

Hetu Sutta

The Discourse on Causes

[How the wrong view of non-causality arises]

(Saṃyutta Nikāya 24.7/3:210 f)

Translated & annotated by Piya Tan ©2008

Introduction

The **Hetu Sutta** (S 24.7) is about the attaining of streamwinning by way of the perception of impermanence (*anicca,saññā*), similar to that given in the suttas of **the Okkanti Saṃyutta** (S 25).¹ Like the two discourses preceding it (**the N’atthi Sutta**, S 24.5;² **the Karota Sutta**, S 24.6)³ and the one following it (**the Mahā Diṭṭhi Sutta**, S 24.8),⁴ it deals with the refuting of one of the four philosophical, but false and morally harmful, theories advocated by the Buddha’s contemporaries. The Hetu Sutta specifically refutes the determinism (*niyati*) or anti-karma views (*akiriya,vāda*) of Makkhali Go,sāla⁵ and the non-causalist (*ahetuka,vāda*) views of Pūraṇa Kassapa.⁶ [§4]

Its approach or “going” (*gamaṇa*)⁷ is that of the catechism, such as “Is form permanent or impermanent?” to the five aggregates, for the realization of their impermanence, unsatisfactoriness and lack of self-identity [§9].

The **Hetu Sutta** (S 24.7) is closely related to **the Cha-ḷ-ābhijāti Sutta** (A 6.57).⁸ Pūraṇa Kassapa’s view of the “six classes by birth” (*cha-ḷ-ābhijāti*) is mentioned and refuted in both these suttas. While the Hetu Sutta refutes the six classes by means of the perception of impermanence (*anicca,saññā*), the Cha-ḷ-ābhijāti Sutta rebuts it with a new set of six kinds of spiritual developments. As such, they both deal with the same topic.

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¹ See eg (*Anicca*) **Cakkhu S** (S 25.1/3:225) = SD 16.7.

² S 24.5/3:206-208.

³ S 24.6/3:208 f = SD 23.10.

⁴ S 24.8/3:211-213.

⁵ See **Sāmañña,phala S** (D 2.19-21/1:52 f) = SD 8.10. See **Cha-ḷ-ābhijāti S** (S 6.57) = SD 23.5 Intro (1.1).

⁶ See **Sāmañña,phala S** (D 2.16-18/1:53) = SD 8.10.

⁷ See S:B 849.

⁸ A 6.57/3:383-387 = SD 23.5.

The Discourse on Causes

(S 24.7/3:210 f)

1 At Sāvattthī. [210]

The wrong view of non-causality

2 “Bhikshus, when what exists, by clinging to what, by adhering to what, does such a view as this arise, that⁹

DETERMINISM (MAKKHALI GOSĀLA)

‘There is neither cause nor condition¹⁰ for the defilement of beings.

Beings are defiled without cause, without condition.

There is neither cause nor condition for the purification of beings.

Beings are purified without cause, without condition.

[There is nothing self-caused, nothing other-caused, nothing human-caused.]¹¹

There is no power, no effort, no personal strength [human energy], no human endeavour.

All living beings, all life, all beings, all souls (*jīva*) are powerless, devoid of power, devoid of effort.

Subject to the changes of fate, circumstances and nature, they experience pleasure and pain in the six classes by birth.’¹²

3 “Bhante, our teachings are rooted in the Blessed One, guided by the Blessed One, has the Blessed One as refuge. It would be good indeed if the Blessed One were to explain its meaning. Having heard the Blessed One, the monks would remember it.”¹³

“Then, listen, bhikshus, pay close attention to it, I will speak.”

“Yes, bhante!” the monks answered the Blessed One in assent.

The Blessed One said this:

How the wrong view of non-causality arises

4 (1) “When there is **form**, bhikshus, there is clinging to form, adhering to form, such a view as this arises, that, ‘There is neither cause nor condition for the defilement of beings...they experience pleasure and pain in the six classes by birth.’

⁹ The full passage, as in **Sāmañña,phala S** (D 2), where these fatalistic views are attrib to Makkhali Gosāla (D 2.19/1:53) = SD 8.10.

¹⁰ *Ahetu, appaccayā*: “condition,” *hetu*, means “root” (eg greed, hatred, delusion); *paccaya* means “condition.”

¹¹ *N’atthi atta, kāre n’atthi para, kāre, n’atthi purisa, kāre*. This sentence is found in the **Sāmañña,phala S** passage (D 2.19/1:83,29-29) = SD 8.10, but omitted here and from **Sandaka S** passage (M 76.13/1:516,33-517,3). The ideas here and in the next para are presented by a certain brahmin to the Buddha who refutes them in **Atta, kāri S** (A 6.38/3:337 f) = SD 7.6.

