The Ethical Foundations of Buddhist Cognitive Models: Presentations of Greed and Fear in the Theravāda *Abhidhamma*

*Tamara DITRICH**

Abstract

While issues related to greed and fear are ubiquitous in everyday life, they become particularly evident in crises such as the current COVID-19 pandemic, when societal responses are frequently based on either fear of the disease or craving for the reestablishment of pre-pandemic "normal" life. In this context, a question can be posed whether it is possible to approach and understand these phenomena in other ways, and consequently respond in a different manner. In search for alternative approaches to the problem of human greed and fear, this article investigates their conceptualisations from the perspective of the Theravāda *Abhidhamma*, an important formulation of ancient Indian Buddhist philosophy. The *Abhidhamma* analyses and expounds the processes of cognition, using a multivalent and complex structure, comprised of interrelated and interdependent components (*dhamma*), which are involved in the ever-changing flow of mental and physical phenomena. This article proposes that the entirety of the structural cognitive model of the *Abhidhamma* is founded on, and permeated by ethics. The components involved in cognitive processes are classified in three ways, as ethical, unethical, or indeterminate; greed and fear are presented as components of unethical mental states, which in turn may lead to actions that are harmful to oneself and society. This Abhidhammic analysis of cognition provides a model, in which a different conceptualisation of greed and fear is presented; it identifies those components and conditions for cognition which allow for an ethical (*kusala*) stance and consequently ethical actions. The article thus propounds that the knowledge of cognitive models of ancient India can be relevant to the search for new approaches to contemporary ethical challenges, and may contribute to a different understanding of, and responses to, greed and fear.

Keywords: Buddhist ethics, Theravāda *Abhidhamma*, ethics in the *Abhidhamma*, fear and greed in Theravāda Buddhism

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* Tamara DITRICH, University of Sydney and University of Ljubljana.
Email address: t.ditrich@gmail.com

Etični temelji budističnih kognitivnih modelov: prezentacije pohlepa in strahu v theravādski *Abhidhammi*

Izvleček

V vsakdanjem življenju se nenehno soočamo s problemom strahu in pohlepa, a to postane še očitneje v kriznih obdobjih, kot na primer v času pandemije COVID-19, ko številni družbeni ukrepi in spremembe odražajo negotovost in strah pred boleznijo ter hlepenje po ponovni ekonomski rasti tržnega gospodarstva. Pri tem si lahko zastavimo vprašanje: ali lahko o strahu in pohlepu razmišljamo na povsem nov način in posledično delujemo drugače?

V iskanju drugačnih perspektiv pri gledanju na problem človeškega strahu in pohlepa ter njunih posledic v osebnem in družbenem življenju pričujoči prispevek raziskuje staroindijske kognitivne modele, ki se v svojih osnovah in pristopih bistveno razlikujejo od zahodnega diskurza. Pri tem se osredotoča na konceptualizacijo strahu in pohlepa v *Abhidhammi,* enem najpomembnejših besedil staroindijske filozofije, ki kognicijo opisuje kot kompleksno strukturo medsebojno povezanih in soodvisnih komponent (*dhamma*), udeleženih v toku mentalnih in fizičnih pojavov, ter jih predstavi kot hipne fenomene brez intrinzičnega bistva. Prispevek raziskuje, kako je strukturalni model kognicije v *Abhidhammi*, ki združuje analitični in sintetično-dinamični pristop, v celoti osnovan na etičnih izhodiščih. Posamezne komponente kognicije so predstavljene kot etične, neetične ali nevtralne; strah in pohlep sta uvrščena med neetične ter sta še posebej izpostavljena kot temeljni komponenti in gibali pri tvorbi večine neetičnih mentalnih stanj, iz katerih posledično izhaja sebi in drugim škodljivo delovanje. Zato *Abhidhamma* predlaga drugačen odziv na pohlep in strah ter identificira tiste kognicijske komponente in pogoje, ki omogočajo etičen odziv (*kusala*) ter posledično vodijo v etično delovanje. Prispevek tako pokaže, da je poznavanje kognitivnih modelov staroindijske filozofije zelo relevantno pri iskanju novih pristopov k etičnim izzivom današnjega sveta in da bi lahko pomembno pripomoglo k razmisleku o drugačnem razumevanju in odzivih na pohlep in strah.

Ključne besede: budistična etika, theravādska *Abhidhamma*, etična izhodišča *Abhidhamme*, strah in pohlep v theravādskem budizmu

Abbreviations[1]

A	*Aṅguttaranikāya*
As	*Atthasālinī*
D	*Dīghanikāya*
Dhp	*Dhammapada*
Dhs	*Dhammasaṅgaṇi*
M	*Majjhimanikāya*
Ps	*Papañcasūdanī*, *Majjhimanikāyāṭṭhakathā*
PED	*Pāli-English Dictionary*
S	*Saṃyuttanikāya*
Sn	*Suttanipāta*
Spk	*Sāratthappakāsinī*
Vibh	*Vibhaṅga*
Vibh-a	*Sammohavinodanī*
Vism	*Visuddhimagga*

Introduction[2]

At the time of writing this article, the COVID-19 pandemic has been spreading worldwide for over a year, engendering societal responses that are largely based on fear of the disease itself and future uncertainties on the one hand, and the desire to return to pre-pandemic "normal" life on the other. Consequently, many countries have been undertaking measures that, often irrationally, sway between total or partial lock down in attempts to control the spread of the disease, and the reinstatement of public life, frequently with a stated aim to strenghten economic growth, which is the foundational principle of the currently prevailing politico-economic paradigm. When such reactions predominantly stem from fear, they often seem to provoke panic, depression, anger and even violence, which are also reflected in the frequent use of military terminology in relation to COVID-19, such as “war with the virus”, the “invisible enemy”, “elimination of the virus”, “victory over the virus”, etc. When the reactions are triggered by craving or greed, they give rise to various socio-economic measures to allow for increased production and consumption in the endless pursuit of economic growth. Similarly, fluctuations between responses based on greed and fear are also the main underlaying principle of the consecutive rise and fall in share markets, as noted by many investigators (Investopedia 2020; Westerhoff 2004).

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[1] The abbreviations of Pāli sources and the quotation system follow the *Critical Pāli Dictionary* (Epilegomena to vol. 1, 1948, 5*–36*, and vol. 3, 1992, II–VI). The numbers in the quotations of Pāli sources refer to the volume and page of the PTS edition (e.g., M I 21 refers to the *Majjhima Nikāya*, vol 1, 21).

[2] This paper is partly based on the author's article about the ethical foundations of ancient Indian cognitive models, published in Slovene (Ditrich 2021), with substantial changes, new materials and foci added.

Greed and fear have undoubtedly been major components of human life since time immemorial, and have been mostly taken for granted as an unavoidable part of life. However, the role and significance of fear and greed in today’s world requires a new consideration, especially in the light of expansive technological achievements, the applications of which, when motivated by fear or greed, can have unprecedented consequences, not only in crises such as epidemics, natural catastrophies and wars, but above all, in facing perhaps the greatest ever challenge of humanity—the massive impoverishment and destruction of the natural environment, which endangers the very existence of humans along with numerous ecosystems. Despite this great existential threat, it is the COVID-19 pandemic that is currently at the forefront of societal attention, but only rarely linked to broader and much more dangerous environmental issues (Klenert et al. 2020), which in turn are deeply related to the ethical challenges of modern societies. Therefore, in this article I reflect upon greed and fear in an ethical context and explore whether they could be approached from an alternative viewpoint and consequently, engaged with in a different manner. With this aim, the article investigates the notions of fear and greed within the ethical framework of ancient Indian cognitive models, as presented in the Theravāda *Abhidhamma*, and identifies those components of cognition, which allow for an ethical stance and moral action.

