

Upaniṣadic Echoes in the *Alagaddūpama Sutta*

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Abstract

Scholars have already identified verbal echoes of the Upaniṣads in the *Alagaddūpama Sutta* ('Discourse on the Simile of the Water-snake', M 22 PTS i.130–42). In this article I argue that the *Alagaddūpama Sutta* also contains muffled verbal echoes of the famous story of Indra's search for the self in *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* 8.7–12. By making this echo audible, I add to the evidence that the *Alagaddūpama Sutta* as a whole can be understood in terms of the Buddha's rejection of an Upaniṣadic soteriology.

Introduction: Ariṭṭha's Wrong View and the Upaniṣads

The narrative setting (*nidāna*) of the *Alagaddūpama Sutta* ('Discourse on the Simile of the Water-Snake') concerns a monk called Ariṭṭha, formerly a vulture-catcher, who has conceived the following bad wrong view: 'I understand the way to awakening taught by the Blessed One in such a way that those things that the Blessed One says are obstacles are not sufficient to impede one who pursues them.'¹ The discourse does not tell us what is meant by 'those things (*dhammā*) that the Blessed One says are obstacles', but the monks who hear about Ariṭṭha's wrong view take it that he is referring to pursuing sensual pleasures (*kāma*). Ariṭṭha is reported to the Buddha, who calls him a foolish person (*mogha purisa*), and explains that he teaches the very opposite view, reminding him that 'I have said that sensual pleasures bring little gratification, much dissatisfaction, much distress; and that the danger in them is great.'² The Buddha goes on to remind Ariṭṭha of some vivid metaphors for the unsatisfying and dangerous nature of sensual pleasures.³

Ariṭṭha's wrong view became a case for monastic discipline (Fuller, 2005, pp.28–9). The commentary reconstructs the logic of Ariṭṭha's view. He must have thought to himself that:

'There are householders enjoying the five sensual pleasures who are stream entrants, once-returners and non-returners. Monks also see pleasing physical forms cognisable by the eye etc., they touch tangible objects cognisable by the body, they enjoy soft cloaks and rugs, and this is entirely appropriate. Why are the physical forms, sounds, smells, tastes and bodies even of women not appropriate? These too are appropriate.'⁴

¹ M 22 PTS i.130: *tathāhaṃ bhagavatā dhammaṃ desitaṃ ājānāmi yathā yeme antarāyikā dhammā vuttā bhagavatā te paṭisevato nālaṃ antarāyāya.*

² M 22 PTS i.130: *appaṣādā kāmā vuttā mayā bahudukkhā bahupāyāsā ādīnavo ettha bhiyyo.*

³ Anālayo (2011, pp.147–8) records parallels to the *Alagaddupamā Sutta* preserved in Chinese and Tibetan, with no significant differences from the Pāli version.

⁴ Ps ii.103: *tatrāyaṃ bhikkhu bahussuto dhammakathiko sesantarāyike jānāti vinaye pana akovidattā paṇṇattivītikkamantarāyike na jānāti tasmā rahogato evaṃ cintesi ime āgārikā pañca kāmaguṇe paribhuñjantā sotāpannāpi sakadāgāminopi anāgāmino pi honti. bhikkhū pi manāpikāni cakkhuviññeyyāni rūpāni passanti pe kāyaviññeyye phoṭṭhabbe phusanti mudukāni attharaṇapāvuraṇādīni paribhuñjanti etaṃ sabbhaṃ vaṭṭati. kasmā itthīnaṃ yeva rūpasaddagandharasaphoṭṭhabbā na vaṭṭanti. etepi vaṭṭantī ti.*

This is to suggest that Ariṭṭha observed that there are householders at the lower stages of awakening, who still enjoy sense-pleasures, and so sense-pleasures cannot in themselves be at odds with those lower stages of awakening. Ariṭṭha, so the commentary has it, supposes that it is possible to progress towards awakening by enjoying sense-pleasures without having a desire for them; but in the discourse, the Buddha rejects this view unequivocally:

‘I have said in many ways that those practices that cause obstacles are sufficient to impede one who pursues them [...]. So this monk Ariṭṭha, formerly a vulture-catcher, misrepresents me through his own misunderstanding, hurting himself and creating a lot of demerit. And this will be for this foolish person’s long-term suffering and harm. For it is not possible that one will pursue sensual pleasures (*kāma*) except through sensual desires (*kāma*), except through the perception of sensual pleasures, except by thinking about sensual pleasures.’⁵

As the commentary helps us understand, it is only through subjective sensual desires (*kilesa-kāma*) that someone would pursue objective sensual pleasures (*vatthu-kāma*); without sensual desire there would be no causal motivation to pursue pleasure.⁶ Ariṭṭha misunderstands human psychology if he thinks he can pursue sensual pleasure without sensual desire. The Buddha’s teaching on the way to awakening precludes a positive evaluation of sensual desire.

Richard Gombrich (1996, pp.22–4) interprets Ariṭṭha as holding that the Buddha’s warnings against sensual pleasures did not preclude sex.⁷ Alexander Wynne (2010, p.199) suggests that Ariṭṭha has taken the Buddha’s teaching over-literally, believing that the distinction between an action and the intention behind it means that sex itself may not be an obstacle if it is without desire. Assuming that Ariṭṭha’s wrong view was indeed about sexual desires, his fault was not that he had them. Elsewhere, the Buddha is shown as skilled in handling the spiritual psychology of sexual desire, helping the monk Nanda to sublimate his desire for a lovely girl by prompting in him a desire for some much lovelier heavenly nymphs, which eventually led to Nanda’s letting go of his desires.⁸ Ariṭṭha’s fault was his obstinate misunderstanding of the Buddha’s teaching.

It is hard to see a logical connection between the introductory narrative of the *Alagaddūpama Sutta*, concerning Ariṭṭha’s wrong view, and the main body of the discourse, in which the Buddha presents various teachings, summarised in the following sections of this article. I propose that, whether or not Ariṭṭha was aware of it, his view about the relationship of desire to the spiritual life in fact echoes a particular passage of the Upaniṣads, in which finding the self (*ātman*)

⁵ M 22 PTS i.133: *anekapariyāyena hi kho bhikkhave antarāyikā dhammā vuttā mayā alaṅ ca pana te paṭisevato antarāyāya... atha ca panāyaṃ ariṭṭho bhikkhu gaddhabādhipubbo attanā duggahitena amhe ceva abbhācikkhati attānaṃ ca khanati bahuṃ ca apuññaṃ pasavati. taṃ hi tassa moghapurisassa bhavissati dīgharattaṃ ahitāya dukkhāya. so vata bhikkhave aññatreva kāmehi aññatra kāmasaññāya aññatra kāmavitakkehi kāme paṭisevissatī ti netam ṭhānam vijjati.*

⁶ Ps ii.105. In both Sanskrit and Pāli, the word *kāma* means both pleasure and desire, and the specific connotation is usually clear in context.

⁷ An interpretation also taken in Holder (2006, p.101); Gethin (2008, p.156) also discusses the commentary.

