Moral development in the *Jātaka*s, *Avadāna*s, and Pāli *Nikāya*s

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Not to do any evil
To develop what is skilful
To purify the mind
This is the teaching of the Buddhas
(*Dhammapāda* 183)

ABSTRACT

In early Indian Buddhism the moral development of the individual through time is conceived of as taking place over many lives and through a number of distinct phases. The aim of this chapter is to provide an overview of moral development as described in three categories of early Buddhist scripture: *jātaka*s, *avadāna*s and the Pāli *Nikāya*s. The discussion begins by distinguishing two related understandings of morality in the texts, with the deeper of the two senses based on considerations of the agent's inner constitution rather than outer behavior. The argument proceeds in relation to two consecutive paths whose contours are traced: one a path of worldly practice, the other a supramundane path that leads directly to the highest good, liberation. These paths are analyzed in terms of a hierarchy of three kinds of moral agent: the ordinary person, the noble disciple and the liberated being. The essay concludes with an attempt to contrast these agents' respective experiences of morality.

INTRODUCTION

If one understands the term *morality* to refer to the personal quality of being in accord with a system of values or code of conduct, then the idea of *moral development* can be understood as referring to the development of the individual's *capability* to live by that system or code. In this article we will examine the manner in which the Buddhist tradition conceives individual moral development, specifically as it is represented in three overlapping classifications of early Buddhist literature: *jātaka*s, *avadāna*s, and the Pāli *Nikāya*s.[2][3] How do Buddhists understand the growth

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[2] The five *Nikāya*s comprise the *Sutta-piṭaka* (*Basket of Discourses*) of the Theravāda tradition's Pāli Canon. They contain both *jātaka*s and *apadāna*s (Sanskrit: *avadāna*s). *Jatāka*s and *avadāna*s are, of course, also found scattered throughout the scriptures of other Buddhist schools and traditions, including Sanskrit, Tibetan and Chinese sources. There are, as well, *jātaka* and *avadāna* type tales to be found in

of the individual's capacity to live morally? To what extent and in what senses is this capacity perfectible? On what basis? To what degree is it under one's control?

The discussion is divided into three parts. Part I aims to provide an accurate general overview of the manner in which Buddhists themselves understand moral development as represented in these categories of text. In Part II the goal is to offer a deeper analysis of the framework of concepts underlying the doctrines of moral development discussed. In both sections the terms of explanation are drawn from the texts themselves. We conclude, in Part III, with a brief characterization of the religious ideal based on our earlier analysis.

Throughout this chapter we will view our material through a very particular lens, one that thematizes the *progressive* nature of the Buddhist path (*magga/marga*) with a continuous eye towards the notion of *hierarchy* on that path. We will indicate those aspects of the material that imply an idea of hierarchy -- whether this be in reference to various categories of spiritual actor, the stages of accomplishment along the path to the goal, fields of merit, or any other morally relevant sense. Hierarchy is an important feature of early Buddhist thought that has not, perhaps, received the attention it deserves. Many have rightly pointed out the radical egalitarian implications of the Buddha's teachings (*dhamma/dharma)* relative to the value system of his day -- with regard to social class and gender issues, for example. [4] At

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Hindu and Jain sources (See Appleton 2014). Our study is limited to Pāli and Sanskrit Buddhist texts.

[3] This essay takes its cue from Onhuma who has suggested that the *jatāka*s and *avadāna*s can be helpfully viewed as representing the first two of the three kinds of knowledge (*tivijjā/trividyā*) attained by the Buddha over the three watches of the night of this awakening (2003, 36-39). In the first watch, the Exalted One is said to have recalled his own myriad past lives, struggling and questing through repeated births and deaths. During the second, he is said to have seen the operations of karma more generally -- in a cosmic vision of *saṃsāra*, with beings everywhere dying and being reborn according to their deeds. Given these correspondences, it only seems natural to complete the final third of Onhuma's thought by associating the *Nikāya*s' non-narrative, systematic discourses with the third watch of the night, in which the Buddha directly realized the four noble truths and thereby achieved his long sought goal. If the *jātaka*s and *avadāna*s demonstrate the Buddha's unparalleled psychic prowess, the *Nikāya*s' systematic discourses demonstrate his awakening.

[4] "The Buddha's theory of karma not only substituted ethics for ritual, but made intention, a private matter, the final criterion for judging ethical value. This was a great step forward in the history of civilization, because it meant that on the ethical plane all human beings are in a general sense equal, even if they differ in their capacity for making sound moral judgements." (Gombrich 2009, 195; Also see: Adam 2013)

the same time, we would do well to identify those respects in which the Buddha's teachings continue to assume a hierarchical structure and outlook.

PART 1: OVERVIEW: MORAL DEVELOPMENT in the JĀTAKAS, AVADĀNAS, and NIKĀYAS

1.1 Background

Early Buddhist ideas of morality need to be understood as part of a practical system of personal liberation that aims for the release of the individual from the rounds of rebirth (*saṃsāra*) and suffering (*dukkha/duḥkha*). As is the case with other ancient Indian systems (e.g. those of Jainism and the *Upaniṣads*), cyclical existence is understood to be relentlessly driven on by the individual's own actions (*kamma/karma*), which have effect of planting the seeds of future experiences, both in this life and in lives to come. Final freedom (*mokkha/mokṣa*) is possible only through the realization or knowledge (*ñāṇa/jñāna*) of a liberating truth. The attainment of such knowledge is thought to require purity of character and conduct, and hence a moral component. This idea of morality as a prerequisite of knowledge may not be intuitively obvious -- at least to a western mindset in which moral and epistemic achievements are viewed as independent. Indian systems tend to regard morality and knowledge as intertwined, a perspective that is particularly clear in the case of Buddhism.[5] This thought should once again remind us of our hermeneutical imperative to identify bedrock cultural assumptions in the material under study, and in oneself.

In spite of sharing a certain common conceptual basis with other Indian systems, the Buddhist understanding of the content of liberating knowledge is unique in at least one key respect. Rather than positing the existence of a hidden Self, knowledge of which leads to liberation, precisely the opposite is maintained. It is the very belief in such an entity that is said to lie at the root of rebirth and suffering. The deluded imputation of a Self enables the arising of self-centred craving, and thereby causes individuals to become attached, suffer, and be reborn. Buddhist practice, including the development of morality, is thus conceived of as a kind of personal training and mental purification, enhancing one's self-control, and ultimately leading to the realization of liberating knowledge. The object of this knowledge is usually articulated in terms of either the four noble truths or the very causal chain through which rebirth and suffering are thought to occur: dependent origination

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[5] As the Buddha himself puts it in the *Soṇadaṇḍa Sutta* of the *Dīgha Nikāya*: "So it is, Brahmin. Wisdom is purified by morality, and morality is purified by wisdom: where one is, the other is, the moral man has wisdom and the wise man has morality, and the combination of morality and wisdom is called the highest thing in the world." (DN 4 *The Qualities of a True Brahmin*, Walshe 131)

(*paṭiccasamuppāda/pratītyasamutpāda*). Our focus here is on how Buddhism understands the role of morality in breaking this chain.