Ancient Indian Cognitive Models: the *Abhidhamma*

Contemporary research into ancient Indian culture, religions and philosophy involves many challenges because of the encounter with a discourse which is considerably different from the modern Western one.[3] The difficulties in translating ancient Indian texts are not only linguistic but above all cultural, because many aspects and components of ancient Indian religions and philosophies are incommensurable with Western presumptions. Since Indian and Buddhist studies are relatively young disciplines, with their early beginnings in the late nineteenth century, they are underpinned by, and considerably reflect, Orientalist discourse, based on European science, ideas of universalism, romanticism, and colonial social sciences of the time (McMahan 2008). Consequently, ancient Indian traditions and their texts were often translated and transposed into the dominant Western discourse and presented within the framework of Western assumptions. Even thereafter, in the twentieth century, attempts in creating bridges between the two disourses have frequently allowed for the traffic moving across the bridge to be in one direction only, that is towards the Western bank. These issues are especially relevant for the investigations of ancient Indian cognitive models, which comprise numerous components that have no counterpart in Western discourse and are consequently difficult to explain with Western concepts. Therefore, it is important to firstly attempt to understand and explicate them within ancient Indian discourse on their own terms.

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[3] Here the term “Western” is used in reference to the European-American paradigms that have become, due to politico-economic and other reasons, increasingly predominant worldwide.

One of the earliest known attempts to systematically study cognitive processes in ancient India is recorded in the body of texts in the Pāli language, called the *Abhidhamma*,[4] usually dated to the third century BCE, which encompass, in terms of Western categories, philosophy, ethics and phenomenological psychology (Bodhi 1993, 3–4). The *Abhidhamma* presents cognition as a dynamic structure, comprised of a number of components that are involved in cognitive processes, and analyses their interrelations, the causes and conditions required for generating various mental states.[5] Although its subject matter largely concurs with the topics considered in Western psychology and philosophy, the *Abhidhamma* has received scant scholarly attention. One of the reasons for this relatively limited interest may lie in the structural generative model of cognition presented in the *Abhidhamma*, for which no parallels can be found in the current Western psychology, cognitive science or other branches of knowledge.

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[4] This paper focuses on the *Abhidhamma*, as recorded in Theravāda Buddhism. Only two ancient Indian *Abhidhamma* (*Abhidharma*) full sets of texts are extant, i.e., one from the Sarvāstivāda Buddhist school which survived only in ancient Chinese translations, and the other from the Theravāda school, preserved in Pāli. Although the texts from the two traditions differ in many aspects, their overall genre, the underlying structural principles and paradigms are quite similar.

[5] As Rošker (2018) argues, in many ways similar structural models of perception or cognition were also developed in ancient Chinese philosophy.

The *Abhidhamma,* as handed down to us, is a collection of seven works,[6] belonging to the Theravāda Buddhist Canon, usually situated in the third century BCE, although its foundations may stem from the early beginnings of Buddhism (Karunadasa 2014, 2). The texts are concerned with systematising the core components and features of Buddhist teachings, which are articulated in a very precise technical language, providing definitions of the key concepts and terms, and detailed analyses of cognitive processes. The first two books of the *Abhidhamma*, the *Dhammasaṅgaṇi* in *Vibhaṅga*, are particularly significant since they comprehensively bring forward the entire structural model of cognition, establish a detailed typology of cognitive states, describe and analyse all the components involved in cognitive structures of lived experience, and link them with the materiality or material aspects of life (Karunadasa 2015). The last and the largest book of the *Abhidhamma*, the *Paṭṭhāna*, describes the entire dynamics of the cognitive processes in the light of the formula of dependent origination (*paṭiccasamuppāda*), presenting the model of interdependent conditionality through twenty-four conditions or modes (*paccaya*), governing all the interrelated *dhammas* (Karunadasa 2014, 275–95; Ledi 2004, 31–61; Nyanatiloka 2008, 162–215).

The *Abhidhamma* presents cognition as a complex structure, comprised of basic components or units, which in Pāli are called *dhamma* (Sanskrit *dharma*), often rendered into English as "phenomena" (Warder 1971, 272–95). *Dhammas*, which are presumed to comprise the rapid flow of momentary mental and physical phenomena or events, are considered interdependent, ever-changing, and without a self or individuality. The *Abhidhamma* presents lived experience at the fundamental level (*paramattha*) as an interaction of a number of interdependent *dhammas*, which are classified into four categories: (1) cognition (*citta*), (2) mental concomitants (*cetasika*), (3) materiality (*rūpa*), and (4) *nibbāna* (Bodhi 1993, 25). The first three categories are considered impermanent, unsatisfactory and without intrinsic substance or self, while *nibbāna* is regarded as the unconditioned state which is empty, beyond time, change, and any afflictions.

The first category is *citta*, which may be translated as "consciousness, cognition, knowing". It is defined in the commentary *Atthasālinī* as that "which knows, cognizes, is conscious of the basis/object of knowing".[7] Cognition (*citta*) is considered momentary and very subtle; moments of cognition (*citta*) follow each other so rapidly that they create, at the conceptual level, a sense of continuity.

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[6] These are: *Dhammasaṅgaṇi, Vibhaṅga, Dhātukathā, Puggalapaññatti, Kathāvatthu, Yamaka,* and *Paṭṭhāna* (As 21–23).

[7] As 63: *Cittanti ārammaṇaṃ cintetīti cittaṃ; vijānātīti attho.*

The impermanent and empty nature of cognition (*citta*) can be revealed only at the fundamental level, mainly through meditation practice; this is also reflected in the classification of 121 different types of *citta* in the *Dhammasaṅgaṇi*, among which more than half refer to various meditative states of high concentration (*jhāna*), insight meditation (*vipassanā*) and *nibbāna* (Dhs 9–133) (Ditrich 2016, 26–29).

The second category are *cetasikas*, mental concomitants, which always arise in various groups along with every moment of cognition (*citta*), and recognise, determine, and affect how the objects of cognition are experienced (e.g., with peace, happiness, mindfulness, anger, greed, envy). According to the *Abhidhamma*, lived experience is a flow of rapidly arising and passing away moments of cognition (*citta*), alongside sets of mental concomitantas (*cetasika*), without there being any observer or reference point existing outside this process. Different types of cognition (*citta*) are classified from an ethical perspective as wholesome, unwholesome, or indeterminate, depending on the types of mental concomitants (*cetasika*) that accompany each moment of cognition (*citta*). The Abhidhammic texts list 52 mental concomitants (*cetasika*) (Dhs 75–76; 87; 120) (Table 1).

Table 1: Mental concomitants (*cetasika*)[8]

Ethically variable (13)	**Ethical/wholesome(25)**
Universals (7) 1. Contact (*phassa*) 2. Feeling (*vedanā*) 3. Perception (*saññā*) 4. Volition (*cetanā*) 5. One-pointedness (*ekaggatā*) 6. Life faculty (*jīvitindriya*) 7. Attention (*manasikāra*) **Occasionals (6)** 8. Application of thought (*vitakka*) 9. Sustained thought (*vicāra*) 10. Intention (*adhimokkha*) 11. Energy (*viriya*) 12. Joy (*pīti*) 13. Wish to act (*chanda*)[9] **Unethical/unwholesome (14)** **Universals (4)** 14. Delusion (*moha*) 15. Moral recklessness (*ahirika*) 16. Disregard for consequences (*anottappa*) 17. Restlessness (*uddhacca*) **Occasionals (10)** ***Greed group (lobha) (3)*** 18. Greed (*lobha*) 19. Views (*diṭṭhi*) 20. Comparison/pride (*māna*) **Aversion group (dosa) (4)** 21. Aversion (*dosa*) 22. Envy (*issā*) 23. Selfishness (*macchariya*) 24. Regret/worry (*kukkucca*) **Delusion group** 25. Dullness (*thīna*) 26. Torpor (*middha*) 27. Confusion (*vicikicchā*)	**Universals (19)** 28. Trust (*saddhā*) 29. Mindfulness (*sati*) 30. Moral restraint/conscientiousness (*hiri*) 31. Moral control/ scrupulousness (*ottappa*) 32. Non-greed (*alobha*) 33. Non-aversion (*adosa*) 34. Mental equilibrium (*tatramajjhattatā*) 35. Tranquillity of mental concomitants (*kāyapassaddhi*) 36. Tranquillity of cognition (*cittapassaddhi*) 37. Lightness of mental concomitants (*kāyalahutā*) 38. Lightness of cognition (*cittalahutā*) 39. Readiness/wieldiness of mental concomitants (*kāya-mudutā*) 40. Softness/malleability of cognition (*citta-mudutā*) 41. Readiness/wieldiness of concomitants y (*kāya-kammaññatā*) 42. Readiness/wieldiness of cognition (*citta-kammaññatā*) 43. Proficiency of mental concomitants (*kāya-pāguññatā*) 44. Proficiency of cognition (*cittapāguññatā*) 45. Straightness/rectitude of mental concomitants (*kāyujukatā*) 46. Straightness/rectitude of cognition (*cittujukatā*) **Occasionals (3)** 47. Right speech (*sammā-vācā*) 48. Right action (*sammā-kammanta*) 49. Right livelihood (*sammā-ājīva*) **Illimitables (2)** 50. Compassion (*karuṇā*) 51. Sympathetic joy (*muditā*) **Absence of delusion (1)** 52. Wisdom (*paññā*)

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[8] This is a modified table, with Pāli terms added, from Bodhi (1993, 79).

