

THE BUDDHA'S BAD KARMA: A PROBLEM IN THE HISTORY OF THERAVĀDA BUDDHISM

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Introduction

"Buddha's bad karma" is a veritable contradiction in terms. When reading the Buddha biography preserved in the *Vinayapīṭaka* and *Sūtapīṭaka* of the Pāli canon (*Tipīṭaka*), one cannot help thinking that Gotama led a charmed life: endowed with physical and spiritual perfection, he transcended the attitudes and attachments that are so often the source of human suffering. The *Jātaka* literature explains the perfection (in this life) of Gotama Buddha by describing its karmic roots over aeons of previous lives, during which the Bodhisatta produced unimaginable quantities of good karma. Despite its vastness, the Buddha biography preserved and developed in the Theravāda tradition up to the present contains not the slightest hint that Gotama did anything productive of bad karma; his *parinibbāna* was the extinction of all karma, good and bad.

But embedded within the Pāli canon are records of certain events in the Buddha's life—systematized in later tradition as twelve in number—which were less than pleasant. Even during the canonical period, some Buddhists interpreted these events as the effects of the Buddha's own previous bad karma. Their explanation gave birth to the problem of Buddha's bad karma. The notion that the Buddha suffered bad karma had important implications for both the developing theory of karmic absolutivity and cherished conceptions of Buddhahood. These implications proved so problematic that some later authors denied the thesis altogether, providing alternate causality arguments to explain the unpleasant events in Buddha's life. Others affirmed the position that these events were the result of Buddha's own bad karma, but not without modifying certain aspects of the theory of karma and the concept of Buddhahood.

This essay will trace the history of the complex problems sur-

rounding the unpleasant events in the Buddha's life as they developed in Theravāda tradition. Part One surveys the original records of these events, as preserved in the earliest texts of the Pāli canon. Part Two discusses a late canonical text, *Pubbakammāpiloti*, which analyzes these events as the result of Buddha's own previous bad karma. Part Three explores the texts which deny this karmic explanation and the reasons for these denials. Part Four examines the rebuttals to these denials, which affirm the karmic explanation by answering the objections fellow Buddhists had raised to it.

Part One: The Buddha's sufferings as recorded in the Pāli canon

The unpleasant events in the Buddha's life fall into three general categories: slander from enemies, assaults from enemies, and physical illness or deprivation. But a grasp on the theoretical problems which this essay addresses requires first of all an appreciation of each discrete event; the debate in later tradition raged over particular contextual details. This section of the paper will therefore survey the early Buddhist accounts of each event that later played a role in the larger problem. The above three-fold categorization provides a useful focus, but more beneficial is the narrative detail itself: these were particular events in the Buddha's life for which particular explanations were offered and debated.

Our first category, slander from enemies, is restricted to the Buddha's interaction with two renunciate women named Sundarī and Ciñcamānavikā. Both were affiliated with "heretics" (*tiṭṭhiya*) who employed them to cast doubt on the Buddha's chastity and ethical propriety.

The Sundarī story is recorded in the *Udāna* of the *Khuddakanikāya*.¹ In order to help her brethren she repeatedly visited the famous Jetavana at Sāvatti (Śrāvasti) while the Buddha was staying there. The elaborations of this story in later commentaries² explain that she told inquisitive townspeople whom she met on the road that she was staying in the perfumed cell (*gandhakuti*) of Gotama himself. Once the rumor had spread, the heretics murdered Sundarī then hid her corpse in the Jetavana. They reported her disappearance to Prasenadi, king of Kosala, who subsequently searched the Jetavana and discovered the corpse. The

heretics then placed the corpse on a litter and paraded it around town, decrying the wickedness of the Buddhists. Begging for alms, the monks were repeatedly scorned. But in this *Udāna* account, the Buddha remains calm. He instructs the monks to preach to their scorners the evil of lying, and assures them that the raucous will end in seven days. At the end of seven days the people renew their trust in the Buddhists, although no clear reason for this sudden change is given in the *Udāna*. The text merely highlights the certitude of the Buddha that the trouble would pass, and the monks' astonishment at the correctness of his prediction. The commentaries add that the truth was found out when the hired killers, drunkenly bragging, confessed to the crime and the heretics' collusion.

The account of *Ciñcamānavikā* is very similar, and the stories have suffered some conflation. *Ciñcamānavikā*'s story is not spelled out explicitly in the canon. It was clearly part of the early tradition, since the core verses of the *Jātaka* allude to it, but it must have been preserved orally since its full telling exists only in the *Jātakatthakathā* and other commentarial sources.³ I will discuss the commentarial tellings in depth below; now I will use the commentaries merely to outline the story as it probably existed, orally, during the canonical period. *Ciñcamānavikā* was a beautiful renunciate woman, employed (as was *Sundarī*) by the heretics to slander Gotama. Like *Sundarī*, she told inquisitive townfolk that she had been sleeping with the Buddha. Then, at a public festival, she feigned pregnancy and accused Gotama both of being the father and of neglecting his fiscal and ritual responsibilities. All tellings continue to state that Śakra's heavenly throne glowed red at this unrighteousness, and that the townfolk cursed *Ciñcamānavikā* and chased her away until the earth itself opened up to suck her into the *avīci* hell. As in the *Sundarī* tale, this attempt by the heretics to defeat Gotama was counterproductive; they suffered a loss of fame, while the Buddha's fame increased.

Just as the stories of slander illustrate not the Buddha's deficiency but rather his great fame, so the stories in our second category (assaults from enemies) illustrate his great power. These stories all revolve around the Buddha's jealous cousin Devadatta, and were included together in the Seventh *Khandhāka* of the *Vinayaṭīkā* (*Cullavagga*), "Divisions in the Sangha".⁴ According to

this text, Devadatta attained certain supernatural powers (*iddhi*) once he had become a monk. Infatuated with his own prestige and honor, he used his favored position with Prince Ajātasattu to attempt assassination of the Buddha. Devadatta sent a man to kill the Buddha and ordered him to return by a certain path. Then he hired two men to kill the murderer, and four men to kill those two men, and so on up to a group of sixteen. But when the first man went to slay the Buddha, he was so overcome by the Buddha's presence that he fell at his feet confessing. The Buddha exhorted the man to restrain himself from future transgression and sent him away by a different path. When the two (four, eight, sixteen) men came to find their targets, they were successively converted by the Buddha until finally the first man had to report to Devadatta that the Buddha's great power (*iddhi*) makes assassination impossible.

Devadatta resolved to do the deed himself. As the Buddha walked in meditation beneath Vulture's Peak in Rajgir (Rājagaha), Devadatta hurled a boulder at him. "But two mountain peaks came together and stopped that rock and only a splinter from it made the foot of the Blessed One to bleed."⁵ The Buddha admonished Devadatta and told the monks that his deed created evil karma which would work itself out in the immediate future (*anantarikakamma*).⁶ The monks made plans for the Buddha's protection, but he assured them that the assassination of a Buddha is impossible.

Then Devadatta sent a fierce man-slaying elephant named Nālāgiri down a road after the Buddha. As the elephant charged, the monks cried out to the Buddha to turn back. But Buddha remained calm, and when the elephant sensed the Buddha's universal love (*metta*) he was instantly tamed. Like the texts describing attempts of heretics to slander the Buddha, this *Vinaya* text describing Devadatta's assaults on the Buddha's person concludes its description by emphasizing that Devadatta's fame diminished, while that of the Buddha increased.

