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Citation

Silk, J. A. (2007). Good and Evil in Indian Buddhism: The Five Sins of Immediate Retribution. *Journal Of Indian Philosophy*, 35(3), 253-286. Retrieved from <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/16446>

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Note: To cite this publication please use the final published version (if applicable).

Good and Evil in Indian Buddhism: The Five Sins of Immediate Retribution

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Published online: 3 August 2007
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Abstract Indian Buddhist sources speak of five sins of immediate retribution: murder of mother, father, an arhat, drawing the blood of a buddha, and creating a schism in the monastic community. This category provides the paradigm for sinfulness in Buddhism. Yet even these sins can and will, be expiated in the long run, demonstrating the overwhelmingly positive nature of Buddhist ethics.

Keywords Evil · Sin · Ethics · Indian Buddhism · Sins of immediate retribution

Questions of good and evil lie at the heart of ethical or moral systems; indeed, they essentially define them as such. And religions, of course, are generally conceived to be, or to comprise, among other things, such ethical and moral systems. But questions of good and evil do not appear to play a starring role in Buddhism generally. To be sure, the karma doctrine may be considered essentially ethical, Buddhist literature and art are replete with depictions of hells, produced to discourage bad behaviors, and so on. But at least when Buddhist theologians reflect on the systematics of Buddhist doctrine, questions which we might fairly map onto familiar notions of “good and evil” are not prominent.

One classificatory category does exist, however, which appears to address directly the question of evil, namely the class Buddhist scholastics speak of as the five “sins of immediate retribution,” the *ānantarya-karma*—to wit, killing one’s father, mother, or an arhat, drawing the blood of a Buddha, and creating a schism in the monastic community. These are crimes so heinous that their inevitable

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karmic result of descent into hell will take place immediately and necessarily in the next life, rather than at some unspecified vague point in the future, as is usual for generic karmic results, which will and must bear their fruit eventually, but for which no specific chronological framework is envisioned.¹ Upon the death in this life of an individual who has committed one of these crimes, his or her fate will necessarily, directly and immediately be that of hell.² These are the most serious crimes catalogued and studied within Indian Buddhist literature.³

Discussions of this set of five transgressions are found in the schematic and classificatory Abhidharma literature, although like many such ideas an awareness of the concept clearly permeates the generalized Buddhist worldview as well, and is not restricted to the realm of abstract doctrinal speculations.⁴ The list of the five crimes is standard, though its ordering—and in some cases thus the sequence of seriousness—is less so.⁵ In the Theravāda *Aṅguttara-Nikāya* (Gradual Sayings of

¹ See for example the quasi-etymological definition of *ānantarya* in the *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya* ad IV.96 (Pradhan, 1975: 259.21–24, trans. in La Vallée Poussin 1923–1931: iii.204).

By saying that the scholastic tradition speaks of this category, I do not intend to imply that it is an innovation not found in the scriptural corpus. For instance, the technical term itself is found in the Pāli Vinaya, and the items are listed in the *Aṅguttara-Nikāya*, as we will see below. The same is true for the canonical corpora of other sects as well.

² According to the *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya* ad IV.99c (Pradhan, 1975: 261.2, trans. La Vallée Poussin, 1923–1931: iv.207), sins other than the creation of a schism in the monastic community do not necessarily result in rebirth in the worst of the hells, *Avīci* (*anantarakalpaṃ avīcau mahānarake vipacyate | anyais tu nāvaśyam avīcau*), although they might (ad IV.80d, Pradhan 1975: 251.4: *ānantaryakārīṇāṃ tu tatra vānyatra vā narake*, where *tatra* refers to *avīcau* in the previous sentence). Precisely the same is found in the *Vibhāṣā* (T. 1545 [XXVII] 185a4–7 [juan 35]).

³ The Chinese **Brahmajāla-sūtra* (T. 1484 [XXIV] 1008c1–3 [juan xia], §40) expands the list to seven, adding the murder of an *upadhyāya* and *ācārya*, the two monastic mentors of a monk; there is no evidence for such a classification in India, however.

⁴ Such ideas should, in principle, always be found elsewhere, namely in the canonical corpus (the sūtra and vinaya, the discourses of the Buddha and his monastic code), since the avowed aim of the Abhidharma is no more than to systematize the unsystematically presented preaching of the Buddha. In other words, since in order for an idea to be acceptable, to be orthodox, it must conform to the teaching of the Buddha, from a normative point of view there can be no source for Abhidharmic categories other than the canonical scriptures. Nevertheless, of course the authors of the texts which came to constitute the Abhidharma literature did introduce their own innovations. This is a process common to every religious tradition, in which innovation is concealed as restatement and representation of the original revelation. In the Buddhist context, then, while we do very frequently find that the lists and categories presented in the Abhidharma literature reproduce what already stood in the existing canonical sūtras and vinaya, this is not always the case.

⁵ Especially peculiar is the order in *Mahāvīyūtpatti* §2324–2328, in which no hierarchy of importance can be discerned: matricide, murder of an arhat, patricide, creating a schism, and drawing the blood of a Buddha.

We may note also the set of six *abhīṭhāna* in Pāli, so called in the commentary to the *Khuddakapāṭha* in *Paramatthajotikā* I (I.189,21–22; quoted by Norman 1992: 192–193, and in the *Critical Pāli Dictionary* [Trenckner et al., 1924–: I. 348b]), matricide, patricide, murder of an arhat, drawing the blood of a Buddha, creating a schism, and adopting another teacher [= heresy]. The items themselves are listed together with others in the *Aṅguttara-Nikāya* (Morris & Hardy, 1885–1900: i.27 [I.xv]).

