

**IDEOLOGIES AND DISSENT
FINDING COMMON GROUND
THROUGH
THE BUDDHA'S TEACHINGS**

BHIKKHU NANDISENA

**Gautam Buddha University, India
September 7-9, 2017**

INTRODUCTION

- In this presentation I will explore the origin of ideologies and dissent, and different possible ways to find common ground according to the Buddha's Teachings.

WHAT IS AN IDEOLOGY?

- The English word “ideology” first came into being in 1796 when Destutt de Tracy, at the National Institute of France, proposed to call the philosophy of mind, “ideology”.

WHAT IS AN IDEOLOGY?

- One modern definition of the term “ideology” is as follows:

“A set of beliefs, convictions or ideas which both binds a particular group of people together and determines the actions they take.”*

* *A Dictionary of Critical Theory* by Ian Buchanan; Oxford University Press (2010).

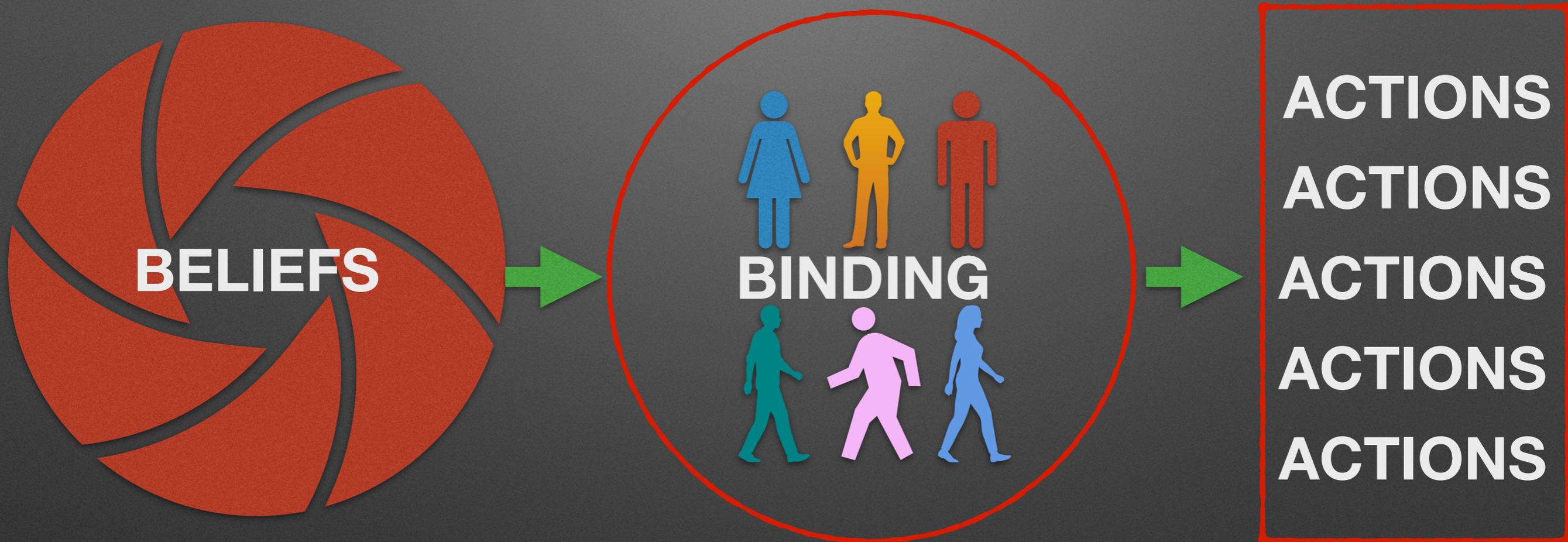
WHAT IS INCLUDED IN AN IDEOLOGY?

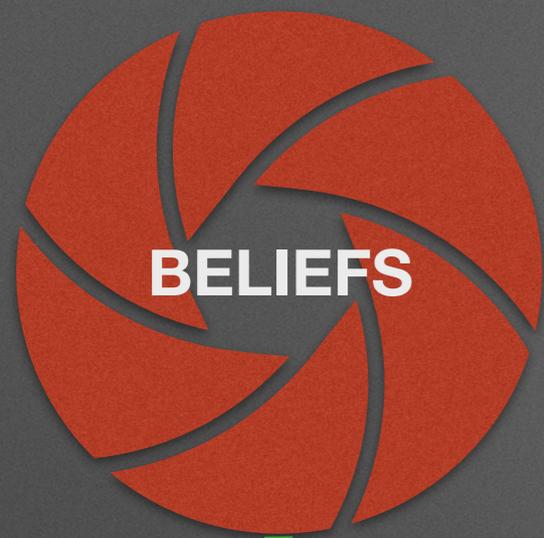
- According to the previous definition, any religion, which has a system of beliefs, qualifies as an ideology, as well as any political ideology such as anarchism, socialism, and so on.