¹² *Niyati, saṅgati, bhāva, pariṇatā chass’ev’ābhijātisu sukha, dukkham paṭisamvedeti*. See **Apapaṅka S** (M 60.21-28/1:407-410 = SD 35.5) where this wrong view is answered. On these 6 “classes by birth” (*ābhijāti*), see **Cha-ābhijāti S** (A 6./3:383 = SD 23.10), where according to the antinomian **Pūraṇa Kassapa**, they are (1) the black class (*kaṇhābhijāti*), ie the bloody trade (butchers, fishermen, robbers, etc); (2) the blue class (*nīlābhijāti*), ie monks who subscribe to karma; (3) the red class (*lohitābhijāti*), ie the loin-clad Jains; (4) the yellow class (*haliddābhijāti*), ie the white-clad disciples of naked ascetics; (5) the white class (*sukkābhijāti*), ie the male and female Ājīvikas; (6) the purest white class (*parama, sukkhābhijāti*), ie Nanda Vaccha, Kisa Saṅkicca and Makkhali Gosāla. The Buddha however rejects this arbitrary gesture, and teaches that it is **karma**, not class, that makes us what we are (A 6.57/-3:383-387; also DA 1:182; MA 3:131; AA 2:342 f; SA 2:342 f). See also **Deva, dāha S** (M 101.22(4)/2:222 = SD 18.4), where *ābhijāti* is mentioned in connection with the Nirgranthas, and Bodhi, *Discourse on the Fruits of Reclusheship*, 1989: 73-75.

¹³ *Bhagavam, mūlakā no bhante dhammā, bhagavaṃ nettikā, bhagavaṃ paṭisaraṇā. Sādhu vata bhante bhagavatañ-ñ’eva paṭibhātu etassa bhāsītassa attho. Bhagavato sutvā bhikkhū dhāressantī ti*. This is stock (M 1:309 f, 317, 465, 3:115; S 2:80 f; A 1:199, 4:158, 351, 5:355).

5 (2) When there is **feeling**, bhikshus, there is clinging to feeling, adhering to feeling, such a view as this arises, that, ‘There is neither cause nor condition for the defilement of beings...they experience pleasure and pain in the six classes by birth.’

6 (3) When there is **perception**, bhikshus, there is clinging to perception, adhering to perception, such a view as this arises, that, ‘There is neither cause nor condition for the defilement of beings...they experience pleasure and pain in the six classes by birth.’

7 (4) When there are **formations**, bhikshus, there is clinging to formations, adhering to formations, such a view as this arises, that, ‘There is neither cause nor condition for the defilement of beings...they experience pleasure and pain in the six classes by birth.’

8 (5) When there is **consciousness**, bhikshus, there is clinging to consciousness, adhering to consciousness, such a view as this arises, that, ‘There is neither cause nor condition for the defilement of beings... they experience pleasure and pain in the six classes by birth.’

How the wrong view of non-causality ends¹⁴

9 Now what do you think, bhikshus? Is **form** permanent or impermanent?”

“Impermanent, bhante.”

“Is what is impermanent unsatisfactory [painful] or satisfactory [pleasurable]?”¹⁵

“Unsatisfactory, bhante.”

“Is what is impermanent, unsatisfactory and subject to change fit to be regarded thus: ‘There is neither cause nor condition for the defilement of beings...they experience pleasure and pain in the six classes by birth.’?”¹⁶

“No, bhante.”

10 “Now, what do you think, bhikshus, is **feeling** permanent or impermanent?”

“Impermanent, bhante.”

“Is what is impermanent unsatisfactory or satisfactory?”

“Unsatisfactory, bhante.”

“Is what is impermanent, unsatisfactory and subject to change fit to be regarded thus: ‘There is neither cause nor condition for the defilement of beings...they experience pleasure and pain in the six classes by birth.’?”

“No, bhante.”

10 “Now, what do you think, bhikshus, is **perception** permanent or impermanent?”

“Impermanent, bhante.”

“Is what is impermanent unsatisfactory or satisfactory?”

“Unsatisfactory, bhante.”

“Is what is impermanent, unsatisfactory and subject to change fit to be regarded thus: ‘There is neither cause nor condition for the defilement of beings...they experience pleasure and pain in the six classes by birth.’?”

“No, bhante.”

12 “Now, what do you think, bhikshus, are **formations** permanent or impermanent?”