The *Vinaya* text proceeds from this point by describing Devadatta's attempt to divide the monastic community and ends with a prediction that its result will be an aeon of suffering. The Devadatta cycle is retold in a variety of ways in many later Pāli and vernacular texts, and I will discuss some of them below. For now, I only want to emphasize the fact that the *Vinaya* text describes a

number of unpleasant things which befell the Buddha: a rock was hurled at him; a splinter of rock struck his foot; the striking of the foot drew blood; thugs were sent to assassinate him; finally, he was rushed by a mad elephant. But in the *Vinaya* text these unpleasant details highlight the Buddha's greatness: even in the face of danger he is calm; even against the most fearsome of adversaries his power prevails.

The final category is illness and physical deprivation. Into this category fall a number of isolated events recorded, for the most part in an off-hand way, in parts of the Pāli canon. The *Majjhimanikāya* and *Saṃyuttanikāya*, for example, both mention occasions on which the Buddha suffered a debilitating back-ache.⁷ The famous *Mahāparinibbānasuttam* of the *Dīghanikāya* mentions two instances of physical illness during the last few months of eighty-year-old Gotama's life. Having gone to Beluva for the rainy season, "there fell upon him a dire sickness, and sharp pains came upon him, even unto death."⁸ Through "a strong effort of the will" the Buddha holds back the sickness that he might live long enough to give proper notice of his imminent demise to the monks. Later the same text states that having eaten truffles (or pork) given to him as alms, the Buddha suffered "a dire sickness, the disease of dysentery, and sharp pain came upon him, even unto death."⁹ The wound on Buddha's foot caused by the splintering of the rock hurled by Devadatta also overlaps with this category of physical illness. In relating a sermon delivered at this time, the *Saṃyuttanikāya* records that "[when] the foot of the Blessed One was wounded with a splinter of stone, great indeed were the pains in his body, painful sensations which were keen, sharp, severe, disagreeable and unpleasant."¹⁰

The remaining two unpleasant events in the canonical Buddha biography also fall into this general category, although they concern physical deprivation rather than illness. The first of them is well-known: for six years before attaining enlightenment at Bodh Gaya, the Bodhisatta performed severe and physically debilitating austerities as a renunciate ascetic.¹¹ The second is less well-known. According to the *Vinaya*, during one rainy season the Buddha and monks resided at Verañja, honoring the request of a Brahmin from that city. It was a time of famine, and the monks, being unable to

obtain almsfood, were forced to scavenge the earth for bulbous roots. Even the Buddha had to eat this inferior food (which later tradition calls *yava* or crude grain, as opposed to rice), although Ānanda carefully prepared it by pounding before feeding it to him.¹²

There is no denying that slander, assault and physical illness are unpleasant. But when we consider the sufferings which most human beings undergo in an eighty-year life, we must admit that Gotama Buddha's life was comparatively free of suffering. Moreover, in each of the canonical accounts recording one of these unpleasant events, we are assured that the Buddha did not suffer anxiety, sorrow or even distraction in the face of such ordinarily-discomfiting adversities as hunger, pain, danger and false accusation. Nevertheless, some degree of unpleasantness did befall even Gotama Buddha; at the very least, during a few moments of his otherwise charmed existence the Buddha's life was not quite up to par.

Part Two: Bad karma as the reason for Buddha's sufferings

The texts we have just discussed belong to the earliest layers of the Buddhist canon, so in a sense the problems concerning the Buddha's suffering are as old as Buddhism itself. But in the early parts of the canon, there is no evidence that Buddhists believed these events the result of bad karma, nor even that they considered the fact of Buddha suffering to be in any way problematic. Moreover, there is no evidence in these texts that these disparate unpleasant events were contemplated together, as a category.

By the late canonical period, however, a text was produced which makes obvious the fact that at least some Buddhists thought about these unpleasant aspects of the Buddha biography categorically, and explained them as the effects of Buddha's own bad karma. This text is called *Pubbakammaṭṭhi*, or *The Strands (Rags) of Previous Karma*, contained as number 387 of the *Therāpadāna*. Oddly¹³, it is placed in the section of the *Apadāna* (of the *Khuddakanikāya*) devoted to biographies of famous monks. But its colophon places it in the *Buddhāpadāna* section of that same text which, as its name implies, contains a cosmic biography of the Buddha spanning countless

aeons of self-perfection (and thus paralleling the *Jātaka* collection, but in a greatly abbreviated form). There is no question that the subject of the text is the Buddha himself, not a monk. In versified *sutta* fashion, it portrays itself as a disclosure made by the Buddha to the community of monks at Lake Anotatta (Skt: Anavatapta): "Near the Anotatta Lake, on the delightful rocky ground, where various gems were sparkling and various sweet scents [were exuded] in the forest, the Lord of the World, surrounded by a huge community of monks, sitting down, then explained his own previous karma: 'Hear from me, O monks, the karma produced by me [and] the ripening of strands of karma in the Buddha himself.'" ¹⁴

The form of *Pubbakammāpiloti* is straightforward. In the briefest of ways, the Buddha describes twelve previous lives in which he performed evil deeds, and states that these deeds resulted in great suffering throughout aeons of transmigration and finally resulted in the unpleasant aspects of the Buddha biography discussed in Part One. The text draws clear causal connections between the previous evil deed and later suffering. Thus the Buddha begins by stating that in a former life he was a scoundrel named Munāli, who slandered an innocent Paccekabuddha named Surabhi. As a result of that deed (*tena kammavipākenā*) he transmigrated in hell (*niraye*) for a long time, experiencing thousands of years of *dukkha*. As the remaining effect of that deed (*tena kammāvesena*) he suffered the slanderous accusations of Sundarī. ¹⁵

Similarly, in a previous existence the Buddha slandered Nanda, a disciple of the Buddha Sabbābhībhū. As a result he transmigrated in hell for ten thousand years, and upon obtaining a human body suffered much slander. The final result of this karma was the slander by Ciñcamānavikā. ¹⁶ Previously Buddha was a learned Brahmin, teaching mantras to five hundred youths in a great forest. Then he accused a sage named Isigana of unchastity. His pupils heard him and repeated his accusation as they begged food from the villagers. As a result, they all suffered slander when Sundarī was murdered. ¹⁷ In a previous life, greedy for wealth, the Buddha murdered his own half-brother by crushing him with a rock; as a result, his cousin Devadatta threw a boulder at him and a splinter wounded his foot. ¹⁸ Being a boy playing on the road, he threw a

shard at a passing Paccekabuddha. As a result, Devadatta employed thugs to kill him. ¹⁹ Mounted on an elephant, he attacked a Paccekabuddha going for alms. As a result, Nālāgiri the fierce tusker rushed him in Rajgir. ²⁰ Born as the unrighteous King Pattiya, the Buddha killed a man with a knife. After "roasting in hell" he suffered the remaining bad karma when the splinter from Devadatta's boulder caused his foot to become infected. ²¹ Born as the son of a fisherman, he felt happiness upon seeing the men bring in dead fish. As a result he got a headache in this life, and his clansmen (who had formerly been the fishermen) were killed in Viḍuḍabha's war on the Śākya. ²² In another life he cursed the disciples of the Buddha Phussa saying, "no rice for you—chew and eat inferior grain". As a result, the Buddha ate inferior food during his sojourn in Verañja. ²³ Formerly born as the son of a wrestler, he interrupted a wrestling match (and, according to the commentary, broke the back of one of the wrestlers in the process). As a result, he suffered backache. ²⁴ As a physician he administered a purge to the son of a millionaire. As a result, in this life he suffered from diarrhea. ²⁵ Finally, born as Jotipāla he reviled the Buddha Kassapa: "Whence the enlightenment of this baldy, the enlightenment so difficult to obtain?" As a result, he performed severe austerities for six years before obtaining his own enlightenment. ²⁶

Pubbakammāpiloti is unique in more ways than one. It is the only text of the *Apadāna* which focuses on bad karma and its unpleasant results; the *Apadāna* genre is otherwise devoted exclusively to good karma and its pleasant results. ²⁷ More important for our purposes, *Pubbakammāpiloti* is the only text of the Pāli canon which explains the Buddha's sufferings as the result of his own bad karma and which provides accounts of his previous bad deeds and sufferings therefrom. Although much Pāli canonical literature (especially the *Jātaka*) devotes itself to previous good karma of the Buddha, only here do we learn the other side of the coin.