A number of the references here and in the following were already noted by La Vallée Poussin 1923–1931: iv.201–202, in the notes, in which there are also other examples of lists of the five sins of immediate retribution “plus alpha.”

the Buddha), for instance, we find the five listed as: matricide, patricide, murder of an arhat,⁶ drawing the blood of a Buddha, and creating a schism.⁷ The order of presentation in the scholastic Sarvāstivāda *Abhidharmakośa* (Treasury of the Abhidharma) is rather:⁸ matricide, patricide, murder of an arhat, creating a schism, and drawing the blood of a Buddha,⁹ but when the text explicitly addresses the question of the hierarchy of severity of the items, its listing reads in ascending order:¹⁰ patricide, matricide, murder of an arhat, drawing the blood of Buddha, and creating a schism. The text in fact specifies that of the five, patricide is the least heinous and the instigation of a schism the most severe.¹¹

There is general agreement that the most serious of the five is the instigation of a schism, which is no doubt motivated by the fact that this is the one crime which directly challenges the Buddhist monastic institution itself. There is less agreement over the first two items. The *Manorathapūraṇī* (The Wish-Fulfiller), the Ceylonese Theravāda commentary to the *Aṅguttara-Nikāya*, enumerates the offences in descending order of severity, beginning from instigating a schism to drawing the blood of a Buddha to killing an arhat, and then explains the relative hierarchy of the two remaining items as follows:¹²

If the father is principled and the mother unprincipled, or simply not [particularly] principled, patricide weighs more heavily in karmic terms. If the mother is principled, matricide [is worse]. If both are equally principled or equally unprincipled, matricide weighs more heavily in

⁶ In the case of Devadatta, it is made quite clear that the murder of a female arhat, an arhatī, is included in this category; see Lamotte (1944–1980: ii.875). (The murder in question is that of the nun Utpalavarṇā.)

⁷ *Aṅguttara-Nikāya* (Morris & Hardy, 1885–1900: iii.146,28–30; §V.13.9 [129]; iii.436,20–22 §VI.9.3 [87], etc.). We should note that the order of listing is unlikely to have been motivated by the rules for compounding in Sanskrit or Pāli; in compound both orderings, mother–father and father–mother, are found in both languages.

⁸ *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya* ad IV.96. So the ordering in *Mahāvvyutpatti* §8760–8764, apparently based on the *Ekaśatakarma*; in the latter text itself, however, the order is patricide, matricide, murder of an arhat, creating a schism, and drawing the blood of Buddha (T. 1453 [XXIV] 461c25–27 [juan 2]).

⁹ This ordering is certainly not unique to this text; the same is found for example in the Mūla-sarvāstivāda *Upasamāpādāññapti* (Jinānanda, 1961: 14.16–20), *Bhikṣukarmavākya* (Banerjee, 1977: 63.2–3), and *Vinayasūtra* (Bapat & Gokhale, 1982: 23.20–21), and the Mahāsāṃghika Lokottaravādin *Bhikṣuṇī-Vinaya* (Roth, 1970 §35, 43).

¹⁰ *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya* ad 105ab. This is the order of presentation in the *Dharmasaṃgraha* §60 (Nishiwaki, 1962: 16). The *Vibhāṣā* (T. 1545 [XXVII] 620c9–11 [juan 119]) agrees that the murder of one's mother is more severe than that of one's father. A number of other texts share this evaluation, such as the **Saṃyuktābhidharmahṛdaya* (T. 1552 [XXVIII] 898b24–25 [juan 4], translated in Dessein, 1999: 228)

¹¹ *Abhidharmakośa* (Pradhan, 1975: 264.4, 10) 105ab: *saṃghabhede mṛṣāvādo mahāvadyatamo mataḥ*, and then in the commentary *sarvalaghuḥ pūrvadhah*.

¹² Walleser and Kopp (1924–1957): ii.8,24–9,1 = Burmese Sixth Council edition (Dhammagiri-Pāli-Ganthamālā 41 [Dhammagiri, Igatpuri: Vipassana Research Institute, 1995]) 342.18–21: *sace piṭā silavā hoti mātā dussilā no vā tathā silavatī piṭughāto paṭisandhivasena vipaccati | sace mātā silavatī mātughāto* | dvīsu pi sīlena vā dussīlena vā samānesu mātughāto va paṭisandhivasena vipaccati | mātā hi dukkarakārinī bahupākārā ca puttānaṃ ti* l. The variants are significant, especially in the phrase marked *, but I follow the Burmese text.

karmic terms, for the mother is responsible for difficult tasks, and is very attentive to her sons.¹³

This Ceylonese opinion, interestingly, seems to stand in at least partial opposition to one strongly stated Indian view which sees the murder of any woman, not just the mother, as a particularly serious offence. Already the *Śatapatha-Brāhmaṇa*, a late Vedic text, states:¹⁴

Prajāpati created Śrī; she was resplendent. The gods said to Prajāpati “Let us kill her and take (all) this from her.” He said “Surely, that Śrī is a woman, and people do not kill a woman, but rather take (anything) from her (leaving her) alive.”

Later literatures, the Indian Epics, the *Mahābhārata* and the *Rāmāyaṇa*, as well as law books and proverbial literature, stress the sinfulness of killing a woman. “Women are not to be slain!” both Epics repeatedly and categorically rule, comparing the killer of a woman even to the killer of a Brahmin, the worst criminal (from the point of view of the elite Brahmins, of course).¹⁵ The murder of a woman is one of the four transgressions for which there is no expiation, such a crime leading to horrible retribution in hell, and subsequent rebirth as a worm, although it is important to note that this attitude is not universally held.¹⁶ In any event, the mother is surely a very special case, despite the fact that at least one Ceylonese source does not see the matter wholly in black and white terms. The story of Maitrakanyaka is most

¹³ Note that a passage in the *Divyāvadāna* credits both father and mother with such generosity (Cowell & Neil, 1886: 51.20–22): *duṣkarakārakau hi bhikṣavaḥ putrasya mātāpitarau āpyāyakau poṣakau saṁvardhakau stanyasya dātārau citrasya jambudvīpasya darśayitārau*. “Mother and father do what is difficult for a son, they are nurturers, nourishers, fosterers, givers of milk, teachers of multifarious ways of the world.” In the *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya* (Pradhan, 1975: 263.9, ad IV.103d) only the mother is so characterized (although at 262.22–23 both parents are called *upakārin*, benefactors, since they are the source of one’s bodily existence, *ātmabhāvasya tatprabhavatvāt*).

Such notions belong not only to the Buddhists. A passage from the *Mahābhārata*, partially cited by Meyer (1930: 199, n. 1) says: “Neither mother nor father is to be blamed, since they are both one’s former benefactors. But, since she has endured suffering in carrying [one during pregnancy], of the two the mother is the more venerable,” *na dūṣyau mātāpitarau tathā pūrvopakāriṇau | dhāraṇād duḥkhasahanāt tayor mātā garīyasī*. (Meyer referred to a southern text, the so-called Kumbakonam version; I am grateful to Reinhold Gruenendahl [email 22 July 2004] for locating the passage in the Critical Edition in vol. 1, App. 37, lines 14–15, appended after 1,57.69f.)