[9] In the *Dhammasaṅgaṇi*, *chanda* is not listed as a mental concomitamnt but is introduced only in the commentaries (As 133).

Each cognitive moment (*citta*), whether ethically wholesome, unwholesome, or indeterminate, is invariably accompanied by at least seven universal mental concomitants (*cetasika*) which occur simultaneously:

1. Contact (*phassa*), which arises when consciousness gets in touch with an object/basis of cognition, and thus initiates the cognitive process (As 107–09).
2. Feeling/feeling tone (*vedanā*) is an affective tone or flavour of an experience, which can be pleasant, unpleasant, or neutral (As 109–10).
3. Perception (*saññā*) notes and recognizes an object (As 110–11).
4. Volition (*cetanā*) is the conative aspect of cognition, which organizeses and coordinates other associated mental states on the object/basis of cognition (As 111–12).
5. One-pointedness (*ekaggatā*) concentrates or focuses on the object/basis of cognition, and brings together the mental states that arise with it (As 118–19).
6. Life faculty (*jīvitindriya*) sustains the associated mental states, and provides continuity of the mental process (As 123–24).
7. Attention (*manasikāra*) draws awareness to the object/basis of cognition, drives and joins the associated mental states to the object, and faces the object (As 133).

The group of these seven universal mental concomitants (*cetasika*) can be joined by several other ethically variable concomittants (listed under 8–13, Table 1), which include: application of thought (*vitakka*), sustained thought (*vicāra*), intention (*adhimokkha*), energy (*viriya*), joy (*pīti*), and wish to act (*chanda*) (As 114–18; 133; Karunadasa 2014, 103–20). The ethicaly variable concomitants in turn can also be joined by other concomitants, either ethically wholesome or unwholesome ones (14–52, Table 1).

Among the ethically unwholesome concomitants (*akusala cetasika*), there are four that are invariably present in all unwholesome mental states, i.e., delusion (*moha*), lack of moral restraint (*ahirika*), disregard for consequences or unscrupulousness (*anottappa*), and restlessness or agitation (*uddhacca*) (As 248–50; 260) (14–17, Table 1). These four are good indicators of unethical mental states; for example, the presence of agitation indicates that one is experiencing an unethical or unwholesome mental state. In addition, they can be joined by other unwholesome concomitants which include the following ten: greed (*lobha*), views (*diṭṭhi*), comparison/pride (*māna*), aversion (*dosa*), envy (*issā*), selfishness (*macchariya*), regret/worry (*kukkucca*), dullness (*thīna*), torpor (*middha*), and confusion (*vicikicchā*) (18–27, Table 1) (Karunadasa 2014, 121–31).

The largest group is formed by the twenty-five ethically wholesome or beautiful (*sobhana*) mental concomitants (*cetasika*) (28–52, Table 1). Among these, nineteen invariably occur in all ethical mental states: trust (*saddhā*), mindfulness (*sati*), moral restraint (*hiri*), moral control/scrupulousness (*ottappa*), non-greed (*alobha*), non-aversion (*adosa*), mental equilibrium (*tatramajjhattatā*), tranquillity of mental concomitants (*kāyapassaddhi*) and cognition (*cittapassaddhi*), lightness of mental concomitants (*kāyalahutā*) and cognition (*cittalahutā*), readiness/wieldiness of mental concomitants (*kāyamudutā*) and cognition (*cittamudutā*), readiness/wieldiness of mental concomitants (*kāyakammaññatā*) and cognition (*cittakammaññatā*), proficiency of mental concomitants (*kāyapāguññatā*) and cognition (*cittapāguññatā*), straightness/rectitude of mental concomitants (*kāyujukatā*) and cognition (*cittujukatā*) (28–46, Table 1) In addition, these universal wholesome concomitants can be joined by other wholesome ones, such as appropriate speech (*sammā-vācā*), appropriate action (*sammā kammanta*), appropriate livelihood (*sammāājīva*), compassion (*karuṇā*), sympathetic joy (*muditā*), and wisdom (*paññā*) (Karunadasa 2014, 133–44) (47–52, Table 1).

Unethical mental concomitants (*cetasika*) are incompatible with the ethical ones and *vice versa*; e.g., anger and restlesness cannot arise together with peace, mindfulnees or wisdom. Thus the *Abhidhamma* classifies the types of cognition (*citta*) on ethical grounds, with regard to wholesomeness or unwholesomness of mental concomitants (*cetasika*) that arise along with cognition (*citta*).

Ethical Foundations of the *Abhidhamma*

Even a quick glance at Table 1 reveals that the Abhidhammic model of cognition differs significantly from any Western models, such as those in psychology or cognitive science. The differences not only involve a considerably incompatible taxonomy and lexicon but, most importantly, disparate fundamental postulates and aims underlying the cognitive models. Consequently, the English renderings of key terms from Pāli are a compromise since, for many words or concepts, there are no precise English translations, and clarity about what they connote has to constantly be kept in mind, i.e., an exact clarification of what each term refers to within the framework of the whole Abhidhammic structural cognitive model is necessary before we can comprehensively examine the model.

It may be contended that the entire Abhidhammic cognitive structure is grounded on, and permeated by, ethics. The pivotal role of ethics is also evident in the very first sentence of the *Dhammasaṅgaṇi*, the first book of the *Abhidhamma*; as in many other ancient Indian texts, the entire topic and aim of the book is introduced at the very beginning through a question: "Which *dhammas* are ethical (*kusala*)?"[10] The implicit premise of the *Abhidhamma* is that only wholesome or ethical cognitive states (*citta*), arising in conjunction with wholesome mental concomitants (*cetasika*), can act as the necessary condition for the occurrence of wisdom (*paññā*), which in turn can lead to the final soteriological goal, to *nibbāna*. Thus, the *Abhidhamma* analyses various mental states with the aim to determine which components, causes and conditions make cognition (*citta*) ethical or not. The *Dhammasaṅgaṇi* presents over one hundred types of cognition (*citta*), which are listed and analysed with reference to ethics (Dhs 9–133), and classified into the following four groups (Bodhi 1993, 23–75):

1. *Kusala-citta*,[11] usually translated as "wholesome/skilful cognition", which arises in conjunction with wholesome or ethical mental concomitants (*cetasika*), such as trust, mindfulness, compassion, and wisdom (Dhs 9–75).
2. *Akusala-citta*, translated as "unwholesome/unskilful cognition", which arises in conjunction with unwholesome or unethical mental concomitants (*cetasika*), founded on the following unwholesome roots (Dhs 75–87):
    a. Greed (*lobha*): grasping and sticking to the object without letting it go (As 249).
    b. Aversion (*dosa*): hostility, anger, hatred, and similar states, always accompanied by displeasure (*domanassa*) (As 257).
    c. Delusion (*moha*): mental blindness, unclarity, not seeing the nature of the object experienced. Delusion is also always present in mental states with greed or aversion and is seen as the root of all unwholesome states (Dhs 249).
3. *Vipāka-citta* "resultant cognition"; indeterminate in reference to *kamma* (As 265–93).

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[10] *Dhammasaṅgaṇi* 9: *katame dhammā kusalā*?

