name-and-form refers to individuated mental functioning and physical existence.

Dependent on name-and-form arise (5) THE SIX SENSE SPHERES (*ṣaḍāyatana*):

The visual sphere, the auditory sphere, the sphere of the nose, the sphere of the tongue, the sphere of the body, the sphere of the mind.

These six spheres constitute the entirety (*sarvaṃ*) of experience. Dependent on them arises (6) CONTACT (*sparśa*):

There are six groups of contact: eye, ear, nose, tongue, body and mind contact.

Contact implies a distinction of subject and object, experiencer and experienced, and hence the manifestation of personal experience of the world. Dependent on contact arises (7) FEELING (*vedanā*), which is defined in two complementary ways in (i) Pāli and (ii) Sanskrit versions of the *Pratītyasamutpādvibhaṅga Sūtra*:

(i) There are these six groups of feeling: feeling born of visual contact, born of auditory contact, born of contact with the nose, born of contact with the tongue, born of contact with the body, born of contact with the mind.

(ii) There are three kinds of feeling: pleasant, painful and neither-pleasant-nor-painful feeling.

The connotation of 'feeling' (*vedanā*), however, is not that of 'emotion' but rather the hedonic feeling-tone of experience. This represents physical and mental affective sensitivity, in so far as it is the causal basis for (8) CRAVING (*tṛṣṇā*), of which there are also two definitions:

(i) There are these six groups of craving: craving for visual forms, for sounds, for smells, for tastes, for tangibles and craving for ideas.

(ii) There are three kinds of craving: craving for sensual pleasure, for physical form, for the formless.

These definitions too are complementary. However, the English translation 'craving' needs qualification, since *tṛṣṇā* actually means 'thirst', a metonymy for wanting or desire based on the idea of a self, which is the basis for (9) APPROPRIATION (*upādāna*):

There are four kinds of appropriation: appropriation of sensual pleasures, of views, of ethical conduct and religious vows, and of a theory of the self.

The factor of ‘appropriation’, often translated as ‘grasping’ or ‘clinging’, refers to the holding on to aspects of experience when there is a belief in the self, which also manifests in different styles of religious life and thought.

This is the causal basis of (10) CONTINUED EXISTENCE (*bhava*):

There are three kinds of continued existence: continued existence with sensual pleasure, with physical form and formless continued existence.

The *nidāna* of ‘continued existence’ refers to the subjective commitment to continue as this ‘I’ or self, in whatever realm (*gati*; see [section 5.1](#)) of the Buddhist cosmos. This is the causal basis of (11) BIRTH (*jāti*):

The birth, origination, appearance, coming into being, manifestation, obtaining of the constituents, the obtaining of elements, obtaining of sense-spheres, the manifestation of the faculties of life of whatever living beings in whatever class of living beings.

The factor of ‘birth’ differs from *bhava* in referring to an actual appearance in a state of having been born, that is to say, a specific manifestation within continued existence. Birth is the causal basis of (12) AGEING-AND-DEATH (*jarā-maraṇa*):

(AGEING): The getting bald, grey-haired and wrinkled, being aged, being broken, being as hump-backed and crooked as a bent roof-beam, the body’s being covered in pits and dark spots, the body’s ragged noisy breathing, the body’s being bent over forwards, being supported by a stick, slowness, decrease and loss, the injuring and maturing of the faculties, becoming old and infirm.

(DEATH): The falling from this existence, the state of falling, the break-up, the vanishing, the abandonment of the life-force, the abandonment of body heat, the cessation of the lifespan, the disposal of the constituents, the death and the coming of one’s time of whatever living beings in whatever class of living beings.

The vivid descriptions in this definition of ageing-and-death reinforce the implication that experiences are inevitable for those who have been born.

It is striking that these definitions focus on human experience and especially on the conditions for cognitive awareness, while setting experience into the cosmological context of the various destinations (*gatis*) in the cycle of rebirth (*saṃsāra*). This suggests that originally the *nidānas* were not intended as a metaphysical explanation of how the process of rebirth (*punarbhava*) works, even though rebirth forms an important part of early Buddhist teaching (Anālayo 2018: 5–35; Jackson 2022: 27–47).

### 3.2 Interpreting the standard formula

The sequence of arising (*samutpāda*) is often described as the ‘natural’ (*anuloma*) order of the *nidānas* and the cessation (*nirodha*) sequence the ‘contrary’ (*pratiloma*) order. The word *anuloma*, ‘with the hair’, and its opposite, *pratiloma*, ‘against the hair’, evoke, through the image of pushing or stroking directional mammalian fur, the contrast of an easy and comfortable causal sequence of phenomena with a stilling and ceasing of that sequence that is difficult and goes against the norm. This contrast appears to have been taken from the Indian cultural context, where it was used in relation to the ease or difficulty of social relationships. The contrast of ‘natural’ and ‘contrary’ sequences of dependent arising is restated in another early Buddhist discourse in terms of a contrast between a ‘wrong mode of progress’ of the *nidānas* and their ‘right mode of progress’ (SN 12: 3 [PTS II 4–5]). This would imply that a causal sequence that is ‘natural’ and comfortable from the unawakened point of view is ‘wrong’ from the awakened viewpoint; and something (like renunciation) that seems ‘contrary’ from the unawakened point of view is ‘right’ from the viewpoint of the awakened.

How exactly the standard formula of dependent arising was meant to be understood is unclear, since early Buddhist literature has not preserved an unambiguous explanation of it (Gethin 1998: 149). It is as if, during the period of oral transmission of the Buddha’s teachings, in approximately the two or three hundred years following the death of the Buddha, the key to unlocking the full meaning of dependent arising was mislaid. An intriguing suggestion is that the twelve *nidānas* of dependent arising were originally meant as a parody of Vedic cosmogony, which would explain how they were formulated in their historical context, which was later forgotten. According to this interpretation, the twelve *nidānas* explain the arising of conditioned experience in the absence of an *ātman* or essential self, in contrast to the cosmogonic thinking of the *Upaniṣads* and other Brahmanical literature of ancient India, which depict the religious quest as a rediscovery of the *ātman* (Jurewicz 2000; Gombrich 2009: 129–143). From a historical point of view, the dominant understanding of dependent arising as explaining the rebirth process over three lives only developed some two or three centuries after the *parinirvāṇa* of the Buddha, and is based on exegetical developments unforeseen in the earliest literature.

## **4 Dependent arising as method and doctrine**

Beginning from the assumption that the standard formula was originally devised as a complex mnemonic, it is in fact possible to identify two ways in which it was used in early Buddhist literature: (i) as a conceptual framework for meditative investigation, and (ii) as a doctrine giving expression to what the Buddha called ‘a middle way’.

### **4.1 Dependent arising as a method of investigation**

In several discourses, the Buddha recommends that his followers investigate suffering in terms of dependent arising. For instance:

Here, monks, a practitioner engages in a full investigation thus: ‘There arise many and various kinds of suffering in the world, not least ageing and death. But this suffering – what is its source (*nidāna*), what is its origin, what is its genesis, what is its origination? When what exists does ageing and death exist? When what does not exist does ageing and death not exist?’. (SN 12: 51 [PTS II 80], cf. NS 10 [Chung and Fukita 2020: 125–135], SĀ 292 [T II 82c18])

The Buddha goes on to guide the monks in a full investigation of the remaining *nidānas*. This investigation prepares the practitioner for a mode of practice that brings the *nidānas*, and thereby suffering, to an end, and the practitioner to the experience of nirvana. In this discourse, the Buddha’s intention appears to have been to teach a practical method of investigation. This puts the standard formula of dependent arising alongside other early Buddhist lists, such as the five constituents (*skandhas*), the six sense spheres (*ṣaḍāyatana*s) and the six elements (*dhātus*) that function as frameworks for analytic meditation.

