1 Components of the phrase

1.1 BASIC DEFINITIONS

1.1.1 The tetrad of cognitive\(^1\) modes—\textit{dīṭṭha suta muta viññāta} [1.2.3]—and the triad of cognitive modes—\textit{dīṭṭha suta muta} [3]—are common models used by the Buddha in his teachings. The nouns and their respective verbs and related forms are as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pali</th>
<th>Sanskrit</th>
<th>past participle</th>
<th>present tense</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>dīṭṭha</td>
<td>dṛṣṭa</td>
<td>“seen”</td>
<td><em>dassati</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>suta</td>
<td>śruta</td>
<td>“heard”</td>
<td>suñāti</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>muta</td>
<td>(māta)(^3)</td>
<td>“sensed”</td>
<td>munāti = maññati</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>viññāta</td>
<td>viññāta</td>
<td>“known”</td>
<td>vijānāti</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This table summarizes the most “developed” senses of the 4 terms, and their most familiar usages in the suttas. Hence, we need to be familiar with these senses before we examine how their usages evolved over time.

We will discuss below how this tetrad is probably at first used by the Buddha to specifically debunk the Upanishadic notion of the eternal soul. [1.2]

1.1.2 These 4 verbs also function as \textit{gerunds or verbal nouns}, as “the seen,” “the heard,” and “the known.” However, as is evident from our study below, the translation of \textit{mata}, because of its Pali usage and pregnant senses (polysemy),\(^4\) has been problematic, mainly because the word has no cognate in Sanskrit nor in English. In other words, it is used in a unique early Buddhist way in the suttas. Hence, translators who understand this difficulty, try to work with near-synonyms or neologisms.

1.1.3 Usages of \textit{mata}

1.1.3.1 We know that these terms deal with \textit{cognition}, that is, function on a basic level of being \textit{conscious} of an object, even of itself (in the case of the mind) as an object. Such objects are called “the seen” (in the experience with the eye), “the heard” (the ear), and “the known” (the mind). Clearly missing from this list are the experiences of the smell, taste and touch.

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\(^1\) “Perception” here is used in a non-technical sense denoting a whole range of cognitive and apperceptive faculties.

\(^2\) The prefixed asterisk (*) is a reconstruction, a back-formation or found only in lexical works. In other words, the form *\textit{dassati} (see PED) does not occur in the Pali Canon, where \textit{dakkhati} (S 1:106, \textit{dakkhasi}) or rarely, \textit{dakkhiti} (Sn 909) (“he sees”) are found instead.

\(^3\) Skt \textit{mata}, “thought, believed, imagined, supposed, understood; a thought, idea, opinion, sentiment, view, belief, doctrine” (SED). Clearly, \textit{mata} has a broader sense, closer to \textit{viññāta}.

\(^4\) On Pali polysemy, see SD 1.1 (4.4.5); SD 10.16 (1.3.1-1.3.2; 2.2).
1.1.3.2 Hence, it makes good logical sense to surmise that *muta*, “the sensed,” must be a broad term for this set of “omitted” senses, that is, those of the nose, the tongue, and the body. Interestingly, all these 3 senses work by way of some form of physical “contact.” Smell molecules touch the inner nasal cavity which senses smell; taste-buds on the tongue gives us a sense of taste; and physical impact of solid objects and the “feel” of temperature give us bodily touch. [5]

1.1.3.3 However, *muta* is used at least in a few different ways in the suttas, and hence does not have a fixed sense. In fact, a careful survey of the usages of *muta* in the suttas will show the following semantic evolution or different applications of *muta* in the Buddha’s teachings. These usages have been listed in a roughly chronological evolutionary pattern.

This is not a historical pattern but more of a usage analysis of these terms, especially *muta*, for a better understanding of the Buddha’s teaching as a whole in terms of right practice. Hence, what we are investigating is not a “technical truth” (how words are used in a philological sense) but rather a quest for “spiritual truth” (how their usages express what the Buddha intends to convey to us). The higher purpose of our study, we should be reminded, is ultimately for the sake of attaining at least streamwinning in this life itself.

1.2 THE UPANISHADIC PRELUDE

1.2.1 Scholars and teachers

An understanding of the philological technicalities of the phrase and its components helps us in clarifying the import of what they teach. Our task here is not merely to understand what the words mean or do not mean, or how they relate to other words and parts of words. These are interesting and profitable endeavours for the philologist and scholar surely. But often they stop right there. They are, by definition only interested in “professional truth.”

However, there are scholars—and the tendency to this is growing by the generation—to go beyond merely the professional truth, that is, to go beyond merely expressing oneself within the academic purview, even “academic correctness,” to understand the Buddhist text for what it is and for personal cultivation. Even when the scholar does this in a personal capacity, he is a Dharma practitioner. He would be valuable to other practitioners in the same endeavour of understanding the suttas and teachings for spiritual development. Insofar as the academic seeks and share this personal quest, he is a Dharma teacher, too.

1.2.2 The Buddha’s social milieu

1.2.2.1 The Buddha arose in an environment that was rich in religious ferment. There were already centuries of religious traditions, especially investigations and speculations into the nature of life, good and the hereafter. In the Buddha’s own time Indian society around him was maturing to such a stage as individuals even within the brahminic tradition were openly questioning their own beliefs and practices.

It was a time of widespread peace and prosperity—even battles seemed short and purposeful, and peace followed. It was after all, called the “second urbanization” in Indian history. Villages (gāma) were growing into market-towns (nigama), and cities were burgeoning with specialists, guild systems and a common currency. More people then had surplus wealth and leisure time. Hence, they had more time to think and question themselves, and to question others.

1.2.2.2 The best known of these seekers is, of course, the Buddha himself. Having found the answer to his questions, he offers the inhabitants of the crowded cities and anyone who has spiritual questions...
his ready and redeeming answers. Even in his teachings, he continues to question the old systems, especially the brahmanical teachings. Understandably, many of the Buddha’s engaging dialogues and teachings contain references to the *Upanishads* (Skt *upanisad*).\(^5\)

It is perfectly proper that the Buddha addressed, even challenges, these ancient traditions and teaching, since what they taught profoundly affects his society. In simple terms, the Buddha had to address the key problems—the wrong views of the old and the wrong ways of the new. He points out why, for example, the Upanishadic teachings about the soul are wrong, and why the costly and bloody sacrifices inspired by the brahmins are unwholesome.\(^6\)

### 1.2.3 Upanishadic precedents

#### 1.2.3.1 As a rule, whenever we see the phrase, *diṭṭha sutta muta viññāta*, the Buddha is, as a rule, addressing the falsity and dangers of the Upanishadic conception of the eternal self (*ātta*; Skt *ātman*). Here is an example. The sage Yajñavalkya explains the abiding self as follows: “You can’t see the seer who does the seeing; you can’t hear the hearer who does the hearing; you can’t think the thinker who does the thinking; and you can’t perceive the perceiver who does the perceiving.”\(^7\)

Further, the Bṛhad-Āranyaka has this passage: “it is one’s self (*ātman*) which one should see (*draṣṭavyaḥ*) and hear (*śrotavyaḥ*), and on which one should reflect (*mantaḥ*) and concentrate (*nīhidhyāsiṁśa-vavyaḥ*)” (BĀU 2.4.5, 4.5.6).\(^8\) This is spoken by the sage Yajñavalkya, who will prove by rational arguments that the *Ātman* cannot be apprehended by any of these conventional ways of knowing (BĀU 2.4.1.4, 4.5.1.5).

From this passage, we can deduce that there are, by those times, seers who believed that the *Ātman* could be known by all these conventional means of knowing. The *Ātman* could be seen or perceived by looking at your reflection in a pan of water (ChU 8.8.1) or when touching the body and feeling its warmth (ChU 3.13.8). It could be heard when we close our ears and hear something like a hum or blazing fire (ChU id).

The *Ātman* could be conceived and understood rationally by thinking—just as in the case of a man falsely accused of being a thief and is tested with a heated axe. On account of his truthfulness (this is his *Ātman*), when he touches the axes, it burns him not (ChU 6.16.3). It is not only his *Ātman*; it is the “self is the all” (*ātmyam idaṁ sarvam*)—“You are that (tat tvam asi).” (ChU 6.14.3, 6.16.3).

To the statement, “the self is the all,” the Buddha responds with the *Sabba Sutta* (S 35.23), SD 7.1. To the statement, “you are that,” the Buddha declares, “This is not mine, this I am not, this is not my self” (*n’etaṁ mama, n’eso’ham asmi, na mēso attā’ti*).\(^9\)

#### 1.2.3.2 Using these very same terms—*diṭṭha sutta muta viññāta*—the Buddha, in his teachings, again and again explains and exhorts us not to make the mistakes of the Upanishadic speculators and their brahminical descendents, the class-minded materialistic priests. When we fall into the wrong views and ways of the speculative seers and manipulative brahmins, we are not only losing our way from the spiritual path, but we become those speculative seers and manipulative brahmins ourselves. This is known as the *brahminization* of Buddhism.

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\(^5\) See “Did the Buddha ‘borrow’ ideas from the Upaniṣads?,” SD 6.15 (5); *Ambaṭṭha S* (D 3), SD 21.3 (3).

\(^6\) See eg *Ambaṭṭha S* (D 3), SD 21.3.

\(^7\) *Na dṛṣṭer draṣṭaṁ paśyeḥ / na śruteḥ śrotāṁ śrṇyayā / na mater mantāraṁ manvīthā / na vijñāter vijñā- tāraṁ vijñāyayā* (BĀU 3.4.2). The tetrad of *draṣṭa śrota manta vijñāta* recurs at BĀU 3.7.23, 4.3.32.

\(^8\) BĀU tr from P Olivelle (tr), *The Early Upaniṣads*, Delhi, 1998:69, 129.

\(^9\) *Mahā Rāhul’ovāda S* (M 62,3 passim), SD 3.11. See DEB: n’etaṁ mama … .

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Our understanding of the true meaning and purpose of *diṭṭha sutta muta viññāta* is not merely doctrinal but also practical. When we diligently work towards a proper understanding of this phrase in its precious context, we have the key to dismantling the phantoms of an abiding self or some eternal essence or supreme being or cosmic buddhas. We can help undo the brahminization of Buddhism and heal the spiritually sick and guide the spiritually lost on that account.