1.2 Sīla (Not to do any evil)

The term that most closely corresponds to *morality* in the Buddhist lexicon is *sīla* (*śīla*). *Sīla* can also be translated as moral conduct, virtue, good habit, moral training, ethics, and so on. Throughout the *Nikāya*s the word appears as a category heading in a number of lists of positively valued behaviors whose practice is thought to facilitate the attainment of liberating knowledge, while at the same time benefitting other living beings. If we follow the well-known Indian division of action into bodily, vocal, and mental acts, *sīla* in the technical sense is understood to refer to moral actions of the body and speech. In Buddhism, however, the very notion of action is understood as entailing an underlying mental intention or volition (*cetanā*). As the Buddha famously put it, ''It is volition, Bhikkhus, that I call kamma. For having willed, one acts by body, speech, or mind'' (AN 6:63 *Penetrative*, Bodhi 2012, 963). Thus all action, whether bodily, vocal, or mental, is to be understood in terms of the agent's underlying intentional state. It follows that *sīla* includes a deeper mental component.

Most employments of the term *sīla* share in the idea of a disciplined restraint of activity, an ongoing effort of will *not to act* (as opposed to an impulse *to act*) in certain specific ways -- usually through the following of a rule or precept. There is a further implication that *sīla* involves a *deliberate effort,* as opposed to a spontaneous impulse, not to act in particular ways. The behavior enjoined is described in terms of *restraints* of various kinds on one's conduct, aiding to bring it, and the mind of craving on which it rests, *under control*. There exist a number of important sets of such restraints for practitioners at different levels of attainment; these vary in terms of complexity, difficulty, and the specific number of injunctions to be observed. Most famous among these are the lay precepts or *pañca-sīla*, a set of five moral principles governing daily activities. They are expressed as precepts or vows:

1. I undertake the precept to abstain from the taking of life
2. I undertake the precept not to take that which is not given
3. I undertake the precept to abstain from misconduct in sensual actions
4. I undertake the precept to abstain from false speech
5. I undertake the precept to abstain from intoxicants that cause heedlessness

Similar lists of basic moral principles can be found in other Indian traditions contemporary with early Buddhism; notably the five-fold formulae of Jainism and the Yoga school (*yama*s). Aside from being viewed as enabling the emergence of a clear mindset and thus spiritual insight, the very act of formally committing to a set of moral precepts is regarded as a profoundly beneficial karmic act in and of itself. It is precisely such an act that allows one to get started, and stay on, a spiritual path.

In the Buddhist tradition the recitation of the *pañca-sīla* occurs on formal, ritual occasions, usually following the rehearsal of another set of formulae in which one marks one's faith in the tradition by "going for refuge" (*saraṇa-gamana*) to the three jewels: the Buddha, the Dhamma and the Sangha.

> *Buddhaṃ saraṇaṃ gacchāmi* (I go for refuge to the Buddha)
> *Dhammaṃ saraṇaṃ gacchāmi* (I go for refuge to the Dhamma)
> *Saṅghaṃ saraṇaṃ gacchāmi* (I go for refuge to the Sangha)[6]

For Buddhists, the act of taking the triple refuge is the single-most highly esteemed symbolic gesture that an individual can make; it has clear implications for a person's moral development -- representing as it does the deliberate, self-conscious decision to follow the Buddhist path. The initial act of taking refuge signals one's recognition that a serious break from one's habitual negative tendencies and patterns of life has become necessary. It also signals a willingness to place one's faith or confidence (*saddhā*) in the Buddha, his teachings, and the community of monks and nuns who uphold those teachings. The communal recital of the triple refuge formula, along with that of the *pañcasīla*, serves to reinforce one's dedication to the path. (A similar function can be seen in the public performance of other sets of precepts, such as the *sangha*'s recitation of the *pātimokkha* formula during the *uposatha* ceremony). When we consider the idea of moral development then, we need to take account of beginnings, and for the Buddhist the starting point is marked by an act of commitment to the path taught by the Buddha.

1.3 The Path (To develop what is skilful)

The fact that such acts of commitment are viewed as meritorious and praiseworthy in and of themselves points to us to a deeper scale of values at play in the Buddhist scriptures, one that is not captured in lists of external conduct such as the *pañcasīla*. In Indian thought generally, any action that leads one to a better rebirth qualifies as good. Such acts are said to be *puñña*: "meritorious, karmicly fruitful" or, understood as a noun, "merit." In Buddhism such praiseworthy actions are also referred to as "skilful" or "wholesome" (*kusala*), in that they lead one in the direction of the highest good, liberation (*nibbāna*). As we shall see below, this is because their volitions are based in a mindset that is free from the so-called three roots of the unwholesome: greed, hatred and delusion (*lobha, dosa, moha*).

In the *Nikāya*s, the idea of a path leading to the highest good, composed of skilful, meritorious elements, is represented by a number of schemas in which the term *sīla* figures as one component. Among the earliest of these schemas referred to in the *Nikāya*s are the three "bases of making merit" (*puñña-kiriya-vatthu*s): giving (*dāna*), morality (*sīla*) and meditation (*bhāvanā*) (See DN 33 *The Chanting Together*, Walshe

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[6] See AN 8:39 *Streams,* wherein the three jewels and five precepts are collectively referred to as the "eight streams of merit". (Bodhi 2012, 1173-74)

485). Here *dāna* and *sīla* appear as separate items; this implies, once again, that the term *sīla* does not share the same semantic range as the English word *morality* -- since giving, as a practice, is clearly encompassed by the latter. The fact that Buddhists also unreservedly think of giving as a morally praiseworthy activity clearly indicates that there are at least two senses of morality at play in the texts: a narrower sense associated with the term *sīla* and a wider sense encompassing praiseworthy acts more generally (*puñña, kusala*). While the former is associated with outer conduct, the latter points to morality as an inner state.

