

Susīma’s Conversation with the Buddha: A Second Study of the Susīma-sutta*

I. Introduction

In my previous paper entitled “The Susīma-sutta and the Wisdom-Liberated Arahant” (*Journal of the Pali Text Society*, XXIX, pp. 51–75), I examined the Pāli Susīma-sutta (S 12:70; S II 119–28) in relation to several parallels preserved in the Chinese Tripiṭaka. This *sutta*, included in the Nidāna-saṃyutta, records the story of an ascetic named Susīma who entered the Buddhist monastic order as a “thief of Dhamma” (*dharmatthenaka*) intent on learning the secret of the Buddha’s success in order to improve the fortunes of his fellow wanderers. After his ordination, he meets a group of monks who had declared “final knowledge” — that is, arahantship — in the Buddha’s presence. Susīma asks them about their other attainments and learns that they lack the supernormal powers and formless emancipations, which he apparently had assumed were intrinsic to the state of final liberation. Thereupon Susīma asks them, “Here now, venerable ones, this answer and the non-attainment of those states: how could this be, friends?” And the monks reply, “We are liberated by wisdom, friend Susīma.”¹ Susīma then goes to the Buddha to ask for clarification.

I compared this portion of S 12:70 with three versions preserved in Chinese translation. Of these, one is contained in the Mahāsāṅghika Vinaya; the second is found in the Saṃyuktāgama (no. 347); and the

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¹S II 123,22–26: *ettha dāni āyasmanto idaṅ ca veyyākaraṇaṃ imesaṅ ca dhammānaṃ asamāpattī, idaṅ no āvuso kathaṅ? paññāvimuttā kho mayaṅ āvuso Susīma*. Note that in E^c the line breaks of this passage are faulty.

third is an incomplete version cited in the Abhidharma-vibhāṣā-śāstra.² My paper focused in particular on the light the parallel versions could shed on the question regarding the minimum attainment in *samādhi* meditation required to become a *paññāvimutta* or wisdom-liberated arahant. In the Pāli version, the monks consulted only deny possessing the five mundane super-knowledges (commonly known as *abhiññā*, though the word itself does not occur in this *sutta*) and the “peaceful formless emancipations transcending forms”.³ Nothing is said about their proficiency in the *jhānas* and Susīma does not even question them on this issue. In M-Vin, the monks deny possessing the divine eye, the recollection of past lives, and the peaceful formless emancipations. Again, though some clarification of the role of the *jhānas* in their path seems called for, the question whether or not the monks are *jhāna*-attainers is not raised.

The Nikāyas themselves never explicitly address this question. The texts routinely define the *paññāvimutta* as “one who does not contact with the body and dwell in those peaceful emancipations that are formless, transcending forms, but whose influxes are exhausted by his seeing with wisdom”.⁴ This means that the *paññāvimutta* lacks access to the four formless meditative attainments and “the cessation of perception and feeling” (*saññāvedayitanirodha*). Nothing is said, in this definition, about how the wisdom-liberated one fares with regard to the *jhānas*. A number of *suttas* define right concentration of the noble eightfold path with the formula for the four *jhānas*, and thus, if this definition is taken

²In this paper I will use the same abbreviations for the alternative versions as I used in the earlier paper, that is, respectively M-Vin, SĀ 347, and Vibhāṣā. It is uncertain whether the Vibhāṣā version is a direct quotation from a *sutta* or a paraphrase.

³S II 121,13–23,17.

⁴M I 477,33–78,36: *ekacco puggalo ye te santā vimokkhā atikkamma rūpe āruppā te na kāyena phusitvā viharatī, paññāya c’ assa disvā āsavā parikkhīṇā hontī. ayaṃ vuccatī, bhikkhave, puggalo paññāvimutto.*

as categorical, it would seem that even the *paññāvimutta* must possess the four *jhānas*, or at least the first *jhāna*.

The commentaries, however, introduce into the interpretation of the Susīma-sutta a new exegetical concept, that of the *sukkhavipassaka* or “dry-insight” meditator. Such an individual, in the commentarial system, rides to liberation in the vehicle of “bare insight” (*suddhavi-passanāyānika*), that is, insight meditation (*vipassanābhāvanā*) without the practice of serenity meditation (*samathabhāvanā*). The insight is called “dry” because it lacks the “moistening influence” of the *jhānas* or even “access concentration” (*upacārasamādhi*) to prepare the mind for insight. The figure of the dry-insight meditator is not explicitly found in the Nikāyas but first appears as such in the commentaries and the Visuddhimagga.

I looked into the Chinese parallels (translated from texts in north Indian languages, probably a Prakrit, Buddhist Hybrid Sanskrit, and Sanskrit) with the thought that these versions might shed some light on the position regarding the *jhānas* in the more familiar Pāli recension. Now if we read the Susīma-sutta alongside its commentary and the parallel versions preserved in Chinese translation, we might notice two intriguing facts emerging from the first part of the discourse. The first is that the Sāratthappakāsinī, the classical commentary (*aṭṭhakathā*) on the Saṃyutta-nikāya, interprets the term *paññāvimutta* as used in the Susīma-sutta in the narrower sense of a dry-insight arahant. Even though this is not stated in the *sutta* itself, the commentary does not take the *paññāvimutta* of the Susīma-sutta to be simply an arahant who lacks the formless meditations, as the definition at M I 477–78, cited above, would lead us to believe; rather, it takes him to be one who does not possess any *jhāna* attainment at all.⁵ The second fact is that two

⁵According to the commentarial system, based on the Abhidhamma, all attainments of the noble path and fruit (*magga-phala*) occur at the level of *jhāna*, and thus any arahant would be an attainer of world-transcending (*lokuttara*) *jhāna*. But what is at issue is their possession of “mundane *jhāna*”, which is the meaning of the term “*jhāna*” in the context of the Nikāyas and Āgamas.

parallels to the Susīma-sutta found in the Chinese canon, SĀ 347 and the citation in the Abhidharma-vibhāṣā-śāstra (as well as the larger Abhidharma-mahāvibhāṣā-śāstra), endorse the idea that the *paññā-vimutta* arahant lacks attainment of the *jhānas*. In these versions, when Susīma questions the monks about their meditative skills, he expressly asks whether they based their realization of arahantship on the *jhānas* or formless attainments and they reply in the negative.

These two facts, taken in conjunction, naturally give rise to the question whether the position taken in the Sāratthapakāsinī had been adopted under the influence of the schools that preserved the Saṃyuktāgama and the Abhidharma-vibhāṣā-śāstra.⁶ The question cannot be answered definitively in the affirmative, for there is no evidence of one school influencing the other on this point; it is perfectly conceivable that forces at work independently in both camps gave rise to the concept of an arahant destitute of *jhānic* attainments.⁷ However, given the easy contact between representatives of the various Buddhist schools in early Indian Buddhism, it is possible that such contacts did occur and placed subtle pressures on the adherents of the Pāli school to admit an arahant without *jhāna* into their gallery of noble ones. Perhaps because of their textual conservatism, and also due to the weight of the canonical formula defining right concentration as the four *jhānas*, the Theravādins were reluctant to explicitly introduce the dry-insight arahant into their Sutta-piṭaka. But taking an indirect route would have allowed them to legitimize such a figure without ruffling feathers (or ochre robes) in more conservative monastic circles. One method was simply to use the idea of a dry-insight arahant as an explanatory concept in their commentaries, an approach that they did in fact adopt. But it is

⁶The former is taken to stem from the Mūlasarvāstivāda and the latter from the Vaibhāṣikas of the main Sarvāstivāda.

⁷But we also cannot rule out any influence, for the Pāli commentarial tradition did absorb some important ideas from the Sarvāstivāda. The most notable of these is the use of the concept of *svabhāva* (Pāli *sabhāva*) as the defining mark of a truly existent *dhamma*.

also possible that the idea of the arahant without *jhāna* attainments fed back into the canonical texts and subtly shaped their final formulation.

Whereas the schools that preserved the Saṃyuktāgama and the Abhidharma-vibhāṣā-śāstra boldly introduced arahants lacking *jhāna* attainments into their canonical collections, the custodians of the Pāli Nikāyas may have sought to grant canonical authorization to a type of wisdom-liberated arahant who lacked *jhāna* attainments by resorting to new definitions and the subtle revision of older texts. Though we cannot discount the possibility that such texts stem directly from the Buddha himself, it is also conceivable that they derive from a slightly later period when older stipulations in the most archaic discourses were undergoing reevaluation. Several *suttas*, for example, introduce a contrast between two ways of practice: one pleasant (*sukhapaṭipadā*), which leads to arahantship through the four *jhānas*; the other painful or difficult (*dukkhapaṭipadā*), which promotes attainment of the final goal through meditation subjects such as the unattractiveness of the body, the impermanence of all formations, and the perception of death.⁸ The Putta-sutta defines the *puṇḍarīka-samaṇa*, the “white-lotus ascetic”, as an arahant destitute of the eight emancipations (which, it seems, include the four *jhānas* among the first three emancipations).⁹ The Mahānidāna-suttanta mentions nothing about meditative attainments but identifies the wisdom-liberated arahant as one who has understood the origin, passing away, gratification, danger, and escape in regard to the nine abodes of beings.¹⁰ The Susīma-sutta, too, I would maintain, belongs to this group of *suttas* that indirectly hint at the existence of arahants without *jhānas*. On the basis of such texts, the transmitters of the Pāli Nikāyas could delicately suggest that liberation by wisdom, without the

⁸For citations, see “The Susīma-sutta and the Wisdom-Liberated Arahant”, pp. 60–61.

⁹A 4:87, at A II 87,7–11. See “The Susīma-sutta and the Wisdom-Liberated Arahant”, pp. 70–71.

¹⁰D II 70–71.

support of *jhānic* attainment, is a valid option in the development of the path.¹¹

If these hypotheses are correct — and I must emphasize that the above observations are largely speculative — it then follows that in admitting the dry-insight arahant, the commentaries did not so much introduce a totally new figure into Buddhist soteriological doctrine as merely make explicit an idea lying implicit in texts they regarded as “word of the Buddha”. These texts, in turn, could have taken the form they did for the express purpose of quietly accommodating such a figure. In the absence of any incontrovertible proof for this hypothesis, I can only point to the striking accord between the Pāli commentaries and the Saṃyuktāgama of the Chinese Tripiṭaka as indirect evidence that such a development was not unimaginable even in schools that considered themselves textually conservative. Although, in the Pāli school, this development did not culminate in texts explicitly acknowledging dry-insight arahants, it might still have led to the revision of several archaic *suttas* in ways that made them congenial to the new ideas. Thus when the commentators peered back into the Nikāyas, they were not at a complete loss to support their exegetical concepts. All they had to do was draw out and articulate what the texts themselves implied but did not state openly.

2. Susīma Calls on the Buddha

Up to this point I have been mostly recapitulating the main themes of my earlier paper on the Susīma-sutta. I have been doing so, not merely to refresh the reader’s memory, but because I believe that similar processes underlie the development of the second part of the

¹¹According to the commentarial system, all experiences of the supramundane (*lokuttara*) states occur at the level of *jhāna*, and thus, for the commentators, dry-insight meditators still acquire *jhāna* simultaneously with their attainment of the path and fruit. In this way, even without attaining *jhāna* prior to their realization, they manage to fulfil the standard definition of the noble eightfold path factor of right concentration (*sammā-samādhi*) as the four *jhānas*.

Susīma-sutta. Now I will resume my examination of the discourse. I will first summarize the narrative of S 12:70 as it continues beyond Susīma's encounter with the wisdom-liberated monks. In the next section I will survey the accounts of the same events presented in the Chinese parallels. Finally, I will call attention to problems emerging from the discourse and try to show how insights into the formation of early Buddhist texts can be generated by comparing different versions of a single *sutta*.