[11] The Pāli term *kusala* is in these contexts usually translated as "good, wholesome, skillful" (Cousins 1996, 136–64).

4. *Kiriya-citta* "functional cognition"; performing tasks that have no *kammic* causes or results (As 293–94).[12]

The first two groups—wholesome cognition (*kusala-citta*) and unwholesome cognition (*akusala-citta*)—are pivotal for Buddhist practice, which is grounded on the cultivation of ethical mental states. The underlying motivation for this Abhidhammic analysis of cognitive process at the fundamental, non-conventional level, is not the search for knowledge about human cognition *per se* but has instead a pragmatic goal: its structural model provides a cognitve map that, above all, articulates meditative experiences and insights which are proposed to lead to liberation from the unsatisfactoriness of existence (*dukkha*), to *nibbāna*. Such experiential understanding or insight, which Buddhism refers to as wisdom (*paññā*), is presumed to be developed through the cultivation of moral virtues (*sīla*) and meditation (*samādhi*). The primary aim of Buddhist practice, as expressed in early Buddhism, is not a moral or ethical improvement of individuals and society, but rather the liberation from the entanglements and entrapment of individuals within the society, and the ultimate freedom from *saṃsāra* (i.e., the cycle of continuous births and deaths). Nonetheless, the essential condition, a *sine qua non* for reaching such a deliverance is the cultivation of ethical mental states and moral virtues in relation to all living beings, which would be undoubtedly reflected in societal life.

In other words, only those aspects of human cognition are investigated and analysed that are important for the cultivation of ethical mental states which are in turn pivotal for liberation from suffering. This main premise of Buddhist teachings is expressed in many texts, such as the *Alagaddūpamasutta* (M I 140), in which the Buddha states that what he teaches is about suffering and the cessation of suffering.[13] This is also pointed out in the frequently quoted Buddhist parable of the poisoned arrow in the *Cūḷamālunkyasutta* (M I 533–36), explaining that the immediacy of human suffering needs to be addressed first, like a poisoned arrow has to be immediately removed from the wound, before proceeding to address any other questions. The Buddhist discourse proposes that such an essential knowledge, which is about liberation from suffering, can be achieved through the cultivation of ethics, meditation and wisdom, leading to a deep transformation of human consciousness. On the path to deliverance from suffering, the cultivation of virtue is considered an essential foundation. The earliest texts already inform about the moral guidelines or rules (*sīla*) for monks and nuns as well as for laity. Moral rules for lay people basically instruct them not to cause harm or suffering

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[12] Since the last two types, *vipāka-citta* and *kiriya-citta* (Karunadasa 2014, 92–93), have no ethical consequences, they are not discussed in this article.

[13] M I 140: *dukkhañ-c'eva paññāpemi dukkhassa ca nirodhaṃ*.

(to oneself and others) through speech and actions. It is thus recommended that one should abstain from killing sentient beings, stealing, lying, consuming alcohol and similar substances, and engaging in harmful pleasures (Harvey 1990, 264–81). The cultivation of moral virtues is also embedded in the noble eightfold path, which is one of the main representations of Buddhist doctrine (*Vibh* 235–43).

Table 2: The noble eightfold path (*ariyo aṭṭhaṅgiko maggo*)

appropriate understanding/view (*sammā diṭṭhi*)	wisdom (*paññā*)
appropriate thought (*sammā saṅkappa*)	
appropriate speech (*sammā vācā*)	moral virtues (*sīla*)
appropriate action (*sammā kammanta*)	
appropriate way of life (*sammā ājīva*)	
appropriate effort (*sammā vāyāma*)	meditation (*samādhi*)
appropriate mindfulness (*sammā sati*)	
appropriate concentration (*sammā samādhi*)	

The eightfold path comprises three interrelated clusters: moral virtues (*sīla*), meditation (*samādhi*), and wisdom (*paññā*). The Pāli term *sammā,* which is used as an attribute of each individual component of the eightfold path, has a wide semantic range; it could be translated as "appropriate, right, suitable" in the sense of being appropriate or right for the path leading to liberation from suffering, to *nibbāna*. The first two components of the path constitute wisdom (*paññā*), encompassing right view or deep understanding (*sammā diṭṭhi*) of the impermanent, impersonal nature of all phenomena, and right or appropriate thought (*sammā saṅkappa*), founded on such wisdom. The next three components constitute moral virtues (*sīla*), which are the very foundations of the Buddhist path and include appropriate speech (*sammā vācā*), action (*sammā kammanta*), and way of life (*sammā ājīva*); by implementing these, one does not cause suffering or harm. The last three components are related to meditation practice, encompassing appropriate effort (*sammā vāyāma*), mindfulness (*sammā sati*), and concentration (*sammā samādhi*) (Table 2).

Modern scholars often state that ethics as such has never existed in Buddhism as an independent discipline; consequently, Buddhist ethics had been quite neglected by Western scholarship until the 1990s. Even then, more recent attempts at theorizing Buddhist ethics have been conducted mostly from a Western perspective, trying to situate the Buddhist model(s) within the principles, notions and indeed categories of Western ethics. Though such studies make valuable contributions, their approach is significantly different from the Buddhist one. Though such studies make valuable contributions, their approach is significantly different from the Buddhist one. For example, the deployment the deployment of Western psychological concepts such as "emotion" and "rational intellect", for example (de Silva 2002; Keown 1992), have no equivalent concepts in Buddhist discourse.

Most scholars successfully link Buddhist ethics to moral virtues (*sīla*), which, in the case of Theravāda tradition, they investigate primarily by drawing from the *Suttapiṭaka* and *Vinayapiṭaka* (Edelglass 2013; Harvey 2000, 3–42; Keown 1992, 107–16). However, to my knowledge, there has been no attempt to systematically theorize and link Buddhist ethics to the *Abhidhamma* models. King (1964, 5), for example, states: "Abhidhammic ethical theory [...] seems to be a vocabulary and system of distinctions almost completely foreign and meaningless to the Western mind, in which the ethical element, in the Western sense, is lost sight of in an unfamiliar maze of Buddhist psychological terminology." Keown (1992, 60) comments on King (1964): "one looks there in vain for the articulation of a theoretical structure [in the *Abhidhamma*] … it bears no resemblance to what would be regarded in the West as a treatise on ethics or moral philosophy."

Furthermore, the ethical premises of the *Abhidhamma* are inextricably linked to the axiomatic notion of non-self (*anattā*). The Buddhist teaching of non-self (*anattā*) or the absence of an intrinsic individuality has been the subject of a range of interpretations and contentions from the earliest Buddhist schools onwards, and it was an important component of ancient Indian philosophical debates. Consequently, every book on Buddhism will inevitably have to touch upon the fundamental Buddhist premise that all mental and physical phenomena are impermanent (*anicca*), subject to non-satisfactoriness (*dukkha*), and that they are without an intrinsic self (*anattā*). Surprisingly, however, most modern works on Buddhist ethics do not explore how ethics as such can be intrinsically related to the notion of non-self, or they only tangentially touch upon this subject; thus, for example, Keown (1992, 19) justifies the notion of self or identity in the following manner: "Buddhism provides sufficient criteria for personal identity to allow the identification of subjects with the moral nexus". Such a statement is an example of how Buddhist ethics tends to be examined from a Western perspective through Western concepts, which cannot but assume the category of a subject or that of a personal identity.

