The Karma of Others: Stories from the *Milindapañha* and the *Petavatthu-aṭṭhakathā*[1]

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Abstract:

In accord with the theme of this conference, I will contrast the challenges to karma made by Dale Wright with a set of recent and equally challenging works on the nature of kamma *and narrative in Theravāda Buddhism.* Kamma *is often portrayed as a coherent and rigid ethic of intentionality and personal responsibility: a being's actions accrue to that being, and those actions inevitably ripen into their morally deserved consequences—pleasure or suffering, sickness or health, wealth or poverty—in this life or in lives to come. Complex versions of* kamma*, which draw and deviate from notions of intentionality and responsibility, are present in the Theravāda story tradition. Using episodic examples from the* Milindapañha *and the commentary to the* Petavatthu*, I will explore analogies and metaphors of a wise Buddhist king acting with intention, ordering and carrying out harsh punishments without the suggestion that the king will garner punishment for himself. As well, a story of meritorious* kamma *gained by an undisciplined and ignorant girl when she is forced to honor the feet of Sāriputta—a small violence that saves her from suffering in the hell realms. Within these stories, intentional acts without* kamma*, nonintentional acts with* kamma*, and ordinary intentional* kamma*, exist simultaneously. As such, they allow for special roles, special actions, and a concern for appropriate timing.*

> *tiracchāna-kathā*: "low talk"; "beastly talk"; the opposite of right speech (*sammā-vācā*); "Talk about kings and robbers, minister and armies, danger and war, eating and drinking, clothes and dwellings, garlands and scents, relations, chariots, villages and markets, towns and districts, women and heroes, street talk, talks by the well, talk about those departed in days gone by, tittle-tattle, talks about world and sea, about gain and loss."[2]

It is customary to begin with a textual definition of *kamma*,[3] relying upon scriptural texts and good dictionaries. I will begin with such a definition before moving into the realm of "beastly talk" with stories of kings, thieves, and those departed (*peta*) from the *Milindapañha* and the *Petavatthu-aṭṭhakathā*. Both texts contain narratives that simultaneously confound and uphold a relationship of agent, intention, and acts based on intention and personal responsibility, and do so through the specialized roles of arahat, king, thief, and hungry ghost.

Binary *kamma*: orthodoxy and its deviations

Kamma means "action." This broadly includes action in general, ritual act, grammatical object or patient, occupation, habitual action, occasion for action, and formal acts—such as the administrative acts of the *saṅgha*.[4] Normally, however, it is moral and causal meanings of *kamma* that is stressed. *Kamma*, when it refers to morally relevant action, is

thought to rest on "a notion of agency which defines the act as rooted in, or even as essentially identical with, volition and decision (*cetanā*)."[5] Once there is a foundation of volition, a determination of whether *kamma* is good or bad, producing merit or demerit, purifying or defiling, depends upon the agent of action, the act itself, patient, and consequence. The meaning of *kamma* in Pāli texts could refer to all or any of these. For example, the phrase *pāpakamma* could mean "bad karma," "a bad deed, one who has done a bad deed, one who has a bad character, the potential effect of a bad deed…context alone decides which of these meanings in the one intended" (*PTS* 191). *Kamma* itself will hold the agent responsible for action by "doing back [the agent] with the act" (*kammakāraṇa*) (*PTS* 190), and being rooted in intention (*cetanā*), such "doing back" ought only to apply to the agent. Based on the volition or intention, an agent is the inevitable patient of their own former actions. This inevitability and inescapable recompense is metaphorically expressed in the *Milindapañha* (65)[6]: "Beings…have each their karma, are inheritors of karma, belong to the tribe of karma, have each their own karma as their protecting overlord [*paṭisaraṇa*[7]]. It is karma that divides them into low and high and the like divisions."[8] I call this meaning of *kamma* "orthodox": action based on intention, the consequences of which cannot be escaped.[9]

Scholars who argue for such an orthodox view must explain the presence of a number of exceptions to it present in the Theravāda tradition, such as "lapsed" *kamma* and the transference of merit. In the case of "lapsed" *kamma*, intentional action does not come to fruition and thus the agent does not experience the consequences of their action. *Kamma* that does not reach result is called *ahosi*, "lapsed" or "superceded," in commentarial literature. Gananath Obeyesekere explains that "a strong deed (*bālavakamma*) can on occasion overcome a weak deed (*dubbalakamma*)" and the weak dead has "'lapsed' as a result of its inability to produce 'results' (*vipāka*)" (2002, 137).[10] Certain actions do not reach fruition because they are overcome by stronger actions or because the opportunity for result does not arise. Arahats are the paradigmatic examples of lapsed *kamma*. Arahats, by means of their attainment, have cut off the causes for rebirth and will only experience the results of past action until their death. In this short span of time, much of their store of *kamma* will not have the opportunity to come to fruition.[11] A second regularly cited exception to orthodox *kamma* is the doctrine of transference of merit (*patti-dāna*).[12] Merit (*puñña-kamma*), metaphorically heaped like coal, stored like gold, poured like water, passed like flame from candle to candle, planted like a seed, is moved from one being to another, through the medium of the *saṅgha*.[13] Most authors agree that rituals and beliefs surrounding merit-transfer are widespread in Theravāda countries,[14] although many explain such rituals and beliefs as "concessions," "vulgarizations," or "popularizations" of *kamma*. Richard Gombrich and James McDermott, for example, divide *kamma* into orthodox and popular theories. Orthodox theories hold that *kamma* is based on intention and volition, and that action, act, and result all adhere (in various ways) to one being. Popular ideas like merit-transfer, feeding and clothing the dead, and magico-ritualistic understandings of *kamma* contaminate orthodox ones by going beyond that one being and beyond a basis in intentionality.

Orthodoxy in textual discussions is based on several criteria, such as the age of texts (the older the better), systematic coherence to a few principles (organized philosophy rather than popular tale), and the style of practice discussed (monastic over

lay). In such theories, deviations from the orthodox must be explained away to eliminate a messy proliferation of meanings in favor of the most basic, pure, or original meaning. Dale Wright's philosophical discussion of karma follows this basic pattern. He divides understandings of karma to identify the ones that are ethically useful and the ones that are unnecessary. He is engaged in a normative project to emphasize what is *good* about karma. Wright begins by taking karma as a description of moral action available to Western thinkers. As such, it ought to be evaluated according to contemporary philosophical and scientific standards (2004, 78). He finds that karma would be acceptable to those standards if the "supernatural" metaphysic of rebirth were excised.[15] Rebirth is not acceptable to Wright for two reasons: (1) it is not provable or reflective of human experience, and (2) it may encourage an unjust or unfortunate version of karma that is "socially and politically disempowering in its cultural effect" and "may in fact support social passivity or acquiescence in the face of oppression" (2004, 81). All persons desire justice, and rebirth is merely an unfortunate consequence of projecting that desire[16] beyond human experience. For Wright, therefore, the removal of rebirth is the removal of extraneous survival from early Buddhism; he seeks to update an otherwise moribund karma.[17]

Wright believes that persons who reflect on our present lives with "maturity and honesty of vision" will see "that the cosmos is simply indifferent to human questions of merit and justice" (2004, 80-81). Those who posit worlds beyond our verifiable experience go beyond empirical and scientific standards (2004, 88). Rather, humans should restrict their views on action and consequence only to "natural" and necessary outcomes. This means restricting a theory of action to its effect on the internal world of the agent-over-time, and perhaps to changes in the behavior of that agent. Wright believes that abandoning rebirth is now possible as a result of a "cultural evolution of ethical understanding" (2004, 89). Rather than an "evolution," "maturation," or more "honest" view of karma, I believe that Wright has evaluated karma according to a different set of metaphysical premises.[18] Beliefs about how the world works, its time and space, as well as how humans proceed and work within that world, are an intrinsic part of the determination of any range of possible actions and possible consequences. To remove the connection between karma and rebirth, to favor those scenarios where they do not coincide, is *necessarily* to replace rebirth with another metaphysical "world." In abandoning rebirth, Wright upholds a different metaphysics, a different set of beliefs about how the world functions, and thus, what sorts of actions make sense within it. Rebirth does not make sense of action in cultures that do not believe in rebirth. Empirical and scientific beliefs about the efficacy of action, however, are a part of a metaphysic often present in the cultures of persons educated at Western universities.

Wright's project makes it necessary for him to distinguish clearly between desirable and undesirable meanings for karma. Because he has made this distinction, Wright is able to focus on the advantages of karma for contemporary ethical theorists. He shows how karma contributes to the exploration of choice and habit-driven forms of character cultivation when karma is freed of its unfortunate rebirth-metaphysic.[19] What I would like to explore here, however, are the implications for character and action when strict divisions are *not* made between karma, rebirth, merit, and other "deviations."

Inclusive *kamma*: systematization and its aporia

Recent scholarship on *kamma* in the early Indian and Theravāda contexts tends in precisely the opposite direction to Wright, and to all those arguments attempt to define a pure karma against a set of useless aberrations. Detailed and inclusive treatments of the "supernatural," "popular," and "wildly undoctrinal"[20] are found in the textual work of James Egge, *Religious Giving and the Invention of Karma in Theravāda Buddhism*, and the anthropological work of Gananath Obeyesekere, *Imagining Karma*. Both scholars present challenging theses. Egge holds that the discourse of *kamma* developed during a later strata of canon formation as a way to harmonize multiple and divergent understandings of action and of the world. He shows how these divergent understandings and the harmonizing discourse of *kamma* exist simultaneously in Theravāda stories. Obeyesekere concludes that "karmic eschatologies" are more likely a specialized form of rebirth, than rebirth a result of the logic of karma. Karma results from systematic ethicization of rebirth through complex social and historical processes. Obeyesekere, like Egge, sees diversity and tension in how rebirth and karma are depicted in Buddhist stories—and most importantly, he sees this diversity as unavoidable.