When Susīma leaves the monks, he approaches the Buddha, keen to learn how those monks could claim to be fully liberated without possessing the five super-knowledges and the peaceful formless emancipations. The Buddha first offers Susīma a single-sentence explanation: "First, Susīma, there is knowledge of the persistence of principles; afterwards, knowledge of nibbāna."¹² This marks the beginning of what we might consider the second part of the *sutta*, the purpose of which is to elucidate the meaning of "liberated by wisdom" (*paññāvimutta*) and thereby resolve the problem posed by the first part.

When Susīma asks the Buddha to explain this enigmatic statement, he responds simply by repeating his words: "Whether or not you understand, Susīma, first there is knowledge of the persistence of principles; afterwards, knowledge of nibbāna." He next leads Susīma through a catechism on the three characteristics of the five aggregates, exactly as we find it in the well-known Anattalakkhaṇa-sutta, the "Discourse on the Characteristic of Non-Self" (S 22:59). Each of the five aggregates is impermanent; because it is impermanent, it is bound up with suffering; and because it is impermanent, bound up with suffering, and subject to change, it is to be seen as "not mine, not I, not my self". Seeing that the five aggregates are non-self, the noble disciple becomes disenchanted with them; through disenchantment, he becomes dispassionate; and through dispassion, his mind is liberated. With liberation comes the

¹²S II 124,10–11: *pubbe kho Susīma dhammaṭṭhitiñāṇaṃ, pacchā nibbāne ñāṇan ti.*

knowledge of liberation and he understands: “Birth is finished; the spiritual life has been lived; what had to be done has been done; there is no more coming back to any state of being.”¹³

Then the Buddha questions Susīma about the links of dependent origination (*paṭicca-samuppāda*), first with respect to arising, taken in reverse order from “because of birth, there is aging-and-death” back to “because of ignorance, there are volitional activities”; then with respect to cessation, again in reverse order from “with the cessation of birth, aging-and-death ceases” back to “with the cessation of ignorance, volitional activities cease”. At each step, the Buddha asks Susīma whether he sees (*Susīma passasi*) the relationship between the two factors, and the monk always replies, “Yes, lord” (*evaṃ bhante*).¹⁴

At this point the Buddha asks Susīma whether “knowing and seeing thus” (*evaṃ jānanto evaṃ passanto*), he possesses the five super-knowledges and the peaceful formless emancipations, and Susīma replies, “Not so.” The Buddha then asks Susīma, “Here now, Susīma, this answer and the non-attainment of those states: how could this be, Susīma?”¹⁵ This was the same question that Susīma had earlier asked the group of monks, which elicited the reply: “We are liberated by wisdom.” Susīma does not answer the question. Instead, he prostrates himself at the Buddha’s feet, confesses that he entered the Buddhist order as a “thief of Dhamma”, and asks the Exalted One to pardon him for his offense. The Buddha tells him that what he did was indeed foolish and unskillful. To underscore the danger, he relates a simile about a criminal who is arrested by the king’s men and beheaded out-

¹³S II 124,18–25,29: *evaṃ passaṃ, susīma, sutavā ariyasāvako rūpasmim pi nibbindati, vedanāyapi nibbindati, saññāyapi nibbindati, saṅkhāresu pi nibbindati, viññāṇasmimpi nibbindati. nibbindaṃ virajjati, virāgā vimuccati. vimuttasmim vimuttamiti ñāṇaṃ hoti. “khiṇā jāti, vusitaṃ brahmacariyaṃ, kataṃ karaṇīyaṃ, nāparaṃ itthattāyā” ti pajānāti.*

¹⁴S II 125,29–26,18.

¹⁵S II 127,22–23: *ettha dāni Susīma idaṃ ca veyyākaraṇaṃ imesaṃ ca dhammānaṃ asamāpatti, idaṃ no Susīma kathaṃ?* E^c mistakenly reads the last word here as *kataṃ* when *kathaṃ* is required.

side the city. Though the consequences of “going forth as a thief in the well-expounded Dhamma and discipline” are far graver than the punishment suffered by the criminal, the Buddha pardons Susīma because he has seen his transgression for what it is and pledges to exercise future restraint. With this the *sutta* ends.¹⁶ It should be noted that, in contrast to the Chinese parallels, this version mentions nothing about Susīma obtaining any transcendent realization, neither the dust-free, stainless eye of Dhamma (*virajaṃ vītamalaṃ dhammacakkhuṃ*) nor the exhaustion of the influxes (*āsavakkhaya*).

Nevertheless, though nothing is said about any attainment on the part of Susīma, it seems to me that the discussion about the two kinds of knowledge must serve to clarify the status of the arahant liberated by wisdom. And as I read it, the intent is to suggest that deep attainment in concentration, even the attainment of the first *jhāna*, is not indispensable. This point is made implicitly rather than explicitly, but I believe a keen reader would still detect it. Of course, a critic might object that the *sutta* does not mention the need for maintaining precepts, or sense restraint, or mindfulness and clear comprehension, as prerequisites for liberation, yet we certainly cannot bypass these steps of the path; and, it might be said, if these steps can be implicitly included, certainly the *jhānas* could too. I won't deny that one can read the Susīma-sutta as simply reaffirming, by silence, the need for the *jhānas*. But if that were the case, I would ask, why didn't the Buddha simply say so instead of drawing upon these two kinds of knowledge to clarify the status of the *paññāvimutta*? I don't think the place of the *jhānas* in the path is so obvious that the point would need no explanation. After all, Susīma is not a doctrinal expert who could be expected to know the intricacies of the path; he even seems ignorant of its broad outlines. Thus a reference to a stock doctrinal formula would not have been inappropriate in his case. If the Buddha wanted to stress the need for the *jhānas*, it would have been fitting for him to explain the *paññāvimutta* arahant in the way

¹⁶S II 127,25–28,26.

done elsewhere, as one who has reached the extinction of the influxes without attainment of the formless emancipations. Instead, by calling attention to “knowledge of the persistence of principles” followed by “knowledge of nibbāna” as the requirements for becoming an arahant liberated by wisdom, the text seems to be putting these kinds of knowledge in the place normally occupied by the *jhānas*.

3. The Chinese Parallels

I now want to take a brief look at how the Chinese parallels to S 12:70 treat the story of Susīma’s meeting with the Buddha. Since the citation in the Abhidharma-vibhāṣā-śāstra is short and incomplete, I will consider this version first. Here, when Susīma tells the Buddha about his discussion with the monks, the Buddha declares, as in the Pāli version, “Susīma, you should know that first there is knowledge of the persistence of principles; afterwards, knowledge of nibbāna.”¹⁷ Perplexed, Susīma asks for clarification and the Buddha repeats his statement, again as in the Pāli version. The statement that follows makes use of Sarvāstivādin technical terminology and thus may be, not part of the citation, but a commentator’s elaboration in the idiom of their exegetical system. However, it may also be intended as a quotation being ascribed anachronistically to the Buddha, as is sometimes done in the Pāli commentaries as well: “Those monks, by earlier relying on threshold *dhyāna* concentration, exhausted the influxes and afterwards aroused the fundamental *dhyāna*. In this way one can understand that knowledge of the persistence of principles is an ancillary knowledge; knowledge of nibbāna, the fundamental knowledge.”¹⁸ The text here is suggesting that

¹⁷T XXVIII 408b6 : 蘇尸摩當知先有法住智後有涅槃智。As in my previous article, for the sake of consistency I will generally use the Pāli forms of Buddhist technical terms, even though the original text may have been composed in another Indian language.

¹⁸T XXVIII 408b8-11: 彼諸比丘。先依未至禪盡漏。後起根本禪。以是事故。知諸邊中智是法住智。根本中智是涅槃智。The version at T XXVII 572c24-27 reads: 然彼五百 應真苾芻依未至定得漏盡已後。方能起根本等至。由此故知近分地智是法住智。根本地智是涅槃智。

the monks first attained “threshold *dhyāna*”,¹⁹ on the basis of which they aroused the wisdom that understands the causation of the saṃsāric process. This wisdom eliminated the influxes and enabled them to attain the wisdom that realizes nibbāna; the latter, apparently, occurs in a state spoken of as “the fundamental meditative absorption” (根本等至 = Skt *mauladhyāna*). This account of attainment roughly corresponds to the process laid out in the Theravāda Abhidhamma system, according to which all path and fruition attainments (*magga-phala*) occur at the level of jhānic concentration and thus can be called “world-transcending *jhānas*”.²⁰ At this point the citation of the discourse in Vibhāṣā ends.

In its treatment of the two kinds of knowledge, the Susīma story in the Mahāsāṅghika Vinaya turns out to be the dissident version among the parallels. Here the Buddha replies to Susīma's plea for clarification with the words: “First [comes] knowledge of the principle, afterwards inferential knowledge.”²¹ The Chinese terms for these two knowledges, 法智 and 比智, are the equivalent of Pāli *dhamme ñāṇa* and *anvaye ñāṇa*. In the Nikāyas, these two knowledges also play a prominent role in relation to dependent origination. They are explained in S 12:33, which makes it clear that *dhamme ñāṇa* and *anvaye ñāṇa* are *not* synonymous with *dhammaṭṭhitīñāṇa* and *nibbāne ñāṇa* of S 12:70. S 12:33 identifies “knowledge of the principle” with the understanding of the chain of dependent origination by way of the “four-truth pattern”. One understands each factor itself, its origination through the preceding factor in the series, its cessation through the ceasing of the preceding factor, and the noble eightfold path as the way to its cessation. Thus, using “aging-and-death” as an example, with knowledge of the principle

¹⁹未至禪, or 未至定 = Skt *anāgamyadhyāna*. This type of concentration seems to correspond to “access concentration” (*upacārasamādhi*) of the Visuddhi-magga system. As the Skt name indicates, it is a state that has not yet arrived at *dhyāna* or full concentration, not a full *dhyāna* that functions as a threshold.

²⁰See Bhikkhu Bodhi, *A Comprehensive Manual of Abhidhamma*, 3rd ed. (Kandy, Sri Lanka: Buddhist Publication Society, 2006), pp. 71–75.

²¹T 22 363a20–21: 先法智後比智。

one knows what is meant by aging-and-death; one knows that birth is the cause of aging-and-death; one knows that when birth ceases, aging-and-death ceases; and one knows that the noble eightfold path is the way to the cessation of aging-and-death.

