

The Buddhist Empiricism Thesis: an extensive critique

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ABSTRACT *The purpose of this paper is to critically examine the claim that early Buddhism could be interpreted as an empirical philosophy. Made in a time when verifiable foundations were thought to lend credence to a system of belief, the assertion served to differentiate Buddhism from a "mystical" Hinduism and even to give it a leg up over theistic religions. The position of this paper is that the Buddhist Empiricism Thesis is most certainly false. That position is arrived at via a close examination of Buddhist means to knowledge and doctrinal content, which unfortunately entails taking only the most shallow view of a deep subject matter. This superficiality is no reflection on Buddhist belief, but rather is the necessary effect of refuting empirical claims for beliefs which are much more than merely "verifiable".*

1. Introductory Remarks

The purpose of this paper will be to show that early Buddhism [1] cannot be considered an empirical system of belief. This overall purpose will be accomplished in three parts. First, we will examine the *abhiññā* (higher knowledges) from the classical empirical point of view in order to determine to what extent they can be sources of empirical evidence. Then, any judgement about the *abhiññā* will be suspended in favour of examining the propositions to which they lead from the perspective of the logical positivist. First, the status of *kammavada* (*kamma* = volitional action; *vada* = view) and *samsāra* (cycle of existence, continuity of existence) will be considered. We will then, lastly, examine the doctrines of *dukkha* (suffering, unsatisfactoriness), *anicca* (impermanence), *anattā* (non-substantiality, no-self), *paticca-samuppāda* (dependent origination) and *pañcakkhandā* (the five aggregates).

Let it here be stated that this paper should in no way be construed as an attack on Buddhism. Rather, this paper has been written to refute the specific assertion by Kalupahana [2], Jayatellike [3] and others that early Buddhism constitutes an empirical philosophy which is based on verifiable premises, i.e. the Buddhist Empiricism Thesis. Although the thesis is not generally accepted and has in fact been critiqued quite effectively by philosophers like Hoffman [4] and Kalansuriya [5], it continues to appear in the field of religious studies. [6] By way of its continual reappearance, it would seem that a sort of verity is accruing to the thesis, and thus a more exhaustive critique is called for.

Additionally it should be noted that the school of philosophical thought that gave birth to the notion of verification has fallen somewhat into disrepute among philosophers since the writing of Jayatellike and Kalupahana. Logical positivism, as this school has been called, no longer seems to hold sway over the philosophical community as it once did in the middle part of this century [7]. And although this paper is written from the logical positivist/empirical point of view, this is done solely in order to refute the

Buddhist Empiricism Thesis. This point of view does not necessarily represent that of the author, who happens to believe that Buddhism constitutes a credible belief without resorting to some type of foundationalism.

Support for this paper will come from varied sources. Among the Buddhist scholars cited are David J. Kalupahana, K. N. Jayatellike, Frank J. Hoffman, A.D.P. Kalansuriya, Deegalle Mahinda, Ramakrishna Puligandla, Walpola Rahula, and James P. McDermott. The paper will also draw on the work of the British empirical philosophers John Locke, David Hume, and George Berkeley. The sections on logical positivism rely heavily on the work of A. J. Ayer, but also cite the works of Moritz Schlick, Carl G. Hempel, and Rudolf Carnap.

2. On the Empirical Status of the *Abhiññā*

In this portion of the paper it will be shown that the *abhiññā* (higher knowledges) cannot be sources of empirical evidence, as they are not sources of sense-experience. First, we will examine the work of the classical British empiricists, David Hume, John Locke and George Berkeley, in order to determine the nature of empirical evidence and its relation to the five senses. According to their work we will see that the mind cannot be a source of such evidence. The Buddhist tradition posits the mind as a sense, however, and the *abhiññā* as modes of perception possible for the mind. Thus we will be forced to conclude that the *abhiññā* cannot be a source of empirical evidence.

2.1. According to classical empirical thought, empirical evidence consists of sense-experience which can only occur via the five senses.

Jayatellike [8] quotes from *Runes' Dictionary of Philosophy* to support the notion that empiricism can include "the entire conscious content of the mind and not merely the data of the senses". Under such a broad definition, almost *any* system of belief might be classified as "empirical". For a more concise formulation of empiricism, we turn to the classical British empirical philosophers. To quote Ayer [9], the most famous recent British adherent of the school:

The theory of sense-data has gone out of fashion since the war, but in one form or another it was taken for granted by Descartes, Locke, Berkeley, Hume, Kant, John Stuart Mill, Husserl, G. E. Moore, Bertrand Russell, Moritz Schlick, C. D. Broad and Henry Price, and seriously considered by Rudolf Carnap and Ludwig Wittgenstein

Ayer [10] has this to say concerning the earlier and most notable of these: John Locke, George Berkeley, and David Hume:

... while they may differ in accounts that they give of the nature of sense experience, and still more in the inferences that they draw from them, they all agree that unless it is validly based upon our sense experience we can have no sufficient ground for maintaining any proposition about a matter of fact. And it is for this reason that they are given the title of Empiricists.

Let us then examine what these three have to say concerning the basis of knowledge. Beginning with Locke, we find a reduction of all thinking into types. According to Locke [11], "all ideas come from sensation or reflection". Sensation "depends solely on our senses", while reflection is an operation of our mind, which can be an internal sense

“only as the mind gets by reflecting on its own operations within itself”. [12] Locke lists the five commonly accepted senses but does admit the possibility of others; however he implies that these would stand outside our “notice, imagination, and conception”. [13]

Berkeley [14] makes a similar division of ideas into (a) those actually imprinted on the senses, (b) those perceived by attending to the passions and operations of the mind, and (c) those formed by the help of memory and imagination, either compounding or dividing or barely representing those perceived under (a) or (b). Once again, we find the division between the operations of the mind and the senses.

Hume [15] divides all perceptions of the human mind into impressions and ideas, of which the former are sensations, passions and emotions, and the latter are the faint images of the former in thinking and reasoning. We are left with little doubt that by sensations, Hume is referring to the information available from the five senses [16]. Thus again the five senses are here indicated as the source of knowledge, considered separately from the operations of the mind.

The later empiricists and logical positivists, notably the so-called Vienna Circle of Moritz Schlick, Rudolf Carnap, Otto Neurath, and others, considered themselves the philosophical descendants of Hume [17]. Ayer also states that he makes the Humean distinction between relations of ideas (i.e. that which is analytical) and matters of fact (i.e. that which is empirical) in *Language Truth and Logic* [18], which is arguably the most influential work of modern empiricism in the English language. For Ayer, that which is empirical must be relevant to some sense-experience or possible sense-experience, whereas that which is analytical is not relevant to any sense-experience [19].

Hence it is apparent that empirical evidence can only be sense-experience which is limited to the data acquired by the five senses (Locke, Berkeley, and Hume), sometimes associated with emotion (Hume and Berkeley only). This distinction between sense-experience and the operations of the mind is essential to empirical thinking, and continues to be an important distinction in the logical positivist tradition.

2.2. For the empiricist the mind is not a sense

As we have seen under the previous premise, the crucial distinction for any empiricist is between sense-data and the operations of the mind. Exactly what constitute the operations of the mind? Locke [20] lists perception, retention, discerning, compounding, naming, abstracting, and method; these are the bases of simple ideas, of which complex ideas are comprised. In perception, for example, a person’s mind is only passively reflecting on impressions, that is, “reflecting on what he does himself, when he sees, hears, feels, etc.” [21]. Hence the raw material of perception is sense-experience. The others are mental operations which likewise operate only with what is given by sense-experience.

