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Academic Articles:

Dependant Origination and the Middle Doctrine in Early Buddhism

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1. Introduction

This article features a brief explication of the doctrine of 'dependant origination' (*paṭicca-samuppāda*) and a discussion of its conceptual applications in early Buddhism. Regarding the latter, it primarily seeks to elaborate on the theory that dependant origination was described as the 'middle doctrine' (*majjhima-dhamma*) in the Pāli Suttas in view of its providing a theoretical platform for Buddhism to transcend the key classical Indian philosophical conflict centered around the dichotomy of 'eternalism' (*sassatavāda*) and 'annihilation-ism' (*ucchedavāda*), as well as other important philosophical and religious controversies contemporaneous to the Buddha. Amongst the other philosophical controversies transcended by *paṭicca-samuppāda*, those that shall be focused on in this paper include several competing views regarding causation or origination, in particular; 1) *Vassavativāda* and *Satkāryavāda*, 2) the theory of self causation (*sayamkata*) as opposed to the doctrine of external causation (*paramkata*), and 3) contrast between the views of strict determination (*niyativāda*) and fortuitous origination (*addhicasamuppanna*). In addition, I will very briefly discuss some of the spiritual and moral implications of this 'middle doctrine' in terms of its underlying two important middle 'ways': a) avoiding the extremes of self mortification (*attakilamathānuyoga*) and self-indulgence (*kāmasukhallikhānuyoga*) (with regards to the *sassatavāda/ucchedavāda* controversy), and; b) avoiding condoning both the 'classism' underlying India's traditional Brahministic caste system and the radical revolutionary/anti institutional tendencies of some proponents of the Samaṇa philosophical movement (with regards to different views regarding causation).

2. The Meaning, Significance and Applications of the Doctrine of Dependant Origination (*paṭicca samuppāda*)

2.1 The Status of the Doctrine of Dependant Origination in Early Buddhism

The theory of Dependant Origination has a central position in early Buddhism as both a defining attribute of Buddhist thought, and a principle theoretical tool that delves into the very heart of the Buddha's soteriological mission. Sariputra is quoted in the Pāli Suttas as stating: 'Whoever understands the *paṭicca samuppāda* understands the Dhamma, and whoever understands the

Dhamma understands the *paṭicca samuppāda* (*Yo paṭicca-samuppādaṃ passati so dhammaṃ passati*). Nyānātiloka similarly states that the comprehension of this doctrine constitutes 'the indispensable condition for the real understanding and realization of the teaching of the Buddha'. This centrality indeed holds true for many other Buddhist traditions, with the doctrine having been described as possibly constituting 'the common denominator of all the Buddhist traditions throughout the world, whether Mahāyāna or Theravāda.'

2.2 Definition and Core Meaning of the Doctrine of *Paṭicca samuppāda*

The doctrine of *paṭicca samuppāda*, which has been rendered in English as 'arising on the ground of a preceding cause', is described in its core form in the Pāli Suttas as follows:

Imasmin sati idaṃ hoti'

'When this is present, that is present'

imass'uppāda idaṃ uppajjati

'With the arising of this, that arises'

imasmin asati idaṃ na hoti

'When this is absent, that does not come to be'

imassa nirodhā idaṃ nirujjhati

'With the cessation of this, that ceases'

Describing this fourfold formulae in summary, Taiken Kamura states that 'all phenomena are established through [a matrix of] interconnections; without these connections, nothing could be established'. The theory of Dependent Origination thus amounts to a statement of the 'interdependence of all phenomena', and as such, should not be thought of as a causal doctrine that deals with 'origination' in a strict ontological or cosmological sense. Indeed, Stcherbatsky states that according to this theory, phenomena can be described as being 'coordinated', rather than being 'produced' through some definitive process of creation, whilst Y. Karunadasa defines this theory as one of 'conditionality'. These notions will be discussed in greater detail in the section concerning *sayamkata* and *paramkata* (theories of self and external causation respectively).

2.3 Theory and Application: *Paṭicca samuppāda*, its Relationship with the Twelve Link Dependent Origination Series, and its Expression in Buddhist Thought.