## 2 The cognition tetrad

### 2.1 The 4 Modes of Cognition

#### 2.1.1 Basic definitions

**2.1.1.1** The commentary on the *Pāsādika Sutta* (D 29), and many other commentarial passages, similarly explain the 4 terms—*diṭṭha sutta muta viññāta*—as follows:

- **diṭṭha**’ti rūp’āyatanaṁ
  - “The seen” means the form-base;
- **sutan**’ti sadd’āyatanaṁ
  - “The heard” means the sound-base;
- **muta**’ti mutvā patvā
gahetabbato ganāyatanaṁ
  - “the sensed” means, having felt, having attained, on account of what is to be grasped, the smell-base,
  - ras’āyatanaṁ phoṭṭhabb’āyatanaṁ
  - the taste-base, the touch-base;
- **viññātan**’ti
  - sukhā, dukkhā, dhamm’āyaṇatā
  - the mind-base comprising pleasure, pain, etc.

Hence, our working definition of *diṭṭha sutta muta viññāta* is "the seen, the heard, the sensed and the known." These translations, as a rule, fit well into all the passages that apply the "*diṭṭha sutta muta viññāta*" phrase, where the context clearly refers to the 6 sense-bases, that is, the 5 physical senses and the mind.

**2.1.1.2** A couple of notes on the translation of *muta* should be made here.

Firstly, the translation of “sensed” for *muta* is not a satisfactory one because “sensed” has a broad meaning and may well refer to any of the physical sense-experiences. However, it is clear that such an application does not arise in any of the suttas. Hence, this is a mere technicality, so that it is safe for us to get used to the sense of *muta* as being limited to “the smelled, the tasted and the touched.”

The idea that a certain translation is “satisfactory,” even “perfect,” or not, lies not in the translation itself—not in the words themselves—but how we use such words. The reality is that there is no “perfect” translation: all translations are new works; they are not the original text. *Traduttore traditore,* “The translator is a traitor!”

**2.1.1.3** Occasionally, we may even translate *muta* as “felt” (the participle of “feel”) (SA 1:270,11). “To feel” here is defined as “In a wider sense: to perceive, or be affected with the sensation by (an object) through the senses which (like that of touch) are not referred to any special ‘organ’” (OED). In our case, the “felt” may arise from the experience of the nose, the tongue or the body, as in the translation of the *Mūla,pariyāya Sutta* passage [2.1.3.3]. At least two translators have rendered *muta* as “felt.” [5.1.1]

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10 Cf a similar saying in Hungarian: *fordítás ferdítés*, roughly translates as "A translation is a distortion."
There is also the possibility that “felt” refers specifically to the sensation involving touch. Buddhaghosa, in his Sanīyutta Commentary, for example, explains patīgha (“the sensed”) as comprising smell and taste (gandha, rasa), and muta as “the felt”\footnote{Bodhi’s tr: S:B 282.} (that is, through direct contact) denoting a tactile object (phoṭṭhabb’ārammaṇa, SA 1:269). [4.2.1]

2.1.1.4 Although it is possible to translate muta as “cognized,” no one (from the list we have compiled) seems to have done so \footnote{On saññā, see SD 17.4.} [5.1.1]. This is probably because “cognized” is too specific and technical, while muta has a broad application. However, the term cognized very well applies to the function of consciousness on every one of the 6 sense-faculties—those of the eye, ear, nose, tongue, body and mind. Hence, it is to leave it at that. [2.1.3]

2.1.1.5 The Pāli-English Dictionary (PED), in its definition of diṭṭha, makes this helpful note on all the 4 terms, diṭṭha suta muta viññāta, thus:

Since sight is the principal sense of perception as well as of apperception (cf cakkhu), that which is seen is the chief representation of any sense-impression, & diṭṭha combined with suta (heard) and muta (sensed by means of smell, taste & touch), to which viññāta (appereceived by the mind) is often joined, gives a complete analysis of that which comprises all means of cognition & recognition. Thus diṭṭha + suta stands collectively for the whole series (Sn 778, 812, 897, 1079; Pv 4.13); diṭṭha suta muta (see Nc 298 for detail & cf diṭṭhiyā sutiyā ṇānena) (Sn 790, 901, 914, 1082, 1086, 1122, na tuyham adiṭṭham asutarām amutām kiñcanaṁ atthi = “you are omniscient”); diṭṭha suta muta viññāta in the same sense as Sn 1122 in yāṁ sadevakassa lokassa diṭṭha suta muta viññāta sabbaṁ taṁ tathāgatena abhisambuddhaṁ of the cognitive powers of the Tathāgata (D 3:134 = Nc 276 = It 121; D 3:232; Sn 1086, 1122). \((\text{PED: sv diṭṭha}; \text{normalized})\)

2.1.1.6 It is helpful that the PED informs us that muta means “sensed by means of smell, taste & touch.” Along with sight, hearing and knowing, muta completes the set of 6 sense-bases (saḷāyatana). It is clearly evident from the suttas that the Buddha was well aware of the 6 sense-faculties as being discrete senses—at no time did the Buddha “vaguely conceived” them, as suggested by Mrs Rhys Davids [2.4.2].

The next interesting point here is that the PED uses “perception” and “apperception.” Aperception has almost the same sense as consciousness, or seems to straddle between perception and consciousness, that is, “conscious perception.” Neither “conception” nor “cognition” are mentioned in the PED definition. This is perhaps understandable because at the time of the compilation of the PED (1921-1925), western psychology was not as we know it today.

2.1.1.7 Today, we understand enough of the psychological meanings of cognition, conception and perception to use them to refer to cognition (cognize, etc) for the fundamental working of consciousness at the “sense-consciousness” level [2.1.3]; perception for saññā (although some may prefer “apperception”),\footnote{On saññā in n’eva, saññā, nāsaññāyatana, for example, is universally and correctly rendered as “consciousness” rather than “perception.” Despite such definitions and technicalities, the first and final arbiter of a good translation is its context. This is a vital “rule of context” to remember when reading and translating Pali.} and conception for maññanā [2.1.3.3].

But these are not hard-and-fast definitions—saññā in n’eva, saññā, nāsaññāyatana, for example, is universally and correctly rendered as “consciousness” rather than “perception.” Despite such definitions and technicalities, the first and final arbiter of a good translation is its context. This is a vital “rule of context” to remember when reading and translating Pali.
### 2.1.2 Vinaya definition

#### 2.1.2.1 Since the Vinaya defines monastic conduct, regulates procedures and arbitrate disciplinary and legal cases, defining the cognition tetrad is a natural part of its function. The Vinaya definition of *diṭṭha suta muta viññāta* is found in its section dealing with Pācittiya 1 (the rule against intentional lying). This definition is also followed by the Cūḷa Niddesa commentary on Sn 1086a (Hemaka Sutta, Sn 5.9), thus:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{diṭṭham} & \quad \text{nāma cakkhunā diṭṭham} \\
\text{sutaṁ} & \quad \text{nāma sotena sutaṁ} \\
\text{mutaṁ} & \quad \text{nāma ghānena ghāyitaṁ} \\
\text{viññātaṁ} & \quad \text{nāma manasā viññātaṁ}
\end{align*}
\]

*diṭṭha* means seeing with the eye; *suta* means hearing with the ear, *muta* means what is smelt by the nose, what is tasted by jivhāya sāyitaṁ kāyena phuṭṭhaṁ the tongue, what is touched [felt] by the body, viññāta means what is known by the mind.

(V 4:2,25 f ≈ Nc:Be 127,10)

Clearly what we have here is a conveniently abridged listing of the 6 ways of sense-cognition.

#### 2.1.3 These 4 ways of cognition, then, are how we know light, sound, matter and thoughts. Both light and sound are, of course, regarded as matter, too. What is sensed is “physical matter” (the earth element, that is, resistance), the seen is only light as visual forms (the water element, that is, cohesiveness); the heard is only vibration (the wind element, that is, motion); and what is known by the mind is simple change (the fire element as decay).

This is not a scientific description, but a metaphorical representation of how we experience the physical and mental worlds. The world (*loka*), as the Rohitassa Sutta (S 2.26) tells us is this very fathom-long body, along with its perception and mind,” the Buddha declares to be the world, its arising, its ending and the way leading to its ending. This is all there is, and all that we need to know.

In the Sabba Sutta (S 35.23), the Buddha declares that the all (*sabba*)—our whole world—comprises our 6 senses and their respective sense-objects. This is to say that our means of knowledge are the 6 sense-faculties, and what we can know are the 6 sense-objects. This is all that can be seen, heard, sensed and known by us.

### 2.1.3 Cognition, perception, conception

#### 2.1.3.1 We have noted why *muta* should not be translated as “cognized” [2.1.1.4] and the usage of “cognition” [2.1.1.7]. We will here further examine cognition here.

Cognition is a convenient word for *viññāṇa* on a basic level of sense-consciousness. The workings of the senses and the mind on a basic conscious level are all cognitive process—a fundamental “knowing” of forms and colours, sounds and vibrations, smells and fragrance, taste and temperature, touch, texture and mental processes. Again, we can notice here how the last 3 physical senses tend to overlap or help one another [5.5.3].

The secondary function of cognition in Buddhist psychology is that of conception or conceiving ideas and views (*maññāna*). This is also the level of karma-formations (*saṅkhārā*), when such conceivings are rooted in greed, hate or delusion. They are karmically potent and significant—we will have to bear the

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13 Light waves, as we know, arise or “travel” in waves like water.
14 S 2.26,9,1:62 (SD 7.2); also in Rohitassa Ss 1+2 (A 4.45+46),SD 52.8a+52.8b.
15 S 35.20 (SD 7.1).
fruits of such actions in due course, or when we habitually commit them, we become our karma. What we conceive, we bring forth; what we bring forth, becomes us.  

2.1.3.2 Viññāṇa is usually translated as “consciousness,” and this should not pose any problem, since we are already very familiar with this usage. Idiom is defined by usage and age—viññāṇa as consciousness has become idiomatic after a century of usage. But we are generally less familiar with other words—rather important ones on account of their usage—related to viññāṇa as consciousness.

Just as the Buddha has naturalized many brahminical terms—such as brahma, brahmin, karma and attā—the usage of modern psychological terms—such as consciousness, the preconscious, the unconscious and the subconscious—should not bear their academic baggage, a karma which tends to change according to academic developments. They are merely words, expressions or conventions (vohāra) with Buddhist lives of their own, expressing concepts and significance that go back to the Buddha himself.