Hume also posits the same relation between the operations of the mind, which he calls ideas, and sense-data, which he calls impressions. Accordingly he states “That all our simple ideas in their first appearance, are derived from simple impressions, which are correspondent to them, and which they exactly represent”, and concludes that “all the objects of human reason or enquiry can be divided into two kinds, to wit, *Relations of Ideas* and *Matters of Fact*” [22]. Relations of ideas take place in the mind, while matters of fact are based on experience [23]. As we have already seen, Berkeley makes the same sort of division between sense-data and operations of the mind.

For these British empiricists the mind can only manipulate that which is received through the five senses; thus the mind is not a sense, but rather a processor of data.

Ayer and the later logical positivists avoided these psychological distinctions and confined themselves to classifying *propositions* as matters of fact or matters of analysis, regardless of the manner in which they were obtained [24].

2.3. *The abhiññā are modes of perception within the mind for the Buddhist*

In Buddhist tradition, humans have six sense organs: ears, eyes, nose, body (touch), tongue, and mind.

A word about what is meant by the term ‘Mind’ (*manas*) in Buddhist philosophy may be useful here. It should be clearly understood that mind is not spirit as opposed to matter ... Mind is only a faculty or organ (*indriya*) like the eye or the ear. It can be controlled and developed like any other faculty ... [25].

Thus under this formulation, ideas are simply mind-objects in the sense that sounds are hearing-objects. Additionally, the mind has certain modes of perception called the *abhiññā* (higher knowledges) which allow it to extend beyond the perception possible with the other five senses. Jayatellike [26] lists the *abhiññā* as follows:

1. *iddhividha-*, i.e. psychokinesis (levitation, etc).
2. *dibbasotadhātu*, i.e. clairaudience.
3. *cetapariyañāna-*, i.e. telepathic knowledge.
4. *pubbenivāsānussatiñāna-*, i.e. retrocognitive knowledge.
5. *dibbacakkhu*, i.e. clairvoyance; also known as *cutūpapātañāna* ... knowledge of the decease and survival of beings.
6. *āsavakkhayañāna-*, i.e. knowledge of the destruction of defiling impulses.

As Jayatellike points out, (1) is not a cognitive function, but an ability. Since the Buddhist Empiricism Thesis addresses the basis of knowledge and not ability, we shall ignore (1). In Jayatellike’s words, (2) is an “expansion of auditory perception (without the medium of the sense-organ) ... The other four forms of the *abhiññā*, it will be noticed, are called specific forms of knowledge (*ñāna-*)” [27]. Apparently then, (2) constitutes a means to sense-experience while (3)–(6) are means to knowledge already formed, all of which are somehow received directly into the mind, circumventing the five senses. According to Kalupahana [28], “... the extrasensory perceptions have their corresponding objects, and these objects are not perceived by the normal senses. The difference between the two forms of perception seems to be a difference in the degree of penetration.” In actuality, as Kalansuriya [29] has pointed out, because the *abhiññā* are achieved through meditation which involves shutting off the five senses, these higher knowledges can *only* be perceived through the mind.

2.4. *The abhiññā must be outside the scope of the five senses*

This follows from premises (2.2) and (2.3). It should be obvious at this point that any knowledge gained by the *abhiññā* circumvents the organs of the five senses and allows entrance directly into the mind of knowledge already formed as in the case of *abhiññā* (3)–(6), or of sense-data as in the case of *abhiññā*(2).

2.5. *The abhiññā therefore cannot be sources of empirical evidence, i.e. sense-experience.*

This follows from premises (2.1) and (2.4). As we have seen, the classical British empirical thinkers consider sense-experience to be the source of empirical evidence, and possible only through the five senses. Locke in particular considers the possibility of another sense beyond our comprehension. Thus empirical thinking places the mind in a position only to process sense-experience, not manufacture knowledge or produce its own sense-experience.

It may be alleged that Hume and Berkeley allowed for emotional sense-experience without an obvious organ of sensation through which it enters. While true, this allegation cannot provide an inlet for the knowledge of the *abhiññā* to the mind. If we take Hume and Berkeley in a very liberal interpretation to be saying that there is a way in which some sensations can enter the mind without a corresponding organ [30] then we still have not opened up the possibility of cognitive knowledge entering the mind already formed, for all ideas must be based on some sense-experience, according to the empirical view. This admittedly liberal formulation would therefore still rule out the possibility of *abhiññā* (3)–(6). Only clairaudience would then be a possibility. However, I must note that no empiricist that I am aware of ever wrote concerning the possibility of an extraordinary sense of hearing without the benefit of the ears, nor is it likely that the Buddha *overheard* the knowledge he received during his enlightenment. If, on the other hand, we take Hume and Berkeley to be saying that we have an internal sense of emotion through which affective sensation is possible, then not one of *abhiññā* (2)–(6) will fit, so to speak, through this organ. Clairaudience is not a specifically affective sense, and the rest concern knowledge already formed which has more than just emotional content.

One may, after these discussions, assert that all this really amounts to is a difference in the definition of 'mind'; can't the problem be resolved by redefining terms or using a neutral terminology? This assertion very neatly captures the main point of contention without actually resolving it. As long as we stick to the formulation of Hume, Berkeley, and Locke, there is simply no place for *extra*-sensory perception in a coherent theory based only upon sensory evidence.

We are therefore forced to conclude that classical empirical thought precludes the possibility of empirical evidence being obtained through the *abhiññā*, based on the work of Hume, Berkeley, and Locke. To reiterate, the argument ran as follows: (2.1) According to classical empirical thought, empirical evidence consists of sense-experience which can only occur via the five senses. (2.2) For the empiricist the mind is not a sense. (2.3) The *abhiññā* are modes of perception within the mind for the Buddhist. (2.4) The *abhiññā* must be outside the scope of the five senses. (2.5) The *abhiññā* therefore cannot be sources of empirical evidence, i.e. sense-experience.

3. On the Verification of *Kammavada* and *Samsāra*

We will now show that neither *samsāra* (cycle of existence, continuity of existence), nor *kammavada* (*kamma* = volitional action; *vada* = view) are empirically verifiable from the perspective of modern logical positivism. We will first adduce evidence that the non-empirical status of the *abhiññā* may be disregarded, so that we may instead consider the propositions which embody *kammavada* and *samsāra*. Next we will note that *samsāra* presupposes planes of existence which cannot be experienced by human beings, thereby making it unverifiable. Finally, we will see that *kammavada* rests on

certain ethical valuations and exhortations to moral behaviour which are likewise unverifiable. Thus we will be forced to admit that neither doctrine would be accepted by a logical positivist as verifiable.

Although the early British empiricists would have rejected the claim that Buddhism constitutes an empirical philosophy due to its extra-sensory sources of knowledge, i.e. the *abhiññā*; modern logical positivists, notably A.J. Ayer, avoided such “psychological empiricism”. The more modern emphasis was on the nature of propositions, regardless of origin. Thus it was not the sources of knowledge which were critiqued by the logical positivists, but rather the type of knowledge that is produced. In the words of Ayer [31] “... one cannot overthrow a system of transcendent metaphysics merely by criticizing the way in which it comes into being. What is required is rather a criticism of the nature of the actual statements that comprise it.” Carnap [32] supports this view, as well:

Every method of inquiry is justified; disputes can arise only over the question of the purpose and fruitfulness of a given method, which is a question our problem does not involve. We may apply any method we choose; we cannot, however, interpret the obtained sentences as we choose. The meaning of a sentence, no matter how obtained, can unequivocally be determined by a logical analysis of the way in which it is derived and tested. ... If A's protocol sentence p_2 were not subject to a physical interpretation, it could not be tested by B, and would, thus, be meaningless to B.