COMPONENTS OF AN IDEOLOGY

1. A set of beliefs or ideas
2. The binding principle
3. The actions effectuated

COMPONENTS OF AN IDEOLOGY





This first component, the set of beliefs or ideas, is a mental construction belonging to the conventional reality.



This second component, the binding principle, is the subjective individual and collective grasping to a particular set of beliefs or ideas. It belongs to the ultimate reality.



This third component, the actions issuing from the various individuals who adhere to a particular ideology, belongs to ethics.

THE FIRST COMPONENT

- The first component, the set of beliefs or ideas, is a mental construction belonging to the conventional reality.

THE FIRST COMPONENT

- Conventional realities include concepts and conventional modes of expression. Unlike the ultimate realities, conventional realities are mental constructions.
- Therefore, since ideologies belong to the conventional or conceptual reality, they are created by the human mind.
- Regarding these constructs, the Buddha admonishes us: “The wise one does not approach whatever conventions that have been constructed by the common people.” (*Sutta-nipāta*, 418)

THE SECOND COMPONENT

- The second component, the binding principle, is the subjective individual and collective grasping to a particular set of beliefs or ideas.

THE SECOND COMPONENT

- The second component, which according to the Abhidhamma, belongs to the ultimate reality, is called “**ditṭhi**”.

THE SECOND COMPONENT

- Although the Pali term “diṭṭhi” can be translated in various ways such as view, belief, dogma, theory, speculation, opinion, from the Abhidhamma standpoint it is just a mental factor associated with certain types of unwholesome consciousness.