There are in fact good reasons to suspect that *Pubbakammāpiloti* has its origin in a "Hīnayāna" tradition other than the Theravāda (e.g., the Sarvāstivāda or Mahāsaṃghika). I am not familiar with any use of the term *kammāpiloti* anywhere in the Pāli canon and commentaries except in reference to this very text. The *Divyāvadāna* of the Sarvāstivādins, however, uses the Sanskrit equivalent *kar-*

mapiloti quite often, usually in a stereotyped phrase by which hungry ghosts (*pretas*) inquire of the Buddha the cause of their fates, asking “what is this strand of karma?”²⁸ The Sarvāstivādins seem to have known more than the term; they seem to have known the prototype of our Pāli text. The *Divyāvadāna*, in the midst of a catalogue of the places where the Buddha made especially important disclosures, states that “the previous strands of karma have been disclosed at the Great Lake Anavatapta [by the Buddha who was] with the disciples.”²⁹

As important as these clues pointing to the Sarvāstivādins is another which points to the Mahāsaṃghikas. We have seen that all of the this-life events discussed in *Pubbakammaṭṭhi* have direct antecedents in earlier texts of the canon. Significantly, however, only one of the stories of previous lives has an antecedent in the Pāli texts, namely the story of Jotipāla and Kassapa, in a telling which does not suggest that the Bodhisatta “slandered” that Buddha or produced bad karma thereby.³⁰ Those later commentaries that discuss the previous evil deeds, to which we shall turn below, always do so by quoting the *Apadāna*; the karmic explanation of Buddha’s suffering, indeed the majority of the stories about the Buddha’s evil deeds in earlier lives, is unique to *Pubbakammaṭṭhi*. But the Mahāsaṃghika *Mahāvastu-avadāna* records one of these “unknown” stories, namely the slander by the Bodhisattva of a disciple of Buddha Sarvābhibhu (Pāli Sabbābhibhu).³¹ This description is considerably more detailed than the mere reference to this event in the Pāli *Pubbakammaṭṭhi*. It is especially significant since it also parallels the Pāli text in describing the Buddha’s slander by a woman (whose name is lost in a textual lacuna) as a karmic effect of the Buddha’s earlier bad deed.³² That is, it not only tells the tale to which our text alludes, but does so in order to make precisely the same connection: the Buddha suffered slander because in a former life he was himself a slanderer. It is probable that the lacuna in the *Mahāvastu* was once filled with the name of Ciñcānavikā, whose slander of the Buddha was, according to *Pubbakammaṭṭhi*, the result of his having insulted a disciple of Sabbābhibhu (Sarvābhibhu). It is at any rate certain that the Mahāsaṃghikas preserved traditions paralleling *Pubbakammaṭṭhi*. Thus, although I have not been able to trace more of the *Pubbakam-*

mapiloti in the Buddhist Sanskrit literature, perhaps because I have overlooked parallels or perhaps because they did not survive history, it would seem that the author of *Pubbakammaṭṭhi* drew his account, and his position, from non-Theravādin schools of the “Hīnayāna”.³³

Part Three: Denials of the karmic explanation of Buddha’s sufferings

Whatever its original source, *Pubbakammaṭṭhi* came to be included in the canon. Once included, the karmic explanation of the Buddha’s suffering became the basis for a debate which raged throughout the Theravādin commentarial period. The specific formulations and solutions to the problem are as numerous as the texts in which they are recorded. For the sake of clarity I will discuss these texts as falling into two main groups: on one hand those texts which support and elaborate the *Apadāna* position and, on the other hand, those which reject the karmic explanation of the Buddha’s suffering by providing alternate causalities. Just as *Pubbakammaṭṭhi* represents the former position, the latter position is represented by the Dilemmas section of the *Milindapañha*, which is the earliest text offering alternate causalities known today. I will turn attention first to the *Milindapañha* and other dissenting texts, investigating the reasons Theravāda Buddhists tried to avoid the conclusion that Buddha had bad karma and how they tried to do so. These denials of the karmic explanation must be examined first since the rebuttals to them—the subject of the next part of this paper—make sense only in light of the objections which tradition raised.

The *Milindapañha* Dilemmas generally affirm the *Apadāna* position that even spiritually advanced people might suffer because of bad karma. The antagonist Milinda asks how the great Moggallāna, if truly an arhant and chief among those skilled in the miraculous powers (*iddhi*), could have been murdered so brutally as hagiographic tradition maintains that he was. The dilemma is this: if Moggallāna was chief among those possessing *iddhi*, it must be false that he suffered so terribly. Or, if it be true that he was beaten to death with clubs, then the Buddha was mistaken in declaring him chief among those with *iddhi*. Nāgasena, the protagonist, answers

the dilemma by stating that the effects of karma are greater than anything, even arhantship and its fruits:

Even among things beyond the reach of imagination, great king, still one is in excess above the other, one more powerful than the other ... It is precisely the effect of karma which overcomes all the rest, and has them under its rule; and no other influence is of any avail to the man in whom karma is working out its inevitable end.³⁴

Good and bad karma come together even in extreme cases, as when an accomplished arhant is clubbed to death.

Another Dilemma questions whether good and bad really have different effects if the evil Devadatta could have been equal or superior to the Buddha during his previous lives (i.e. in the *Jātaka* stories). The text affirms the mixed nature of karma:

All beings in fact, O king, who, in various forms as creatures, are carried down the stream of transmigration, meet, as they are whirled along in it, both with pleasant companions and with disagreeable ones—just as water whirled along in a stream meets with pure and impure substances, with the beautiful and the ugly.³⁵

This text points out that in the *Jātaka* the Bodhisatta (though sometimes inferior) acquired much merit at the same time that Devadatta, sometimes superior, attained much demerit. It also points out that Devadatta had good karma too, even though he suffered greatly in the end. Again, good and bad karma come together. But the text makes a curious omission from the standpoint of *Pubbakammāpiloti*: it does not affirm that the Bodhisatta had some bad karma too.

In this same vein, Dilemmas Forty-five and Forty-six deny that the Bodhisatta accumulated bad karma when he slaughtered animals for sacrifice and when he reviled the Buddha Kassapa, respectively. Although the demerit gained from slaughtering animals (Dilemma Forty-five) is not included in the *Pubbakammāpiloti* account of Buddha's previous bad karma, it clearly represents the same kind of troublesome ascription of bad karma to the Buddha. But the *Milinda* author is able to avoid saying that the Bodhisatta heaped up bad karma by explaining the animal sacrifice as the act of a man temporarily insane:

"Now an evil act done, O king, by one out of his mind, is even in this present world not considered a grievous offence, nor is it so in respect of the fruit that it brings about in a future life."³⁶

Suggesting this non-karmic explanation for the Bodhisatta's activities saves the *Milinda* author from admitting that the Bodhisatta had bad karma when he did the act and, more important, it saves him from admitting that the Bodhisatta did something productive of bad karma. In Dilemma Forty-six, the same problems are avoided by saying that the Bodhisatta's slander of the Buddha Kassapa "...was owing to his [Brahmin] birth and family surroundings."³⁷ Even if Dilemma Forty-five is not specifically responsive to issues raised in *Pubbakammāpiloti*, Dilemma Forty-six clearly is. Only in the *Apadāna* is this story told to exemplify Buddha's bad karma. *Milindapañha* admits the story, but denies that it was a karma-producing event.