2.1.3.3 The Mūla-pariyāya Sutta (M 1), in an interesting passage, shows us how from mere cognizing, we go on to conceiving. The well-known tetrad diṭṭha suta muta viññāta—the 4 modes of cognition or cognition tetrad—forms an important section in the Sutta (§§19-22), which shows how the unawakened conceive views through them, that is, by way of the 4 self-views. These are the 4 modes of conception, that is:

1. he conceives himself as (the seen | the heard | the sensed | the known),
2. he conceives himself apart from (the seen | the heard | the felt | the known),
3. he conceives himself apart from (the seen | the heard | the felt | the known),
4. he conceives, (the seen | the heard | the felt | the known) is mine. (M 1,19-22), SD 11.8

2.1.3.4 Each of these 4 statements is elaborated in its own passage forming a special section dealing with conception following the 4 modes of cognition—that is, the seen (diṭṭha), the heard (suta), the sensed [felt] (muta) and the known (viññāta). The “sensed” or “felt” (muta) comprises the data of smell, taste and touch; “thought,” the data of introspection, abstract thought and imagination. The objects of perception are “conceived” when they are known in terms of “this is mine,” “I am this” and “this is my self” or in other ways that generate craving, conceit and views, which in turn fuel such conceivings (maññanā).

2.1.4 “Disowning” I, me and mine

2.1.4.1 The Alagaddūpama Sutta (M 22) gives a more elaborate and instructive version of the same process of conceiving [2.1.3.3], by way of the 5 aggregates, thus:

“Bhikshus, a well-taught noble disciple, who has regard for noble ones and is skilled and disciplined in their Dharma, who has regard for true individuals and is skilled and disciplined in their Dharma:

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16 See Karma, SD 18.1.
17 On the Buddha’s “natural adaptation” of such words, see SD 39.3 (3.3.4).
18 On these terms, see SD 17.8a (6.1); The unconscious, SD 17.8b (1).
19 It should be noted that the “3rd wave” of modern psychology is significantly indebted to Buddhism in their appropriation and adaptation from Buddhist doctrines and meditations.
20 See SD 3.13 (5.2.2).
21 See V 4:2 & V:H 2:166 n3 where they are called “ignoble statements” (anariya vohāra); also SD 19.1 (4.3).
regards form thus: ‘This is not mine; this I am not; this is not my self.’
He regards feeling, thus: ‘This is not mine; this I am not; this is not my self.’
He regards perception, thus: ‘This is not mine; this I am not; this is not my self.’
He regards what is seen, heard, sensed, known, found, sought after, mentally pursued, thus: ‘This is not mine; this I am not; this is not my self.’
And this ground for views, namely, ‘The world is the self; after death I will be permanent, ever-lasting, eternal, unchanging in nature, eternally the same; I will endure as long as eternity’—this, too, he regards thus: ‘This is not mine; this I am not; this is not my self.’
Regarding them thus, he is not anxious [agitated] regarding what is non-existent.

(M 22,16-17), SD 3.13

2.1.4.2 The suttas do not usually regard such conceptions as maññanā because this is wholesome conceiving—a process we can colloquially call “disowning”—avoiding the idea and usage of “I, me, mine”—that is, not identifying with any of the aggregates. Interestingly, the Sutta also includes the disowning of “what is seen, hear, sensed, known” (the 4 modes of cognition). This is famously formulated in the Bāhiya teaching,22 the main part of which runs thus:

| In the seen | there will only be the seen; |
| In the heard | there will only be the heard; |
| In the sensed | there will only be the sensed; |
| In the known | there will only be the known. |

| diṭṭhe | diṭṭha,mattaṁ bhavissati; |
| sute | suta,mattam bhavissati; |
| mute | muta,mattam bhavissati; |
| viññāte | viññāta,mattaṁ bhavissati. |

(U 1.10,16), SD 33.723

This verse is the crux of the sutta and of satipatthana practice. When we cognize the seen, the heard, the sensed or the known as “This is mine” (etam mama), there is craving (tanhā); when any of them is cognized as “This I am” (eso 'ham asmi), there is conceit (māna); when cognized as “This is my self” (eso me attā), there is wrong view (diṭṭhi). This is the teachings of the Anatta Lakkhaṇa Sutta (S 3:68).24 When properly done, such a practice does not generate “beliefs” but are direct experiences of reality.25

In simple Abhidhamma terms, such a process should be left at the sense-doors, and not be allowed to reach the mind-door, not to be attended to. As long as the experience of sensing is mindfully left at its sense-door and taken for what it really is, that is, an experience of reality (param’attha). When it reaches the mind-door and is evaluated, it becomes conventional (paññatti) reality, that brings us suffering due to greed, hate or delusion. When such sense-experiences are mindfully left on the reality level, we would, in due course, see the 3 characteristics of impermanence, unsatisfactoriness and non-self.26

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22 See (Arahatta) Bāhiya S (U 1.10/8), SD 33.7.
23 This teaching is also given to Māluṅkya,putta, where here, (Arahatta) Māluṅkya,putta S (S 35.95,12/4:73) + SD 5.9 (3). Having heard this teaching, it is said that Bāhiya becomes an arhat, while Māluṅkya,putta attains arhathood during his ensuing solitary retreat. On the Bāhiya teaching, see (Arahatta) Bāhiya S (U 1.10,15-17) + SD 33.7 (1).
24 Anatta Lakkhaṇa S (S 22.59), SD 1.2.
2.2 Cognition and the 4 Biases

2.2.1 Self-identity

2.2.1.1 Thus, from what we cognize—what we see, hear, sense and know—we tend to conceive views, especially the 4 self-views, rooted in the 4 biases (agati) (greed, hate, delusion and fear), which can be summarized in the following manner:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Conceptual Modes</th>
<th>Bias</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Identification</td>
<td>Delusion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Projection</td>
<td>Fear</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Objectification</td>
<td>Hate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transference</td>
<td>Greed</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2.2.1.2 The Paṭisambhidā,magga gives a variation of these 4 conceptual modes, but reflecting the same idea, as evident in this comparative table:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>4 Basic Modes of Self-identity</th>
<th>Explanation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(1) We conceive ourself as X</td>
<td>(1) form (etc) is the self</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(2) We conceive ourself in X</td>
<td>(3) the self is in form</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(3) We conceive ourself apart from X</td>
<td>(4) form is in the self</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(4) We conceive X as mine</td>
<td>(2) the self possesses form</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2.2.1.3 Putting all these teachings together, we may reflect thus:

1. When we conceive ourself or a self as X (say, as some kind of soul), it is an identification rooted in delusion, because there is no eternal essence. We are ourself like the colour of a flame, no different from it.

2. When we conceive ourself or a self as being in X (say, in some kind of universal soul), it is a projection of our fear into something we see as being safe; but this is a delusion, too, since there is no such universal soul. We view this self or soul in our body like a jewel in a casket.

3. When we conceive ourself (that is, eg, our body) as being apart from X (from such a personal or a universal soul), it is an objectification rooted in hate, such as seeing ourself as being “impure,” “evil” or “sinful,” and that this other being or state is pure, etc. We imagine our self or soul to be able to exist separately from our body (but not the other way around)—just as a flower’s scent can still be detected even outside or without the flower (the scent comes from the flower).

For example, we view that some kind of separate eternal soul inhabits our body. This is a delusion because we have conceived all these ideas, imagining ourself (our body, etc) to be corrupt, and this other to be pure, etc.

4. When we conceive X as “mine,” we imagine that we possess that self or soul and have control over it—like a tree possessing a shadow. This is a psychological transference in the sense that we “transfer” desirable qualities we once experienced, say, in the love and security of a parent onto such that soul or creator of such a soul.

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27 See Sigal’ovāda S (D 31.4+5), SD 4.1; Āgati S 1 (A 4.17), SD 89.7; Āgati S 2 (A 4.18), Āgati S 3 (A 4.19); Bhatt’ud-desaka S (A 4.20); Saṅgha Bala S (A 9.5, 6.4) n, SD 2.21; SD 31.12 (6.4.1.3).
The reality is that we have no real control over our self, body, mind or existence. The tree has no control of its shadow, which depends on the light shining on it. This light may be said to represent our past actions (karma) and present conditions (paccaya).

When these conceptual modes—identification, projection, objectification and transference—are applied to each of the 5 aggregates (form, feeling, perception, formations and consciousness), we get a total of 20 self-views.  

2.2.2 The 3 unwholesome roots

2.2.2.1 Whenever we commit bad (“fall into bias,” agatiṁ gamana) or omit to do good (when we should); hence, we do what should not be done—this is called “falling into a bias” (agati, gamana)—it is invariably rooted in one of the 4 biases (agati) or motives (ṭhāna) of greed, hate, delusion or fear.

Greed or lust (lobha) acts as a bias when we habitually measure satisfaction in terms of “having” rather than “being”—that happiness, for example, is possessing a lot of money, instead of actually enjoying what we have to its optimum extent. As the Buddha says, “Contentment is the greatest wealth” (santuṭṭhi paramaṁ dhanaṁ, Dh 204b). Greed, then, means never having enough and never enjoying what we have.

Hate is the opposite side of the same coin as greed. As we go in quest for what we lust after, hate pushes away whatever we see as not helping greed, not giving us pleasure. The power of greed can be so great that it generates such strong hate that is willing and able to reject, even destroy, whatever we see as distracting us from the path of greed.

While hate is the easiest to overcome—it weakens once we acknowledge it—greed is more deceptive and more difficult to acknowledge. Greed is constantly fed by delusion with ideas of the permanence of what is really impermanent, of the pleasure of what is really unsatisfactory, and the essence of what is basically non-self. These are the universal characteristics of all conditioned existence: whatever exists is necessarily impermanent. Whatever is impermanent will pass away. Indeed, everything in this world is conditioned, and hence impermanent, and will pass away.

2.2.2.2 Delusion works by distracting us from the real presence of things—what we see, hear, feel [sense] or know can only happen here and now. We can only see, hear, feel or know whatever is impermanent. Impermanence is change; change is the flux and movement of reality. Only when things change we can know it meaningfully as sight, sound, feeling [sensing] and knowledge. Knowledge is always that of change.

When delusion hides change from us, distracting us with greed and hate—grasping what we see as pleasurable and worthwhile, rejecting what we see as lacking pleasure and value—it generates and sustains ignorance in us. This ignorance is our not knowing what is really going on right here before our very eye, ear, nose, tongue, body and mind.