Obeyesekere presents a widely comparative study of rebirth in several cultures, and its particular manifestation as karma in Indic cultures.[21] Based on this comparative work, he proposes a model for the development of Buddhist versions of karma theory. This complex model takes into account kin-group reincarnation, society-wide rebirth, abhorrence of eating one's own species, and cross-species rebirth between humans, animals, plants, and other beings (2002, 88-97). He charts the "ethicization" of cyclic rebirth and redeath (*saṃsāra*), where ethicization is "a qualitative change in the structure" of *saṃsāra* such that ethical action propels and determines future births (2002, 126). He describes historical, social, and ideological processes "whereby morally right or wrong action becomes a religiously right or wrong action that in turn affects a person's destiny after death" (2002, 75). In other words, he suggests a model for understanding how rebirth becomes karma. However this ethicization process presents a new understanding of the inescapable consequences of action.[22] This inevitability of karmic result generates several aporia. Aporia, for Obeyesekere are "existential puzzles," stubborn and unsolvable problems that seem to, by their very existence, provoke attempts to harmonize and resolve them (2002, 131). Obeyesekere contends that contradiction, tension, and puzzlement are built into the tradition of karma from its beginning (2002, 136).[23] They are *inherent* in any systematic "orthodox" karma and are, in the final analysis, impossible to resolve. These aporia[24] are precisely those things noted as "deviations" or "popularizations" by McDermott and Gombrich, such as the transfer of merit, and *ahosi kamma*. When these scholars or Buddhists have attempted to resolve them, more aporia appear. Obeyesekere's "aporia" is thus a reimagining of what other scholars have considered aberrant and contradictory:

> These "contradictions" are a consequence of the aporias that arise from within an ideology and in many instances *cannot* be resolved. In Theravada Buddhist practice they are expressed and debated in multiple, open-ended discourses, some "authorizing" karma, some de-authorizing it—for example, in popular Buddhist stories, in monk sermons and lay responses, in everyday conversations, as well as

on special occasions such as funerals, in discussions about natural and human catastrophes, endlessly. (2002, 135)

Obeyesekere's concept of aporia allows us to consider it natural that karma expressed in received stories and texts is full of tension, contradiction, and argument.

James Egge's work also discusses the diverse and systematizing features of *kamma*. Based on textual evidence from the Pāli canon and its commentaries, he holds that *kamma* is a later invention of the Theravāda tradition that draws together a diverse set of action theories: ideas of destiny after death, of mental purification, heroic giving, and sacrificial action. Egge notes that these discourses are present but not rigidly separated, often occurring together in the same text. The style and metaphoric imagery[25] of these various action theories is worth noting:

1. The sacrificial discourse of action speaks of the *saṅgha* as being the medium of sacrifice, having an "inner fire," and as the proper recipient of gifts (*dakkhiṇā*).[26] Gifts create merit (*puñña*) where merit is "something that people seek (*pekkha*), for which they have need (*attho*) or desire (*kāma, ākaṅkhā*). People obtain (*labhati*) and have (*puññavant-*) merit which is amassed (*cīyate, upacita*) to form a heap (*uccaya, nicaya, sañcaya*), a store (*nidhi*), a provision (*patheyya*) or an island (*dīpa*)…Merits are said to be helpers (*upakāra*), friends (*mitta*), or supporters (*patiṭṭha*) in the next world. Merits bring happiness (*sukhāvaha*)" (2002, 21). Gifts given to the *saṅgha* create more merit than gifts to inferior recipients. Other metaphors associated with merit are field (*khetta*) and fruit (*phala*). Examples of merit-making are gifts (*dāna*) to the *saṅgha* and undertaking the 8 precepts on *uposatha* days. Sacrificial action here occurs through the medium of the *saṅgha*.[27]

2. The purificatory discourse appears most frequently in lists (2002, 9). It consists of mental states called skillful or unskillful, healthy or unhealthy, wholesome and unwholesome (*kusala-akusala*). The cultivation of *kusala* conduces to *nibbāna* through the elimination of harmful mental states (2002, 23). Such *kusala* states "adorn the mind" (*cittālaṅkāram*) (2002, 43) and are pure (*suddhi*). Mental purification results from the abstention from acts based on lust (*rāga*), hatred (*dosa*), and delusion (*moha*) (2002, 44). Rebirth and merit can be obtained based on mental purity and dispassion (*visuddhattā, vītarāgattā*) (2002, 43). Mental purification does not depend on the mediation of the *saṅgha*, rather, it is a part of the path of renunciation itself.

3. The heroic discourse is based on *jātaka* where characters such as Vessantara, Sivi and Dhanañjaya[28] display extreme generosity (2002, 34-35). The value of their gifts is in the cost to the donor, as exemplified by the great personal cost to Vessantara who gave away his wife and children. Their value is not based on the worthiness of the recipient—in direct contrast to the sacrificial model. In some instances, this model values the role of the lay donor and his actions over and above the role of the renunciate.

4. In the discourse of *kamma*, "one does (*karoti*) or wills (*ceteti*) acts (*kamma*), and that those acts that are accumulated (*upacita*) will ripen (*vipaccati*) to produce their fruit (*phala*) or result (*vipāka*). The original actor feels (*paṭisaṃvedati, vediyati*) or

experiences (*anubhavati*) this outcome of the act, which thereby comes to an end (*vyantibhāva*) or is exhausted (*khīṇa*)" (2002, 42). These actions propel the various births: human, deity, animal, hungry ghost (*peta*), and hell-being. As a harmonizing discourse, the language and function of other sorts of action are explained in terms of *kamma*.

What we inherit in Pāli texts is a situation where all of these discourses persist. Egge's careful analysis of *sutta*, based on the ages of verse and prose sections, demonstrates how these different ways to imagine action, with their respective stylistic and structural features, occur simultaneously in narrative texts.[29] On the strength of this evidence, he is able to propose a later date for the development of *kamma* and show how it harmonizes the sacrificial, purificatory, heroic, and other discourses—where action is mediated by renunciation, or by renunciates. What we receive are stories where different ways to understand action are presented together, sometimes parodied, sometimes explained, sometimes considered synonymous.

Obeyesekere and Egge present theories that include multiple understandings of action as well as accounting for the harmonizing or systematizing thrust of *kamma*. They also identify story as a good place to observe both the systematizing influence of *kamma*, and to trace the inevitable *aporia* that accompany it. I would like to proceed on this understanding and apply it to two story texts.

Why stories?

There are several reasons that I have chosen to focus on story and metaphor. Perhaps the most important of these is that story-telling is part of the life of Buddhist communities. Charles Keyes (1983a) describes how story serves to link local communities and scriptural texts. Stories are told by local specialists and used for drama, ritual, and causal explanation.[30] Story represents the common inheritance and usage of local communities and as such is a good place to look for moral information. Another reason to focus on stories is that they have often been considered vulgarizations, popularizations, or distortions of abstract Buddhist doctrines—just as "merit-giving" (*patti-dāna*) is considered a distortion of orthodox *kamma*. As a result, stories have rarely been taken seriously,[31] and little attention "given to the ethical significance of either the form or the content of the stories themselves" (Hallisey and Hansen 1996, 309).[32]

Hallisey and Hansen (1996) examine Theravāda story literature to examine the action of stories to enable moral life, that is, as having features that frame ethical thought and behavioral possibility prior to the identification of a particular ethic. These features enabling moral life are the effect of stories to heal, transform,[33] expand "an agent's moral horizon," and "expose the opaqueness of moral intention."[34] An audience that participates in story has their horizons expanded through relationship with its characters even—or especially—terrible ones such as Aṅgulimāla (1996, 316). And, through the experience of these characters, the audience finds an instance of the world as imagined in Buddhist thought. They participate in and learn of "a world structured by karma."[35] Peter and Renata Singer agree that stories morally orient those who participate in them. They argue that raising and resolving moral questions happens in the field of literature as well as the field of systematic philosophy. Indeed, fictions[36] are often part of philosophical writing

on ethics. Philosophical discussions of ethics strive to present clear and rigorous argument, as Dale Wright has done in his account of karma. In contrast, "discussions of ethical issues in fiction tend to be concrete, rather than abstract, and to give a rich context for the distinctive moral views of choices that are portrayed. Literature therefore often presents a more nuanced view of character and circumstances than is to be found in the works of philosophers" (Singer and Singer 2005, x-xi). Charles Hallisey and Anne Hansen assert that in the comparison of the practical function of abstract doctrine and concrete stories, neither is "automatically more correct than the other" (1996, 311).