“Knowledge of the principle” (*dhamme ñāṇa*), the *sutta* makes clear, pertains to the present life and involves the grasp of principles that are directly visible. “Inferential knowledge” (*anvaye ñāṇa*), in contrast, is the extension of this knowledge to the past and future:

By means of this principle that is seen, understood, immediately attained, and fathomed, one applies the method by way of the past and the future thus: “Whatever ascetics and brahmins in the past directly knew aging-and-death, its origin, its cessation, and the way leading to its cessation, all these directly knew it in the very same way that I do now. Whatever ascetics and brahmins in the future will directly know aging-and-death, its origin, its cessation, and the way leading to its cessation, all these will directly know it in the very same way that I do now.” This is one’s inferential knowledge.²²

The same is said about each factor, back to volitional activities, which originate from ignorance and cease with the cessation of ignorance. The Buddha declares that a disciple who has purified these two kinds of knowledge — knowledge of the principle and inferential knowledge — is “accomplished in view, accomplished in vision, one who has arrived at this good Dhamma, who sees this good Dhamma, who possesses a trainee’s knowledge, a trainee’s understanding, who has

²²S II 58,3–16: *so iminā dhammena diṭṭhena viditena akālikena pattena pari-yogāḷhena atītānāgatena yaṃ neti*: “*ye kho keci atītamaddhānaṃ samaṇā vā brāhmaṇā vā jarāmaṇaṃ abbhāññaṃsu, jarāmaṇasamudayaṃ abbhāññaṃsu, jarāmaṇanirodhaṃ abbhāññaṃsu, jarāmaṇanirodhagāminiṃ paṭipadaṃ abbhāññaṃsu, sabbe te evameva abbhāññaṃsu, seyyathāpāhaṃ etarahi. ye pi hi keci anāgatamaddhānaṃ samaṇā vā brāhmaṇā vā jarāmaṇaṃ abhijānissanti, jarāmaṇasamudayaṃ abhijānissanti, jarāmaṇanirodhaṃ abhijānissanti, jarāmaṇanirodhagāminiṃ paṭipadaṃ abhijānissanti, sabbe te evameva abhijānissanti, seyyathāpāhaṃ etarahi*” *ti. idamassa anvaye ñāṇaṃ.*

entered the stream of the Dhamma, a noble one with penetrative wisdom who stands squarely before the door to the Deathless".²³

M-Vin may have adopted the use of these two knowledges in the present passage from a parallel discourse in the Mahāsāṅghikas' own Sūtra-piṭaka, a discourse that has not survived. On the other hand, it is also possible that the alteration was made only in the Vinaya version of the discourse and that the corresponding *sūtra*, if there was one contained in the Mahāsāṅghika Sūtra-piṭaka, may have designated the two knowledges in ways that match the Pāli discourse. We should bear in mind that the Susīma story in M-Vin belongs to a Vinaya text, not to a *sūtra*, and it is not impossible that in the course of oral transmission the Vinaya account was altered while the Sūtra-piṭaka version (if there was one) preserved a pair of knowledges that correspond to those of S 12:70.

Nevertheless, there are good grounds for insisting that the two knowledges of M-Vin, 法智 and 比智, are intended to correspond to *dhamme ñāṇa* and *anvaye ñāṇa* of S 12:33, and are not an alternative Chinese translation for the two knowledges of S 12:70, *dhammaññhiti-ñāṇa* and *nibbāne ñāṇa*. One reason is that the two terms 法智 and 比智 occur in an exact Chinese parallel of S 12:33. The parallel to S 12:33 in the Saṃyuktāgama (SĀ 356, T II 99c19–26) does not say anything about these two types of knowledge; the corresponding paragraphs are strangely missing just where we would expect them. But an Abhidharma treatise, the *Śāriputrābhidharma-śāstra (舍利弗阿毘曇論), cites a *sūtra* almost identical with S 12:33, where the terms 法智 and 比智 are used with the same meanings that *dhamme ñāṇa* and

²³S II 58,17–25: *ayaṃ vuccati, bhikkhave, ariyasāvako diṭṭhisampanno iti pi, dassanasampanno iti pi, āgato imaṃ saddhammaṃ iti pi, passati imaṃ saddhammaṃ iti pi, sekhena ñāṇena samannāgato iti pi, sekhāya vijjāya samannāgato iti pi, dhammasotaṃ samāpanno iti pi, ariyo nibbedhikapañño iti pi, amatadvāraṃ āhacca tiṭṭhati iti pi ti.*

anvaye ñāṇa bear in the Pāli *sutta*.²⁴ A second reason is that a later work with Mahāsāṅghika affiliations, the *Satyasiddhi-śāstra, also explains these two terms in a way that corresponds with the two knowledges of S 12:33 (see n. 26).

It is particularly important to emphasize that 法智 and 比智 probably mean the same thing as *dhamme ñāṇa* and *anvaye ñāṇa* do in S12:33, because the Sarvāstivāda Abhidharma adopted the two equivalent Sanskrit terms often translated as 法智 and 比智 — *dharma-jñāna* and *anvaya-jñāna* — and assigned them new meanings determined by the parameters of their own system. These meanings were quite different from those the two terms bear in the Pāli Nikāyas (and presumably in the Āgamas of other early Buddhist schools).²⁵ In the Sarvāstivāda Abhidharma, direct knowledge of the four noble truths occurs as a series of steps in which each truth is individually penetrated in two main phases. In the first phase, which the Sarvāstivādins designated *dharma-jñāna*, the meditator penetrates the noble truth as it applies to the sense-desire realm (*kāmadhātu*). In close succession, the meditator penetrates the truth as it applies to the form and formless realms (*rūpa-arūpadhātu*); this phase the Sarvāstivādins called *anvaya-jñāna*.²⁶

²⁴At T XXVIII 605b12–606a1. The Śāriputrābhidharma-śāstra is believed to have been the Abhidharma treatise of the Dharmaguptakas, a school doctrinally close to the Theravāda. If the *sūtra* it cites came from the Dharmaguptaka Sūtrapīṭaka, it is quite reasonable to expect that it would closely resemble its Pāli parallel.

²⁵Perhaps this explains why the paragraphs on 法智 and 比智 are missing in the SĀ counterpart of S 12:33. As SĀ belonged to a school with Sarvāstivāda affiliations, its scribes may have removed these paragraphs because they cast doubt on the new definitions of the two knowledges that had emerged in the Sarvāstivāda Abhidharma.

²⁶For a summary of this scheme, see Louis de La Vallée Poussin's Foreword to his *Abhidharmakośabhāṣyam*, English translation by Leo Pruden (Berkeley: Asian Humanities Press, 1991), Vol. 3, pp. xiv–xxii. See too Erich Frauwallner, *Studies in the Abhidharma Literature and the Origins of Buddhist Philosophical Systems*, English translation by Sophie Francis Kidd (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995), pp. 167–68. Whereas some

It would have been tempting for the Sarvāstivādins to insert these two terms into their version of the Susīma-sutta as representing the two kinds of knowledge constitutive of the wisdom-liberated arahant's attainment. However, in the two accounts of the Susīma story regarded as stemming from schools with Sarvāstivāda affiliation — SĀ 347 and Vibhāṣā — these two knowledges have no place. Like their Pāli counterpart, these versions take the two knowledges to be knowledge of the persistence of principles (法住智) and knowledge of nibbāna (涅槃智). Nevertheless, we cannot discount the possibility that during the classical age of Abhidharma Buddhism in India, when the Sarvāstivāda presentation of the path was widely accepted among the Buddhist schools, scribes or reciters of the Mahāsāṅghika Vinaya, impressed by the prestige of this system, either mistakenly or deliberately replaced the original two knowledges (corresponding to those of S 12:70) with the other pair, which they could support in relation to dependent origination by a *sūtra* in their own collection that was a parallel to S 12:33.²⁷

To return to the M-Vin account: When Susīma tells the Buddha that he does not understand what is meant by the two knowledges, the

Chinese translators of Abhidharma texts, such as the translators of the Zhong shi fen a bi tan lun ([Abhidharma]prakaraṇapāda[śāstra]) and the Abhidharma-vibhāṣā-śāstra, render the two knowledges 法智 and 比智, the great translator Xuan Zang (Hsuan Tsang), in his translations of the Abhidharma-mahāvibhāṣā and the Abhidharmakośa, replaced 比智 with 類智 as a rendering for *anvayaññāna*. Peter Harvey suggests that where the Theravāda sees the inference as about other time periods, the Sarvāstivāda sees it as about other realms (private communication).

²⁷It is perhaps testimony to the dominance of the Sarvāstivāda presentation of the path that the *Mahāprajñāpāramitopadeśa (大智度論, at T XXV 232c19–23), the large commentary on the Mahāprajñāpāramitā-sūtra, in commenting on 法智 and 比智 in the *sūtra*, explains the two knowledges very much as they are explained in the Sarvāstivāda system: as the undefiled knowledge of the dharmas, their cause, their cessation, and the path of dharma in relation respectively to the desire realm and to the form and formless realms. The *Satyasiddhi-śāstra too partly accepts this interpretation of the two knowledges, though it also argues in favor of preserving the meanings propounded in the *sūtras* (see T XXXII 372a7–28).

Buddha repeats his words and then begins to elucidate his meaning. In contrast to S 12:70, M-Vin shows the Buddha directly question Susīma about his understanding of dependent origination without first drilling him on the three characteristics. His questions occur in two stages, which I call respectively “the doctrinal questionnaire” and “the experiential questionnaire”. In the doctrinal questionnaire, the Buddha asks Susīma about the links of dependent origination simply as bare facts: “Does aging-and-death occur with birth as condition?” And so on, abridged, back to: “Do volitional activities occur with ignorance as condition?” To each question Susīma answers, “Yes.” Then the Buddha guides Susīma through the cessation of the chain of conditions, from “with the cessation of birth, aging-and-death ceases” to “with the cessation of ignorance, volitional activities cease”. The text does not correlate the chain of conditions with the two knowledges, knowledge of the principle and inferential knowledge, and we thus have to draw our own conclusions about their relationship.

Following this doctrinal questionnaire, the Buddha asks Susīma, “If a monk rightly contemplates and knows this Dhamma (此法 = *imaṃ dhammaṃ*), wouldn’t he attain everything that should be attained?”²⁸ Again, Susīma answers, “Yes”, apparently signifying that a monk can attain arahantship, the goal of the Buddha’s teaching, by properly understanding dependent origination.

Next, the Buddha takes Susīma through the chain of conditions again, first with regard to arising and then with regard to cessation. This time, however, in each case he asks Susīma, “Have you understood (汝知) [the link between each pair of factors]?” This is what I call the *experiential* questionnaire. As expected, Susīma answers affirmatively. Next, the Buddha asks, “When you know the Dhamma thus, do you attain the divine eye, the knowledge of past lives, or the peaceful emancipations?” And Susīma replies, “I do not attain them.” The Buddha then challenges him: “You say that you know things thus but do not

²⁸ T XXII 363b1-2: 若比丘於此法中正觀正知。所應得者。盡皆得不?

attain those excellent qualities: who will believe you?"²⁹ This sentence corresponds to the sentence of the Pāli version: *ettha dāni Susīma idaṃ ca veyyākaraṇaṃ imesaṃ ca dhammānaṃ asamāpatti, idaṃ no Susīma kathaṃ*?³⁰ It echoes the question that Susīma himself had posed to the monks when they claimed arahantship without the super-knowledges and formless emancipations. Susīma then admits that his mind had been enveloped by ignorance and wrong views; but, he says, now that he has heard the Dhamma in detail his evil views have vanished. He further states, "I have gained the pure eye of the Dhamma",³¹ which is a claim to the realization of, at minimum, the state of stream-entry, the first of the four stages of liberation. Finally, Susīma confesses his transgression in entering the Saṅgha as a thief. After telling him how much suffering he might have brought upon himself by such a foolish deed, the Buddha pardons him.

In the version of the Saṃyuktāgama, SĀ 347, as in M-Vin, the Buddha moves directly into the questionnaire on dependent origination without any intervening catechism on the three characteristics. The two knowledges here, 法住智 and 涅槃智, are the same as those of Vibhāṣā and correspond exactly to the Pāli version, not to M-Vin. When the Buddha mentions these two kinds of knowledge, Susīma entreats him: "Please let the Exalted One teach me the Dhamma so that I can come to know knowledge of the persistence of principles, to see knowledge of the persistence of principles."³² The Buddha then guides Susīma through the series on dependent origination, using a somewhat more complex pattern than is used in S 12:70 and M-Vin. I will exemplify this with the first member in each of the two series, on arising and on cessation. The Buddha asks, "Isn't it true that there is aging-and-death because there is birth, that aging-and-death does not occur in the

²⁹T XXII 363b8-9: 汝自言知如是諸法而復言不得。是諸功德誰當信者。

³⁰S II 127,22-23: I translate literally: "Here now, Susīma, this answer and the non-attainment of these states: how could this be, Susīma?"