⁸ Ud 3: 2 PTS 21. The concluding stanza describes how a successful practitioner has ‘crushed the thorns of sense-pleasures’ (*maddito kāmakaṇṭako*).

is presented as the fulfilment of desire (*kāma*). *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* (CU) 8.7 has the god Prajāpati describe the goal of the spiritual life as an *ātman* or true self whose desires (*kāmā*) are real:

‘The self (*ātman*) that is free from evils, free from old age and death, free from sorrow, free from hunger and thirst; the self whose desire (*kāma*) and intention (*saṃkalpa*) is real – that is the self you should seek, that is the self that you should desire to know. When someone finds that self and knows it, he obtains all the worlds, and all his desires (*kāma*) are fulfilled.’ So said Prajāpati.⁹

Dermot Killingley (2018, p.143) points out that CU 8.7 is unusual among teachings in the Upaniṣads in associating liberation with the fulfilment of desire. In contrast, Yājñavalkya’s teaching in *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* (BU) envisages the liberated self as without objects of sensation (BU 4.3.23–31), and the liberated self as without desires (BU 4.4.6–7).¹⁰

Perhaps Aritṭha had come under the influence of this unusual Upaniṣadic view about the place of sensual desires in the liberated state. Whether or not this was the case, the rebuttal of Aritṭha’s view provides the Buddha with a starting point, in the *Alagaddūpama Sutta*, for what will turn out to be a long and detailed refutation of the Upaniṣadic view of the *ātman* and the nature of liberation. Moreover, the passage above from the *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* marks the starting point for the well-known story, in *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* 8.7–15, of Indra’s search for the self. My argument will be that in fact there are echoes of this story in the Pāli text of the *Alagaddupamā Sutta*. These echoes are buried and lie dormant and forgotten, but can be brought to light. The Buddha therefore appears to connect Aritṭha’s wrong view with a particular Upaniṣadic soteriology, then goes on to engage with that soteriology in more detail.

K.R. Norman, Richard Gombrich and Alexander Wynne have already drawn attention to different ways in which the Buddha in the *Alagaddupamā Sutta* engages in debate with Upaniṣadic teachings, so I will review these discussions. I will argue further that the discourse *as a whole* shows the Buddha presenting his teaching over and against the teaching of the Upaniṣads. The Buddha’s discussion of Aritṭha’s wrong view gave the Buddha the opportunity to present his own teaching as a systematic rebuttal of an Upaniṣadic soteriology and its conception of the *ātman*.

The Buddha’s critique of the *ātman* in the *Alagaddūpama Sutta*

Following the narrative setting (*nidāna*) of the Discourse on the Simile of the Water-snake, concerning Aritṭha and his wrong view, the Buddha goes on to teach how the *dhmma* is like a water-snake – it can be grasped in the wrong way, which causes harm, or in the right way, which does not.¹¹ This simile does not directly address Upaniṣadic soteriology, or any particular teaching at all, but concerns how to *handle* the Buddhist teaching. The Buddha goes on to explain how the

⁹ Trans. Olivelle (1998, pp.279–81) (here with small changes). CU 8: 7: *ya ātmā apahata-pāpmā vijaro vimṛtyur viśoko vijighatso ’pipāsaḥ satya-kāmaḥ satya-saṃkalpaḥ so ’nyeṣṭavyaḥ sa vijijñāsitavyaḥ | so sarvaṃś ca lokān apnoti sarvaṃś ca kāmān yas tam ātmānam anuvidya vijānāti iti ha prajāpati uvāca.*

¹⁰ BU 4.4.7 trans. Olivelle (1998 p.121): ‘When they are all banished, those desires lurking in one’s heart; Then a mortal becomes immortal, and attains *brahman* in this world.’ (*yadā sarve pramucyante kāmā yesya hṛdi śritāḥ | atha martyo ’mrto bhavaty atra brahma samaśnuta iti ||*).

¹¹ The teaching relies on a pun, since the verb *gañhāti* and its cognates means both ‘grasp’ and ‘understand’ – just like the English ‘grasp’.

teaching is like a raft, for crossing over, not for holding on. With these two similes, the Buddha emphasises the pragmatic nature of his teaching (Gombrich, 1996, p.24). Wrong view (*sammā-dit̥ṭhi*) and right view (*micchā-dit̥ṭhi*) concern whether or not the practitioner holds on to views (Gethin, 2004), and does not concern the kind of metaphysical speculation that is found in the Upaniṣads.

The discourse continues with a discussion of how there are six points of view (*dit̥ṭhi-t̥ṭhānāni*), namely, (1–4) that in which an uneducated non-Buddhist considers each of the first four constituents (*khandhas*) of physical form (*rūpa*), feeling (*vedanā*), perception (*saññā*) and formations (*saṅkhārā*), as ‘this is mine, I am this, this is my self’;¹² (5) the view that what is ‘seen, heard, thought, cognised, attained, searched for and explored with the mind’ is likewise considered ‘this is mine, I am this, this is my self’;¹³ and (6) the point of view that:

‘the world is the same as the self; having departed I will be permanent, fixed, eternal, not of a nature to change; I will stay like this, the same for ever’ – one considers this too as ‘this is mine, I am this, this is my self’.¹⁴

The Buddha goes on to explain that the educated Buddhist does not consider any of these points of view to be true. While points of view (1–4) concern a pre-theoretical identification with aspects of experience, points of view (5) and (6) concern a deliberate theoretical commitment. In fact, they concern the taking up of an Upaniṣadic point of view. In relation to point of view (5), Richard Gombrich (1990, pp.14–16) identifies in verbal echoes of Yājñavalkya’s teaching in the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad*.¹⁵ To identify as ‘mine’ what is ‘seen, heard, thought, cognised’ would mean to take up Yājñavalkya’s advice to his wife:

‘You see, Maitreyī – it is one’s self (*ātman*) which one should see and hear, and about which one should think and concentrate. For when one has seen, heard, thought and cognised one’s self, one knows this whole world.’¹⁶

¹² M 122 PTS i.135: *rūpaṃ* [etc.] *etaṃ mama eso ’ham asmi eso me attā ti*.

¹³ M 122 PTS i.135: *yam pi taṃ dit̥ṭhaṃ sutam mutam viññātam pattam pariyesitam anuvicaritam manasā tam pi etaṃ mama eso ’ham asmi eso me attā ti samanupassati*. My translation of *mutam* as ‘thought’ facilitates comparison with the Upaniṣad, below, although in Buddhist usage *mutam* can be understood in relation to tasting, smelling and touching, as ‘sensed’ (implicitly, at S 35: 95 PTS iv.74, explicitly at Nidd² §298).

¹⁴ M 122 PTS i.135–6: *yam pi taṃ dit̥ṭhit̥ṭhānaṃ so loko so attā so pecca bhavissāmi nicco dhuvo sassato avipariṇāmadhammo sassatisamaṃ tatheva ṭhassāmī ti tam pi etaṃ mama eso ’ham asmi eso me attā ti samanupassati*.

¹⁵ The identification of this view with the Upaniṣadic formula had already been made by Jayatilleke (1963, pp.60–1); Gombrich’s discussion is rehearsed further in Fuller (2005, p.31), and Wynne (2010b, pp.200–2). Gombrich disagrees with the interpretation of this passage in Bhattacharya (1980), who argues that the Buddha teaches a metaphysical ‘Absolute’ no different from that of the Upaniṣads (see also Bhattacharya, 1989, p.23, and n.22 below).