Delusion spurs us to run to the glorious past so that we desire to resurrect it, or the painful past we want to avoid or destroy; delusion spurs us to jump into the hopeful future to imagine possible glory or boundless pleasure that awaits us. The reality is that the past is dead and gone, and the future never comes.

2.2.2.3 Looking for the dead past and never-coming future, we are lost to the present, too. As we keep looking back into the past and wishing for the future, we fail to live in this presence of contentment.

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28 On the 20 kinds of self-views, see SD 19.1 (2.2).
[2.2.2.1]. Unanchored to the present, the only true reality, we are blown about by the winds of the 16 doubts. The suttas mention the following speculations that we habitually have:29

1. “Was I in the past?”
2. “Was I not in the past?”
3. “What was I in the past?”
4. “How was I in the past?”
5. “Having been what, did I become what in the past? [What was I before I became such and such in the past?]”
6. “Will I be in the future?”
7. “Am I not in the future?”
8. “What will I be in the future?”
9. “How will I be in the future?”
10. “Having been what, will I become what in the future? [What now would lead me to that future state?]”
11. “Am I?”30
12. “Am I not?”
13. “What am I?”
14. “How am I?”
15. “Where has this being come from?”
16. “Where will it [this being] go?”

2.2.3 Fear

2.2.3.1 The 4 biases [2.2.1] are an extension of the 3 unwholesome roots (akusala, mūla) or greed, hate and delusion, with fear as the 4th bias or motivation for doing the bad and unwholesome. Modern psychology defines fear as feelings “elicited by tangible, realistic dangers, as opposed to anxiety, which often arises out of proportion to the actual threat or danger involved.”31 However, “fear” as a bias in the set of 4 biases contains both fear as a reaction to real dangers, with a significant dose of anxiety.

2.2.3.2 Fear, often paired or overlapping with guilt (an anxiety over perceived wrongdoing), is a common conditioned reaction of faithful believers in some supreme being, to whom one’s devotion must be channeled—as a slave to his master or a serf to his feudal lord. Fear, then, works on our baser emotions rooted in greed, hate and delusion. We must fear the supreme being, that is, our desire is that of devotion to him. Hate, then, should be directed to his perceived unbelievers and enemies.

Even in a more “open” system like Buddhism, a believer or practitioner may feel fear when he mistakes the precepts to be commandments to be obeyed or rituals that purifies one, and mistakes meditation as attracting magical powers or a means of communicating with Buddha in other realms, and so on. Or, fear could arise when we are devoted to a guru, and feel that we have not followed his teachings or executed his instructions.

29 These are the 16 doubts: Sabb’āsava S (M 2,7 f), SD 30.3; Mahā Taṃkhā,saṅkhaya S (M 38,23), SD 7.10; Pacca-ya Sutta (S 12.20), SD 39.5. On present and future conceivings, see Dhātu Vibhānga S (M 140,31/3:246), SD 4.17; Samanupassanā Sutta (S 22.47/3:47), SD 26.12; Yava,kalāpi S (S 35.258,8-12/4:202 f), SD 40a.3.
30 Comy: He doubts his own aggregates, or his own existence (MA 1:69).
We simply need to be reminded here that in early Buddhism, the teaching is always above the teacher.\textsuperscript{32} Our respect for the teaching entails that we should study, practise and realise it for ourself. Just like the Buddha and the arhats, we, too should walk the same path of awakening, or at least aspire to head for that path in this life itself.\textsuperscript{33}

2.3 Occurrences of the phrase

The phrase \textit{diṭṭha suta muta viññāta} occurs in such discourses as follows (not a comprehensive list):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sutta</th>
<th>D M/1:135</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pāsādika Sutta</td>
<td>D 29/3:135</td>
<td>SD 40a.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mūla,pariyāya Sutta</td>
<td>M 1,43-46/1:4 f</td>
<td>SD 11.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alagaddūpama Sutta</td>
<td>M 22,15(9)/1:135 f</td>
<td>SD 3.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anātha,piṇḍika Sutta</td>
<td>M 143,14/3:261</td>
<td>SD 23.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vata Sutta</td>
<td>S 24.1/3:203</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Etam Mama Sutta</td>
<td>S 24.2/3:204</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Ca Me Siyā Sutta</td>
<td>S 24.4/3:206</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N’aththi Dīnna Sutta</td>
<td>S 24.5/3:208</td>
<td>SD 65.16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Karoto Sutta</td>
<td>S 24.6/3:209</td>
<td>SD 23.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hetu Sutta</td>
<td>S 24.7/3:210</td>
<td>SD 23.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mahā Diṭṭhi Sutta</td>
<td>S 24.8/3:213</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sassa Diṭṭhi Sutta</td>
<td>S 24.9/3:213</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assasa Diṭṭhi Sutta</td>
<td>S 24.9/3:214</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N’eva Hoti Na Na Hoti Tathāgata Sutta</td>
<td>S 24.18/3:216</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bahu,kāra Sutta</td>
<td>A 4.24/2:24, 25 ×4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anariya Vohāra Sutta 1</td>
<td>A 4.247/2:246</td>
<td>SD 53.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ariya Vohāra Sutta 1</td>
<td>A 4.248/2:246</td>
<td>SD 53.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anariya Vohāra Sutta 2</td>
<td>A 4.249/2:246</td>
<td>SD 53.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ariya Vohāra Sutta 2</td>
<td>A 4.250/2:246</td>
<td>SD 53.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anariya Vohāra Sutta 3</td>
<td>A 8.67/4:307</td>
<td>SD 53.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ariya Vohāra Sutta 3</td>
<td>A 8.68/4:307</td>
<td>SD 53.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saññā Manasikāra Sutta 1</td>
<td>A 11.7/5:320 (×8)</td>
<td>SD 53.20a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saññā Manasikāra Sutta 2</td>
<td>A 11.8/5:321 f (×4)</td>
<td>SD 53.20b</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sandha Sutta</td>
<td>A 11.9/5:324-326 (×5)</td>
<td>SD 82.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Samādhi Sutta 1</td>
<td>A 11.19/5:355 f (×4)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Samādhi Sutta 2</td>
<td>A 11.20/5:356 (×4)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Samādhi Sutta 3</td>
<td>A 11.21/5:357 f (×4)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Tathāgata) Loka Sutta</td>
<td>It 4.13/112/121</td>
<td>SD 15.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vibhaṅga (Abhidhamma)</td>
<td>Vbh 939/376, 1036-1037/429 (×5)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parivāra (Vinaya)</td>
<td>V 5:125</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\textsuperscript{32} See The teacher or the teaching? SD 3.14.

\textsuperscript{33} (Anicca) Cakkhu S (S 25.1), SD 16.7.
2.4 Dhamma, saṅgaṇī

2.4.1 The Dhamma, saṅgaṇī defines the 4 modes of cognition as follows:

- **Rūp’āyatanaṃ diṭṭhaṃ**, the form-base is “the seen”;
- **sadd’āyatanaṃ sutaṃ**, the sound-base is “the heard”;
- **gandh’āyatanaṃ rasāyatanam**, the smell-base, the taste-base, and
- **phoṭṭhabb’āyatanaṃ mutaṃ**, the touch-base are “the sensed”; 34
- **sabbaṃ rūpaṃ manasā viññātaṃ rūpaṃ**. all form is form known by the mind. 35

(Dhs §961/177)

2.4.2 Commenting on her own translation of the above passage [2.4.1], CA F Rhys Davids, in A Buddhist Manual of Psychological Ethics (1900, 3rd ed, 1974), her Dhamma, saṅgaṇī translation, notes:

I am under the impression that the first three members of this group are survivals of an older tradition, belonging to an age when the five senses had not been co-ordinated by psychological analysis comparable to that effected by the earlier Buddhist school, and when mano and its functions, expressed here (in part) by this old past participle, were more vaguely conceived.

In the Prāśna Upaniṣad, eg which is probably older than the Abhidhamma, either the five senses are grouped as above under manas, eye and ear, or the last two are alone held worthy to rank with the divine elements of life.

If it be contended that the former interpretations is not plausible, it should be remembered that, in the (?) older Bṛhad,āraṇyaka Upaniṣad (1.5.3), it is said that by manas we know when we are touched from behind. It is as though the tradition were endeavouring to say, smell, taste, touching, without the aid either of sight or of hearing, require a greater effort of inference, of mental construction, of imagination, to realize the external cause, or potential concrete mental percept, than either sight or hearing.  (Dhs:RD 221 n1)

We have already noted the Upanishadic precedents [1.2.3].

2.4.3 Sets of senses

2.4.3.1 It is clear from the suttas, that the cognition tetrad of “the seen, the heard, the sensed, and the known” is only used in the context of disproving or rejecting the notion of an abiding self, or to help us understand that all our experiences are “non-self,” with an ātman (P attā). In other words, it is used almost specifically against the Upanishadic teachings of the abiding ātman [1.2.3.1].

2.4.3.2 The fundamental early Buddhist teaching on the human senses are that they comprise the 5 physical senses and the mind, together forming the 6 “internal sense-bases,” and their respective 6 “external sense-objects,” thus:

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34 Comy explains muta as "having considered the sense of that which is to be known" (munitvā jānitabbaṭṭhena) and “on account of arisen knowledge when touched (by a sense-contact)” (phusitvā pi paññ’uppatti,kāranato). (DhsA 338)

35 Ie, that which should be known with the mind-consciousness (mano, viññāṇena jānitabbaṃ, DhsA 338)
2.4.3.3 Based on this dodecade of 6 internal sense-bases and 6 external sense-objects, the Buddha gives numerous teachings based on variations of it. We have many suttas that work with the 6 sense-bases (saḷ-āyatana), or 12 sense-bases (dvādas’āyatana), or 18 elements (aṭṭharasa dhātu), or even beyond these, expanding the list to include the respective sense-contacts (phassa) and then showing how craving arises. Beyond this, we have the formula of dependent arising and their conditional links (paccay’ākāra) totaling up to 12.