³¹T XXII 363b11-12: 廣聞正法滅惡邪見。得法眼淨。

³²T II 97b14-15: 唯願世尊為我說法。令我得知法住智。得見法住智。

absence of birth? ... Isn't it true that when there is no birth, there is no aging-and-death, that aging-and-death ceases only when birth ceases?"³³ Susīma, of course, answers all these questions in the affirmative.

The questionnaire being over, the Buddha asks Susīma about the relationship between his insights and his meditative attainments. The Chinese text is drastically abbreviated: "When you know and see thus, do you, secluded from sensual desires and bad unwholesome states ... realize with the body, possess, and dwell in [them]?"³⁴ To all these questions, Susīma answers, "No, Exalted One." Note how the questions here differ markedly from those in both S 12:70 and M-Vin. Despite the abridgment, we can see that the text mentions the first and last phrases of the questions Susīma had earlier asked the group of monks.³⁵ The first is the opening clause of the formula for the first *jhāna*, the last is the final clause of the question on the formless emancipations. Thus, when we fill out the abridgment, we see that the Buddha is actually asking Susīma whether he attains each of the four *jhānas* and the formless emancipations. The monk's negative reply means that he does not attain them.

The Buddha then applies what Susīma has understood to the case of the monks who claimed to be arahants liberated by wisdom: "This is what is meant by saying first one knows the persistence of principles, afterwards one knows nibbāna. Those good men — dwelling alone in a quiet place, earnest, reflective, and heedful — eliminated the view of a self and did not arouse any influxes; their minds were well liberated."³⁶

³³T II 97b17-22: 有生故有老死。不離生有老死耶? ... 無生故無老死。不離生滅而老死滅耶?

³⁴T II 97b28: 作如是知·如是見者。為有離欲·惡不善法。乃至身作證具足住不?

³⁵At T II 97a6-17. See "The Susīma-sutta and the Wisdom-Liberated Arahant", pp. 66-67.

³⁶T II 97c1-4: 是名先知法住。後知涅槃。彼諸善男子獨一靜處。專精思惟。不放逸住。離於我見。不起諸漏。心善解脫。

The narrator then tells us that when the Buddha spoke this *sutta*, “Venerable Susīma gained the pure eye of the Dhamma, dust free and without stain. He saw the Dhamma, attained the Dhamma, awakened to the Dhamma, and crossed over doubt; without depending on faith in others, without needing the aid of others, his mind obtained confidence in the true Dhamma.”³⁷ SĀ 347 thus concurs with M-Vin that Susīma's discussion with the Buddha transformed him from a “Dhamma-thief” into a seer of the Dhamma, one standing at minimum on the level of a stream-enterer.

Following this narrative report, Susīma confesses to the Buddha, relating the whole background story about how he became a monk at the request of his fellow wanderers with the intention of stealing the Dhamma. The Buddha then instructs him how to confess for the sake of future restraint, which he does. Next the Buddha speaks the simile, which corresponds to the simile of S 12:63 rather than to the one in S 12:70, about a thief arrested by the king and punished by being struck by a hundred spears three times in a day. From this, the Buddha draws a lesson: “If one goes forth secretly as a thief in this proper Dhamma and discipline with the intention of stealing it, and one takes the Dhamma and expounds it to people, one will undergo pain and suffering vastly exceeding that [of the man struck by the three hundred spears].”³⁸ The text ends with the announcement: “At the time the Buddha spoke this Dhamma, the outside-ascetic Susīma's influxes were exhausted and his mind was liberated”,³⁹ which means that at the end of the discourse Susīma reached arahantship.

³⁷T II 97c4-7: 尊者須深遠塵離垢。得法眼淨。爾時。須深見法得法。覺法度疑。不由他信。不由他度。於正法中心得無畏。

³⁸T II 98a9-10: 若於正法·律盜密出家。盜受持法。為人宣說。當受苦痛倍過於彼。Note that the Buddha's closing admonitions in S 12:70 and M-Vin have nothing corresponding to the phrase “expounds it to people” (為人宣說). These versions make the mere act of “stealing the Dhamma” a terrible crime in itself.

³⁹T II 98a10-11: 佛說是法時。外道須深漏盡意解。

4. The Two Knowledges

We have seen that in the different versions of the Susīma story the Buddha refers to two different pairs of knowledge. In M-Vin, the pair is 法智 and 比智, which correspond to Pāli *dhamme ñāṇa* and *anvaye ñāṇa*; I translate these terms as “knowledge of the principle” and “inferential knowledge”. In S 12:70, the pair is *dhammaṭṭhitiñāṇa* and *nibbāne ñāṇa*, reflected in the Chinese translations of SĀ 347 and Vibhāṣā as 法住智 and 涅槃智; the Pāli and the Chinese can both be translated as “knowledge of the persistence of principles” and “knowledge of nibbāna”.⁴⁰ Both pairs are related to dependent origination, and in each pair the two knowledges occur in sequence.

Although the two pairs are unlikely to be identical, the fact that they are both concerned with dependent origination suggests that it may be possible to establish some correlation between them. The only other place in the Nikāyas where the pair, *dhamme ñāṇa* and *anvaye ñāṇa*, occurs is in the Saṅgīti-sutta of the Dīgha-nikāya, as two members of a group of four knowledges that do not occur as a group elsewhere in the Nikāyas.⁴¹ The terms are not explained in the Saṅgīti-sutta itself, but the Abhidhamma treatise, Vibhaṅga, defines *dhamme ñāṇa* as the wisdom in the four paths and fruits (concepts drawn from the mature Theravāda Abhidhamma system) and *anvaye ñāṇa* simply by quoting S 12:33. Thus an attempt to establish the relationship between the two pairs by

⁴⁰It is difficult, indeed impossible, to determine from the expression *dhamma-ṭṭhitiñāṇa* alone whether *dhamma-* here should be understood as the singular “the Dhamma” or as a suppressed plural, *dhammā*. In my translation of the Saṃyutta-nikāya, *The Connected Discourses of the Buddha*, I rendered the expression “knowledge of the stability of the Dhamma.” The commentary takes *dhamma-* as the plural *dhammā* with the meaning “[saṃsāric] phenomena.” I understand the word, in this context, as signifying the principles or laws that underlie the arising of saṃsāric phenomena.

⁴¹D III 226,33–34. The other two are “encompassing knowledge” (*pariye ñāṇa*, knowledge of the minds of others) and “knowledge of what is conventional” (*sammutiye ñāṇa*).

using *dhamme ñāṇa* and *anvaye ñāṇa* as a starting point leads to a blind alley.

It might be more fruitful to begin at the opposite end, by seeking other occurrences in the Nikāyas of the terms *dhammaṭṭhitiñāṇa* and *nibbāne ñāṇa* and then try to work out the relationship from there. In the Nidāna-saṃyutta, the Paccaya-sutta (S 12:20) speaks of the conditional relationship between each pair of factors in dependent origination as “the persistence of the principles” (*dhammaṭṭhitatā*), which remains valid whether or not Buddhas arise in the world. Since there is no essential difference in meaning between *dhammaṭṭhitatā* and *dhammaṭṭhiti*, it would thus follow that *dhammaṭṭhitiñāṇa* is the knowledge of this conditional relationship.

We explicitly encounter the term *dhammaṭṭhitiñāṇa* in S 12:34 (at S II 60,7, 23). In this *sutta* it is shown how seven kinds of knowledge arise in relation to each of the eleven links of dependent origination. The first six are constituted by three pairs. The fundamental pair is knowing the relationship established by the link to hold positively (“with X as condition, Y comes to be”) and negatively (“in the absence of X, there is no Y”) in the present. Knowing this pair with respect to the other two time periods — the past and the future — gives us the six knowledges. Thus, with respect to the three time periods, one knows that birth is the condition for aging-and-death, and that in the absence of birth there is no aging-and-death; and so on back to: with respect to the three time periods, one knows that ignorance is the condition for volitional activities and that, in the absence of ignorance, there are no volitional activities. The seventh knowledge occurring with respect to each link is “knowledge that this ‘*knowledge of the persistence of principles*’, too, is subject to destruction, vanishing, fading away, and cessation”.⁴² Thus, as a working hypothesis, we might propose that “knowledge of the persistence of principles” (*dhammaṭṭhitiñāṇa*)

⁴²S II 60,7, 23: *yam pi 'ssa taṃ dhammaṭṭhitiñāṇaṃ taṃpi khayadhammaṃ vayadhammaṃ virāgadhamaṃ nirodhadhammanti ñāṇaṃ.*

signifies the above-mentioned six types of knowledge regarding each link.

The Sāratthappakāsinī, in commenting on S 12:34, seems to support this with its gloss on “knowledge of the persistence of principles”:

Knowledge of the persistence of principles is knowledge of the principle of conditionality. The principle of conditionality is called “the persistence of principles” because it is the cause for the occurrence [or] persistence of principles. The knowledge of this, [namely] “knowledge of the persistence of principles”, is a designation for these same six kinds of knowledge.⁴³

Since, of the six types of knowledge, one pair refers to the present, one to the past, and one to the future, then according to the explanations of these terms in 12:33, the first should constitute “knowledge of the principle” (*dhamme ñāṇa*) and the other two pairs referring to the past and the future should constitute “inferential knowledge” (*anvaye ñāṇa*). This gives to “knowledge of the persistence of principles” (*dhammaññhiṭṭiñāṇa*) a wider scope than either of the two types of knowledge mentioned in 12:33 — “knowledge of the principle” (*dhamme ñāṇa*) and “inferential knowledge” (*anvaye ñāṇa*); for the former embraces the latter two as subordinate branches of itself. The knowledge of a principle indeterminate with respect to time must include instances of that knowledge pegged to specific periods of time.

The question remains of how *nibbāne ñāṇa*, “knowledge of nibbāna”, is related to these other knowledges. The knowledge of nibbāna is not defined in the *Susīma-sutta* itself and the expression does not occur elsewhere in the *Nikāyas*. Thus, while many discourses make it plain that nibbāna is something to be known and experienced, none explicitly and unambiguously enables us to assign “knowledge of nibbāna” to a definite place in the broader doctrinal blueprint of the *Nikāyas*. Nevertheless, we can still make the attempt.

⁴³Spk II 68: *dhammaññhiṭṭiñāṇan* ti paccayākāre ñāṇaṃ. paccayākāro hi dhammānaṃ pavattiññhiṭṭikāraṇattā dhammaññhiṭṭi ti vuccati. ettha ñāṇaṃ dhammaññhiṭṭiñāṇaṃ etass’ eva chabbidhassa ñāṇass’ etaṃ adhivacanaṃ.

ñāṇa, inferential knowledge), the knowledge of *nibbāna* has been subordinated to both knowledge of the principle and inferential knowledge, and thereby subordinated to knowledge of the persistence of principles, which includes both. To me, this would be an undesirable conclusion, but it is not inescapable. Instead of supposing that knowledge of the Dhamma and inferential knowledge are fully nested within knowledge of the persistence of principles, we might instead stipulate that knowledge of the persistence of principles comprehends only the positive or originative aspect of dependent origination.⁴⁶ We can then hold that knowledge of *nibbāna* comprehends the negative or cessation aspect of dependent origination. In such a case, “knowledge of the persistence of principles” and “knowledge of *nibbāna*” become symmetrical. The former comprises the side of knowledge of the principle and inferential knowledge concerned with the origination of *saṃsāric* phenomena from their conditions; the latter comprises the side of knowledge of the principle and inferential knowledge concerned with the cessation of *saṃsāric* phenomena through the cessation of their conditions. Despite the manner of expression, we should understand that knowledge of *nibbāna* is not merely knowledge of a fact, but knowledge by acquaintance. It is, that is to say, present knowledge of *nibbāna* as the cessation of each term in the chain of dependent origination, knowledge born of a direct experience of *nibbāna*.