As pointed out by Karunadasa and recognized by a growing number of modern scholars, one common tendency in the interpretation of early Buddhism has been an inability to distinguish the

theory of Dependant Origination from perhaps its most important conceptual application: the twelve link causal series (featuring the elements; ignorance (*avijjā*), volitional activities (*saṅkhāra*), consciousness (*viññāṇa*), name and form (*nāma-rūpa*), the sixfold base (*saḷāyatana*), craving (*phassa*), clinging (*vedanā*), becoming (*bhava*), birth (*jāti*), ageing and death (*jarāmaraṇa*) often quoted together with 'sorrow, lamentation, pain, grief, and despair'). As pointed out by Ye Yuan-hou, 'In interpretations of the doctrine of dependant origination, the twelve link dependant origination (dependant origination series) has almost substituted [all] other dependant origination series, [and] because of its unique and important position, it has drowned out other series'. This trend has indeed only relatively recently been reversed by modern scholars' recognition of a range of other dependant origination series.

While it is certainly erroneous to equate the doctrine of Dependant Origination with the twelve link causal series, this tendency is nonetheless understandable. The reason for this, in line with the abovementioned point about the 'centrality' of this doctrine, most definitely lies in its strong connection with the fundamental Buddhist doctrine of the Four Noble Truths. Starting with 'ignorance' as its first and (essentially) 'suffering' as its last element, this chain is typically interpreted as describing the Second Noble Truth (*samudaya* – the arising [of suffering]), whilst also providing the theoretical foundation for the Third Noble Truth (*nirodha* – the cessation [of suffering]). As stated in the *Kaccāvanagotta Sutra*:

From ignorance as condition formations come to be; from formations as condition consciousness comes to be... such is the arising of this entire mass of suffering. From the complete fading away and cessation of that very ignorance, there comes to be the cessation of formations; from the cessation of formations, the cessation of consciousness... Such is the cessation of this entire mass of suffering.

Given the Four Noble Truths in a way defines the fundamental soteriological mission of the Buddha, it is thus not surprising that many would automatically associate the doctrine of Dependant Origination with the twelve link Dependant Origination series. Such an explanation indeed seems to help explain the statement 'He who understands the doctrine of Dependant Origination understands the dhamma'; particularly in view of the fact that the Buddha stated his doctrine has 'one taste, the taste of deliverance' (ie, from suffering). Indeed, soon after the statement 'Whoever understands the *paṭicca samuppāda* understands the Dhamma...', a reference is made to this very chain (the links 'grasping' to 'decay-and-death, sorrow, lamentation,' etc.).

It should be noted, however, that the link between the notion of *paṭicca samuppāda* and the Buddhist purport of suffering and deliverance is much more multifaceted than can be encapsulated by this more specific twelve link dependant origination series. Indeed, Sue

Hamilton's statement in reference to the more core definition of the notion of *paṭicca samuppāda* given above, that 'it is because all things are conditioned that they are impermanent..., it is because all conditioned things are impermanent that they are unsatisfactory', is a pertinent case in point. Yet the statement 'He who understands the doctrine of dependant origination understands the dhamma' takes on greater significance when we look at the pervasive application of this core theory, elucidated by the basic formulae 'when this is present, that is present' etc, in almost all other aspects of Buddhist thought. Indeed, this core theory of 'conditionality' is both a foundation and distinguishing characteristic of Buddhist ontology, epistemology, psychology and ethics. As stated by Y. Karunadasa, 'it is on the basis of this principle (the above mentioned core definition of Dependant Origination) that Buddhism seeks to explain all its fundamental doctrines, such as the analysis of mind and the theory of perception, karma and the moral order and the nature of the empirical individuality and its samsaric dimension.' Indeed, as the Buddha defined 'deliverance' as being the one 'flavour' of his doctrine, so may we define *paṭicca-samuppāda* as being the key ingredient that defines and distinguishes the aroma of the Buddhist teachings.