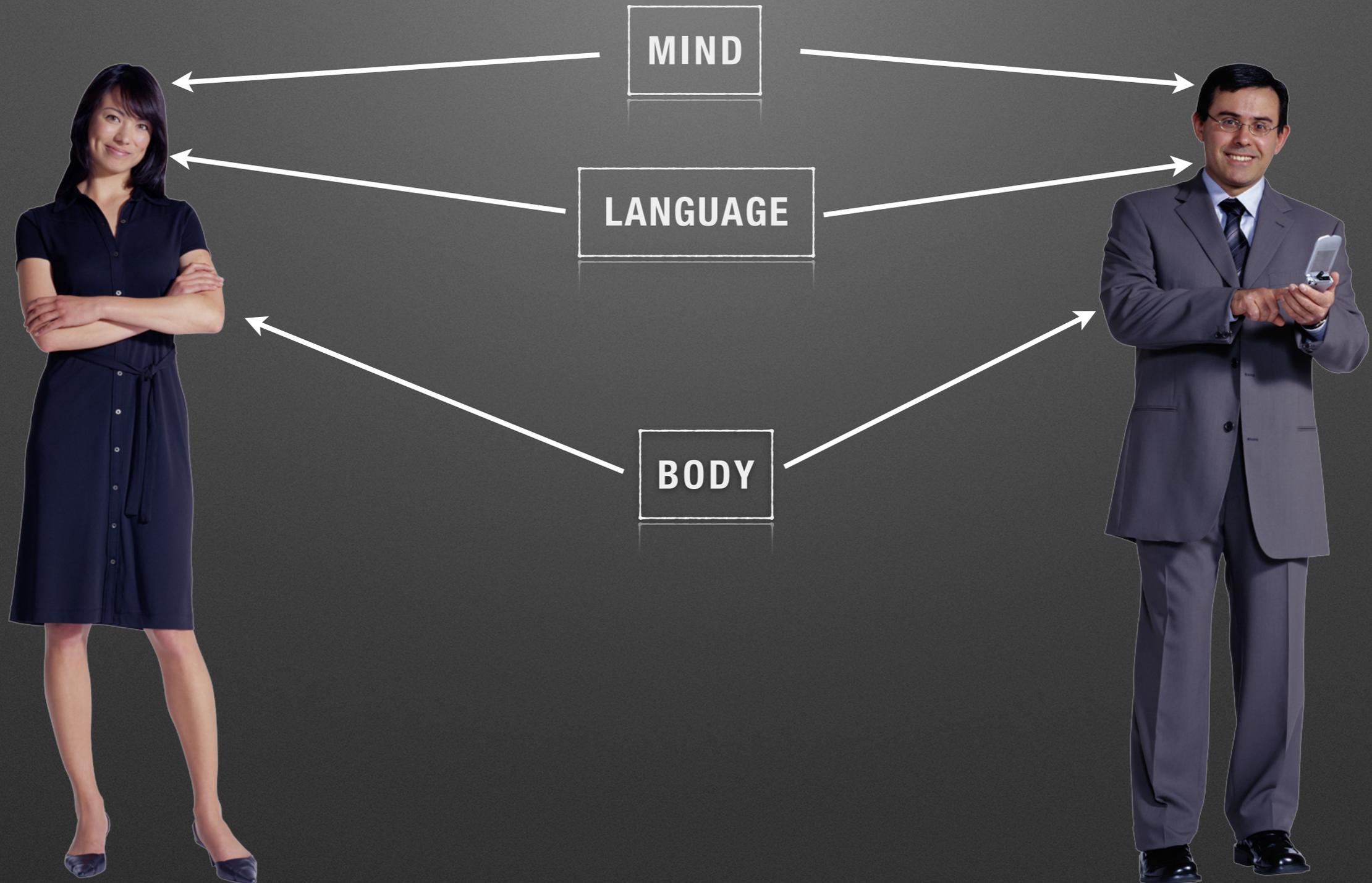
THE THIRD COMPONENT

- The third component of an ideology are the actions effectuated by those who adhere to it.
- Dissent, as well as violence, are included in this third component.