The Buddha is reported to have taught that a practitioner who is an ‘inquirer’, may become an ‘expert’ in these modes of investigating experience; in another discourse the Buddha teaches that practitioners should ‘engage mindfulness’ to know and see each of the *nidānas* as they actually are, as well as their origin, cessation and the way to their cessation (SN 12: 91 [PTS 132]; Choong 2000: 172). In Pāli sources, meditation on dependent arising in its standard formula is described as the ‘noble method’ (*ariya ñāya*) for the attainment of stream-entry (SN 12: 41 [PTS II 68–70]). The word ‘method’ (*ñāya*) in this context conveys the sense of a general principle or rule rather than a specific practical instruction. This would imply that the standard formula of dependent arising was regarded as conveying the general principle of how experience in *saṃsāra* works, as a pattern for the practitioner to employ in the course of their investigation, such that when dependent arising has been clearly seen with wisdom, the path of stream-entry may be attained, the beginning of the path to liberation from *saṃsāra*.

## **4.2 Dependent arising as a ‘middle way’ and as emptiness**

Early Buddhist literature preserves evidence that the standard formula of dependent arising was also understood from ancient times as a doctrine. It is presented in some discourses as a way to explain how it is not necessary to posit a self (*ātman*) in order to explain how the cycle of rebirth works (*Saṅghabhedavastu* I 158–9 [(Gnoli 1977], cf. MĀ 62 [T 26 497b–499a]). Dependent arising is explained as an alternative to both eternalism

(*śāśvatavāda*), the teaching of the existence of a self (*ātman*) as an eternal, transmigrating essence of human experience, and annihilationism (*ucchedavāda*), the denial of any such self along with the possibility of anything in human experience continuing beyond death. In this way, dependent arising is presented as a doctrine or teaching with a clear purpose in explaining the way things work. Several discourses call dependent arising a ‘middle way’. In the *Kātyāyana Sūtra* (‘Discourse to Kātyāyana’) (NS 19 [Chung and Fukita 2020: 166–168], cf. SN 12: 15 [PTS II 16–7] (trans. Bodhi 2000), SĀ 301 [T II 85c17]), a Buddhist monk called Kātyāyana asks the Buddha what exactly he means by ‘right view’ (*saṃyag dṛṣṭi*). The Buddha replies:

Kātyāyana, this world for the most part relies on a duality: it relies on [the idea of] existence and on [the idea of] non-existence. Kātyāyana, this world is bound up with attachment and appropriation, which relies, in fact, on [ideas of] existence and non-existence. When one does not fall into the fixations, inclinations and latent dispositions of the mind towards these mental attachments and appropriations, one does not attach to, does not fixate upon and does not incline towards thinking about ‘my self’. When arising, it is suffering that arises. When ceasing, it is suffering that ceases. If one has no doubt or uncertainty about this matter, there is just knowledge of this that is not dependent on another.

As his reply to Kātyāyana makes clear, the Buddha connects the habitual ways of thought and life of average humanity to rival ontologies in which people have beliefs and experiences concerning a transmigrating ‘self’ or the lack of it. The Buddha goes on to explain how someone with right view has no such belief, and their understanding of the human condition is expressed in terms of the standard formula of dependent arising as a philosophical ‘middle way’ (*madhyena dharma*). The Buddha sees the arising of the sense of self simply as a source of suffering (*duḥkha*), and an understanding of dependent arising as a cure.

Dependent arising, in the standard formula, is also presented as a formulation of the dharma called ‘great emptiness’ (*mahāsūnyatā*), since none of the twelve *nidānas* should be understood as implying the existence of a person who identifies with or possesses each or any *nidāna* (NS 15 [Chung and Fukita 2020: 151–155], cf. SĀ 297 [T II 84c11]). What is meant by ‘emptiness’ in early Buddhism is thus how experience works without a permanent self. Therefore early Buddhist literature implies a series of equivalences: dependent arising = the middle way = emptiness. This is significant because it suggests that some great themes of later Mahāyāna scripture and philosophy were present, at least in outline, in earlier Buddhist literature (Huifeng 2013).

## 5 The three-life interpretation of dependent arising

In later centuries, across Asian Buddhist traditions and cultures, the twelve *nidānas* came to be understood as explaining the rebirth process over three lifetimes, an interpretation of the standard formula that has often come to be seen as the meaning of the Buddha's teaching. While this may follow in part from the fact that the meaning of dependent arising in the Buddha's teaching is obscure, the prevalence of the three-life interpretation has nevertheless led to constant argument within the Buddhist tradition, given that it represents a religious metaphysics at odds with the more practical orientation of the Buddha's teaching.

## 5.1 The image of the 'Wheel of Life'

Many Buddhists first encounter the teaching of dependent arising in the form of the 'Wheel of Life' (*bhava-cakra*), more properly, 'wheel of continued existence', also called the 'wheel of transmigration' (*saṃsāra-cakra*), a popular teaching device in Buddhist traditions in India, China, Tibet and in the modern west (Sopa 1984; Teiser 2006). In the claws of Yāma, the demon of impermanence (*anityatā*), is an ever-turning wheel. At its hub are the three root afflictions (*mūla-kleśas*) of greed (*lobha*), hostility (*dveśa*) and confusion (*moha*), which keep the wheel turning. In white and black segments around this hub, living beings are depicted ascending and descending, according to the ethical quality of their actions (*karma*). Depicted in the spokes of the wheel are the six (originally, five) realms of rebirth (*gatis*): the god realm, the realm of the *asuras* (originally included in the god realm), the realm of the hungry ghosts (*pretas*), the hell realm, the animal realm, and the realm of human beings. In each of the realms of rebirth, a Buddha is shown teaching the Dharma. Around the rim of the wheel are images representing each of the twelve *nidānas*, where they symbolize twelve stages of the individual human being's life in *saṃsāra*: (1) a blind person with a stick (representing *avidyā*); (2) a potter making pots (*saṃskārāḥ*); (3) a monkey in a tree (*vijñāna*); (4) three people in a boat (*nāma-rūpa*); (5) a house with five windows (*ṣaḍ-āyatana*); (6) a man and a woman embracing (*sparśa*); (7) someone with an arrow in their eye (*vedanā*); (8) a man taking a drink (*trṣṇā*); (9) someone picking fruit (*upādāna*); (10) a pregnant woman (*bhava*); (11) a woman giving birth (*jāti*); and (12) a body carried on a bier (*jarā-maraṇa*).

The image of the Wheel of Life goes back to the *vinaya* of the Mūlasarvāstivādin school, a collection of stories that 'provided a narrative authority for a collective enterprise that drew laypeople to Buddhist temples and sent monks and nuns out into the lay community' (Teiser 2006: 5), and to a story in which the Buddha instructs the monks about how to paint it correctly, and how a competent and knowledgeable monk should be appointed to explain the image to visiting lay-people. What such monks would have explained was the three-life interpretation of the twelve *nidānas* that had gradually evolved in the centuries prior to the compilation of the Mūlasarvāstivādin *vinaya* c. second century

CE, and which had become a teaching device for communicating the Buddhist worldview to lay-people.

## 5.2 Abhidharma interpretations of dependent arising

Buddhist exegetes of the first centuries after the Buddha's *parinirvāṇa*, seeking to understand and systematize the Buddha's teaching as it had been passed down to them, came to see in the twelve *nidānas* an explanation of how individual beings transmigrate through *saṃsāra* according to their karma. Eventually this resulted in a standard interpretation of the twelve causal factors of dependent arising as applying over three lifetimes. However, the precise way in which the ontology of the twelve *nidānas* and their causal relations were interpreted varied across the schools.