In contrast to these standard approaches, it is proposed here that despite the fact that ethics is not articulated as a special or separate branch of knowledge, it is deeply embedded in Buddhist doctrine, especially in the model of cognitive processes as presented in the *Abhidhamma*. This model is founded on the principle of *kusala,* which is usually translated as "good, wholesome, skilful" (PED, *s.v.*), largely in reference to ethical mental states. Moral virtues (*sīla*) serve as the foundation of, and aid for the cultivation of ethical mental states, which in turn constitute a prerequisite for the emergence of wisdom (*paññā*), viewed as an essential mental factor (*cetasika*) for reaching liberation, *nibbāna.* Wisdom (*paññā*) is often presented as a deep insight into impermanence (*anicca)* of all phenomena (*dhamma*), their intrinsic unsatisfactoriness (*dukkha*), and emptiness (*anattā*) (Vism 436–38). It means that one can then observe phenomena at a deep level and no longer identifies with them, but rather understands that everything that appears is an ever-changing flow of physical and mental phenomena that are impermanent and without any self or innate essence (*anattā*).[14] Conversely, any identification with, or attachment to the phenomena and processes that constitute lived experience creates an illusory identity that leads to confusion, dissatisfaction and suffering (*dukkha*) (Vism 436–38). In other words, non-identification with phenomena is the basis of ethics: insight into emptiness is a perfect ethical stance because in such moments there is no identification with the phenomena contained in an experience, no identity is generated nor any separate individual or "self" and with it therefore no "other". In such moments, the three roots of all harmful mental states—greed (*lobha*), aversion (*dosa*) and delusion (*moha*) —are also absent.

Representation of Fear and Greed in the *Abhidhamma*

Having outlined the main features of the structural cognitive model of the *Abhidhamma* and its ethical foundation, fear (*bhaya*) and greed (*lobha*) will now be taken up in order to examine how they are understood and conceptualized within this paradigm. As frequently stated in the *Tipiṭaka*, fear *(bhaya)* and greed (*lobha*) are intrinsically linked to craving (*taṅhā*), which is viewed as the fundamental vehicle for non-satisfactoriness and suffering (*dukkha*) (e.g., Dhp 61). The key role of craving (*taṅhā*) is already established in the four noble truths, allegedly explained by the Buddha in his first speech, the *Dhammacakkappavattanasutta*, in which he summarizes the entire Buddhist doctrine. The four noble truths speak of 1) the dissatisfaction and suffering of human existence (*dukkha*), 2) its cause, which is craving (*taṅhā*), 3) the possibility of liberation from suffering (*nibbāna*), and 4) the noble eightfold path (*ariyo aṭṭhaṅgiko maggo*) that leads to freedom from suffering (Table 2) (S V 420–25). The Pāli term *taṅhā* literally means "thirst"; this is a yearning, craving or desire to retain pleasurable experiences and discard unpleasurable ones, which necessarily creates a conflict between actual experience and expectations, hopes, ideas or thoughts. Buddhism identifies three types of craving (*taṅhā*): 1) craving for sensual pleasures (*kāmataṇhā*), 2) craving for being and becoming (*bhavataṇhā*), which includes the desire for continuation of one's identity or "I", and yearning for eternal life after death, and 3) craving for non-being (*vibhavataṇhā*), ceasing to be, annihilation, removal and destruction of anything unpleasant, which may lead to violence or suicide.[15] Because craving (*taṅhā*) is considered the root cause of unsatisfactoriness and suffering (*dukkha*), it is associated not only with fear and greed, but also with all other harmful or unwholesome mental states, as it is, for example, comprehensively expounded in the formula of dependent origination (*paṭiccasamuppāda*), showing how craving (*taṅhā*) can lead to clinging (*upādāna*)[16] and, eventually, to unsatisfactoriness and suffering (*dukkha*).[17]

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[14] The notion of non-self has been explored from various angles by many scholars. It was also discussed in relation to Buddhist meditation (and mindfulness in particular) in a special issue of the *Asian Studies* journal, with contributions by Zalta (2016) and others.

Greed (lobha)

The term *lobha* is usually rendered as "greed" (PED, s.v.); it is frequently closely related to the terms *rāga* (referring to lust or passion), and *abhijjhā* (referring to covetousness) (Dhs79). Greed (*lobha*) is always regarded as unwholesome desire or clinging to objects of experience and, as iterated in many instances in the *Tipiṭaka* such as the *Sammādiṭṭhisutta*, it is always listed among the three unwholesome roots (*tīṇi akusalamūlāni*)—greed (*lobha*), aversion (*dosa*) and delusion (*moha*)—which are considered the very foundations for all unwholesome states (M I 47). Greed (*lobha*) is also presented as one of the defilements (*kilesa*), i.e., unwholesome mental components that incite unethical states and obstruct the cultivation of clarity, wisdom and other wholesome qualities.[18] Sometimes it is included among the fetters (*saṃyojana*), i.e., the factors that bind living beings to *saṃsāra*, the cycle of births and deaths that generates suffering (*dukkha*).[19] The ultimate aim of the Buddhist path is freedom from defilements and fetters; this is why *arahants* as well as the Buddha are described in many instances in the *Tipiṭaka* (e.g., S I 220) as free from greed (*lobha*), aversion (*dosa*), and delusion (*moha*). The absence of greed (*alobha*) is a wholesome mental concomitant (*cetasika*) (32, Table 1), which is invariably present in all ethical mental states (*citta*) and considered a condition for understanding impermanence—as opposed to greed which seeks for prosperity to be permanent (Karunadasa 2014, 139). The commentary *Atthasālinī,* as well as the *Visuddhimagga* describe greed (*lobha*):[20]

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[15] M I 48–49: *Yā' yaṃ taṇhā ponobhavikā nandirāgasahagatā tatratatrābhinandinī, seyyathīdaṃ: kāmataṇhā bhavataṇhā vibhavataṇhā, ayaṃ vuccat' āvuso dukkhasamudayo.*

[16] Four kinds of clinging are listed in SN II 3: to sensual pleasures (*kāmupādāna*); to views (*diṭṭhupādāna*); to rules and rituals (*sīlabbatupādāna*); and to belief in self (*attavādupādāna*).

[17] For discourses on causation and dependent origination, see the *Nidānavagga* (SN II 1–133*;* D II 55–71).

[18] Defilements (*kilesa*) are variously presented in the Pāli texts, most frequently as a group of ten: 1) greed (*lobha*), 2) aversion (*dosa*), 3) delusion (*moha*), 4) conceit (*māna*), 5) views (*diṭṭhi*), 6) doubt (*vicikicchā*), 7) sloth (*thīna*), 8) restlessness (*uddhacca*), 9) shamelessness (*ahirika*), and 10) lack of fear of doing wrong (*anottappa*) (Dhs 257; Vism 683).

[19] For example, the *Potaliyasutta* (M I 360–361) includes greed among the following eight fetters: 1) destroying life (*pāṇātipāta*); 2) stealing (*adinnādāna*); 3) false speech (*musāvāda*); 4) malicious speech (*pisunā*); 5) covetousness and greed (*giddhilobha*); 6) blame and scolding (*nindārosa*); 7) anger and malice (*kodhūpāyāsa*); and 8) conceit (*atimāna*).

> Greed has the characteristic of grasping the object like birdlime. Its function is clinging, like meat thrown into a hot pan. It manifests itself as not letting go, like the dye of lampblack. Its cause is perceiving pleasure in things that bring bondage.[21]

In the *Abhidhamma,* greed (*lobha*) is considered a mental concomitant (*cetasika*) which is always unwholesome (18, Table 1), and can occur only in unwholesome mental states (*citta*). In this analysis, greed (*lobha*) is invariably accompanied by another four unwholesome concomitants, i.e., delusion (*moha*), moral recklessness (*ahirika*), disregard for consequences (*anottappa*), and restlessness (*uddhacca*) (14–17, Table 1), as well as two specific concomitants, namely, views (*diṭṭhi*) and comparison or pride (*māna*) (18–19, Table 1). Greed is thus always accompanied by delusion (*moha*), which the commentary *Atthasālinī* explains as ignorance, mental blindness, absence of judgment and lack of wisdom, and considers it the source of everything unethical (*akusala*).[22] Moreover, greed always occurs along with restlessness (*uddhacca*),[23] described in the *Atthasālinī* as agitation, and compared to rough water or a flag blowing in the wind.[24] Mental states comprising greed (*lobha*) also include moral recklessness (*ahirika*), i.e., absence of moral shame, resulting in moral misconduct, and disregard for consequences or absence of moral apprehension (*anottappa*) (15–16, Table 1); it means that when greed is present, there are no shame or moral "brakes" (in relation to oneself and others respectively) and consequently, harmful speech and actions can ensue (As 248, Vism 468).

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[20] All translations from Pāli into English are by the author of this article.