The three bases of merit can be viewed as a progression beginning with the practice of giving, proceeding through the disciplined morality of *sīla*, and then advancing to meditation. Gethin sums up the rationale for this order:

> In order to see the four truths, the mind must be clear and still; in order to be still, the mind must be content; in order to be content, the mind must be free from remorse and guilt; in order to be free from guilt, one needs a clear conscience; the bases of a clear conscience are generosity and good conduct. (83)

1.31 The noble eightfold path (ariya-aṭṭhangika-magga)

Two of the better known early path schemas that incorporate *sīla* are the noble eightfold path leading to arahantship, found throughout the *Nikāya*s, and the *bodhisatta* path leading to Buddhahood, which we find more precisely in the *jātaka*s. The most famous formulation of the Buddhist path is that of the eightfold path, the fourth of the four noble truths taught by the Buddha. (See: e.g. DN 22 *The Greater Discourse on the Foundations of Mindfulness*, Walshe 348-349). The eightfold path is the complete set of factors whose cultivation is said to lead away from a self-centred, worldly orientation and place one on a clear and irreversible trajectory toward the final goal, *nirvāṇa*.

fig. 1*: The noble eightfold path:*

1. right view (*sammā-diṭṭhi*)	understanding the reality of karma and rebirth seeing the four noble truths
2. right intention (*sammā-sankappa*)	desirelessness friendliness nonharmfulness
3. right speech (*samma-vāca*)	refraining from false speech refraining from divisive speech refraining from hurtful speech refraining from idle chatter
4. right action	refraining from harming living beings

(*sammā-kammanta*)	refraining from taking what is not given
	refraining from sexual misconduct
5. right livelihood	refraining from harmful forms of earning a living
(*sammā-ājiva*)	
6. right effort	to discourage unarisen unwholesome states of mind
(*sammā-vāyama*)	to abandon arisen unwholesome states of mind
	to develop unarisen wholesome states of mind
	to encourage arisen wholesome states of mind
7. right mindfulness	awareness of body
(*sammā-sati*)	awareness of feelings
	awareness of mind
	awareness of mental contents
8. right concentration	practice of the four *jhāna*s (*dhyāna*s)
(*sammā-samādhi*)	

The eight factors are called "right" (*sammā*) in the pragmatic sense of being appropriate, fitting responses to the way things actually are. This is to say that they are regarded as *effective* in bringing about the end of rebirth and suffering. Contrary to the view that would ascribe any kind moral relativism to early Buddhist ethics, the Buddha's teachings maintain that there is an objective moral law (*dhamma*) governing the manner in which events unfold, and more specifically how rebirth and suffering arise and cease. If one wants to bring suffering to a final end, one first needs to bring the mind under control. In order to accomplish this most difficult of tasks some kinds of practice work, while others simply do not. In general, extreme behaviors are to be avoided. The eightfold path is thus also known as the middle path (*majjhima-paṭipadā*), an epithet indicating the unprofitability of two extreme and opposite ways of living, namely, a self-indulgent life of the senses (associated with normal worldly existence), or a severe life of ascetic self-denial (associated with other renunciate traditions). Practicing the middle way eventually has the effect of bringing one's will into alignment with the *dhamma*, allowing one to make progress. (See SN 1.1 *Crossing the Flood*, Bodhi 2012, 89-90).

Thus all eight factors can be considered skilful and wholesome in that their practice brings about the insight and moral purity that lead to liberation. A common analysis of the path divides its eight elements into three groups of trainings (*sikkhā*), with those comprising *sīla* (3-5*)* placed at the beginning, followed by *samādhi* or meditation (6-8), and *paññā* or wisdom (1-2). (See: DN 10 *Subha Sutta*, Walshe 171-174). The reason for placing the *sīla* components first in this constellation parallels that of the three bases of making merit: one cannot progress in meditation and wisdom if one has not first restrained one's outer behavior, thereby allowing the mind to gain some immediate freedom from distractions and disturbances. Through

sīla the mind is provided the opportunity to become self-aware and focused. On this basis, insight can emerge. In this way, *sīla* can be viewed as the foundation of the entire path.

Even so, it has also been widely noted that there is a good reason for the placement of right view and right intention *before* the *sīla* components in the eightfold formula: *sīla* cannot properly take root unless one possesses a correct understanding of the necessity of making an effort in the first place. It is only by understanding the reality of being subject to karma and rebirth that one forms appropriate intentions to free oneself from worldly entanglement through the practices of *sīla* and *samādhi.* To this extent it is possible to discern a kind of progressive logic to the ordering of the eightfold path, with each limb understood as having a special dependence on the one that precedes it.[7] This being said, the most widely held understanding of the path is that each of the eight elements is regarded as conditioning and aiding the others. They are not regarded as individual steps or stages of a sequential practice, but rather as mutually reinforcing components of an integrated system designed to gradually enhance one's morality, self-control, and understanding. They are to be cultivated together.

There is an important sense, however, in which this cultivation of the path can *itself* be considered as possessing an initial stage of practice. To understand this, we need to take account a distinction drawn by the Buddhist tradition. The development of the eightfold path is said to eventually give rise to a pivotal transformative moment of spiritual insight. The content of this life-changing event is described in different terms in different contexts; but for our purposes can best be identified as the direct initial experience of the four noble truths, an experience that is also identified as the arising of "noble right view".[8][9] This instant marks the beginning of the *noble* eightfold path proper. This noble path is also referred to as the supramundane path

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[7] See DN 18 *About Janavasabha,* Walshe 299, where right knowledge and right liberation are added in a ten-fold path formula, which is described as a sequence. The translator notes that the last two factors are to be understood as part of the supramundane path (581), discussed below.

[8] This is in contradistinction to "mundane right view", which at best contains only a conceptual understanding of the four truths (rather than an experiential one). Mundane right view is principally associated with recognizing the reality of one's karma and rebirth. (See AN 5.57 *Themes*, Bodhi 2012, 686-688; and Bodhi 1995, 1184)

[9] This event is also aptly referred to with another visual expression, namely, the arising of the "pure and spotless Dhamma-eye". (DN 2 *The Fruits of the Homeless Life*, Walshe, 1995, 109)

(*lokuttaramagga*), in contrast to the worldly path (*lokiyamagga*) practiced initially.[10] Upon entering that supramundane path, the practitioner himself also receives the designation "noble" *(ariya)* -- indicating that a fundamental spiritual transformation has occurred. Formerly deemed an ordinary person (*puthujjana*), the follower of the path is now designated a noble person (*ariyapuggla*), or more precisely yet, a noble disciple (*sekha*).[11]

At this advanced stage the practitioner is said to glimpse the reality of *nirvāṇa* for the first time. Despite the fact that effort is still required, one has entered the stream that will inevitably lead one to the final goal of *nibbāna*; it is no longer possible to be reborn in one of the lower realms. It is difficult to overestimate the impact of this moment upon the psyche of the practitioner, as well as upon his subsequent moral development. At this juncture one's faith in the three jewels becomes unshakable owing to the disappearance of doubt (*vicikicchā*). This is due to the direct experience of the four noble truths, which, it must be noticed also allows one to definitively see through the illusion of self (*sakkāya-diṭṭhi*). This moment thus signifies the establishment of a completely different way of being in the world -- and the possibility of genuine altruism. Interestingly, it is also said that one's attachment to rules and rituals (*sīlabbata-parāmāssa*) falls away at this point.[12] This is notable, as it also said that one's outer *sīla* is perfect from this point on. In spite of this, some residual mental defilements do remain -- including the residual conceit, if not the view, that "I am" (*māna*). This feeling, and other subtle mental fetters (*samyojana*), will not entirely disappear until one has completely purified the mind, thereby becoming a liberated being or *arahant*.