We return to Ayer [33], who echoes Carnap's formulation:

We do not deny a priori that the mystic is able to discover truths by his own special methods. We wait to hear what are the propositions which embody his discoveries, in order to see whether they are verified or confuted by our empirical observations.

Ayer goes on in that passage to express supreme doubt over whether the mystic can produce any intelligible propositions. To those propositions we now turn our attention—that is, the doctrines of which the *abhiññā* provide knowledge: *kammavada* and *samsāra* [34].

3.1. Samsāra posits planes of existence beyond the human

Samsāra consists of a world-view where beings are reborn into various *gati* (realms of existence, rebirth stations). These *gati* are, in ascending order: (1) *niraya*, purgatory or hell; (2) *tiracchānayoṇi*, brute creatures, the realm of animals; (3) *pettivisaya*, the world of shades and hungry ghosts; (4) *manussā*, men, human existence; and (5) *devā*, the gods, heavenly existence [35]. It should be quite obvious that, except for (4), these realms are beyond the experience of human beings *qua* human beings. Although one may contend that humans in former lives *did* experience these realms, propositions of the type, “I was a hungry ghost” seem to deny the possibility of any objective human test of verification. And if one contends that one need only practice meditation to acquire the *abhiññā* so that the proposition can be verified [36], then this puts the objective investigator in the odd position of having to become an adherent of a system of belief in order to objectively test a proposition. Even if we allow this in theory, there is no guarantee of confutability in practice, as Hoffman has pointed out [37].

3.2. Planes of existence beyond the human are not empirically verifiable

This premise follows from the discussion under (3.1). Given the impossibility of an objective test, and in the absence of any clear idea of what would count as a counter-instance for propositions like “I was a hungry ghost”, we must judge *samsāra* to embody propositions that are not confutable in human experience.

One may object, however, that “there is rebirth” might itself be a verifiable proposition. One may address this objection in the following two ways. First, as Hoffman [38] has noted, this proposition does not occur as a claim in any of the standard Buddhist schemas (e.g. the four noble truths), except perhaps as a reminder. Thus it is more a presupposition of Buddhist belief, and not a separately distinguishable belief in and of itself. As a background belief, reincarnation [39] in some form exists in nearly all early Indian systems (Hinduism and Buddhism, to name two). Thus “the question for the vast majority of schools and thinkers was not whether this sort of thing occurred, but how to precisely articulate what was generally supposed to be the case” [40]. Considered in this manner, it should be clear that any verification of reincarnation *per se* would not be material to Buddhist belief [41]. This naturally leads us to the second way in which the objection may be treated, which consists in recognizing what is specifically Buddhist about rebirth. In the Buddhist paradigm, rebirth is merely a mechanism within *samsāra*. What makes it specifically Buddhist are: the rebirth stations, the rules which govern the assignment of rebirth stations, and that which is reborn [42]. Propositions concerning rebirth stations within *samsāra* have already been judged not verifiable. The rules which govern the assignment of rebirth stations occur within *kammavada*, which will be addressed under (3.3) and (3.4), below. That which is reborn will be addressed in part 4 of this paper.

Kalansuriya [43] has contended that Buddhist rebirth is unverifiable because it is really an ethical theory. He argues that rebirth only has meaning within the Buddhist paradigm—a closed system out of which one cannot arbitrarily export words without loss of meaning. Although I agree with this last statement, it will be shown shortly that it is not rebirth itself which is ethical, but its doctrinal milieu: *kammavada* [44]. Kalansuriya has merely lumped the mechanism of rebirth together with the rules which govern its occurrence.

From these discussions it should now be clear that even the attempt to verify that a person has lived previous lives cannot be relevant to the verification of Buddhist *dhamma* (doctrine, teaching) taken as a complete system, or as a subsystem (e.g. *samsāra*), any more than it is relevant to verifying any other belief which presupposes some kind of reincarnation [45]. This would verify the mechanism without verifying the system of belief which presupposes it.

3.3. *Kammavada* is predicated on certain ethical valuations, and is combined with exhortations to moral behaviour

Now we will examine *kammavada* in order to make note of its ethical nature. Few informed people would doubt that Buddhism, as a system of thought, entails ethical valuations which derive their meaning entirely within the Buddhist paradigm—in spite of the efforts of the “pop philosophers” to import words like *karma* (*Skt.*, volitional action; *Pāli.*, *kamma*) into Western thinking. It remains only to be shown then, that *kammavada* is itself an ethical doctrine.

Kammavada entails a strict causation of the effects of volitional acts; *kusala* (whole-

some, skilful) acts in general lead to certain consequences; *akusala* (unwholesome, unskilful) acts lead to consequences opposite in nature.

Volition may relatively be good or bad, just as desire may relatively be good or bad. So karma may be good or bad relatively. Good karma (*kusala*) produces good effects, and bad karma (*akusala*) produces bad effects. 'Thirst', volition, karma, whether good or bad, has one force as its effect: force to continue—to continue in a good or bad direction. Whether good or bad it is relative, and is within the cycle of continuity (*samsāra*) [46].

Obviously *kusala* and *akusala* are evaluative terms and they relate to rebirth within *samsāra*, but what is the exact nature of the relationship? According to Mahinda [47], "Moral and skillful (*kusala*) actions ultimately lead to final liberation by freeing humanity from suffering, *kamma*, and the cycle of birth and death". It would seem, then, that *kusala* acts lead ultimately to Buddhism's *summum bonum*: *nibbāna* (Ultimate Truth, literally: blowing out), whereas *akusala* acts lead to further rebirth. The noble eightfold path is the formulation given by the Buddha for the attainment of *nibbāna*, and within this path *sīla* (morality) is one of the principle modes aimed at overcoming the negative dispositions of the individual which cause *akusala* acts [48]. Thus *kusala* and *akusala* are ethical valuations of acts according to *kammavada*, which are the determining factors of rebirth within *samsāra*.

The concepts *puñña* (merit) and *pāpa* (demerit) also play important roles in *kammavada*. According to Mahinda [49], there is a subtle difference between *puñña* and *kusala* acts: *kusala* acts determine whether one is to be liberated from *samsāra*, while *puñña* determines the rebirth station and circumstances after rebirth within *samsāra* [50]. Once again, *puñña* and *pāpa* are valuations of acts determined within the Buddhist ethical system.

We can therefore conclude that *kammavada* entails a causality predicated on valuations that are distinctive to Buddhism. When Kalupahana [51] writes of the Buddha "with his paranormal clairvoyant vision he sees beings dying and others being reborn, the low and the high, the fair and the ugly, the good and the evil each according to his karma", we now can conclude that the Buddha's vision was an ethical one.