In short, while the Upanishads were still struggling with the 4 means of cognition, the Buddha had already conceived the 6 sense-faculties and their variations. However, the cognition tetrad also serve as a convenient shorthand for the 6 sense-bases and their 12 sense-bases, such as in the Mūla,pariyāya Sutta (M 1) [2.1.3.3] and the (Arahatta) Mālunkya,putta Sutta (S 35.95) [2.1.4.2]. For a fuller exposition of the non-self nature of our whole being, the Buddha would use the full 18-element formula or go beyond that, as in the Bahu Dhātuka Sutta (M 115) and the Saḷ-āyatana Vibhaṅga Sutta (M 137).

3 The cognition triad

3.1 The cognition triad in Sutta Nipāta

3.1.1 Occurrence and provenance

3.1.1.1 The less common phrase or cognition triad—diṭṭha suta muta (that is, without viññāta)—probably older, occurs in the Canon only in the Sutta Nipāta, where throughout it means “seen, heard or thought”:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sutta</th>
<th>Sn</th>
<th>Comy: Nm or Nc</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Suddh’aṭṭhaka Sutta</td>
<td>793</td>
<td>Nm 96,13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Param’aṭṭhaka Sutta</td>
<td>798c</td>
<td>Nm 106,14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jarā Sutta</td>
<td>813b</td>
<td>Nm 137,21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mahā Viyūha Sutta</td>
<td>901b</td>
<td>Nm 315,5,334,8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nanda Māṇava Pucchā</td>
<td>1083c</td>
<td>Nc:Be 25:121,8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

These suttas are preserved in the oldest strata of the Pali Tipitaka. The first 4 suttas are from the Aṭṭhaka Vagga (S ch 4), while the 5th is from the Pārāyana Vagga (Sn ch 5). The fact that they are quoted by name in the Vinaya (V 1:196), the Samyutta (S 3:9,12) and the Udāna (U 5), shows that they have

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existed as independent works before being incorporated into the Sutta Nipāta. They probably existed even during the Buddha’s own time.\footnote{See Ency Bsm: Aṭṭhaka Vagga & Pārāyana Vagga; see also Princeton Dictionary of Buddhism, Aṭṭhakavagga.}

3.1.1.2 These suttas from the Aṭṭhaka Vagga and the Pārāyana Vagga [3.1.1.1] record the Buddha as teaching precepts and practices in contrast to the brahminical teachings of the Upanishads with which his audience are familiar (often enough from the questions that they ask). The cognition triad of diṭṭha suta muta is clearly the Buddha’s answer (in opposition) to the Upanishadic doctrines of (draṣṭa śrotā manta), for example, in the Chāndogya Upaniṣad, where it says: “As a pupil, he i

3.1.2 The cognition triad and the 3 doors

3.1.2.1 The triad of “seen, heard, thought” (diṭṭha, suta, muta) are an early version of the “3 doors” (dvāra) or karma, that is, those of body (kāya), speech (vācā) and mind (citta). Of the cognition triad, diṭṭha, “the seen” obliquely refers to the body or form, the “seen.” This somewhat awkward triad in understandably later replaced by the germane term, “the 3 doors” (dvāra) of karmic action.

This cognitive triad and the karmic triad are, in these early texts synonymous in the sense that they refer to the “whole being” of a person, especially in term of whether he is completely pure or not. When one is purified in terms of body, speech and mind—the seen, heard and thought—one is liberated.

3.1.2.2 In all the commentarial passages of the Mahā Niddesa and the Cūḷa Niddesa glossing on the phrase, diṭṭha suta muta, speak of Māra as referring to our defilements, and that purity (that is, awakening) arises when one “has given up the all by way of purity of the seen, hear and thought” (ye sabbā diṭṭha, suta, muta, suddhiyo pahāya, Nc:Be 25:121,11). The “all” (sabba) here refers to the world as our sense-experiences, that is, body, speech and mind represented by the cognition triad, diṭṭha, suta, muta.

The cognition triad refers to our whole being in terms of karma. In giving up the world of “the seen, heard and thought,” we leave behind all our karma, and awaken to nirvana. Clearly, muta cannot refer to what is “sensed”—the tasted, the smelled and the thought—since they are already implied therein.

3.2 The verb for MutA

3.2.1 The British Pali scholar, R C Childers, in his Dictionary of the Pali Language (1875), takes muta as the “participle of the perfect passive” of munāti, defining it as “thought, supposed, considered.” Understandably, he renders diṭṭham suttam mutam as “seen, heard, thought,” and further quotes amute muta,-vāditā, “one who says he has thought when he has not thought.”\footnote{Upasīdan draṣṭā bhavatī śrotā bhavatī mantā bhavati boddhā bhavati kartā bhavati vijñātā bhavati (CU 7.8.1). The phrase draṣṭā śrotā mantā recurs at CU 7.9.1.}

Childers is helpful in identifying munāti as the verb of muta, since it is rather obscure [1.1.1]. The verbs of the other three—the seen, the heard and the known—are dassati (or passati), sunāti and vijā-nāti respectively, and are well known. [5.2]
3.2.2 Some 40 years later, the German orientalist, W Geiger, makes the same note in his *A Pali Grammar* (1916; rev 1994), thus:

*muta*, “thought” (Sn 714), *muti*, “thought” (Sn 846), *mutimā* (Sn 321) = Skt *matimān*, should be regarded only as dialectical side-forms of *mata* [past participle of *maññati*], etc. (1994 §18.1)

3.2.3 However, it seems that *muta* means “the thought” only when in the cognition triad—dīṭṭha suta muta—as the phrase is used in the Sutta Nipāta verses we have noted [3.1.1]. In the cognition tetrad of dīṭṭha suta muta viññāta, the component *muta* has only one sense: “the sensed (or the felt)” [2.1.1]. However, as we shall soon see, *muta* has a troubled childhood and growth [5]. While it means “the sensed” in the cognition tetrad, it again means “the thought” in the company of the rare phrase *dīṭṭha suta paṭigha muta* [5.3.1] and has other senses when used alone [5].

3.4 I B Horner, in her Vinaya translation, notes of *muta*:

The Old Commentary’s definition of *muta* shows that the sense-functions of nose, tongue and body had been differentiated by the time that it was compiled. Hence I translated *muta* by “sensed” and not by “thought,” although etymologically “thought” may be more correct. Possibly *muta*, as a term covering these three sense-functions, dates from a time prior to their differentiation. That *muta* does not include the sense-functions of the eye and ear suggests that these were recognized earlier than the others, their specific terminology emerging earlier. Cf VA 736; and *Buddhist Psychological Ethics*, 2nd ed, 221 n1, for *muta* pointing to an older tradition of a time when the five senses had not been co-ordinated. (V:H 2:166 n5; normalized)

And in a following note, she adds:

At eight Sn passages, *dīṭṭha suta muta* are combined, sometimes with other items, but not with viññāta. The first three may therefore belong to some old tradition, originally threefold, of *viññāta* is here a function.45 (V:H 166 n5, normalized)

We have already noted some of the “eight Sn passages” [3.1], and will not examine the changes in the meaning of *muta* in other usages and contexts.

4 The evolution of sense awareness

4.1 The Buddha’s progressive approach

4.1.1 From our discussion thus far, we can safely surmise that with the Buddha’s teachings, there arises a comprehensive awareness of the sense faculties, as we know them today. Even the early Upanishads do not refer to the 5 physical senses (*pañc'indriya*), although they allude to the mind. We can more or less see, on a close examination of the early Buddhist texts, some kind of evolution of the awareness of the human senses.

45 She adds: “See S 1:270 = Tha 1216, where *dīṭṭha suta muta* are combined with *paṭigha*; and cf SA 1:270. See also *Psalms of the Brethren* [Tha:RD] 398 n9; *Kindred Sayings* [S:RD] 1:237 n1; and *Buddhist Psychological Ethics*, 2nd ed, 211 n1, for Upaniṣad refs.” (Normalized)
4.1.2 Amongst some of the oldest Buddhist texts, especially in the discourses of the Atthaka Vagga and the Pārāyana Vagga—such as the Suddh’atthaka Sutta (Sn 793) and the Nanda Māṇava Puccā (Sn 1083)—we only see the threefold modes of perception (diṭṭha suta muta viññāta) with the omission of viññāta. Apparently, in the early years of his ministry, the Buddha resorts to a simplified or abridged perception-formula, accommodating the common understanding of the human faculties at that time.

4.1.3 In the later discourses, we almost always meet with the fourfold cognition list (diṭṭha suta muta viññāta). This set of 4 modes of cognition act as a bridge to the full Buddhist conception of the human faculties, that is, of the 5 physical senses (pañc’indriya), and the more common 6 sense-bases (saḷāyatana).

The Āditta Pariyāya Sutta is addressed to the fire-worshipping matted-hair ascetics, the Kassapa brothers, who are advanced in their religious learning and spiritual practice for the Buddha to approach them so early in his ministry. This Sutta contains the first mention of the 6 sense-bases in the Buddhist scripture. As such, my usage of “evolution” here applies as a whole to the growing awareness of the faculties in the cultural history of India, but in terms of the Buddha’s teachings, he of course is aware of it all along, but introduces the idea in a progressive manner, depending on the capability of his audience.

4.1.4 Notice that in the 1st discourse (the Dhamma,cakka-pavattana Sutta, S 56.11) and the 2nd discourse (the Anatta Lakkhaṇa Sutta, S 22.59), the sense-faculties are not mentioned at all though there is the context for them. In the second discourse, the main teaching model is that of the 5 aggregates (pañca-k,khandha), a model that is well known by non-Buddhists then.

Then, in the Māluṅkya,putta Sutta (S 35.95), we see the Buddha applying both the 6-sense-base model and the four-perception (diṭṭha-suta-muta-viñṇāta) model in his admonition to Maluṅkya,putta. As the Buddha’s ministry progresses, we see more teachings using the model of the 6 sense-bases, alongside those dealing with the 5 aggregates, as in the Vaṅgīsa Sutta (S 754/8.12/1:196; Tha 1255).