¹⁶ BU 4.5.6: *āt mā vā are draṣṭavyaḥ śrotavyo mantavyo nididhyāsitavyo maitreyi | ātmani khalv are dr̥ṣṭe srūte mate vijñāta idaṃ sarvaṃ viditam*; trans. Olivelle (1998, p.129), with changes to facilitate comparison with Buddhist texts.

While Yajñavalkya teaches the value of equating the microcosm (one's personal self) with the macrocosm (the whole world), the Buddha teaches that one considers even the microcosm of one's own experience not to be one's own.¹⁷ Alexander Wynne (2010b, p.201) also makes the point that the Buddha's mentioning of what is 'attained, searched for and explored with the mind'¹⁸ covers the possibility that the Upaniṣadic *atman* might be realised through meditation, a possibility stated at BU 4.4.23.¹⁹

While point of view (5) concerns one's true identity while alive, point of view (6) concerns the metaphysics of identity beyond death. K.R. Norman (1981, p.20) observes that the wording of this last point of view includes 'actual verbal echoes' of the Upaniṣads, and he quotes from the *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* (CU) to make his point.²⁰ The Upaniṣad repeats the phrase 'this self of mine'²¹ as a verbal expression for the deep, inner truth of subjectivity, upon which one should resolve in order to become it after death: 'What a person becomes on departing from here after death is in accordance with his resolve in this world... "It is *brahman*. On departing from here after death, I will become that."' ²² One might add that the phrase 'the world is the same as the self' should be read as an echo of the Upaniṣadic phrase, '*Brahman*, you see, is this whole world'.²³

¹⁷ Gombrich, (1990, p.16) makes the point that the Buddha did not reject everything that Yajñavalkya said, citing BU 4.4.5, in which Yajñavalkya revalorises *karma* to mean ethical as well as ritual 'action'; the Buddha accepted such a revalorisation while going even further, in considering the ethical significance of action (*karma*) to lie in intention (*cetanā*). It should similarly be noted that the Buddha did not reject Yajñavalkya's teaching about the value of paying attention to the 'seen, heard, thought, cognised', but revalorised it in terms of realising the true nature of experience as lacking a true self or experiencer (see Ud 1: 10 PTS 8; S 35: 95 PTS iv.73).

¹⁸ M 122 PTS i.135: *pattam pariyesitam anuvicaritam manasā*. 'By adding a few words suggesting the attainment of the religious goal through meditation, the Buddha adapts the Upaniṣadic pericope to suggest that identifying oneself with the *ātman*, through meditative realisation or otherwise, is misconceived' (Wynne, 2010b, p.202). Likewise, at A 11: 9 PTS v.324 (also discussed in an Appendix, below), the Buddha teaches Sandha that one who meditates (*jhāyati*) based on (*nissāya*) 'what is seen, heard, thought, cognised, attained, searched for and explored with the mind' is an 'unruly person' (*purisakhaḷuṅka*). Wynne (2010b, p.202, n.47) lists further occurrences of the whole formula, to which I would add that it is also found at M 143 PTS iii.261. In each case, 'what is seen, heard, thought, cognised, attained, searched for and explored with the mind' represents the entirety of the experienced world, which may become the basis for views and which should be let go of.

¹⁹ BU 4.4.23: *tasmād evaṃvic chānto dānta uparatas titikṣuḥ samāhito bhūtvātmany evātmānam paśyati sarvam ātmānam paśyati*: 'Therefore the one who knows this becomes calm, controlled, restrained, patient and concentrated; he sees the self in his very self, he sees everything as the self' (trans. Olivelle, 1998, p.127, with small changes).

²⁰ Bhattacharya (1998, p.10), points out that he among other scholars (Oldenberg, von Glasenapp) had already noticed this apparent echo (Bhattacharya, 2015, p.45), and suggests that BU 4.5.6 itself echoes *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* X.6.3 (see also Bhattacharya, 1997, p.25). But see n.22 below.

²¹ CU 3.14.2–4: *eṣa ma ātmā*, trans. Olivelle, 1998, p.209.

²² CU 3.14.1: *yathā kratūr asmiml loke puruṣo bhavati tathetaḥ*; CU 3.14.4: *etam itaḥ pretyābhi-sambhavitāsmīti*, trans. Olivelle, 1998, p.209, with small changes. Bhattacharya (1998) argues that this 'echo' risks an absurd mis-reading of the Upaniṣad, which concerns a 'vision of the Absolute... beyond the subject-object split' (p.15). However, it is clear that the Buddha is critiquing 'points of view', expressed in terms reminiscent of the Upaniṣad, rather than 'a vision of the Absolute'.

²³ CU 3.14.1: *sarvaṃ khalv idaṃ brahma*. Norman's analysis is rehearsed in Gombrich (1990, p.15), Fuller (2005, p.31 and n.5, pp.186–7), and Wynne (2010b, p.202). All these scholars repeat Norman's discussion of

In the *Alagaddūpama Sutta*, the Buddha goes on to say that the educated Buddhist does not hold any of these six points of view.²⁴ In answer to a monk's question, he explains that this letting go of views ought not provoke anxiety and does not amount to annihilationism in regard to the self, since an empirical examination of experience reveals that there is nothing to be found there that is 'permanent, fixed, eternal, not of a nature to change'.²⁵ We can infer that the Buddha regards the teaching of the Upaniṣad, that there is a permanent self (*ātman*) that is metaphysically identical with this whole world (*brahman*) as a theory of self which leads to disappointment;²⁶ and he regards the taking of up such a theory, which the Upaniṣad teaches is soteriologically effective, merely as dependence on a view (*diṭṭhinissaya*). The Buddha concludes:

'Monks, given that in actual fact neither a self nor what belongs to a self is found, isn't this point of view – "the world is the same as the self; having departed I will be permanent, fixed, eternal, not of a nature to change; I will stay like this, the same for ever" – a totally and completely foolish teaching?'²⁷

In short, the Buddha regards the famous teaching of the Upaniṣad, that there is a permanent self (*ātman*) that is metaphysically identical with reality (*brahman*), as a theory of the self (*attavāda*); and he regards the taking of up such a theory, which the Upaniṣad teaches is soteriologically effective, to be merely dependence on a view (*diṭṭhi-nissaya*). Taking up a theory of self, which is just dependence on a view, is foolish because it does not lead to liberation.

Returning to the *Alagaddūpama Sutta*, the Buddha goes on to question the monks about their experience. In an exchange familiar from other discourses,²⁸ he asks if the constituents (*khandhas*) are permanent or impermanent, whether what is impermanent is painful or pleasant, and whether it is appropriate to regard what is painful and liable to change as one's self. Since it is not appropriate, practitioners should regard all aspects of experience as 'this is not mine, I am not this, this is not my self.'²⁹ In this way, the Buddha's teaching of the way to awakening is clearly articulated in terms of a rejection of Upaniṣadic metaphysics.³⁰ The Buddha then describes a

the teaching of a 'world self' ('world-*attā*') in the Upaniṣads. I take it that this is a reference to *brahman*, in that, according to the Upaniṣads, *brahman* is the whole world, and the *ātman* is *brahman*.