The above hypothesis seems confirmed by both S 12:70 and SĀ 347, the two versions of the *Susīma* story available to us that refer to these two types of knowledge. Although the Buddha does not formally define “knowledge of the persistence of principles” and “knowledge of *nibbāna*”, when *Susīma* expresses his lack of understanding of the Buddha’s statement, “First there is knowledge of the persistence of principles, afterwards knowledge of *nibbāna*”, the Buddha guides him through the formula of dependent origination first with respect to aris-

⁴⁶This seems to be the way the *Paṭisambhidāmagga* treats *dhammañhiñāṇa*, which is formulated only in terms of the originative and supportive role of the conditions.

ing and thereafter with respect to cessation. This manner of presentation thus indirectly supports the interpretation of these two knowledges by way of the two sides of dependent origination.

We saw above that S 12:34 treats knowledge of the persistence of principles as knowledge of the principle of conditionality *with respect to both arising and cessation*, a meaning made explicit by the commentary on the *sutta* in the *Sāratthappakāsinī* with its gloss: “‘knowledge of the persistence of principles’ is a designation for these same six kinds of knowledge”. On this basis, one might protest that the distinction I make between “knowledge of the persistence of principles” and “knowledge of nibbāna” in the *Susīma-sutta* unreasonably cuts S 12:34’s definition of the former knowledge into two halves. One might then argue that if knowledge of the cessation side of dependent origination is assigned to “knowledge of the persistence of principles”, “knowledge of nibbāna” cannot be identified with it but must have some other meaning.

The expression *nibbāne nāṇa* is problematic in that it does not occur elsewhere in the four Nikāyas or the oldest parts of the *Khuddaka-nikāya*; it is found uniquely in the *Susīma-sutta*. In attempting to understand it, we thus have no alternative but to rely on inference and conjecture. Apart from the interpretation I proposed, I can see two alternative ways that this knowledge might be understood. Both, however, are difficult to reconcile with its function in the *Susīma-sutta*.

The first is to understand *nibbāne nāṇa* in terms of a passage on the destruction of the *āsavas* that occurs at A 9:36:

Here, bhikkhus, secluded from sensual pleasures ... a bhikkhu enters and dwells in the first *jhāna*.... He considers whatever phenomena exist there pertaining to form, feeling, perception, volitional formations, and consciousness as impermanent, suffering, an illness, a tumor, a dart, misery, affliction, alien, disintegrating, empty, and non-self. He turns his mind away from those phenomena and directs it to the deathless element thus: “This is peaceful, this is sublime, that is, the stilling of all formations, the relinquishing of all acquisitions, the destruction of craving, dispassion, cessation, nibbāna.” If he is firm in this, he attains the destruction of the influxes. But if he does not attain the destruction of the influxes, then,

because of that same passion for the Dhamma, delight in the Dhamma, with the utter destruction of five fetters, he is spontaneously reborn and attains final nibbāna there, not subject to return from that world.⁴⁷

Here it is shown that insight into the three characteristics (expanded into eleven items) comes first, followed by the fixing of the mind on the “deathless element”, nibbāna. Thus, the knowledge of phenomena as impermanent, suffering, and selfless could be identified as *dhamma-ṭṭhitināna* and the fixing of the mind on nibbāna as *nibbāne nāna*. While this interpretation is appealing, its disadvantage, at least with regard to the Susīma-sutta, is that these two knowledges here have no clear connection to dependent origination, the theme of the Susīma-sutta and the reason for its inclusion in the Nidāna-saṃyutta.

The second interpretation would take *nibbāne nāna* to be identical with *aññā*, the final knowledge that the *paññāvimutta* monks declare in the presence of the Buddha: “We understand: Birth is finished, the holy life has been lived, what had to be done has been done, there is no more coming back to any state of being.”⁴⁸ This certainly has the advantage of relating *nibbāne nāna* to the opening problem of the Susīma-sutta, the meaning of *paññāvimutta* arahantship. A drawback to this interpretation, however, is that this knowledge has its own distinct name, *aññā*, which had already been used earlier in the *sutta*. Thus it would have

⁴⁷A IV 422,22–23,10: *idha bhikkhave bhikkhu vivicc’ eva kāmehi vivicca akusalehi dhammehi savitakkaṃ savicāraṃ vivekajaṃ pītisukhaṃ paṭhamaṃ jhānaṃ upasampajja viharati. so yadeva tattha hoti rūpagataṃ vedanāgataṃ saññāgataṃ saṅkhāragataṃ viññāgataṃ te dhamme aniccato dukkhato rogato gaṇḍato sallato aghato ābādhato parato palokato suññato anattato samanupassati. so tehi dhammehi cittaṃ paṭivāpeti so tehi dhammehi cittaṃ paṭivāpetvā amatāya dhātuyā cittaṃ upasaṃharati. “etaṃ santaṃ etaṃ paṇītaṃ yadidaṃ sabbasaṅkhārasamatho sabbūpadhipaṭṭinissaggo taṇhakkhayo virāgo nirodho nibbānan” ti. so tattha ṭṭhito āsavānaṃ khayaṃ pāpuṇāti. no ce āsavānaṃ khayaṃ pāpuṇāti ten’ eva dhammarāgena tāya dhammanandiyā pañcannaṃ orambhāgiyānaṃ saññōjanānaṃ parikkhayaṃ opapātiko hoti tattha parinibbāyī anāvattidhammo tasmā lokā.*

⁴⁸S II 120,30–32: *khīṇā jāti vusitaṃ brahmacariyaṃ kataṃ karaṇīyaṃ nāparaṃ itthattāyā ti pajānāma.*

been more economical for the Buddha, in this second part of the *sutta*, to have said, “First comes *dhammaṭṭhitiñāṇa*, afterwards *aññā*,” without having to introduce still another type of knowledge determining the status of the *paññāvimutta* arahant.

Thus I believe the interpretation of *nibbāne ñāṇa* that I originally proposed remains the most cogent. While there is some degree of tension between S 12:34, which subsumes knowledge of the cessation side of dependent origination under *dhammaṭṭhitiñāṇa*, and S 12:70, which appears to identify this knowledge with *nibbāne ñāṇa*, the two are not inherently contradictory. The tension could be resolved by holding that, despite S 12:34, the origination side of *paṭicca-samuppāda* has a more legitimate claim to represent *dhammaṭṭhitiñāṇa* than the cessation side. This assertion can marshal support from S 12:20, which uses the expression *dhammaṭṭhitatā* solely in relation to the origination side.⁴⁹ The commentary to S 12:34, too, with its words, “the principle of conditionality is called ‘the persistence of principles’ because it is the cause for the occurrence [or] persistence of principles”, conjoins *pavatti* and *ṭhiti*, suggesting this knowledge relates to the forward movement of *saṃsāra*. The canonical exegetical work, the Paṭisambhidāmagga, though stemming from a later period than the old Nikāyas, explains *dhammaṭṭhitiñāṇa* only in terms of the origination series.⁵⁰ These sources can thus justify restricting “knowledge of the persistence of principles” to knowledge of the principle of conditionality *with respect to arising*. This would then allow us to interpret “knowledge of *nibbāna*” as knowledge of the cessation side of dependent origination, especially when this knowledge is taken as experiential rather than deductive. In this way, both knowledge of the persistence of principles and knowledge of *nibbāna* intersect with the other two types of

⁴⁹S II 25. It seems that this form of the expression is used here in preference to *dhammaṭṭhiti* simply in order to cast each technical term with the abstract *-tā* termination: *dhammaṭṭhitatā dhammaniyāmatā idappaccayatā*.

⁵⁰Paṭis I 49–52.

knowledge: knowledge of the principle and inferential knowledge. The following table illustrates these relationships:

PRIMARY TYPE OF KNOWLEDGE	APPLIED TO PRESENT TIME	APPLIED TO PAST AND FUTURE
dhammaṭṭhitiñāṇa	dhamme ñāṇa	anvaye ñāṇa
nibbāne ñāṇa	dhamme ñāṇa	anvaye ñāṇa

The Abhidharma-vibhāṣā-śāstra, the treatise of the Sarvāstivādins, comments on the two knowledges of the Susīma-sutta in a way that confirms the interpretation that I have proposed here:

Question: Herein, what is knowledge of the persistence of principles? What is knowledge of nibbāna?

Reply: Knowledge of the persistence of principles is the knowledge that knows the process of birth and death. Knowledge of nibbāna is the knowledge that knows the cessation of the process of birth and death. Further, knowledge of the persistence of principles is the knowledge that knows twelfold dependent origination. Knowledge of nibbāna is the knowledge that knows the cessation of twelfold dependent origination. Knowledge of the persistence of principles is the knowledge that knows [the truths of] suffering and its origin. Knowledge of nibbāna is the knowledge that knows [the truths of] cessation and the path. If one speaks thus, one has well understood [the saying] “First there is knowledge of the persistence of principles; afterwards, knowledge of nibbāna.” There are some who say that knowledge of the persistence of principles is the knowledge of [the truths of] suffering, its origin, and the path. Knowledge of nibbāna is the knowledge of [the truth of] cessation.... Knowledge of the persistence of principles is an ancillary knowledge; knowledge of nibbāna is the fundamental knowledge.⁵¹

Both pairs of knowledge connected with the Susīma-sutta are said to be cognitions of a *sekha*, a trainee, one who has reached the stage of

⁵¹T XXVIII 407c17-26: 此中何者是法住智。何者是涅槃智耶。答曰。知生死增長智是法住智。知生死增長減智是涅槃智。復次知十二緣起是法住智。知十二緣起滅是涅槃智。知苦集智是法住智。知滅道智是涅槃智。若作是說則為善通。先有法住智後有涅槃智。復有說者。苦集道智是法住智。滅智是涅槃智。... 復次諸邊中智是法住智。根本中智是涅槃智。

stream-entry or higher but has not yet attained arahantship. This is clear from those *suttas* in the Nidāna-samyutta which state that one with direct knowledge of dependent origination in its aspects of arising and cessation has “a trainee’s knowledge, a trainee’s true knowledge”.⁵² In the methodology of archaic Buddhism, even knowledge of nibbāna does not mark the disciple as an arahant. This knowledge, taken as knowledge of the cessation side of dependent origination, is already realized by the stream-enterer, who, with his first breakthrough to the Dhamma (*dhammābhisamaya*), gains the Dhamma-eye by which he sees the four noble truths.⁵³ By seeing the four noble truths, the disciple sees nibbāna as the cessation of aging-and-death, as the cessation of birth, and as the cessation of all the other causal factors of dependent origination back to ignorance. Though such disciples still have to train further to attain realization of nibbāna, they have eliminated the three fetters rooted in cognitive distortions. Their remaining task is to cultivate the path acquired with this breakthrough until they reach the extinction of the influxes, which marks the attainment of arahantship.

5. What Did Susīma Attain?

As I mentioned earlier, when we compare the second part of S 12:70 with its counterparts in M-Vin and SĀ 347, two important differences stand out. (1) In S 12:70, when the Buddha sets out to clarify his statement, “First there is knowledge of the persistence of principles; afterwards, knowledge of nibbāna”, he does so by drawing Susīma into the stock catechism on the three characteristics: the impermanence, suffering, and selflessness of the five aggregates, culminating in disenchantment, dispassion, and liberation. Only when the Buddha completes this exposition does he begin the questionnaire on dependent origination. The other two versions, in contrast, lack this catechism on the three

⁵²*sekhena nāṇena samannāgato itipi, sekhāya vijjāya samannāgato itipi*, at e.g. S II 43,20–21, 45,6–7.

⁵³See S 13:1–11, S 56:51–60.

characteristics and depict the Buddha as moving directly into the questionnaire on dependent origination. (2) In S 12:70 Susīma does not gain any transcendent attainment, whereas in M-Vin he gains the eye of Dhamma and in SĀ he first gains the eye of Dhamma and finally becomes an arahant.