### 5.2.1 Buddhaghosa and the Theravāda tradition

Evidence from the Theravāda tradition suggests a gradual development of the exegetical principles behind the three-life interpretation. The *Paṭisaṃbhidāmagga* (*The Path of Discrimination*) (Paṭis) (Warder 1997) dated between the second century BCE and the second century CE, divides up the *nidānas* into groups, spread over three lives (Paṭis 1.1.4 [PTS 52]):

Ignorance is confusion in reference to actions in a previous existence. Formative forces are pursuance. Craving is wanting. Appropriation is holding on. Continued existence is intention. These five phenomena are the causal bases for relinking in this life. In this life consciousness is relinking. Name-and-form is conception. The sense spheres are the sensitivity [of the sense-organs]. Contact has touched. Feeling has experienced. These five phenomena are causal bases in reference to being reborn in this world from actions done in a former existence. In this world, ignorance is the confusion of sense spheres through being fully matured. Formative forces are pursuance. Craving is wanting. Appropriation is holding on. Continued existence is intention. These five phenomena are causal bases in reference to being actions in this life for relinking in the future. In future consciousness is relinking. Name-and-form is conception. The sense spheres are the sensitivity [of the sense-organs]. Contact has touched. Feeling has experienced. These five phenomena are causal bases in reference to being reborn in the future from actions done in this life.

Thus one knows, one sees, one directly knows, one penetrates dependent arising with three junctures in the three times in these four summaries [of past cause, present result, present cause, future result] with twenty modes [i.e. five modes for each of the four condensed accounts].

The three 'junctures' (*saṃdhis*) are (i) between the *nidānas* of formative forces and consciousness, (ii) between feeling and craving, and (iii) between continued existence

and birth. It is at these junctures that the causal process may be arrested. Paṭiṣ introduces some new concepts in its exegesis, notably, a 're-linking' (*praṭisaṃdhi*) consciousness between lives, in a continuity of action (*karma*) and result (*phala*) (Paṭiṣ I: 52), and the interpretation of the *nidānas* as a theoretical explanation of human existence as a dynamic process across lifetimes.

In his monumental work, *Visuddhimagga (Path of Purification)* (Vism) (trans. Ñāṇamoli 1956), Buddhaghosa sets out the three-life interpretation concisely:

Its three times are past, present and future. In reference to these, on account of what has been handed down in the texts, it should be understood that the two factors of ignorance and formative forces belong to the past, the eight factors beginning with consciousness and concluding with continued existence belong to the present, and the two factors of birth and ageing-and-death belong to the future. (Vism section 287 [PTS 578])

This interpretation of the *nidānas* as distributed over past, present and future lives represents the culmination of a process of reflection on their significance, indicated by Buddhaghosa's comment that the three-life interpretation has been handed down (*āgata*) rather than newly invented. Buddhaghosa (Vism XVII sections 66–100) also uses the scheme of twenty-four kinds of causal basis (*pratyaya*) (from the *Paṭṭhāna*, the seventh book of the *Abhidhamma-piṭaka*) as well as an Abhidhamma analysis of each of the *nidānas* to make an enormously detailed study of how human beings revolve on the wheel of continued existence (*bhava-cakra*). The eighth century CE compendium of Abhidhamma, the *Abhidhammatthasaṅgaha* (trans. Bodhi 2007), puts together the three-life interpretation with the twenty modes of the *Paṭisambhidamaggā* to create the full standard picture of the meaning of the twelve *nidānas*. In another important development, the *Abhidhammatthasaṅgaha* (VIII section 9) describes ignorance and craving as the 'two roots' (*mūlas*), because these two *nidānas* are the roots of the process, such that destroying them brings an end to the revolving of the wheel of continued existence.

### **5.2.2 Vasubandhu and the Sarvāstivāda interpretation**

The three-life interpretation of dependent arising is also found in the seventh book of the Sarvāstivāda Abhidharma, the *Jñānaprasthāna* (Cox 1993: 136), dated to the second century BCE (Dhammajoti 2015: 105), and hence probably the earliest extant account of the three-life interpretation. In the Sarvāstivāda tradition the three-life interpretation received its fullest treatment in Vasubandhu's great work, the *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya* (ADK) (trans. Sangpo and de La Vallée Poussin 2012), dated to the fourth or fifth century CE. It is presented quite concisely:

This dependent arising has twelve factors and three sections [of time]: Two at the beginning, two at the end and eight in the middle, for the complete person. (ADK III v.20).

The reference to the ‘complete person’ in this stanza is to a living being in this realm of desire (*kāma-avacara*) who has a physical body and who has developed sufficiently to experience contact and feeling. A living being who dies early or who lives in the realm of form or in the formless realm would not be a ‘complete person’ in the sense of manifesting all of the states of dependent arising.

This reference to the ‘complete person’ points to ways in which the Sarvāstivāda interpretation of the twelve *nidānas* differs from the Theravādin. While both schools understand the twelve factors as spread over three lives, instead of the ‘modes and groups’ of the Theravāda version, which goes back to the *Paṭisambhidāmagga*, the Sarvāstivādins analyse the twelve *nidānas* in terms of a threefold distinction of ‘intrinsic natures’ (*svabhāvas*): ignorance, craving and appropriation have the nature of ‘defilement’ (*kleśa*); the formative forces and continued existence have the nature of ‘action’ (*karma*); and each of the remaining *nidānas* has the nature of being a ‘phenomenal basis’ (*vastu*). These intrinsic natures refer to the nature of each of the *nidānas* considered as a ‘state’ (*avasthā*), meaning a state of the five constituents (*skandhas*) that make up a living being, namely, physical form (*rūpa*), feeling (*vedanā*), perception (*saṃjñā*), formations (*saṃskārā*) and consciousness (*vijñāna*). Each of the *nidānas* characterizes the dominant feature of the constituents at distinct points in the lifetime of a living being. Hence the Sarvāstivādins consider *pratītya-samutpāda* as ‘pertaining to states’ (*āvasthika*). The Sarvāstivādins therefore interpret the twelve *nidānas* as being a series of states, each arising on the basis of the preceding, through life after life. Many of the *nidānas* are therefore understood to refer to stages in the development of the embryo, so this is an ‘embryological interpretation’ of dependent arising.

## 6 Other interpretations of dependent arising

Whether the pertaining-to-states interpretation of the twelve *nidānas* was what the Buddha meant by dependent arising was disputed in the Sarvāstivāda tradition even in Vasubandhu’s day. Certainly, it has been disputed in pre-modern Japan (Tominaga 1990: 128–130) and by modern scholars (Williams, Tribe and Wynne 2011: 52). There have also been alternative interpretations of dependent arising since ancient times.

### 6.1 Present moment interpretations

Vasubandhu (ADK *bhāṣya* on III v.24d, Sangpo and de La Vallée Poussin 2012: 984) presents a typology of contrasting ways of interpreting dependent arising: (i) as *prolonged* over three lifetimes and *pertaining to states*; and (ii) as *momentary*, the *nidānas* arising and ceasing in the moment or simultaneously, and *interconnected* rather than linear (Kritzer 1999: 96, 117). The Vaibhāṣikas (certain scholars within the Sarvāstivāda school) held that the prolonged interpretation pertaining to states was the original meaning

of dependent arising in the *sūtras*. Vasubandhu himself doubted this and preferred a Sautrāntika exegesis of the twelve *nidānas* (ADK *bhāṣya* on III v.28ab, Sangpo and de La Vallée Poussin 2012: 1001–1004). The Sautrāntikas rejected scholastic Abhidharma explanations in favour of the *sūtras*, hence Vasubandhu’s understanding of the *nidānas* is close to the *Pratītyasamutpādivibhaṅga Sūtra* (studied in [section 3.1](#)), although he interprets the *nidānas* as unfolding over three lives.