We may also note that the Buddha's discourse, insofar as it espouses an ethical system, also consists of exhortations to moral virtue. As we have seen, Buddhism's *kammavada* is predicated on certain ethical valuations; thus the way prescribed by the Buddha was in an all-important sense an ethical path to *nibbāna*: the eightfold noble path. In Jayatilleke's words [52]: "The method of verification of the Four Noble Truths is stated in detail in a number of similar passages which recur throughout the *Nikāyas*. Briefly, it consists in the practice of the virtuous life." Kalansuriya [53] also concludes that the noble eightfold path is a set of instructions, which "are in the direction of exhortation to moral virtue ...".

It is apparent that the Buddha's discourse consists not only of value judgements of actions, but also embodies an invitation to accept these valuations and to behave in a certain way; in effect it is an exhortation to join the Buddhist's moral valuation.

3.4. Ethical valuations and exhortations to moral behavior are not empirically verifiable

We now return to the logical positivists in order to see to what extent an ethical theory can be empirical. Ayer [54] has made some distinctions between types of ethical propositions:

- [1] There are, first of all, propositions which express definitions of ethical terms, or judgements about the legitimacy or possibility of certain definitions. [2] Secondly, there are propositions describing the phenomena of moral experience, and their causes. [3] Thirdly, there are exhortations to moral virtue. [4] And lastly, there are actual ethical judgements.

It is interesting to note that the Buddhist Empiricism Thesis and the thesis of this paper both fall under propositions of type [1], and therefore constitute what Ayer believes to be the proper area of ethical philosophy. According to Ayer, propositions of type [2] fall within the purvey of psychology or sociology. That the Buddha's discourse is comprised of statements which fall under [3] and [4] has already been shown under (3.3), above. As regards statements of type [3], Ayer [55] has this to say:

The exhortations to moral virtue are not propositions at all, but ejaculations or commands which are designed to provoke the reader [or listener] to action of a certain sort. Accordingly, they do not belong to any branch of philosophy or science.

Thus the exhortations do not qualify as propositions, let alone empirical propositions; but what of the ethical judgements? Ayer treats these at length in *Language Truth and Logic* [56]. We must conclude that the ethical judgements we have seen in *kammavada* fall under what Ayer calls an "absolutist" view of ethics. Although Walpola Rahula termed these judgements "relative" [57], we can clearly see from the following phrase in *Language Truth and Logic* [58] that Ayer is speaking of the ethical judgements as described within *kammavada*:

... the "absolutist" view of ethics—that is the view that statements of value are not controlled by observation, as ordinary empirical observations are, but only by a mysterious "intellectual intuition". A feature of this theory, which is seldom recognized by its advocates, is that it makes statements of value unverifiable.

Ayer [59] concludes that such valuations add nothing empirical to a statement and therefore serve only to communicate an emotive value. We have been forced to rely on A.J. Ayer's work very heavily here only because, in the main, the logical positivists did not delve into ethical theory. The one exception to this is the work of Moritz Schlick; his work mainly examines ethical theories which embody type [1] and [2] propositions, as laid out by Ayer, above [60].

One might argue against Ayer's analysis, saying that one only need acquire the *abhiññā* in order to verify the valuations; however this line of thinking has already been critiqued under (3.1), above (see especially note 37). This inability to test moral experience falls right in line with Ayer's [61] thinking:

We should not certainly be justified in denying *a priori* the possibility of moral experience. But this does not mean that we recognize that there is any ground for inferring the existence of an ideal objective world of values. It is necessary to say this because the use of "God" or "value" as a designation of the content of a certain kind of experience often misleads people into thinking that they are entitled to draw such inferences; and we must make it clear that in admitting the possibility of such experiences we are not also upholding the conclusions which are illegitimately drawn from them.

We have tried to show that neither the form nor the validity of basic propositions is dependent merely on convention.

Hence the conventions of Buddhism cannot verify themselves by bootstrapping. Either the *abhiññā* must be sources of empirical evidence, or the propositions to which they lead must be confutable in experience. Each cannot rest on the claim of the other.

The ethical/evaluative nature of *kammavada* can clearly be seen in the work of Kalupahana [62] and Jayatellike [63] who both recount the fact, as recorded in the *Pāli* cannon, that the Buddha criticised the recluse or brahmin who during meditation sees what the Buddha sees, but draws a different conclusion concerning the effects of *kamma*. This fact argues very strongly in favour of the subjective-evaluative nature of the Buddha's insight. That those recluses and brahmins may have drawn their conclusions on insufficient evidence is itself an ethical valuation of which and how many actions count, and how the actions are to be weighted relative to each other in the evaluation of effect according to *kammavada*.

Is the more limited notion of Buddhist causation verifiable? We note that causation within *kammavada* posits a law-like relation between volitional acts and effects on rebirth and the rebirth station (see (3.3), above). Rahula gives an account of rebirth and *kammavada* that lists the "four Nutriments (*āhāra*) in the sense of 'cause' or 'condition' necessary for the existence and continuity of beings ..." [64].

Kammavada is the theory of cause and effect, of action and reaction; it is a natural law, which has nothing to do with the idea of justice or reward and punishment. Every volitional action produces its effects or results ... This is not difficult to understand. But what is difficult is that, according to the karma theory, the effects of a volitional action may continue to manifest themselves even in a life after death [65].

As Kalansuriya [66] has pointed out, Buddhist causality-talk occurs specifically on a human-action ethical level, entirely within the *dhamma* (teaching, moral code), and has no repercussions outside the Buddhist language-game.

In fact, we may make a similar argument against treating causation separately from *kammavada* as we did previously against the separate treatment of rebirth and *samsāra*. Causation has, in one form or another, been a part of many philosophical and religious systems; what makes causation in this case specifically Buddhist? We see that (a) it presupposes a law-like causal relation; (b) the causes are based on the evaluation of volitional acts; and (c) the effects are upon the manner and type of rebirth. Upon inspection, we note that (b) is subsumed under *kammavada*, and (c) is subsumed under *samsāra*, leaving only (a)—that it is a law of universal causation. Thus Buddhist causation, stripped of its environment, is really a mechanism that only acquires its full meaning within *kammavada* and *samsāra*. Hence acceptance of causation *per se* does not entail acceptance of the Buddhist *dhamma* (teaching, doctrine) in which it occurs [67].

3.5. Therefore, neither *kammavada* nor *samsāra* can be considered empirically verifiable

This follows from (3.1), (3.2), (3.3), and (3.4).

Thus we have seen that neither *samsāra* nor *kammavada* are empirically verifiable. To recapitulate the argument: (3.1) *Samsāra* posits planes of existence beyond the human. (3.2) Planes of existence beyond the human are not empirically verifiable [68]. (3.3)

Kammavada is predicated on certain ethical valuations and is combined with exhortations to moral behaviour. (3.4) Ethical valuations and exhortations to moral behaviour are not empirically verifiable. (3.5) Therefore, neither *kammavada* nor *samsāra* can be considered empirically verifiable.

4. On the Verification of Dependent Origination, The Five Aggregates, Impermanence, Suffering and Non-Substantiality

In this final portion of the paper, the doctrines of suffering (*dukkha*), non-substantiality (*anattā*), impermanence (*anicca*), dependent origination (*paticca-samuppāda*), and the five aggregates (*pañcakkhandā*) will be shown to be empirically unverifiable. Once again, we will take the logical positivist's view that any mode of investigation is justified. We may thereby disregard the status of the *abhiññā* in favour of examining the propositions which embody the doctrines of the five aggregates, dependent origination, suffering, non-substantiality, and impermanence. We will then show that the five aggregates are merely definitions of experienced reality, and that dependent origination posits a relation between the aggregates which cannot be verified. Next, we will determine the doctrine of impermanence to also be unverifiable. Finally, non-substantiality and suffering will be found to be vitally dependent on the previous doctrines, making them unverifiable as well.