¹⁴ *Śatapatha-Brāhmaṇa* XI.4.3.2, quoted in Kane (1968–1977: II.593 (I cite the translation of Eggeling [1882–1900])). Nevertheless, in some Jaina stories thieves actually discuss this question, cited in Bloomfield (1926: 216).

¹⁵ We note that it is passages like this which make absolutely clear the pervasive Brahmanical influence on the fundamentally kṣatriya or warrior class Epics. Of course, this influence is seen in a multitude of other dimensions as well, not least the fact that they were transmitted in Sanskrit, rather than in a vernacular language.

¹⁶ See Meyer (1930: 487–489), with copious references to the Epic and legal literature, as well as Kane (1968–1977: II.593–594) for additional references. See now also Hara (2003: 23–27). It is true that, as Meyer (1930: 488, n. 1), details, not all legal texts treat such murders with the same seriousness, among the differences the most particular and obvious being the caste-wise differentiations in severity and, as Kane points out, some law books do authorize kings to punish women by death. See also Jamison (1996: 261, n. 21, and 1991: 216).

instructive in this respect.¹⁷ This popular tale, known in Southern Pāli and Northern Sanskrit sources alike, recounts the events which lead the protagonist to bear upon his head a blazing wheel of iron, a punishment which, it turns out, is undergone by sons who have struck their mothers. The notions of filiality which underlie this story clearly imply that an actual killing of one's mother is hardly even imaginable, although there are a number of examples of episodes in Indian Buddhist literature in which just such a case is not only imagined but explicitly depicted.¹⁸ However multiple particular views here and there might be, the special status accorded women in general, and the mother in particular, in ancient Indian culture at large plainly informed Buddhist scholastics, and led them to almost uniformly rank the murder of a mother more severely than that of a father.¹⁹

The standard list of five sins of immediate retribution is found in Mahāyāna Buddhist literature as well.²⁰ Peculiar, however, is a passage found in the *Ākāśagarbha-sūtra* (The Womb of Space) which subordinates, or appears to subordinate, the five sins of immediate retribution to a list of five “root transgressions,” *mūlāpatti*, of a ruler.²¹ The first of these crimes that a king might commit is the theft of monastic property; the second is criticism of Buddhist teachings, which is to say intervention in the internal doctrinal and policy affairs of the monastic community; and the third is forcible laicization or the application of judicial punishments to a monk, whether he is upstanding in his observation of the Buddhist monastic rules or not. It is only when it comes to the fourth item that the text lists the commission of the five sins of immediate retribution.²² Finally, the fifth item concerns the king's adherence

¹⁷ I am grateful to Gregory Schopen for reminding me of the story in this context. See most centrally among the secondary literature Feer (1878), Brough (1957), and Klaus (1983).

¹⁸ I have discussed such examples in my forthcoming book, *Riven By Lust: Incest and Schism in Indian Buddhist Legend and Historiography* (University of Hawaii Press).

¹⁹ Whether this is part of the larger pattern that Schopen (2001) (and elsewhere) has detected between Buddhist canon law and the Dharmaśāstra is a question which must await further research.

²⁰ For instance, in the *Laṅkāvatāra-sūtra* (The Entrance into Lanka) Nanjio (1923: 138.9–10): *māṭṭipitarahadvadhasaṃghabhedāḥ tathāgatakāye duṣṭacittarudhīrotpādaś ca*.

²¹ Almost precisely the same is found in one Chinese translation of the **Bodhisattvagocara-upāyaviśayavikurvaṇanirdeśa*, although the passage is absent both in the other Chinese version (T. 271) and the Tibetan translation (Tōh. 146, Ōtani 813). See the *Da sazheniganzi suoshuo jing* 大薩遮尼乾子所說經, T. 272 (IX) 336b1–13 (*juan* 5).

²² The text is cited in Sanskrit in the *Śikṣāsamuccaya*. The full passage is at Bendall (1897–1902: 59.10–60.8); the passage concerning the five *ānantarya* is 60.3–5, which I cite here on the basis of the manuscript, Cambridge Add. 1478, folio 35a4–5: *yaḥ punaḥ ksatriyaḥ sañcintya mātaraṃ jīvitaḥ vyaparopayati pitaraṃ arhantaṃ bhagavacchrāvakaṃ vā jīvitaḥ vyaparopayati samagram vā saṃghaṃ bhinatti tathāgatasyārhatāḥ samyaksambu[ddha]*sya sañcintya duṣṭacitto rudhīraṃ utpā(da)**yati ||* (* omitted in the ms; ** ms damaged). (Cp. the translation in Bendall and Rouse (1922: 62).) The original scripture being quoted is found in T. 405 (XIII) 651c9–652a16, with the relevant passage at 651c28–652a1 (the same is then repeated here and in the other translations with regard not to kings but to their ministers); T. 406 (XIII) 659a10–29, with the relevant passage at 659a18–19; T. 407 (XIII) 665a11–b9, with the relevant passage at 665a24–26; T. 408 (XIII) 671b22–c24, with the relevant passage at 671c6–9 (*juan shang*); and in Tibetan at Derge Kanjur 260, *mdo sde*, za 272b2–273b3, with the relevant passage at 273a2–4. Note that the series of transgressions is summarized by Śāntideva in verse at Bendall (1897–1902: 66.16–67.2).

