



ISSN 1076-9005
Volume 4 1997: 73-78
Publication date: 21 January 1997

The Selfless Mind: Personality, Consciousness and Nirvāṇa in Early Buddhism. By Peter Harvey. London: Curzon Press, 1995. Pp. viii, 293. ISBN 0-7007-0337-3 (paperback), £14.99; ISBN 0-7007-0338-1 (cloth).

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The present work represents a revision of Professor Harvey's doctoral thesis, "The Concept of the Person in Pāli Buddhist Literature," submitted to the University of Lancaster in 1981. Two of the fourteen chapters (on "developing a Self without boundaries" and "the nature of the *Tathāgata*") have been previously published as articles, while material from another three chapters (on intermediate existence, the "brightly shining mind" or *pabhassara-citta*, and *nibbāna* and consciousness) has also been previously published (see 259). How substantial a revision Harvey has undertaken of the original thesis is not clear, but the lack of a sustained attempt to deal with relevant secondary literature published since 1981 suggests that the work remains much as it was originally.

The starting point of Harvey's book is the Buddhist teaching of "not-self" (*anattā/anātman*) as found in early Buddhist thought, but his concern is not so much to provide a comprehensive account of the logic of *anattā* in the manner, say, of Steven Collins's now standard work, *Selfless Persons: Imagery and Thought in Theravāda Buddhism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), as to focus on and bring out the positive account of human personality found in early Buddhist texts. Harvey is thus more concerned with what Buddhist texts tell us the Self is than with what they tell us it is not. Yet this does not mean that Harvey wishes to ally himself with those interpreters of the Buddha who have wanted to argue that the Buddha did, after all, accept the existence of some sort of metaphysical self. Despite his criticism of "no-self" as a translation of *anattā* (Harvey prefers "not-self") and his reminding the reader that the Buddha of the *Nikāyas* falls short of categorically denying the existence of the Self (6–7), Harvey restates (42) the "orthodox" (Buddhist and, surely, scholarly) position: the Pudgalavādins have got it wrong; early Buddhist texts do indeed deny the existence of a "metaphysical Self" (i.e., an unchanging, substantial, personal entity) but nonetheless allow the existence of an empirical, conventional self or personality. Harvey's point (as I understand it) is that contemporary scholarly treatments, in dwelling too much on the philosophical critique of the notion of a metaphysical Self found in early Buddhist texts, veer towards an "annihilationist" presentation of Buddhist thought which fails to give a proper account of the positive understanding of personality contained in the texts; Harvey tries to redress the balance without veering off into the "eternalist" territory of those who wish to smuggle a metaphysical Self back into early Buddhist thought.

Harvey thus pays particular attention to the account given in the Pali *Nikāyas* of the positive qualities of the personality and consciousness of awakened beings, the Buddha and the Arahats. The book includes interesting discussions of the *Nikāyas*' understanding of the workings of conscious-

ness (*viññāna*) (or as Harvey prefers, “discernment”), the process of death and rebirth, the relationship between a “subliminal” *bhavaṅga*-type consciousness and the radiant (*pabhassara*) mind, and the nature of *nibbāna*.

Harvey’s general approach is characterised by a very thorough exploration of the “early *Suttas*,” which he defines broadly as embracing the first four *Nikāyas* along with the *Suttanipāta*, *Udāna*, *Itivuttaka*, *Dhammapada*, *Theragāthā*, *Therīgāthā*, *Vimānavatthu*, *Petavatthu*, *Jātaka* and “*sutta*-like” portions of the *Vinaya* (10). More limited use has been made of the Theravādin *Abhidhamma* and later commentaries, which are mostly brought in to reinforce certain aspects of Harvey’s reading of the “early *Sutta*” material. Harvey is also concerned to make connections and suggest affinities between the materials of the Pali *Nikāyas* and certain themes of the later Mahāyāna *sūtras* and *śāstras*. Despite his thorough exploration of primary sources, there is in places, however, a curious absence of reference to relevant secondary literature. Thus Harvey’s discussion of the self and the world in the *Alagaddūpama Sutta* (24–28, 78–83) makes no mention of K. R. Norman’s important article demonstrating allusions to Yājñavalkya’s *Upaniṣadic* equation of the self and the world in this *sutta* (“A note on *attā* in the *Alagaddūpama-sutta*”, *Studies in Indian Philosophy: Memorial Volume for Pandit Sukhlaji Sanghvi*, Ahmedabad, 1981, 19–29); similarly his discussion of the term *paha/pabha* at D I 223 and M I 329–30 (205–56) omits any reference to Norman’s discussion (“An Epithet of *Nibbāna*” in *Śramaṇa Vidyā Studies in Buddhism: Professor Jagannath Upadhyaya Commemoration Volume*, Saranath, 1987, 23–31); one also might have expected a reference to Lance Cousins’s “*Nibbāna* and *Abhidhamma*” (*Buddhist Studies Review* 1 (1984): 95–109) in the context of his allusion (196–67) to the *Paṭisambhidāmagga*’s understanding that both *dukkha* (= *saṃsāra*) and *nibbāna* constitute the object of a single moment of knowledge at the time of awakening. But his failure to refer to these sources perhaps simply reflects the fact that they were published since the original thesis was submitted.

