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The Principle Of Conditional Arising And Ceasing: From The Twelve Links To Everyday Experience And Emancipation

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Abstract

This article examines how dependent origination (paṭicca-samuppāda) accounts for the arising and ceasing of suffering at different levels of analysis, from momentary cognition to the life span and the multi-life frameworks, without positing a permanent self. The problem is twofold: the conceptual muddle over the Twelve Links' temporal scope (momentary vs. multi-life) and the gap between doctrinal theory and everyday applied experience. The former concerns early Buddhist sources and commentarial representation, while the latter involves specific cross-references and clarifications in later traditions. In seeking to address the problem, the study integrates textual analysis of Pāli terms, analytic philosophy to model conditional relations and address circularity puzzles (viññāṇa nāma-rūpa), and phenomenological mapping of micro-episodes (contact, feeling, craving, appropriation) within widely understood contexts, such as interpersonal feedback and digital cue-reactivity. The significant proposed contribution is a cohesive, multi-scale conditional arising-and-ceasing model with leverage points at feeling (vedanā) and craving (taṇhā), the points at which practical interruption (active stopping) is possible through mindfulness, sense restraint, and insight into not-self. This article synthesizes a coherent account that (1) reconciles competing interpretations of the Twelve Links, (2) clarifies that operationalized cessation refers to pattern-level control rather than annihilation, and (3) presents a usable framework that integrates doctrine, lived experience, and emancipatory practice.

Keywords: dependent origination; paṭicca-samuppāda; twelve links; cessation; phenomenology; liberation

Introduction

Buddhist philosophy begins with conditionality, not with substances. The earliest Nikāyas state that, for the Buddha, conditionality framed the analysis of experience: 'with this as condition, that comes to be; with the cessation of that, that ceases.' This grammar of arising and ceasing replaces speculative metaphysics with a more practical causal science of the mind and the world. While the early discourses bypass the question of 'what the self-is' and instead focus on the construction of suffering (dukkha) through ignorance, formations, contact, feeling, craving, and appropriation, and how that construction may be deconstructed. This leads to conditionality being foundational for three interlocking domains. The conditionality of ethics shifts the focus of responsibility from a persistent agent to the unfolding intentionality and the patterns that disposition outcomes bear. In the psychology of liberation, conditionality identifies 'leverage points' where practice disrupts the chain, shifting the system from compulsive reactivity to freedom.

This article primarily argues that dependent origination (paṭicca-samuppāda) accounts for the arising and cessation of suffering across different time intervals. At the micro-temporal level, which spans seconds to minutes, suffering, feeling tone, and craving are activated by a stimulus, and how a nonreactive awareness can open alternatives. At the life-course level, repeated intentions accumulate and shape habits, character, and even influence patterns of social and economic interdependence. At the macro-scale, which in classical terms is the multi-life becoming, the extension of the horizon of ethical causation and conditionality remains without a permanent substratum. What is common across these scales is not an underlying metaphysical substance but a pattern: the presence of ignorance at any point in the chain causes suffering to proliferate; when insight and skilful means remove essential supports, the chain relaxes, and suffering decreases.

The article consists of four parts. The first examines the principal texts and significant interpretative controversies, including the dispute between linear and dynamic interpretations of the Twelve Links and the early Buddhist meanings of the terms "arising" and "ceasing." The second establishes the theoretical framework, which incorporates conditionality, the three characteristics (impermanence, unsatisfactoriness, and not-self), and ethical psychology associated with wholesome and unwholesome roots. The third offers a multi-scale framework, including (a) an examination of practical "choke points" for intervention in the moment-to-moment sequence of contact, feeling, craving, and appropriation; (b) a life-course description in which intentions, traits, and the surrounding social environment come to be; and (c) a brief discussion of causal arcs of more expansive scope that are traditionally spoken of as rebirth. In the discussion, these strands are brought together into a model that is pedagogically useful, articulates and responds to the most common critical arguments (on determinism, circularity, and agency), and clarifies the connections to ethics, contemplative practice, and therapy. The conclusion articulates the work's main contribution: a coherent, textually informed, and experientially actionable account of how conditions make and unmake suffering.