to heretical (not only non-Buddhist but completely non-mainstream) ideas which deny an individual's karmic responsibility for his own actions.²³ One might easily be tempted to suggest that such a subordination of the five sins of immediate retribution to the set of five royal transgressions is to be understood as part of an effort to expand and universalize Buddhist ethics by increasing the range of behaviors stipulated to be entirely beyond the pale—and certainly Indian Buddhist literature has examples of just such broadenings.²⁴ On the other hand, when we look closely at these five root transgressions, and bear in mind that they are made to apply specifically to rulers (the scripture says “consecrated kṣatriyas,” which is to say kings), we come to recognize that the expansion functions in one particular dimension only. The *Ākāśagarbha-sūtra* is concerned to establish doctrinal and religious grounds for the protection of the Buddhist monastic institution and its resources, Buddhist doctrine and policy, and Buddhist monks from royal control. It prosecutes this agenda by suggesting that any royal (governmental) attempts to confiscate property, exert influence on teachings, or bring monks within the purview of the civil or state legal system would constitute not merely a violation of the trust that Buddhist apologists have always tried to suggest exists between the monastic institution and the rulers, but more fundamentally a violation of the very norms of civilized and moral behavior. In this light, the inclusion in the list of the five “root transgressions” of the five sins of immediate retribution and the denial of personal karmic, and therefore moral, responsibility only as the last two items effectively subordinates the most basic moral standards of civil society (item four), and the only effective limitation on consequenceless actions (item five), to the correspondingly superordinated necessity of maintaining the independence of the Buddhist monastic community.²⁵ It is more important, the authors of this scripture are saying in this reading, for a ruler to respect the independence of the Buddhist monastic community even than it is for him to avoid such crimes as the murder of his parents. We have, of course, no way of knowing if, how or in what way such an attempt at propaganda might have been received,²⁶ although the fact that the passage in question was repeatedly cited by later Indian anthologies of Buddhist scriptures, and continues to be cited even in modern Tibetan

²³ The association of such ideas with the sins of immediate retribution is found in Pāli sources as well, as noted by La Vallée Poussin (1923–1931: iii.201–202, in the note).

²⁴ See for instance the passage in the *Gaṇḍavyūha* at Suzuki and Idzumi (1949: 228), and compare the translation (from Chinese) in Cleary (1984–1987: III.163–163).

²⁵ It is true that, as we have seen, the list of the five sins of immediate retribution itself proceeds in increasing order of severity, such that the last item is worse than the first. There is no indication that such a logic might be appealed to here, and in fact the concern expressed in the very first item for freedom from the danger of state fiscal expropriation argues for a descending order of seriousness here. If the listing of the items were hierarchical, we would be forced to conclude that its authors considered the bringing of an individual monk into the control of the state judicial apparatus to be more serious than state expropriation of corporate monastic resources. I very much doubt this is the case.

²⁶ We may indeed wonder whether kings normally cared at all what the Buddhists wrote in their scriptures.

works, suggests that it struck a certain chord at least with some Buddhist authors.²⁷

In spite of what I have just suggested, however, the ultimate lesson we may draw from the *Ākāśagarbha-sūtra*'s evocation of the five sins of immediate retribution is, I believe, quite different. Perhaps paradoxically, the way in which the scripture employs the five sins of immediate retribution cannot be used as evidence for any *genuine* subordination of that idea; rather, the passage seems to demonstrate precisely the opposite. The authors of the *Ākāśagarbha-sūtra*, by choosing to frame their appeal for the extraterritoriality of Buddhist institutions, ideas and individuals in the context of a set of five transgressions, and by utilizing within that pentad as two items the five sins of immediate retribution and the pan-Indian, and perhaps pan-human, idea of personal ethical responsibility, actually emphasize their own assumption of the universality of these five sins of immediate retribution as the epitome of immoral behavior. Did these ideas not represent a generally accepted standard, they would not be effective in highlighting the revaluation the text attempts in its effort to propound an ethical basis for the defence of Buddhist institutional autonomy. What allows the *sūtra*'s authors to appear to subordinate this five-fold category can be nothing other than their tacit recognition of that very category as a gold-standard, a touch-stone with which to establish and orient subsequent categorizations of acceptable and unacceptable behavior. If this reading of the text is correct, the *Ākāśagarbha-sūtra*'s apparent subordination of the five sins of immediate retribution to another category of transgressions is instead to be understood, ultimately, as an affirmation of the suggestive force of the former, and thus a recognition of its paradigmatic status.

Even if there lingers some minor disagreement over their respective hierarchical ordering, the meaning of the first three of the five sins of immediate retribution is nevertheless straightforward. That of the final two is somewhat less so. Although we cannot enter into detail here on the complex question of schism in Indian Buddhist thought, it is important to notice an interesting restriction on the individual who is legally qualified to motivate a schism. According to a number of Sthavira lineage texts, including both the Pāli Theravāda Vinaya and the Sarvāstivāda *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya* (Commentary on the Treasury of Abhidharma), a monastic community can only be split by one who is a genuine monk in good standing within a regular monastic community. The Pāli *Cullavagga* (Lesser Division of the Vinaya) tells us, for instance, that “Only a regular monk in good standing,²⁸ belonging to the same

²⁷ In addition to the citation in the *Śikṣāsamuccaya* cited above, the same is found repeatedly, for instance in Indian works such as the *Sūtrasamuccaya* (Pāśādika, 1989a: 83.15–19) and *Bodhicaryāvatārapañjikā* (La Vallée Poussin, 1901–1914: 160.8 [which abbreviates the passage, having here only *pañcānantaryeṣv anyatamakaraṇāt*]), and in later Tibetan works such as the late eleventh century “Jewel Ornament of Liberation” of Sgam po pa (Guenther, 1959: 166), and more recently in the 19th century “Infinite Ocean of Knowledge” of Kong sprul blo gros mtha' yas (Tayé, 1998: 176).

²⁸ I adopt this rather cumbersome circumlocution for *pakatatta*, which indicates a monk who is not subject to any disciplinary restrictions on his monastic status, and is thus not only a monk, but in good standing vis-à-vis the rules of monastic conduct. See Nolot (1996, nn. 18, 19, 27, 50).

community, dwelling together within the same monastic boundary, splits a monastic community.”²⁹ The *Abhidharmakośa*’s idea is quite similar:³⁰

Who is the one who splits a monastic community?

A monk who acts virtuously based on his discernment splits [the monastic community].

A monk splits [the monastic community], not a layman, a nun or any other. And he is one whose acts are based on his discernment, not one whose acts are based on his impulses. He is one who is virtuous, not one whose virtue is compromised, since the utterances of such a person are inadmissible.

The idea appears to be rather simple: Buddhist technical literature acknowledges the possibility that schism might occur within a monastic community. In fact, it seems to accept this as an inevitability. What it insists upon, however, is that any action to instigate such a schism must be brought about by a legitimate, and indeed respected and honorable, member of the community in question, and only upon reflection and never impulsively.³¹ This cannot but strike us as peculiar, since the same literature which sets these conditions nevertheless holds the instigation of a schism to be the most serious of the five sins of immediate retribution.³² A solution to this apparent contradiction awaits further research.