²⁴ The manner of 'not holding' a view is in accordance with the simile of the water-snake: the educated Buddhist observes how the six points of view are incorrect, in that no self is to be found, but does not enter disputes about these points of views, as if there were some value in dispute.

²⁵ M 122 PTS i.137: *nicco dhuvo sassato avipariṇāmadhammo*.

²⁶ M 122 PTS i.137: *aham pi kho taṃ bhikkhave attavādudupādānaṃ na samanupassāmi yaṃ sa attavādudupādānaṃ upādiyato na uppajjeyyūṃ sokaparidevadukkhadomanassupāyāsā* ('Monks, I too do not consider there to be a way of making a theory of self one's own which would not produce grief, sorrow, pain, misery and unrest for the one who does so.')

²⁷ M 22 PTS i.138: *attani ca bhikkhave attaniye ca saccato thetato anupalabbhamāne yaṃ pi taṃ diṭṭhiṭṭhānaṃ so loko so attā so pecca bhavissāmi nicco dhuvo sassato avipariṇāmadhammo sassatisamaṃ tatheva ṭhassāmīti nanāyaṃ bhikkhave kevalo paripūro bāladhammo*.

²⁸ Especially the *Anattalakkhaṇa Sutta*, S 22: 59 PTS iii.66–8.

²⁹ M 22 PTS i.139: *n'etaṃ mama n'eso 'ham asmi na m'eso attā*.

³⁰ Wynne (2010a, pp.103–114) makes the important distinction between a Buddhist 'no-self' teaching (the metaphysical denial of a self as permanent essence of a person) and a 'not-self' teaching (the empirical denial that the person has the characteristics of a self or permanent essence). While the Buddhist tradition has the reputation of denying the self in the manner of the 'no-self' teaching, early Buddhist discourses – as in

practitioner awakened in this way using five epithets for an *arahant*, who has abandoned ignorance, the cycle of rebirth, craving, the lower fetters, and the conceit ‘I am’.³¹

Norman identifies one last rejection of the Upaniṣadic worldview in the *Alagaddūpama Sutta* in the Buddha’s advice to ‘give up what is not yours’.³² Just as the grass and wood there in Jeta’s Grove, where the Buddha is speaking, does not belong to the monks, so that burning it would not be burning what is theirs, so the constituents are not the self (*attā*) nor do they belong to the self (*attaniya*). Norman (1981, p.23) identifies an implicit argument here: if ‘the self is the same as the world’,³³ then burning the grass and wood in Jeta’s Wood, which are part of the world, would be burning the self. But since burning the grass and wood in Jeta’s Wood is not burning the self, then the self is not the same as the world.³⁴ Likewise, if one identifies the self with the constituents, then ‘I’ would feel pain (which is a modality of feeling or *vedanā*), and this painful feeling would be ‘mine’. But since, according to the Buddha’s teaching earlier in the discourse, the constituents are directly observed to be neither ‘I’ nor ‘mine’, then self is not the constituents. Therefore, the practitioner should give up the constituents, which are not the self and nor do they belong to the self.

Prajāpati’s teaching and Indra’s search for the self

Just prior to the passage in the *Alagaddūpama Sutta* in which the Buddha advises the monks to ‘give up what is not yours’, there appears a short section in which the Buddha praises the one who has let go of all wrong views:

‘Monks, the gods together with Indra, Brahmā and Pajāpati, searching for the monk whose mind is thus liberated, do not ascertain that which the consciousness of the *tathāgata* is reliant on. What is the reason? Monks, I say that in this world the *tathāgata* is not to be found.’³⁵

the *Alagaddūpama Sutta* – more often simply deny that a self can be found. The ‘not-self’ teaching in this way denies Upaniṣadic metaphysics without making an alternative metaphysical claim.

³¹ The epithets are also found at A 5: 71 PTS iii.84–5, and discussed in Anālayo (2011, p.155). Levman (2014, pp.282–7) explores the linguistic ambiguities of these epithets, the meanings of which differ across early Buddhist traditions. In the Pāli tradition, these epithets are (1) one who has lifted up the cross-bar, (2) one who has filled in the trench, (3) one who has uprooted the pillar, (4) one who has no bolt, (5) a noble one who has lowered the banner, who has put down the burden, who is without fetters (M 22 PTS i.139).

³² M 22 PTS i.140: *yaṃ na tumhākaṃ taṃ pajahatha*.

³³ M 22 PTS i.135: *so loko so attā*; assuming that this is an allusion to e.g. CU 3.14.1: *sarvaṃ khalv idaṃ brahma*, ‘this whole world is *brahman*’. Again, Norman distinguishes the individual *attā* from the ‘world-*attā*’, and I take it that by ‘world-*attā*’, Norman has in mind the *brahman*. Taking the ‘world-*attā*’ to be an equivalent of *brahman* also allows us to dispute the argument made by Johannes Bronkhorst (2007, pp.217–8), that the fact that the *Alagaddūpama Sutta* does not refer to *brahman* means that the early Buddhists were not familiar with the *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* as we now have it but rather with a teaching circulating in the spiritual culture of Greater Magadha at the time.

³⁴ I have presented the argument here so that it takes the form of *modus tollens*: if *x* then *y*; not *y*; therefore not *x*.

³⁵ M 22 PTS i.140: *evaṃ vimuttacittaṃ kho bhikkhave bhikkhuṃ saindā devā sabrahmakā sapajāpatikā anvesaṃ n’ādhiḡacchanti idaṃ nissitaṃ tathāgatassa viññāṇan ti. taṃ kissa hetu? diṭṭhevāhaṃ bhikkhave dhamme tathāgataṃ ananuvejjo ti vadāmi*.

My conjecture is that this flourish relates specifically to the well-known story, found in CU 8.7–12, of Indra’s search for the self. The story begins with a teaching, already cited, by the Vedic deity Prajāpati, here speaking in the role of an Upaniṣadic sage:

‘The self (*ātman*) that is free from evils, free from old age and death, free from sorrow, free from hunger and thirst; the self whose desire (*kāma*) and intention (*saṃkalpa*) is real – that is the self you should seek (*anveṣṭavyaḥ*), that is the self you should desire to know (*vijijñāsitavyaḥ*). When someone finds that self (*anuvīdyā*) and knows (*vijānāti*) it, he obtains all the worlds and all his desires (*kāma*) are fulfilled.’ So said Prajāpati.³⁶

The successful seeker of the self, says Prajāpati, has all their desires (*sarvān kāmān*) fulfilled (*apnoti*), a teaching that may be particularly relevant in relation to the *Alagaddūpama Sutta*, in which Ariṭṭha has a more positive view about sensual desires than the Buddha.