In my previous paper on the Susīma-sutta I stipulated that when a text in one school of the Sthavira camp concurs with its Mahāsāṅghika parallel but the version in another Sthavira school differs from both, we can suspect that the dissident version has undergone modification. While this is a convenient working principle to generate hypotheses, it should not be adopted inflexibly, for other explanations might account for the difference in the dissident Sthavira version. Applying this principle to the present case, in which S 12:70 and SĀ 347 are rooted in schools with a Sthavira orientation, we might suspect S 12:70 to have been altered in both respects: first, by having the “three-characteristics catechism” spliced in; and second, by having any reference to Susīma’s obtaining the Dhamma-eye excised. However, though such suspicions may be defended, I believe that the two discrepancies in S 12:70 have different grades of credibility. I think that we are on fairly solid ground in supposing that the discussion on the three characteristics in S 12:70 is an interpolation. At the same time, I also believe that there is little reason to suppose that all mention of a transcendent attainment by Susīma has been removed.

In support of my first point I would contend that the discussion on the three characteristics does not fit in comfortably with the logical progression of the *sutta*, but has the net effect of depriving the discussion of dependent origination of a meaningful role in the discourse. In support of my second contention I would point out that M-Vin and SĀ 347 differ between themselves over Susīma’s attainment: the former sees him emerge from his discussion with the Buddha only as one who has gained the Dhamma-eye, which makes him a trainee on the path (*sekha*); the latter sees him ending up as an arahant.

With respect to attainments we can thus posit three possibilities regarding the most archaic form of the Susīma story:

- (1) The original version did not mention any attainment (as in S 12:70) and the statements about attainments in M-Vin and SĀ 347 were inserted later.
- (2) The original version mentioned the gain of the Dhamma-eye, and only this; S 12:70 removed this ascription while SĀ 347 boosted Susīma's stature by also attributing arahantship to him.
- (3) The original version mentioned Susīma's successive attainment of both the Dhamma-eye and arahantship; S 12:70 removed both attainments, whereas M-Vin removed the attainment of arahantship but left the gain of the Dhamma-eye.

To help resolve this issue we might note that later Buddhist literature displays a marked tendency to increase the number and status of attainments resulting from the Buddha's preaching. We find, for example, that at the end of many stories from the Dhammapada commentary and the Jātaka commentary, stories with little or no doctrinal content, many people, numbering even in the thousands, attain the fruit of stream-entry and hundreds of monks attain arahantship. This should arouse our suspicion that the ascription of arahantship to Susīma at the end of SĀ 347 is one more instance of this tendency to boost attainments, especially when the attainment takes place not after a formal exposition of Dhamma but after the Buddha describes the suffering that awaits a Dhamma-thief. By eliminating the third of the three alternatives mentioned above, we narrow our options to the first two. Between them, however, it is hard to determine which has a better claim to be the original or more archaic version.

Once we have taken note of these differences, we can also raise the question, "Are these differences merely fortuitous, the by-product of chance variations in the oral process of transmission, or do they result from conscious choices within the schools responsible for the preservation and transmission of the text, choices that might have been governed by underlying doctrinal perceptions?" Although we have no way to

answer this question with any certainty, I submit the opinion that in the case of the Susīma story, these differences resulted from conscious choices in part governed by doctrinal perceptions.

The commentary on the Pāli Susīma-sutta in the Sāratthappakāsinī, the authorized Saṃyutta commentary, can give us an instructive insight into the motivations that might have resulted in such alterations in S 12:70. Where the *sutta* itself is silent about any transcendent attainment by Susīma, the commentary states that at the conclusion of the Buddha's exposition of the three characteristics, Susīma attained arahantship:

[The Buddha] began the teaching with its three turns, [saying:] "What do you think, Susīma, is form permanent or impermanent?" and so forth, because he knew that [Susīma] was capable of penetration.... Then, at the conclusion of the teaching with its three turns, the elder attained arahantship.⁵⁴

It is well known that in writing the Sāratthappakāsinī, Ācariya Buddhaghosa did not compose an original work of exegesis but, rather, primarily collated and translated into Pāli material from the ancient Sinhala commentary, no longer extant. On the basis of this fact, we can be almost certain that the view that Susīma became an arahant derives from the old commentary, which must have pre-dated Buddhaghosa's work by several centuries. Now it seems to me that the interpolation of the passage on the three characteristics into S 12:70, which originally lacked this catechism (as in the Susīma story in M-Vin and SĀ 347), is closely connected with the commentarial ascription of arahantship to Susīma. So close is this connection, in fact, that I would venture the hypothesis that the reciters charged with maintaining the Saṃyuttanikāya added this passage to the discourse precisely because they

⁵⁴Spk 2:127: *idāni' ssa paṭivedhabhabbataṃ ñātvā teparivaṭṭaṃ dhamma-desanaṃ desento ... teparivaṭṭadesanāvasāne pana thero arahattaṃ patto*. By "penetration" (*paṭivedha*) is meant the attainment of a world-transcending (*lokuttara*) path and fruition. By "three turns" (*teparivaṭṭaṃ*) is meant the three characteristics.

inclined to the opinion that, during the discourse, Susīma did actually attain arahantship. On the one hand, due to textual conservatism and some degree of uncertainty, they might have been reluctant to insert a line of text ascribing arahantship (or even stream-entry) to Susīma; on the other hand, they might have believed that the coherence of the discourse required that Susīma end as an arahant and were willing to relax their conservatism by inserting what they considered a mere standard trope on the three characteristics into the *sutta* to help substantiate this belief.

In support of this conviction, they might well have had a suggestive reason in the archaic text itself. It will be remembered that when Susīma queried the monks who had announced their attainment of arahantship to the Buddha, they denied possessing the super-knowledges and formless emancipations. Susīma thereupon asked them, “Here now, venerable ones, this answer and the non-attainment of those states: how could this be, friends?”⁵⁵ By way of explanation, the monks answered: “We are liberated by wisdom.” Now later in the discourse, Susīma winds up in a position parallel to the monks of this group. The Buddha has questioned Susīma about the arising and cessation aspects of dependent origination and gotten him to affirm that he sees all these links. To see all the links, “to know and see them thus” (*evaṃ jānanto evaṃ passanto*), is the mark of one who has made the breakthrough to the Dhamma, who is at least a stream-enterer. The Buddha then asks Susīma whether he possesses the super-knowledges and formless emancipations. When Susīma denies having attained them, the Buddha asks him, “Here now, Susīma, this answer and the non-attainment of those states: how could this be, Susīma?”⁵⁶ Based on the analogy between Susīma and the monks in the first part of the *sutta*, we might well expect Susīma to say, “I am liberated by wisdom.” To our disappointment, however, Susīma does not answer; rather, as we have

⁵⁵See n. 1.

⁵⁶See n. 13.

seen, he prostrates himself before the Buddha and confesses his transgression in taking ordination as a thief of Dhamma.

Despite the silence on this point, the parallelism the text draws between Susīma and the group of wisdom-liberated monks might readily be understood to imply that Susīma himself had become a wisdom-liberated arahant. Nevertheless, this is not stated explicitly, and that is what leaves the stamp of mystery on the discourse. Did Susīma attain anything at all, and if so, what did he attain? Generally, whenever the Nikāyas want to assign the attainment of arahantship to a monk listening to a discourse, they do not hesitate to state, “While this discourse was being expounded, that bhikkhu’s mind was liberated from the influxes by non-clinging.”⁵⁷ Or, in the case of a lower attainment, it is said, “While this discourse was being expounded, in that bhikkhu the dust-free, stainless Dhamma-eye arose.”⁵⁸ Since the Susīma-sutta places Susīma in a position analogous to the wisdom-liberated monks, but makes no assertion about him realizing any attainment, his final status is unclear. On the one hand, if nothing is said about an attainment, the general rule would prescribe that we understand the listener had not achieved anything. On the other, if Susīma affirms that *he sees* the connections between all the links of dependent origination, this suggests that he is at least a stream-enterer. And if, further, he is placed in a position parallel to the wisdom-liberated monks, a position from which

⁵⁷e.g., at S IV 20,26 28, it is said of the thousand bhikkhus who heard the Ādittapariyāya-sutta: *imasmīñ ca pana veyyākaraṇasmīñ bhaññamāne tassa bhikkhusahassassa anupādāya āsavehi cittāni vimuccīṃsu.*

⁵⁸e.g., at S V 423,13 16, it is said of Koṇḍañña during the Buddha’s first sermon: *imasmīñ ca pana veyyākaraṇasmīñ bhaññamāne āyasmato Koṇḍaññassa virajaṃ vītamalaṃ dhammacakkhuṃ udapādi: “yaṃ kiñci samudaya-dhammaṃ, sabbhaṃ taṃ nirodhadhammaṃ” ti.* It is interesting to note that in all the Chinese Āgamas as well as independent *suttas* stemming from the early Buddhist schools, no text on the “eye of Dhamma” has a line corresponding to Pāli *yaṃ kiñci samudayadhammaṃ, sabbhaṃ taṃ nirodhadhammaṃ*. This strongly suggests that this line was added by the redactors of the Pāli school after the schools had gone their separate ways.

he can be expected to understand how arahantship is possible without the super-knowledges and formless meditations (and if we follow the commentary, even without the *jhānas*), this seems to suggest that he himself had reached nothing short of arahantship.

It was thus natural that teachers and commentators, probably already in the age of oral transmission, should attempt to resolve the ambiguity by assigning to Susīma some transcendent stature, either the gain of the Dhamma-eye or the realization of arahantship. In the school that preserved its texts in the language we call Pāli, this originally oral opinion would then have been set down in writing in the ancient commentary preserved in Sri Lanka. When Buddhaghosa accepted the opinion found in this commentary, that Susīma attained arahantship, and planted it into the Pāli commentary that he wrote on the *Samyutta-nikāya*, the opinion became hallowed Theravādin orthodoxy.

Now, in my understanding (which, I admit, is purely speculative), while the transmitters of the Pāli discourse may have been reluctant to state explicitly, in the text itself, that Susīma had attained arahantship, they did subtly alter the *sutta* in a way intended to buttress this ascription in its commentary. They did so by inserting into the text the passage on insight into the three characteristics with its concluding “disenchantment–dispassion–liberation sequence”: “Seeing thus, the noble disciple becomes disenchanted with form, feeling, perception, volitional activities, and consciousness. Through disenchantment, he becomes dispassionate. Through dispassion his mind is liberated.”⁵⁹

The question might be raised: “How does the inclusion of this passage support the ascription of arahantship to Susīma?” By way of an answer, we should note an important difference, in the Nikāyas (and presumably the Āgamas), between the respective roles that dependent origination and the three characteristics play in the spiritual evolution of the disciple. Both are domains of “wisdom” (*paññā*), but they are not interchangeable. Direct knowledge of dependent origination is the

⁵⁹S II 125,24–27. For the Pāli, see n. 11 above.

wisdom specifically assigned to one with the status of a *sekha*, a disciple at one of the lower stages of awakening who must still train further to reach the final stage of arahantship. In contrast, the knowledge of the three characteristics, especially when culminating in the disenchantment-dispassion-liberation sequence, is often presented as a prelude to the realization of arahantship.