As mentioned, we once again take the logical positivist's view that only propositions may be verified in experience, regardless of their origin. Thus we again disregard the extra-sensory nature of the *abhiññā* in order to examine the doctrines of the five aggregates, dependent origination, suffering, non-substantiality, and impermanence [69].

4.1. The doctrine of the five aggregates (*pañcakkhandā*) amounts to a definition of things experienced

In the Buddhist view, the doctrine of the five aggregates presents a comprehensive typology of experience. According to Kalupahana [70]:

Here [in the *Sabba-Sutta*] a contemporary of the Buddha, a philosopher named Janussoni, questions him with regard to "everything", that is, the metaphysical question as to what constitutes "everything" in this universe. The Buddha's immediate response is that "everything" means eye, form, ear, sound, nose, odor, tongue, taste, body, tangible objects, mind, and mental objects or concepts. In short, "everything" consists of the six senses and the corresponding objects.

Kalupahana continues on in that passage to give the Buddha's view that all else is beyond the realm of experience. The five aggregates constitute these six senses [71] and their six corresponding objects under various aspects of human experience. These aspects are as follows [72]: (i) The aggregate of matter, including the four great elements (solidity, fluidity, heat, and motion) and the derivatives of the five material sense organs and their corresponding objects, and also some ideas/concepts. This is the realm of matter, both external and internal. (ii) The aggregate of sensation—pleasant, unpleasant, and neutral—as experienced through the six senses and their corresponding objects. This realm includes all physical and mental sensations. (iii) The aggregate of perception, also including the six senses and their corresponding objects. This is the

faculty of recognition. (iv) The aggregate of mental formations, including all volitional activities [73]. *Kamma* (volitional action) comes under this heading, as well as 52 mental activities which can produce *kamma* effects, such as will, concentration, ignorance, etc. Once again, mental activities are broken down into those associated with each of the six senses and their corresponding objects in the physical and mental world. (v) The aggregate of consciousness, which is purely a non-reflective awareness (note: recognition is under aggregate (iii).) This realm includes consciousness of the six senses and their corresponding objects.

Disregarding any thoughts concerning the efficacy of this system, we clearly see an attempt to classify all experience into types. This classification amounts to a series of definitions or conventions for the purpose of exhaustively enumerating all possible experience. Whether or not the five aggregates are exhaustive is immaterial for our purposes here; we need only note that, as definitions, these classifications add nothing empirical to that which is classified.

4.2. *Definitions are not empirically verifiable*

We have already seen that A.J. Ayer follows Hume in the bifurcation of all propositions into “matters of fact”, i.e. the empirical, and “relations of ideas”, i.e. the analytical. And, as has been noted, the *definiens* adds nothing empirical to its *definiendum*; hence definitions fall into the category of analytical knowledge. In Ayer’s words [74]:

... I maintain that the reason why [analytic] propositions cannot be confuted in experience is that they do not make any assertion about the empirical world, but simply record our determination to use symbols in a certain fashion.

Ayer amended this statement slightly in the introduction to the 1946 edition of *Language Truth and Logic*; he defends his formulation against the charge that the facts of linguistic usage may be empirical [75]:

Just as it is a mistake to identify *a priori* propositions with empirical propositions about language, so I now think that it is a mistake to say that they are themselves linguistic rules. For apart from the fact that they can properly be said to be true, which linguistic rules cannot, they are distinguished also by being necessary, whereas linguistic rules are arbitrary. At the same time, if they are necessary it is only because the relevant linguistic rules are presupposed.

The formulation and implications of definitions are the proper stations of analytic philosophy, in Ayer’s eyes [76]. Thus the five aggregates form the part of the necessary philosophical ground of Buddhist doctrine. As such, verification is not only impossible, but inapplicable.

4.3. *Dependent origination (paticca-samuppāda) posits a peculiar connection between the five aggregates, which is not empirically verifiable*

The doctrine of dependent origination (sometimes known as conditioned genesis) appears in a short form and a long form in the *Pāli* canon. Rahula [77] gives a translation of the short form as follows:

When this is, that is
 This arising, that arises
 When this is not, that is not
 This ceasing, that ceases. [78]

The longer version replaces the this/that formulation with specific aggregates as follows [79]: ignorance [aggregate (iv)]; dispositions/*kamma* formations [aggregate (iv)]; consciousness [aggregate (v)]; mental and physical phenomena/psychophysical personality [aggregate (i)]; the six senses [all aggregates]; sensorial and mental contact [aggregate (iii)]; sensation/feeling [aggregate (ii)]; desire/thirst/craving [aggregate (iv)]; clinging/grasping [aggregate (iv)]; becoming, birth, and old age/death/lamentation/decay/pain/suffering etc. [all aggregates?]. They stand in a peculiar relationship, variously translated as “X conditions Y” [80], and “dependent on X, Y arises” [81]. As is evident from the shorter version quoted above, “when X ceases, Y ceases” also holds.

The relations inherent in dependent origination might be interpreted in various ways, for instance as an inductively arrived at causal law. “While individual instances of causal happening were verified on the basis of experience, both sensory and extrasensory, the uniformity of the causal law was reached through inductive inference based on these experiences” [82]. Kalupahana [83] later qualified this assertion, noting that the tense of the verb “to arise” indicates something that “has occurred”, hence no eventual counter-example is specifically excluded (which puts the doctrine more in line with scientific inductive inference). Additionally, Kalupahana cautions that the elements related should not be viewed as absolutely distinct items, substantially conjoined by causation. Rather, the essence of dependent origination is that these elements cannot be considered independently as they are invariably connected. Whether one considers the doctrine of dependent origination an invariant causal law or an inductive inference based on experience, one is left with a rather interesting proposition: these elements always arise together, and when these elements cease, they also cease together. Unfortunately, this proposition is not subject to an empirical test, as some of the elements which cease are precisely those elements necessary for gathering sense-data: sensation, perception and consciousness! [84] To once again resort to the *abhiññā* for verification is useless in this instance, as these are modes of perception of the mind which is one of the elements which would cease. Perhaps we might instead search for an instance in which one or some of the elements cease while others continue; but here again we run into problems because certain of the terms are not empirically defined, e.g. ignorance and craving, while others occur in the future or past, e.g. birth and death. Kalansuriya [85] has deemed the relations in dependent origination to be necessary/moral relations on this basis and in light of the fact that *kamma* formations arise and cease as a result of the arising and ceasing of the rest [86].

Even if one sticks to Kalupahana’s original argument in favor of their necessary nature, they still remain unverifiable. The one principle on which the logical positivists agreed is that empirical propositions may be probable but never sure, while necessary truths are purely analytical and unverifiable [87].

Ramakrishna Puligandla [88] asserts that the doctrine is actually an *a priori* truth (in the Kantian sense) and that it is based on phenomenological insight:

The insight is available to anyone who is phenomenologically astute, and, needless to say, one can be taught and enabled to command the insight oneself. There is nothing mysterious, metaphysical, theological, or supersensible about the insight. It is through and through phenomenological. And

once it is clearly understood as to what is [sic] for anything to exist—to be a phenomenon—the doctrine becomes an analytic truth, but not in the trivial sense. Rigorously, the doctrine becomes a tautology.