Abhidharmikas also interpreted the twelve *nidānas* as occurring simultaneously and interconnectedly (Dhammajoti 2015: 472). Vasubandhu imagines the extreme case of someone committing an act of murder, and how the twelve *nidānas* may be interpreted as an analysis of the rapid sequence of simultaneous and momentary states (*dharmas*) occurring when a person carries out such an act (ADK *bhāṣya* on III v.24d, Sangpo and de La Vallée Poussin 2012: 984–985). The Theravāda Abhidhamma text, the *Vibhaṅga* (138–192, Tiṭṭhila 1969: 184–250) also uses the scheme of the twelve *nidānas* to analyse the causal structure of experience at the time (*yasmiṃ samaye*) when various kinds of episodes of consciousness or cognition (*citt’ uppāda*) occur. Dependent arising is applied to the present moment (*khaṇa*), which does not yet mean the very short moment of the later theory of ‘momentariness’ (*khaṇikavāda*), according to which mental states arise, endure and cease with incredible rapidity (Ronkin 2005: 59–66). The present moment is instead that impermanent and swiftly changing now, which is the only time in which anything can happen.

## 6.2 Contemporary interpretations

Buddhists have continued to disagree about the interpretation of the twelve *nidānas*. Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu (1906–1993) was an outspoken critic of the orthodox three-life interpretation of dependent arising, preferring an interpretation of the twelve *nidānas* as a wheel of events occurring in the present moment (Buddhadāsa 2020). He argues that dependent arising was taught for the sake of investigating how unsatisfactoriness arises on causes and conditions (very rapidly, like a flash of lightning) in the context of the wrong view that there is a self or soul which continues identically through time. Although Buddhadāsa believes this is the original meaning of the Buddha’s teaching, his approach in fact has much in common with what Vasubandhu called the ‘momentary, connected’ interpretation of dependent arising. His main criticism of the three-life interpretation is that it is completely useless, because ‘dependent origination taught in this way cannot be practised’ (Buddhadāsa 2020: 34). The three-life interpretation is a teaching device, whereas the Buddha’s intention in teaching dependent arising was to enable the practitioner to put an end to suffering by practising it.

Bhikkhu Ñāṇavīra (1920–1965) likewise developed an interpretation of dependent arising in present experience (Ñāṇavīra 2010; Jones 2009). Like Buddhadāsa, Ñāṇavīra

notes that the Buddha described the dharma as self-evident and timeless, and that seeing dependent arising meant seeing the Dharma. Conditionality should therefore be taken as a structural principle concerning the dependence of one thing on another thing already existing, rather than as a temporal (causal) process by which one thing happens after another thing. 'For as long as *paṭicca-samuppāda* is thought to involve temporal succession (as it is, notably in the traditional 'three-life' interpretation), so long is it liable to be regarded as some kind of hypothesis (that there is rebirth and that it is *caused* by *avijjā*)' (Ñāṇavīra 2010: 70). In Ñāṇavīra's view, the twelve *nidānas* are not a causally related sequence of temporally successive phenomena, but are the structurally related phenomena that make up the lived experience of being an ordinary human being, meaning, the experience of being a self, a 'someone', an 'I'. This experience, characterized as unsatisfactory, is a mistake since it finds a self, a sense of 'me' and 'mine' where, according to the Buddha, no such self can really be found. An analogy for what Ñāṇavīra means by the twelve *nidānas* as the structure of experience is that of a building. Just as a house cannot have a roof without walls, so there can be no subjective existence as a self without craving and appropriation; similarly, just as there can be no lower walls without foundations, there can be no consciousness of being a self and the name-and-form of that experience without ignorant unawareness. The roof does not arise after the walls but depends on those walls for its existence; conversely, without a foundation, the whole building ceases to stand. However, whereas a building is a static entity, human experience is dynamic. The sense of self, of being a 'someone', is constantly attempted and renewed through the processes of feeling, craving and appropriation by which personal life is sustained.

Ñāṇavīra develops his interpretation with the help of the method and vocabulary of modern European philosophers, especially Kierkegaard, allowing him to discover exegetical possibilities not previously explored. Bhikkhu Bodhi, however, has subjected Ñāṇavīra's unorthodox interpretation to a severe critique, to show that his exegeses of the *nidānas* of becoming, birth, and formations are inconsistent with Buddhist discourses, claiming that the three-life interpretation is closer to the Buddha's intention (1998a; 1998b). Despite Bhikkhu Bodhi's attempt to vindicate the three-life interpretation of dependent arising, Bhikkhu Ñāṇananda (1940–2018) has also rejected it, in favour of an interpretation of the *nidānas* as describing the structure of saṃsāric experience (Ñāṇananda 2016). Ñāṇananda particularly emphasizes the importance of the 'hidden vortex' of the reciprocal conditionality of the *nidānas* of consciousness (*vijñāna*) and name-and-form (*nāma-rūpa*), a teaching found in the *Mahānidāna Sutta (Dīgha-nikāya 15 [PTS II 56])* (Bodhi 1995) and elsewhere. Under the influence of ignorance and the formative forces, the 'flow' of consciousness, like water in a river, is disrupted, forming a distinct whirlpool. This deluded consciousness is taken in by name-and-form, consisting in the mental events of feeling, perception, intention, contact and attention, together with the nature of physical matter,

and this being taken in of consciousness gives life and substance to name-and-form. The vortex is comparable to being entranced by the images on a cinema screen, which, however, are not what they seem to the one who is taken in by them. The rest of the *nidānas* arise within as well as because of this vortex. The cessation of the vortex through Buddhist practice is not, however, the entire cessation of consciousness, for there remains a 'non-manifestive' (*anidassana*) awareness. Hence the cessation process implies the discovery of a transcendental experience (Ñāṇananda 1974).

The Thai Theravādin scholar Bhikkhu P. A. Payutto has made a synthesis of competing interpretations (Payutto 2017b; Seeger 2005). He sets out the hermeneutic method behind the orthodox three-life interpretation, involving the distinction of causes and effects, and past, present and future lives, attributes it specifically to the commentaries, and contrasts it with what he calls the 'everyday life' interpretation, which is a way of describing the momentary interpretation of the twelve *nidānas*, as explained in Abhidhamma texts. Whereas the 'orthodox interpretation' explains the round of rebirth, the 'everyday life' one enables the working of dependent arising to be seen in the present moment, with the understanding that it can be inferred to past and future, given that the cycle of dependent arising works in the same way through time. Payutto argues that the 'everyday life' interpretation can claim scriptural justification, and that it largely shares its definitions of the *nidānas* with the three-life interpretation.