Milindapañha does more than hint at disagreement with the *Pubbakammāpiloti*; in two Dilemmas the author addresses precisely its issues. In Dilemma Eight Milinda asks Nāgasena, "...had the Blessed One, when he became a Buddha, burnt out all evil (*akusala*)³⁸ in himself, or was there still some evil remaining in him?" Nāgasena's answer: "He had burnt out all evil. There was none left."³⁹ So just as Dilemmas Forty-five and Forty-six express disagreement with the position that in previous lives the Buddha accumulated bad karma, Dilemma Eight denies that in this life the Buddha suffered the effects of bad karma. Then Milinda asks whether the Buddha suffered bodily pain, and the monk replies that indeed he did, mentioning a number of the tradition's difficulties as regards the Buddha's suffering:

At Rājagaha a splinter of rock pressed his foot, and once he suffered from dysentery, and once when the humours of his body were disturbed a purge was administered to him, and once when he was troubled with wind the Elder who waited on him (that is Ānanda) gave him hot water.⁴⁰

Milinda's rejoinder is that since all pain is the result of karma, the Buddha must have had residual bad karma. This is a thesis which the *Milinda* author is unwilling to maintain. He cites a text in the *Samyuttanikāya* in which the Buddha says that not all bodily pain is caused by karma, that some bodily pain is the result of external causes, i.e. "Superabundance of wind, and of bile, and of phlegm, the union of these humours, variations in temperature, the avoiding of dissimilarities⁴¹ [and] external agency" in addition to karma.⁴² He argues that the pain suffered by the Buddha was due

to natural causes and thereby removes the doubt surrounding the statement that the Buddha was free of bad karma. As a second refutation he argues that the Buddha suffered as the result of another of the possibilities listed above, namely external human agency (i.e. Devadatta). Both solutions contradict the Buddha's statement in *Pubbakammāpiloti* that these very pains were the direct result of bad karma.

Similarly, Dilemma Twenty-six concerns the rock hurled by Devadatta which splintered and injured the Buddha's foot. According to *Pubbakammāpiloti* this was the remaining effect of the Buddha having crushed his half-brother to death with a rock in some previous existence.⁴³ The *Milindapañha*, however, treats it purely as the result of external causes. Its proximate cause was a freak of nature (the earth sent two boulders to intercept Devadatta's hurled rock but the collision happened to cause a shard to splinter off)⁴⁴ and "...the real cause of its so striking against his foot was the sorrow-working deed of that ungrateful, wicked Devadatta."⁴⁵

When we examine the Dilemmas of *Milindapañha* in their entirety, we see that these questions about whether the Bodhisatta and/or Buddha had bad karma are in fact part of a larger class of problems concerning aspects of the Buddha's Buddhahood, the veracity of which is called into question on the basis of events in the Buddha's life and teachings: How could he have been all-knowing if he admitted the schismatic Devadatta into the Order, or if he reflected on things, or if he was once persuaded by new facts? Did he once doubt, was he once angry, did he once show immodesty? Was he really Buddha if he needed to meditate? The denial of a position which explains Buddha's suffering as the effect of bad karma responds, I think, to similar questions. If he had bad karma, what guarantee is there in Buddhahood that bad karma can be overcome? If bad karma is sure to bear fruit, is it possible that his "complete going out" (*parinibbāna*) might have been illusory? The *Milinda* author seems to have a lot at stake in denying that the Buddha had bad karma. Like these other Dilemmas, the Dilemmas discussing Buddha's bad karma concern the consistency of certain dogmatic positions about the nature of Buddhahood in light of accepted hagiographic tradition. Most of the *Milindapañha* Dilemmas affirm both the hagiographical tradition or canonical

text and the position about Buddhahood which is held up as contradictory, often arriving at "solutions" through not a little casuistry. In the Dilemmas concerned with Buddha's bad karma, however, *Milindapañha* does more than provide fanciful evasions. In at least Dilemmas Eight and Twenty-six, the objection which Nāgasena defeats is itself the traditional position, the position which, according to *Pubbakammāpiloti*, was disclosed by the Buddha himself.

The *Milinda* author may have been the first Buddhist to deny that Gotama had any bad karma, either as Bodhisatta or as Buddha, but he was certainly not the last. Buddhaghosa, in his commentary on the *Samyutta* record of the Buddha's backache, glosses the Buddha's statement that he has a backache by providing a non-karmic causal explanation for it:

Why did [the Buddha's back] pain him? The Blessed One, who had devoted himself to great exertion for six years [as an ascetic], had a great deal of bodily suffering. Then later on, at the time when he was very old, he had back trouble. That [backache] had no karmic cause (*akāraṇam etaṃ*).⁴⁶

This physiological explanation of the Buddha's backache, and statement that there was no deeper cause than asceticism in early life, contradicts directly the *Pubbakammāpiloti* ascription of the Buddha's backache to bad karma from his former existence as a wrestler's son.

The *Dhammapadaṭṭhakathā* retells several of the stories of unpleasant events in the Buddha biography without the slightest hint that Buddha's own bad karma was involved. Thus Sundarī's slander of the Buddha was caused by the jealousy of the heretics.⁴⁷ The same cause is stated for the slander by Ciñcamānavikā.⁴⁸ Here the Buddha explains that in a previous life too Ciñcamānavikā had slandered him, thus shifting the focus of the discussion from Buddha's bad karma to Ciñcamānavikā's bad karma. In this same way, *Dhammapadaṭṭhakathā* retells the entire Devadatta cycle, portraying him as agent of the Buddha's suffering and shifting the focus to his bad karma.⁴⁹ Finally, this text retells the time that Buddha and the monks were forced to eat inferior food in Verañja, explaining this to have been the result of bad karma which the monks accumulated during one of the Buddha's previous lives (when, as five hundred horses, they served inferior food to other horses).⁵⁰ Whether the

result of no one's previous bad karma, of the antagonists' bad karma, or of the monks' bad karma, in the whole *Dhammapadaṭṭhakathā* we find no suggestion that any of the Buddha's sufferings were the result of his own bad karma.⁵¹

The *Jātakatṭhakathā* also retells the stories of many of the times in which Buddha suffered, seemingly in order to refute the karmic explanation. Like *Dhammapadaṭṭhakathā*, the *Jātaka* gives a previous karma explanation for Ciñcamānavikā's desire to slander the Buddha, not mentioning any bad karma on the part of the Buddha which made him her target.⁵² Sundarī's story is also told, again without any hint that the Buddha was suffering bad karma.⁵³ Nālāgiri's attack on the Buddha is retold, shifting the focus from the reason that Buddha was attacked to the reason that, in that instance, Ānanda reacted with heroism.⁵⁴ Similarly, the *Jātakatṭhakathā* alludes to the story of Verañja but focuses upon the equanimity displayed by the Buddha, giving a previous karma reason for that but not for his bad-luck at alms-gathering.⁵⁵

In all of these texts, we find a number of devices employed to refute the thesis that in these instances Buddha suffered as a result of bad karma. Whether the explanation be non-karmic or the karma of another, the effect is the same: the position that the Buddha did not suffer because of bad karma is upheld.