If the doctrine is taken to be certain, then we may agree with the final sentence of the passage; however, it is difficult to see how one can gain a phenomenological insight into, e.g. birth and death, as these are beyond memorable experience.

4.4. *The doctrine of impermanence (anicca) is not empirically verifiable*

The notion that all things are impermanent is one of the central themes of Buddhism; much of the Buddha's teaching including the four noble truths rests on this principle [89].

According to Buddhism, the Absolute Truth is that there is nothing absolute in the world, that everything is relative, conditioned and impermanent, and that there is no unchanging, everlasting, absolute substance like Self, Soul.... [90]

If we take the doctrine to be synonymous with the proposition “everything is impermanent”, then it becomes unfalsifiable, for we would have to find at least one instance of a permanent thing. Thus phrased, no counter-example is possible in the constant progression of time. If we instead interpret the doctrine to mean “there is no permanent, unchanging substance, nothing passes from one moment to the next” [91] then the doctrine becomes tautological. Our notion of time is conditioned by change and vice versa. In science, the direction of time is determined by the positive change in entropy which represents a change in the organisation of the universe. In that sense, time is always passing because the universe is constantly changing. Thus the doctrine becomes logically equivalent to the proposition “time passes”. To assert the doctrine of impermanence in this sense is to assert an unfalsifiable statement, as a counter-example to “time passes” is not within sensory experience [92]. It would seem that under either interpretation, the doctrine of impermanence is not empirically verifiable.

4.5. *Hence, neither the doctrine of impermanence, dependent origination, nor the five aggregates is empirically verifiable*

This follows from (4.1), (4.2), (4.3), (4.4) and (4.5).

4.6. *The doctrine of suffering (dukkha) is a value-judgement based on impermanence, the five aggregates and dependent origination*

The first noble truth of Buddhism states that everything is *dukkha*, which is variously translated as suffering, pain, and unsatisfactoriness. Subtle differences may be discerned in the application of the word *dukkha*, however. In this vein, Rahula [93] distinguishes: “(1) *dukkha* as ordinary suffering, (2) *dukkha* as produced by change, and (3) *dukkha* as conditioned states” [94]. The power of the Buddhist Way to the Cessation of *Dukkha* (the fourth noble truth) rests on ending not only ordinary everyday suffering, but the more profound suffering that is caused by the impermanence and the dependent nature of all things. In Kalupahana's terms,

Yet none of these factors could be considered permanent and eternal; all are

liable to change, transformation, and destruction—in brief, they are impermanent (*anicca*). As such, whatever satisfaction one can gain from them or through them will also be limited. Often such satisfaction can turn into dissatisfaction. Hence the Buddha looked upon them as being unsatisfactory (*dukkha*) [95].

Rahula [96] connects not only impermanence, but the conditioned states (that which is dependently arisen) to *dukkha*:

A happy feeling, a happy condition in life, is not permanent, not everlasting. It changes sooner or later. When it changes, it produces pain, suffering, unhappiness. This vicissitude is included in *dukkha* as suffering produced by change ... the third form of *dukkha* as conditioned states is the most important philosophical aspect of the First Noble Truth ... The Buddha says: 'in short these five aggregates of attachment are *dukkha*'.

Thus, *dukkha* may be seen as a value judgement produced by the following argument:

- (1) All things in the universe consist of the five aggregates.
 - (2) That which consists of the five aggregates is impermanent and arises dependently.
 - (3) That which is impermanent and arises dependently is suffering.
- ∴ All things in the universe are suffering.

It is arguable whether proposition (3) is empirical; however, the fact that propositions (1) and (2) are not verifiable has been shown in (4.6), above.

4.7. *The doctrine of non-substantiality (anattā) logically follows from impermanence, the five aggregates and dependent origination.*

Non-substantiality properly is the doctrine of no-self or no-soul, which asserts that there is no permanent substantial self which exists from one moment to the next or from one life to the next. As is evident, this follows from impermanence, dependent origination and the nature of the five aggregates, as Rahula [97] corroborates: "The doctrine of *Anattā* or No-Soul is the natural result of, or the corollary to, the analysis of the Five Aggregates and the teaching of Conditioned Genesis (*Paticca-samuppāda*)". Thus the argument might proceed as follows:

- (1) All things in the universe consist of the five aggregates.
 - (2) That which consists of the five aggregates is impermanent and arises dependently.
 - (3) I am a thing in the universe
- ∴ I am impermanent and arise dependently
- Corollary:* There is no permanent, unconditioned me.

As before, the argument rests on propositions (1) and (2): the doctrines of the five aggregates, impermanence, and dependent origination, which are not verifiable.

4.8. *Therefore, neither the doctrines of non-substantiality nor suffering is empirically verifiable*

This follows from (4.5), (4.6) and (4.7). As both doctrines logically follow from other doctrines which have been shown to be unverifiable, they too are unverifiable.

Thus it has been shown that the doctrines of dependent origination, the five aggregates, suffering, impermanence, and non-substantiality are not empirically verifiable. The argument consisted of the following: (4.1) The doctrine of the five aggregates (*pañcakkhandā*) amounts to a definition of things experienced. (4.2) Definitions are not empirically verifiable. (4.3) Dependent origination (*paticca-samuppāda*) posits a peculiar connection between the five aggregates which is not empirically verifiable. (4.4) The doctrine of impermanence (*anicca*) is not empirically verifiable. (4.5) Hence, neither the doctrine of impermanence, dependent origination, nor the five aggregates is empirically verifiable. (4.6) The doctrine of suffering (*dukkha*) is a value-judgement based on impermanence, the five aggregates, and dependent origination. (4.7) The doctrine of non-substantiality (*anattā*) logically follows from impermanence, the five aggregates and dependent origination. (4.8) Therefore, neither the doctrine of non-substantiality nor suffering is empirically verifiable.

5. Concluding Remarks

During the course of this paper, some of the major doctrines of Buddhism were shown to be empirically unverifiable. The *abhiññā* failed to qualify as a source of empirical evidence from a classical empirical point of view. After considering the status of the propositions contained in *kammavada* and *samsāra*, we found them both to embody non-empirical assertions concerning human existence. The doctrines of *dukkha*, *anicca*, and *anattā*, *paticca-samuppāda*, and *pañcakkhandā* likewise contained propositions which were not empirically verifiable. On the basis of these determinations, we may say that Buddhism is not an empirical system, nor should it be construed as such where any of these doctrines is applied, thus refuting the Buddhist Empiricism Thesis. This judgement in no way maligns Buddhism, but rather should prevent Buddhist doctrines from being extrapolated into the realm of empirical philosophy. This extrapolation was perhaps attempted in order to lend a certain credibility to Buddhism; however, this is unnecessary as Buddhism is sufficiently credible *qua* religious belief. Moreover, making this kind of extrapolation seems to inevitably lead to a superficialisation of complex systems of belief, as the superficial treatment Buddhist doctrines have received in this paper shows. And this is not to say that experience plays no role in Buddhism, however misplaced the label "empirical" may be. Uphadhaya [98] notes that the Buddha associated himself with the experientialists of Indian philosophy as opposed to the traditionalists and rationalists, citing the *Majjhima-nikāya* II.211. We should also note that Hoffman [99] has argued that not only experience, but faith too enters into Buddhism as a concept of importance to the adherent [100].