If we peruse the Nikāyas, we would not find a single *sutta* in which the wisdom that perceives dependent origination becomes the triggering event for the attainment of arahantship. One might think this happened in the case of the Buddha's own attainment of enlightenment, as described at S 12:4–10 (S II 5–11). However, the Dīgha-nikāya account of the Buddha Vipassī's enlightenment makes a subtle but important distinction. Vipassī first attains “the eye, the knowledge, the wisdom, the true knowledge, the light” by which he sees dependent origination, first with respect to arising and then with respect to cessation.⁶⁰ Even after contemplating the cessation series, however, he is still a *bodhisatta*. He has discovered the path to enlightenment, but he has not yet walked the path to its goal; his mind is not yet liberated from the influxes and thus he cannot claim to have reached supreme enlightenment. The *sutta* continues: “Some time later the *bodhisatta* Vipassī dwelled contemplating rise and vanishing in the five clinging aggregates.... As he dwelled thus, before long, by non-clinging, his mind was liberated from the influxes.”⁶¹ This passage thus makes Vipassī's

⁶⁰At D II 33,5–8, 35,10–13.

⁶¹D II 35,14 24: *atha kho, bhikkhave, Vipassī bodhisatto aparena samayena pañcasu upādānakkhandhesu udayabbayānupassī vihāsi ... tassa pañcasu upādānakkhandhesu udayabbayānupassino viharato na cirass' eva anupādāya āsavehi cittaṃ vimuccī ti*. It is interesting to see that the Chinese Tripiṭaka has a parallel to this passage in an independent translation, the Vipāśyin Buddha Sūtra (毘婆尸佛經). Here, the bodhisattva Vipāśyin first contemplates dependent origination by way of arising and cessation. Then, at T I 156b19 22, it is said that he contemplates the five aggregates by way of their arising, cessation, and evanescence, as a result of which “through direct

attainment of complete enlightenment (and by implication the complete enlightenment of all Buddhas) consequent upon insight into the arising and vanishing of the five aggregates; in other words, upon the insight into impermanence, the first of the three characteristics.

In the Nikāyas and Āgamas, dependent origination serves as the portal to the *first breakthrough* to the Dhamma. We see, for example, that in the story of the enlightenment of the seven Buddhas each makes his initial discovery of the Dhamma through careful consideration (*yoniso manasikāra*) of dependent origination.⁶² Again, the wanderer Upatissa, better known as Sāriputta, gained the eye of Dhamma when he heard from the arahant Assaji the famous four-line stanza which states in abstract terms the principle of causal origination.⁶³ Several *suttas* in the Nidāna-saṃyutta assert that direct perception of dependent origination is the distinctive knowledge and vision of the trainee (*sekha*), of one “who has entered the stream of the Dhamma ... who stands squarely before the door to the Deathless”.⁶⁴

In the original version of the Susīma-sutta, as I would reconstruct it, the Buddha's catechism is intended to show how deep understanding of dependent origination in its sequence of arising — “the knowledge of the persistence of principles” — precedes “the knowledge of nibbāna”. This latter is the world-transcending breakthrough to a vision of the cessation of dependent origination which bestows upon the disciple a trainee's right view of the essential Dhamma, the four noble truths. From this platform of experientially knowing all four truths, the trainee has to develop insight further until he or she reaches “the exhaustion of the influxes”, namely, arahantship. This comes about, not simply by

realization, all his karma, habits, and defilements no longer arose. He attained great liberation and accomplished supreme perfect enlightenment”.

⁶²S II 5–11; see too D II 31–34.

⁶³Vin I 40,28–29.

⁶⁴S II 58,24–25: *dhammasotaṃ samāpanno itipi ... amatadvāraṃ āhacca tiṭṭhati iti pi*.

reviewing dependent origination, but by stopping the process of origination through disenchantment (*nibbidā*) and dispassion (*virāga*).

Whereas teachings on dependent origination generally culminate in gaining the eye of Dhamma, that is, in one of the three lower stages of awakening, contemplation of the three characteristics leads more incisively to disenchantment and dispassion and thence to the full liberation of arahantship. While a discourse including the sequence of disenchantment, dispassion, and liberation is occasionally shown to terminate in the mere gaining of the Dhamma-eye, more typically it is followed by the attainment of arahantship. Conversely, the attainment of arahantship is generally shown to follow from an exposition of the three characteristics, particularly when this leads into the disenchantment-dispassion-liberation sequence.⁶⁵ The disciple at the stage of trainee (*sekha*) contemplates all dependently arisen phenomena as impermanent, bound up with suffering, and non-self. He then pursues this insight until it brings disenchantment (*nibbidā*) and dispassion (*virāga*), as a consequence of which the mind abandons clinging and is liberated from the influxes (*anupādāya cittaṃ āsavehi vimuccati*).

I would conjecture that the custodians of the Saṃyutta-nikāya, probably during the age of oral transmission, interpolated the catechism on the three characteristics specifically to support the case for imputing the attainment of arahantship to Susīma. In contrast, the versions of the Susīma story in M-Vin and in the earlier part of SĀ 347, up to the final sentence, remain faithful to the exegetical principle underlying the archaic teaching, that direct knowledge of dependent origination is the

⁶⁵Using the Chaṭṭha Saṅgāyana CD, I have done a global search through the Nikāyas on the expressions *anupādāya āsavehi cittaṃ vimucc** and *anupādāya āsavehi cittaṃ vimucc**, seeking to find out how they correlate with the attainments reached by listeners to a discourse. A tabulation of my results might be the subject for a separate paper, but I can state briefly that whereas these expressions never occur in conjunction with discourses on dependent origination, they do occur quite often following discourses on the three characteristics, or one of the three characteristics, especially when the teaching culminates in the sequence of *nibbidā*, *virāga*, and *vimutti*.

special domain of a trainee. Hence these two versions, up to the conclusion of SĀ 347, hold that as a result of the Buddha's questionnaire on dependent origination, Susīma gained the eye of Dhamma, the wisdom of a trainee.

These two versions, moreover, seem to uphold the two aspects of dependent origination, the aspects of arising and of cessation, as the key for understanding the two types of knowledge mentioned by the Buddha, no matter whether those knowledges are designated with M Vin as "knowledge of the principle" and "inferential knowledge" or with SĀ 347 as "knowledge of the persistence of principles" and "knowledge of nibbāna". The Sāratthappakāsinī, the Saṃyutta commentary, further falls in line with this interpretation when, in commenting on the expression *dhammaṭṭhitiñāṇa* as it occurs in S 12:34, it calls this knowledge of the principle of conditionality.⁶⁶

When, however, the Sāratthappakāsinī comes to S 12:70, the Susīma-sutta itself, it proposes an alternative interpretation of these two knowledges that differs markedly from the other versions. The commentary states, " 'Knowledge of the persistence of principles' is insight knowledge, which arises first. 'Knowledge of nibbāna' is path knowledge, which arises at the end of the course of insight."⁶⁷ The Saṃyutta-tīkā, or subcommentary, clarifies the meaning of this: "The 'persistence of principles' is the nature of phenomena as impermanent, suffering, and non-self. The knowledge of this is 'knowledge of the persistence of principles.' This is what he [the commentator] calls 'insight knowledge'."⁶⁸

⁶⁶See above, p. 23.

⁶⁷Spk II 127: *dhammaṭṭhitiñāṇan ti vipassanāñāṇaṃ, taṃ paṭhamataraṃ uppajjati. nibbāne ñāṇan ti vipassanāya ciññante pavattamaggāñāṇaṃ, taṃ pacchā uppajjati.*

⁶⁸Spk-pt II 106 (VRI ed.): *dharmānaṃ ṭhitatā taṃsabhāvatā dhammaṭṭhiti, aniccadukkhānattatā, tatha ñāṇaṃ dhammaṭṭhitiñāṇan ti āha "vipassanā-ñāṇan" ti.* The author may have based this explanation on A I 286, which applies the term *dhammaṭṭhitatā* to each of the three characteristics.

When the *Susīma-sutta* states that “the knowledge of the persistence of principles” precedes “the knowledge of *nibbāna*”, the intention may well have been the same as that of the other versions, namely, that knowledge of the arising sequence of dependent origination precedes knowledge of the cessation sequence. Its commentary, however, takes this to be a statement to the effect that insight knowledge precedes the arising of the transcendent path. In the exegetical scheme of the Pāli commentaries, insight knowledge means direct insight into the five aggregates (or twelve sense bases, or eighteen elements) by way of the three characteristics; path knowledge supervenes on this and takes *nibbāna* as its object. From the commentarial standpoint, therefore, “the knowledge of the persistence of principles” is to be situated in the catechism on the three characteristics of the five aggregates; the knowledge of *nibbāna*, presumably, is referred to by the statement about the disciple gaining dispassion (*virāga*) and liberation (*vimutti*).⁶⁹

On account of the interpolation of the catechism on the three characteristics, the exact meaning of *dhammaṭṭhiṇāṇa* in the original text has become obscure. When we read the text in the light of its commentary, which identifies “knowledge of the persistence of principles” with insight into the three characteristics and (presumably) “knowledge of *nibbāna*” with the culminating events of dispassion (*virāga*) and liberation (*vimutti*), the questionnaire on dependent origination seems to be left hanging in limbo. Since the discussion on the three characteristics, culminating in dispassion and liberation, brings the noble disciple to arahantship, the questionnaire becomes almost superfluous, without a determinate purpose. In fact, the *Sāratthappakāsinī*, in

⁶⁹Elsewhere the commentaries identify dispassion (*virāga*) with the world-transcending path, and liberation (*vimutti*) with fruition; both are types of knowledge taking *nibbāna* as object. For example, Ps II 115: *ettha virāgo ti maggo virāgā vimuccatī ti ettha virāgena maggena vimuccatī ti phalaṃ kathitaṃ*. Spk II 53, commenting on *virāga* and *vimutti*, says: *vimuttī ti arahattaphalavimutti.... virāgo ti maggo*.

glossing the passage on dependent origination, says that this is brought in as a way of interrogating Susīma about his attainment.⁷⁰

If, however, the three-characteristics catechism is deleted, the questionnaire on dependent origination serves a clear purpose, elucidating the meaning of the two knowledges: the series on dependent origination in its aspect of arising brings out the meaning of *dhammaṭṭhitiñāṇa*; the series on dependent origination in its aspect of cessation brings out the meaning of *nibbāne ñāṇa*. One *first (pubbe)* arrives at the knowledge of how saṃsāric phenomena originate from their respective conditions. One follows the chain of conditions back to ignorance, just as the Buddha did on the night of his enlightenment, and then *afterwards (pacchā)*, when this knowledge comes to maturity, one makes the breakthrough to the knowledge of nibbāna. As a consequence of this one sees how, with the cessation of ignorance, all the phenomena linked together in the series are made to cease. This is the dual knowledge of the trainee, which enables him to understand how arahantship is possible without attainment of the super-knowledges and formless emancipations (in S 12:70 and M-Vin) or even without the four *jhānas* (in SĀ 347, Vibhāṣā, and the Saṃyutta commentary).