As Payutto has noted, past and present disagreements about the meaning of the twelve *nidānas* depend on different hermeneutics. Noa Ronkin (2005) has made an invaluable scholarly contribution by noting that, while in both early discourses and in Abhidhamma traditions the *nidānas* are psycho-physical occurrences, in the discourses they are treated as *processes* while in the Abhidhamma they are *events* (Ronkin 2005: 68). Whereas processes occupy time, events occur in moments of time. Hence, for the Abhidhammas, the *nidānas* represent a series of caused and causal events, occurring rapidly in the present moment or over lifetimes; whereas in the discourses:

The [...] twelvefold formula [...] represents a linear succession of processes necessarily conditioned by one another: the arising of any given process implies the operation of another process, either preceding or coexistent with the former; the obliteration of any given process implies the cessation of another process, either subsequent to or coexistent with the former. (Ronkin 2005: 208)

This subtle distinction of emphasis is enough to make a difference. Bhikkhu Ñāṇavīra and Bhikkhu Ñāṇananda interpreted dependent arising in terms of the *structure* of experience, in that coexistent processes can be structurally related. The relation of ignorance, for instance, to the processes of feeling, craving and appropriation may be conceived in structural terms, like that of a root and a tree, or a foundation and a building. But from the perspective of time and lifetimes, these processes may be considered as conditioning

each other successively, so that feeling occurs after the arising of the sense spheres, and ageing-and-death certainly occur after birth; hence the *nidānas* can be understood as related temporally, as Bhikkhu Buddhādāsa, Bhikkhu Bodhi and Bhikkhu Payutto prefer. The *nidānas* formula is not very philosophically exact. As Ronkin observes, ‘the *paṭiccasamuppāda* formula is not so much loose as pragmatic’ (Ronkin 2005: 207); a point which coheres with the interpretation of the formula as originally a theme for meditative investigation.

## 7 Dependent arising and conditionality

Let us turn now from interpretations of the standard formula of dependent arising to the principle of conditionality. A famous ancient stanza (the *Pratītya-samutpāda-gāthā*) recalls the Buddha’s teaching of a general principle:

*ye dharmā hetuprabhavā hetum teṣāṃ tathāgato āha  
teṣāñ ca yo nirodha evaṃvādī mahāśramaṇaḥ*

Those things arisen from a cause – the Realized One has told their cause,  
and the ceasing of them too; this is the great ascetic’s teaching. (Mvu III 62)

The stanza is preserved in other *vinaya* texts (e.g. Pāli Vin PTS I 39–42); it later became a popular devotional text, and has been found embossed on clay seals and inscribed into carved images of Buddhas and Bodhisattvas (Boucher 1991).

While this stanza appears practical in scope, concerning the Buddha’s teaching of the arising and ceasing of suffering, contemporary scholarly accounts of dependent arising often begin with a statement of an abstract principle of conditionality, expressed in terms of a general metaphysical claim, for instance that dependent arising is a principle of universal conditionality. Some scholars often make the further claim that the ‘this being, that becomes’ (*imasmiṃ sati*) formula, found in the standard formula of dependent arising, should be understood as a statement of the principle of conditionality (e.g. Williams, Tribe and Wynne 2011: 48; Harvey 2013). However, although the *imasmiṃ sati* formula may be taken as stating that the arising and ceasing of phenomena are correlated, correlation is not the same as causation or conditionality. It might be preferable to understand the formula as a summary expression of causal relationships (Jones 2022).

Nevertheless, there is a principle of conditionality. It is, in fact, implicit in the very expression *pratītya-samutpāda*, a syntactic compound that would have been understood by its original hearers as a compressed expression: ‘the arising (*samutpāda*) [of phenomena (*dharmas*)] depending on (*pratītya*) [causal bases (*pratyayas*)]’, and implying a metaphor of the organic growth (arising) from a basis (a ground) when the requisite conditions are present (Jones 2021). The principle is first conceptualized as

distinct from its application in the twelve *nidānas* in the *Pratītya-sūtra* ('Discourse on Dependent Arising') (NS 14 [Chung and Fukita 2020: 146–150]; cf. S 12: 20 [PTS II 25–27], SĀ 296 [T II 84b12], compared by Choong 2000: 150–156). In this discourse, the Buddha distinguishes dependent arising from dependently-arisen phenomena (*pratītya-samutpannā dharmāḥ*), defining dependent arising as a general principle and dependently-arisen phenomena in terms of the twelve *nidānas*. The principle of dependent arising describes the exact nature of the causal connection between each of the twelve *nidānas*: it does not depend on the existence of Realized Ones (*tathāgatas*), so the principle is an objective feature of experience. It is a firm or constant (*sthitā*) natural (*dharmatā*) principle (*dhātuḥ*) for the maintenance of how experience works (*dharmasthitaye*). Its synonym is conditionality (*idaṃpratyayatā*), 'the state (-tā) of having this (*idaṃ*) as a causal basis (*pratyaya*)'.

A modern person coming across this principle might be struck by its precise, almost scientific character, and by the claim that the Buddha discovered by himself this law-like principle of how experience works. There has indeed been a tendency to characterize the principle of conditionality in quasi-scientific terms or as a general metaphysical claim (Jayatilleke 1963; Kalupahana 1975), but dependent arising more properly concerns the possibility of a radical transformation of subjective experience (Kalansuriya 1979). As the Buddha goes on to teach in the *Pratītya-sūtra*, the effect of investigating dependent arising is a seeing-through of ego-identity as well as the dropping of speculative views concerning the self. The principle of conditionality is a conceptual tool for this investigation. It is a metaphysical principle, in the sense of applying to all experience, but not a topic of or basis for speculative metaphysics.

For Abhidharmikas, who hold that *dharmas* or phenomena are real, the interactions of these ultimately real entities are analysed in terms of kinds of intrinsic causal efficacy called 'causes' (*hetus*) and 'conditions' (*pratyayas*). Whereas the Theravādins described twenty-four kinds of condition (Vism Ch. 17 [Ñāṇamoli 1956]; Karunadasa 2013: 89), the Sarvāstivādins found four conditions and six causes (Dhammajoti 2015: Ch. 6). By means of such elaborate analyses of causation, the Abhidharma traditions held dependent arising to be a feature of reality. However, Nāgārjuna, taken here as representative in a certain way of the Mahāyāna Buddhist tradition, developed a non-realist account of dependent arising, summed up in a stanza from the *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā* ('Fundamental Verses on the Middle Way') (MMK):

Dependent arising we declare to be emptiness.

It is a dependent concept; just that is the middle path. (MMK 24.18, Siderits and Katsura 2013)

Nāgārjuna’s philosophy interprets dependent arising not as an ultimately real feature of the world, but as a conventional designation for the causal processes that characterize the world of phenomena, which is empty of intrinsic existence and depends for its intelligibility on the mind (Westerhoff 2013). As a convention, dependent arising should be understood to designate the middle way between the ideas of existence and non-existence. Although Nāgārjuna continued to employ the Abhidharma analyses of causation and the three-life interpretation of the twelve *nidānas*, he regarded these as conventions. His account of dependent arising consciously evokes the Buddha’s own pragmatic teaching (Garfield 1994; Della Santina 2002).

## 8 Transcendental dependent arising

The pragmatism of the early Buddhist conception of dependent arising is also evident in a less well-known application of conditionality to the path to Awakening. There is an early Buddhist discourse, the *Upanisā-sutta* (‘Discourse on Preconditions’) (S 12: 23 [PTS II 29–32]) in which the usual twelve *nidānas* are extended, so that on condition of suffering arises a sequence of further causal factors indicating a process of meditative integration and liberating insight:

(1) ignorance > (2) formative forces > (3) consciousness > (4) name-and-form > (5) six sense spheres > (6) contact > (7) feeling > (8) craving > (9) appropriation > (10) continued existence > (11) birth > (12) suffering > (13) faith (*śraddhā*) > (14) gladness (*prāmodya*) > (15) joy (*prīti*) > (16) relaxation (*praśrabdhi*) > (17) happiness (*sukha*) > (18) meditative integration (*samādhī*) > (19) knowledge and vision of what is actually the case (*jñāna-darśana-yathā-bhūta*) > (20) disenchantment (*nirveda*) > (21) dispassion (*virāga*) > (22) liberation (*vimukti*) > (23) knowledge about the destruction of the pollutants (*āsrava-kṣaye jñāna*).