The two texts I will be examining are believed to date from a period after the majority of canonical texts were composed and established. The *Milindapañha* has canonical status in Burma as a part of the *Khuddhakanikāya*, and remains a key narrative in other Theravāda regions. And although the *Petavatthu* is canonical, its commentary was composed centuries later. The *Milindapañha* is assumed to be of North Indian origin—perhaps Sarvāstivādin. Although it no longer extant in Sanskrit or Northern Prakrit, King Milinda and the arahat Nāgasena are well-known in Southeast and East Asia.[37] This text was translated into Pāli sometime before Buddhaghosa (5th century CE, c. 430 CE, Cousins 1972, 163).[38] S. Dutt and A.L. Basham believe it was compiled after the time of King Milinda in the 1st century CE, and I.B. Horner estimates that it was "compiled, in India or Kashmir, some 300-400 years before" Buddhaghosa went to Sri Lanka (1963, xxi). Several Chinese versions are extant, a few long Pāli versions, as well as Sinhalese, Burmese, and Thai versions. These Chinese versions contain the first three books, the latter four added in Sri Lanka at different times beginning in the 5th century (Horner 1963, xxxi). The *Petavatthu* is thought to date from around the 2nd century BCE (Obeyesekere 2002, 139). The commentary, *Petavatthu-aṭṭhakātha*, is believed to have been written by Dhammapāla, a single author thought responsible for seven *Khuddakanikāya* commentaries. The dating for Dhammapāla is not certain and the Pāli Text Society suggests the 6th century CE, while De Silva prefers the early 7th century CE, and Cousins discusses several reasons why "Dhammapāla" might actually be three separate authors whose dates span the 5th to the 9th centuries (Cousins 1972, 159). In summary, what I will examine here are narratives from a predominantly Sri Lankan textual tradition dating from the 5th to the 9th centuries CE.

The *Milindapañha* and the punishment of kings

The *Milindapañha* is an epic debate between a king, born to smash weak and contradictory doctrines, and a monk born to defend the *dhamma* against him. Both come to this particular destiny in a humorous way (*Mld* 2-6). In their former lives (*pubbakamma*), King Milinda and the monk Nāgasena were members of the monastic order during the dispensation of the Buddha Kassapa. Every morning they would sweep out the monastery grounds. One morning, a monk (Nāgasena) asked a novice (Milinda) to take the sweepings out—but the novice pretended not to hear him. The angry monk hit the novice with a broom. Crying, the novice took the sweepings out, making an aspiration based on the meritorious act of taking out the trash: "may I…be powerful and glorious as the midday sun!" And later, while bathing in the Ganges: "may I…possess the power of saying the right thing, and saying it instantly, under any circumstance that may arise [*uppatti*], carrying all before me like this mighty surge!" (Rhys 3).[39] The unhappy novice

became, in due time, the powerful, glorious, and clever King Milinda. The monk became a deity who (after being asked by the god Sakka three times) agreed to be born in the human realm to defeat the clever king in debate.

In the course of their great debate, Nāgasena uses many metaphors and short episodes that provide information about specifc aspects of *kamma*. I hope to elaborate using four brief sections of the *Milindapañha*: "Devadatta goes forth" (107-113); "full of benefit for all beings" (164-167); "non-harm and punishment" (184-186); and "which is stronger: good[40] or bad action?" (290-294). In these episodes, Milinda presents a contradiction. In these four, Milinda questions the contradiction between the Buddha's all-knowing and all-compassionate when he appears to have recommended, or actually done, violence to another. In all cases, Nāgasena explains that the contradiction is apparent and resolves the king's doubt with analogies.

1. "Devadatta goes forth" (*devadattapabbājjajā*, 107-113):

King Milinda is puzzled: why did the Buddha ordain (*pabbājita*) Devadatta when he knew that he would commit the horrible act of splitting the monastic order?[41] Either the Buddha must not have foreseen that Devadatta would do this, or the Buddha does not always act for the welfare of beings. Nāgasena replies that the Buddha is both compassionate and omniscient, and displayed both by allowing Devadatta to be ordained. This is because the Buddha could see that Devadatta was destined to fall, limitlessly traversing from hell realm to hell realm, *niraya* to *niraya*. By ordaining him, the Buddha "limited" this future suffering.[42] The suffering of splitting the monastic order would be less than what his past evils would cause. Nāgasena explains that "limiting" is a special benefit of receiving ordination (*Mld* 107). Thus, due to the action of the Buddha, Devadatta will only boil (*paccissati*) in *niraya* hell for one eon rather than countless eons. Therefore, the Buddha is compassionate *(kāruṇika)*, merciful (*anukampaka*), and is one who causes benefit (*hitesin*) (Horner 108).

To explain this further to the King, Nāgasena gives an analogy using a few of the main characters that occur frequently in the text: king (*rājā*), thief (*cora*[43]), and Buddha or arahat. A thief is condemned to death by a king as punishment for his evil acts. On the way to the place where the thief would be put to death, a kind patron intervenes saying "take only a hand or a foot" (Rhys 109). Nāgasena explains that the kind patron has saved the thief's life, but the punishment of losing a hand is due to the thief's own past evil deeds (*attakāra*). In this analogy, the kind patron is the Buddha, and the thief, Devadatta. The death sentence of the king is the fruition of the thief's evil *kamma*. The Buddha gains no demerit (*apuñña*) by intervening. The mechanism described is one where the king acts as *kamma* when he punishes, and the Buddha acts against *kamma* to ease suffering and give life (*jīvitadāyaka*) (*Mld* 109). Nāgasena presents further analogies. The Buddha is compared to a skillful and clever surgeon (*kusala bhisakka sallakatta*) who does what harm is necessary for the final good of the patient (*Mld* 109). The Buddha as an influential man who with the power of words (*balavata vacana*) intervenes on a thief's behalf (*Mld* 110). The "evil-doing" (*āgucarin*) thief is given life by the powerful man's words, and any pain he experiences is because of his own actions (*attakāra*).

The Buddha, as surgeon or patron, intervenes in karmic punishment of the thief, the patient, and Devadatta, who cannot escape the "doing back" (*kammakāraṇa*) of their

own past evil deeds. He causes them to move "upstream" (*paṭisota*) against the momentum of their own actions, from fairing on the wrong path (*vipanthapaṭipanna*) to fairing on the right path, and gives them a foothold (*paṭṭha*) to avoid falling into lower realms of rebirth (Horner 113).

2. "full of benefit for all beings" (*sabbasattahitapharaṇa*, 164-167):

During a teaching on the *dhamma*, sixty monks had hot blood issue from their mouths and died. King Milinda is puzzled about how sixty monks came to harm by the actions of the Buddha (*Mld* 164). The Buddha either could not foresee this would happen, or he did not act for the welfare of beings. Nāgasena explains that it was not the action of the Buddha that caused those monks to die; it was from what the monks themselves had done (*attakāra*). Those monks had been "proceeding falsely" (*micchā paṭipannāna*) and this manifested on the occasion of the discourse on *dhamma*. Milinda jumps in, pointing out that their deaths occurred under the control and supervision of Buddha,[44] while he taught the *dhamma*. The term used is *adhikāra*, a term with a difficult range of meanings. It is translated as "ability," "power," "authority," or "capacity." Other translations include "supervision," "management," and "help" (*PTS* 27). Nāgasena disagrees. The Buddha, though it was his *adhikāra*, did not earn any demerit. This is because the Buddha exercised his *adhikāra* in the proper fashion, that is, he taught "liberated" from approval or repugnance (*anunaya-paṭighavippamutta*) (*Mld* 165). Those monks who were "proceeding falsely" fell by their own acts, and fell necessarily, so that others could be awakened.

Nāgasena presents several analogies to explain this. He first compares the Buddha to a farmer that must kill many grasses in order to cultivate his crop (the supreme benefit of *nibbāna*). He next describes the Buddha as a carpenter that must destroy and remove knots to create smooth wood (who makes timber "pure" and "perfect" *parisuddha*), and a presser of sugar cane that kills many small worms to get at the juice (Horner 166). Harm to some is portrayed as inevitable for the enlightenment of others. "And just, O king, as it is by their own acts [*attakatena*] that robbers [*corā*] come to have their eyes plucked out, or to impalement, or to the scaffold, just so were the evil-minded destroyed by their own act, and fell from the teaching of the [Buddha]" (Rhys 166).[45]

These analogies add to the picture of the Buddha. Here the Buddha provides the occasion for the manifestation of *kamma*. For those who fare rightly, this occasion is liberating. For those who fare wrongly, this occasion allows the consequences of their actions to manifest (and so they vomit hot blood). Those who are "thieves," who proceed wrongly and have committed evil acts, again suffer because of their own actions (*attakāra*). This suffering is inevitable in order to bring the supreme benefit (*nibbāna*) into the world, with the proviso that the Buddha will mitigate such suffering wherever possible. The Buddha by providing these "occasions" allows the benefit of some and the inevitable harm of others, but gains no demerit *(apuññakamma)*. I argue that the Buddha, and the king to the extent he acts in an analogous manner, despite intending the actions that cause harm, are not "acting" in the orthodox sense of intentionality and personal responsibility.

3. "non-harm and punishment" (*ahiṃsāniggaha*, 184-186):

Again king Milinda is confused about the relationship of non-harm and harm. Milinda sees a contradiction between that idea of "non-harm" (*ahiṃsa*) – which Nāgasena calls the essence of the *dhamma* – and the idea that a wise person should punish what ought to be punished (*Mld* 184). How can the Buddha simultaneously renounce and advocate harm? Nāgasena, as he does over and over again, explains that this contradiction between non-harm (*ahiṃsa*) and wise and just punishment (obviously involving harm[46]) is not really a contradiction at all. Nāgasena does not explain with an analogy here, but with a distinction between what is of the nature of dhamma and what is merely conventional.