“Impermanent, bhante.”

“Is what is impermanent unsatisfactory or satisfactory?”

“Unsatisfactory, bhante.”

“Is what is impermanent, unsatisfactory and subject to change fit to be regarded thus: ‘There is neither cause nor condition for the defilement of beings...they experience pleasure and pain in the six classes by birth.’?”

¹⁴ This section parallels that in **Anatta,Jakkhāṇa S** (S 22.59.12-16/3:66-68) = SD 1.2.

¹⁵ *Dukkhaṃ vā sukhaṃ vā.*

¹⁶ In **Anatta,Jakkhāṇa S** (S 22.59), the wrong view refuted here is: the notion “This is mine,” which arises through craving (*taṇhā*); the notion “This I am,” which arises through conceit (*māna*); the notion “This is my self,” which arises through views (*diṭṭhi*). (S 22.59.12-16/3:66-68) = SD 1.2.

“No, bhante.”

13 “Now, what do you think, bhikshus, is **consciousness** permanent or impermanent?”

“Impermanent, bhante.”

“Is what is impermanent unsatisfactory or satisfactory?”

“Unsatisfactory, bhante.”

“Is what is impermanent, unsatisfactory and subject to change fit to be regarded thus: ‘There is neither cause nor condition for the defilement of beings...they experience pleasure and pain in the six classes by birth.’?”

“No, bhante.”¹⁷

14 “That which is **seen, heard, sensed, cognized**,¹⁸ that is, attained, sought after, examined by the mind—is that permanent or impermanent?”

“Impermanent, bhante.”

“Is what is impermanent unsatisfactory or satisfactory?”

“Unsatisfactory, bhante.”

“Is what is impermanent, unsatisfactory and subject to change fit to be regarded thus: ‘There is neither cause nor condition for the defilement of beings...they experience pleasure and pain in the six classes by birth.’?”

“No, bhante.”

Overcoming wrong view results in streamwinning

15 Bhikshus, when noble disciple has abandoned doubt in these six cases,¹⁹ and when, further, he has abandoned doubt about suffering, the arising of suffering, the ending of suffering, [211] and the way leading to the ending of suffering, he is then called a noble disciple who is a streamwinner, not bound for the lower world,²⁰ sure of liberation, destined for awakening.

—evam —

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¹⁷ In **Anatta, Jakkhaṇa S** (S 22.59), the teaching on not-self (*anattā*) continues, and the monks become arhats at the end of the discourse. (S 22.59.12-16/3:66-68) = SD 1.2.

¹⁸ This is a fourfold classification of the 5 sense-objects, ie “the sense-object tetrad.” Comy: “The seen” (*diṭṭha*) is the visible-form base; “the heard” (*suta*), the sound base; “the sensed” (*muta*), the objects of smell, taste and touch; and “the cognized” (*viññāta*), the remaining seven bases (ie the 6 internal bases and the mind-object base) (DA 3:914; MA 2:110; SA 2:337 f; AA 3:31; ItA 2:187; Nc 66; PmA 2:432). The words “attained, sought after, examined by the mind” (*pattam pariyesitam anuvicaritam manasā*) are merely an elaboration of the fourth, the “cognized” (SA 2:338). However, from the practical viewpoint, this last phrase could well apply to the other 3 sense-objects, too; for, they are all mind-rooted.

¹⁹ Comy is silent on this term, but “it seems the six cases are the five aggregates and the tetrad of the sense objects taken collectively as one” (S:B 1095 n251). Cf **Alaggadūpama S** (M 22), where the tetrad of sense-objects actually replaces *viññāna* as a basis for wrong view (*diṭṭhi-t, thāna*). (M 22.15/1:135,34-36)

²⁰ *Avinīpāta*, alt tr “not fated for birth in a suffering state”; opp of *vinīpāta*, “the world of suffering”, another name for the 4 woeful courses (*duggati*) or the 4 lower worlds (*apāya*) (Vism 13.92 f). Sometimes 5 woeful courses (*pañca, gati*) (D 3:234=33.2.1, A 11.68) are mentioned: the hells (*niraya*), the animal kingdom (*tirachāna, yoni*), the ghost realm (*pitti, visaya*), the human world (*manussa*) and the heavenly world (*deva*). Of these, the first three are woeful, with the asura-demons (*asura, kāya*) as the fourth woeful course. The remaining two are “happy courses” (*sugati*). For a discussion, see Nyanaponika & Bodhi (tr), *Numerical Discourses of the Buddha*, 1999:14-19.