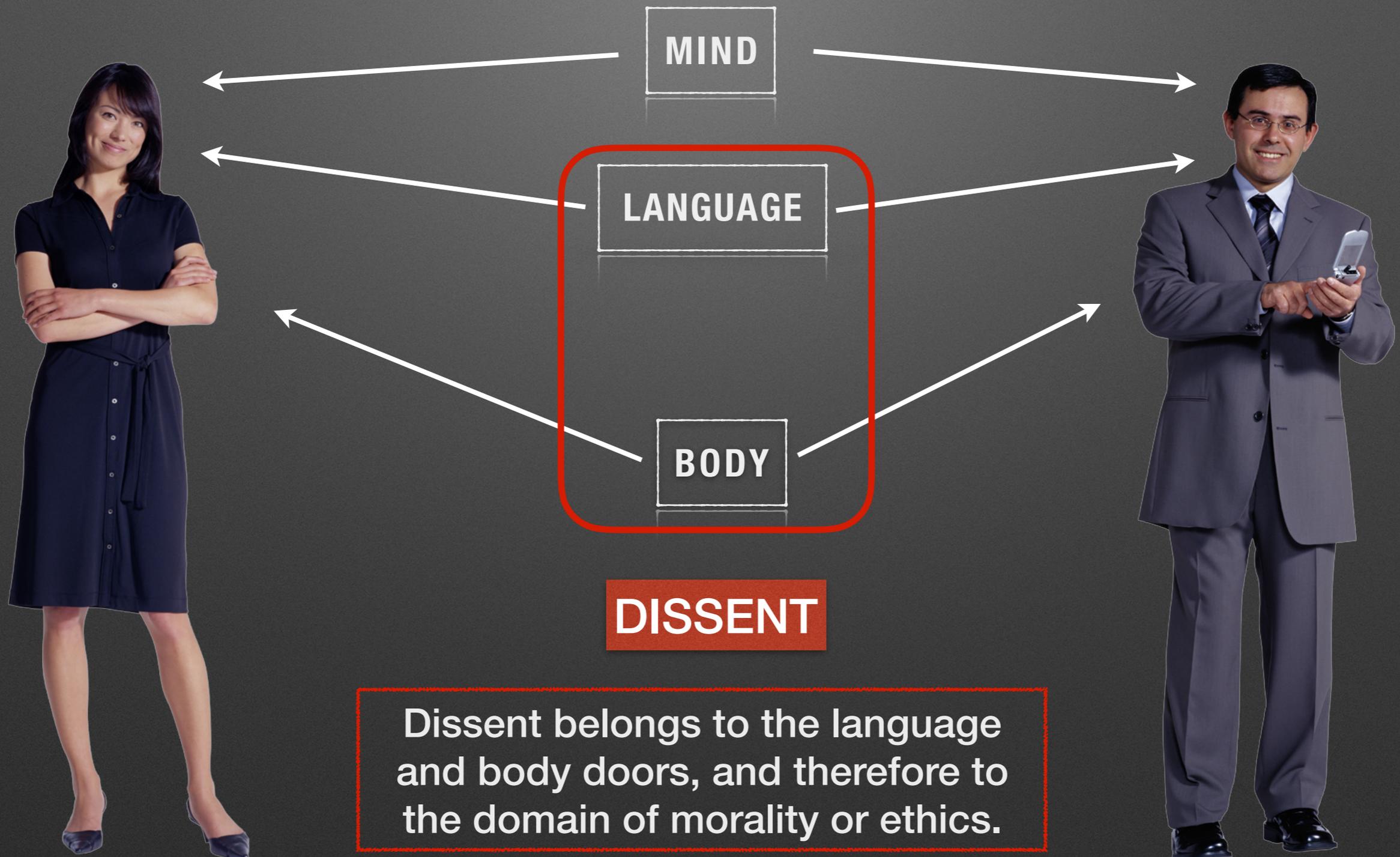
THE THIRD COMPONENT

- Since dissent and violence are expressed through the body and speech doors, they belong to the morality or ethics sphere.

THREE DOORS OF ACTION



THREE DOORS OF ACTION AND DISSENT



Dissent belongs to the language and body doors, and therefore to the domain of morality or ethics.

TWO KINDS OF DISSENT

1. Constructive dissent
2. Detrimental dissent

TWO KINDS OF DISSENT

CONSTRUCTIVE DISSENT

- Constructive dissent, which consists of wholesome types of bodily and verbal actions, contributes to the enhancement of knowledge and well-being of society.

TWO KINDS OF DISSENT

CONSTRUCTIVE DISSENT

- Constructive dissent should be taught and encouraged at all levels of society.
- Positive outcomes are to be expected as the result of constructive dissent.
- Constructive dissent, to be of the best quality possible, should ultimately be grounded in wisdom and compassion.

TWO KINDS OF DISSENT

DETRIMENTAL DISSENT

- Unlike constructive dissent, detrimental dissent is rooted in unwholesome mental states which often lead to disputes and violence.

THE ORIGIN OF IDEOLOGY

- While it is a fact that ideologies are manifold and that they often lead to dissent and conflict, it is not so clear how they come into existence.

THE ORIGIN OF IDEOLOGY

- To shed light on to the arising of an ideology there is a passage in the first book of the Theravada Abhidhamma which says:

“All dhammas are the pathways of concepts, language and designation.”

Dhammasaṅgaṇi-pāḷi 256, §1313-1315.