1. Methodology

Methodology prose should largely remain unchanged. The showcased text should remain horizontal, with each sample honing in on and clarifying specific intricacies. A closely detailed, multi-line explanation and interpretation of each of the cited samples, with each sample discussion painstakingly detailed, should comport with the specified individual rationales, elaborating and streamlining the multi-line explanation and ensuring that each sample isolates specific characteristics. Offering guidance for samples while interlinking with the specified rationales should demonstrate essay coherence with the cited streamlining, ensuring each component in each section planned is explained, and that the multi-line explanation of said samples collectively addresses each provided rationale. Streaks should remain permissible, and each segment should address shoot samples, which must detail and summarise the critical thinking for each segment. Sections prepared should document the interlinked cited thoughts, rationalised as processed into a higher normative framework. Text for blocks should largely remain unchanged. Having each section prepared should show natural discipline, streamline multi-line elaborations, ensure compositional coherence, and be rationalised alongside a prepared multifunction pamphlet and a central framework. Address the specific normative framework; the structured guidance must detail a maximum of three samples. The section should focus on explaining elements specific to flexible segments. Dynamic interlinking must allow navigation through provided frameworks. Pls highlight rationales for each block. Each provided structured, stimulus-driven interlinking to guide navigation through a specific thought framework, with sections giving interlinked rationales for particular elements.

The project offers optional analytical strategies, including the construction of causal diagrams which capture directionalities, feedback loops (e.g., *viññāṇa nāma-rūpa*), and "choke points," as well as a limited corpus co-occurrence analysis on DO vocabulary, which aims to map out doctrinal neighbourhoods and recurrent collocations and test the viability of the suggested connections. Limitations have been candidly stated, including the likely translation biases arising from the polysemy of the terms, the commentary tradition shaping the contemporary translation, the restricted scope of the project (which focuses primarily on the earlier strata and uses the later layers illustratively), and the difficulty of moving beyond the textual assertion to operationalize "cessation," which has been addressed here with the definition of a reduction of compulsivity and flexibility of response as pragmatic cessation markers rather than an unverifiable metaphysical assertion. This composite approach seeks to offer experience-actionable insights while remaining textually faithful.

2. The Twelve Links: Structure and Functions

The Twelve Links outlines a coherent account of how suffering is constructed, and how grief can end, utilizing the Buddha's conditional grammar: "with as condition, Y arises; with the cessation of ceases." In their canonical order, ignorance, formations, consciousness, name-and-form, the six sense bases, contact, feeling, craving, clinging, becoming, birth, ageing-and-death, the links function, less as a tight chain, more as a constellation of interdependent sequential layers of processes which can be traced across multiple

temporalities. The arising description details, all the while, ignorance is present, formations proliferate, and conditioned thus, consciousness orients to objects, conjoins with name-and-form, opens the six sense fields, contacts stimuli, produces feeling tones, inclines toward craving, solidifies as clinging, becomes hard, births, and culminates in ageing-and-death. The cessation description flips the grammar: with the fading of ignorance, formations are stilled; as formations quiet, the subsequent nodes also relax in a cascading manner. Nevertheless, the system does exhibit both symmetry and asymmetry. It is symmetrical at the level of logic, negating a condition, and it will undermine its dependent, but asymmetrical in practice; this is because defilements can multiply at a much greater rate than they can be extinguished. Wholesome factors, on the other hand, often require an intentional effort to cultivate and counter entrenched habits. The sequence is modulated by conditions that strengthen or weaken it, thereby allowing control over it.