Harvey’s book is full of thought-provoking discussions of various puzzles and points raised by the *Nikāyas*’ understanding of consciousness and personality, yet some of his conclusions are based on a series of moves, each one of which is not entirely unproblematic, and as such, while interesting and stimulating, it seems to me that they must remain far more speculative and tentative than he always acknowledges. His application of phrases like “it will then be shown that” (89), “this chapter has thus shown” (178), “this can be disproved” (181), “in chapter 12, it was also shown that” (227) is not always appropriate. Overall there is a tendency to generalize on the basis of one or two admittedly thought provoking but nonetheless isolated

Nikāya passages about the outlook of the “early *Suttas*” as a whole. By way of example, I shall focus on two significant discussions in Harvey’s book: the question of an “intermediate existence” (*antarā-bhava*) and the metaphysics of *nibbāna*.

On the basis of several passages found in the *Nikāyas*, Harvey seems to understand that he has shown that the position of the “early *Suttas*” is that there is an intermediate existence (*antarā-bhava*) between lives, despite the later Theravāda denial of the *antarā-bhava* (e.g., *Kathāvatthu* 361–66). Yet given that the *antarā-bhava* was a matter of dispute among Indian Buddhist schools it might be expected that, when we examine the sources that constitute their common heritage (i.e., the *Nikāyas* and *Āgamas*), we should find at least some passages that apparently support the *antarā-bhava* position. Indeed, as Harvey points out (100), some of these passages are precisely the passages cited by the Sammatīyas, Pūrvaśailas and Sarvāstivādins as supporting their position. Yet even if Harvey (like the Sammatīyas, Pūrvaśailas and Sarvāstivādins before him) is correct in suggesting that the later Theravādin Abhidhamma interpretation of these passages just does not work, and that they definitely assume an intermediate existence, all this shows for sure is that the dispute about the intermediate existence has a certain history, not that “the early *Suttas*” as a whole accept the notion of an intermediate existence.

The final part of Harvey’s book is devoted to the problem of the understanding of *nibbāna* in early Buddhist thought. In effect Harvey constructs a quite specific metaphysics of *nibbāna* on the basis of two passages: (1) five lines of verse (D I 223; cf. M I 329-30 which repeats the opening line in a similar context) which talk of *viññāṇa* in terms more usually associated with *nibbāna* and finish by paradoxically stating that *viññāṇa* “stops” (*uparujjhati*) here; and (2) a simile that compares *appatiṭṭhitam viññāṇam* or “unsupported discernment” to a ray of sunlight that has nothing in its path upon which to settle (S II 103). For Harvey, the “stopped” *viññāṇa* of D I 223 is *nibbāna*, and is equivalent to *appatiṭṭhitam viññāṇam*. (The precise moves in this equation are not clear to me, but they have to do with the fact that the expression *appatiṭṭhitam viññāṇam* occurs in the context of the *Samyutta Nikāya*’s account of the cessation of the twelve links of dependent arising, which, of course, include *viññāṇa*.) Since, an *appatiṭṭhitam* sunbeam, although never settling anywhere, nevertheless exists, so “stopped,” *appatiṭṭhitam* consciousness (i.e., *nibbāna*) “exists.” Harvey then suggests (215), in the course of dismissing the traditional Theravādin *Abhidhamma* understanding of *nibbāna* as the object of consciousness at the moment of awakening, that the passages he has cited (S II 65–6, 102-3; III 54–5) “give not the slightest hint that they are talking about

anything other than the ‘stopping’ of *all* forms of discernment” (Harvey’s emphasis); yet if this is so the problem for Harvey’s argument is that they then also give not the slightest hint that they are thinking of the attainment of *nibbāna* as a form of discernment at all, and certainly not a form that has “stopped”: if all forms of consciousness have stopped, then “stopped” consciousness must also have stopped. Harvey is really defining the words *viññāṇa* and *nirujjhati/uparujjhati* to suit his case, and this is a dangerous strategy; if “stopped” consciousness simply “exists” (albeit without an object), then why not conclude that “stopped” (*niruddha*) greed, hatred and delusion also exist (albeit without an object)?