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NOTES

- [1] Buddhism of the five *Pāli Nikāyas*. The *Pāli* language terms will accordingly be used throughout the article.
- [2] KALUPAHANA, DAVID J. (1976) *Buddhist Philosophy: a historical analysis* (Honolulu, The University of Hawaii Press).
- [3] JAYATELLIKE, K.N. (1980) *Early Buddhist Theory of Knowledge* (Delhi, Motilal Banarsidass).

- [4] HOFFMAN, FRANK J. (1982) The Buddhist empiricism thesis, *Religious Studies*, 18, pp. 151–158.
 HOFFMAN, FRANK J. (1987) *Rationality and Mind in Early Buddhism* (Delhi, Motilal Banarsidass).
- [5] KALANSURIYA, A.D.P. (1987) *A Philosophical Analysis of Buddhist Notions* (Delhi, Sri Satguru).
 KALANSURIYA, A.D.P. (1996) 'The logical grammar of the word 'rebirth' in the Buddhist paradigm: a philosophical sketch, in: F.J. HOFFMAN & D. MAHINDA (Eds) *Pāli Buddhism* (Surrey, UK, Curzon Press).
- [6] See, for example, DOORE, GARY (1979) 'The 'radically empiricist' interpretation of early Buddhist nirvāna, *Religious Studies*, 15, pp. 65–70. RAJAPAKSE, REGINTON (1986) Buddhism as religion and philosophy, *Religion*, 16, pp. 51–55. LESSER, A.H. (1979) Eastern and western empiricism and the 'no-self' theory, *Religious Studies*, 15, pp. 55–64, and KALUPAHANA, DAVID J. (1992) *A History of Buddhist Philosophy: continuities and discontinuities* (Honolulu, The University of Hawaii Press).
- [7] For a more recent account of this school of thought, see GRIFFITHS, A. PHILLIPS (Ed.) (1991) *A.J. Ayer Memorial Essays: Royal Institute of Philosophy Supplement: 30* (New York, Cambridge University Press).
- [8] JAYATELLIKE, op. cit., note 3, p. 464. Although Jayatellike does not cite the reference, the entry 'empiricism' can be found in RUNES, DAGOBERT (Ed.) (1962) *Dictionary of Philosophy* (Totowa, New Jersey, Littlefield, Adams & Co.), pp. 89–90. The passage which Jayatellike seems to be paraphrasing can be found on p. 89: "Experience may be understood as either all conscious content, data of the senses only, or other designated content".
- [9] AYER, A.J. (1991) A defence of empiricism, in: A. PHILLIPS GRIFFITHS (Ed.) *A.J. Ayer Memorial Essays: Royal Institute of Philosophy Supplement: 30* (New York, Cambridge University Press), p. 9.
- [10] AYER, A.J. (1963) Introduction, in: A.J. AYER & RAYMOND WINCH (Eds) *The British Empirical Philosophers* (London, Routledge and Kegan Paul), p.10.
- [11] LOCKE, JOHN (1689/1963) *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, in: A.J. AYER & R. WINCH (Eds) *The British Empirical Philosophers* (London, Routledge and Kegan Paul), p. 43.
- [12] *Ibid.*, pp. 43–44. The question of whether the *abhiññā* could qualify as an internal sense will be addressed under (2.5), below.
- [13] *Ibid.*, p. 48.
- [14] BERKELEY, GEORGE (1710/1963) *Principles of Human Knowledge*, in: A.J. AYER & R. WINCH (Eds) *The British Empirical Philosophers* (London, Routledge and Kegan Paul), p. 178.
- [15] HUME, DAVID (1739/1963) *A Treatise of Human Nature*, in: A.J. AYER & R. WINCH (Eds) *The British Empirical Philosophers* (London, Routledge and Kegan Paul), p. 298.
- [16] HUME, DAVID (1748/1988) *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding* (Amherst, NY, Prometheus Books), pp. 22–23.
- [17] AYER, A.J. (1959) Editor's introduction, in: A.J. AYER (Ed.) *Logical Positivism* (New York, The Free Press of Glencoe), p.4.
- [18] AYER, A.J. (1946) *Language Truth and Logic* (New York, Dover), p. 35.
- [19] *Ibid.*
- [20] LOCKE, op. cit., note 11, pp. 60–67.
- [21] *Ibid.* pp. 60–61.
- [22] HUME, op. cit., note 15, p. 300.
- [23] HUME, op. cit., note 16, p. 28.
- [24] The nature of Buddhist doctrines will be considered on this basis in parts 3 and 4 of this paper.
- [25] RAHULA, WALPOLA (1974) *What the Buddha Taught* (New York, Grove Press), p. 21.
- [26] Op. cit., note 3, p. 438.
- [27] *Ibid.*, p. 439.
- [28] Op. cit., note 2, p. 22.
- [29] 1987, op. cit., note 5, pp. 90, 117–118.
- [30] Bear in mind that, from the empirical point of view, the mind is not an organ of sensation (see (2.2), above), although it certainly is from the Buddhist standpoint. This is, of course, the crux of the problem.
- [31] Op. cit., note 18, p. 34.
- [32] CARNAP, RUDOLF (1959) Psychology in physical language, in: A.J. AYER (Ed.) *Logical Positivism* (New York, The Free Press of Glencoe), pp. 193–194.
- [33] Op. cit., note 18, p. 118.
- [34] The doctrines of dependent origination, suffering, impermanence, the five aggregates, and non-substantiality will be treated in part 4 of this paper.

- [35] McDERMOTT, JAMES P. (1980) Karma and rebirth in early Buddhism, in: W. DONIGER O'FLAHERTY (Ed.) *Karma and Rebirth in Classical Indian Traditions* (Los Angeles, University of California Press), p. 172. McDermott cites the *Digha-nikāya* III.234, *Anguttara-nikāya* IV.459, *Majjhima-nikāya* I.73, and *Culaniddesa* (*Niddesa* 2) 550, as the sources of this list.
- [36] *Dibbacakkhu*, the knowledge of the decease and survival of human beings would be required, or *pubbenivāsānussatiñāna*, retrocognitive knowledge, in one's own case.
- [37] See HOFFMAN 1982, op. cit., note 4, pp. 155–156. This is evident in Hoffman's "parable of the *bhikkhu* (monk)":

Two men hear a sermon on Buddhism in which it is characterized as a "come and see doctrine", not requiring faith in scripture, but confidence in the meditation instructor. They decide to put it to the test. After five years of disciplined meditation under the same teacher, they meet again. The first says: "I have verified rebirth by seeing the arising and passing away of beings". The second replies that he has seen no such thing. They resume meditation practice, and after they have both been meditating twenty years they meet again, this time in the presence of the teacher (by then old and grey). The second man says: "I have heard that this is a 'come and see doctrine', but although I came I have not yet acquired knowledge and vision. Is not the doctrine falsified?" The teacher replies with a great resounding laugh and the words: "Fool, go and meditate some more!"

After the teacher's pronouncement it became clear that the issue is not an experimental one, although each one takes his experience as the basis for interpretation. The sceptical *bhikkhu* thinks: "I have had many experiences of meditating without acquiring knowledge and vision of rebirth, for example. So if the teacher will not allow that any of my experience counts *against* the rebirth doctrine, then I do not see how anything could count *for* it either. If you can't falsify it, then you can't verify it either".