Importantly with regards to this 'distinguishing' attribute, it is also essentially on the basis of this doctrine of Dependant Origination that the Buddha had found a powerful tool to both respond to and transcend the diametrically opposed extreme theoretical positions of *sassatavāda* (eternalism) and *ucchedavāda* (view of annihilation); a contemporary controversy of great significance in the formation of Buddhist thought, and in addition derive new solutions to a variety of philosophical dichotomies defining many of the other philosophical/religious controversies of his time. As I shall now discuss, it is fundamentally in virtue of this ability to escape the constraining polarization of these contemporary controversies that the theory of Dependant Origination came to play an essential role in the formation of Buddhist ideology and identity, and came to be described with reverence in the Suttas as defining the Buddha's 'middle doctrine'.

3. *Paṭicca samuppāda* as the Middle Doctrine (1): Transcending the Mutual Conflict between *Sassatavāda* and *Ucchedavāda*

3.1 The Formation of Buddhism and Conflict between *Sassatavāda* and *Ucchedavāda*

It has been established by Y. Karunadasa that Buddhism arose as a critical response to the mutual conflict between two prevailing contemporary ideologies in India – that of the spiritualists and the materialists, known as *sassatavāda* (eternalism) and *ucchedavāda* (view of annihilation = 'annihilationism') respectively. Due to constraints in time and space I will not describe them in detail here, however a brief overview of their fundamental positions is perhaps in order.

Sassatavāda refers to the spiritualist ideologies of India that held the view of a duality between the soul and the body ('duality principle'), and that on the basis of purporting the liberation of the soul (ie, the 'metaphysical self') through resisting the 'gravitational pull' of the worldly body (ie, sensual desire and in some cases biological need), constituted the ideological basis underlying the extremely harsh Indian aesthetic practices amounting to self-mortification (*attakilamathānuyoga*). In stark contrast with this position, the materialist view held that the body and the soul are one (identity principle/theory of the physical self), therefore denied the possibility of survival, and on the basis of this position promoted the enjoyment of temporal existence through unrestrained sensual indulgence (*kāmasukhallikānuyoga*). Seeking to avoid the extremes of self-mortification and self-indulgence inspired by these ideologies, the Buddha promoted a 'Middle-Path' (*majjhimā-patipada*) – known as the Eightfold Path, which purported that the way to spiritual liberation laid in practicing sensual restraint whilst avoiding bringing upon oneself the calamity of harsh and undue physical duress or injury.

In combating the unprofitable practices of self-mortification and uninhibited sensual indulgence, the Buddha had clearly perceived the fundamental need to respond to the ideological bases that underlined them. Thus just as the Buddha taught what he described as a 'middle path' (*majjhima-patipada*) for the negotiation of these extreme practices, so also did he promote a theoretical foundation for this path, known as the 'middle doctrine' (*majjhima dhamma*), that in a similar way would transcend the two extremes of belief in absolute permanent existence (ie, *sassatavāda*) and the notion of impending non-existence through annihilation (*ucchedavāda*). This so called 'middle doctrine' is itself non other than the theory of Dependant Origination (*paṭicca samuppāda*).

3.2 Not-self, Dependant Origination and the Middle Way

As highlighted by Y. Karunadasa in his work 'The Buddhist Critique of *Sassatavāda* and *Ucchedavāda*...' , the identification of *paṭicca samuppāda* as the 'middle doctrine' in the Pāli Suttas arises in the context of a discussion concerning views representing *sassatavāda* (eternalism) and *ucchedavāda* (annihilationism). The following passage appears in the Kaccayanagotta Sutta of the Saṃyutta Nikāya:

"By and large, Kaccayana, this world is supported by (ie, takes as its object) a polarity, that of existence and non-existence. But when one sees the origination of the world as it actually is with right discernment, 'non-existence' with reference to the world does not occur to one. When one sees the cessation of the world as it actually is with right discernment, 'existence' with reference to the world does not occur to one.