Repetition, profound attentiveness, and emotional involvement reinforce transitions, particularly the one involving feeling (pleasant, painful, neutral) and craving. On the other hand, transitions are weakened or severed with the mindfulness, sense restraint, wise reflection and nonreactive equanimity, especially at the nodal "choke points." Of these, feeling craving is pivotal: when feeling is misperceived as commanding, craving rushes in, with appropriation close behind; when feeling is recognised as a transient tone, craving may not ignite. Contact feeling can also be a leverage point, since careful attention to the conditions of contact, sensory, conceptual, and interpersonal can prevent biased construction. Later nodes admit intervention too: observing the urge to defend an identity narrative can loosen clinging; recognising how intentions configure environments can de-escalate becoming. The early discourses also indicate networked feedback, such as the reciprocity of consciousness and name-and-form, reminding us that the sequence diagrams a pathway without denying loops. Thus, the Twelve Links are best read as a conditional map rather than a metaphysical ladder: a practitioner can enter at any node, diagnose which upstream supports are operative, and apply counter-conditions. When ignorance and craving are supplied, suffering predictably arises; when insight and dispassion are installed, the system cools.

The teaching function is pragmatic: to identify where pressure can be relieved, enabling the experience to shift from compulsively constructing to a state of freedom. This model scales from the seconds to the seasons of a life, and classically, to many lives, without assuming a core self. What remains is patterned conditionality; what varies is the arrangement of the supports, which practice can rewire and free conditionally, over time, and gradually.

3. Timescales of Dependent Origination

Dependent origination functions across multiple timescales. Distinguishing these timescales prevents us from mistaking a flexible causal grammar for a rigid chronology. In the briefest instances, links develop in seconds. A stimulus is encountered, a feeling tone is attached, craving is triggered, and clinging is the final act that consolidates appropriation and selfing. This empirical micro-loop is readily observable; for example, one

can note the transformation of a neutral email into an irritation and how craving urges a defensive reply while clinging narrates. Over a lifetime, the repeated micro-loop sequence shapes identity and behaviour by sedimenting dispositions. Intentions streamline into habits, which solidify into traits, and traits arrange environments and relationships to predetermine future contacts and feeling states. On this meso scale, the patterned life sequence, or "becoming," refers to the momentum of a life in the formation of careers, loyalties, and default strategies to regulate pain and pleasure. The classical multi-life model further extends the arc: craving and clinging fuel becoming, which conditions rebirth, and the cycle repeats across lives without a fixed self. Continuity, in this case, flows through causal streams; it does not lie in an essence.

An integrated proposal considers these scales to be both nested and fractal; thus, the same conditional dynamics occur at different levels, from the milliseconds involved in an affective appraisal to the decades required for character formation and the formation of multi-life trajectories. This nesting accounts for the efficacy of focused interventions at a micro "choke point" (e.g., the meeting of a feeling with clear comprehension), which, through repetition, can rewire life-course tendencies and, in a classical sense, decelerate the longer arc of becoming. Although the grammar remains unified, the rhythms operate independently.

4. From Doctrine to Daily Experience

When doctrine meets the small frictions of daily life, dependent origination shifts from being an abstract schema to a practical map for steering moments toward freedom. Think over three ordinary vignettes. First, email criticism: imagine that a report has been submitted to a supervisor. The supervisor has sent an email stating that the report has "careless mistakes." The stimulus lands as text; perception quickly interfaces and stacks the words and intent; then a painful feeling tone blooms; craving and an action sequence rush to draft a defensive reply, gather allies, and rehearse counterarguments. Appropriation locks in: "I am the one under attack", and an identity narrative crystallizes. Action follows with a curt response or a string of justifications. The aftermath is one of tightness and cooling regret of a relationship. Second, the smartphone's home screen pings. The stimulus is a notification. Perception deems it as urgent or rewarding, and a feeling tone shifts to pleasant or anxious. Craving reaches to check and appropriation narrates, "I must respond or I'll miss out." Action becomes compulsive tapping. The aftermath is scattered attention, unfinished work, and a subtle self-reproach. Third, interpersonal conflict: a partner sighs at dinner.