[21] As 249; Vism 468: *Tesu lobho ārammaṇagahaṇalakkhaṇo, makkaṭālepo viya; abhisangaraso, tattakapāle khittaṃ maṃsapesi viya; apariccāgapaccupaṭṭhāno, telañjanarāgo viya; saṃyojanīyadhammesu assādadassanapadaṭṭhāno.*

[22] As 249: *Moho cittassa andhabhāvalakkhaṇo aññāṇalakkhaṇo vā, asampaṭivedharaso ārammaṇasabhāvacchādanaraso vā, asammāpaṭipattipaccupaṭṭhāno andhakārapaccupaṭṭhāno vā, ayonisomanasikārapadaṭṭhāno. Sabbākusalānaṃ mūlanti daṭṭhabbo.*

[23] Restlessness (*uddhacca*) is presented is the *Dhammasaṅgaṇi* and *Vibhaṅga* as "agitation, disturbance, turmoil of the mind" (Dhs 205; Vibh 255: *avūpasamo cetaso vikkhepo bhantattaṃ cittassa*).

[24] As 251: *Uddhatabhāvo uddhaccaṃ. Taṃ avūpasamalakkhaṇaṃ, vātābhighātacalajalaṃ viya anavaṭṭhānarasaṃ, vātābhighātacaladhajapaṭākā viya.*

Another two mental commitants that accompany greed (*lobha*) are attachment to views (*diṭṭhi*) (18, Table 1), and comparison or pride (*māna*) (18, Table 1). Many canonical and commentarial texts discuss views; the term refers to dogmas, opinions, convictions or ideas, grounded in craving (*taṅhā*), which one grasps or holds on to, identifies with, and erroneously regards as permanent (As 252). Therefore, in several texts, such as the *Paramaṭṭhakasutta* (796–803) of the *Suttanipāta*, it is said that one should abandon past views and not take up any new views, but instead live beyond them, without attaching to, or relying on any view (Sn 156–58). Conversely, as comprehensively expounded in the *Sammādiṭṭhisutta*, Buddhism presents right or appropriate view (*sammā diṭṭhi*) as the understanding of what is wholesome or ethical and what is not, and links it to an insight into the four noble truths, dependent origination (*paṭiccasamuppāda*), and taints (*āsava*)[25] (M I 46–55). Comparison or pride (*māna*) (19, Table 1) is yet another concomitant that is invariably linked to greed (*lobha*). The *Visuddhimagga* and *Atthasālinī* describe pride:

> its characteristic is haughtiness, its function is arrogance, its manifestation is desire for prominence, its cause is greed, dissociated from views, and it should be considered madness.[26]

As explained in the *Sāratthappakāsinī*, pride (*māna*), in conjunction with views (*diṭṭhi*) and craving (*taṇhā*), creates the (delusionary) idea of self, which comprises the following three aspects: "I am" (*aham asmi*) which is linked with views (*diṭṭhi*), "mine" (*mama*) which is linked with craving (*taṇhā*), and "myself" (*me attā*) which is linked with pride (*māna*).[27] Pride (*māna*) is explained in the *Dhammasaṅgani* as three kinds of thoughts: "I am a superior person", "I am as good a person", and "I am an inferior person" (Dhs 197–98).[28] The *Abhidhamma* thus places comparison with others among unethical mental states, related to greed and other unwholesome components, which can eventuate in unethical action.

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[25] The term "taint" (*āsava*) refers to predispositions such as sense desire (*kāma*), becoming (*bhava*), ignorance (*avijjā*), and views (*diṭṭhi*), which obstruct liberation and motivate further existence. According to the *Atthasālinī*, the term *āsava* refers to deeply rooted corruptions, defilements, or "intoxicants", which flow through the five senses and the mind (As 48).

[26] Vism 469, As 256: *Ayaṃ viseso: so uṇṇatilakkhaṇo, sampaggaharaso, ketukamyatāpaccupaṭṭhāno, diṭṭhivippayuttalobhapadaṭṭhāno, ummādo viya daṭṭhabbo.*

[27] Spk II 215: *ahaṅkāramamaṅkāramānānusayāti ahaṃkāradiṭṭhi ca mamaṃkārataṇhā ca mānānusayā ca.*

[28] Dhs 197–198: *Seyyo 'hamasmīti māno—sadiso'hamasmīti māno—hīno 'hamasmīti māno.*

To recapitulate, greed (*lobha*) is presented within the cognitive structure in the *Abhidhamma* as an unethical mental concomitant (*cetasika*), which is invariably linked with a number of other unethical concomitants, such as delusion (*moha*), moral recklessness (*ahirika*), disregard for consequences (*anottappa*), restlessness (*uddhacca*), views (*diṭṭhi*), and comparison or pride (*māna*); these can then serve as indicators for any unethical mental state, and signal the potential for harmful, immoral speech and action.

Fear (bhaya)

Much like greed (*lobha*), fear (*bhaya*) is also linked to craving (*taṅhā*), which is considered the source of all discontent and suffering (*dukkha*). As stated, for example, in the *Dhammapada* (verse 216):

> From craving is born grief, from craving is born fear.
>
> For one who is free from craving, there is no grief; where from is then fear?[29]

Fear (*bhaya*) is related to the craving to avoid unpleasant experiences, such as the loss of agreeable circumstances, suffering and pain, and especially, as illustrated by *Bhayasutta*, the fear of birth (*jātibhaya*), aging (*jarābhaya*), disease (*vyādhibhaya*), and death (*maraṇabhaya*) (A II 12). It is said in the *Suttanipāta* (576) that mortals are in constant fear of death (Sn 113),[30] which the *Visuddhimagga* compares to "a murderer with poised sword", appearing already at birth (Vism 231).[31]

The *Vibhaṅga* describes various types of fear, presented in three fourfold classifications, which refer to the most common natural and societal threats and dangers: 1) fear of kings (*rājabhaya*), thieves (*corabhaya*), fire (*aggibhaya*), and water (rivers and oceans) (*udakabhaya*); 2) fear of waves (*ūmibhaya*), crocodiles (*kumbhilabhaya*), whirlpools (*āvaṭṭabhaya*), and savage fish (*susukābhaya*); and 3) fear of self-blame (*attānuvādabhaya*), blame by others (*parānuvādabhaya*), punishment (*daṇḍabhaya*), and misfortune or unhappy destiny (*duggatibhaya*) (Vibh 376; Vibh-a 502). In addition, the fivefold classification in the *Vibhaṅga* lists: fear related to livelihood (*ājīvikabhaya*), fear of blame (*asilokabhaya*), timidity or embarrassment in assembly (*parisasārajjabhaya*), fear of death (*maraṇabhaya*), and fear of misfortune or unhappy destiny (*duggatibhaya*) (Vibh 379; Vibh-a 505–06). The texts frequently refer to the fear experienced by renunciates when they dwell alone in the forest (Vism 115) or contemplate corpses (Vism 187), and advise on how fear and dread can be prevented and conquered (Vism 218).

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[29] Dhp 61: *taṇhāya jāyatī soko taṇhāya jāyatī bhayaṃ, taṇhāya vippamuttassa n' atthi soko kuto bhayaṃ*.

[30] Sn 113*: niccaṃ maraṇato bhayaṃ*.

[31] Vism 231: *Evaṃ ukkhittāsiko vadhako viya sahajātiyā āgataṃ pan'etaṃ maraṇaṃ gīvāya asiṃ cārayamāno*.

Fear (*bhaya*) is sometimes listed along with greed (*lobha*), aversion (*dosa*) and delusion (*moha*) as the main root of all unwholesomeness (A I 72) and associated with foolishness or lack of wisdom (A I 101). In many *suttas*, such as the *Bhayabheravasutta* (M I 1720), fear (*bhaya*) and dread (*bherava*) are called unwholesome (*akusala*) states (M I 17) which were, as narrated in the *sutta*, overcome by the Buddha. Absence of fear is thus seen as one of the virtues and spiritual achievements (Vism 64); advanced practitioners are called fearless (*abhaya*), and *nibbāna* is compared to a place without fear (*abhayadesa*) (Vism 664).