4.2 EVOLUTIONARY EVIDENCE

4.2.1 Muta: “felt” or “thought”?

4.2.1.1 Occasionally, we see evidence of independent or contextual references to the senses or modes of cognition. We find this interesting ancient passage, composed by Vaṅgīsa, in the Aratī Sutta (S 8.2):

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46 Pañc’indriyāni: cakkhu’ndriyaṁ ... kāy’ndriyaṁ (D 3:239,10 = M 1:295,5 f = S 5:217,24 f); pañcannaṁ indriyānam avakkantī hoti: cakkhu’ndriyassā ... kāya’ssā (S 3:46,22).
47 Cha-y-imāni indriyāni ... cakkhu’ndriyaṁ ... kāy’ndriyaṁ man’ndriyaṁ (S 5:205,8 f; asekho bhikkhu cha indriyāni pajānāti: cakkhu’ndriyaṁ ... man’ndriyaṁ (S 5:230,23; indriyānam avekkattā dullabhā lokasmīṁ (A 3:441,7, mana-, chaṭṭhānaṁ), AA 3: 414,16).
48 S 35.28/4:19 f (SD 1.3).
49 S 56.11/5:420-424 (SD 1.1).
50 S 22.59/3:66-68 (SD 1.2).
51 D 22/2:305; M 9/1:49; S 5.10/1:135; Vbh 1; sometimes the models appear together, eg the aggregates, the sense-bases and the elements (S 754/8.12/1:196; Tha 1255).
52 On the 5 aggregates, see SD 17.
53 S 35.95/4:72-75 = SD 5.9.
Upadhisu janā gadhitaśe,  
dittha,sute patighe ca mute ca  
ettha vinodaya chandam anejo  
yo ettha na limpati taṁ munim āhu.

People are bound to their birth-bases, to what is seen, heard, sensed and thought. Who here, having rid of desire, unshaken, who clings to nothing here—they call him a sage. (S 714/8.2/1:186 = Tha 1216), SD 53.7

The Commentaries either show independence in their interpretation, or have difficulties in trying to understand the sense of the terms in this verse (S 714b). Buddhaghosa, in his Samyutta Commentary explains patigha (“the sensed”) as comprising smell and taste (gandha, rasa), and muta as “the felt” (that is, by direct contact) denoting a tactile object (phoṭṭhabb’ārammana, SA 1:269). [2.1.1.3]

4.2.2 Commentarial difficulties

4.2.2.1 Dhammapāla, in his Thera,gāthā Commentary on the same verse by Vaṅgīsa (Tha 1216), quotes the Sār’attha, pakāsinī (SA 1:170), but gives his own interpretation. He, in fact, reverses the explanations: patighe’ti ghāṭṭaniye phoṭṭhabbe. Mute’ti vuttāvasese mute, gandharasesūti vuttaṃ hoti (ThaA 3:190,15-20). Patigha is glossed as “-touches that impact” (ghaṭṭaniye phoṭṭhabbe), and muta as “smell and taste” (gandha, rasa).

4.2.2.2 The explanation in the Sārattha, pakāsinī is, as C A F Rhys Davids notes in her translation of the Sārīyutta (S:RD 1:237 n1) is an attempt to include the usual 5 senses in four words. That is, we see here, as Bodhi, points out, “patigha assuming the usual role of muta and the latter serving in place of viññāta” (S:B 458 n494).

Thus, in deference to the Commentaries (SA & ThaA), Bodhi adds, “I prefer to translate the present tetrad [at S 714 above] in a way that comprises only the five external sense bases and thus as signifying the five cords of sensual pleasure.” (id)

4.2.3 The rule of context

4.2.3.1 Now, remember the “context rule”: the first and final arbiter of a good translation is its context [2.1.1.7]. In S 714, Vaṅgīsa refers to the “birth-bases” (upadhi), one of the trickiest of Pali words, often confused with upādi, “substrate (of life).” A rule of thumb is that upādi is usually used in connection with the “final passing away” (parinibbāna), while upadhi refers to the “fuel” or “baggage” of rebirth, and, as such, also translated as “acquisition.” While upadhi has a “karmic tone” to it, upādi simply means “the 5 aggregates.” Otherwise, they practically have the same sense or overlap closely in sense, differing only in usage.

4.2.3.2 If upadhi [4.2.1.1] means “acquisition,” or the burden we pile up and roll up the hill of samsara (like Sisyphus pushing his rock uphill) or a dung-beetle his dung-ball. If upadhi is the burden we build up in life, upādi is the fuel or motivation that keep us to instinctively, uncontrollably, that keeps us going —like Sisyphus, we think it is something enjoyable to so!

Upadhi is easily and often confounded with upadi. But upādi is very close, a near-synonym, of “clinging” (upādāna) of the 5 aggregates—then, surely, all our 6 sense-bases contribute to it or them. Upādi, then, are our “birth-bases” that keeps us going life after life.

54 See SD 28.11 (3.2).
55 Bodhi’s tr: S:B 282.

http://dharmafarer.org
Both upadhi and upādi are the mental aspect behind our samsaric existence. If upadhi is what we “have,” then upādi is what we “are.” Upadhi is the diachronic (“daily, this moment”) collecting, acquisition; upādi is the synchronic (“over time”) expending—the insatiable shopping around for more acquisitions—that keeps going life after life. Hence, if we translated diṭṭha, sute paṭthāhe ca mute ca as “to what is seen, heard, sensed and felt” (following the Commentary), we omit the most potent of the birth-bases: the mind!

4.3.2.3 Linguists and philosopher are aware of how fluid and plastic language can be. Even though Pali is not technically a “living language,” it is not exactly a “dead language,” either. It has a life of its own as a literary language (Kunstsprache) that evolved for the sole purpose of preserving the early Buddhist texts. It is the language of the most complete canon of the early teachings to have come down to us. Pali is much simpler than Sanskrit but just as rich in depth and play on words whose senses seem to grow in clarity and significance as we mature in our spiritual development. These texts are, after all, records of the Buddha’s awakening and accounts of his awakened disciples.

4.3.2.4 Philosopher Donald Davidson, in his essay, "A nice derangement of epitaphs" (1986), gives us some insight into such a plasticity of language and the vitality of contextuality. He suggests that mala-propisms (for example) show how people process the meanings of words. He argues that language competence must not merely involve learning a set meaning for each word, and then rigidly applying those semantic rules to decode what is said (or written).

Rather, he says, we should continually make use of other contextual information to interpret the meaning of utterances. Then, we must adjust our understanding of each word’s meaning based on those insights. In short, we need to understand words, phrases and sentences in proper context, especially in translating Pali into English and reading those translations.

4.3.2.5 This is what I call the “rule of context” [4.2.3]. In the cognition triad—diṭṭha, suta, muta—we have noted, muta can only mean “thought,” referring to the “mind-door” of karma [3.1.2.1]. Here, muta does not have its usual sense as a component of the cognition tetrad—diṭṭha, suta, muta, viññāta—where it means “sensed” or “felt” [2]. In the context of S 714, muta can only mean “thought”—this gives us a complete list of the factors that contribute to the “birth-bases.”

5 The meanings and translation of muta

5.1 The problem with muta

5.1.1 Let us look at muta again, and perhaps even identify its pattern of evolution in the suttas. But let us first recall what we know of muta. Usually, the Commentaries would explain muta as comprising smell, taste and touch [2.1.1.2; 5.5], and viññāta as mental objects [7]. The difficulty of translating the term muta is attested by its differing translations, the best known, of which are listed here:

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57 On upadhi, see SD 53.7 (2.3.1.2).
5.2 Mutā as “known”

5.2.1 German Pāli scholar, Wilhelm Geiger, in his Pāli Grammar (§18.1), states that muta—like related words, muti (“thought,” Sn 846), mutimā, Sn 321 = Skt matimān, Sn 714)—should be regarded as dialectical side-forms of muta (§18.1) (“thought, understood, considered,” Vbh 2). Muti (derived, by the labialization of -a- → -u-, from mati, “mind, opinion, thought”) in Sn 846 has the sense of “feeling (by the senses other than seeing and hearing).”\(^{58}\)

This word mata, however, is a late form in Pāli, and is related to the Sanskrit manta, “think, reflect.” The form mata, a participle of manteti, “to think; to take counsel,” comes from VMA\(\text{N}\), “to think,” and should not be confused with its homonym, mata, “dead,” derived from VMR, “dead.”

This wordy exercise, tedious as it is, help us see the link between the Pāli of the Buddha’s lessons to what he is addressing, that is, the Upanishadic views rooted in or promoting the abiding self (ātman) [1.2.3.1], which he rejects.

5.2.2 We have noted that the verbs dassati (or passati), suṇāti and viññāta respectively of diṭṭha, suta and viññāta are well known. But munāti, the verb for muta is not common. It is a synonym of maññati, “he thinks,” which is very common. However, from the sutta usages of these two words, we will see an important difference: while munāti usually refers to “think” in a positive sense (of bringing wisdom)

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\(^{58}\) This is from VMA\(\text{N}\), “to think,” and should not be confused with a different form, mata, from VMR, “dead.”

\(^{59}\) See Sn:N 312 n714 & 353 n846.
maññati has a negative connotation of bringing about “thought proliferation” (papañca), which, in turn, creates a jungle of views.

na monena munī hoti Not by silence is one a sage,
mūḷha,rūpo aviddasu who is confused and ignorant.
yo ca tulaṁ va paggayha One, as if holding up a balance,
vaṇā ādāya panḍito takes hold of the best—he is wise—
pāpāṇi parivajjeti rejecting the all the bad, he is a sage.
sa munī tena so muni For that reason, he is a sage,
yo munāti ubho loke who knows both in the world [who knows both worlds]—
muni tena povuccati hence, he is called a sage.

5.3 Muta as “thought”

5.3.1 Perhaps, the earliest usage of muta reflects its popular usage outside of Buddhism, as found in the Sanskrit traditions of the day. This usage is reflected in the Aratī Sutta (S 8.2), where, clearly, the context dictates that we must translate muta as “thought,” thus:

Upadhīsu janā gadhitāse, People are bound to their birth-basis,
dīṭṭha,sute paṭīghe ca muta ca to what is seen, heard, sensed and thought.
ettha vinodaya chandam anejo Who here, having rid of desire, unshaken,
yo ettha na limpati taṁ munim āhu. who clings to nothing here—they call him a sage.

We have already discussed this interesting usage of muta elsewhere [4.2.1.1].

5.3.2 Bodhi, however, renders line b as “To what is seen, heard, sensed, and felt” [2.1.1.3], explaining that he does so “in a way that comprises only the five external sense bases and thus as signifying the five cords of sensual pleasure” (S:B 458 n494). However, the context clearly refers to the arhat (the sage, munī), who is mentally unaffected by the impact of all the 6 senses. Hence, we need to include all the sense-faculties (as reflected in the translation above).