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[10] Technically, the supramundane path contains four "paths" resulting in four "fruits", those of the stream-enterer (*sotāpanna*), once-returner (*sakadāgāmin*), non-returner (*anāgāmin*), and the liberated being or worthy one (*arahant*). As Bhikkhu Bodhi summarizes it: "The breakthrough to the unconditioned is achieved by a type of consciousness or mental event called the supramundane path *(lokuttaramagga).* The supramundane path occurs in four stages, four 'supramundane paths,' each marking a deeper level of realization and issuing in a fuller degree of liberation, the fourth and last in complete liberation. The four paths can be achieved in close proximity to one another — for those with extraordinarily sharp faculties even in the same sitting — or (as is more typically the case) they can be spread out over time, even over several lifetimes. The supramundane paths share in common the penetration of the Four Noble Truths." (1999, 105)

[11] A number of labels become applicable to the practitioner at this point. He is a noble disciple, but of a particular kind, namely, a stream-enterer (*sotāpanna*). We will discuss the significance of these and related terms below.

[12] Technically, the disappearance of these three fetters marks the fruition of the first supramundane path, *sotāpatti*.

1.32 Buddhist narrative literature

Thus, for ordinary persons walking on the mundane eightfold path moral development can be understood as a gradual process of enhancing control over the different dimensions of one's life: bodily, vocal, and mental. It occurs over vast numbers of lifetimes as one finds one's way to the noble eightfold path, which leads directly out of *saṃsāra*. For most sentient beings, however, the vicissitudes of cyclical existence are unending; one wanders deluded, with a mind out of control, through the six realms of existence, perpetually dying and being reborn according to one's deeds. Morally good actions (*puñña*) result in heavenly birth; morally bad actions (*apuñña, pāpa*) lead to lower realms. Even the gods eventually exhaust their good karma and fall from their elevated positions. It is extremely rare for an individual to find the path that leads away from and out of the repetitive patterns of samsaric existence. In general, the Buddhist tradition maintains that such an achievement requires exposure to the Buddha's teachings -- ideally in the form of an encounter with a Buddha, who either through explicit instruction or sheer presence inspires one to practice. Without such practice, moral progress is possible but limited in its effects to temporarily attaining a higher rebirth.

In the Buddhist narrative genres known as *jātaka*s (birth stories) and *avadāna*s (glorious deeds) we find the idea of moral development over many lifetimes illustrated in colourful detail.[13] *Jātaka*s concern deeds remembered by the Buddha to have taken place during his own past lives, when he was yet a being aspiring for Awakening or (*bodhisatta/bodhisattva*). In the *jātaka*s, narrated by the Buddha himself, present events and circumstances are traced back to actions performed during one of those earlier lives. At least one the characters, usually the hero, is the *bodhisatta*. *Avadāna*s, on the other hand, mainly concern the praiseworthy acts of the Buddha's disciples and devotees. (Although there are some that are centred on the actions of the Buddha-to-be as well. Technically these also

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[13] *Jātaka*s and *avadāna*s are found scattered throughout the *Sutta-* and *Vinaya-pitaka*s, as well as in commentarial sources. Many are gathered into collections. Among the best known of these are the *jātaka* verses contained in the *Jātaka* section of *Khuddaka Nikāya.* Together with its prose commentary, this famous compilation is known as the *Jātakatthavaṇṇanā* or *Jātakaṭṭhakathā.* Its commentarial introduction, the *Nidānakathā,* contains past life stories of the Buddha as well as episodes from his final pre-awakening life as Siddhāttha Gotama. Also included in the KN are three other well-known collections: the *Apadāna*s, the *Buddhavaṃsa,* and the *Cariyāpitāka.* Examples of Sanskrit sources of *jātaka*s include the *Lalitavistara, Jātakastava* of Jñanayaśas, *Jātakamāla* of Āryaśūra, as well as myriad Mahāyāna *sūtra*s. Sanskrit collections of *avadāna*s include the *Avadānaśataka, Divyāvadāna, Karmaśataka*, and a late collection, the *Avadānamāla*s.

qualify as *jātaka*s).[14] [15] A general point of contrast between these two genres can be drawn in terms of the respective goals of their heroes. In the *jātaka*s the *bodhisatta* is aiming to become a fully awakened Buddha *(sammāsambuddha)*; in the *avadāna*s the protagonist is striving for arahantship.[16] In this, the *avadāna*s are similar in orientation to the systematic treatises of the *Nikāya*s.

Thus both genres of literature are concerned to illustrate morally significant actions and their fruits.[17] As moral exhortations, the stories they contain can be understood as serving to reinforce acceptance of the reality of karma and rebirth, which is to say, mundane right view. They offer moral examples, inspiration, and entertainment to their audiences -- as opposed to providing the kind of systematic explanation and practical instruction that characterizes so much of the *Nikāyas*.[18]

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[14] Owing to the great diversity of the literature encompassed under these two headings, it seems inevitable that there will be exceptions to such generalizations. Probably the safest definition for the *jātaka*s is that proposed by Appleton: "birth stories of the Buddha." This allows for the inclusion of a relatively small number of tales in which the *bodhisatta*'s role is minor and his actions karmicly insignificant (2010, 3-5). In such stories another character's moral development is on display and the *bodhisatta* is simply reported to have been a witness to the events. It is possible, nevertheless, to consider even these stories as demonstrating the *bodhisatta*'s moral development -- provided that one recognizes the *bodhisatta* as developing wisdom through his observations. Aside from being one of the *pāramitā*s (discussed below), wisdom is, as we have noted, a moral quality in the wide sense we are considering here.

[15] Occasionally we find *avadāna*s that establish the operations of karma within a single present lifetime or between a present situation and one that is predicted to happen in the future.

[16] The distinction is usually drawn in terms of the superior teaching capacity and universal concern of the Buddha. It should be noted that the Buddha regularly refers to himself as an *arahant* throughout the *Nikāya*s.

[17] Interestingly, the connections we find established by many of these stories are not limited to those of *moral* causality, with good deeds causing good results and so on; we also find repeated patterns of personal relationships from one life to the next, such that, for example, an enemy in the present is shown to have been an enemy in the past, a mother of two sons a mother of two sons, and so on.