Part Four: Rebuttals affirming the karmic explanation of Buddha's sufferings

These denials of the Buddha's bad karma, in texts which scholars today recognize as central to the development of Theravāda tradition, did not satisfy all Theravāda Buddhists. Some commentators and later editors were less willing to ignore *Pubbakammapiḷoti*, which the early Theras included in the canon as authentically promulgated by the Buddha himself. That is, according to the canon, Buddha himself sided with those Buddhists favoring the karmic explanation. The texts which deny the karmic explanation never mention *Pubbakammapiḷoti*, as though it did not exist, even though their arguments clearly speak to the problems it raises. Similarly, the rebutters of those denials never mention the denials specifically, but the manner in which they elaborate the simple *Pubbakammapiḷoti* references makes clear that they are writing with those denials in mind.

The earliest such text known today is the commentator Dhammapālācariya's *Paramattha-Dīpanī Udānatṭhakathā*, his commentary on the *Udāna* which, we recall, is the earliest canonical text telling the story of Sundarī the slanderer. That Dhammapāla supported the karmic explanation cannot be doubted:

All the [Buddha's] sufferings (*dukkhāni*), beginning with the slander of the Blessed One by deceitful women like Ciñcamānavikā and so forth are to this extent conditioned, the remaining effects of deeds done in a former existence, which are called "karma strands" (*kammāni piḷotikāni*).⁵⁶

Here Dhammapāla cites by name the *Apadāna* and proceeds to quote *Pubbakammapiḷoti* in its entirety.

But Dhammapāla does not simply affirm an old position; he affirms it in light of the denials which have been made:

[With regard to Sundarī's slanderous accusations,] it is asked, "what then was that karma?" The Master, who for an immeasurable period of time carefully heaped up a wide accumulation of merit, received harsh and untrue slander. It is said that this very Blessed One, being a Bodhisatta in a previous birth, was a scoundrel named Munāli. He served evil people, intent on fixing his attention improperly, and roamed about. One day he saw a Paccekasambuddha named Surabhi adjusting his robe to enter the city for alms. At that time various women were going with him. [Munāli] slandered, "This renunciate is a scoundrel, no celibate he." [Munāli/Buddha], because of that karma, roasted in hell for many thousands of years. As the remaining effect of that karma, now, even though he was the Buddha, he received slander because of Sundarī.⁵⁷

Dhammapāla refers his account to a debate over the cause for Sundarī's slander, and states that *even though* he was Buddha, with all the merit described by the *Jātaka*, still the Buddha was subject to the effects of his previous bad deeds. Dhammapāla affirms the absolutivity of karma even in the case of the Buddha, thus affirming the *Pubbakammapiḷoti* position against the denials of it. There was no alternate causality; Dhammapāla's language makes this point even clearer than *Pubbakammapiḷoti* itself.

Even some of the later editors of the *Dhammapadaṭṭhakathā* did not like the implications of its silence with regard to the Buddha's bad karma. One sub-tradition in the transmission of this text, which the Pali Text Society editor labelled "Kambodian", appends this passage to the *Dhammapadaṭṭhakathā* account of the Ciñcamānavikā incident:

Because of what did the Blessed One receive the slander of heretics? This is the previous karma done by the Blessed One...⁵⁸

The text gives the account of Buddha's birth as Munāli, apparently quoting from the *Apadānatthakathā*,⁵⁹ then quotes the verses of *Pubbakammapiḷoti* concerning Ciñcamānavikā concluding "this is the former karma of the Master."⁶⁰

But the quintessential rebuttal to the denials that Buddha had bad karma is the commentary on *Pubbakammapiḷoti* contained in *Visuddhajanavilāsini nāma Apadānatthakathā*. *Pubbakammapiḷoti* receives more attention from the commentator than any other text of the large *Apadāna* collection. The commentary contains lengthy descriptions of the previous life stories, the intermediate sufferings in hell and low states, and the stories of Buddha's sufferings in this life. In the process of this elaboration, the commentator is able to undercut the denials of the karmic explanation at the same time that he generates out of this debate some startlingly new Buddhist perspectives. The commentary on *Pubbakammapiḷoti* is lengthy, and so I will not be able to relate all of the details it provides here. But it is worthwhile to consider some of the ways in which it modifies the *Apadāna* telling in order to affirm the karmic position despite the denials of it.

First, the order in which the stories are told is changed, so that the commentary is chronological in terms of Buddha's present life. That is, the six years' asceticism is told first (not last, as in *Pubbakammapiḷoti*), because it preceded all the other unpleasant events chronologically. In the process of narrating these events chronologically, the commentator demonstrates that as the Bodhisatta neared his goal, and even after the great events in his life as Buddha, he continued to suffer bad karma. The juxtaposition of his progress on the Path with the effects of his previous karma drives home Dhammapāla's position that Buddha suffered *even though* he was the Buddha. Thus the narrative points out that the Bodhisatta slandered Kassapa Buddha "even though it was in the time of that very Buddha that he received his prediction [of future Buddhahood]."⁶¹ Then, the commentator continues, even after he had perfected himself in the last *jātaka* as King Vessantara, had been born as Siddhattha, renounced his kingdom, cut off his hair and entered into austerities, he suffered the bad karma of having slandered that

same Buddha whose prediction was about to come true. The narrative continues to recall for us that he gave up asceticism after six years, sat beneath the Bodhi Tree, and became Buddha. It was after this that he received slander because of Sundarī. By describing famous events in the Buddha biography, repeatedly juxtaposing the sufferings Buddha endured, the commentary highlights the problem which had so bothered the authors of *Milindapañha* and related texts. Even as he prepared to die, as he prepared to achieve his unsurpassed *parinibbāna*, the Buddha suffered diarrhea.

Second, this commentary is the first (and in my knowledge the only) text which addresses the nature of the "badness" of the Buddha's karma. "Strands of karma" (*kammapiḷoti*) is a euphemistic term; it always refers to bad karma but does not state such a bad case. *Pubbakammapiḷoti* itself never provides an adjective for the karma which results in Buddha's suffering. But in the commentary, less significant deeds (like the happy mind of the fisherboy) are categorized as "unwholesome karma" (*akusalakamma*) whereas the major offences (like murdering his own half-brother out of greed) are described as "evil karma" (*pāpakamma*).

Third, the commentator sometimes deepens the karmic connection by providing previous karma explanations for the evil deeds done in the past. Thus when Jotipāla slandered Kassapa Buddha, the primary karmic force which brought it about was Kassapa's *own* previous bad karma.⁶² So it was karmically determined not only that Buddha would perform painful austerities but also that in a previous life he would slander a Buddha! Moreover, the fact of Buddhas suffering bad karma becomes universalized: not only this Buddha; previous Buddhas too suffered bad karma.