Here is a good case where Pali words are used in a non-technical sense in the early Buddhist texts. The sense of such words has to be teased out from the context and—in this case—how other words are used. Since paṭīgha here clearly refers to “sense-impact” or simply “sensing,” we can only render muta as “thought,” which also completes and conveys the import of the whole verse.

5.4 Muta as “experienced”

5.4.1 Now let us examine a related line from the Nālaka Sutta (Sn 3.11), from this verse:

60 Comy ad Dh 296 explains: “Any person … as if holding up a balance and measuring, ‘These are internal aggregates; these are external ones,’ and so on, he thinks of these two (in the same way); hence, he is called a sage (munī)” (yo puggalo … tulaṁ āropetvā minantī viya ime ajjhakkhā khandhā ime bāhirātī,ādinā nayena ime ubho pi at the minātī muni tena povuccatī) (DhA 3:396). Se Dh:N 126 nn 268+269.
61 The noun of maññati is maññanā, “conceiving (ideas, views)” [2.1.1.7]. On papañca, see SD 6.14 (2).
62 Although both trs are possible, the former fits the context better.
For, high and low are the ways [paths] proclaimed by the recluse:

they do not go to the far shore twice;

this is not experienced once. (Sn 714)

5.4.2 Commenting on the phrase na-y-idaṁ eka,guṇaṁ mutaṁ (“This is not experienced once”) (Sn 714), the Sutta Nipāta Commentary explains muta as “worthy of being touched [experienced]” (phusan-āraha, SnA 498; quoted at KvuA 38). Here, clearly, the word muta is used in a general sense of experiencing or attaining a state. The rendition “thought” is definitely wrong here. A technically correct (but pedantic) translation would be “attained,” as the context demands.

5.5 MUTA AS “SENSED”

5.5.1 Muta defined. The most developed and best known usage of muta is that if “sensed,” which should be its translation in the well-known phrase, diṭṭha,suta,muta,viññāta, “seen, heard, sensed and known.” We see this explanation given in the Vinaya’s internal Old Commentary, as follows: “mutra refers to what is smelt by the nose, what is tasted by the tongue, what is touched by the body” (mutam nāma ghāne ghāyitaṁ jivhāya sāyitaṁ kāyena phuṭṭham, V 4:2,25 f).

5.5.2 Saṁyutta Commentary definition

5.5.2.1 An intermediate stage in the definition of the phrase diṭṭha,suta muta viññāta is perhaps that found in the Saṁyutta commentary (by Buddhaghosa) on the line diṭṭha,sute paṭighe ca mute ca in verse S 714 of the Aratī Sutta (S 8.2), which goes thus:

diṭṭha,sute’ti cakkhunā diṭṭhe rūpe
sotena sute sadde
paṭigha,saddena gandha,rasa,gahitā
mute,saddena phoṭṭhabb’ārammanāṁ

In the phrase diṭṭha,suta, diṭṭha means seeing forms with the eye;
suta means hearing sounds with the ear;
in the phrase paṭigha ca mute câti,
by the word paṭigha is meant grasping smell and taste;
by the word muta is meant the objects of touch.

5.5.2.2 The Thera,gātha commentary (by Dhammapāla) on Tha 1216, quoting SA 1:270 [5.5.2.1], says thus:

Duṭṭha,sute’ti diṭthesu c’eva sutesu ca rūpa,saddesūti attho
paṭigha’ti ghaṭṭaniye phoṭṭhabbe
mute’ti vuttavasese mute
gandha,rasesūti vuttaṁ hoti
Sāratthapakāsiniyām [SA 1:270]:
paṭigha,saddena gandha,rasa,gahitā
mute,saddena phoṭṭhambān gahitan’ti vuttaṁ

Diṭṭha,sute means “in the seen and in the heard,” meaning, in forms and in sounds (respectively).
Paṭigha means contact by way of impact (touched).
Mute by way of verbal usage is said to be what is sensed by way of smells and tastes.
In the Sār’attha, pakāsini, it is said:
“By the word paṭigha is meant grasping smell and taste;
by the word muta is meant grasping touch.”

(ThaA 3:190,16-20)

63 Aratī S (S 8.2/714d/1:186,32), SD 92.6.
64 The Saṁyutta Commentary by Buddhaghosa.
Dhammapāla’s interesting note attests to the fact that even in commentarial times, the teachers were not fully agreed in some of the finer points of the terms, which can be summarized thus:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Diṭṭha Suta Muta Viññāta</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>diṭṭha</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>suta</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>paṭigha</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>muta</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Here is a good example of Pali “technicality” which may trouble or at least concern the academic scholar, but simply delight the sutta seeker. It is likely that in S 174 of the Aratī Sutta (S 8.2), paṭigha refers to what is smelled, tasted and touched—that is, the sense of muta in the tetrad [5.5]. And muta, in this context, follows the Upanishadic senses of mata, “mentally conceived,” or vijñātaḥ (etc), “rationally conceived.” [1.1.1; 5.2]

Although the words (vyāñjana) in the set differ, their overall meaning (attha) agree. In fact, paṭigha and muta here have the same sense of “impact” or physical contact of “molecules” (the earth element) on the nose-faculty. Hence, in practical terms, both paṭigha and muta—especially in other suttas—refer to the same set of senses, that is, smell, taste and touch.

### 5.5.3 Smell, taste and touch

#### 5.5.3.1 Both smell and taste are part of our body chemosensory system. All physical things (such as rocks, perfumes, books and bread) emit molecules. We are mainly familiar with smelling through our nostrils, but eating food releases molecules into the back of the throat causes us to smell, too.

Inside our nostrils, these molecules land on the olfactory epithelium—a tissue covered in mucus that lines the nasal cavity. The epithelium contains millions of olfactory receptors, or neurons that are capable of binding with specific odor molecules. These are the “locks and keys” of the olfactory system, which help identify certain smells.65

#### 5.5.3.2 Once the olfactory receptors bind with a specific smell (odorant), they send their electrical impulses to a microregion known as the glomerulus (of which there are some 2,000 in the olfactory bulb in the forebrain or limbic region), which then passes it along to other parts of the brain. The “odorant patterns” that are released from the glomerulus are interpreted by the brain as smell.

In the 1920s, scientists calculated that the human nose was capable of only smelling 10,000 different scents. However, recently, scientists have shown this notion to be wrong: the nose is, in fact, capable of identifying up to 1 trillion scents (although we wonder if there is really a need to discriminate so many scents!).66 This is because smell molecules have a myriad of different shapes that can fit into several receptors at once, making it possible for the nose to identify more smells than the number of receptors available.67

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65 This function was discovered by Richard Axel and Linda Buck, who won the 2004 Nobel Prize in Physiology or Medicine for their discovery.

66 This fact, however, helps us appreciate the fact that the Buddha has a “perfect sense of taste” (the 21st mark of the great man), and in his birth as a deva he had peerless “divine smell (and sense of smell)”: see Lakkhaṇa S (D 30,2.7), SD 36.9.

5.5.3.3 The olfactory bulb, which contains glomeruli, is located in the forebrain’s limbic system, which is often associated with memory and emotions. The olfactory bulb is also linked to the amygdala, which processes emotion, as well as to the hippocampus, known for its role in learning. Notice how a smell—the inside of an old book, chlorine smell, or fresh-cut grass—triggers memories and powerful emotions, and we find ourselves going back to a familiar time—an experience known as “involuntary memory.”

5.5.3.4 Taste is the sensation that arises when a substance in the mouth reacts chemically with taste receptor cells located on taste buds in the oral cavity (the mouth), mostly on the tongue. Taste, along with smell and trigeminal nerve stimulation (registering texture, pain, and temperature), determines flavors of food or other substances. Humans have taste receptors on taste buds (gustatory calyculi) and other areas including the upper surface of the tongue and the epiglottis. The gustatory cortex in the brain is responsible for the perception of taste.

The tongue is covered with thousands of small bumps called papillae, which are visible to the naked eye. In each papilla are hundreds of taste buds, except for the filiform papillae. There are between 2000 and 5000 taste buds that are located on the back and the front of the tongue. Others are located on the roof, sides and back of the mouth, and in the throat. Each taste bud contains 50 to 100 taste receptor cells.

5.5.3.5 Modern science identifies 5 specific tastes received by taste receptors, that is: saltiness, sweetness, bitterness, sourness and savouriness (Japanese umami). In some circles, however, the 5th taste, savouriness, is omitted, so that we have only the 4 tastes: salty, sweet, bitter and sour. The Sūda Sutta (S 47.8) lists the following 8 kinds of tastes that the ancient Indians were aware of:

1. ambila sour, astringent buttermilk (takkambali, DhsA 320)
2. tittaka bitter neem leaves (nimi,panna, DhsA 320)
3. kañuka spicy hot ginger, black pepper (singivera,marica, DhsA 320)
4. madhura sweat honey (ThA 3:22)
5. khañika sharp, acrid egg-plant sprout (vātingana,kañira, DhsA 320)
6. akhañika mild, not sharp [Commentary probably has “acrid” (lambila) here]
7. lōnika salty sea-salt (sammodikaloña, DhsA 320)
8. aloñaka bland, unsalted [Commentary probably has “astringent” (kasāva) here] (S 47.8/5:149-152), SD 28.15

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68 The French writer, Marcel Proust (1871-1922), coined the term “involuntary memory,” in his novel À la Recherche du Temps Perdu (In Search of Lost Time or Remembrance of Things Past) (1913-1927). This is also known as the “Proust phenomenon,” which he described as a childhood memory primed by the taste of dunking a piece of madeleine (a biscuit) in lime-tea (Schwann’s Way, 1928). For a scientific overview of the sense of smell, see https://www.medicaldaily.com/how-does-nose-smell-inner-workings-our-sense-smell-324566.

69 Umami (Jap, “delicious”) has been described as being characteristic of broth and cooked meat, and is tasted through taste receptors that typically respond to glutamates. See Ikeda, Kikunae (2002), "New Seasonings" [1909], Chemical Senses 27,9 2002: 847-849. doi: 10.1093/chemse/27.9.847. PMID 12438213.

70 For general reading, see https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Taste.

71 Given as madhuka at Khajjaniya S (S 22.79/3:87).

72 In place of this and the last, aloñaka, Comy has “acrid” (lambila), such as jujube (Zizyphus jujuba), emblic myrobalan (Phyllantus emblica), wood-apple (Feronia elephantum), sālava (?)[badarāmalaka,kapittha,sālavādî], and “astringent” (kasāva), such as yellow myrobalan (haritaka) (DhsA 320). For botanical names, see DPL (Childers).