"By and large, Kaccayana, this world is in bondage to attachments, clingings (sustenances), &

biases. But one such as this does not get involved with or cling to these attachments, clingings, fixations of awareness, biases, or obsessions; nor is he resolved on 'my self.' He has no uncertainty or doubt that what arises is just suffering; what passes away is just suffering. In this, his knowledge is independent of others. It's to this extent, Kaccayana, that there is right view.

"'Everything exists': that is one extreme. 'Everything doesn't exist': that is a second extreme. Avoiding these two extremes, the Tathāgata teaches the Dhamma via the middle: From ignorance as a requisite condition come fabrications. From fabrications as a requisite condition comes consciousness. From consciousness as a requisite... From birth as a requisite condition, then aging & death, sorrow, lamentation, pain, distress, and despair come into play. Such is the origination of this entire mass of stress and suffering."

What is interesting to note in this passage is the mention, in conjunction with this dichotomy describing the *sassatavāda* and *ucchedavāda* ideologies, of the notion of a fixation on the concept of a 'self' or 'soul' (*ātman*). Indeed, it is by means of this notion that the Buddha was able to discern a commonality between these apparently diametrically opposed viewpoints. *Sassatavāda*, (particularly in its Brahmin articulation), for instance, held the existence of 'a permanent, self entity impervious to change', and featuring 'a spiritual substance... which relates... to some kind of transcendental reality serving as the ultimate ground of existence'. Although holding the view of the non-permanence or temporality of a being, *ucchedavāda* too can be seen to essentially agree with *sassatavāda* in its belief in a self-sustaining, independently constituted entity, consistent with the idea of a (relatively enduring) self or personality. By forwarding the notion of 'non-self', Buddhism thus established a contrast delineating itself, at the one time, from these two extreme positions.

It is important, however, that the notion of 'non-self' not be interpreted in the nihilistic sense as the absolute 'non-existence' of a subjective entity, but rather be perceived as the avoidance of the understandings of the self that define the ideological positions of *sassatavāda* and *ucchedavāda*. In this sense, non-self (also defined as 'impersonality'), as it is understood in Buddhism, could essentially be defined as another side of the doctrine of *paṭicca samuppāda* as applied to the constitution of a (conventionally designated) person, being, or self-entity – with 'non-self' negatively describing the very conditionality of the 'self' concept, whilst dependant origination explains the basis for the 'self' being regarded as 'conventional' yet ultimately insubstantial. As stated by Nyanatiloka; 'Whereas the doctrine of Impersonality, or *anattā*, proceeds analytically, by splitting up into the ultimate constituent parts, into merely empty, unsubstantial phenomena or elements, the doctrine of dependant origination... proceeds synthetically, or showing that all these phenomena are, in some way or other, conditionally related with each other.' Through the theory of Dependant Origination, therefore, the existence

of a 'self' is denied, however there is still recognition that an entity, defined in the sense of numerous interconnections and causal processes, 'exists' at a conventional level.

Through positively defining the notion of non-self, *paṭicca samuppāda* serves as the principal conceptual tool Buddhism employs to transcend the 'extreme' positions of absolute permanence and annihilationism. Contrasting with this first view, which posits the idea of a permanent and transcendental metaphysical 'self-entity', this doctrine states that what is designated as the 'self' in fact constitutes 'an uninterrupted and interconnected process of psycho-physical forces' not completely divorced from an apparently external socio-material environment, and of which each constitutive element in isolation can be defined as being devoid of an intrinsic 'self' identity. In addition, such a 'conventional' self, in virtue of constituting a 'constructed' or conditioned entity, is inevitably subject to continuing transformation or impermanence (above I have cited a description of the relationship between 'conditionality' and 'impermanence'). In addition, and with regard to the *ucchedavāda* position, the notion of dependant origination rejects the notion of the human personality being merely a product of matter, and defines it instead as 'an uninterrupted' process which, given that it arises dependant on conditions not limited to physical matter (ie, ignorance, past conditioning activities [*saṅkhārās*], etc), can not be terminated merely by the decay of the physical body.