He states that non-harm (*ahiṃsa*) is a "teaching of the *dhamma*" (*dhammadesanā*), an "admonition" (*anusatthi*).[47] When the Buddha said "punish" (*nigganhati*) this was merely "vernacular speech" (*bhāsā*).[48] The difference is that the first is an essential expression of *dhamma*, the second, a conventional saying. The meaning of this conventional saying is that certain things ought to be[49] "punished": unwholesome thoughts (*akusala citta*), unreasonable thoughts (*ayonisomanasikāra*), faring wrongly (*micchā paṭipanna*), the un-ariyan (*anariya*), and thieves (*cora*) (*Mld* 185). Milinda sees his chance and asks Nāgasena how should one "punish" a thief? With the mention of the thief, the king seems confident that he has caught Nāgasena in a contradiction at last. Nāgasena answers that punishment by rebuke (*paribhāsa*), "penalty" (*danḍa*[50]), banishment (*bandha*), and death (*ghāta*) ought to be applied to those who deserve them.[51] These items obviously enjoin the harm of thieves.

Nāgasena, of course, explains that there is a difference between the *dhamma* of the Buddha and the punishment of a thief, for a thief is punished by what they themselves have done and not on the recommendation of the Buddha. He asks the king if it would be possible "for a man who had done nothing wrong, and was walking innocently along the streets, to be seized and put to death by any wise person?" (Rhys 186). The king agrees that it would not be possible to seize an innocent. Nāgasena replies that the *dhamma* does not admonish the thief with death, nor the Buddha approve of it; it is by their own actions that they die.[52] Thus, "punishment" is not a teaching, but a description of the working of *kamma* manifesting itself as punishment by the wise (*matimant*)—who unable to punish those who have done nothing.

4. "which is stronger: good or bad action?" (*kusalākusalabalavatara*, 290-294):

The last puzzle of the king that I will examine here is about the relative strength of *kusala* action as opposed to *akusala* action. As we have seen, negative action (*pāpa, akusala*) plays out in the world without delay when it is facilitated by the wise, particularly by the king. King Milinda says that it can be observed in the world that those who do evil (*pāpa*)[53] attain punishment such that their hands and feet are cut off, red hot iron is placed in their skulls, abraiding the head with gravel until all that is left is a polished skull, and many other tortures[54] (*Mld* 290). Milinda argues that the immediacy of fruition—that night, the next day, as soon as they are apprehended—indicates that evil action is stronger than good action. He asks: "who, having given a gift with all its accessories to one (member of the Order) or to two or three or tour of five or ten or a hundred or a thousand or a hundred thousand, and experiencing here and now wealth or fame or happiness, (has received bliss in this life) by means of moral habit [*sīla*] or the carrying out of the Observance [*uposatha*]?" (Rhys 290). Milinda brushes aside Nāgasena's examples of six

persons who received bliss saying that "on one day alone I have seen ten men who have been impaled as the result of an evil deed…" (Rhys 291).

Nāgasena begins to explain the difference between *kusala* and *akusala* and why *kusala* actions are stronger. First, evil actions are limited and ripen quickly. Good acts ripen after a long time. It is analogues to slow-ripening rice in contrast to quickly growing grain. The rice is "fit for a king" (Horner 292). Milinda rejects his analogies and replies with his own: it is the warrior who wins quickly in battle, the physician who cures disease quickly, and the accountant who quickly arrives at the result. It is these that are strong and "powerful in the world" (Horner 292). Nāgasena explains that the *kamma* of both *kusala* and *akusala* are "to be experienced in a future state. Yet, because it is blamable, unskill is to be experienced here and now at the (proper) moment" (Horner 293).[55] This is due to the decree (*niyama*) of former kings that evil conduct "merits punishment." But no king has established a decree to reward, here and now, those who give gifts (*dāna*), guard moral habit (*sīla*), and keep *uposatha*. It is only because of the decree of kings that good actions are not experienced here and now (*Mld* 294).

These four dialogues suggest a basic model for the characteristic actions of king, thief, and Buddha or arahat, in respect to evil *kamma*. For the thief,[56] the model is discouraging. In all similar analogies the thief, the patient, and Devadatta, are portrayed as being unable to save themselves and move against the momentum of their *kamma*. The thief must depend on the paternalistic consideration of others, particularly of the arahat. For the Buddha or the arahat, the model that emerges is one of intercession and mitigation of evil *kamma*. For the king,[57] the model is one of obligation to punish[58] those who commit evil.

On Buddhist kingship in the *jātaka*, Juliane Schober notes that two models emerge. One, the Aśokan, depicts kings as protectors and patrons of the *saṅgha*. The other, the Vessantaran, depicts the king's extreme giving and sacrifice (1997, 9).[59] Based on the analogies in the *Milindapañha*, I suggest a third model where the king acts as the fruition of negative *kamma*, just as King Yama does in the lower realms. By punishing thieves the king manifests the fruit (*phala*) and result (*vipāka*) of negative action in this life, as soon after the commission of the act as possible (*Mld* 292-293). This is in part because negative actions are fundamentally different from positive *kusala* action,[60] and because the kings of this world have not decreed that good actions are to be rewarded.

It is difficult to ascertain whether these Yaman kings acquire negative (*akusala* or *pāpa*) *kamma* as a result of their intentional punitive actions. If kingship is similar to arahatship, then several questions can be raised. The event of ordination has the effect of "limiting" evil deeds as in the case of Devadatta. Does the king's consecration have the same effect on his violent, punitive actions? Nāgasena elsewhere compares the coronation of king and ordination of an arahat (*Mld* 357). Both ought to be fit, worthy, have reached the appropriate attainments, and gain for themselves "twofold honour" by undergoing coronation or ordination (Rhys 359). Through this process, both gain authority and mastery of certain areas, and an authority or power (*adhikāra*) to perform certain actions. The king "is master over the treatment of outlaws, is an independent ruler and lord, and does whatsoever he desires, and all the broad earth is subject to him" and the arahat is "master, ruler, and lord in the religion of the Conquerors, and all the virtues

of the Samanas are his" (Rhys 360). But it is not because of that authority that thieves are punished or arahats spew hot blood. The Buddha gains no demerit because he taught in a detached manner, without "approval or repugnance" (*anunaya-paṭighavippamutta*[61]) (*Mld* 165). Perhaps the king must also be free from such feelings to experience no repercussions. Someone who is "unfit" for ordination or coronation, however receive a "twofold punishment." The failed king is subject to the same tortures he was unfit to carry out, and he "would suffer mutilation, having his hands or his feet, or his hands and feet cut off, or his ears or his nose, or his ears and nose cut off," tortured in many ways (Rhys 357). The failed and expelled ordinand[62] becomes a hell-dweller, a hungry ghost (*peta*) "with no place of refuge to fly to, no protector to help him, groaning and weeping and crying out for mercy, shall he wander wailing o'er the earth!" (Rhys 357). If they are unfit, they are punished twice. Once by losing the role they had taken upon themselves, and once by taking on the role of their opposite. The king becomes the tortured thief; the failed monk becomes the suffering hungry ghost (*peta*). It is to the *peta* that I turn here.

The *Petavatthu-aṭṭhakātha* and the kindness of arahats

Sāriputta encountered a *petī*, a female hungry ghost, and the verses spoke by them are recorded in the *Petavatthu*. In the commentary to the *Petavatthu*, Dhammapāla tells a story to explain the circumstances that preceded these verses.

At one time, the *petī* was a young girl living in a village and family of non-believers and heretics. Their particular heresy[63] was the belief that action had no effect on one's liberation from *saṃsāra*. Accordingly, there is nothing to do but endure *saṃsāra* until the time arrives for liberation. Sāriputta, accompanied by twelve arahats, was traveling the road near her village (Kyaw 67). When Sāriputta encountered her as a young girl of seven or eight, he immediately perceived her past. He saw that she, due to her wrong views (*micchādiṭṭhi*) and evil deeds (*pāpakamma*) had been cycling between birth in the heretical village and the realm of King Yama as a *petī*. The *petī* fell into Yama's realm because she killed many insects.[64] Having suffered there horrible hunger and thirst (*khuppipāsādidukkha*), she arose again as a girl in the same family of "heretics" (*micchādiṭṭhika*) and "non-believers" (*assaddhākula*). Sāriputta also saw that the *petī* was worthy of arising only (*āyatiñca*) in hell (just as Devadatta was). The elder felt compassion for her suffering.

As Sāriputta walked past where the *petī* and the other village girls were playing, all of the girls except the *petī* approached the elder and performed the "five-fold prostration" (*pañcapatiṭṭhitena*)[65] with "devotion in their hearts" (*pasannamānasā*). But that *petī* remained standing: "disrespectful and lacking the good manners of virtuous people by not having collected skilled deeds for a long time, remained standing like one undisciplined."[66] Sāriputta could discern her suffering in the past and her future births in hell. He thought: "If this one would salute me, she would not arise in *niraya*,[67] but, having arisen among the *peta* she will attain success [*sampatti*] through me" (*PvA* 68). Sāriputta, "heart stirred with compassion" (*karuṇāsañcoditamānasa*), said to the girls saluting him that the girl over there "stands like one undisciplined" (*alakkhikā viya ṭhitā*).[68] "Then those girls grabbed her by the hands, dragged her forward and, with the use of force [*balakkārena*], made her salute at the elder's feet" (Kyaw 68). Sāriputta, by instigating a forceful and violent act, changed the direction of her future rebirths.