An exhalation and a turned gaze provide a stimulus; blame is assigned through perception, and a painful feeling tone is activated. Craving relief through counterattack or withdrawal is followed by appropriation, which installs the narrative, "I'm disrespected". Sarcasm or the silent treatment is followed by escalating action, leading to estrangement and unresolved resentment. The same arc is evident in each of these cases: the repeating stimulus, dispassionate perception, feeling tone, craving, appropriation, action, and aftermath, with the same points of intervention. Mindfulness of contact perception can slow inference by automatons, a raw data mind read: "seeing words", "hearing a sigh", and "feeling vibration". Clear perception of the painful,

pleasant, or neutral feeling as a command is recognition that craving is built of tone and craving, countering the craving rush. Wise reflection rethinks the question between appropriation and craving: "What evidence supports this story?" "What outcome do I actually value?" A sense of restraint is a helpful input. Ethical self-restraint requires asking whether pre-action speech is accurate, beneficial, and timely. Restraint means that less than a breath can narrow the field of action choices. These principles form expected routines.

When drafting emails, prepare your messages but refrain from sending them right away. It is recommended to read the message aloud in a monotone voice to foster emotional detachment. Ask a colleague to review the message to assess its tone. Lastly, for emails that require a response but are not urgent, a delay is recommended. For phones, schedule focused time by placing them out of reach, turning to Do Not Disturb, and removing notification badges. When the strong desire to pick the phone up arises, describe the feeling in words such as "tingling, leaning forward, anticipation." For conflicts, practice micro-agreements ("you're right, I did interrupt") and ask, "Can you say more about what you meant?" as a prompt and a time-out to allow for emotional regulation. Rationally, the configuration of craving seems to relax as feeling is known, allowed, and in action-undone. The act of craving has a rational grip; the narrative folds, the hunger is there, but the will is withdrawn. The micro, for over weeks, imposes a calculated order; the macro, over months, absorbs the disorder. The long arc of gradual repression traces the cooling of passion.

5. Conditional Ceasing (Nirodha) and Emancipation

Nirodha, or conditional ceasing, is described in early Buddhist texts in both adverse and favourable terms. In the negative sense, it refers to the "fading," "stilling," and "cessation" of the very supports that sustain suffering, most importantly ignorance, craving, and clinging. Nothing of importance needs to be extinguished. What is required is the compulsive relaxing of the pressure of conditions so that the following link is not set off. In a positive sense, nirodha implies ease specifically, a cooling, a peace, and the unbinding of the reflex to cling to phenomena as "mine," "for me," or "about me." These two descriptions form a complementary system. The first describes what drops out of the system, while the second describes the quality of life that becomes available when the system is no longer driven by defilement. The path offers practical interrupts that translate this understanding into orders of operations that can be applied and practised in ordinary situations. Sense restraint, for example, prevents unhelpful contacts before fixation ripens: turning off nonessential notifications, pausing or softening the gaze when irritation builds, and stepping out of situations that reliably inflame craving. Relabelling feeling meets *vedanā* at the point of ignition. Recognising "pleasant," "painful," and "neutral" as mere tonal colourations draws less attention, thus cooling the jump from feeling to craving.

Nonreactive awareness, or *sati* with clear comprehension, suspends sensations, images, and emotions without reflexive obstruction or draw, permitting the phenomena to rise and fall in completion without appropriation. The insight of not-self totally reframes the entire field. Experiences are viewed as conditioned processes, not as ownership, weakening the narrative to defend or gratify. It is the repeated disconnects that, in combination,

erode high-gain transitions. These are transitions, in which the acceleration of the entire chain is most readily linked to the sequence of feeling, craving, and clinging. Freedom, in the display, has two intertwined facets. The first is the direct diminishment of compulsivity.