Fear (*bhaya*), which is linked to craving (*taṅhā*), could be presented within the framework of the Abhidhammic analysis as an unwholesome state, comprised of several unethical mental concomittants (*cetasika*). These always include the four universal unwholesome mental concomitants (*cetasika*), i.e., delusion (*moha*), moral recklessness (*ahirika*), disregard for consequences (*anottappa*), and restlessness (*uddhacca*) (14–17, Table 1), which were discussed earlier since they also accompany greed (*lobha*). Because fear is associated with the craving or desire to prevent unpleasant experiences, it can arise along with the mental concomitants (*cetasika*) which are listed in the unethical aversion group (21–24, Table 1). Aversion (*dosa*), one of the three unwholesome roots (i.e., greed, aversion, delusion), refers to dislike, obstruction, irritation, anger, and similar states (Dhs 84, 190; As 257). It can lead to morally harmful speech and actions, including violence, because it is always associated with delusion (*moha*), moral recklessness (*ahirika*), and disregard for consequences (*anottappa*). In addition, aversion can be joined by another three specific mental concomitants: 1) envy (*issā*) toward anyone who appears to be in better circumstances (Dhs 198–99; As 257);[32] 2) selfisheness or lack of generosity (*macchariya*) which is shown as unwillingness to share anything (from materials things to good reputation and knowledge) with others (Dhs 199);[33] and 3) worrying or regret (*kukkucca*) which is often associated with sadness, remorse, and grief (Dhs 205; As 258).[34] Fear and greed can also give rise to attachment to rites and rituals (*sīlabbataparāmāsa*) in the hope that these will bring security and the fulfillment of desires (Ps I 288).

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[32] Envy (*issā*) is described as "jealousy at the gifts, honour, hospitality, praise, respect, and reverence given to others" (Dhs 198–199: *Yā paralobhasakkāragarukāramānanavandanapūjanāsu issā issāyanā issāyitattaṃ usuyyā usuyyanā usuyitattaṃ--idaṃ vuccati issāsaññojanaṃ.*).

[33] Five types of meanness or lack of generosity (*macchariya*) are listed in the the *Dhammasaṅgaṇi*: "meanness in relation to the dwelling place, family, gifts, social reputation, and doctrine" (Dhs 199: *Pañca macchariyāni--āvāsamacchariyaṃ kulamacchariyaṃ lābhamacchariyaṃ vaṇṇamacchariyaṃ dhammamacchariyaṃ.*).

[34] Worry (*kukkucca*) is described as perplexity about "what is appropriate in the inappropriate, what is inappropriate in the appropriate, immoral in the moral, moral in the immoral—this is worry, remorse, remorsefulness, regretfulness of the mind" (Dhs 205; Vibh 255: *akappiye kappiyasaññitā, kappiye akappiyasaññitā, avajje vajjasaññitā, vajje avajjasaññitā. yaṃ evarūpaṃ kukkuccaṃ kukkuccāyanā kukkuccāyitattaṃ cetaso vippaṭisāro manovilekho.*).

Unlike greed (*lobha*), which the *Abhidhamma* invariably considers as one of the unwholesome mental concomitants (*cetasika*), fear (*bhaya*) is not classified as a mental concomitant. As already noted by Heim (2014, 101–2), this seems puzzling since fear is a universal impulse, which seems as prevalent as greed, and yet the Abhidhammic analysis does not consider it a fundamental unit (*dhamma*) of sentient experience. The explanation for this proposed here is that *bhaya* is a more complex notion, appearing in different contexts, and therefore it cannot be reduced to a fundamental unit of experience. Though largely associated with unethical mental states which are related to craving (*taṅhā*), the word *bhaya* also occurs in other contexts. In many instances the term *bhaya* refers to understanding the troublesome, dangerous, and oppressive nature of life and, more generally, *saṃsāra*, and the danger of defilements that may arise due to lack of moral restraint and wisdom.[35] In this context, instead of rendering the term *bhaya* as "fear, fright" (PED, *s.v.*), which implies a fearful mental state, it would be more suitable to translate the term as "danger". For example, the *Visuddhimagga* explains that a monk (*bhikkhu*) is the one who "sees danger (*bhaya*) in the round of rebirths (*saṃsāra*)" (Vism 3), which does not imply that the monk is "afraid." Similarly, the *Upanīyasutta* (S I 3) talks about "seeing danger in death" (*bhayaṃ maraṇe pekkhamāno*), and the *Sīhasutta* (S III 85–86) uses the term in the sense of oppression and danger due to impermanence and instability of the world.[36]

In the *Sāmaññaphalasutta*, in which the fruits of homeless life are discussed, the ascetic who has renounced the wordly life is described to cultivate, among other things, virtue, and sees danger in the slightest fault (*aṇumattesu vajjesu bhayadassāvī*) (D I 63), referring to danger of breaking their virtuous behavior and thus allowing unwholesome states to arise. Similarly, the term *bhaya* occurs in relation to perception of danger (*bhayasaññā*) in regard to moral offences (A II 241) or danger of breaking the five precepts (A III 205), and dreading self-blame (*attānuvādādibhaya*) that could arise due to the lack of virtue (Vism 10). In these instances, *bhaya* is not considered to be linked to craving (*taṅhā*) but is rather regarded as an insight into the impermanent nature and instability of phenomena that comprise experiences, along with an understanding that unethical mental states are dangerous, leading away from the path to the liberation and freedom from the entanglements of *saṃsāra*.

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[35] This is also discussed by Giustarini (2012), who shows that apart from being seen as an obstruction, fear (*bhaya*) can also provide motivation and support in the Buddhist path; his argument is well supported through an analysis of two compounds, *bhayūpurata* and *abhayūpurata*, usually rendered as "restrained by fear" and "unrestrained by fear" respectively.

[36] Other examples include the *Sammasasutta* which uses the term in reference to the world as dangerous (*bhayato*), along with being impermanent (*aniccato*), unsatisfactory (*dukkhato*), without self (*anattato*) and subject to disease (*rogato*) (S II 110). The five aggregates (*khandha*) are also regarded as dangerous (*bhayaṭṭha*), along with being impermanent, unsatisfactory and without self (Vism 611).

The *Atthasālinī* links *bhaya* with moral control or scrupulousness (*ottappa*) (31, Table 1), which is listed among ethically wholesome, universal concomitants, and described as shame of doing wrong, and shrinking from evil (As 124–125). When different types of insight knowledges are discussed, the term *bhaya* is used in the sense of danger, weariness, insecurity or peril: for example, in the *Atthasālinī* the term *bhayadassana* refers to discernment of peril (As 352), and describes that seeing birth, aging and death as danger (*bhayato disvā*) gives rise to the desire to be liberated (*muccitukāma*) from the cycle of rebirths (As 407). The word *bhaya* often occurs along with apprehension (*santāsa*) and incitement or urge towards liberation (*saṃvega*), which is experienced when the unsatisfactory aspects of existence and the four noble truths are revealed and understood (S III 85; A II 33; Vibh-a 189).

Thus, the word *bhaya* can refer to seeing danger in all phenomena one experiences due to their impermanence, instability, and lack of intrinsic self. With such an insight, which is based on wisdom (*paññā*) and is therefore ethical, one can develop a different perspective towards fear: instead of identifying with it and thus triggering unethical states, one observes it with a deep insight into its potential danger and therefore does not grasp it. This understanding occurs at certain levels of insight meditation (*vipassanā*) and is comprehensively described in Buddhist texts such as the *Visuddhimagga*, in the section "Purification by knowledge and vision of the way" (*paṭipadā-ñāṇadassana-visuddhi*) (Vism 639–71).[37] The section depicts nine stages of insight knowledges (*vipassanāñāṇa*), experienced by meditation practitioners, which include the knowledges of contemplation of danger (*bhayatupaṭṭhānañāṇa*) and oppression (*ādīnavānupassanāñāṇa*); at that stage, the meditator understands at a deep level that phenomena experienced are liable to destruction (*khayato*) and falling away (*vayato*), that they are dangerous (*bhayato*), and intrinsically empty (*suññato*) (Vism 644). Importantly, as explained in the *Visuddhimagga*, one who has the knowledge of danger is not afraid[38] but instead knows that all phenomena—past, present and future—continuosly dissolve, are impermanent (*anicca*), unsatisfactory (*dukkha*), devoid of self (*anattā*), and intrinsically empty (*suñña*) (Vism 646–47). Thus, seeing danger in the impermanent phenomena comprising sentient experiences is fundamentally different from being afraid: the former is a wholesome mental state, inciting wisdom and detachment, the latter is unwholesome, generating unethical states and obstructions in the Buddhist path.