[18] There is clearly a strong association between these stories and the Buddhist lay culture. Some of the Buddhist *jātaka* stories, for example, circulated as popular Indian folktales before being modified and incorporated into the Buddhist Canon (Onhuma 2003, 37). It is likely that many of these stories were composed with the

1.321 Jātakas

As told in the *Nidānakathā*, the Buddha's career as a *bodhisatta* begins in the story of the brahmin ascetic Sumedha, who encounters a previous Buddha named Dīpankara passing through the city of Ramma (Rhys-Davids 1880, 91-97). Inspired by faith (*pasāda*), the young seeker lays himself down upon a muddy road for the Awakened One to walk upon, vowing that one day he too will become a Buddha. Dipankāra then makes a prediction of his future success. The moment of Sumedha's aspiration (*abhinīhāra*) marks the starting point of his journey to Buddhahood. Thus the *jātaka*s record only those of Gotama's former lives that occur after this fateful commitment -- a vast number, in any case. (Ohnuma, 46; Appleton 2014, 108). The *Jātaka* collection of the *Khuddaka Nikāya* alone contains 547 such stories.

The *bodhisatta* takes on myriad forms and interacts with beings in every realm on his cosmic journey, from hell-beings to gods. It should be noted that while the *bodhisatta* is often depicted as *interacting with* beings in lower realms, some commentaries assert that he is excluded from taking on certain lower rebirths himself. (Appleton 2010, 93-97). A number of possible structural parallels with the path of the noble disciple might be noted here. The moment of the arising of the *bodhisatta*-path leading to Buddhahood and the moment of arising of the supramundane path leading to arahantship are both understood as having the effect of forever eliminating the possibility of particular kinds of lower rebirth.[19] Additionally, the noble disciple and the *bodhisatta* both share the certainty of attaining their respective goals, in the latter case on account of Dīpankara's prediction. There are, of course, some differences. The certainty associated with the moment of the arising of the supramundane path is characterized as one based on insight; the certainty of the *bodhisatta,* on the other hand, is based on faith or confidence in the Buddha's truthfulness (Rhys-Davids, 100). As well, the noble disciple, as a stream-enterer, is traditionally said to be assured of achieving his goal in no more than seven lives -- for the *bodhisatta* no such number is specified; it is clear that his path is much, much longer.

In stories too numerous to count the *bodhisatta* takes on a huge variety of human roles and vocations: teacher, acrobat, merchant, lumberjack, prince. Often he appears in spirit form, whether as a highly placed god or a humble tree fairy. In other

express purpose of attracting lay support for the *sangha*; this seems especially true of the *avadāna*s, which regularly extol the merits of devotion to the *sangha*.

[19] This general understanding may have been carried over into Mahāyāna path theory where the arising of the Path of Seeing (*darśanamarga*) is said to have the same exclusionary effect. A parallel can thus be noted with the concept of the arising of noble right view.

tales yet, he appears as an animal -- a deer, a lion, a monkey, a parrot -- or as we find demonstrated in the following story, a fish:

<mark>******************</mark>

MITACINTI-JĀTAKA (JA 114, trans. Cowell 1957, 256-257)

"*They twain in fisher's net*."-- This story was told by the Master while at Jetavana, about two aged Elders. After a rainy-season spent in a forest in the country they resolved to seek out the Master, and got together provisions for their journey. But they kept putting off their departure day by day, till a month flew by. Then they provided a fresh supply of provisions, and procrastinated till a second month was gone, and a third. When their indolence and sluggishness had lost them three months, they set out and came to Jetavana. Laying aside their bowls and robes in the common-room, they came into the Master's presence. The Brethren remarked on the length of the time since the two had visited the Master, and asked the reason. Then they told their story and all the Brotherhood came to know of the laziness of these indolent Brethren.

Assembling in the Hall of Truth the Brethren talked together of this thing. And the Master entered and was told what they were discussing. Being asked whether they were really so indolent, those Brethren admitted their short-coming. "Brethren," said he, "in former times, no less than now, they were indolent and loth to leave their abode." So saying, he told this story of the past.
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Once on a time when Brahmadatta was reigning in Benares, there lived in the river of Benares three fishes, named Over-thoughtful, Thoughtful, and Thoughtless. And they came down-stream from the wild country to where men dwelt. Hereupon Thoughtful said to the other two, "This is a dangerous and perilous neighbourhood, where fishermen catch fish with nets, basket-traps, and such like tackle. Let us be off to the wild country again." But so lazy were the other two fishes, and so greedy, that they kept putting off their going from day to day, until they had let three months slip by. Now fishermen cast their nets into the river; and Over-thoughtful and Thoughtless were swimming on ahead in quest of food when in their fully they blindly rushed into the net. Thoughtful, who was behind, observed the net, and saw the fate of the other two.

"I must save these lazy fools from death," thought he. So first he dodged round the net, and splashed in the water in front of it like a fish that has broken through and gone up stream; and then doubling back, he splashed about behind it, like a fish that has broken through and gone down stream. Seeing this, the fishermen thought the fish had broken the net and all got away; so they pulled it in by one corner and the two fishes escaped from the net into the open water again. In this way they owed their lives to Thoughtful.

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His story told, the Master, as Buddha, recited this stanza:

> They twain in fisher's nets are ta'en;
> Them Thoughtful saves and frees again.

His lesson ended, and the Four Truths expounded (at the close whereof the aged Brethren gained fruition of the First Path),[20] the Master identified the Birth by saying: "These two Brethren were then Over-thoughtful and Thoughtless, and I Thoughtful."

<div align="center">FIN.</div>

<mark>*******************</mark>

In this example we can discern a number of features typical of _jātaka_s. At end of the story the Buddha identifies himself as one of its characters. Other present day personages are also identified (although this feature is not found in all _jātaka_s). The consequences of hearing the story, or a subsequent _dhamma_ discourse (usually on the four truths), upon members of the assembled audience is stated. In many cases these effects are described in terms of attaining a higher spiritual status, often on the supramundane path.[21] (This motif is common at the end of _sutta_s throughout the _Nikāya_s).

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[20] This is a reference to the fruition of the path of stream-entry (_sotāpatti_), the first of the four supramundane states of fruition.

[21] Thus, for example, in _Avadanaśataka_ 11 "The Sailors" we find the following typical passage:

> And the Exalted One, understanding the dispositions, propensities, character and nature of those sailors, furnished them with a _dharma_ teaching of such a kind that penetrated the four noble truths. Having heard this some sailors attained the fruit of stream-entry, others the fruit of once-returning, others the fruit of non-returning, some renounced and by abandoning all defilements realized arhatship, others produced a resolve to attain _śrāvaka-bodhi_, others a resolve to _pratyeka-bodhi_ and yet others a resolve to full and perfect buddhahood. And the whole assembly was established in commitment to the Buddha, inclination towards the _dharma_, and devotion to the _saṅgha_. (Appleton 2013, 5)

Here it is not the past-life story itself that triggers the higher attainments, but rather a sermon on the four noble truths.