The empirical status of any proposition which is only verifiable by *certain* people is very doubtful, as this parable illustrates. This is especially poignant in light of Jayatellike's quotation from the *Samyutta-nikāya*: "out of five hundred monks, sixty have attained the six-fold higher knowledge" (JAYATELLIKE, op. cit., note 3, p. 438). These are not good odds.

- [38] 1987, op. cit., note 4, pp. 75–76.
- [39] This is the generic, non-sectarian heading under which one finds Hindu transmigration and Buddhist rebirth.
- [40] HOFFMAN, FRANK J. (1985) Buddhist belief 'in', *Religious Studies*, 21, pp. 381–387 (see p. 382).
- [41] KALANSURIYA, (1996, op. cit., note 5, pp. 134–135), also argues the inappropriateness of the attempt to verify rebirth.
- [42] This is not to say that some *thing* is reborn, as will be evident from the discussion of *anattā* in part 4 of this paper.
- [43] 1996, op. cit., note 5.
- [44] See (3.3), below. One should also not infer from Kalansuriya's conclusion that, for the logical positivist, ethical theories are necessarily metaphysical and meaningless. As will be made clear, A.J. Ayer made some very careful distinctions concerning ethical propositions, which Kalansuriya does not seem to acknowledge (see under (3.4), below).
- [45] This type of "verification" has been attempted in the case of human past lives. See, for example, STEVENSON, IAN (1980) *Twenty Cases Suggestive of Reincarnation* (2nd ed.) (Charlottesville, University Press of Virginia).
- [46] RAHULA, op. cit., note 25, p. 32.
- [47] MAHINDA, DEEGALLE (1996) The moral significance of Buddhist nirvana, in: F.J. HOFFMAN & D. MAHINDA (Eds) *Pāli Buddhism* (Surrey, UK, Curzon Press), pp. 105–106.
- [48] *Ibid.*, p. 111.
- [49] *Ibid.*, pp. 111–116.
- [50] See also McDERMOTT, op. cit., note 35.
- [51] Op. cit., note 2, p. 44.
- [52] Op. cit., note 3, p. 466.
- [53] 1987, op. cit., note 5, p. 169.
- [54] Op. cit., note 18, p. 103.
- [55] *Ibid.*
- [56] Op. cit., note 18.

- [57] RAHULA, op. cit., note 25, p. 32; see under (3.3), above.
- [58] Op. cit., note 18, p. 106.
- [59] Ibid., pp. 107–109.
- [60] See SCHLICK, MORITZ (1959) What is the aim of ethics?, in: A.J. AYER (Ed.) *Logical Positivism* (New York, The Free Press of Glencoe).
- [61] AYER, A.J. (1959) Verification and experience, in: A.J. AYER (Ed.) *Logical Positivism* (New York, The Free Press of Glencoe), p. 240.
- [62] Op. cit., note 2, pp. 49–50.
- [63] Op. cit., note 3, pp. 462–463.
- [64] RAHULA, op. cit., note 25, p. 30.
- [65] Ibid., p. 32.
- [66] 1987, op. cit., note 5, ch. 6.
- [67] The notion of causation within the doctrine of dependent origination will be treated separately in part 4 of this paper.
- [68] Strictly under the empirical premises layed out under (3.1) and (3.2), above.
- [69] For justification see part 2 of this paper.
- [70] Op. cit., note 2, pp. 23–24.
- [71] In the Buddhist tradition, the mind is a sense. See under (2.3), above.
- [72] RAHULA, op. cit., note 25, pp. 20–23.
- [73] Sometimes translated as dispositions (KALUPAHANA, op. cit., note 2, p. 71).
- [74] Op. cit., note 18, p. 31.
- [75] Ibid., p. 17.
- [76] Ibid., p. 31.
- [77] Op. cit., note 25, p. 53.
- [78] Rahula cites the *Majjhima-nikāya* and the *Samyutta-nikāya* as his sources.
- [79] Combining Rahula's (op. cit., note 25, pp. 53–54) and Kalupahana's (op. cit., note 2, pp. 58–59) versions. The references to the aggregates are mine.
- [80] RAHULA, op. cit., note 25, pp. 53–54.
- [81] KALUPAHANA, op. cit., note 2, pp. 58–59.
- [82] Ibid, p. 29.
- [83] KALUPAHANA, op. cit., note 6, pp. 53–59.
- [84] Perhaps one could say that the doctrine is trivially true from an empirical standpoint; when I am knocked unconscious, experience ceases.
- [85] 1987, op. cit., note 5, pp. 131–152.
- [86] The ethical nature of *kammavada* has been discussed under (3.3), above.
- [87] That this is the one constant that remained through the various forms of the “verification principle” is evident in HEMPEL, CARL G. (1959) ‘The empiricist criterion of meaning, in: A.J. AYER (Ed.) *Logical Positivism* (New York, The Free Press of Glencoe). (Reprint of: HEMPEL, CARL G. (1950) Changes in the empiricist criterion of meaning, *Revue Internationale de Philosophie*, 4). See also AYER (op. cit., note 17, p. 13). Empirical matters must be confutable in experience; the problem for the logical positivists was in phrasing the verification principle so that it could be rigorously applied. Another problem concerned the status of the verification principle itself.
- [88] PULIGANDIA, RAMAKRISHNA (1996) What is the status of the doctrine of dependent origination?, in: F.J. HOFFMAN & D. MAHINDA (Eds) *Pāli Buddhism* (Surrey, UK, Curzon Press), p. 181.
- [89] Such as the doctrines of *anattā*, and *dukkha*; see (4.6) and (4.7), below.
- [90] RAHULA, op. cit., note 25, p. 39.
- [91] Ibid., p. 34.
- [92] SHOEMAKER, SYDNEY (1969) Time without change, *Journal of Philosophy*, 66, pp. 363–381 notwithstanding. In his article, Shoemaker posits a “possible universe” in which time passes without material change; yet this conclusion is a reasonable inference for the inhabitants of this universe based on past experience, not on direct sense-data.
- [93] Op. cit., note 25, p. 19.
- [94] Similarly, HOFFMAN (1987, op. cit., note 4, pp. 28–29) differentiates between *dukkha* as ordinary suffering, and *dukkha* as a more profound dissatisfaction with existence. See also RHYNS DAVIDS, T.W. & STEDE, WILLIAM (1921–25/1975) *Pāli-English Dictionary* (New Delhi, Oriental Reprint Corp.), pp. 324–326. (Reprint of *The Pali Text Society's Pāli-English Dictionary* (London, Pali Text Society) in which *dukkha* is thoroughly defined with canonical citations.

- [95] KALUPAHANA, op. cit., note 6, p. 69.
- [96] Op. cit., note 25, p. 20.
- [97] Ibid., p. 52.
- [98] UPADHAYA, K.N. (1971) *Early Buddhism and The Bhagavagītā* (Delhi, Motilal Banarsidass).
- [99] HOFFMAN, FRANK J. (1987) The pragmatic efficacy of *saddhā*, *Journal of Indian Philosophy*, 15, pp. 399-412. See also HOFFMAN, op. cit., note 40.
- [100] This paper owes a great debt to the work of A.D.P. Kalansuriya and Frank J. Hoffman for their already extensive critiques of the Buddhist Empiricism Thesis. In addition, Frank Hoffman's comments have been invaluable in the formulating of these ideas. Nevertheless, these men should not be held responsible for the shortcomings of the author, who is solely responsible for the content of the paper.