As alluded to in this last point, the expression of *paṭicca samuppāda* as a transcendental 'middle doctrine' between the opposing extremes of permanence and annihilationism is perhaps clearest when we consider its influence on the issue of survival and transmigration. As explained by Venerable Nāgasena to King Miliṅda, that which transmigrates from one life to another can be considered 'neither the same nor another (*na ca so na ca o/n→an*)'; a fact perhaps best explained in terms of the process described in Buddhaghosa's *Visuddhimagga* in which the consciousness of a new life 'has neither come here from the previous becoming nor has it become manifest without the *kamma*, the formations, the pushing, the objective field, etc., as its cause'. By this removal of the notion of the survival of an unchanging transcendental identity Buddhism thus thoroughly uproots the craving for permanent existence underlying the practice of *attakilamathānuyoga* (self-mortification). At the same time, the recognition of survival (*punabbhava*) and the necessity, for liberation, of the removal of craving, underlies an ideological platform for moral responsibility (*kammavāda*) and the abandonment of the practice of *kāmasukhalikānuyoga* (sensual indulgence). In this way, we can see, *paṭicca samuppāda*, as a 'middle doctrine', serves as an indispensable philosophical foundation for Buddhism's 'middle path' approach at the level of spiritual and moral praxis.

4. *Paṭicca samuppāda* as the Middle Doctrine (2): The Transcendence of Various Speculative Views with regards to Origination and Causation

In addition to responding to the conflict between *sassatavāda* and *ucchedavāda*, the Buddha was also knowledgeable of, and willing to critically engage with a broad range of other speculative views dealing with various aspects of human existence and the human condition. This is most apparently the case in the Brahmajala Sutta, in which the Buddha critiqued sixty-two heretical views current amongst contemporary 'ascetics and Brahmins'. In a way not dissimilar to the *sassatavāda* and *ucchedavāda* dispute, the theory of Dependant Origination was also instrumental in equipping Buddhism to respond to these controversies whilst avoiding the 'extreme' speculative positions defining a variety of contemporary philosophical/religious controversies. Dependant Origination, therefore, could be defined as the 'middle doctrine' in this broader context by its empowering Buddhism to avoid the 'thesis/antithesis' dichotomy of many of these disputes (ie, 'existence, nonexistence'), and in many cases the various positions ascribed by the application of the classical Indian 'fourfold predication' paradigm, which in addition to a 'thesis/antithesis' dichotomy included 3. an assertion of both the thesis and antithesis (ie, 'both existence and nonexistence'), and 4. a denial of them (ie, 'neither existence or nonexistence'). On current textual evidence we cannot really go as far as to say the original denotation of the doctrine of *paṭicca samuppāda* as the 'middle doctrine' was specifically informed by the Buddhist response to these controversies (collectively or individually); at least not with the same certainty than it was with regards to the *sassatavāda/ucchedavāda* controversy. Nonetheless, this correlation is particularly apparent in the consideration of the Buddhist response to many of these controversies, particularly those regarding views about causation or 'origination', which most closely correspond to the core quality of the *Paṭicca samuppāda* doctrine. Here we shall discuss three such controversies: 1. that involving the views of *vassavativāda* and *satkāryavāda*, 2. that defined by the dichotomy of self causation (*sayamkara*) and external causation (*paramkara*), and 3. that regarding the extreme ideals of fortuitous origination (*adhiccasamuppāda*) and strict determinism (*niyativāda*).

4.1 *Paṭicca samuppāda* vs *vassavativāda* and *satkāryavāda*

As mentioned in the core definition given above, one important distinctive aspect of the doctrine of Dependant Origination is that it is more a theory of 'conditioning' than what would generally be regarded as 'causation'. In the time of the Buddha, this contrast would have existed in the context of a number of more specifically articulated competing theories of 'causation'; amongst which are the key doctrines of *vassavativāda* and *satkāryavāda*. Indeed, it is through an integral contrast with these two positions that Dependant Origination further reveals its qualities as a 'middle doctrine', in addition to its essential association with the doctrine of 'not self' (*anattā*).