Throughout the *jātaka*s, then, we find the Buddha-to-be planting karmic seeds through his actions and cultivating the personal qualities that will eventually reach their perfection in his awakening as Gotama Buddha. The Theravāda tradition identifies these qualities as a set of ten specific virtues known as the *pāramitā*s or *pāramī*s: giving (*dāna*), morality (*sīla*), renunciation (*nekkhamma*), wisdom (*paññā*), energy (*viriya*), patience (*khanti*), truthfulness (*sacca*), determination (*adhiṭṭhāna*), loving-kindness (*mettā*), equanimity (*upekkhā*).[22][23]

As skilful character traits, each *pāramitā* is seen as a repository or accumulation of a morally beneficial karma (*puñña*) to be developed and perfected over many lifetimes. The ten *pāramitā*s are clearly among the most distinctive values promulgated in the *jātaka*s, and were used as an organizing principle by the texts' compilers. Indeed they can be seen to frame the entire Jātaka collection. The story of Sumedha *qua bodhisatta* begins with a series of successive resolutions to fulfil each of the ten *pāramita*s in turn, beginning with giving (Rhys-Davids 1888, 101-108), while the last ten stories of the collection (JA 538-547) demonstrate the ten once again, culminating where it all began, with perfection of giving (in what is arguably the most famous and incredible story of the collection, the *Vessantara Jātaka*. (See Ohnuma 2007).

Aside from the *pāramitā*s other values are promulgated in the various *jātaka*s, notably compassion (Jātakamāla 1) and non-harm; the latter is particularly notable in tales showing the folly of animal sacrifice, associated with the brahmanical tradition (e.g. JA 18 *Matakabhatta Jātaka*). We also find *jātaka*s in which the five precepts are extolled (e.g. JA 31 *Kulāvaka Jātaka*). Worldly virtues such as wiliness are also sometimes in evidence (e.g. JA 318 *Kanavera Jātaka*); in some cases these depict the *bodhisatta* in ways that are hard to square with Buddhist morality. Indeed, as Appleton points out, there are even some *jātaka*s that openly depict the *bodhisatta* acting immorally (2010, 26-28). Such stories are used to explain negative experiences in the life of the historical Buddha -- for example, personal injuries and ailments. (See Dhammajoti 2012)

1.322 Avadānas

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[22] As in the *puñña-kiriya-vatthu*s, *dāna* is seen to be listed immediately before and separate from *sīla*.

[23] Owing to the fact that the quality being illustrated is not usually named in the *jātaka* itself, it is not always clear which, if any, of the ten qualities is being demonstrated. Appleton has convincingly argued that the elaborate rubric of ten specific virtues is a late commentarial preoccupation. While we are not concerned with the historical development of this schema here, it seems clear enough that its emergence may well be related to developments in the early stages of the Mahāyāna. (Appleton 2010, 98f.)

One of the basic differences between *jatāka*s and *avadāna*s is the marked presence in the latter of what has been called a devotional ethos. Scholars have noted that the *paramitā*s themselves are not the focus of the *avadāna*s; what we find being celebrated instead are the merits of devotional acts directed toward the Buddha and the *sangha*:

> [W]e might say that *jātaka*s illustrate the bodhisattva's arduous cultivation of certain moral perfections, whereas *avadāna*s take place is Buddhist devotional context and involve the performance of devotional acts by disciples and lay followers. In short, we might say that *jātaka*s are about 'perfections' whereas *avadāna*s are about 'devotions'... (Onhuma 2003, 41)

As Onhuma is quick to point out, however, there are notable exceptions to this generalization. As a *jātaka* with a strong devotional ethos, the story of Sumedha and Dīpankara itself demonstrates this. Nevertheless the devotional flavour of the *avadāna* genre is manifest and this is clearly connected to the presence of a Buddha in the world, a state of affairs that is presupposed in stories of this genre. With this circumstance a whole new range of praiseworthy actions becomes possible in the form of devotional acts, donations to the *sangha* and so on. All such acts are, of course, karmicly meritorious, and so remain moral in the wide Buddhist sense being considered here.[24]

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The following past life story narrated by the elder Sopāka demonstrates many of these features. Incarnated as an ascetic, Sopāka encounters and honours one of the Buddhas of the remote past, named Siddhattha, who proceeds to instruct him.

Sopāka (trans. Clark 2015, 232-233; reformatted)

While cleaning my cave in the highest mountain in a forest, the blessed one named Siddhattha came into my vicinity. Seeing the Buddha arrived, I arranged a mat for

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[24] In point of fact, the *avadāna*s assume the pan-Indian doctrine of the "worthy recipient," (*supātra*) which maintains that some recipients are more potent than others in terms of generating merit for the donor. The Buddha and the *sangha* represent the most powerful fields of merit; donations and devotional acts directed towards them constitute meritorious action *par excellence*. The idea of an ascending hierarchy of progressively more worthy recipients can be found throughout the Pāli Canon, where it is spelled out in terms various kinds of person, notably the ordinary person and the noble person -- and the various subdivisions thereof (See Ohnuma 2003, 59-64, 152-153). It should not be surprising that the same individual, alternately viewed as either agent or recipient, should be situated on a corresponding rung of a parallel hierarchy.

the venerable one, supreme in the world, [and] gave him a seat of flowers. Having sat down on the seat of flowers and understanding my disposition, Siddhattha, leader of the world, declared impermanence:

> "The formations are indeed impermanent, subject to arising and decay. Having arisen, they cease. Their quiescence is joyful".

Having said this, the all-knowing one—supreme in the world, bull among men, hero—rose into the air like a king of geese in the sky. Abandoning my own view, I developed the perception of impermanence. Having developed it for one day, I died there. After experiencing the two fortunate state[s of being a god or a human], impelled by a pure foundation, when my final rebirth had been reached I entered the womb of an outcaste. Having departed from the house, I went forth to the houseless state. While seven years old, I attained arahatship. Putting forth energy, resolute, well concentrated upon the virtuous practices, pleasing the great man, I obtained full ordination. Ninety-four aeons ago I performed the deed at that time. I am not aware of [having been reborn in] a bad destination [since]. This is the fruit of giving [a seat of] flowers. Ninety-four aeons ago I developed the perception [of impermanence] at that time. Developing that perception [of impermanence] I attained the annihilation of the taints. The four analytical insights and also the eight liberations and the six supernormal knowledges have been realised. The Buddha's teaching has been accomplished.

In this way the venerable elder Sopāka ("Outcaste") spoke these verses. The *apadāna* of the elder Sopāka is concluded.