In due course, she arises not in hell, but as a hungry ghost, naked (*naggā*), discolored body (*dubbaṇṇarūpā*), overwhelmed with hunger and thirst, and extremely disgusting to behold (*ativiya bībhacchadassanā*). In this state, she shows herself to Sāriputta and tells him that she has "gone to a miserable existence in the world of Yama; having done a wicked deed, I have gone from here to the world of the *petas*" (Kyaw 67)[69] Sāriputta questioned her, "What evil act (*pāpakamma*) was done by you by body (*kāya*), speech (*vācā*), or mind (*manasa*) that resulted (*kammavipāka*) in your birth in the *peta* world?" (Kyaw 69). In reply the *petī* explains that she has been greedy (*maccharin*) and ungenerous (*adānasīla*),[70] that she had no father or mother, no relatives to urge her to give to renunciates.[71] She then salutes and venerates Sāriputta with a devoted heart (*pasannacitta*)—the same act she was unable to perform as a young human child. She begs him to act with compassion for her (as relatives would) and give something to the saṅgha, assigning (*uddisati*) the donation to her (*dakkhiṇā*). Sarīputta makes a donation[72] to the *saṅgha* himself, giving to the monks a mouthful of food, a handful of cloth, and a bowlful of water. The result was "reborn" as divine food, clothing, and drink for the *petī* (Kyaw 70).

Again she shows herself to Sāriputta. She tells him that her good deed (*puññakamma*) was the gift of Sāriputta, who saw her and gave to the monks on her behalf.[73] The mouthful has been reborn as one thousand years of delicious food, the piece of cloth as more silk, wool, linen, and cotton than can fill a great kingdom, and the bowlful of water as beautiful, four-cornered lotus ponds (Kyaw 72). She has come again to salute Sāriputta this time as a deity (*devatā*).

In the first part of the text, the *petī* falls because her wrong views cause her to kills many living things. In the second, she falls because she lacked a family that would have taught her to revere and give to the *saṅgha*. Non-reverence, non-giving, wrong views, and killing all flow into one another for this one "undisciplined" (*āsikkhitā*), from a "family of without faith" (*assadhākula*). It is common for the ungenerous to become hungry ghosts (*peta*) through a lack of charity to the *saṅgha*. The *saṅgha* acts as a special medium to transfer the food, clothing, or other donations to the normally unseen world of minor divinities and ghosts that impinges on our own. This food can be stored up for one's own use after death, or given by a relative or friend if one has no such store.

Just as Nāgasena plays on the word "punish" (*niggaṇhati*) in his replies to the king, so Sāriputta here plays on the word "excellence" (*sampatti*). The excellence the *petī* received came in the form of food, clothing, water, and a beautiful appearance. It also came in the form of an increase in devotion and discipline, becoming able to venerate him, she acted towards Sāriputta in a way she was unable to before. *Sampatti*, in addition to "happiness, bliss, and fortune" also refers to the "three higher states"—human birth, divine birth, or *nibbāna*. Here it could refer to the *petī*'s attainment of the three higher states, since it is opposed to *niraya*, *petaloka*, and *yamaloka* in the narrative or to her receipt of beauty, and divine food and water. More likely, however, the unqualified *sampatti* is a play on words. *Sampatti* refers to both worldly and spiritual attainments: beauty, prosperity, comfort, as well as and the opposite of the corruptions and influxes (*vipatti*[74]). The ambiguity suggests—but does not state—here a movement from ugliness to beauty, from deprivation to comfort, and from corruption to the purity of *nibbāna*.

The *petī*, like the thief, requires the intervention of the arahat, whether it is the Buddha or Sāriputta. Arahats act as they do out of concern and compassion for the suffering they see. They are able to see past and future and act as they must without attachment or revulsion. When they do so, the *petī* and the *cora* gain their lives—though both must undergo some measure of the fruition of their former deeds: the *cora* loses his hands and feet, the *petī* dies in childbirth and arises as a hungry ghost. Neither can save themselves from the weight of their evil *kamma* and must rely on an arahat. As they are released from destinies that tend always lower, arahats thwart King Yama and worldly kings, who cannot enact the punishments that *petī* and *cora* deserve. *Kamma* is thus frustrated by arahats, and ordinary beings benefit by it.

Storied *kamma*

The analogies of Nāgasena and the story of the *petī* display many characteristics common to Theravāda stories. These stories most often concern a few individual characters and revolve around the occasions that one character told a story to another.[75] They are concrete and detailed accounts of individuals that highlight respective roles as well as Buddhist ideas. Buddhist concepts "are woven into the dialogues of the Buddha that deal essentially with the nature of existence and the transcendence of the everyday world. The Buddhist dialogues…have dramatis personae whose roles must be unfolded before we can begin to appreciate their content" (Obeyesekere 2002, 124). Each story, though they differ considerably in length, begins with a story of former deeds (*pubbakamma*), and culminates with a conversation between two main characters, and ends happily with the conversion of King Milinda and the "excellence" (*sampatti*) of the *petī*-turned-*devatā*. Both display the tendency of Pāli works to play with the meaning of words and images. In the *Milindapañha*, the model of action and character is given mainly through analogy. In the *Petavatthu-aṭṭhakathā*, it is given in the chronology of the narrative and in the actions of its characters. It is my contention that the particular style of these Theravāda narrative conventions are not superfluous but integral to the meaning of moral action. I would like to conclude this preliminary study by commenting on the possible implications of these devices for understanding moral action.[76]

1. Acts

These stories suggest that the actions "veneration of a monk" and "punishment by a king" belong to a special class, that is, the acts themselves have a special status and power. The ritual veneration of monks is a meritorious act, but *puññakamma* is normally thought to accrue only to intentional actions not merely formal ones.[77] The *petī*'s "five-fold prostration" (*pañcapatiṭṭhitena*) is a specific ritual act where the body touches the ground in five places. It is enacted not by her, and certainly not intended by her, but is an act that creates merit causing her to be born as a *petī* rather than in hell. Interestingly, the other actions of the *petī* are quite intentional and create *kamma* according to the orthodox understanding. She originally falls by wrongly killing insects, and after she is forced to venerate Sāriputta, she is able to perform the *pañcapatiṭṭhitena* with the correct intention and emotion. The unintentional act occurs between her intentional evil and intentional good, marking the pivotal moment when her story changes. After she is made to venerate the arahat, she turns against the momentum of her past *kamma*. The punishment applied by kings is similar in structure to forced ritual veneration. The king's well-timed and

appropriate words bring about the death of torture of thieves. This is parallel to Sāriputta's well-timed and appropriate words that force the *petī* to be prostrated. Both are intentional acts that participate in violence, but neither plants negative *kamma* in the actor.

The merely formal prostration of the *petī* conforms to a sense of ritual action, but if the parallels between *petī* and thief, as well as those between king and arahat, are pursued, to what extent is it possible to see ritualization in Sāriputta's words, in the king's duty, or even in the undergoing of punishment? These narratives contain both intentional and ritualized conceptions of action.

2. Roles

In addition to specific actions, ritual and intention have a part to play in the creation of specific roles. Arahat and king are both able and expected to perform certain actions on the basis of undergoing rituals of ordination and coronation, as well as their worthiness to hold the position those rituals inaugurated. Ordination and coronation have the character of an initiation, where the subject is separated from, and established in, a new identity. Post-initiation, king and arahat act intentionally according to the vows that structure their respective professions. As a result, their actions do not create *kamma* for them. Perhaps these special roles are best captured by the difficult term *adhikāra*, meaning management, authority, capacity, etc. It was under the *adhikāra* of the Buddha that sixty monks died, though they died because of their own *kamma*. When king and arahat act with prescribed *adhikāra*, their actions devolve onto and belong to their patients: the *petī* (the one forced) or the *cora* (the one punished). In the case of the *cora*, punishment is the fruition of past *kamma*, in the case of the *petī*, veneration plants the seeds for future *kamma*.

The way that these roles function is similar to Peter Harvey's description of gradualism in Buddhist ethics. Harvey refers to a metaphor used in the *Aṅguttaranikāya* (1.249-253) where salt in a glass of water makes it undrinkable, but salt in the Ganges is unnoticeable. Salt is evil conduct and the person of lesser attainment is like a glass of water. They suffer great consequences in comparison with the person of greater attainment who is affected less (2000, 25-26). The greater the worth and attainment, the less effect negative *kamma* will have. If we combine this notion of graduated worth with the ritual initiations of arahat and king, the resulting model approaches how these actors are portrayed in the two stories. A cultivated monastic who has undertaken vows or a wise and consecrated king are of a different moral status that an ordinary person. By means of a combination of ritual and intentional cultivation they possess *adhikāra*, the power to manage and direct the manifestation of *kamma* without participating in the ordinary mechanism of acquiring it. Both arahat and king have special duties and capacities as a result of their initiations, and the actions taken in accordance with those duties—even when they are violent—do not occasion a "two-fold punishment." Yet the king is punishing those who commit violent acts! Punishment of the immoral thief is simply what the wise should do and what, as king, he is able to do. There is a complex interplay here between intention, form, and the change in the agent over time.

Despite the many similarities between king and the arahat, there are also important differences. The king acts in accordance with *kamma* and manifests its punishments, while the arahat acts to frustrate it. Because of this, the king's punishment takes on some of the character of *kamma*: impersonal, inevitable, and retributive. As I

suggested above, the worldly king acts in the same way as King Yama. In contrast, the Arahat takes on the character of those who act as intercessors: compassionate, sympathetic, professional, skilled, and paternal. Arahats take the proper action to alleviate the worst of the suffering that awaits the greedy and wrong-viewed. They are the doctors and kind patrons.

The other side of "gradualism" in the capacity of agents, is that some are less able, impaired or afflicted. The thief, the young girl, and Devadatta all committed intentional evil acts. They are all portrayed as being unable, as lacking the *adhikāra*, to change the direction of their future experiences and future rebirth. This notion of incapacity is strongly suggested by the sick patient in the medical analogies used in the *Milindapañha*.