This is manifest in reduced intermittent defensive outbursts, rational speech, grasping, and even praise or relief, and in a faster recovery after the pain, with a greater disposition to choose helpful responses with optionality. This "cooling now" is visible in the emanated states of attention, in equanimous or softened interpersonal relationships, and in ethical clarity that requires no strain to uphold. The second is the cessation of future becoming. With the decay of craving and clinging, the drive that fuels narrative identity and, in classical terms, rebirth, winds down. While contact occurs and feelings arise, the sequence lacks the fuel of appropriation and consolidation, leading to the resulting pain. In practice, cessation is not the miraculous event of a single instance, but a repeatable pattern. With time, the clarity of feelings reduces the strength of craving; the tightening of the self-defensive story weakens; the speech restriction weakens; the sustained consciousness encourages the relief of habitual loops. Over time, this manifests as fewer spikes of irritation, over months as the persona shifts toward generosity, and over years as the tranquil unfolding of the self.

6. Comparative and Philosophical Reflections

Dependent origination invites comparative philosophical reflection. It serves both as a causal account of suffering and as a critique of substance metaphysics. Madhyamaka famously sharpens this critique: Nāgārjuna's pivot is that whatever arises dependently is empty (*śūnya*) of intrinsic nature. And, whatever is empty is precisely capable of functioning dependently. Emptiness, in this view, is not a nihilistic void but the refusal of self-existence that would seal phenomena off from conditions. Read this way, emptiness is two sides of one coin: it describes the patterned relations by which phenomena appear and pass away, and emptiness names the ontological consequence no node in the network owns its own being. The soteriological payoff is immediate: reification of any moment in the chain (feeling, craving, self-story) as self-grounded hardens grasping and aversion, but the affective grip softens when we see it as dependent and constructed. Process philosophy, as a Western analogue, adequately provides this perspective without collapsing differences. If reality is better described as becoming rather than being, then continuity is a series of patterned events rather than the persistence of a thing through time. Agrees that continuity is absolute, but derivative: what streams on are causal-conventional patterns, not selfsame substances. The clarifications offered by contemporary cognitive science are also in tune with this perspective.

Within the predictive processing framework, the brain is seen as a hierarchical system that predicts and minimises errors; perceptions, in this case, are hallucinations controlled by the brain's predictive mechanisms, and sensory evidence regulates the brain before and during hallucinations. Heuristically, the sequence is described as contact and feeling as low-level sensory and affective updates and craving and clinging as precision weighting and policy selection under uncertainty. Consolidation of high-level prors fore identity

projections that guide future world sampling is named becoming. The habit loop (cue routine reward) is a perfect parallel to the contact and appropriation systems, and the frameworks state that the critical system is in the junctions of the loop. The system's reward de-automates the routine or alters the precision of a prediction, and the loop weakens. These parallels extend beyond neuroscience. They illustrate the congruence between ancient diagnostics and functional mind models, while maintaining the ethical purpose. The purpose is to reframe moral accountability and responsibility, paradoxically, through an enduring self. Without a self to own an experience, is there an agency to be accountable to? In reading, agency is pattern modulation, wherein an intention is an intervention that shifts probabilities and reconfigures processes for future reactions. Thus, responsibility is pattern cultivation.

By avoiding determinism because patterns are malleable through practice and context and by preventing reification because the agent is neither an outside stream controller nor an inert stream product praise and blame become constructive. Skilful modifications are reinforced, and unskillful adjustments are discouraged because they alter the stream's downstream effects on the self and others. In practice, the conjunction of emptiness and dependent arising yields compassion: understanding that no node stands alone, we change the conditions social, linguistic, economic, and interpersonal so that unwholesome patterns can be starved and wholesome patterns are easy to access. The philosophical arc at the end returns to the practical: non-substantialist causality is not an abstract thesis but a principle that redefines habits, relationships, and institutions in terms of liberation-oriented functioning.