73 See n for akhañika above.
The traditional Indian awareness of tastes seems to be classes in approximate pairs of sour-bitter, spicy hot-sweet, sharp-mild, and salty-bland. Umami is apparently a cultural phenomenon not found in ancient India, just as “spicy hot” (kaṭuka) is not included amongst the 4 kinds of tastes in the western scientific classification.

5.5.3.6 Touch (phassa) is the body sense, especially the skin, that allows us to perceive pressure and related sensations, including temperatures and pain. The sense of touch is located in the skin, which is composed of 3 layers: the epidermis, dermis and hypodermis. Different types of sensory receptors, varying in size, shape, number, and distribution within the skin, are responsible for relaying information about pressure, temperature, and pain.

The largest touch sensor, the Pacinian corpuscle, is located in the hypodermis, the innermost thick fatty layer of skin, which responds to vibration. Free nerve endings—neurons that originate in the spinal cord, enter and remain in the skin—transmit information about temperature and pain from their location at the bottom of the epidermis.

Hair receptors in the dermis, which are wrapped around each follicle, respond to the pressure produced when the hairs are bent. All the sensory receptors respond not to continued pressure but rather to changes in pressure, adapting quickly to each new change, so that, for example, the skin is unaware of the continual pressure produced by clothes.

Once stimulated by sensation, the receptors trigger nerve impulses which travel to the somatosensory cortex in the parietal lobe of the brain, where they are transformed into sensations. Somatic senses are sometimes referred to as somesthetic senses, with the understanding that somesthesia includes the sense of touch, proprioception (sense of position and movement), and (depending on usage) haptic perception.

Haptic perception, a major form of touch, involves active exploration, usually by the hands, or the experience that arises when one’s hands envelop an object and explore its surface freely, providing information about its general shape or form and allowing object-recognition to occur, even when the object is larger than any area of the skin. 74

6 The tetrad

6.1 Remembering the tetrad

6.1.1 The most useful way of remembering of the cognition tetrad—diṭṭha suta muta viññāta—is to be familiar with the cognition tetrad passage found in the Māluṅkya,putta Sutta (S 35.95), thus:

Here, Māluṅkya,putta, regarding things seen, heard, sensed and known by you:
  in the seen there will only be the seen;
  in the heard there will only be the heard;
  in the sensed there will only be the sensed;
  in the known there will only be the known. (S 35.95/4:73), SD 5.9

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75 “Regarding things seen, heard, sensed and known,” diṭṭha,suta,muta,viññatabbesu dharmesu, lit “in things that are to be seen, to be heard, to be sensed, to be known.” See foll n.
6.1.2 Here, all the Commentaries agree in glossing *muta* as comprising the faculties of smell, taste and touch, that is, all the senses except seeing, hearing and mentation (in the 6 sense-bases). In this connection, I think that U Thittila, in his translation of the Vibhaṅga (1969), has given us the best English rendition of *muta*, as “sensed otherwise” (Vbh 1036-1037/429 = Vbh:T 548).

Thittila’s translation may be a bit awkward and may not sound like good English in certain passages. In that case, we can use an amplified translation: “(otherwise) sensed.” Like Thittila, we may dispense with the parenthesis, and simply use “otherwise” where the reading is very awkward (as in the following line above). The principle is that by appending the word “otherwise,” we have a better idea what the expression means. When we understand the meaning of the key word and the rest of the passage, then we are ready to fulfil the purpose of the teaching that the passage preserves.

6.1.3 *Words are how we use them*, and we need to define how we use them, especially in connection with the Buddha’s teachings and practice. Knowing how to use words means knowing their proper context. As we have noted, although *muta* should be translated as “thought” [5.3] or as “sensed” [5.5], these are not fixed. Words rarely have fixed senses: we give meaning to the word by making sense of the context of the word. This is called “the rule of context” [4.2.3]. When we know the context of the passage, we know its meaning and purpose—then, it is helpful in our understanding and practice of the Buddha Dharma.

7 Translation of *viññāta*

7.1 *Function of viññāta*. The word *viññāta* in the phrase *diṭṭha suta muta viññāta* is difficult to render into English. If we take *muta* as a collective term of “the 3 physical object-bases, that is, those of the nose-object, tongue-object, and body-object” [5.5.1], then, clearly, the whole phrase is a shorthand for the 6 sense-bases, that is, the seen, heard, smelt-tasted-touched, and thought. This may well apply to the early Buddhist context. *Viññāta*, then, refers to mental processes, mentation, including cognizing and thinking.

7.2 *Viññāta as “the known.”* However, in the broader Upaniṣad context—unfamiliar with the Buddha usage—it is more appropriate to render *viññāta* (Skt *vijñāta*) as “the known,” that is, *as the faculty or activity of the mind*. It is the mind that knows through the physical sense-faculties, which includes the mind itself. *Viññāta* here then refers to our “making sense” (however that may work out to be) of the other experiences. “Knowledge,” then, is simply a construal or construction of what the mind *thinks* of what it sees, hears, smells, tastes, touches, and thinks. This sense conveniently applies to the Buddhist context, too, when we speak of the unawakened mind.76

7.3 Cognition

7.3.1 *A technical term*

7.3.1.1 *Viññāta* should not be translated as “the cognized” or “cognition” for the simple reason: *viññāta* includes a broader spectrum of mental activities. In modern psychology, *cognition* is (1) a general term for all forms of mental processes involved in acquiring and processing information, including conscious ones such as perception, thought, and memory, as well as non-conscious processes, such as

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76 See SD 3.13: 5.2.1.4 f.
grammatical construction, parsing of sensory data into percepts, and the neural control of physiological processes. (2) It is, in itself, an item of knowledge and belief, that is a particular thought.\footnote{Cambridge Dictionary of Psychology (ed D Matsumoto), 2009 sv cognition.}

\subsection{7.3.1.2} It is, of course, possible for us—just as we apply (by natural adaptation)\footnote{On the Buddha’s “natural adaptation” of such words, see SD 39.3 (3.3.4).} terms such as consciousness, the preconscious, the unconscious and the subconscious [2.1.3.2]—to define the way we use “cognition, cognitive, etc.” It’s not that cognitive or cognition are not suitable terms here, but we have a more beautiful one-syllable Anglo-Saxon word which well applies here, that is, know, known and their related forms. “The known” is a perfectly good translation for viññāṇa, even etymologically: vī (a prefix evoking analysis, taking apart) + ā (a suffix) = viññā. “to know + -tā (a noun ending).

\subsection{7.3.2 More than just viññāṇa}

\subsubsection{7.3.3.1} Arguably, the words cognize, cognition etc, are bulls in a china shop when we consider that viññāṇa covers a wide range of vital and beautiful Buddhist experiences: to dream, to be fundamentally conscious (like when we first waken from sleep), to see, to hear, to smell, to taste, to touch, to feel, to think and conceive ideas and views, to perceive others and their views, to intend and create karmically charged acts, to be aware, to enjoy that awareness, that bliss, that joy, and above all, to celebrate wisdom that frees us from all things. Does cognition do all this?

\subsubsection{7.3.3.2} Viññāṇa—as “the known”—embraces the experiences of all the physical senses (and its own mental objects), all their vital and beautiful experiences [7.3.3.1]. Hence, it is not an aspect of viññāṇa, “consciousness,” but rather viññāṇa is an aspect of viññāṇa. It is true that from “knowing” (viññāṇā) arises “consciousness” (viññāṇa). But we need to look at this full etymology of viññāṇa, especially the one found in the Khajjaniya Sutta (S 22.79), thus:

\begin{quote}
It cognizes (viññāṇā), bhikshus, therefore it is called consciousness.\footnote{See SD 17.8a (8.2).}
And what does it cognize?
It cognizes sour, ... bitter, ... spicy hot, ... sweet, ... sharp, ... mild [not sharp], ... salty, ... bland [unsalted].\footnote{The 8 kinds of taste are, respectively, ambila, tittika, kaCUDA, madhuka, khārika, akhārika, loṇaka, aloṇaka [5.5.3.5]. See also Sūda S (S 47.8/5:149-152), SD 28.15, qu at Vism 4.122/150 f. For the difference btw perception (saṇā) and consciousness (viññāṇa), see Viññāṇa, SD 17.8a (8.2).}

It cognizes, bhikshus, therefore it is called consciousness.\footnote{See SD 17.8a (8.2) Saṇā and viññāṇa.}
\end{quote}

(S 22.79,9/3:87), SD 17.9

The definition of consciousness here does not merely say that we are only conscious of tastes, but they are used to highlight the fundamentality of consciousness: it cognizes, it “tastes” sense-objects in “first blush” encounters, even as passing nodding acquaintances. It is perception that rekindles those acquaintances. It recognizes old flames, and rekindles them into warm or blazes, or it simply turns a cold shoulder, or is nonchalant to uninteresting cognitions (thoughts) and memories.

\subsubsection{7.3.3.3} Note that perception (saṇā) is defined (in the same Sutta) in terms of colours, thus: “It perceives blue, ... yellow, ... red, ... white.”\footnote{For the difference btw perception (saṇā) and consciousness (viññāṇa), see Viññāṇa, SD 17.8a (8.2).} It perceives, bhikshus, therefore it is called perception.”\footnote{Khajjaniya S (S 22.79,7), SD 17.9.}
don’t perceive or recognize merely colours, but the definition uses the imagery of colours to highlight its more “colourful” mental reactivity to past memories and present conditions. Hence, “perception” goes beyond “consciousness”; but both these processes are “known” to viññāta, included in its compass. Hence, it would be inappropriate to render it as “the cognized.”

It should be noted that the verb vijānāti only “cognizes.” It “knows”—to that extent it is viññāta—but viññāna stops there. Saññā then works on it, it recognizes: “I know this person, this experience, etc.” and so on. Viññāṇa cognizes; saññā recognizes—a perfect pair. Broadly, we can say that viññāṇa knows “objectively,” saññā knows “subjectively,” viññāta knows both “analytically” and “synthetically”—it “sees” parts of an experience or puts one together.

Then, we project our desires for what has been recognized as being pleasurable or likeable, our hate rejects their opposites or distractors, and our ignorance is fed when we fail to recognize the pleasurable or its opposite—karma is formed, formations constructed; and so on. This—and more—are all under the purview of “the known” (viññāta).

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