Finally, there is the question of how anyone may be, literally, accused of the remaining transgression from the classic set of five, drawing the blood of a Buddha. It would seem that without the presence of a Buddha one cannot do him any injury, and thus no one in the period after the lifetime of the Buddha may be guilty of this particular offence, regardless of his or her degree of

²⁹ Oldenberg (1879–1883: ii.204,8–9) (VII.5.1): *bhikkhu kho upāli pakatatto samānasamvāsako samānasīmāya tītho saṅghaṃ bhindaṭi ti*. Translated also in Horner (1938–1966: 5.286).

³⁰ Pradhan (1975: 261.7–11) (IV.100ab, with commentary): *kaḥ punar eṣa saṅghaṃ bhinatti | bhikṣur dṛkcarito vṛtī bhinatti bhikṣur bhinatti na gṛhī na bhikṣuṇyādayaḥ | sa ca dṛṣṭicarita eva na tṛṣṇācaritaḥ | vṛttastho na bhinnavṛttas tasyānādeyavākyatvāt |*

See the translation in La Vallée Poussin (1923–1931: iv.208), and note Yaśomitra’s commentary in Wogihara (1936: 427.17–22).

The same idea is found in other Abhidharma treatises. See the *Vibhāṣā* (T. 1545 [XXVII] 602c20–603a3 [juan 116]), but note that it speaks here of a person, **pudgala*, not a monk. However, both the **Samyuktābhidharmahṛdaya* (T. 1552 [XXVIII] 899a3–14 [juan 3]) and Saṅghabhadra’s *Apidamozang xianzong lun* 阿毘達磨藏顯宗論 (T. 1563 [XXIX] 886b25–c8 [?] [juan 23]) also specify that the offender must be a monk.

³¹ In this regard we might also notice the brief discussion in the *Kathāvatthu* regarding the claim “That the five cardinal crimes, even if unintentionally committed, involve retribution immediately after death” (trans. Aung & Rhys Davids, 1915: 343, Book XX.1). In this context the problem of schism is also discussed. In the *Samantapāsādikā* we find causistry regarding unintentional patricide and so on (for convenience see Bapat & Hirakawa, 1970: 321).

³² We may recall here the paradigmatic case of Devadatta, who clearly was a regularly ordained monk, and thus uniquely liable to the technical accusation of instigation of a schism. One may consult briefly the note in Lamotte (1944–1980: ii.873–874, n. 1).

depravity.³³ Eighty years after his birth the Buddha died, and was therefore thenceforth no longer present. Practically no one disputes this, and even those who uphold an essentially docetic view of the Buddha as thoroughly transcendent and transmundane,³⁴ and hence as not gone and dead, so to speak, would perforce and correspondingly be constrained to admit the impossibility of harm coming to such a transcendent being.³⁵ Traditional Buddhist scholars, nonetheless, can always find a way to preserve every category and every list inherited from the tradition.

Drawing the blood of a Buddha is thus understood to mean, in a Buddhaless world, the destruction or damaging of a stūpa, the memorial mound which encases relics of the Buddha.³⁶ This makes perfect sense from the perspective of Buddhist doctrine, once one understands the stūpa as equivalent, legally and otherwise, to the Buddha, as recent scholarship has demonstrated may be the case.³⁷ Moreover, commentaries and even inscriptional references tend to make clear that the destruction of a stūpa is not, itself, exactly a sin of immediate retribution, but rather “resembles” such a sin, or is functionally equivalent to it.³⁸ In fact, the scholastic tradition extends the entire list of five sins of immediate retribution by means of a new set of

³³ In the Mahāsāṃghika *Bhikṣuṇī-Vinaya* (Roth, 1970 §35, 43), following the listing of this item as one of the actions or situations which restrict one’s access to ordination (to be discussed below), that is, having performed which one may not be ordained, the text says: *ciraparinivṛto kho puna so bhagavāṃs tathāgato ’rhan samyaksambuddho*, “although that Blessed One, Tathāgata, Arhat, Complete and Perfect Buddha is already long in nirvāṇa.” Nolot (1991: 20, n. 48), draws attention in this context to the fact that in modern ordination rituals, the ordinand in taking refuge in the Buddha (in the formula: “I take refuge in the Buddha; I take refuge in the Dharma; I take refuge in the Saṃgha”) adds “although he is long in nirvāṇa.” As far as I know, the texts which discuss this question do not raise the possibility of one doing harm to a (living) Buddha in another world-realm.

³⁴ I am thinking of those who might uphold views such as those espoused by Mahāsāṃghika Lokottaravādins, the authors of the Lotus Sūtra or the *Upāyakaṣāya*, and so on. For a brief discussion of some parallel issues, see Silk (2003).

³⁵ Actually, we find this idea elsewhere as well. As Peter Skilling tells us (2003: 288, n. 3): “According to the Pāli commentaries, the blood of a Tathāgata cannot literally be shed, because his body cannot be wounded (*abhejjakāyātā*). ‘Lohituppāda’ means a congealing of blood within the body, where it comes together in one spot, under unbroken skin. In other words, it is a bruise. ...” Skilling does not cite references, but according to Trenckner et al. (1924), s.v. *abhejjakāyātā*, the passage is found in the *Manorathapūraṇī* (ii.6,11), *Papañcasūdanī* (iv.110,27) and *Vibhaṅgaṭṭhakathā* (*Sammohavinodanī*) (427,4).

³⁶ This issue has recently been discussed by Skilling (2003).

³⁷ See a number of the papers collected in Schopen (1997).

³⁸ Two inscriptions from Sāñcī are mentioned by Skilling (2003, 292–293), namely those numbered by Marshall 396 and 404.

equivalences. Immediately following its discussion of the five sins of immediate retribution the *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya* asks:³⁹

Is it only through [one of] the sins of immediate retribution that one is necessarily reborn in the hells? [No,] one is necessarily reborn [there] also through sins of the same category as the sins of immediate retribution (*ānantaryasabhāga*). Others say: But just not immediately. What are they?