DHAMMAS

PATHWAY

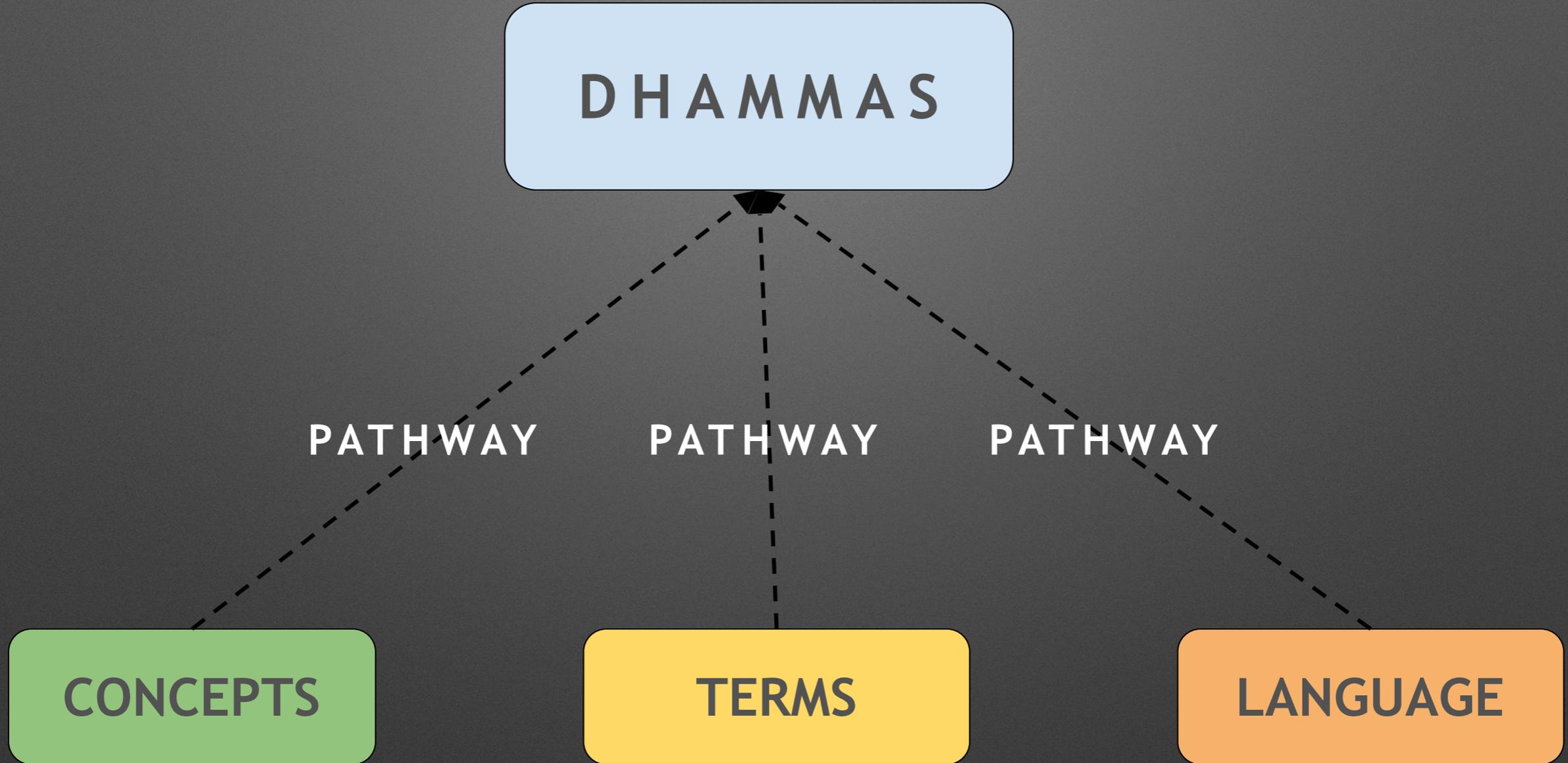
PATHWAY

PATHWAY

CONCEPTS

TERMS

LANGUAGE



REFLECTIONS ON THIS PASSAGE

- According to the previous passage from the first book of Abhidhamma, the following assertions can be made:
 1. All the processes of designation, language and conceptualization are only possible because of the existence of the dhammas, the final components of existence.
 2. Conventional reality is always a mental construction.
 3. There can be many conventional realities. This means that the realm of conventional reality allows for the existence and coexistence of all sorts of concepts. Opposing concepts can both be true within the realm of conventional reality.
 4. Often these conventional realities fall within the category of wrong views, that is, they do not have a corresponding entity within the ultimate reality.
 5. A correct understanding of each of the four previous assertions should lead us towards the recognition of the relativity of the conventional reality, and this should lead us towards a more enlightened and peaceful world.

REFLECTIONS ON THIS PASSAGE

- In general, according to this Abhidhamma passage, it can be said that each culture, each religion, and each civilization, establishes a particular “pathway” to the “dhammas” resulting in distinct art forms, distinct belief systems, distinct languages, and so on. This also applies to ideologies which are concept-systems that are created from the dhammas.

REFLECTIONS ON THIS PASSAGE

- There is another important implication that can be extracted from this passage:

Since ideologies are derived from something else, their very nature is marked by diversity and proliferation. As a Buddhist treatise clearly points it out, concepts only exist as shadows of ultimate things. As one thing can project many shadows, likewise different ideologies come into being from the same ultimate realities.

FINDING COMMON GROUND

- Since wisdom and compassion are the two main principles of Buddhism, it is through them that one should search for common ground with respect to divergent ideologies and beliefs.

FINDING COMMON GROUND

THROUGH WISDOM

- Wisdom regarding ideologies means two things:
 1. Understanding their true nature as a derived reality subject to diversity and proliferation, and
 2. Understanding the tendency of the human mind to grasp or adhere to them through wrong views as “this is mine”, “I am that”, etc., or through desire or attachment.

FINDING COMMON GROUND

THROUGH WISDOM

- To arrive to any of these two kinds of understanding, one needs to practice meditation or mind development (bhāvanā).
- Without a clear understanding of the nature of reality, which comes through insight meditation, it is unlikely that one will attain this kind of wisdom, necessary for finding common ground regarding different ideologies and beliefs.

FINDING COMMON GROUND

THROUGH COMPASSION

- Compassion regarding ideologies means cultivating and possessing virtues like respect and tolerance, but above all, developing the quality of considering the rest of humankind, irrespective of ideologies and beliefs, as oneself.

FINDING COMMON GROUND

THROUGH COMPASSION

- This path of compassion, which is based on seeing others as oneself, should be taught and cultivated.
- It is through compassion that humankind can move steadily towards a common ground, towards a more peaceful world.

FINDING COMMON GROUND

THROUGH THE BUDDHA'S TEACHINGS

- The Buddha says that ultimately we need to go beyond ideologies and beliefs, that there exists a safe common ground which is a sphere where there are no factions or disputes (avivāda-bhūmi). To reach this common ground one needs to practice and fulfill the path of wisdom.