3. Timing

In addition to action and role, Theravāda stories evince a strong concern with timing, that is, they confirm that the Buddha and his disciples choose the appropriate occasion for action, and for the telling of further stories. The "right" time or "appropriate" time appears frequently in commentarial literature as *aṭṭhuppatti*,[78] or "arisen need," understood as "the occasion for (proper) interpretation and meaning." After his encounter with the *petī*, Sāriputta tells the story to her village having recognized the right moment, *aṭṭhuppatti*. As a result, the heretics and non-believers of the village convert and he accepts them as lay followers of the Buddha. The Buddha later tells the same story to the arahats, recognizing and acting in the appropriate moment: "The Lord took the matter as an arisen need [*aṭṭhuppatti*] and taught Dhamma to the company assembled there. That teaching was of benefit to those people" (Kyaw 77-78). Dhammapāla's commentary is a story told to readers and listeners—of the Buddha telling the story about Sāriputta and the heretical *petī* to the assembly of arahats—of a story which Sāriputta told to an assembly of heretical villagers, releasing them from their non-belief—about an encounter where Sāriputta recognizes the opportunity to speak and thus, save, the *petī*. The *Milindapañha* displays the same format of are stories within stories. The trick to telling them is the *aṭṭhuppatti*, the occasion. This theme of stories, their first telling and continued tellings, stories inside of other stories, is a feature of Theravāda narrative that tended to increase over time. Obeyesekere quotes E.W. Burlingame on the nature of Buddhist commentaries: "The verbal glasses begin to shrink both in size and importance and the stories begin to grow. Finally as in the case of the *Dhammapada Commentary* the exegesis of the text becomes a matter of secondary importance…to all intents and purposes what was once a commentary has become nothing more or less than a huge collection of legends and folk tales" (1991, xiv).

This concern with timing has several dimensions. There is the actual timing of physical actions in stories, such Sāriputta's well-timed words to the *petī*'s playmates or the wise king's swift punishments. Sāriputta recognized the opportunity to save the *petī*-as-young-girl, but could not save her immediately. His timely actions set up the conditions for her to become a ghost and thus susceptible to Sāriputta's further intervention on her behalf through the medium of donations to the *saṅgha*. Another is the emphases provided by telling stories-within-stories particularly when their audiences are monks and kings. I would like to suggest that this feature of Theravāda story increases

the normative impact of the story itself. Story is told to an audience because it is appropriate for them to know and because they will benefit by it. The story of the *petī* is told to monks, who would be encouraged to act in the same manner as Sāriputta. The analogies of the thief and his just punishments are told to king Milinda, who would be encouraged to act in the same manner as the wise king. This impact is further extended to the external audiences[79] that participate in the stories-within-stories in reading, ritual, and drama.

These stories present multiple understandings of *kamma* framed by the peculiar normative character of act, role, and timing. I suggest that in the case of specific acts, ritual understandings are not opposed to intentional ones. Both occur in sequence or simultaneously in the narrative and serve a vital roll in the moment towards "excellence." Birthplace, family, sex, initiation, and profession do have moral relevance. On the upper end of a graduated scale, stand the king and arahat. I cast the fusion of ritual and intentional undertakings that establish their professions in terms of *adhikāra*. On the opposite side of *adhikāra*, however, are the thief and *petī*. These stories paint a bleak picture of their moral capacity, and in the narratives they must depend on the paternal consideration of others. For timing, the Pāli term *aṭṭhuppatti* captured the sense of perfect-timing for teaching, telling stories, skilful interjection, and wise decree. Each of these concrete and particular elements forms part of the *Milindapañha* and the *Petavatthuaṭṭhakathā*. In the space of one essay it is impossible to touch on all the dimensions these and similar stories present. I hope that in future studies attention might be devoted to the question of women and children and the roles they play, the idea of giving or acting by proxy where merit is ascribed to another by a proper ritual formula, the connection between merit and food transactions with the deceased, and further examination of narrative as forum for resolving moral questions, a type of Theravāda casuistry, as suggested by Hallisey and Hansen (1996, 323).

Two projects

I began by describing two ways to discuss karma: one that identifies orthodoxy and discards alternatives, and a second that acknowledges the multiple theories of karma included in Theravāda texts, particularly in stories. Wright presents an argument of the first type, dividing karma into its ethically useful descriptions of habitual action and its harmful rebirth-belief accretions. He has strong reasons to prefer this orthodox type, however, because he is engaged in a philosophical and normative project of identifying those good and useful notions of karma.[80] In his argument, it is most useful to discard rebirth. The second type of argument about karma suggests the opposite: that resolving the problems posed by rebirth is not possible, but that rebirth by no means limits the forms of action portrayed by the tradition. The second, inclusive, manner of conceiving karma is based on the models of Obeyesekere and Egge. This model allowed me to take the multiple modes of action present in narrative episodes as unproblematic from the first, which opened different questions. If there are multiple modes, is there a distinction between who engages in them? In answer, I have found that certain characters have the capacity to perform action without karmic consequence, but that these actions are contextualized within a role-based duties, intentional undertakings, as well as within the ritual initiations of arahat and king. The "who" matters a great deal. If there are different

modes of action, is one sort better than the other? These narratives suggest that one sort of action is not necessarily better than another. The balance and shades of ritual and intentional action apply to characters throughout the human and non-human realms of rebirth. And if the right moment arises, it could be the compassionate *kamma* of others that change our course in spite of intentions to the contrary.

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[1] The material for this paper was gathered in preparation for a course taught at McGill University in the Fall of 2004 entitled "Theravāda Buddhist Literature: Stories." I would like to acknowledge the hard work and insight of my students who engaged with me in the interpretation of story. I would also like to thank Gwynn Kirk and Patricia Campbell for their comments while preparing this essay.

[2] *Aṅguttaranikāya* 10.69, cited by Ñāṇatiloka (1980, 334).

[3] *Kamma* is the Pāli version of the Sanskrit *karma*. I will follow the usage of the scholar or text under discussion, where most scholars use *kamma* to refer to the Theravāda tradition and to Pāli texts, and karma when discussing Buddhism in general.

[4] See *Routledge* (1998, "Karma") and *PTS* (190-194). These additional meanings come into play when discussing ritual acts, and actions of ordained or initiated agents, both of which emerge from the stories I will discuss below.

[5] See *Routledge* (1998, "Karma"). James McDermott cites the "recurring definition of *kamma* as *cetanā*" (1977, 464), and Obeyesekere: "only intentional and ethically motivated actions have karmic effects" (Obeyesekere 2002, 130). As an example of how this emphasis on intentionality is maintained, McDermott (1977, 464) cites an episode in the *Milindapañha* where an agent "unknowingly" (*ajānato*) performs an act, and because of this, suffers worse karmic consequences, like someone who unknowingly grasps a red-hot iron ball. McDermott holds that this episode refers to intentional action without knowledge (*ajānato*) of its harmful consequences. In another example, Gombrich explains that the "bank account" notion of merit transference—though aberrant—is consistent with intentionality; one intentionally gives merit to another (1971, 279). Even for these ambiguous cases, Gombrich and McDermott both take intentionality to be fundamental.

[6] *Mld* (65). All page references use the pagination of the Pāli Text Society edited Pāli language texts.

[7] Also translated as "refuge" (*Mld* 65).

[8] Obeyesekere (2002, 131) and McDermott (1984, 2). McDermott (1984, 2 note 4) also quotes the *Aṅguttaranikāya* 3.72: "Possessed of my own deeds, I am the inheritor of deeds, kin to deeds, one who has deeds as a refuge. Whatever deed I shall do, whether good or evil, I shall become the heir of it." This formula is repeated in many places in canonical texts.

[9] See Gombrich (1971). Similar to what McDermott identifies as a *Sutta-piṭaka* stage of Buddhist merit theory (1977, 460).

[10] See also Gombrich (1971, 251-254), and *BDict* ("ineffective karma," 24).

[11] King Duṭṭhagamāni (Gombrich 1971, 253) is considered the only non-Arhat example according to Gombrich. Despite his killing and violence, because he acted to establish the *sāsana* and for the

dhamma, his negative actions were superceded. Gombrich's monastic informants disagreed about whether Duṭṭhagāmāṇi would escape the consequences of his actions.

[12] It is a controversial topic as to whether the transference of merit can be said to exist in Theravāda Buddhism. McDermott calls the transfer of merit a truly Mahāyāna doctrine (1977, 462), while King calls it "merit-sharing" rather than "transfer of merit" though he notes that "collective merit" and the *Petavatthu* are exceptions to this rule (1964, 50-51). In the texts examined here, merit and offerings may be directly ascribed to another.

[13] Others include the Nāgasena's description of merit like water from a great rain cloud, that pours down into the fields and crevices, spreading widely (*Mld* 296), and Buddhaghosa's description of merit as a candle lighting another, and another, and another, actually increasing the amount of total merit in the world (King 1964, 52). For extended discussions of merit see Gombrich (1971, 265-284) and Keyes (1983b).

[14] See Keyes (1983a), Tambiah (1977), and Gombrich (1971).

[15] In this, I am reminded of attempts to remove all of the supernatural elements from the lifestory of the Buddha. These readings of Buddhist texts subjected them to criteria that determined whether events in the lifestory were plausible. For a brief summary of revisionings of the lifestory of the Buddha, see John Strong (2001, 1-4, 149-153). For a discussion of the use of "natural" to oppose "metaphysical" and "supernatural" see Schilbrack (2005).