Having heard this teaching, Indra from among the *devas* and Virocaṇa from among the *asuras* become Upaniṣadic pupils in order to learn how to find this *ātman* (CU 8.8.1–3). Prajāpati teaches them that the *ātman* reflected in the mirror and which they can dress up (i.e. the body) is the immortal *brahman*. Virocaṇa and Indra go off ‘having contented hearts’ (*śāntahṛdayau*). Of course this *upanīṣad* or ‘hidden connection’ between the *ātman* and *brahman* is false, for if the *ātman* is the same as the body then when the body dies the *ātman* will die, which means that this *ātman* is not the immortal *brahman* at all (CU 8.8.4–5). Indra realizes this and comes back to Prajāpati for more teachings (CU 8.9).

Indra is led by by Prajāpati in three further steps to the teaching that the *ātman* is not the same as the mortal body but dwells in it as an immortal (*amṛta*) and bodiless (*aśarīra*) *ātman*, the seer behind seeing, the hearer behind hearing, an *ātman* untouched by bodily pleasures and pains (CU 8.10–12). Perceiving this *ātman* one will attain the world of *brahman* after death, but also in the present, perhaps in meditation:

This serene one, having arisen from this body and reached the light beyond, is revealed in his own form. He is the highest person (*uttamaḥ puruṣaḥ*).³⁷

Having taught Indra about this self (*ātman*), Prajāpati makes a final speech showing that it is indeed this experience of the self that brings the results he had promised:

³⁶ Trans. Olivelle, 1998, pp.279–81 (here with some changes). CU 8.7.1: *ya ātmā apahata-pāpmā vijaro vimṛtyur viśoko vijighatso ’pipāsaḥ satya-kāmaḥ satya-saṃkalpaḥ so ’nveṣṭavyaḥ sa vijijñāsitavyaḥ | so sarvāṃś ca lokān apnoti sarvāṃś ca kāmān yas tam ātmānam anuvīdyā vijānāti iti ha prajāpati uvāca* (reading *sarvāṃś*, with Limaye and Vadekar (1958) (via GRETEL) rather than Olivelle’s *sarvaṃś*).

³⁷ CU 8.12.3: *eṣa saṃprasādo ’smācchrīrāt samutthāya paraṃ jyotir upasampadya svena rūpeṇābhiniṣpadyate | sa uttama puruṣaḥ*. One who *ātmani sarvendriyāṇi saṃpratiṣṭha* ‘concentrates all the faculties on the *ātman*’ attains the world of *brahman*: CU 8.15.

Those gods venerate this self (*ātman*), as a result of which they have obtained all worlds and all his desires (*kāma*) are fulfilled. Likewise, when someone finds that self and knows it, he obtains all the worlds, and all his desires are fulfilled.³⁸

Knowing such an *ātman* is therefore associated with the fulfilment of sensual desires (*kāmā*), in the world of *brahman*. Alexander Wynne (2010a, pp.132–8) makes the important conjecture that the successively more satisfactory conceptions of the *ātman* taught to Indra by Prajāpati in CU 8.7–12 were familiar enough to the Buddha for him to use them as a foil for a three-stage critique of the *ātman* in the *Mahānidāna Sutta* (D 16 PTS ii.66–8):

- (1) The Buddha’s argument against the conception of the self as the same as feeling (*vedanā*) corresponds to Prajāpati’s first teaching that the self is the same as the body (in CU 8.8–9), a teaching that Indra sees through as implying that the self will suffer and die; this first argument also corresponds to Prajāpati’s second teaching that the self is like the person in a dream (CU 8.10), in that such a self still experiences feeling. The Buddha likewise argues that a self that suffers and dies is an unsatisfactory account of personal identity.
- (2) The Buddha’s argument against the conception of the self as being without feeling and experience corresponds to Prajāpati’s third teaching that the self is like deep sleep (in CU 8.11), a teaching that Indra sees through as implying experiential annihilation. The Buddha’s argument is that a self which transcends experience (comparable to deep sleep) would lack the conditions for being recognisably a self.
- (3) The Buddha’s argument against the conception of the self as being different from feeling, but not without feeling and experience, corresponds to Prajāpati’s fourth and final teaching that the true self is bodiless and immortal, while yet experiencing bliss and the satisfaction of desire (in CU 8.12). The Buddha’s argument is that feelings are the condition for being a self, which can therefore never exist independent of feeling in some bodiless form.

The Buddha concludes that self-consciousness always depends on conditions, making the Upaniṣadic ideal given in CU 8.12 of realising the *ātman* impossible to fulfil. Instead the Buddha teaches liberation through letting go of dependence on conditions.

The Buddha’s critique of Prajāpati’s teachings to Indra suggests that the story of Indra’s search for the self was well-known in the Buddha’s milieu.³⁹ My contribution here is to suggest that there is further evidence, in the *Alagaddūpama Sutta*, for the Buddha’s familiarity with and rejection of Prajāpati’s teaching about the self in CU 8.7–12. My conjecture is that the Buddha’s flourish in praise of the liberated monk includes muffled verbal echoes of the story of Indra’s search for the self. I begin with the names of the deities. In the *Alagaddūpama Sutta*, the Buddha refers to ‘the gods together with Inda, Brahmā and Pajāpati’ (*sa-indā devā sa-brahmakā sa-pajāpatikā*). Although Inda (in Sanskrit: Indra) and Pajāpati (in Sanskrit: Prajāpati) are mentioned elsewhere in the Pāli canon, it is usually only as representatives of the Vedic deities, members of the thirty-three

³⁸ CU 8.12.6: *taṃ vā etaṃ devā ātmānam upāsate | tasmāt teṣāṃ sarve ca lokā āttāḥ sarve ca kāmāḥ | sa sarvāṃs ca lokān āpnoti sarvāṃs ca kāmān yas tam ātmānam anuvidya vijānāti*. This translation is from Olivelle, 1998, p.287, with some changes.

³⁹ The philosophical implications of this story are studied in detail in a positive way in for instance Kapstein (2001, pp.53–76) and Ganeri (2012).

gods of whom Sakka (in Sanskrit: Śakra) is the chief.⁴⁰ Only in this discourse (and two others)⁴¹ are the names of Inda and Pajāpati found together in this way, rather than in the company of other Vedic deities. In Vedic mythology, Brahmā is closely related to or synonymous with Prajāpati.⁴² It is therefore possible that the particular association of Inda, Brahmā and Pajāpati found in the *Alagaddūpama Sutta* represents an allusion to the *Chāndogya Upaniṣad*. Since there appears to be no other reason for mentioning these particular deities, my conjecture is that this passage is an allusion to the story of Indra, instructed by Prajāpati, in search of the *ātman* and the way to the world of *brahman*, though this original allusion has here almost disappeared into inaudibility.

While this conjecture is far from certain, there are other hints of connections. In the *Alagaddūpama Sutta*, Inda (= Indra) and Pajāpati (= Prajāpati) are represented as indeed on a search, although it is not for an *ātman*, but for ‘the monk whose mind is liberated’ (*vimuttacitta bhikkhu*). The word used here for ‘searching’ is *anvesaṃ*, echoing their interest in the *ātman* which, in Chāndogya Upaniṣad 8 is *anveṣṭavyaḥ* ‘to be sought’, both terms deriving from the verbal root *anu-iṣ*, ‘search’ or ‘seek’.⁴³ In the *Alagaddūpama Sutta*, therefore, the Buddha acknowledges the theme of a spiritual search, using the same verb, while disputing with the Upaniṣad the object of that search.