Defilement⁴⁰ of one's mother [when she is] an arhat; murder of one certain [to become a Buddha]; murder of a practitioner who has not yet reached the stage of becoming an arhat; theft of the wealth of the monastic community; and the destruction of a stūpa as the fifth: [these are] the sins of the same category as the sins of immediate retribution.

These five belong to the same category as the five sins of immediate retribution, in corresponding order. One defiles one's mother who is an arhat through the performance of unchaste acts; one murders a bodhisattva who is certain [to become a Buddha]; one murders a practitioner who has not yet reached the stage of becoming an arhat; one steals the wealth of the monastic community;⁴¹ one destroys a stūpa.

Yaśomitra's commentary to this passage makes explicit the equivalences implied by the expression "in corresponding order": Defilement of one's mother who is an arhat belongs to the same category as matricide; murder of a bodhisattva certain to become a Buddha belongs to the same category as patricide; murder of a practitioner who has not yet reached the stage of becoming an arhat belongs to the same category as the murder of an arhat himself; theft of the wealth of the monastic community belongs to the same category as creating a schism in that same community; and the destruction of a

³⁹ *Abhidharmakośa* and *bhāṣya* ad IV.106–107ab, in Pradhan (1975: 264.22–265.4) (Tibetan in Derge Tanjur 4090, *mngon pa, ku* 219a1–4). The passage was translated by La Vallée Poussin (1923–1931: iii.219–220) who, it is important to point out for what follows, sees two actions in the beginning of the verse, “souiller sa mère, souiller une Arhanti.” Note that the same list of five is given in the *Mahāvīyutpatti* §2330–2334 where, however, the classification (§2329) is termed *upānantariya*, a term I have not seen elsewhere. However, Harunaga Isaacson brings to my attention the quotation of the verse and a half in the *Guhyasamājatantra-Pratīpodyotana-ṭīkā* (Chakravarti, 1984: 46.24–47.2), which labels the five *upānantaryāni*, and in verse 14 of the *Cittaviśuddhiprakaraṇa* (Patel, 1949), we find the term *upānantaryakāraṇa*.

⁴⁰ The term I have rendered “defilement,” *dūṣaṇa*, certainly implies unwelcome attention, and therefore might well be rendered “rape.”

⁴¹ Pradhan prints *sukhāyadvārikam*; Hirakawa et al. (1973: 432) suggest emending to *mukha*°. The Tibetan translation has *zhal du 'du ba'i sgo*, demonstrating that *mukha*° was the reading before the Tibetan translators. The *Vyākhyā* (Wogihara 1936: 430.27) is printed as *sukha*°, but see La Vallée Poussin's citation (1923–1931: iv.219, n. 2) with *mukha*°.

stūpa belongs to the same category as drawing the blood of a Buddha.⁴² We can hardly fail to notice here that the very first item refers to incest with one's own mother, although the terms in which this text states the nature of this offence are odd.

I have translated in accord with what I think is the only way to understand the Sanskrit text of the *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya*, and Yaśomitra's commentary thereon, and in agreement with the interpretation of the Chinese and Tibetan translators.⁴³ Some light might be shed on the issue by a look at the parallel list in the encyclopedic *Yogācārabhūmi* (Stages of the Yoga Practitioner). In the list in the *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya*, it is not clear why it should be a crime equally as serious as one meriting immediate retribution to have sexual relations with one's own mother *only if she happens to be a saint*. As far as I know, commentaries are silent on this point. This is doubly peculiar since the same literature has already made it abundantly clear that sexual relations with one's own mother are forbidden, the list of forbidden women in the *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya* comprising the wife of another, one's mother, one's daughter, and maternal or paternal kinswomen.⁴⁴ Moreover, it might be relevant to note that in the *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya*'s own discussion of the possibility of double culpability for the murder of one's father who is an arhat, we read:⁴⁵ "Who would kill his father, an arhat, would be [guilty of] only one sin of immediate retribution, because the bodily basis [of the act of murder] is

⁴² *Sphuṭārthā Abhidharmakośavyākhyā* of Yaśomitra, in Wogihara (1936: 430.21–28) (Tibetan in Derge Tanjur 4092, *mngon pa, ngu* 78b6–79a2). The text goes on to explain that according to the opinion of Vasumitra, theft of the wealth of the monastic community means forcible confiscation of permanent endowments. Yaśomitra agrees, and explains that what is meant by the expression "removal of the wealth of the monastic community" is the forcible confiscation of that upon which the monastic community depends for its continued existence, precisely the sort of concern we saw expressed in the *Ākāśagarbha-sūtra* above.

In his detailed study of chapter four of the *Abhidharmakośa* and Yaśomitra's commentary, this discussion has been passed over by Funahashi (1954: 357–358) without a word.

⁴³ The appositional reading of this item is clearly confirmed by both the Tibetan and Chinese translations of the *Abhidharmakośa*, as well as the Tibetan translation of Yaśomitra's commentary. In Xuanzang's translation, the verse (T. 1558 [XXIX] 94b23 [juan 18]) has 汚母無學尼, and the prose commentary (94b27–28) 謂有於母阿羅漢尼行極污染、謂非梵行. In Paramārtha's translation, the same is (T. 1559 [XXIX] 249a1 [juan 13]) 汚母阿羅漢, and in the commentary (249a3–4) 若人污壞自母阿羅漢、由行非梵行故, while the Tibetan translation has in both the verse and commentary the clearly appositional *ma dgra bcom ma* (and the same in the rendering of Yaśomitra's treatise). As did La Vallée Poussin (see above), Mochizuki (1932–1936: 1125c) understood the Chinese expression to mean "one's mother and an arhantī," but his basis for this is unclear.

⁴⁴ *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya* ad IV.74ab (Pradhan, 1975: 244.14–15): *catusprakāram agamyagamanam kāmamithyācārah | agamyān gacchati paraparigṛhītān vā mātaraṁ duhitaraṁ vā mātṛpitṛsaṁbandhinīn vā*. The passage is translated in La Vallée Poussin (1923–1931: iv.157). See Silk (Forthcoming a).

⁴⁵ Pradhan (1975: 263.15): *yaḥ pītaram arhantaṁ hiṁsyāt tasyāpy ekam eva syād ānantaryam āśrayaikatvāt*. See La Vallée Poussin (1923–1931: iv.215).

singular.” So in this light too the text’s wording of the first item looks odd. In the parallel in the *Yogācārabhūmi*, however, the first item is quite clearly stated to be sexually approaching a female arhat *or* one’s mother,⁴⁶ which seems to make considerably better sense.