Fourth, the commentator provides previous bad karma explanations for the alternate causalities propounded by the texts described in Part Three of this paper. Thus Devadatta's enmity, which *Milinda* and other texts state to be the real cause of the Buddha's suffering at his hand, is in the commentary explained to be itself the result of Buddha, in a former life as a merchant, having cheated Devadatta of his due.⁶³ Similarly, the hatred and jealousy of the heretics is explained as a response to monks showing off their miraculous powers (before the Buddha had established the rule forbidding such displays).⁶⁴

Fifth and finally, the commentator develops out of this debate a new Buddhology. He treats *Pubbakammapiḷoti* at the beginning of the *Apadāna*, as part of the *Buddhapadāna* section of that text. For him, the stories about bad karma and bad effects are part of the same story which tells of good karma and good effects; his is a new conception of the Buddha biography:

After asking which road to take, when “avoid the left and take the right” is said, travellers having gone by that [right] road accomplish their duties in villages, towns and royal cities; but those gone just as far in the same manner on the other, avoided, left road, also [eventually] accomplish their duties in villages, towns, etc. [once they have realized their mistake and returned to the correct road]. In just this way the *Buddhapadāna* was set forth because [it exemplifies] the wholesome (*kusala*) *apadāna*; there is this problem karma (*pañhakamma*) [i.e. the problems described in *Pubbakammapiḷoti*] to detail that [analogue to the left road] because [it exemplifies] the unwholesome (*akusala*) *apadāna*.⁶⁵

For the commentator, the Buddha biography is not only paradigmatic of the pleasant and ultimately liberating effects of good karma; it is also paradigmatic of every person’s ability to get onto the right road, even if he or she be the doer of bad karma. Like the travellers who, failing to heed the warning of those who know, must waste time on the wrong road before realizing their mistake and getting back on course, so the man or woman who acts evilly, not heeding the warning of the Buddha, will, like the Buddha himself, waste time suffering in hell and on earth, but in the end even that evil-doer can also get on the right road.⁶⁶

Just as the commentary on *Pubbakammapiḷoti* seeks to resolve the difficulties surrounding the karmic explanation with an innovative interpretation of Buddhahood, the final text we will consider provides an innovative twist on the theory of karma. This is the *ṭikā* on *Milindapañha*, a late medieval text which originated in a Sinhalese Mahāvihāra monastery in Thailand. In the *Milindapañha*’s explicit denial of the Buddha’s bad karma referred to above (Dilemma Eight), Nāgasena states rhetorically that Buddha’s pain must have been the result of “the fruit of karma or the deed [of Devadatta]” (*kammavipākato vā kiriyato vā ti*) and then proceeds to defend the latter position. The *ṭikā* simply explains “because of the deed” (*kiriyato*) as the deed of Devadatta, which is obvious from the context. But it glosses “because of the fruit of karma” (*kam-*

mavipākato) by quoting the *Pubbakammapiḷoti* verse in which the Buddha states that the splinter of rock injured him as the remaining effect of having murdered his half-brother.⁶⁷ The commentator does not agree with the stand taken by the *Milindapañha* in this debate:

The Thera [Nāgasena] does not have a certain explanation for this problem. Therefore having thought it out one should accept [whichever answer] is most appropriate. In that regard [I] am making this investigation: The killing on the road [by the Buddha in a previous life] produced defilements which were not laid hold of in the past, future and present. The talk about [the Buddha having experienced] the cessation of that [karma] which is laid hold of is spoken with reference to future existence. The [painful] feelings were born to the Lord in this present existence. Karma, which is to be experienced again and again, cannot be turned back even in Buddhas and Paccekabuddhas. We should therefore take [this as] the most appropriate theory as regards the Thera’s [question], “were these pains [of the Buddha’s] because of the fruit of the deed or were they reborn [effects of karma]?”⁶⁸

Although the Pāli is terse, the meaning is clear enough. The commentator upholds the *Pubbakammapiḷoti* position that even Buddhas must experience the effects of unrealized bad roots-of-karma. But he answers the objection of the *Milindapañha* as regards that doctrine’s implications for Buddhology by affirming that “with regard to future existence” all bad karma had been exhausted. Even as Buddha, the Buddha had to finish burning up his karma. But being Buddha, this left no residue for rebirth. Thus the author of this commentary postulates a kind of karma which is only experienced, which results in no further karma. Although there are serious philosophical problems here in terms of wider issues surrounding the theory of karma, it at least allows proponents of the karmic explanation to have their cake and eat it too: the Buddha experienced bad karma, but it wasn’t the kind of karma which casts doubt on cherished conceptions of Buddhahood.

This solution, that the Buddha’s bad karma was a type of karma which will not come to fruition in the future, can be stated with greater technical clarity than the commentator here achieves. I became aware of this terminology when I mentioned the conflict between *Pubbakammapiḷoti* and *Milindapañha* to a Sinhalese friend, Mr. H. M. Wijeratna. He had not previously been aware of the problem, but received a classical education as a Buddhist monk and so when confronted with it could provide me a technical response.

He stated that there are four types of karma: 1) karma whose fruit will be experienced in this life; 2) karma whose fruit will be experienced in the next life; 3) karma whose fruit will be experienced in some future life and 4) karma whose fruit will not be experienced at all (*ahosikamma*, lit. "was-karma"). The Buddha's suffering was the result of a long distant act (karma of the third type) whose effect was *ahosikamma* (karma of the fourth type).

As far as I can tell, this four-fold classification of karma is first reported by Buddhaghosa in chapter nineteen of *Visuddhimagga*.⁶⁹ There it is reported as one of several fourfold classifications of karma preserved in the tradition and offered up as suitable meditative topics for "purification through the removal of doubt". Because Buddhaghosa does not give this classification in its problematic context it would be a mere guess to suggest that it was developed to answer the problem of Buddha's bad karma. Whether it was or not, in its context that is precisely the effect it has. Although it alters the theory of karmic absolutivity, it allows for an affirmation of *Pubbakammapiḷoti* which also rebuts the objections tradition has raised to it.

Conclusion

In the course of this essay I have discussed a wide range of arguments clustering around the problem of the Buddha's bad karma. Theravāda Buddhists have used various devices in order to deny that thesis; various others were employed to affirm it. The problem is complex and, I think, unresolved. The denials of the karmic explanation not only contradict canonical statements by the Buddha himself; they also fail to explain why, even if some alternate agency caused the Buddha to suffer, the Buddha fell into those circumstances in the first place. Dhammapāla's rebuttal does not answer the concern which we have suggested motivated these denials, namely the worry that, since karma is sure to bear fruit, the Buddha's bad karma would necessitate a conclusion that his Buddhahood was somehow incomplete. The commentary on *Pubbakammapiḷoti* answers this worry, but its innovative Buddhology causes new kinds of problems still. For example, if the Buddha biography shows that bad karma is ultimately no hindrance to Bud-

dhahood, then the Buddhist ethical system is to some degree undermined. Similarly, the *Milinda-tikā* answers the *Milindapañha's* concern over the implications of bad karma for Buddhology, but in modifying the theory of karmic absolutivity it too leaves us in a congeries of theoretical contradictions.⁷⁰

Theravāda Buddhism is not the only religious tradition in which the fact that the good suffer has created complex and unresolvable theoretical difficulties. The problem has appeared in many guises in the history of religions. In each instance, the problem is compelling in tradition-specific ways; it is problematic only because it challenges specific doctrines, specific soteriologies, specific forms of faith. In the case of Theravāda Buddhism, no less than any other, this problem has been particularly Buddhist, indeed particularly Theravādin. The various answers to it have been not theodicies but what we might call "Buddhodicies". Different religious traditions—even different schools of Buddhism—have struggled with similar problems, but operating in different cultural contexts with different presuppositions, they arrived at very different formulations of the problem and solutions to it. This essay has attempted to detail the problem in its specifically Theravāda Buddhist formulation, since we can only appreciate why the Buddha's bad karma has proven unresolvably problematic in the context of the tradition which debated it.