In CU 8.7, Prajāpati teaches that one should ‘should desire to know’ (*vijijñāsitavyaḥ*) the *ātman*, and Indra and Prajāpati take up the search; at CU 8.12, Prajāpati teaches that ‘someone who knows (*vijānāti*) the *ātman* has their desires fulfilled’. However, in the *Alagaddūpama Sutta*, the Buddha presents Inda and Pajāpati as unable to find the kind of ‘knowing’ or ‘consciousness’ (*viññāṇa*) of the liberated monk. The Sanskrit *vijijñāsitavyaḥ* and *vijānāti*, as well as the Pāli *viññāṇa* derive from *vi-jñā*, ‘know something’.⁴⁴ Again, the Buddha takes up the theme of the goal of the spiritual search as a kind of knowing, the object of which is, in the Upaniṣad, the *ātman*; but for the Buddha the ‘knowing’ of the monk whose mind is liberated will remain unknown to those who seek to know the *ātman*.

Not only do Inda and Pajāpati in the *Alagaddūpama Sutta* not find the *ātman* of a monk with a liberated mind, but they ‘do not ascertain that which the consciousness [‘knowing’] of the *tathāgata* is reliant on’.⁴⁵ The word *tathāgata* has here the meaning of ‘one who is like that’, i.e.

⁴⁰ This is to summarise the information gathered in the inestimable *Dictionary of Pali Proper Names* (Malalasekera 1938), s.v. Inda and Pajapati.

⁴¹ These two others are discussed in an Appendix, below, in order to fully draw out some further significance in their formulations.

⁴² This is the case even at CU 8.15, directly after the story of Indra’s search for the self, in which it is said that the teaching of the Upaniṣad was passed on from Brahmā to Prajāpati, and thence to Manu and his children (*tadaitad brahmā prajāpataya uvāca prajāpatir manave manuḥ prajābhyah*).

⁴³ In Pāli, *anvesaṃ* is a *namuḥ* form of absolute (Geiger 1994: §215). At S 4: 23 PTS i.122, Māra *anvesaṃ n’ādhigacchati* (‘searching does not ascertain’) the *viññāṇa* of the monk Godhika, who has just attained *parinibbāna*. In Sanskrit, *anveṣṭavyaḥ* is a gerundive, with a prescriptive sense.

⁴⁴ In Pāli, *viññāṇa* is a nominal formation from *vi-jñā*, and (despite its standard English translation as ‘consciousness’) it is a word for a kind of (conscious) knowing of an object. In Sanskrit, *vijijñāsitavyaḥ* is the gerundive of the desiderative of *vi-jñā*, signifying the prescription of a desire to know. It is a passive participle, hence literally meaning ‘to be desired to be known’, but this is awkward in English.

⁴⁵ M 22 PTS i.140: *n’ādhigacchanti idaṃ nissitaṃ tathāgatassa viññāṇan ti*.

reached the ineffable state of awakening, rather than referring specifically to the Buddha.⁴⁶ Elsewhere in the Pāli discourses, a *tathāgata* is described as *uttamapuriso*, ‘the highest person’.⁴⁷ This is the very phrase (*uttamaḥ puruṣaḥ*) which, at CU 8.12.2, Prajāpati uses to describe to Indra the person who has attained the immortal bodiless *ātman*. We thus appear to find the Buddha implicitly contending the true meaning of the *uttamaḥ puruṣaḥ*. While in the Upaniṣad this highest person taught by Prajāpati had realized the *ātman*, in the Buddhist discourse, the state of consciousness of the highest person, called *tathāgata*, is something of which this same Upaniṣadic teacher cannot ascertain the basis. The Upaniṣadic ‘highest person’ is therefore, from the Buddhist perspective, not the highest at all.

The Buddha explains that the reason Inda and Pajāpati do not ascertain that which the consciousness of the *tathāgata* is reliant on, is that the *tathāgata* is *ananuvejja*, ‘not to be found’ (DOP i.97).⁴⁸ In the Upaniṣad, Prajāpati teaches that by ‘finding (*anuvīdya*) and knowing that self (*ātman*), one obtains all worlds and all one’s desires are fulfilled’.⁴⁹ Both *ananuvejja* and *anuvīdya* are derived from *anu-vid*, ‘find’. This suggests that, according to the *Alagaddūpama Sutta*, Inda and Pajāpati, although they are supposed to have found the *ātman*, will not be successful when they try to ascertain the basis of the *tathāgata*’s consciousness. The reason has already been given in the Buddhist discourse: someone examining their mind for any traces of an *ātman*, finds that *n’etaṃ mama n’eso ’ham asmi na meso attā ti*, ‘this is not mine, this is not what I am, this is not my *ātman*’ (M 22 PTS i.139). The highest person, for the Buddhists, lets go of what is not the self.

The common terms of debate between the Upaniṣad and the Buddhist discourse can be summarised in a table:

<i>common terms</i>	CU 8.7–12	M 22
<i>anu-iṣ</i> ‘seek’	The <i>ātman</i> is <i>anveṣṭavyaḥ</i> ‘to be sought’.	Inda and Pajāpati, though <i>anvesaṃ</i> ‘searching’,
<i>vi-jñā</i> ‘know something’	The seeker <i>vijjñāsitavyaḥ</i> ‘should desire to know’; when successful, <i>vijānāti</i> ‘one knows’.	do not ascertain the <i>viññāṇa</i> ‘consciousness’ of that liberated monk,
<i>anu-vid</i> ‘find’	The successful seeker, <i>anuvīdya</i> ‘finding’, the <i>ātman</i> ,	who is <i>ananuvejja</i> ‘not to be found’,
		<i>elsewhere in Pāli discourses</i>

⁴⁶ DOP ii.286 s.v. *tathāgata*, ‘2. a designation of an arhat’; also discussed in Gethin, 2008, p.xlvi, p.287; the ineffability of the *tathāgata* is discussed in Gombrich, 2009, pp.151–2.

⁴⁷ At S 22: 86 PTS iii.116 (= S 44: 2 PTS iv.381), the *tathāgata* is described as the ‘highest person’ (*tathāgato uttamapuriso*); at S 22: 57 PTS iii.61, ‘the perfected one who has lived [the spiritual life] is called “the highest person”’ (*kevalī vusitavā uttamapuriso ’ti vuccati*); likewise in a slightly different context at A 10: 12 PTS v.16; at It 97 PTS 96, the monk of ‘lovely conduct’ (*kalyāṇasīla*) is described in the same way; see also S 44: 9 PTS iv.398.

⁴⁸ We are again reminded of Godhika at S 4: 23 PTS i.122: although Māra searches (*samanvesati*) for the liberated monk Godhika’s consciousness (*viññāṇa*), he cannot find it, because it is ‘unestablished’ (*appatiṭṭhita*); at S 22: 53 PTS iii.53, the Buddha describes the unestablished consciousness as liberated (*appatiṭṭhitaṃ viññāṇaṃ... vimuttaṃ*).

⁴⁹ CU 8.12.6: *sa sarvāṃś ca lokān āpnoti sarvāṃś ca kāmān yas tam ātmānam anuvīdya vijānāti*.