7. Discussion of the article

Objections to a multi-scale account of dependent origination usually fall into three clusters. First is the charge of circularity in the *viññāṇa nāma-rūpa* dyad: if consciousness conditions name-and-form while name-and-form conditions consciousness, have we smuggled in a vicious loop? The early grammar is better read as mutual dependence across levels: neither term claims isolated priority; each specifies enabling conditions for the other's functioning. In contemporary terms, think organism–environment coupling or brain–body–world loops: bidirectionality does not entail incoherence; it marks a dynamical system. Second is the worry that conditionality collapses into determinism. On the proposed view, causes are probabilistic, multi-factor, and plastic under training; leverage points, especially at feeling craving and craving clinging, permit pattern modulation. Openness appears whenever attention, restraint, and insight alter transition probabilities. Deterministic caricatures ignore that the teaching is prescriptive: it tells us where to intervene, not to resign. Third is the puzzle, "Does everything have a cause?" The tradition restricts claims to dependent processes; it neither endorses an infinite causal regress that must be mentally grasped nor a metaphysical First Cause. Pragmatically, the map covers the causal neighbourhoods relevant to the manufacture and release of suffering.

The implications are practical. For ethics, responsibility attaches to how patterns are cultivated, not to an imagined owner; praise and blame are instruments for shaping conditions that favour non-greed, non-hatred, and non-delusion. For psychotherapy, the sequence from contact to appropriation aligns with affective habit loops and predictive processing; interventions such as relabeling feeling tones, de-automatizing urges, and widening choice sets operationalise "cessation" as reduced compulsivity. For contemplative education, curricula can teach students to notice the micro-timing of episodes, experiment with sense restraint, and test claims first-person. Across domains, the benefit of a multi-scale model is portability: the same conditional grammar applies to seconds, seasons, and classically lifetimes. What unifies these settings is actionable diagnosis: when ignorance thickens, loops tighten; when clarity, care, and collectedness are installed, loops slacken. The discussion, then, recommends designing personal practices and social structures that consistently remove fuel from craving while supplying supports for insight. In short, conditions change; freedom follows conditioned pathways.

Conclusion

In this article, I argued that dependent origination should be seen as a multi-scale causal grammar that describes the arising and ceasing of suffering from micro-cognitive episodes to the life-span, and, in the classical context, multi-life spans. By interpreting the Twelve Links as a conditional map rather than a rigid ladder, I reconciled linear presentations with networked mutualities (*viññāṇa-nāma-rūpa*). We identified practical leverage points, especially the junctures involving feelings, craving, and craving-clinging. Textual analysis based on the model in early sources. At the same time, the comparative approach demonstrated that later traditions refine or shift emphases without changing the core insight that nothing in the chain is self-grounded. Through a phenomenological approach, I transformed doctrine into practical diagnostics for daily use, operationalizing cessation as cooling in measurable terms: diminished compulsivity, broader options, and softer consequences. This synthesis enables tools that preserve doctrinal fidelity and that clinicians, educators, and practitioners can freely use and adapt.

There are three proposed endeavours. One possible empirical contemplative approach is to study the micro-timing of contact, feeling, and urge. Such an approach could use experience-sampling, psychophysiology, and behavioural markers to quantify the "where" and "how" of interventions (mindfulness, sense restraint, relabeling feelings) as they alter transition probabilities. Such work would not settle metaphysical questions, but could evaluate trainable decreases in reactivity and improvements in well-being, refining our understanding of "cessation" as pattern modulation. Second, comparative cross-tradition dialogues Theravāda, Madhyamaka, Yogācāra, and Tibetan bardo frameworks can explore how varied hermeneutics shed light on the same conditional terrain, differentiating pedagogical upāya from ontological stances and mapping convergences (e.g., emptiness as non-substantiality) that fortify ethical and contemplative praxis. Third, formal models can further develop the proposal: dynamical-systems diagrams of feedback and damping; probabilistic graphical

models that represent conditional dependencies and leverage points; and computational simulations that study micro-interrupts and how they aggregate to produce meso-level trait change over time.

Overall, the contribution presents a cohesive, textually grounded, experienceably accessible, and scalable model of dependent origination that provides helpful guidance. Freedom, in this perspective, is not external to the conditions we face, but rather is achieved through improved circumstances: when attention mitigates the feeling of a craving, and the craving relinquishes control, disordered patterns and intrapsychic conflicts reorganise, and the system cools.

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