In this formulation, the contrary (*pratiloma*) sequence of cessation of the twelve *nidānas* has been replaced with a positive sequence of factors, each arising on condition of the previous. The version of this discourse preserved in Chinese translation (MĀ 55 [T 26 490c–91a], trans. Bingenheimer, Anālayo and Bucknell 2013) includes a greater number of positive factors at the beginning of the path, including mindfulness and clear knowing, virtuous conduct and freedom from remorse, before converging on shared factors from gladness to liberation. Related sequences of causal factors culminating in liberation are in fact found in many discourses, and also occur in commentarial and even poetic works in the Indian Buddhist tradition (Jones 2019c).

In one early Buddhist exegetical text, the *Nettipakaraṇa* (‘Guide’), this positive sequence of causal factors is called ‘transcendental dependent arising’ (*lokuttara paṭicca-samuppāda*), in contrast to the usual twelve *nidānas*, which are called ‘worldly dependent arising’ (*lokiya paṭicca-samuppāda*) (Jones 2019b). The concept of dependent arising as explaining both

the workings of the world of *saṃsāra* and the path to Awakening has been taken up by several modern western Buddhist teachers (Sangharakshita 2018: 114–120; Bodhi 1980) as a holistic explanatory principle, whilst being acknowledged by several contemporary Theravādin teachers as a dimension of the original teaching (Buddhadāsa 1989: 129; Payutto 2017b). In the modern context of the naturalistic worldview of science, it is obviously compelling to discover a formulation of the dharma that explains both *saṃsāra* and the path to nirvana in naturalistic terms, so that transcendental dependent arising may count as a feature of Buddhist modernism (McMahan 2009).

Progress through the positive factors is compared in the early discourses to the overflowing of water, from high tarns to streams to pools to rivers to the sea, and to the complete development of a mature tree, when its roots are undamaged (Jones 2019a). In both comparisons, the idea of states ‘overflowing’ into the following state, and the idea of the ‘full development’ of a tree are based on different forms and meanings of the verb *pari-pūreti*, ‘to make perfect’, ‘completely fulfil’. This idea of progressive fulfilment is in contrast to the idea of the endless arising of suffering implicit in the twelve *nidānas*, and suggests that, from the beginning of the Buddhist tradition, there was the recognition of two distinct modes of conditionality, one circular and reactive, associated with *saṃsāra* and suffering, and the other comparable to a spiral (Sangharakshita 2017: 258–279) and teleological, aiming at the progressive realization of nirvana (Jones 2019a).

The sequence of transcendental dependent arising shares some factors with the list of seven Awakening factors (namely, joy [*prīti*], relaxation [*praśrabdhī*] and meditative integration [*samādhi*]), and like that list it is a mnemonic for investigating the path to Awakening. It could be considered as a conceptual framework for individual meditative investigation, as well as a convenient device for teaching the structure of the path to Awakening, comparable to the structure of ethics (*śīla*), meditative integration (*samādhi*) and wisdom (*prajñā*) of the Buddha’s last days (*Dīgha-nikāya* 16 [PTS II 72–168]). In this, the sequence combines the functions of method and doctrine, just like the twelve *nidānas*, as well as reinforcing the sense of the principle of conditionality as a pragmatic principle applicable to experience in different ways.

## 9 Interdependence and ecology

The modern world has seen the emergence of an ecological interpretation of dependent arising as interdependence and interconnectedness, constituting a further dimension of Buddhist modernism (McMahan 2009). In the face of an environmental crisis produced in part by a pervasive ethical anthropocentrism (White 1967), the claim is that human beings exist in an interconnected web of matter and processes, and that the Buddhist teaching of dependent arising is fundamentally an ecological principle which supports an ecological awareness and an ethics of nonharming and non-anthropocentric concern

(Edelglass 2021). While there are historical and conceptual difficulties with this claim, it is also instructive to trace how an ancient Buddhist teaching can be reinterpreted for the sake of teaching the dharma in contemporary times.


The Buddhist scholar most associated with the claim that the Buddha's teaching of dependent arising concerns 'mutual causality' and interdependence, comparable to a systems theory perspective, is Joanna Macy (1991). Her work has established dependent arising as the conceptual framework both for the inner work of overcoming anthropocentrism, and for an engaged Buddhism of active concern for the interconnected whole. But Lambert Schmithausen (1997) has argued, with great depth and rigour, that it is implausible to interpret dependent arising in the Buddha's teaching in terms of interdependence. The twelve *nidānas* explain how *saṃsāric* experience arises, and how it ceases through the practising of the path, whereas dependent arising as interdependence depends on a quite tendentious hermeneutic of the early teachings (Anālayo 2021). Scholars have explored how, rather than deriving from the early Buddhist teaching of dependent arising, the concept of interdependence combines insights and intuitions from the Romantic movement in Europe and the USA with Mahāyāna developments of Buddhist thought (McMahan 2009).

Nevertheless, there is a sound precedent for interpreting dependent arising as interdependence. It begins with the Madhyamaka development of dependent arising, originally a practical teaching concerning experience, into a more rigorous philosophical account of dependence relations, especially the conceptual dependence of all objects on the mind, implying their emptiness of intrinsic existence (Westerhoff 2022). The development continues in the Huayan school of Chinese Buddhism, in which the emptiness of phenomena was illustrated by means of images, such as the 'jewel net of Indra', in which each jewel reflects every other jewel. Likewise, all phenomena interpenetrate as an interdependent totality (Fox 2013). These developments come together in the teaching of the Vietnamese Buddhist Thich Nhat Hanh, who has coined the word 'interbeing' to characterize dependent arising as interdependence and to draw attention to its ecological implications (Lim 2019).

What is quite new about dependent arising as interdependence, however, is the implication that a deep insight into how each of us and everything in our world is interconnected is connected with and necessary for an ethical transformation. By contrast, the Buddha's teaching of dependent arising was originally concerned with insight into the causes and conditions for unsatisfactoriness, and into the path to ending it. While some scholars have argued that the teaching of interdependence is not much of a basis for an environmental ethics, since if everything depends on everything else, no ethical judgements are possible (Harris 1995), there is a profound feature in common between dependent arising as conditionality and as interdependence: both are ways of putting a

fundamentally relational worldview that makes clear how the ego, conceptualized as an essential self, which is usually the focus of human views and emotions, is empty of intrinsic existence and cannot be the basis for either a satisfactory or a sustainable life.

## **Attributions**

Copyright [Dhivan Thomas Jones](#)  (CC BY-NC)

# Bibliography

## • Further reading

- Gethin, Rupert. 1998. *The Foundations of Buddhism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Harvey, Peter. 2013. 'The Conditioned Co-Arising of Mental and Bodily Processes Within Life and Between Lives', in *A Companion to Buddhist Philosophy*. Edited by Steven M. Emmanuel. Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 46–68.
- Jones, Dhivan Thomas. 2011. *This Being, That Becomes: The Buddha's Teaching on Conditionality*. Cambridge: Windhorse.
- Karunadasa, Yakupitiyage. 2018. *Early Buddhist Teachings: The Middle Position in Theory and Practice*. Boston, MA: Wisdom. Reprint. Chapter 3: 'Dependent Arising'. First published 2013.
- Macy, Joanna. 1991. *Mutual Causality in Buddhism and General Systems Theory*. Albany: State University of New York Press.
- Payutto, Bhikkhu P. A. 2017a. 'Dependent Origination', in *Buddhadhamma: The Laws of Nature and Their Benefits to Life*. Translated by Robin P. Moore. Bangkok: Buddhadhamma Foundation. <https://buddhadhamma.github.io/dependent-origination.html> (Part 1, section 3, chapter 4.)