<i>uttamaḥ puruṣaḥ</i> 'highest person'	realises the nature of <i>uttamaḥ puruṣaḥ</i> 'the highest person' through meditation.	like that of the <i>tathāgata</i> , who is the <i>uttamapurisa</i> 'the highest person'.
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Table 1: comparison of terms

This comparison tries to reveal how the Buddha's words in the *Alagaddūpama Sutta* appear to contain muffled echoes of a debate with teachings found in *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* 8.7–12. What is at stake is the true nature of the goal of the spiritual life. While both the Buddhist discourse and the Upaniṣad agree that liberation from and transcendence of *saṃsāra*, the round of rebirth and unsatisfactoriness, is the goal of the spiritual life, they disagree about the nature of this goal. For the Upaniṣad, the discovery of the *ātman* or true self, through study and meditation, is the goal; while for the Buddha, the realisation that no *ātman* can be found in experience is an insight that leads to a complete letting go.

Conclusion: The Buddha and the Upaniṣads

The *Alagaddūpama Sutta* concludes with the Buddha explaining that 'the *dhamma* that has been well proclaimed by me in this way is clear, open, visible and laid bare'.⁵⁰ He goes on to say that, because his *dhamma* is like this, those who practise it will succeed in gaining various stages of awakening, from *arahant*-ship to rebirth in heaven. Although this conclusion stands on its own, we may now read into it an implicit judgement that the teaching of the self in the Upaniṣads is ineffective. We have seen that an Upaniṣadic teaching of the self, according to the Buddha's critique in the *Alagaddūpama Sutta*, involves a deliberate theoretical commitment to the view that there is a permanent self behind experience which is identical to the reality of the cosmos; and that there is a self attainable after death, which is immortal and bodiless. But such a self in experience cannot be actually be found; and such a post-mortem self is likewise a 'foolish teaching'. And by alluding to the story of Indra's search for the self, the Buddha takes up what may have been a popular teaching vehicle for an Upaniṣadic view of the self, in order to present his soteriology as superior. In this way, the *Alagaddūpama Sutta* as a whole can be read as an indirect rebuttal of Upaniṣadic teachings about the self.

The Buddha's strategy as implied in the *Alagaddūpama Sutta* gives us some insight into the relationship of the Buddha to the Upaniṣads. Nowhere in the discourse, nor anywhere else in the Pāli canon, does the Buddha directly discuss or critique the Upaniṣads. Rather, it seems that the teachings that we now read in the texts called the Upaniṣads provide an important though implicit part of the intellectual context for the Buddha's own teaching. Criticising the tendency towards metaphysical speculation in the Upaniṣads offers the Buddha the opportunity to demonstrate a different path to liberation. The Buddha's approach is anti-metaphysical, viewing religious speculation of the Upaniṣadic sort as a form of conceptual proliferation (*papañca*) to be abandoned. His discussion of Upaniṣadic teachings therefore lacks systematic disproofs, instead favouring *reductio ad absurdum* arguments that undermine the tendency to metaphysical speculation and

⁵⁰ M 22 PTS i.194: *evaṃ svākkhāto bhikkhave mayā dhammo uttāno vivaṭṭo pakāsito chinnapilotiko.*

promote the letting go of views.⁵¹ This strategy is subtle, and does not yield clearly articulated accounts of defined points of view.⁵²

Thinking more broadly, it is possible to identify two issues that have made it difficult to identify a Buddhist critique of the Upaniṣadic view of the self in the *Alagaddūpama Sutta*. Firstly, Upaniṣadic views do not appear in the discourse as opinions actually held by actual people. Rather, they appear as ways of thinking and points of view passed on by word of mouth among the brahmins and renunciates with whom the Buddha conversed. It is as if the actual composers of the texts we now know as the Upaniṣads, and the communities of those for whom the Upaniṣads were important or sacred, were elsewhere and known only indirectly by the Buddha in his social world. Hence the sense from the *Alagaddūpama Sutta* and elsewhere, that the Buddha is discussing views and opinions that are perhaps secondhand and perhaps imperfectly understood by those who hold them. Secondly, it would appear that the compilers and reciters of the *Alagaddūpama Sutta*, working probably after the Buddha's death, though perhaps remembering his words, had little idea of the philosophical context of the discussions and debates they sought to pass on.⁵³ Hence Upaniṣadic ideas and stories, such as that of Indra's search for the self, are preserved only as unconscious turns of phrase about Inda and Pajāpati, or passings words like *ananuvejja* and *anvesam*. These two issues mean that the 'Upaniṣadic echoes' I have sought to identify in the *Alagaddūpama Sutta* are muffled by time and circumstance. By the time of the commentaries, Buddhists no longer heard these echoes at all.

And what of Ariṭṭha? It is possible that his wrong view about sense pleasures that sets the scene for the *Alagaddūpama Sutta* means that he had come under the influence of an Upaniṣadic teaching about an *ātman* whose desires will be fulfilled. Other discourses in the Pāli canon suggest that the Buddha did in fact come across ascetics and brahmins who held to a belief about a sensually fulfilling post-mortem existence. In the *Poṭṭhapāda Sutta* (D 9 PTS i.192), the Buddha tells the wanderer Poṭṭhapāda about such men, 'who hold beliefs and views like this: "there is a self that is completely happy and healthy after death".'⁵⁴ The Buddha goes on to tell Poṭṭhapāda about his subsequent conversations with such ascetics and brahmins, in which he asks them about the evidence for their beliefs and views, which turns out to be lacking: the Buddha describes their views

⁵¹ The Buddha's strategy in M 22 is similar to his strategy towards interlocutors in direct debate, a strategy discussed by Rhys Davids (1899, pp.206–7), as first accepting the point of view of his opponents, so as to lead them beyond those views.

⁵² As Rhys Davids (1899, p.207) puts it: 'In accepting the position of the adversary, and adopting his language, the authors compel us, in order to follow what they give as Gotama's view, to read a good deal between the lines. The *argumentum ad hominem* can never be the same as a statement of opinion given without reference to any particular person.' Although these comments are made in reference to the Buddha's dialogue in D 8 with the ascetic Kassapa, they apply in principle to the indirect debate of M 22 with his monks about the Upaniṣadic view of the self. (Rhys Davids seems to use the idea of an *argumentum ad hominem* in a positive sense, whereas it is usually understood to mean a fallacious attack on the character or qualities of the person making an argument).

⁵³ Wynne (2010b) makes a different, though not incompatible argument, that idiosyncratic features of the *Alagaddūpama Sutta* suggest that it may record the Buddha in the process of formulating his ideas. In contrast with Wynne's concern for the possible historicity of the *Alagaddūpama Sutta*, I restrict myself to a discussion of the discourse as literature.