[16] Wright's psychological theory for the origin of karma joins a broad controversy. Obeyesekere (2002) has recently hypothesized that the rebirth system was inherited from small-scale, local groups that predate Buddhism and that karma represents a later development of that rebirth system. And others argue that karma is a reinterpretation of ritual action present in the *Upaniṣads*.

[17] Wright sees the "contortions that Buddhist intellectuals went through in the process of explaining what rebirth might mean" in relation to no-self and impermanence as proof that rebirth is not a necessary idea (2004, 88).

[18] I accept the contention that values and ethics are not intelligible without a metaphysical worldview. See Schilbrack (2005), Geertz (1983), and Tambiah (1970). Each argues that ethics and metaphysics are not separable.

[19] The internal results of choice and their action over time to cultivate moral character is the aspect of karma that Wright calls "naturalistic" (90). Wright's preferred version of karma is very similar to the *kusala-akusala* discourse of mental purification described by Egge (2002). See below.

[20] Gombrich (1971, 261).

[21] Obeyesekere's theory of the emergence of karma is complex, and I am unable to present it, with all its qualifications, in the space I have here.

[22] Obeyesekere discusses karmic determinism and its aporias. See Keyes discussion of karma as simultaneously forward-looking agency and backward-looking fate (1983b).

[23] Obeyesekere is remarkably consistent in holding that aporia are not "popularizations" but rather present from the beginning, part of the process of ethicization. The one exception to this is the comments he makes regarding practices of feeding the dead. For him, texts such as the *Petavatthu* "reflected monk responses to the demands of laypeople" (2002, 139). I see no discontinuity between the Buddha and his disciples mediating in food and clothing transactions between the living and the dead and other practices where they bridge worlds of living and dead such as giving predictions for followers curious about the status of their deceased family and clan-group members. The Buddha and arahats regularly discussed past lives and future rebirths of both monastics and laypersons in early texts and concern for the dead is not limited to the laity. See Obeyesekere "The Buddha as Seer" (2002, 160-164). For the social functions of these transactions between the living and the dead, see Julie Gifford (2003).

[24] Obeyesekere (2002) identifies several aporia: for ordinary beings punishment in this life may be due to a "nonspecifiable" bad karma or to another cause entirely (131-132); for ordinary beings, one's past karma is "unknowable" (132-133); continued propitiation of deities and transference of merit (134); the problem of evil and suffering (135); *pirittas* or "protections" from the recitation of Buddhist texts (136); merit-making to counteract bad karma (137); transferring merit (as food, clothing, etc.) to the dead (138-139); intentions or wishes, especially those made the moment of death (139).

[25] Robert Campany discusses the way metaphors and analogies structure discourse by introducing an understanding of function. He looks particularly at how "religions" are talked about. They are discussed as entities ("ists" and "isms") which implies unity, coherence, identifiability, organization, and persistence in time (291-294). Entity metaphors serve as powerful tools to generalize and identify data, but they obscure processes, dissention, diversity, and change over time. Religions are also talked about as living organisms "often plants" (294-296). These religions grow, mature, absorb, are transplanted, flourish, have roots, live, and exist as seeds or embryos. The organic development and holism present in these metaphors also obscures diversity and dissention, while highlighting change over time. Religions are talked of as agents (296-297). They know, act, see, fail, offer, etc. These metaphors serve to undercut the agency of individuals and groups. It obscures "textual and ritual skirmishes over time by multiple historical agents…as the work of a single, but impersonal agent" (297). Campany continues with market and economic metaphors, military metaphors, including road, founder, teachings, and law metaphors from Chinese texts. Each metaphor highlights and obscures, it structures how we imagine the referent to work. As we have seen, Buddhist stories rely heavily on analogy and metaphor to explain doctrines. I would like to thank my colleague, Ethan Lindsay, who directed me to this excellent article.

[26] "For just as pouring a sacrificial oblation into Agni, the sacrificial fire, resulted in that offering being transferred, through the medium of Agni, to the world of the devas, so similarly does the placing of food in the [*saṅgha*] result in the appearance of that food, or its divine counterpart, in the world beyond for one's own use after death" (Masefield, in Kyaw vii). McDermott, B.C. Law, and Egge all remark on the influence of *śrāddhā* practices on feeding the dead on Buddhism.

[27] Brief summary of Egge, "The Discourse of Sacrifice" (2002, 13-39).

[28] See also Huxley (1995).

[29] Egge focuses his study on the *Petavatthu* and the *Vimaṇavatthu*, as well as a medieval Burmese story collection, the *Sīhaḷavatthuppakaraṇa* (2002, 101-114).

[30] Keyes relies particularly on Stanley Tambiah's (1970) work where ritual specialists in Northern Thailand juxtapose, in their personal performance, textual knowledge and ritual knowledge.

[31] When stories have been read for their import, it has been for the sociological data they might provide about early Buddhist communities (Hallisey and Hansen 1996, 309). For an interesting critique of sociological readings of Buddhist texts, see Gregory Schopen (1997).

[32] Hallisey and Hansen draw on the work of Paul Ricouer and Martha Nussbaum. Writing on ethical thought in Greek literature, she views the works of tragic poets "as ethical reflection in their own right, embodying in both their content and their style a conception of human excellence" (Nussbaum 1986, 13). Hallisey and Hansen note that many scholars are working to address this neglect of story. They mention John Strong and Gananath Obeyesekere. Others include Ranjini Obeyesekere, Juliane Schober, Alan Sponberg, Helen Hardacre, Phylllis Granoff and Koichi Shinohara – to mention a few.

[33] In addition to healing and transformation, there are several dimensions of story that I will not be addressing here. In particular, the didactic function of story where participating in story constitutes a kind of moral education. Singer and Singer (2005, x-xi) point out arguments that the value of a story should be based on those values it inculcates. See Hallisey and Hansen (1996, 307-308).

[34] Hallisey and Hansen label these last two items *prefiguration* and *configuration* after Paul Ricouer (1996, 308). They also look to Ricoeur's idea that we have a limited number of "imaginative practices" that make others accessible to us. Prominent among these is utopia: the no-place upon which human society is analogically projected (Hallisey and Hansen 1996, 312). These scholars seem to have an idealized view of the effect of narrative. Or perhaps, they hold that it is "good" stories take us out of ourselves, reduce self-centeredness, and promote other-directedness.

[35] See Hallisey and Hansen's discussion of the story of Bandhula and Mallikā (1996, 317-319).

[36] Singer and Singer give the example of Plato's invisible man (Gyges the shepherd) and Benjamin Constant's fugitive (2005, x).

[37] Milinda (Menander) was the Bactrian king of the Pundjat c. 150 BCE (Demiéville 1924). There are several Chinese names for Nāgasena and for King Milinda. See Behrsing (1934).

[38] Rhys Davids also estimates for the flourishing of Buddhaghosa c. 430 CE (1890, xvi).

[39] These constitute Milinda's *patthāna* ([1971], 254-259): "earnest wish" or "fervent rebirth-wish." Found in both the formal vow to become a Buddha, and in expressed desires to be reborn in heaven, with wealth, to be attractive to women, to understand the *dhamma*, to be reborn with Metteyya, etc. For Gombrich, these wishes are untenable because they express "desire" for enlightenment. He calls such wishes "wildly undoctrinal" and "foreign to Buddhism" (1971, 261). Related to this is the special potency of death-bed wishes and dying moments, which include the recollection of merit and enactment of desired rebirth. See also Gombrich's discussion of "acts of truth" (*saccakiriyā*) and *piritta* (1971, 263-264).

[40] For issues regarding the translation and use of *kusala*, see Keown (1992) and Cousins (1996).

[41] Commit *saṅghabheda*, one of the 5 heavy evil acts (*ānantarika-kamma*) in Theravāda Buddhism for which there is immediate retribution. Ñāṇatiloka (*BDict* 30) lists these as "actions with immediate destiny": parricide, matricide, killing a Arahat, wounding a Buddha, and causing a schism (*saṅghabheda*). He sees the list as a later formulation, from compilation of the *Abhidhamma*. See also *Mld* (25).

[42] Devadatta had performed an "unlimited" (*āparāpariyaka*) deed so evil that he would be born in hell continuously. Thus, ordaining him was the only way to save him (Horner 109).

[43] *Cora*, "thief" or "robber," occurs several times in the text (*Mld* 20, 32, 110-111, 122, 157, 158, 166-167, 196, 203, 277, 293, 321, 391, 410).

[44] In modern arguments, it has been translated as a legal or moral "right." Horner translates it as "main cause."

[45] *yathā mahārāja corā attakatena cakkhuppāṭanaṃ sōlāropaṇaṃ sīsacchedanaṃ pāpuṇanti, evameva kho mahārāja ye te micchā paṭipannā te attakatena haññanti, jinasāsanā patanti* (*Mld* 166).

[46] *Niggaṇhāti*, "to restrain or rebuke" (*PTS* 354; *Mld* 184). Milinda describes "restraint" as "the cutting off of hands, the cutting off of the feet," various ways of killing (Horner 185).

[47] Horner (185). Rhys Davids has "that verse is an injunction, an unfolding of the Dhamma, for the Dhamma has as its characteristic that it works no ill." See *PTS* (43, 330).

[48] Horner translates *bhāsā* as "symbolic language," Rhys Davids as "a special use of terms [which you have misunderstood]" (185). See *PTS* (503).