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In the story of Sopāka we find the simple act of providing the Buddha with a lovely seat of flowers bearing the fruit of higher rebirths, while it is the perception of impermanence that leads to the final destruction of taints, the condition of the arahant. The fruitfulness of karma remains the central theme of the both the *jatāka* and the *avadāna* genres. The basic lesson is clear: "Actions do not disappear even after a hundred aeons. When they have reached completion and it is time, they fruit for living being" (*Avadānaśataka* 15, 16, 18-20). As Speyer observes:

> [I]t is not without importance that the conclusion of half of the hundred texts out of which the *Avadānaśataka* is made up and several parts of the *Divyāvadāna* is the standing phrase that black actions bear black fruits, white actions white fruits, and mixed ones mixed fruits, with the exhortation to strive only after white actions, shunning or letting alone the other two..." (Speyer 1909, 1)

PART 2: UNDERVIEW

2.1 What is it like to be a noble disciple? (To purify the mind)

Our discussion thus far has aimed to provide an objective general overview of the manner in which the path of moral development is portrayed in the *Pāli Nikāya*s, *jātaka*s, and *avadāna*s. In pointing to the importance of the concept of volition (or intention, *cetanā*) we have already alluded to the *subjective* dimension of the path; we have not, however, explored this aspect in detail. Here, then, we will offer a deeper analysis of the conceptual framework underlying this general account, one that focuses on moral development *as it is experienced* by different kinds of spiritual agent. In previous writings (2005, 2008) I have argued that the hierarchy of three categories of agent provides a critically important key to interpreting Buddhist moral discourse in general. These have been introduced above as the ordinary person (*puthujjana*), the noble disciple (*sekha*), and the liberated being (*arahant*).[25] In this section we will draw a distinction between the ordinary person's experiences of moral development upon the worldly path, and the noble disciple's experiences of moral development as mental purification upon the supramundane path. We will conclude with a brief discussion of the distinctive moral experience of the *arahant* -- a task fraught with conceptual difficulties, in part because any moral "development" at this stage is technically impossible.

That moral development in early Buddhist thought should be appropriately interpreted in terms of the inner experience of the agent of moral conduct is clear enough when one considers the emphasis that the tradition places on volition. As noted above, the Buddha's identification of karma with volition had radical implications for the notion of moral conduct in ancient Indian thought and civilization. Not only did it pull the carpet out from under the feet of a culture of ritual animal sacrifice, it also had the effect of undermining the conceptual basis of the Indian four-fold class (*varṇa*) system, in which nobility, or purity, is based on birth. As noted above, the Buddha's teachings redefined this concept in terms of wisdom and morality rather than occupational inheritance.

It is nevertheless important to recognize that the idea of nobility does persist in the Buddha's teachings -- we have already noted many applications of the concept:

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[25] See Bodhi (1992, 14–15). Technically the term *sekha* covers seven out of eight categories of noble person (*ariya-puggala*), that is all those noble persons who have not yet reached the fruit of arahantship. This group includes those who have attained the path and the fruit of the stages of the stream-enterer, once-returner, and non-returner, as well as those who have attained the path but not the fruit of the stage of the liberated being (*arahant*). These stages are distinguished on the basis of the progressive elimination of ten different defilements. The eighth class of noble person is the individual who has attained the fruit of arahantship — that is, one who has completely purified his or her mind of the last traces of the deepest mental taints (*āsava*s): sensual desire, attachment to existence and rebirth, attachment to views, and ignorance. Such persons are termed *asekha* (non-disciple).

to the path walked, the person walking, the view experienced, and indeed the very truths realized. As with so many other concepts afloat in the air of his times, it is apparent that a pernicious idea was here subverted and put to good use by the historical Buddha, who seems to have had a special talent for this kind of skilful transmutation of existing ideas (see esp. Gombrich 2009).

Thus the "noble person" is situated in a hierarchy, not based on social class or occupation but on insight and moral purity. The social-spiritual hierarchy of the *varṇa* system comes to be displaced, on the one hand by a spiritual hierarchy based on inner character, and on the other by a new social division based around the partition of lay and monastic. We will not discuss the latter division in any detail here, nor its relationship with the hierarchy of spiritual agents. While it is clear that there is a significant overlap between the two schemas, it would be an obvious mistake to equate monastics and laity respectively with noble persons and ordinary persons. The texts often depict monks as ordinary persons and lay people as noble ones.

To understand the differences between the experiences of moral development of ordinary persons and noble disciples, we need make use of a conceptual schema employed by the Buddha himself in order to explain the nature of karma. In the *Kukkuravatika Sutta* (MN 57 *The Dog-duty Ascetic*) the Buddha provides an outline of the four basic kinds of action:

(1) dark with dark result;
(2) bright with bright result;
(3) both dark and bright with dark and bright result;
(4) neither dark nor bright, neither dark nor bright in result, the action that leads to the destruction of actions.[26]

The first three categories of action are precisely the same as those observed by Speyer in the *Avadānaśataka* (see above). It seems clear that they were employed in that context to encourage their intended audiences to aim for higher rebirths in *saṃsāra*. As such, the terms would seem be referring to karmicly meritorious and unmeritorious actions (*puñña* and *apuñña*). But what are we to make of the fourth category, included in the *sutta* but not in the passage from the *avadānas*? With its reference to the "destruction of actions" it would seem to be referring to actions that lead to *nibbāna*, and hence skilful actions (*kusala*) *par excellence*. Why would this

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[26] "Puṇṇa, there are four kinds of action proclaimed by me after realizing them for myself with direct knowledge. What are the four? There is dark action with dark result; there is bright action with bright result; there is dark-and-bright action with dark-and-bright result; there is action that is neither dark nor bright with neither dark nor bright result, action that leads to the destruction of actions." (Bodhi 1995, 495).

category be absent from the exhortation noted by Speyer? To whose actions does it refer?

Elsewhere I have argued that this fourth kind of action belongs to none other than the noble disciple (2005, 2008). To see this how this is so, one needs to give proper weight to the consideration that it is the state of mind characterizing a person's volition (*cetanā*) that is deemed the key factor determining the moral quality of any action. Importantly, the positive and negative terms translated here as "bright" and "dark" have strong epistemic connotations as well as the more obvious moral ones:

> *sukka* and *kaṇha* (*śukla* and *kṛṣṇa*): bright and dark, white and black, pure and impure, good and evil.

Dark actions are those that are based upon afflictive, unskilful mental formations (i.e. those conditioned by the three roots of the unwholesome: greed, hatred, and delusion). As such, they prevent insight into the four noble truths. Actions that are not dark are those based on skilful mental formations (those arising from non-greed, non-hatred and non-delusion).[27] They do not block such insight. For an ordinary person such actions are deemed "bright"; as such, they clearly do not fit the description of the fourth category: "neither bright nor dark, with neither dark nor bright result..." On the other hand, the conduct of the *arahant* does not quite fit the description of the fourth category of action either. His conduct cannot accurately be characterized as "action that *leads to* the destruction of actions"; as a liberated being, the *arahant* has *already achieved* the destruction of actions.