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[37] The stages of insight knowledges are also thoroughly discussed in Mahāsi (2016, 303–466).

[38] Vism 646: *Bhayatupaṭṭhānañāṇam pana na bhāyati.*

This insight into danger leads to dispassion, equanimity, and final liberation, *nibbāna*, which eventually diminishes or destroys fear, enmity, and other unethical states (Vism 649–63). Wisdom (*paññā*) (52, Table 1) is thus positioned as the ethical mental concomitant (*cetasika*) that can lead to the uprooting of fear through an insight into the intrinsic emptiness (*suññatā*) and impermanence (*anicca*) of all phenomena and non-identification with them. That is why the fully awakened ones (*arahant*) and Buddhas[39] are often described with the epithet *abhaya*, "without fear, fearless"; this is not the fearlessness of a brave hero, but rather wisdom and detachment of a highly ethical person who cannot be unethical under any circumstances, neither in thought nor in action.

To summarise, in the cognitive model of the *Abhidhamma*, greed and fear that are related to craving exclude the arising of ethical mental states and actions. Instead, one identifies with experienced phenomena and views them from a standpoint of "I" or "self" as constant, unchanging events. Since living beings are born with fear and greed, Buddhism recommends many approaches on how to limit or prevent their arising and thus avert unethical states. For this purpose, the cultivation of moral virtues (*sīla*), generosity (*dāna*), and meditation (*bhāvanā*) are recommended.[40] With meditation, including mindfulness (*sati*) and concentration (*samādhi*), the meditator can cultivate ethical mental states that condition the arising of wisdom (*paññā*), which engenders non-identification with experiences and consequently, impedes and gradually reduces unethical states. As recommended by the *Tevijjasutta* (D I 251), the following four meditation practices are particularly useful in counterbalancing fear, greed and other unethical states: 1) friendliness or loving kindness (*mettā*) that wishes for all to be well and thus diminishes anger and fear (Vibh 86); 2) compassion (*karuṇā*) towards all who suffer, the altruistic state that counteracts selfishness (Vibh 86–87); 3) joy over the happiness and success of others (*muditā*) which counteracts jealousy and envy (Vism 318); and 4) equanimity (*upekkhā*) which refers to non-attachment, absence of greed or aversion, and evenness or equity in relation to wordly matters and concerns.[41]

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[39] For example, in the *Mahāsihanāsasutta*, the Buddha claims to live in peace, fearlessness, in confidence (M I 72: *khemappatto abhayappatto vesārajjappatto viharāmi*).

[40] The cultivation of moral virtues *(sīla*), generosity (*dāna*), and meditation (*bhāvanā*) are the three foundations of ethical development and the prospective liberation from suffering (*dukkha*); this is stated in many texts, such as the *Dānavagga* section of the *Aṅguttaranikāya* (A IV 241: *Tīṇ' imāni bhikkhave puññakiriyavatthūni. Katamāni tīṇi? Dānamayaṃ puññakiriyavatthuṃ, sīlamayaṃ puññakiriyavatthuṃ, bhāvanāmayaṃ puññakiriyavatthuṃ.*).

[41] For a detailed description of these four meditation practices, called "the divine abodings" (*brahmavihāra*), see *Visuddhimagga*, 295–325.

Conclusion

This article has briefly delineated the complex theoretical model of cognition in the Theravāda *Abhidhamma*, which appears to be founded on the ethical principle of *kusala.* In discussing two important, commonly experienced components of mental states, those of fear (*bhaya*) and greed (*lobha*), both related to craving (*taṅhā*), it demonstrated how within this cognitive model, they are considered to be unethical. It further explored another connotation of the term *bhaya* which refers to the dangerous or oppressive nature of all phenomena due to their impermanence and lack of an intrinsic self. In this sense, the word *bhaya*, by understanding phenomena as dangerous, can serve as an incitement for cultivating the path to liberation from suffering. This approach indicates that it is possible to see danger (in relation to a particular object or more broadly) without being fearful or afraid but instead perceive it with knowledge and wisdom, which is to say in an ethical manner.

From the Buddhist perspective, the removal of unethical states such as fear, greed, and ignorance constitutes the necessary precondition for a person to act ethically (*kusala*). Therefore, Buddhist praxis is to a large degree focused on recognizing and deeply understanding and identifying the roots of, and conditions for the arising of unethical mental states with the intention of limiting and stopping them temporarily or permanently. A major role in this process is played by wisdom (*paññā*), which is equated with insight into the intrinsic emptiness (*suññatā*) of all phenomena and the illusonary nature of identity or "self". In this model, the absence of wisdom allows for the erroneous perception of an individual as a separate entity and thus for the dichotomy of "I" and "other". Individuality or in fact any separate identity is thus viewed as deceptive, unethical, and dangerous since it can cause harmful speech and actions. Thoughts, ideas, words, and actions can be ethical only in the absence of fear and greed (and other unethical mental states), which means that at such moments one does not cling to experiences and consequently create any perception of individuality. According to this Buddhist model, thoughts and actions founded on kindness and compassion (i.e., absence of aversion or fear), generosity (i.e., absence of greed), and wisdom (i.e., absence of delusions), mean that the "I" and "other" dichotomy is not created. Thus, the cognitive model of the *Abhidhamma* indicates that humans have the potential for transformation and can develop radically different perspectives on the fundamental premises related to lived experience.

Returning to the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic, which instigated this piece of research in the first place, I wish to conclude with a few reflections on the current attitudes to the pandemic from the point of view of the *Abhidhamma*.

As mentioned earlier, fear and greed seem to be the prime movers for societal responses to the pandemic, which fluctuate between various levels of lock-down, aiming to control the virus temporarily, and then a projected return to "normal" public life, hoping to in due course reinstate economic growth, i.e., the previous model. It is evident that the anxiety about economic loss, disease, personal suffering and death is at the forefront, creating a parallel pandemic of uncertainty and fear. This in turn is greatly boosted by mass media, and seems significantly more contagious than the virus itself, evoking a range of reactions such as depression, anger, and exacerbating existing divisions, violence, and various conspiracy theories, to name a few. The virus has become the "other", an invisible enemy we are at war with. In contrast, from the Buddhist perspective, as specifically expressed in the cognitive model of the *Abhidhamma*, all mental states rooted in fear, greed, and ignorance, are considered unethical and viewed as grounds for harmful actions. However, it is possible, as the model shows, not to fall pray to fear, but instead understand its nature and not act upon it. Such a response is founded on wisdom, cognizant of the fact that there is no autonomous self (perceived as an individual, group, or collective human identity) which is separated from other sentient beings and the natural world (including viruses).[42] Thus, the Buddhist analysis of cognition points out that through the absence of fear, greed and ignorance, an ethical stance is indeed possible, not only to the COVID-19 pandemic but also to the far greater challenges of the environmental crisis.

By way of recapitulation, in the light of the currently prevailing responses to the COVID-19 pandemic which are largely motivated by fear and/or greed and have conceivably grave consequences, this article has explored, through the analysis of ethics within the framework of the Abhidhammic cognitive modes, whether greed and fear may be approached in an ethical manner, suggesting in turn that cognitive models of ancient India may serve as incitement in the search for new approaches to ethical issues in today's world.

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The paper has not been previously published and is not being considered for publication elsewhere.

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[42] The Buddhist idea of the interrelatedness of all phenomena, presented in some Buddhist schools of thought as non-separation or oneness of humans and all the natural world, has been the main starting point in recent scholarly research on how Buddhist teachings may contribute to the current environmental crisis (e.g., Loy 2015, 123–33); for a panoramic overview of literature on Buddhist environmental ethics, see Kaza (2018, 432–52).

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