

The Good, the Bad and the Undetermined:
Reflections on the Theravāda, Sarvāstivāda and Yogācāra listing of dharmas

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Existing studies of the Abhidharma tend either to focus on a particular tradition or to reduce the Abhidharma enterprise to the question of the ontology of *dharmas*—something which neither its ancient exponents nor critics did. While such studies have succeeded in shedding considerable light on many important facets of Abhidharma, many other facets remain obscure. An account of the world in terms of *dharmas*—whatever *dharmas* are precisely—is for all practical intents and purposes the Indian Buddhist account of the world. Yet this account comes down to us in a number of versions, which, although broadly similar, differ in many details. With some notable exceptions such as Bareau’s study of Buddhist doxographical works and Karunadasa’s study of the Buddhist analysis of matter, relatively little attempt has been made to even set out let alone explore the significance of the differences between Abhidharma traditions.

The present paper will seek to explore some aspects of what is common and different in the lists of dharmas of the Theravāda, Sarvāstivāda, and Yogācāra traditions, and also what might underlie those differences. The paper seeks to demonstrate how a consideration of these differences reveals something about the evolution of Abhidharma systematic thought, as well as bringing to life the manner in which Buddhist thinkers employed both reasoning (*yukti*) and direct introspection (*pratyakṣa*) to explore and develop their inherited textual tradition (*āgama*) in intellectually creative ways.

The differences between the lists of dharmas take the form of additional and missing dharmas (the six pairs of the Theravādins, many of the *cittaviprayuktasaṃskāra*-s and *upakleśa*-s of the Sarvāstivādins and Yogācārins), as well as differences in the classification of dharmas as *kuśala*, *akuśala* and *avyākṛta*.

The paper will consider in particular the possible significance in the classification of ‘unhappiness’ (*daurmanasya/domanassa*), and ‘tiredness’ (*middha*) and ‘regret’ (*kaukr̥tya/kukkucca*) as always *akuśala* by the Theravādins but as potentially *kuśala*, *akuśala* or *avyākṛta* by the the Sarvāstivādins and Yogācārins.