Thus, by necessity, actions of the fourth category need to belong to someone in an intermediate position—a person who has not yet achieved the final freedom of *nibbāna*. This person is the noble disciple (Adam 2005; Ñāṇamoli and Bodhi 1995, 1258; Payutto 1999, 76). As discussed above, the supramundane path walked by the noble disciple leads directly to *nibbāna*; it is the embodiment of skilful action. With this understanding, the reason the fourth category is missing from the *avadāna* passage discussed by Speyer becomes apparent: the exhortation it contains is directed toward ordinary persons, those still practicing on the mundane path. This interpretation helps to sharpen our earlier observations regarding the intended audience of Buddhist narrative literature, which can now be understood as directed

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[27] A well-known passage of the *Majjhima Nikāya* contains two tenfold lists of the unwholesome and wholesome (MN 9 *Right View,* Ñāṇamoli and Bodhi 1995, 132-133), as well as their conditions. Afflictive, unwholesome mental volitions are said to be conditioned by the so-called "three roots of the unwholesome" or three poisons: greed, hatred, and delusion. Their opposites constitute the "three wholesome roots": non-greed (*alobha*), non-hatred (*adosa*), and non-delusion (*amoha*). The key point is that it is the quality of the state of mind underlying one's volition that is the fundamental determinant of the brightness or darkness of an action.

toward ordinary persons, including monks, on the mundane path -- rather than simply the laity. (See Appleton 2010, 11-12)

Ordinary persons are motivated by a concern marked by the delusion of self; moral action is performed under the deluded desire to benefit oneself (e.g., with a higher rebirth, the prospect of pleasure, etc.) The agent's mentality is samsaric. But once a person enters the supramundane path, their actions are indelibly marked by the intimation of *nibbāna*; efforts are thereafter undertaken in the light of an unwavering recognition of the final goal. The mistaken belief in a Self has been penetrated by an ever-deepening experiential insight into the reality of the four noble truths. This agent's mentality is nirvanic.

In terms of moral development, the experiential quality of moral conduct for the two classes of agent is entirely different. They display radically different intentional structures in relation to the binary poles of *saṃsāra* and *nibbāna*. For a person with a samsaric orientation, actions can be viewed as positively and negatively "charged" with attachment -- in the sense that they are undertaken with positive or negative results for oneself in mind. They are either bright or dark (or both). For a person with a nirvanic orientation, actions are neither positively nor negatively charged with attachment to results. They are neither bright nor dark. They have been emptied of such "charge" in virtue of the absence of a false view of self to become attached to. The agent feels inescapably drawn towards *nibbāna*, but, paradoxically, is not motivated by the goal of attaining it for a falsely imagined "self". While the agent's actions continue to have unintended effects on their rebirths, this prospect does not form part of their motivation.[28]

Similar considerations apply to the noble disciple's experiences of *free agency* on the way to the final goal (Adam 2011). Different degrees of the feeling of freedom can be associated with each of the various subdivisions of *noble disciple*. Unlike the ordinary person's experience, which is marked by feelings of not being in control over one's life and fate, the noble disciple's experience is free from such oppressive feelings. Being irreversibly oriented away from suffering and its causes, such a person can be characterized as more consistently having the desires she wants to have. An internal harmony has been established in such a person; we can say that her will has been brought into alignment with the *dhamma*. Interestingly, from a western philosophical perspective, such an agent feels that she *cannot do otherwise* than act in ways that are consistent with her eventual attainment of *nibbāna*. Outwardly, her *sīla*

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[28] Technically, while the possibility of rebirth in lower worlds disappears upon entering the supramundane path, deep-rooted craving for rebirth in higher spheres does not entirely fall away until final liberation is achieved. In general, although their *sīla* is perfect, noble disciples remain subject to various fetters, including craving for subtle *rūpa* and *arūpa* states.

is perfect. As with the noble disciple's experiences of attachment and freedom, we can also recognize a parallel when it comes to feelings of *effort*. As one ascends along the supramundane path, one's inner struggles become fewer and the effort needed to act virtuously less burdensome and more natural. One happily does what one has to do. When one finally reaches the end of the path, effort is no longer required. One has become a moral virtuoso.

PART 3: NO MORE VIEW, NO MORE PATH

The above considerations suggest that the Buddhist tradition recognizes fundamental differences between the inner moral lives of the ordinary person and the noble disciple. Thus far, however, we have said very little concerning the third and final class of agent—the liberated being or *arahant*. If a vast distance exists between the mentality and outer conduct of a noble disciple and those of an ordinary person, this is even more the case when it comes to those who have actually attained the final goal. In fact, the systematic *Nikāya*s seem to recognize that the inner lives of the *arahant* and those who are still on the path must differ in fundamental ways. Indeed, because the *arahant* is precisely one who will no longer be reborn, the very language of karma *cannot* be applicable to her. The fourfold schema of action laid out in the *Kukkuravatika Sutta* is meant to be exhaustive, and in it there is no place for the conduct of the *arahant*.

So it is that the texts describe the *arahant*'s conduct and consciousness (*kiriya-citta*) as ''adhering to the moral, but not 'full of' morality''(that is, *sīlavā* but not *sīlamaya*; alternative translation below). The implication is that it is completely empty of both attachment and merit (that is, it is neither *puñña* nor *apuñña*). Clearly, a tension exists within the texts on the matter of how best to characterize the inner reality lying behind the *arahant*'s conduct. On the one hand the *arahant* represents inner perfection, the religious ideal, the living example of all that is worth striving for. As such, she is the embodiment of the positive qualities developed on the path. On the other hand, she also represents the realization of *nibbāna*, a value that lies beyond all dualistic predication. As such, the consciousness associated with the *arahant*'s conduct is said to be indeterminate (*avyākata*).

> And where do these wholesome habits (*kusala sīla*) cease without remainder? Their cessation is stated: here a bhikkhu is virtuous (*sīlavā*) but he does not identify with his virtue (*no ca sīlamaya*) and he understands as it actually is that deliverance of mind and deliverance by wisdom where these wholesome habits cease without remainder. (MN ii 27; trans. Ñāṇamoli and Bodhi 1995, 651)

In spite of the difficulties involved in providing a literal description of the *arahant*'s paradoxical condition, we can see that this agent personifies the perfection of the inner qualities we find developing on the paths taught by the Buddha: knowledge, moral purity, non-attachment, freedom. In the inner world behind the

arahant's selfless conduct lies a pure, unified state of stillness born from the realization of the highest good.

Abbreviations

AN   *Aṅguttara Nikāya*
DN   *Dīgha Nikāya*
KN   *Khuddaka Nikāya*
MN   *Majjhima Nikāya*
SN   *Saṃyutta Nikāya*
JA   *Jātakatthavaṇṇana*

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