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¹ F. L. Woodward, tr., *The Minor Anthologies of the Pali canon* Part II (London: Oxford University Press, 1948) p. 52-54 (*Sacred Books of the Buddhists, VIII*). This text may have originated in the early *Dhammapada* commentarial tradition since the story glosses as an *udāna Dhammapada* 306, a verse stating that slanderers will suffer in future lives. The *Dhammapadaṭṭhakathā* glosses this verse with the Sundarī story as well, in very similar form. The verse is also included as *Suttanipāta* 660 (*Kokāliyasuttaṃ* v. 5), again in the context of slanderous lies but without reference to Sundarī.

² See E. B. Cowell, tr., *The Jātaka or Stories of the Buddha's Former Births* Volume Two (London: Luzac, 1969 repr.) p. 283-85; H. C. Norman, ed., *The Commentary on the Dhammapāda* Volume III (London: P.T.S., 1912) p. 474ff; C. E. Godakumbura, ed., *Visuddhajanavilāsini nāma Apadānaṭṭhakathā* (London: P.T.S., 1954) p. 120-121.

³ E. B. Cowell, tr., *The Jātaka ...*, op. cit., Volume Two, p. 116-117; C. E. Godakumbura, ed., *Visuddhajanavilāsini nāma Apadānaṭṭhakathā*, op. cit., p. 118-119; H. C. Norman, ed., *The Commentary on the Dhammapāda*, op. cit., Volume III, p. 178ff; M. M. Bose, ed., *Paramattha-Dīpani Iti-Vuttakāṭṭhakathā (Iti-Vuttaka Commentary) of Dhammapālacariya* Volume I (London: P.T.S., 1934) p. 86.

⁴ T. W. Rhys Davids and Hermann Oldenberg, trs., *Vinaya Texts Part III* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1969[1885]) p. 224ff.

⁵ *ibid.*, p. 245.

⁶ *ibid.*, p. 246.

⁷ *piṭṭhim me āgilāyati/piṭṭhi me āgilāyati*; see V. Trenckner, ed., *The Majjhimanikāya* Volume One (London: P.T.S., 1888) p. 354 (*Sekhasuttaṃ*) and M. Leon Feer, ed., *Samyutta-nikāya* Part IV (*Salāyatana-vagga*) (London: P.T.S., 1894) p. 184.

⁸ T. W. Rhys Davids, tr., *Dialogues of the Buddha* Part Two (London: P.T.S., 1959[1910]) p. 106. The text continues to state that "the Exalted One, mindful and self-possessed, bore them [his pains] without complaint."

⁹ *ibid.*, p. 138-139. Here too he does not complain about the discomfort: "He bore with fortitude the pain, the sharp pain even unto death/."

¹⁰ M. Leon Feer, ed., *Samyutta-nikāya*, Part One (*Sagātha-vagga*) (London: P.T.S., 1884) p. 27 (my translation).

¹¹ References to these austerities and their debilitating effect upon the Bodhisatta's body are scattered throughout the canon. See for example V. Trenckner, ed., *The Majjhima-nikāya* Volume I (London: P.T.S., 1888) p. 77ff. (*Mahāsīhanādasuttaṃ*) and p. 240ff. (*Mahāsaccakasuttaṃ*).

¹² Hermann Oldenberg, ed., *Vinaya Piṭakam: One of the Principal Buddhist Holy Scriptures in the Pāli Language* Volume III (London: Williams and Norgate, 1881) p. 1-11 (*Pārājikam* of the *Suttavibhanga*, I. 1ff.).

¹³ Heinz Bechert has suggested a novel hypothesis to explain this displacement, that the *Apadāna* collator tried to fill out the number of Thera-biographies to 550, in order to parallel the *Jātaka*. See Heinz Bechert, "Über Das Apadānabuch" in E. Frauwallner, hrsg., *Wiener Zeitschrift Für Die Kunde Süd- Und Ostasiens Und Archiv Für Indische Philosophie* Band II (Wien: Verlag Brüder Hollinek, 1958) p. 11-14. I think it equally possible that the final editors of the *Apadāna* were of the party which denied that Buddha had bad karma, and that the text was made to be a monk's biography to undermine its association with the Buddha himself.

¹⁴ For text see Mary E. Lilley, ed., *The Apadāna of the Khuddaka Nikāya* Volume One (London: P.T.S., 1925) p. 299-301 v. 1-2. Although I will cite Lilley's edition throughout, it is highly flawed and in great need of re-editing. I have relied in my translations herein on two editions in Sinhala script: Ven. Pandita Walagedara Somaloka Tissa Nāyaka Thero, ed., *Apadānapāli of Suttanta Piṭaka* (Colombo: Hewawitarne Bequest, 1957) and Ven. Pandita Talalle Dhammananda Thera, ed., *Apadānapāli* (Government of Ceylon, 1961) (*Buddha Jayanti Tripiṭaka Series Volume XXXVI*). C. E. Godakumbura, ed., *Visuddhajanavilāsini nāma Apadānaṭṭhakathā* (London: P.T.S., 1954) has also been used in emending Lilley's text.

¹⁵ *Apadāna*, op. cit., p. 299-301 v. 4-6.

¹⁶ *ibid.*, v. 7-9.

¹⁷ *ibid.*, v. 10-14.

¹⁸ *ibid.*, v. 15-16.

¹⁹ *ibid.*, v. 17-18.

²⁰ *ibid.*, v. 19-20.

²¹ *ibid.*, v. 21-22.

²² *ibid.*, v. 23-24.

²³ *ibid.*, v. 25-26.

²⁴ *ibid.*, v. 27. Compare Godakumbura, ed., *Visuddhajanavilāsini nāma Apadānaṭṭhakathā*, op. cit., p. 126.

²⁵ *ibid.*, v. 28.

²⁶ *ibid.*, v. 29-32.

²⁷ In the Sanskrit tradition, however, bad karma causing bad results and good karma causing good results are equally constitutive of the parallel *Avadāna* genre.

²⁸ See E. B. Cowell and R. A. Neil, eds., *The Divyāvadāna, A Collection of Early Buddhist Legends* (Cambridge: at the University Press, 1886) p. 87 line 8, p. 150 line 24, p. 241 line 26. This term is also used often in *Avadānaśataka*. See J. S. Speyer, ed., *Avadānaśataka: A Century of Edifying Tales, Belonging to the Hinayāna* Volume One (Tokyo: Meicho-Funyu-Kay, 1977 [1902-1906]) (*Bibliotheca Buddhica, III*) p. 242 line 9, p. 246 line 9, p. 249 line 13, p. 253 line 6, p. 257 line 8, p. 267 line 14, p. 275 line 12.

²⁹ *Divyāvadāna*, op. cit., p. 150: *Anavatapte mahāsarasi śrāvakaḥ sārḍham pūrvikā karmaḥlotir vyākṛitā bhavati*. *Anavatapta* is, of course, the Sanskrit equivalent of *Anotatta*, where the Pāli text is said to have been disclosed to the monks.

³⁰ The text in question is the *Ghaṭikārasuttaṃ*, included in the *Majjhimanikāya* as number eighty-one. In it, Jotipāla the Brahmin (the Bodhisatta) is a friend of the devoted potter Ghaṭikāra during the time of Kassapa Buddha. Ghaṭikāra encourages his friend to visit that Buddha, but the Bodhisatta refuses with the words which *Pubbakammaṭṭhi* calls "slandering". In the *Majjhima* version, however, no such suggestion is made. Instead, Ghaṭikāra convinces Jotipāla to visit the Buddha, and Jotipāla henceforth lays the foundation for his own future Buddhahood. A very similar recension of the story is also found in the *Mahāvastu*. Compare J. J. Jones, tr., *The Mahāvastu* Volume One (London: Luzac, 1949) p. 267ff. (*Sacred Books of the Buddhists, Volume XVI*).