## • Works cited

- Anālayo, Bhikkhu. 2018. *Rebirth in Early Buddhism and Current Research*. Somerville, MA: Wisdom.
- Anālayo, Bhikkhu. 2021. 'Dependent Arising and Interdependence', *Mindfulness* 12: 1094–1102.
- Anālayo, Bhikkhu. 2022. 'Situating Mindfulness, Part 3: Unmasking Buddhism?', *Mindfulness* 12: 1136–1143. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12671-021-01765-8>
- Bingenheimer, Marcus, Bhikkhu Anālayo, and Roderick Bucknell (eds). 2013. *The Madhyama Āgama (Middle-Length Discourses) Volume I (Taishō Volume 1, No. 26)*. Moraga, CA: BDK America.
- Bodhi, Bhikkhu. 1980. *Transcendental Dependent Arising*. The Wheel Publications Volume 277/278 Kandy: Buddhist Publication Society. [https://www.buddhanet.net/pdf\\_file/upanisa\\_sutta.pdf](https://www.buddhanet.net/pdf_file/upanisa_sutta.pdf)
- Bodhi, Bhikkhu. 1995. *The Great Discourse on Causation: The Mahānidāna Sutta and Its Commentaries*. Kandy, Sri Lanka: Buddhist Publication Society. 2nd edition.
- Bodhi, Bhikkhu. 1998a. 'A Critical Examination of Ñāṇavīra Thera's "A Note on Paṭiccasamuppāda" Part One', *Buddhist Studies Review* 15, no. 1: 43–61.
- Bodhi, Bhikkhu. 1998b. 'A Critical Examination of Ñāṇavīra Thera's "A Note on Paṭiccasamuppāda" Part Two', *Buddhist Studies Review* 15, no. 2: 157–181.

- Bodhi, Bhikku (ed.). 2000. *The Connected Discourses of the Buddha: A Translation of the Saṃyutta Nikāya*. Translated by Bhikkhu Bodhi. MA, Boston: Wisdom Publications.
- Bodhi, Bhikkhu (ed.). 2007. *A Comprehensive Manual of Adhidhamma: The Abhidhammattha Saṅgaha of Ācariya Anuruddha*. Kandy: Buddhist Publication Society. 3rd edition.
- Boucher, Daniel. 1991. 'The Pratītyasamutpādagāthā and Its Role in the Medieval Cult of the Relics', *Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies* 14, no. 1: 1–27.
- Bucknell, Roderick. 1999. 'Conditioned Arising Evolves: Variation and Change in Textual Accounts of the Paṭicca-Samuppāda Doctrine', *Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies* 22, no. 2: 311–342.
- Buddhadāsa, Bhikkhu. 1989. *Me and Mine: Selected Essays of Bhikkhu Buddhadāsa*. Edited by Donald K. Swearer. Albany NY: State University of New York Press.
- Buddhadāsa, Bhikkhu. 2020. *Patīccasamuppāda: Practical Dependent Origination*. Translated by Steve Schmidt. Bangkok: Buddhadāsa Indapañño Archives. <https://www.suanmokkh.org/books/126>
- Buddhaghosa, Bhadantācariya. 1956. *The Path of Purification (Visuddhimagga)*. Translated by Bhikkhu Ñāṇamoli. Kandy: Buddhist Publication Society.
- Choong, Mun-keat. 2000. *The Fundamental Teachings of Early Buddhism*. Wiesbaden: Harassowitz Verlag.
- Chung, Jin-il. 2017. 'Pratītyasamutpādavibhaṅga-Sūtra from Nālandā: A New Edition of the Brick Inscription B', *International Journal of Buddhist Thought and Culture* 27, no. 1: 107–136.
- Chung, Jin-il, and Takamichi Fukita (eds). 2020. *A New Edition of the First 25 Sūtras of the Nidānasamyukta*. Tokyo: Sankibo Press.
- Cox, Collett. 1993. 'Dependent Origination: Its Elaboration in Early Sarvāstivādin Abhidharma Texts', in *Researches in Indian and Buddhist Philosophy: Essays in Honor of Professor Alex Wayman*. Delhi: Motilal Barnarsidass, 119–141.
- Della Santina, Peter. 2002. *Causality and Emptiness: The Wisdom of Nāgārjuna*. Singapore: Buddhist Research Society.
- Dhammajoti, Bhikkhu K. L. 2015. *Sarvāstivāda Abhidharma*. Hong Kong: Buddha-Dharma Centre of Hong Kong. 5th edition.
- Edelglass, William. 2021. 'Buddhism and the Environment', in *Research Encyclopedias: Religion*. <https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780199340378.013.721>
- Fox, Alan. 2013. 'The Huayan Metaphysics of Totality', in *A Companion to Buddhist Philosophy*. Edited by Steven M. Emmanuel. Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 180–189.

- Garfield, Jay L. 1994. 'Dependent Arising and the Emptiness of Emptiness: Why Did Nāgārjuna Start with Causation?', *Philosophy East and West* 44, no. 2: 219–250.
- Gethin, Rupert. 1998. *The Foundations of Buddhism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Gnoli, Raniero (ed.). 1977. *The Gilgit Manuscript of the Saṅghabhedavastu, Being the 17th and Last Section of the Vinaya of the Mūlasarvāstivādin*. Rome: Istituto Italiano Per Il Medio Ed Estremo Oriente.
- Gombrich, Richard. 2009. *What the Buddha Thought*. London: Equinox.
- Harris, Ian. 1995. 'Getting to Grips With Buddhist Environmentalism', *Journal of Buddhist Ethics* 2: 173–190.
- Harvey, Peter. 2013. 'The Conditioned Co-Arising of Mental and Bodily Processes Within Life and Between Lives', in *A Companion to Buddhist Philosophy*. Edited by Steven M. Emmanuel. Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 46–68.
- Huifeng, Shi. 2013. "Dependent Origination = Emptiness" – Nāgārjuna's Innovation? An Examination of the Early and Mainstream Sectarian Textual Sources', *Journal of the Centre for Buddhist Studies Sri Lanka* 11: 175–228.
- Jackson, Roger R. 2022. *Rebirth: A Guide to Mind, Karma and Cosmos in the Buddhist World*. Boulder, CO: Shambhala.
- Jayatilleke, K. N. 1963. *Early Buddhist Theory of Knowledge*. London: George Allen and Unwin.
- Jones, Dhivan Thomas. 2009. 'New Light on the Twelve Nidānas', *Contemporary Buddhism* 10, no. 2: 241–259. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14639940903239793>
- Jones, Dhivan Thomas. 2019a. 'A Teleological Mode of Conditionality in Early Buddhism', *International Journal of Buddhist Thought and Culture* 29, no. 2: 119–149.
- Jones, Dhivan Thomas. 2019b. 'Going Off the Map: "Transcendental Dependent Arising" in the Nettippakaraṇa', *Buddhist Studies Review* 36: 167–190.
- Jones, Dhivan Thomas. 2019c. "'Preconditions": The Upanisā Sutta in Context', *Journal of the Oxford Centre of Buddhist Studies* 17: 30–62.
- Jones, Dhivan Thomas. 2021. 'Translating Paṭicca-Samuppāda in Early Buddhism', in *Translating Buddhism: Historical and Contextual Perspectives*. Edited by Alice Collett. Albany: State University of New York Press, 227–258.
- Jones, Dhivan Thomas. 2022. "'This Being, That Becomes:" Reconsidering the Role of the Imasmim Sati Formula in Early Buddhism', *Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies* 45: 119–155. <https://doi.org/10.2143/JIABS.45.0.3291578>
- Jurewicz, Joanna. 2000. 'Playing with Fire: The Pratīyasamutpāda from the Perspective of Vedic Thought', *Journal of the Pali Text Society* 26: 77–103.