6. Conclusion

Some of the more speculative views I have advanced in this paper (and its predecessor) are admittedly conjectural and cannot be supported with “hard evidence”. Their appeal is necessarily to intuition, but I believe I have presented enough cogent reasoning to show that these intuitions merit serious consideration. By proffering such views, I do not intend in any way to suggest that all differences between the variant versions of a discourse among the early Buddhist schools reflect differences in doctrine. Many of their differences, probably the great majority, were probably due simply to chance variations in the process

⁷⁰Spk II 127: *idāni 'ssa anuyogaṃ āropento jātippaccayā jarāmaraṇan ti, Susīma, passasī ti ādim āha.*

of oral transmission. However, there are several important instances in which the variations in the parallel versions of a discourse preserved by different schools are too pointed to be put down to chance. In my opinion, it makes better sense to see them as reflecting doctrinal pressures — differences in points of emphasis and understanding — that shaped the formulation of the text in the course of its transmission in different early Buddhist communities. To advance our understanding of early Buddhism, particularly in the transitional phase from archaic to

SOURCE	WHAT THE PAÑÑĀVIMUTTA ARAHANT LACKS	TWO KNOWLEDGES MENTIONED BY THE BUDDHA	DOCTRINES IN DISCUSSION WITH THE BUDDHA	SUSĪMA'S ATTAINMENTS
S 12:70 (S II 119–28)	Five mundane <i>abhiññās</i> ; formless emancipations	<i>Dhammaṭṭhiti</i> knowledge; knowledge of nibbāna	(i) Three universal characteristics; (ii) dependent origination, by way of arising and cessation	None mentioned
Sāratthappakāsinī (Saṃyutta Commentary) (Spk II 124–127)	Besides the above, the four <i>jhānas</i>	<i>Dhammaṭṭhiti</i> knowledge = insight into three characteristics; knowledge of nibbāna = path knowledge	(i) Three characteristics; (ii) dependent origination, by way of arising and cessation	Arahantship
M-Vin (T XXII 362 b25–363b21)	Divine eye, recollecting past lives; formless emancipations	Knowledge of Dhamma; inferential knowledge	Dependent origination, by way of arising and cessation	The eye of Dhamma
SĀ 347 (T II 96b25–98a10)	Four <i>jhānas</i> ; formless emancipations	<i>Dhammaṭṭhiti</i> knowledge; knowledge of nibbāna	Dependent origination, by way of arising and cessation	(i) The eye of Dhamma; (ii) arahantship
Vibhāṣā (T XXVIII 407c26–408b11)	Four <i>jhānas</i> ; formless emancipations	<i>Dhammaṭṭhiti</i> knowledge; knowledge of nibbāna	Various explanations of the two kinds of knowledge	Passage ends before this point is reached

sectarian Buddhism, it is fruitful to peruse the texts closely for examples of variant versions that reflect different viewpoints shaping the doctrinal agendas of the schools. I believe that the Susīma-sutta, read against its counterparts in the other schools, provides a fertile example of this.

To summarize my comparative study of the Susīma-sutta and its parallels in both my earlier paper (“The Susīma-sutta and the Wisdom-Liberated Arahant”) and this one, I have prepared a table (p. 42) that highlights the differences between the several versions, which are listed in the first column.

The second column refers back to my earlier paper. It lists the attainments that the *paññāvimutta* arahant lacks, as revealed in the different versions by the questions that Susīma asks the monks who declared arahantship to the Buddha. In the Pāli version, S 12:70, Susīma asks about the five “mundane” super-knowledges and the peaceful formless emancipations, which the monks deny possessing. M-Vin closely resembles the Pāli version, except that here Susīma asks the monks only about the knowledge of the passing away and rebirth of beings, the recollection of their own past lives, and the formless emancipations; again, the monks deny possessing these. In both these versions, Susīma does not inquire from these monks whether or not they possess the four jhānas, and it remains perplexing why the *sutta* does not touch on this question. This is particularly curious in view of several canonical texts (in the Pāli Nikāyas) that contrast a practitioner who takes the “pleasant route” of the four *jhānas* with one who takes the “painful (or strenuous) route” of such meditations as the unattractive nature of the body, the inevitability of death, discontent with the entire world, and so forth.

The version of the Susīma story in SĀ 347, the Chinese translation of the Saṃyuktāgama, at once catches our attention with the difference in the questions Susīma asks the monks. Here, and in the partial replication of this account in Vibhāṣā, Susīma asks the monks whether they

attained the exhaustion of the influxes on the basis of the four *jhānas* and the formless emancipations, which they all deny attaining. They still claim to be “liberated by wisdom”, and thus in this system to be “liberated by wisdom” means to attain arahantship without achievement of the *jhānas*. The Mahāvibhāṣā admits the old canonical definition of a wisdom-liberated arahant as one who attains liberation without possessing the formless attainments, but it sees possession of the *jhānas* by a wisdom-liberated arahant to “dilute” the completeness of his liberation by wisdom. The most complete kind of wisdom-liberated arahant is the one who does not achieve any *jhānas* but gains comprehension of the Dhamma based on a state of concentration called “threshold meditation” (*sāmantaka-dhyāna*), closely corresponding to the “access concentration” (*upacāra-samādhi*) of the Theravāda commentarial system.⁷¹

If the relationship between the texts merely remained as I have just described it, we could simply dismiss this as a difference between the Theravāda and Mahāsāṅghika systems on the one hand, and the Sarvāstivāda (and possibly Mūlasarvāstivāda) system on the other. However, the relationship between the positions of these schools becomes thorny and convoluted when we discover that the Visuddhimagga and the Pāli commentaries admit a kind of arahant who attains the goal without any attainment of the *jhānas*. This type is called the *sukkhavipassaka*, the “dry-insight meditator”. To increase the complexity of the inter-relations among the texts, the Sāratthappakāsinī, the authorized commentary to the Saṃyutta-nikāya, explains the wisdom-liberated arahants of S 12:70 in a way that resembles SĀ 347 and Vibhāṣā. It declares that these monks were dry-insight meditators, as is clear from its gloss on the term *paññāvimutta* as it occurs in the *sutta*: “We are without *jhāna*, dry-insight meditators, liberated simply by wisdom.”⁷²

⁷¹See “The Susīma-sutta and the Wisdom-Liberated Arahant”, p. 71.

⁷²Spk II 126–27: *mayam nijjhānakā sukkhavipassakā paññāmatten’ eva vimuttā*.

The fact that the Pāli commentary endorses a position that is closer to SĀ 347 and Vibhāṣā than to the actual text of S 12:70 raises the question whether the views circulating in the Sarvāstivāda camp might not have influenced the interpretation proposed in the Theravāda commentary. We cannot answer this question with a definite affirmative, for it is perfectly possible that the two similar interpretations arose independently; but the fact that the Pāli *sutta* and M-Vin never touch on the issue of whether or not the wisdom-liberated monks possess the *jhānas* raises a suspicion that the underlying intent of the *sutta* in all versions is precisely to suggest this possibility. Thus, as I construe it, in its final formulation the *sutta* is intended to convey the idea that achievement of the *jhānas* is not indispensable to the attainment of the final goal, arahantship. In the texts with Sarvāstivāda affiliation, which probably achieved their final literary form somewhat later than the Pāli version, this idea was admitted into the *sutta* itself. In the Pāli version, due perhaps to textual conservatism, this idea was not stated explicitly but was hinted at by silence regarding the *jhāna* attainments of the monks questioned by Susīma. Explicit expression of this view was reserved for the early commentators, whose opinion eventually passed into the Sāratthappakāsinī, the official Mahāvihāra commentary on the Saṃyutta-nikāya composed by Buddhaghosa.

The third column lists the two kinds of knowledge with which the Buddha answers Susīma when the latter questions him about the possibility of *paññāvimutta* arahantship. From this list we can see that all the versions except M-Vin agree that the names of the two knowledges are “knowledge of the persistence of principles” (*dhammaṭṭhitiñāṇa*, 法住智) and “knowledge of nibbāna” (*nibbāne ñāṇa*, 涅槃智). M-Vin has instead two knowledges, 法智 and 比智, that correspond to Pāli *dhamme ñāṇa* and *anvaye ñāṇa*. These two knowledges also occur in relation to dependent origination at S 12:33, where they are respectively defined as knowledge of the conditional relationships with regard to the present time (= *dhamme ñāṇa*) and knowledge of the conditional relationships with regard to the past and future (= *anvaye ñāṇa*). It is quite

likely that the reading of the two knowledges in S 12:70 and SĀ 347 is the more original one. The preservers of the Mahāsāṅghika Vinaya might have borrowed the alternative pair of knowledges from a *sūtra* in their own collection corresponding to S 12:33. It is possible this change came about through a Sarvāstivādin influence; for in the Sarvāstivāda presentation of the path of realization, the two knowledges, *dharmajñāna* and *anvayaññāna*, play a major role. Though the names are the Sanskrit equivalents of those found in S 12:33, they were given new meanings as determined by the Sarvāstivāda account of the path. This system had been adopted by other schools, and it is possible that the Mahāsāṅghikas, either through accidental copyists' error or by deliberate choice, adopted the names of those knowledges for their Vinaya version of the Susīma story, dropping the names of the older pair of knowledges.

To understand the two knowledges shared by S 12:70 and SĀ 347 — “knowledge of the persistence of principles” (*dharmatthitīṇāṇa*) and “knowledge of nibbāna” (*nibbāne ñāṇa*) — I collated the different versions of the Susīma story and also consulted the explanations of them found in Vibhāṣā. Read together, these texts give us firm ground for identifying the two knowledges as direct knowledge respectively of the arising and cessation aspects of dependent origination. However, in the discussion that occurs between Susīma and the Buddha, S 12:70 includes a passage not found in the other versions. This is a catechism on the three characteristics of the five aggregates — impermanence, suffering, and selflessness — which culminates in the disciple becoming disenchanted, gaining dispassion, and becoming liberated. The Sāratthappakāsinī dissents from the apparent meaning of all versions (a meaning made explicit in Vibhāṣā) by interpreting “knowledge of the persistence of principles” as knowledge of the three characteristics and “knowledge of nibbāna” as the world-transcending path, which (based on a standard commentarial gloss) is presumably to be identified with the occasion of dispassion (*virāga*) in the “disenchantment-dispassion-liberation” sequence.

I noted that because this catechism on the three characteristics is not found in any of the other versions of the Susīma story, it is almost certainly an interpolation. I also pointed out that because it appropriates the “knowledge of the persistence of principles” for knowledge of the three characteristics, the commentary leaves the questionnaire on dependent origination hanging in suspension almost like a vestigial organ. These considerations lead us to believe the versions that omit the “three-characteristics catechism” are more archaic in this respect.

The last column lists the attainments reached by Susīma in the different versions of the story. Such a comparison, I held, may give us some insight into the motivation of the Pāli transmitters in incorporating the discussion on the three characteristics into their version of the *sutta*. We saw that S 12:70 does not ascribe any transcendent attainment to Susīma. In contrast, M-Vin shows him gaining the “eye of Dhamma”, which would make him a noble disciple at one of the three lower stages of awakening. SĀ 347 shows him first gain the eye of Dhamma and then, at the end of the discourse, attain arahantship.

Now even though the Pāli *sutta* does not assign any transcendent attainment to Susīma, the Sāratthappakāsinī, commenting on the *sutta*, states that he attained arahantship during the catechism on the three characteristics. We thus find here another remarkable convergence between SĀ 347 and the position taken in the Pāli commentary. Just above, we saw that SĀ 347 explicitly states that the wisdom-liberated arahants questioned by Susīma claimed to have attained arahantship without the *jhānas*, a position adopted by the Saṃyutta commentary though not evident in the text of S 12:70 itself. Similarly, we see here that both SĀ 347 and the Saṃyutta commentary attribute to Susīma the attainment of arahantship, while the Pāli *sutta* itself remains silent about such an attainment. I surmise that the passage on the three characteristics was spliced in precisely to justify commentators and teachers (probably during the early formative stage of the commentaries) in their opinion that Susīma attained arahantship. This was done because the “three-characteristics” catechism, especially when it culminates in the

“disenchantment-dispassion-liberation” sequence, is typically connected in the *suttas* with the attainment of arahantship, while insight into dependent origination does not play such a role.

If my suppositions and speculations are correct, the several versions of this Susīma story available to us illustrate how chance variations due to oral transmission (mostly in the narrative) and subtle pressures imposed by emerging doctrinal interpretations (at key points in the dialogues) worked in unison to transform a text constructed from a simple plot and a simple script in different directions among the early Buddhist schools. Far more work is still needed in comparative study of the *suttas* to see how these texts may reveal traces of subtle doctrinal tendencies that came to clear articulation only in the early Abhidharma, the commentaries, and the mature philosophical systems. But comparison between the Susīma-sutta and its parallels serves as an example of how such studies can be fruitful.

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