One additional passage appears to reflect the same idea. The *Tathāgata-guhyakośa*, extant in its entirety only in Chinese but here quoted in Sanskrit, offers a list of the worst sorts of offences, which begins as follows:⁴⁷

If one were, Kāśyapa, to deprive of life either his father or a pratyekabuddha, that would be the worst of the sins of killing. The worst of thefts is the stealing of property belonging to the Three Jewels. The worst of sexually depraved acts is to violate either one’s mother or an arhatī.

We noticed above Yaśomitra’s suggestions of the correspondence between the five sins of immediate retribution and those sins of the same category. The

⁴⁶ Bhattacharya (1957: 185.20–186.1), Chinese in T. 1579 (XXX) 318b21–22 (*juan* 9), Tibetan Derge Tanjur 4035, *sems tsam, tshi* 93b7. The Sanskrit, which is somewhat corrupt, reads (with Bhattacharya’s n. 1 on 186): *ānantaryasabhāgāni punaḥ | yathāpihaikatyō ’rhanṭīm vā gacchati mātaram vā*. The Chinese is also quite explicit: 無間業 同 分者、謂如有一、於阿羅漢尼及於母所、行穢染行。The Tibetan reads: *mshams med pa dang mthun pa rnams ni | ’di ltar ’di na kha cig dgra bcom ma ’am ma la nyal ba ’am*.

The other four items in this list are rather different, and read as follows (*Yogācārabhūmi*, in Bhattacharya (1957: 186.1–6); see the corresponding Derge Tanjur 4035, *sems tsam, tshi* 93b7–94a3, T. 1579 [XXX] 318b22–27 [*juan* 9]):

To strike a bodhisattva who is in his last life before attaining buddhahood. Or to kill animals in temples, or at crossroads. Or to plot against, cheat or banish trusted friends who have the greatest confidence in one, or acquaintances or intimates. Or again having taken care, without recompense, of the suffering, the destitute, those without any protection or recourse and those who come to one for shelter, then later to try to harm them and cause them pain. Or to confiscate the wealth of the monastic community. Or to destroy a shrine. Such similar acts are called those of the same category as sins of immediate retribution.

⁴⁷ In Sanskrit in the *Śikṣāsamuccaya* and *Subhāṣitasamgraha* (Bendall, 1897–1902: 171.13–16 = 1903–1904: Part II.45.8–12 [folio 99]): *yaḥ kāśyapa pitā ca syāt pratyekabuddhaś ca taṁ jīvitaḥ vyaparopayed idam agram prāṇātipātānāṁ | idam agram adattādānānāṁ yad uta triratna-dravyāpaharaṇatā | idam agram kāmamithyācārāṇāṁ yad uta mātā ca syād arhanṭī ca tāṁ cādhyāpadyet** * Bendall read *adhyāpaṭyati*, corrected by Edgerton 1953 s.v. *adhyāpaṭyati*. Derge Tanjur 3940, *dbu ma, khi* 96a7–b2: *de bzhin gshegs pa’i mdzod kyi mdo las gsungs pa | ’od srungs gang gis pha yang yin la | rang sangs rgyas kyang yin pa de srog bcad na de’i srog gcod pa’i nang nas ma rungs pa’o || ’di lta ste | dkon mchog gsum gyi dkor rku ba ’di ni ma byin par len pa’i nang na ma rungs pa’o || ’di lta ste ma yang yin la dgra bcom ma yang yin pa de la log par spyad pa ’di ni ’dod pa la log par spyod pa rnams kyi nang na ma rungs pa’o ||* T. 1636 (XXXII) 109a27–b2: 如來藏經云。佛言。迦葉波、有十不善業道、是為大罪。此最極殺生者、謂若殺父斷緣覺命。最極不與取者、謂若欺奪三寶財物。最極欲邪行者、謂起汚母及無學尼。T. 821 (XVII) 844c10–13 (*juan xia*): 迦葉、如人有父得緣覺道、子斷父命、名殺中重。奪三寶物、名盜中重。若復有人、其母出家得羅漢道、共為不淨、是姪中重。

The indication in Bendall (1897–1902): 407 that the citation is from the *Tathāgatagarbha-sūtra* is an error; I owe the correct identification to my friend Tōru Tomabechi. Moreover, this identification was made already by Izumi Hōkei in Ono (1932–1935: 7.465bc). Note that the Chinese translation of the sūtra itself (T. 821) appears to correspond rather to the *Abhidharmakośa*’s understanding that the mother is herself an arhanṭī, which does not appear to be the intention of the Indic text or its translations in the Tibetan and Chinese versions of the *Śikṣāsamuccaya*.

latter are likewise coordinated with the more basic set of sins in various ways by East Asian commentaries on the *Yogācārabhūmi*.⁴⁸ (Kui)ji's *Yuqieshidilun lüezuan* 瑜伽師地論略纂 offers the following scheme:⁴⁹

- Defiling a female arhat and a mother = matricide.
- Injuring a bodhisattva in his last existence = patricide.
- Committing murder in a temple (or other sacred precinct), causing injury in a place of refuge, or offering safe haven to those who are in trouble and then causing them injury = murder of an arhat.
- Stealing from the monastic community = causing a schism.
- Destroying stūpas and so on = drawing the blood of a Buddha.

This text goes on to discuss its disagreement with the analysis of the *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya*. Otherwise, after quoting Kuiji's analysis, his contemporary the Korean commentator Toryun 遁倫 (better Tullyun 道倫?) in his *Yuqie lunji* 瑜伽論記 offers yet another series of correspondences:⁵⁰

- Defiling a female arhat = murder of an arhat.
- Defiling a mother = matricide.
- Injuring a bodhisattva in his last existence and destroying stūpas = drawing the blood of a Buddha.
- Stealing from the monastic community = causing a schism.
- The remainder [unspecified, but in context perhaps to be understood as committing murder in a temple, causing injury in a place of refuge, or offering safe haven to those who are in trouble and then causing them injury?] = patricide.