⁵⁴ D 9 PTS i.192: *evaṃ vādino evaṃ diṭṭhino ekantasukhī attā hoti arogo paraṃ marañā ti.*

as ‘not very impressive talk’.⁵⁵ The Buddha compares such men with someone who says, ‘I want and desire the most beautiful girl in the land’,⁵⁶ but who, on being asked if they know her social background, her name, her height, her shape, her skin colour, or where she lives, says, ‘no’. The Buddha appears to have regarded the belief in a post-mortem self whose desires are fulfilled merely as a soteriological fantasy, and his teaching that ‘sensual pleasures bring little gratification, much dissatisfaction, much distress’⁵⁷ invites an investigation of experience. What Ariṭṭha appears to lack is an inkling of the Buddha’s middle way, which begins from the experience of non-sensual pleasure and happiness through practising the path of meditation and insight.⁵⁸

Appendix: Disputing the ‘Highest Person’

The Pāli Buddhist texts preserve what may be some further allusions to the Upaniṣadic story of Prajāpati’s teaching and Indra’s search for the self, although these possible allusions only indirectly support my conjecture of Upaniṣadic echoes in the *Alagaddūpama Sutta*. Hence, to preserve the flow of the argument above, I discuss these further allusions here in an Appendix.

In the *Sandha Sutta* (A 11: 9 PTS v.322–6),⁵⁹ the Buddha teaches the monk Sandha how an ‘excellent, well-bred person’ is like a well-bred horse in thinking in a well-trained way. But in addition, free of the five hindrances, such a person does not meditate (or think, *jhāyati*) relying on any familiar object, including ‘whatever is seen, heard, sensed, cognised, attained, searched for and explored with the mind’, and yet that person still meditates (or thinks). The Buddha concludes with a formula and a stanza repeated three times:

‘But the gods, together with Indra, Brahmā and Pajāpati, honour from afar the excellent, well-bred person who thinks in this way:

‘Homage to you, thoroughbred person,
homage to you, highest person (*uttamapurisa*).
What it is you rely on when you think

⁵⁵ D 9 PTS i.193: *appāṭihīrakataṃ*: the word seems to mean ‘not done in a wonderful way’. The difficulties of understanding and translating this word are discussed by Jayatilleke, 1963, §557–9. It is not that one whose speech is *appāṭihīrakata* is ‘foolish’ or ‘nonsense’, exactly; but that it has gone astray philosophically, that it has missed the point.

⁵⁶ D 9 PTS i.193: *ahaṃ yā imasmiṃ janapade janapadakalyāṇī taṃ icchāmi taṃ kāmeme ti*. It is hard not to hear in the Buddha’s humorous simile an echo of CU 8.2.9: *atha yadi strīlokakāmo bhavati | saṅkalpādevasya strīyaḥ samuttiṣṭhanti | tena strīlokena saṃpanno mahīyate ||* ‘If such a person desires the world of women, by his intention alone women rise up. And, securing the world of women, he rejoices’ (trans. Olivelle, 1998, p.277). The simile of ‘the most beautiful girl in the land’ (*janapada-kalyāṇī*) is also found at D 13 PTS i.227; M 79 PTS ii.34; M 80 PTS ii.41.

⁵⁷ M 22 PTS i.133 etc.: *appaṣādā kāmā... bahudukkhā bahupāyāsā*.

⁵⁸ This middle way is evoked for instance at M 36 PTS i.247, in which the Buddha recounts how, prior to his awakening, he recalled a childhood experience of meditative pleasure beneath a Jambu tree, and realised that this non-sensual pleasure was the way to awakening: ‘And I thought, I am not afraid of that happiness which is totally without sensual pleasures and totally apart from unwholesome states’ (*na kho ahaṃ tassa sukhasa bhāyāmi yaṃ taṃ sukhaṃ aññatreva kāmehi aññatra akusalehi dhammehi*).

⁵⁹ Already cited above, n.18.

we do not understand.’⁶⁰

There is no direct connection between this juxtaposition of Inda, Brahmā and Pajāpati with *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* 8.7–12, as discussed above. Rather, the allusion appears to be to the Upaniṣadic story via the Buddha’s own discussion of it in the *Alagaddūpama Sutta*, assuming my conjecture about this discourse to be the case. There, the Buddha says that the gods cannot ascertain the consciousness of the unfindable *tathāgata*, whereas in *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* 8.12, those same gods believe that the ‘highest person’ is the *ātman*. In the *Sandha Sutta*, the Buddha’s stanza summarises the same rhetorical dispute, praising the ‘highest person’, the basis of whose meditation (or thinking) the gods do not understand.

This rhetorical differentiation of the Buddhist ‘highest person’ from that of the Upaniṣads recurs at the end of the *Khajjanīya Sutta* (S 22: 79 PTS iii.86–91). In this discourse, the Buddha teaches with great subtlety how someone who thinks ‘I’ in relation to the five constituents (*khandhas*) is consumed (*khajjati*) by those constituents, whereas the Buddhist practitioner, through analytic reflection, does not fabricate such a self. Yet the constituents remain. Of such a practitioner the Buddha concludes:

‘Monks, the gods, together with Inda, Brahmā and Pajāpati, honour from afar the practitioner whose mind has been liberated in this way:

Homage to you, thoroughbred person,
homage to you, highest person.
What it is you rely on when you think
we do not understand.’⁶¹

The indirect allusion to the story in *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* 8.7–12 in this concluding flourish suggests that disputing the meaning of the ‘highest person’ with the Upaniṣads was a regular feature of the Buddha’s teaching. It illustrates, in the context of religious discussions of the Buddha’s day, the difference between the pursuit of the *ātman* taught by Prajāpati and practiced by Indra, and the way to liberation taught by the Buddha, which involves observing how ‘I am not this, this is not mine, this is not my self (*anattā*)’ in relation to all experience.

Abbreviations

A	<i>Aṅguttara Nikāya</i> PTS eds. vols.1–5 (Morris and Hardy 1885–1900)
BU	<i>Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad</i> (Olivelle 1998)
CU	<i>Chāndogya Upaniṣad</i> (Olivelle 1998)
D	<i>Dīgha Nikāya</i> PTS eds. vol.1 (Rhys Davids and Carpenter 1890), vol.2 (Rhys Davids and Carpenter 1903), vol.3 (Carpenter 1910)

⁶⁰ A 11: 9 PTS v.326: *evaṃ jhāyīṅca pana... bhadrāṃ purisājānīyaṃ saindā devā sabrahmakā sapajāpatikā ārakāva namassanti: namo te purisājāñña | namo te purisuttama || yassa te nābhijānāma | yampi nissāya jhāyasī ||*.

⁶¹ S 22: 79 PTS iii.90–1: *evaṃvimuttacittaṃ kho, bhikkhave, bhikkhuṃ saindā devā sabrahmakā sapajāpatikā ārakāva namassanti: namo te purisājāñña | namo te purisuttama || yassa te nābhijānāma | yampi nissāya jhāyasī ||*.

DOP	<i>A Dictionary of Pāli</i> , Vol.1 (Cone 2001), Vol.2 (Cone 2010)
It	<i>Itivuttaka</i> (Windisch 1889)
M	<i>Majjhima Nikāya</i> PTS eds. vol.1 (Trenckner 1888), vol.2 (Trenckner and Chalmers 1898), vol.3 (Chalmers 1899)
Nidd ²	<i>Cūlaniddesa</i> (Stede 1918)
S	<i>Saṃyutta Nikāya</i> PTS eds. vols.1–5 (Féer 1884–98)
Ud	<i>Udāna</i> (Steinthal 1885)

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