[49] The optative forms that imply "ought" occur throughout this passage. It is not possible to firmly separate "is" statements from "ought" statements in the dialogue.

[50] The translation of *daṇḍa* as "fine" is rather narrow. It refers literally to a stick of wood used for punishment or beating, and figuratively as "a fine, a penalty, penance in general" *PTS* (312). The distinctive feature of *daṇḍa* is often violent means.

[51] Horner takes this list to be entirely mental in nature and *cora* to refer to a class of false arahats (*theyyasaṃvāsaka*) (186 note 3). Rhys Davids agrees (186 note 1). Yet the list refers to wrong practice, the *ariyan* mode of life, and the thievish mode of life. I take the terms in this list to refer to a spectrum of "restraint" that includes physical punishment and the term "thief" (*cora*) to beings who pursue wrong views and modes of life. I agree with Rhys Davids that "punish" more accurately reflect the play on words Nāgasena makes.

[52] *yo so mahārāja ghātiyati no so tathāgatānaṃ anumatiyā ghātiya, sayaṃkatena so ghātiyati* (*Mld* 186)

[53] The list includes those who commit sexual misconduct (*kamesu micchācārin*), those who take what is not given (*adinnadāyin*), liars (*musāvāsin*), those who slaughter in the village (*gāmaghātaka*), highwaymen (*panthadūsaka*), cheats (*nekatika*), and swindlers (*vañcaka*) (Horner 290).

[54] This full page list of torments is remarkably similar to descriptions of hell realms and the torments of Aśoka's prison.

[55] *ubhayam pi taṃ mahārāja kammaṃ samparāyavedaniyaṃ yeva, api ca akusalaṃ sāvajjatāya khaṇena diṭṭhadhammavedaniyaṃ hoti. pubbakehi mahārāja khattiyehi ṭhapito eso niyamo* (*Mld* 293).

[56] The term for thief is *cora*, see also *thenaka*, *takkara*. Under the entry for *kamma* (PTS 192), evil acts make a thief: *pāpakānaṃ kammānaṃ hetu coraṃ rājāno gāhetvā vividhā kammakāraṇā kārenti* "for his evil deeds the kings seize the thief and has him punished" (A.1.48). Note that the

term for punishment (*kammakāraṇa*) here is the same as the technical term for *kamma* itself holding the wrong-doer responsible. Other quotes regarding punishment are listed. *Cora* is often used in similes and metaphors.

[57] Kings are viewed ambiguously. Some texts support the use of punishment, violence, armies, etc. by a wise and discerning king, while others suggest that violence is never necessary and a king's violent acts are a cause of suffering and untimely death in the world. To note this distinction, Rhys Davids' translates *rājā* as either "wise king" or "despot." See also Harvey (2000, 346-347): *Agaññasutta* (D.3.92) talks about the "first king" being elected specifically to punish wrong-doers and preserve social order; in contrast, *Cakkavattisīhanādasutta* (D.3.58-79) describes ideal kings as ruling in accordance with *dhamma* – conquering without violence; *Sūtra of Golden Light* (*Suvarṇaprabhāsasūtra*): a king acts "to demonstrate the fruition and fruit of acts that are well-done or ill-done," in other words, they are consecrated that they might punish. Punishment by kings appears alongside karmic retribution in hell and natural disaster in lists of sufferings or painful things. See also Hallisey's discussion of King Siri Sanga Bo (1996).

[58] This is both a narrative and historical role as Rhys Davids states: "it is yet clear that the actual apportionment of punishment (as well as the execution of it) was always held to be the sole prerogative of the king. This was more especially the case where mutilation or a death sentence was concerned. Minor punishments the judges could, no doubt, order without reference to the king" (246).

[59] Similar to Egge's notion of the heroic mode of action noted above.

[60] For example, negative actions cannot be shared but positive actions can, like pouring water. See Nāgasena's explanations of gifts made to the deceased (*peta*) (*Mld* 294-297).

[61] *Anunaya* means "leading along" or "friendliness" (*PTS* 37) in the sense of conduct or judgement that (improperly) inclines toward another. And *paṭigha*, means "repulsion" or "anger" (*PTS* 393), indicating again, an inappropriate rejection or disinclination regarding another.

[62] I use "ordinand" because it is unclear how an arahat can fail, losing the good they have. The passage portrays a strong connection between ordination and arahatship, and is not systematic in identifying at what point, or even if, arahatship could be lost. Wise king and despot display a similar ambiguity.

[63] Saṃsāramocaka heretics (*saṃsāramocakā micchādiṭṭhikā*): "delivering / setting free from *saṃsāra*." From the villages of Iṭṭhakāvāti and Dīgharājī (in Magadha). Related to the "purification through transmigration" (*saṃsārasuddhi*) belief that there is no use in action, only to wait for destiny to work itself out. It is a form of fatalism (Masefield, note 1, Kyaw 78).

[64] *bahū kīṭapaṭaṅge jīvitā voropetvā* (PvA 73).

[65] A full bow where knees, hands and forehead touch the ground (Masefield, note 2, Kyaw 78). A five-fold veneration where forehead, waist, elbows, knees, feet are arrayed (*PTS* 388).

[66] *cirakālaṃ aparicitakusalatāya sādhujanācā ravirahitā anādarā alakkhikā viya aṭṭhāsi* (Kyaw 67). This passage contains sacrificial, kammic and purificatory discourses. See Egge (2002) above.

[67] The young girl's escape from *niraya* is similar to that of Devadatta. In both cases, an arahat acts in a way that changes their *kamma*. The Buddha allows Devadatta to join the order so that he would be "free of Niraya at last" (Horner 1990, xxxiii-xxxiv). Here, Sāriputta has instigated his own veneration so that the girl would be free of *niraya* at last.

[68] Perhaps Sāriputta could be seen as one intervening "with the power of words" as the influential man in the analogies of the *Milindapañha* described above.

[69] *duggatā yamalokikā / pāpakammaṃ karitvāna, petalokaṃ ito gatā* (PvA 67).

[70] In relation to the discussion of the "thief" above, it is interesting to note that the opposite of *dāna* or giving, which the girl is guilty of here, is understood actively as thievery: *adinnādāyin* "he who takes what is not given, a thief; stealing, thieving" (*PTS* 26). *katakamma* vs. *ākatakamma*: the first can mean the skilled actions of a thief, and Horner translates the second as "innocence." The term could be more specific, thus implying the non-thievery in particular (*PTS* 181).

[71] Egge mentions a story from the *Vimānavatthu* (3.6) where Bhaddā explains that she enjoys less merit as a deity because she was not instructed in the proper ritual dedication. She should have given to the *saṅgha* as a whole, rather than to an individual monk. The ritual words were incorrect (Egge 2002, 74).

[72] Harvey mentions that *peta* are in a unique position to benefit from gifts to the dead, but only certain kinds of *peta*. He also notes that giving to the dead might be examined as a kind of donation-by-proxy combined with the sharing (*anumodāna*) in merit by the deceased (2000, 65-66).

[73] Generosity (*dāna*) to the *saṅgha* is portrayed as an act that can be performed by proxy. Proxy-actions that are verbally ascribed, or inscribed, in the correct ritual manner allow an agent to intentionally create merit for another. Often the individual who is being acted for also intends, shares, or rejoices, in the merit produced.

[74] *Vipatti* as an "aberration" (in morality and understanding), "misery" "deviation" (*BDict* 13, 96, 380; PTS 626). It could also be a play on the *petī*'s particular heresy as a deviation from morality and right understanding by believing that actions have no fruit, that there is no life to come (*BDict* 366).

[75] Hallisey and Hansen: "instruction imparted directly to individuals is clear from standard Theravādin commentarial, by which commentators always explain not only the occasion on which a story was originally told but also the audience to which it was told" (1996, 311).

[76] This project of providing preliminary analysis and commentary on narratives is similar to Andrew Huxley's treatment of king Dhanañjaya from the *Kurudhamma jātaka* (1995). Huxley examines two narrative treatments of this story and shows how each suggests a progressive negotiation of ethics. The *pañcasīla* and the ten *rājadhamma* are worked out in dialogues and sermons that merge, as stories-within-stories, with the narrative of the original *jātaka*. They suggest competing notions of intention (is their guilt in the unintentional taking of life? what about negligent actions?), or how to rank the precepts (which is worse, killing or stealing?).

[77] McDermott comments on non-intentional acts as follows: "we must conclude that Nāgasena's position is really quite different from the usual canonical position. Nāgasena holds that serious demerit accrues to anyone who takes the life of another, even when this is done without awareness and, hence, by implication, unintentionally. Nāgasena, then, here appears to represent the view that the actual physical act is of greater ethical significance than is the thought, motive, or intention behind it. In this he has moved away from the distinctively Theravāda Buddhist notion" (McDermott 1977, 465).

[78] *Aṭṭhuppatti* is the arising or occasion (*uppatti*) of *attha*, "meaning" or "advantage" (*attha*, *PTS* 23). It refers to the appropriate time to act, explain, or tell a story, that will benefit others. It is an idea strikingly similar to *upāya*.

[79] See Hallisey and Hansen's discussion of the moral life "configured" and "refigured" by Theravāda story (1996, 316-324). They describe the effect on a hypothetical external audience to the story of Bandhula and Mallikā, but also the real effects and interpretations recorded by Hansen in her work with Cambodian refugees.

[80] This is a prominent way to discuss karma theory in contemporary Japan. Often authors call for a new and minimal understanding of karma along the same lines as Wright, and for many of the same reasons.