The first of these influential doctrines of causation, *vassavativāda*, proposes that a primary 'cause' has the overall power to bring about an 'effect'. The second, *satkāryavāda*, holds that the 'effect' is present within the 'cause' in a latent or dormant form, as can be described by the

statement 'the cloth is in the yarn'. Despite a difference with regards to emphasis or attribution, both of these theories can be seen to support the notion of a linear causal process in which one aspect (ie, cause or latent effect) functions as the determiner of the causal process.

Through its association and explication of the notion of 'not-self', the theory of dependant origination offers an alternative to both of these theories in that it denies the key role of a central 'agent' in the causal process. Indeed, both these theories assert the existence of such an unconditioned substance or, essentially, '*ātma*' – *vassavativāda* in the sense of a substantial and efficacious 'cause', whilst *satkāryavāda* holds an essentially permanent and substantial entity exists, being either explicitly manifest or in a 'dormant' state. *Paṭicca sammupāda* overcomes these views by removing the centrality of any element in a causal (or 'conditioned') chain, and instead positing a dynamic process in which various facilitative components must be coordinated for the fruition of an effect, and that such an effect is in itself destined to constitute a condition for the perpetual continuation of this process. Thus, according to Sue Hamilton, 'everything becomes a process of dependant origination, or constant change'.

According to this theory of dependant origination, *vassavativāda* is essentially denied because, according to Stcherbasky, 'The cause is not a reason. The cause is not sufficient for predicating (or predicting) the effect'. Indeed, as noted by Sue Hamilton, what may be conventionally isolated as a causal element is denied lasting prominence over any other conditional factor – an assertion evidenced by the fact that in early Buddhism the very notion of cause (*hetu*) and condition (*paccaya*) is not delineated – both functioning as synonyms. At the same time through Dependant Origination, *satkāryavāda* is avoided because it denies the delineating of any 'abode' for a dormant 'effect'. Dependant Origination in this way defined an important new 'middle doctrine' in classical Indian thought, and through positing the perpetuation of a dynamic process devoid of the existence of a permanent agent of either an action or experience articulated an important aspect of the central Buddhist doctrine of *anattā*.

4.2 Transcending Self and External Causation, Determinism and Fortuitous Origination

Another controversy which is perhaps even more instrumental to defining Dependant Origination's functioning as a 'middle doctrine' with regards to causation involves four theories describing the arising of suffering; the dichotomy of *sayamkata* (theory of self causation) and *paramkata* (theory of external causation), the related theory affirming the combination of both these two types of causation (*sayamkata ca paramkata*), and the theory purporting the negation of both (*asayamkara aparamkara*); also known as the theory of Fortuitous Origination (*adhiccasamuppāda*). As shall be the subject of our discussion in this section, this latter element

can also be placed in an important dichotomy with the notion of 'strict determinism' (*niyatīvāda*). The Buddhist response to these theories is significant in that it, through various means, underlies a 'middle way' between key theoretical foundations informing the extremes of the 'class-ist' Indian caste system purported by the orthodox Brahmins, and the radical anti-social/moral ideologies that grew in opposition to this, and that define some elements of the anti-institutional, liberal and diverse Sāmaṇa philosophical movement.

The Buddhist response to the first of these theories, the view that suffering is self caused, in many ways restates the abovementioned critiques concerning *sassatavāda* and the *vassativāda/satkāryavāda* positions. This position is fundamentally rejected by Buddhists via the doctrine of dependant origination in that it posits the idea of a permanent and unchanging self that is both the agent and experiencer of the results of its good and bad actions, and is thus condemned to eternal perpetuation without the prospect of spiritual transformation or liberation.

The next view, that of external causation, offers the opposite position that one suffers due an agent outside of oneself and above which one has no control, incorporating the theories that suffering is determined by a divine creator or god (*issara*), destiny (*niyata*) or past karma, or nature (*svabhāva*). The following view, that affirming both external and self-causation, amalgamates these theories, positing that the self has relative powers of self-determination within a framework of ultimate external control. The final doctrine, known also as that of Fortuitous Origination (*adhiccasamuppana*), negates all of the above positions by stating that suffering occurs merely by chance. As mentioned before, this can be defined in terms of a dichotomy with the theory of Strict Determinism (*niyatīvāda*) (alluded to in the notion of 'external causation'), which is represented in the Indian theories of Theistic Determination (*sabbaṃ issaranimmāṇa hetu*), Karmic Determinism (*sabbaṃ pubbekataṃ hetu*), and Natural Determinism (*svabhāvavāda*).

