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Although several thinkers before him had observed the existence of unconscious processes in the workings of the mind, the 'scientific' concept of the *Unconscious* must be attributed to the undoubted genius of Sigmund Freud. According to him mental life is the function of an apparatus made up of several portions, which he compared to a telescope or microscope. To the oldest of these he gave the name of *id*, which he believed contains everything that is inherited, above all, the biological instincts which according to him originate in the somatic organization. For the purpose of this paper, it is necessary to lay stress on Freud's concept of the *id* as a reservoir of the psychical forces which maintain the dynamism of all the conscious and the unconscious factors of the human psyche. Next he posited a later-developed region of mental life, giving it the name of *ego*. This according to Freud is a part of the *id* which has undergone a special development under the influence of the external world. This is the agency which is in control of voluntary activity arising in consequence of the relation between sensory perception and muscular action. Such, practically in Freud's own phraseology, is a description of the most important aspect of the human psyche. What is important to note is that the *id*, as Freud himself points out, is intimately connected to the Unconscious, with the implication that the *ego* is closely associated with the (waking) consciousness.

Several writers on Buddhist psychology who have discussed the Theravada concept of *bhavaṅga* have taken it as referring to some sort of subconsciousness or subliminal consciousness or unconsciousness. Mrs Rhys Davids, who was the first to point it out in her very first work on Buddhism, published soon after 1911, made this observation: "The Pali word *bhavaṅga* expresses both (a) the objective aspect of vital functioning and (b) the subjective
aspect of our sub-consciousness, or mental state, when we are not attending to anything . . .” In her last work on the subject she had this to say of bhavanga: “It was wanted for vital continuance when the act of waking advertence, which we now call attention, is absent. The vital continuum with its potentiality of attention-in-perception was ever proceeding (becoming) . . .” In the same work she understood by bhavanga “the stream of unconscious life” (p. 407), which she also called “the flow of organic life” (p. 398). Mrs Rhys Davids did not clearly identify bhavanga with the Unconscious of Freud, but generally took it as some sort of subconsciousness as was posited by philosophical writers of the period. In his work Buddhist Psychology of Perception Saratchandra translated the term bhavanga as the unconscious (p. 75), but nowhere discussed the relevant theory of Freud in relation to it, although he attempted a comparison of Freud’s theory of dreams with that of later Buddhist works. My intention in this paper is to attempt a little more detailed comparison of the Buddhist notion of bhavanga with the Freudian concept of the Unconscious.

In a previous paper I have made an attempt to define the provenance and the original significance of the term bhavanga. The conclusion I arrived at was that the concept was not a later product of Abhidhamma thought as believed by the above-mentioned writers, but was already found in the early Canonical period, occurring as it does in the Anguttara Nikāya in a passage which refers to rūpaṅga, vedāṅga, saññāṅga, bhavāṅga (II. 79). In agreement with Keith’s interpretation of this passage I pointed out that bhavanga here obviously stood for the two last factors, namely samkhāra and viññāna, in the well-known list of five skandhas. I cited evidence from the Pali canon to justify such an interpretation. Students of Buddhism cannot miss the fact as found in the formula of Dependent Origination (paticcasamuppāda) that saṁkhāra and viññāna are the conditions par excellence for samsaric becoming (bhava). They are indeed, with antecedent avijjā, the conditions for the arising of individuality (nāma-rūpa). It is therefore no cause for surprise if saṁkhāra and viññāna came to be regarded as the factors of existence (bhava-āṅga). This interpretation is supported indirectly by the usage of Sarvastivada Abhidharma which applied the term bhavangāni to all the twelve factors of becoming in the pratitya-samutpāda. As La Vallee Poussin pointed out, in the Sarvastivada tradition viññāna came to be con-
sidered the bhavaṅga par excellence, but a closer study of the links (nidānas) of the paticcasaṃuppāda series as preserved in the Pali Canon indicates that saṅkhāra which are the immediate conditions for viññāna are even more important as a factor in the development of individuality. In fact in the Theravada Canon saṅkhāra are regarded as the most characteristic condition for becoming (bhava). Hence it is that the samsaric being (satto) is characterized in the Samyutta Nikāya (I. 135) as purely a complex of saṅkhāra (suddha-saṅkhāra-puṇja). Thus it would appear that the Pali Canonical tradition which considers saṅkhāra and viññāna as equally important factors in samsaric becoming, that is to say as the two most important constituents of bhavaṅga, is more legitimate than the later developed doctrine of Sarvastivada which takes only vijnāna as the bhavaṅga par excellence. A study of the meaning of saṅkhāra in the Pali Canon clearly supports such an interpretation.

It is necessary at this stage to inquire into the meaning of the terms saṅkhāra and viññāna as they occur at the beginning of the paticcasaṃuppāda series. A careful study of the relevant contexts will indicate beyond doubt that saṅkhāra signify the predispositions or tendencies resulting from previous voluntary action (cetanā/kamma). This may be understood as the momentum resulting from previous kamma. It finds a parallel usage in the physical sphere when the term (abhi)saṅkhāra is used to describe the continuing momentum of a wheel set rolling (Anguttara Nikāya, I. 112). Hence we may understand saṅkhāra in this context as psychical dispositions or tendencies, or generally as psychical forces. Similarly, the term viññāna in the same context, although generally translated as consciousness, has a special meaning when it appears as the precondition of nāma-rūpa. Now, students of Buddhism are aware that by nāma Canonical doctrine refers to vedanā, saṅñā, saṅkhāra and viññāna which are the constituents of empiric individuality. In this latter occurrence there is no doubt that viññāna means consciousness. Thus the term viññāna as a prior link in the paticcasaṃuppāda series must be understood as viññāna in a potential form. In Western terminology this may be described as noetic potential. Such a significance of the term may be understood in the light of the concept of viññāna-sota which is said to continue from the past into the present life, and if samsara is not ended, into the future also (see Dīgha Nikāya, III. 105). It is obvious that at the non-empirical state viññāna is unconscious and becomes con-
scious only when confronted by the objective world in the perceptual process, etc. As we showed at the beginning of this paper, Freud’s concept of the human psyche consisting of id-forces and the Unconscious may therefore be considered to a large extent parallel to the Buddhist notion of bhavaṅga which too, according to our interpretation, is constituted by the saṅkhāras or psychical forces combined with viññāna which in the empirical state appears as consciousness which Freud attributed to the ego or the empirical agent.

NOTES

2. Buddhism, Williams and Norgate (Home University Library).
6. Douze Causes, 40.