- Kalansuriya, A. D. P. 1979. 'Is the Buddhist Notion of "Cause Necessitates Effect" (Paṭiccasamuppāda) Scientific?', *The Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies* 1, no. 2: 7–22.
- Kalupahana, David. 1975. *Causality: The Central Philosophy of Buddhism*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press.
- Karunadasa, Yakupitiyage. 2013. *Early Buddhist Teachings: The Middle Position in Theory and Practice*. Hong Kong: Centre for Buddhist Studies.
- Kritzer, Robert. 1999. *Rebirth and Causation in the Yogācāra Abhidharma*. Wiener Studien Zur Tibetologie Und Buddhismuskunde. Volume 44. Vienna: Arbeitskreis für Tibetsche und Buddhistische Studien.
- Lamotte, Etienne. 1980. 'Conditioned Co-Production and Supreme Enlightenment', in *Buddhist Studies in Honour of Walpola Rahula*. Edited by Somaratna Balasooriya et al. London: Gordon Fraser, 118–132.
- Lim, Hui Ling. 2019. 'Environmental Revolution in Contemporary Buddhism: The Interbeing of Individual and Collective Consciousness in Ecology', *Religions* 10, no. 2: 120. <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel10020120>
- Lopez, Donald S. 2008. *Buddhism and Science: A Guide for the Perplexed*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.
- Macy, Joanna. 1991. *Mutual Causality in Buddhism and General Systems Theory*. Albany: State University of New York Press.
- Marciniak, Katarzyna (ed.). 2019. *The Mahāvastu: A New Edition*. Volume 3. Tokyo: The International Research Institute for Advanced Buddhology.
- Marciniak, Katarzyna (ed.). 2020. *The Mahāvastu: A New Edition*. Volume 2. Tokyo: The International Research Institute for Advanced Buddhology.
- McMahan, David L. 2009. *The Making of Buddhist Modernism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780195183276.001.0001>
- Mejor, Marek. 1997. 'On the Formulation of the Pratītyasamutpāda: Some Observations from Vasubandhu's Pratītyasamutpādayākyā', in *Aspects of Buddhism: Proceedings of the International Seminar on Buddhist Studies LIW 25 June 1994*. Edited by Agata Bareja-Starzyńska and Marek Mejor. Warsaw: Oriental Institute Warsaw University, 125–137.
- Ñāṇananda, Bhikkhu Kaṭukurunde. 1974. *The Magic of the Mind: An Exposition of the Kālakārāma Sutta*. Kandy: Buddhist Publication Society. <https://seeingthroughthenet.net/books/>
- Ñāṇananda, Bhikkhu Kaṭukurunde. 2016. *The Law of Dependent Arising: The Secret of Bondage and Release: Library Edition*. Sri Lanka: Kaṭukurunde Ñāṇananda Sadaham Senasun Bhāraya. <http://seeingthroughthenet.net>
- Ñāṇavīra, Thera. 2010. *Clearing the Path*. Netherlands: Path Press Publications. <https://www.nanavira.org/> (2nd edition.)

- Payutto, Bhikkhu P. A. 2017b. *Buddhadhamma: The Laws of Nature and Their Benefits to Life*. Translated by Robin P. Moore. Bangkok: Buddhadhamma Foundation. <http://buddhadhamma.github.io>
- Reat, N. Ross. 1987. 'Some Fundamental Concepts in Buddhist Psychology', *Religion* 17: 15–28.
- Reat, N. Ross. 1993. *The Śālistamba Sūtra*. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass Publishers.
- Rhys Davids, T. W., and C. A. F. Rhys Davids (eds). 1910. *Dialogues of the Buddha Part II*. London: Oxford University Press.
- Ronkin, Noa. 2005. *Early Buddhist Metaphysics: The Making of a Philosophical Tradition*. Abingdon: RoutledgeCurzon.
- Sangharakshita. 2017. *Complete Works Vol. 3: The Three Jewels II*. Edited by Vidyadevi. Cambridge: Windhorse Publications.
- Sangharakshita. 2018. *Complete Works Vol. 1: A Survey of Buddhism and The Buddha's Noble Eightfold Path*. Edited by Kalyanaprabha. Cambridge: Windhorse Publications.
- Sangpo, Gelong Lodrö, and Louis de La Vallée Poussin (eds). 2012. *Abhidharmakośa-Bhāṣya of Vasubandhu: The Treasury of the Abhidharma and Its (Auto) Commentary*. Translated by Gelong Lodrö Sangpo and Louis de La Vallée Poussin. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass.
- Schmithausen, Lambert. 1997. 'The Early Buddhist Tradition and Ecological Ethics', *Journal of Buddhist Ethics* 4: 1–74.
- Schmithausen, Lambert. 2000. 'Zur Wölfgliedringen Formel Des Entstehens in Abhängigkeit', *Hōrin* 7: 41–76.
- Seeger, Martin. 2005. 'How Long Is a Lifetime? Buddhadasa's and Phra Payutto's Interpretations of Paṭiccasamuppāda in Comparison', *Buddhist Studies Review* 22, no. 2: 107–130. <https://journal.equinoxpub.com/BSR/article/view/14022>
- Siderits, Mark, and Shōryū Katsura. 2013. *Nāgarjuna's Middle Way: Mūlamadhyamakakārikā*. Boston, MA: Wisdom Publications.
- Skilling, Peter. 2015. 'An Untraced Buddhist Verse Inscription from (Pen)Insular Southeast Asia', in *Buddhist Dynamics in Premodern and Early Modern Southeast Asia*. Edited by D. Christian Lammerts. Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 18–79.
- Sopa, Geshe. 1984. 'The Tibetan "Wheel of Life": Iconography and Doxography', *The Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies* 7, no. 1: 125–145.
- Sopa, Geshe. 1986. 'The Special Theory of Pratītyasamutpāda: The Cycle of Dependent Origination', *The Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies* 9, no. 1: 105–119.

- Teiser, Stephen F. 2006. *Reinventing the Wheel: Paintings of Rebirth in Medieval Buddhist Temples*. Seattle, WA: University of Washington Press.
- Tiṭṭhila (ed.). 1969. *The Book of Analysis*. Translated by U. Tiṭṭhila. London: Pali Text Society.
- Tominaga, Nakamoto. 1990. *Emerging from Meditation*. Translated by Michael Pye. London: Duckworth.
- Tripathi, Shridha (ed.). 1987. *Lalita-Vistara*. Darbhanga: The Mithila Institute of Post-Graduate Studies and Research in Sanskrit Learning. 2nd edition.
- Warder, A. K. (ed.). 1997. *The Path of Discrimination*. Translated by Bhikkhu Ñāṇamoli. Oxford: Pali Text Society. 2nd edition.
- Westerhoff, Jan. 2013. 'Metaphysical Issues in Indian Buddhist Thought', in *A Companion to Buddhist Philosophy*. Edited by Steven M. Emmanuel. Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 129–150.
- Westerhoff, Jan Christoph. 2022. 'Nāgārjuna', in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. Edited by Edward N. Zalta. <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2022/entries/nagarjuna/>
- White, Lynn, Jr. 1967. 'The Historical Roots of Our Ecologic Crisis', *Science* 155, no. 3767: 1203–1207.
- Williams, Paul, Anthony Tribe, and Alexander Wynne. 2011. *Buddhist Thought: A Complete Introduction to the Indian Tradition*. Abingdon: Routledge. 2nd edition.