Rejecting each of these views and their theoretical foundations, Buddhism's theory that suffering arises on the basis of dependant origination (*paṭicca-samuppanna dukkhaṃ*), represented by the twelve-linked causal formulae discussed above, serves as an important 'middle doctrine' that transcends each of these extremes, and the 'extreme' social ramifications they advance. According to the theory underlying this chain, each successive link, (ie, ignorance, formations, consciousness... old age and death) results from the one that immediately precedes it, thus allowing the cause of suffering to be defined 'without reference to an external principle and without positing a self-entity which persists throughout the cycle of samsaric existence and also without subscribing to the view that suffering is befallen by chance'. With regards to the view of strict determinism, the 'middle' doctrine thus rejects the notion that the human predicament cannot be influenced, and states that just as elements in this causal chain arise from the one that immediately precedes it, so can the cessation or non arising of this preceding element bring

about the non arising of the latter (leading to the cessation of 'suffering'). This is indeed defined by the formulae '*imasmin asati idaṃ na hoti*' – 'When this is absent, that does not come to be', '*imassa nirodhā idaṃ nirujjhatī*' - 'With the cessation of this, that ceases', and is illustrated in the Pāli Suttas with the simile of two bundles of reeds leaning against each – when one is removed, the other will collapse on its own accord . According to this theory, therefore, human effort applied in a focused and intelligent manner (ie, guided by knowledge of the twelve factors of dependant origination and through abiding by the 'eightfold path') can potentially bring an end to the entire gamut of human (or 'sentient') suffering and misery.

This last point is significant with regards to the importance of the theory of dependant origination, being an expression of the 'middle path', serving as both a theoretical basis for underlying views regarding man's place in society, and for informing spiritual and moral praxis. The theories of strict determinism and fortuitous education, which originate in the Sāmaṇa movement and in different ways deny the potential for skillful effort to bring about a transformation of suffering, both remove the incentive for both moral observance and spiritual praxis, and would thus have disastrous social and psychological consequences. As stated by Ye Yuanhou, they are anti social, anti moral and anti religious, in many ways epitomizing the more radical, anti-institutional elements of the Sāmaṇa philosophy. At the same time, the removal of any personal or theistic element in the causal process both denies the authority of dogmatic speculation, and underlies a greater sense of uniformity and equality in the depiction of man's predicament and his potential for spiritual progress and liberation, thus undermining the basis of the extreme 'class-ism' defining the traditional Indian caste system. By transcending these extreme views, the theory of dependant origination promotes the development of a harmonious and progressive society by promoting the notion of self responsibility, and by challenging the idea of religious privilege with the concept of fundamental human equality and spiritual meritocracy.

5. Conclusion

The Buddhist theory of Dependant Origination at its core level stipulates the interdependent and dynamic nature of all things, describing how phenomena arises through the temporary coordination of various causes and conditions. In line with this, and in view of the fact that the theory eschews traditional linear causation theories emphasizing the 'origination' or 'creation' of phenomena, it could therefore be perhaps more aptly described as a doctrine of 'conditionality'. In a negative sense it underlies the view that phenomena cannot exist in isolation, cannot contain an intrinsic self-defining individuality or substance which could be defined as a self (atman) or self nature, nor exist permanently; thus playing a pivotal role in the Buddhist description of suffering, and a crucial function in the articulation of the Buddha's essential theory of the Four Noble Truths. The theory of dependant origination in addition to this pervades many

aspects of the Buddha's philosophy. The doctrine underlies the Buddhist approach to the fields of ontology, epistemology, psychology and ethics, and informs the Buddhist comprehension of perception, karma, the nature of the empirical individuality, and of its samsaric dimension. Dependant origination has thus been described as being at the heart of the Buddhist teachings, and as being an essential instrument to the correct understanding of its many dimensions.