³¹ J. J. Jones, tr., *The Mahāvastu* Volume One (London: Luzac, 1949) p. 29ff.

³² The karmic connection is not as direct as in the Pāli. The woman slandered as Sarvābhū's disciple's lover vows at that time to slander the Bodhisatta in return, repeatedly, until he reaches final enlightenment. See *ibid.*, p. 38.

³³ Bechert, op. cit., p. 10-11 (esp. n. 34) discusses another Sanskrit parallel, the *Anavataptaḡāthā*, which he says is part of the Lhasa-Kanjur *Vinaya*. This substantiates the general point being made here, that *Pubbakammaṭṭhi* appears to be based on a non-Theravādin textual tradition.

³⁴ T. W. Rhys Davids, tr., *The Questions of King Milinda* (Varanasi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1982[1890]) Part One, p. 261-262. (*Sacred Books of the East, Volumes 35-36*).

³⁵ *ibid.*, Part One, p. 292.

³⁶ *ibid.*, Part Two, p. 18-19.

³⁷ *ibid.*, Part Two, p. 20.

³⁸ The tradition has used both *akusala* and *pāpa* to denote the "bad" in Buddha's karma. In the commentary on the *Apadāna*, *akusalakamma* refers to less-

grievous offences (like when, as the son of a fisherman, the Bodhisatta smiled at the fishermen's catch), reserving *pāpakamma* for the truly awful acts like when the Bodhisatta, greedy for his inheritance, crushed his own half-brother to death with a rock.

³⁹ *The Questions of King Milinda*, op. cit., Volume One, p. 190-91.

⁴⁰ *ibid.*, p. 191.

⁴¹ Professor Lily de Silva has suggested (personal communication) that the term, *visamparihāraja*, actually refers to the toxic mixture of two otherwise harmless substances.

⁴² *ibid.*, p. 191-2.

⁴³ See *Apadāna*, op. cit., Volume One, p. 300, v. 15-16.

⁴⁴ *Questions of King Milinda*, op. cit., Volume One, p. 249-50.

⁴⁵ *ibid.*, p. 251.

⁴⁶ F. L. Woodward, ed., *Sārattha-ppakāsini, Buddhaghosa's Commentary on the Saṃyutta-nikāya* Volume III (London: P.T.S., 1937) p. 52 (my translation). In his commentary on the *Majjhima*, Buddhaghosa repeats this same passage, but the text differs slightly. The addition of "or" (*vā*) in the final line gives the passage a different thrust: either the cause of this backache was asceticism in early life or else there was no cause at all. See I. B. Horner, ed., *Papañcasūdanī Majjhimanikāyatthakathā of Buddhaghosācariya* Part III (London: P.T.S., 1933) p. 28 (*Sekhasuttavannānā*). Of course in terms of the topic at hand, this textual variation is insignificant. Whichever reading we take to be Buddhaghosa's own, it is clear that he did not accept the karmic explanation of Buddha's sufferings; if the *Majjhima* commentary reading is uncorrupted, Buddhaghosa went beyond even the alternate causality position in allowing the possibility that Buddha suffered for no reason at all!

⁴⁷ H. C. Norman, ed., *The Commentary on the Dhammapāda* Volume III (London: P.T.S., 1912) p. 474ff.

⁴⁸ *ibid.*, p. 178ff.

⁴⁹ H. C. Norman, ed., *The Commentary on the Dhammapāda* Volume I (London: P.T.S., 1906) p. 133ff.

⁵⁰ H. C. Norman, ed., *The Commentary on the Dhammapāda* Volume II (London: P.T.S., 1911) p. 154-155.

⁵¹ A much later appendix to this text, however, quotes the *Pubbakammapiḷoti* tradition in explaining the reason for Ciñcamānavikā's slander of the Buddha. See below, note 58.

⁵² E. B. Cowell, tr., *The Jātaka ...*, op. cit., Volume IV, p. 187ff.

⁵³ *ibid.*, Volume II, p. 415ff.

⁵⁴ *ibid.*, Volume V, p. 175ff.

⁵⁵ *ibid.*, Volume III, p. 294.

⁵⁶ F. L. Woodward, ed., *Paramattha-Dīpanī Udānaṭṭhakathā (Udāna Commentary) of Dhammapālācariya* (London: P.T.S., 1926) p. 263 (my translation).

⁵⁷ *ibid.*, (my translation).

⁵⁸ H. C. Norman, ed., *The Commentary on the Dhammapāda* Volume III, op. cit., p. 512 (my translation).

⁵⁹ Compare Godakumbura, ed., *Visuddhajanavilāsini nāma Apadānaṭṭhakathā*, op. cit., p. 119.

⁶⁰ H. C. Norman, ed., *The Commentary on the Dhammapāda* Volume III, op. cit., p. 512.

⁶¹ Godakumbura, ed., *Visuddhajanavilāsini nāma Apadānaṭṭhakathā*, op. cit., p. 114.

⁶² *ibid.*: *tassa [Kassapassa] Bhagavato pilotikakammanissandena.*

⁶³ *ibid.*, p. 121-122.

⁶⁴ *ibid.*, p. 115ff.

⁶⁵ *ibid.*, p. 114 (my translation).

⁶⁶ The notion that Buddha's paradigmatic life extends into this exemplary arena is not unique to our text. Buddhaghosa conceives much of the Buddha biography in the *Ariyapariyesanasuttaṃ* as such a negative example, the Buddha preaching it in order to demonstrate first-hand what ought not be done. He even uses this same analogy, of the traveller asking directions. See Buddhaghosa's commentary on the *Ariyapariyesanasuttaṃ* called "Explanation of the *Sermon on the Heap of Snares*" (*Pāsarāsīsuttavannānā*) in J. H. Woods and D. Kosambi, eds., *Papañcasūdanī Majjhimanikāyatthakathā of Buddhaghosācariya* Part II (London: P.T.S., 1979) p. 169-170. But here the Buddha describes only his unproductive strivings in the present life, not counter-productive ones as in *Pubbakammapiḷoti*. I know of no text other than that under discussion which specifically portrays the Buddha's previous evil and present suffering as paradigmatic of every person's chance to gain enlightenment.

⁶⁷ Padmanabh S. Jaini, ed., *Milinda-ṭikā* (London: P.T.S., 1961) p. 26 (my translation).

⁶⁸ *ibid.*, p. 26-27 (my translation).

⁶⁹ A germinal form of this developed idea is a short section of the *Paṭisambhidāmagga* entitled "Karma-talk" (*Kammakathā*). It states that karma-which-was (*ahosikamma*) might or might not have borne fruit previously, might or might not be bearing fruit presently, and might or might not bear fruit in the future. The same is true of karma-which-is (*atthikamma*) and karma-which-will-be (*bhavissatikamma*). The text repeats its terse diagnosis for the range of types of karma: wholesome, unwholesome, blameworthy, not blameworthy, etc. So karma of the past, present and future, and all types of karma, might not bear fruit. Here *ahosi* is not used in a technical sense, however, but as a verb. For the use of the term in its technical sense we still must credit Buddhaghosa with being the first. For text of the *Kammakathā* see Arnold C. Taylor, ed., *Paṭisambhidāmagga* Volume Two (London: P.T.S., 1905) p. 78-79.

⁷⁰ For a recent discussion of some of the theoretical problems raised by *ahosikamma* see Richard Gombrich, *Precept and Practice* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971) p. 214-17.