Furthermore the philological basis of Harvey’s argument appears questionable on occasion. Part of his argument for *nibbāna* as “stopped” *viññāṇa* involves reading significance into a variation in a sequence of terms in a sutta formula at S III 87: *rūpa-*, *vedanā-*, *saññā*, *saṃkhāra-ttāya*, but *viññāṇatthāya* (see pages 124, 207). But surely this variation just reflects the sloppiness of Feer’s PTS edition. A quick comparison of editions suggests that we should either read *-ttāya* or *-atthāya* throughout and that there is no textual basis for reading *-ttāya* with the first four *khandhas* and *-atthāya* with the last. But the variant anyway could hardly bear the significance Harvey wants: the literal meaning must be either “they [i.e., constructing activities] construct for *viññāṇa*-ness” (*viññāṇattāya . . . abhisamkharonti*) or “they construct for the sake of *viññāṇa*” (reading *viññāṇatthāya*), but Harvey’s “they construct into *what is meant* by discernment” (my emphasis) is scarcely possible. (Incidentally, the book’s intended audience must be scholarly, and it is to be regretted that he did not include the original Pali text of the passages he cites.)

Yet even if we accept the validity of each of the moves in Harvey’s argument, he cannot claim that his conclusion holds for the “early *Suttas*” as a whole—that he has somehow found the key to the early *Sutta*’s understanding of *nibbāna*. Indeed, in his concluding summary chapter he is more careful, suggesting only that the “early *Suttas*” contain “a clear strand of thought that is willing to see *nibbāna* as discernment” (251). But is this strand of thought so clear? Still I am doubtful that Harvey has succeeded in demonstrating that the early *Suttas* contain a strand of thought that sees the metaphysics of *nibbāna* in precisely the manner he suggests—as “stopped,” “objectless,” “unsupported” consciousness or discernment. If such a strand of thought is so clear why is it effectively tucked away in five lines of verse in the *Dīgha Nikāya*, such that it escaped the notice of the Buddhist tradition for over two millennia and has only now been teased out by Professor Harvey? Harvey might reply that it has not escaped the notice of the Buddhist tradition, for he sees his interpretation of *nibbāna* in the early *Suttas*

as having “something in common with the Yogācārin emphasis on discernment (*vijñāna*) as central to both the enlightened and unenlightened state” (250). There may be some truth in this, yet Yogācārin metaphysics achieves a sophistication that is ultimately absent from Harvey’s account of *nibbāna*. As Harvey rightly says in the final paragraph of his book, one of the universal characteristics of Buddhist thought is the attempt to articulate the middle way between annihilationism and eternalism. He goes on to suggest that both the classical Theravādin understanding of *nibbāna* and the Mahāyāna understanding of eternal Buddhas have failed in this respect, falling foul of “partial annihilationism” and “partial eternalism” respectively; his own reading of the early *Suttas*’ understanding of *nibbāna* he presents as avoiding these two extremes. Yet I find it hard to see how his view of *nibbāna* as consciousness that has somehow stopped but continues to exist can so easily avoid the charge of “partial eternalism.”

In questioning some of Professor Harvey’s conclusions, I do not mean to suggest that the reflections and ideas contained in this book are not of value. Its great virtue is that Harvey continually cites interesting and challenging material from his primary sources; he is also not afraid of those awkward passages that others often overlook or shy away from because they do not fit the received understanding of early Buddhist thought. But the relationships described in the early *Suttas* between ordinary consciousness, consciousness in various meditation attainments, consciousness at the moments of death, rebirth and awakening, between consciousness at the moment of awakening and the post mortem state of the Buddha and the Arahats are complex and subtle. That they can be as neatly circumscribed as Professor Harvey sometimes suggests, I remain unconvinced. But the publication of this book is to be welcomed as bringing together very many interesting passages, in making intriguing connections, and in suggesting affinities between aspects of early *Sutta* teaching and later Mahāyāna Buddhist thought. More generally it is a useful reminder of the breadth and range of unexplored material on consciousness, personality and *Nirvāṇa* in the *Nikāyas*.