One key aspect of the Buddhist theory of Dependant Origination concerns its description in the Pāli Suttas as the 'middle doctrine' (*majjhima-dhamma*). This description in its most primary sense refers to the doctrine's constituting a theoretical basis for transcending the mutual conflict between the positions of *sassatavāda* (eternalism) and *ucchedavāda* (theory of annihilation); this response constituting a central platform for the formation and early development of Buddhism. By means of the doctrine of Dependant Origination, Buddhism rejected both the notion of an eternal metaphysical self-entity or soul and the theory of the total annihilation of the self at death, and advanced instead the notion of 'not self' (*anattā*), stating that the entity reborn can neither be defined as the same, or not the same as he who has deceased. Through the rejection of these positions, this 'middle doctrine' undermines the key theoretical bases informing the extreme Indian practices of self mortification (*attakilamathānuyoga*, related to *sassatavāda*) and sensual indulgence (*kāmasukhallikhanuyoga*, *ucchedavāda*), and thus constitutes an essential doctrinal foundation for the Buddha's 'middle path'.

Another important sense underlying the Buddhist description of the doctrine of Dependant Origination perhaps resides in its ability to avoid the extreme views present in dichotomies defining various contemporaneous controversies in Indian philosophy. This is most likely to be particularly true, although not exclusively the case, with regards to other Indian theories concerning causation or origination, with which this theory in its core sense can be most closely associated. Dependant Origination avoids the two key Indian theories of *Vassativāda*, according to which the cause has ultimate power to bring about the effect, and *Satkāryavāda*, in which the effect exists in the cause in latent form, thus removing the centrality of any agent of action or experience in the causal process which could be associated with the notion of a self-defined, lasting entity or atman. It also transcended the dichotomy that the cause of suffering is either self caused, or externally caused, challenging, through the twelve-fold link theory, the human tendency to introduce personal elements into impersonal processes. Perhaps most significantly Dependant Origination avoided the extreme views that suffering is the result of strict determinism (*niyativāda*) and fortuitous origination (*adhiccasamuppanna*), and stated that the suffering of man and the promise of liberation is to be decided by man's own actions or efforts. In doing so, the Buddha put forward a vital challenge to orthodox Brahmin's caste system's 'class-ism', based on religious privilege but devoid of genuine spiritual meritocracy, whilst denying the radical anti social and anti moral platforms stemming from elements of the anti-

institutional Samaṇa philosophical movement. As a 'middle doctrine' between lopsided or incomplete theories of causation, it can thus be seen that the doctrine of Dependant Origination in a way underscored the Buddha's 'middle way' between the ideologies of institutionalised inequality and dissolute revolution in the context of contemporary India's socio-political and intellectual milieu.

Whilst we have outlined several core ways in which the doctrine of Dependant Origination departed from, and indeed transcended the philosophical controversies of the Buddha's time, it should be noted that there are a great many other contemporaneous philosophical dichotomies in the context of which the theory of Dependant Origination could be seen to function as a middle doctrine, including those between the views of *sabbaṃ atthi* and *sabbaṃ natthi* (everything exists/nothing exists), *sabbaṃ ekattaṃ* and *sabbaṃ puthuttaṃ* (everything is a unity/everything is a plurality), and even the core causative theories of *pariṇāma-vāda* and *arambhavāda* (the Brahmin 'evolutionary theory of causality'/Samaṇa movements 'theory of the arising of effects'). Not only would a deeper or broader investigation into the internal nature of these controversies help us discover more about where Buddhism both meets and departs from contemporary philosophical trends, it would also teach us more about the ways Buddhism sought to distinguish itself in the context of concrete philosophical positions or ideological beliefs. Such an investigation would indeed be most fruitful for the still arduous task of attending to the many apparent vague abstractions and ambiguities in the Pāli texts that continuing to underlie considerable controversy with regards to the intended meanings of the Buddha's teachings.