Though neither of these texts is Indian, the diversity with which they interpret the category is nevertheless noteworthy. An additional curious feature of the category of the five sins similar to those of immediate retribution is the extension of the idea that the murder of an arhat is a heinous crime to include within the “same category” the murder of anyone who is not as far advanced along the path to perfection as is the arhat. When the texts maintain that the murder of a *śaikṣa*, which is to say one “with things left to learn,” is as serious as the murder of an arhat, who is an *aśaikṣa*, one “with nothing left to learn,” this seems to signal a rather radical devaluing of the seriousness of the murder of the arhat, which may be a reason that the **Abhidharma Mahāvibhāṣā*, whose defence of the arhat's perfection among other things characterizes its critique of the Mahāsāṃghikas, explicitly rejects the equivalence of the two crimes.⁵¹ Similar remarks might be made about the

⁴⁸ These lists are cited in Mochizuki (1932–1936: 2.1126a).

⁴⁹ T. 1829 (XLIII) 50b11–16 (*juan* 4). See Deleanu (2006: 251).

⁵⁰ T. 1828 (XLII) 360a15–17 (3/1). On the commentary and the commentator, see Deleanu (2006: 251–252, and 269–270, nn. 37–40).

⁵¹ The *Vibhāṣā* (T. 1545 [XXVII] 620a5–15 [*juan* 119]) argues for the difference between the killing of an arhat and that of a *śaikṣa*, a fact which may be related to its strenuous objections to Mahādeva's Five Theses, which after all constitute, according to the consensus reading, precisely an attack on the special status of the arhat. See my detailed discussion in *Riven By Lust*.

remaining items. On the other hand, the associations we see in these texts are not unique. A passage in the Pāli Vinaya lists, together with a miscellany of others, “matricides, patricides, those who kill arhats, those who defile nuns, those who cause a schism in the monastic community, and those who draw the blood [of a Buddha].”⁵²

Yet a farther extension is evident in a Tantric text, the *Guhyasamājantra Pradīpodyotana-tīkā-ṣaṭkoṭivyākhyā* attributed to a certain Candrakīrti. There we find the five sins of immediate retribution listed as murder of one’s mother, father, a monk (bhikṣu, not arhat!), destruction of an image of the Buddha (*buddha-pratimā-bheda*), and opposing the True Teaching (*saddharma-pratīkṣepaka*). Here the question of how to deal with the crime of violence against the Buddha in a post-Buddha world is dealt with by replacing the Buddha with his image. Additionally, the murder of any monk replaces the murder of an arhat, and opposition to orthodoxy replaces the much more technical transgression of the creation of a schism.⁵³

To another type of discourse belong passages of philosophical reinterpretation of the category of the five sins of immediate retribution, such as the following in Xuanzang’s translation of the *Vimalakīrtinirdeśa*:⁵⁴

It would be better to become guilty of the five acts of immediate fruition than to be like us holy ones who are completely delivered. And why? Because those who become guilty of the five *ānantarya* still have the power to destroy these *ānantarya*, to produce the thought of supreme and perfect enlightenment and gradually attain all the Buddhadharmas. While we, Arhats, who have destroyed our impurities, will never be capable of it.

A passage in the *Pitṛputrasamāgama* takes a śūnyavādin stance:⁵⁵

All things, Blessed One, are awakening; they should be known as lacking in intrinsic nature. Even the sins of immediate retribution are awakening. How so? Because, Blessed One, awakening is devoid of essential nature, and the five sins of immediate retribution are devoid of essential nature. Thus even the sins of immediate retribution are said to be awakening.

⁵² Oldenberg (1879–1883: ii.173,23–24) (Cullavagga VI.17.3), with a translation in Horner (1938–1966: V.243). The additional term is *bhikkhunīdūsaka*. Note too that in the Mūlasarvāstivāda *Vinayasūtra* (Bapat & Gokhale, 1982: 23.21–22), in the context of those restricted from ordination, immediately after the five sins of immediate retribution is listed *bhikṣuṇīdūsaka*, precisely equivalent to the Pāli term. (The term is normal for such lists, but it is not always placed adjacent to or amidst the enumeration of the sins of immediate retribution.)

⁵³ Chakravarti (1984: 46.21–47.5). I owe the reference to Harunaga Isaacson.

⁵⁴ Lamotte (1976: 179) (VII §4), translating T. 476 (XIV) 575c25–29 (*juan* 4). Other versions of the sūtra do not explain things in quite the same way.

⁵⁵ Quoted in the *Śikṣāsamuccaya*, Cambridge Add. 1478, folio 113b7–8 = Bendall (1897–1902: 257.10–13): *sarvvadharmaṃ bhagavaṃ bodhiḥ | svabhāvavirahitā boddhavyāḥ | antaśā ānantaryāṇy api bodhiḥ | tat kasya hetor aprakṛtikā hi bhagavaṃ bodhir aprakṛtikāni ca pañcānantaryāni | tenocyate ānantaryāṇy api bodhir iti*.

Similar is the intent of a passage from a text cited under the title *Satyadvayāvātara*:⁵⁶

The equality, from the ultimate point of view, Devaputra, of thusness, the dharma-realm and eternal non-production is the equality, from the ultimate point of view, of the five sins of immediate retribution. The equality of the five sins of immediate retribution is the equality of the appropriations of philosophical views.

This passage continues with such equivalences until it equates, from the ultimate point of view, nirvāṇa with non-production (*anutpāda*), itself equivalent to saṃsāra. Such uses of the concept, however, clearly belong to a discourse different from that which assumes the literal idea.⁵⁷

What of the retribution promised to those who commit one of the five sins? There is no notion of eternal damnation in Buddhism, but the performance of even one of the five sins leads to necessary and immediate suffering in hell. That suffering, however, is inevitably *temporary*. The punishment even for multiple occurrences of these gravest of sins is emphatically not damnation as such, although some sources suggest that multiple transgressions require correspondingly longer periods of suffering to recompense. The one possible exception to the claim that (at least Indian) Buddhism knows no idea of eternal damnation is the doctrine of the *icchantika*. But even here, the core concept is actually quite distinct.

The problem of the meaning of the *icchantika* in Buddhism is extremely vexed, confronting, as it does, the very question of the universality of access to awakening and therefore the ultimacy of Buddhism as a spiritual path.⁵⁸ Fortunately, none of these complex questions are directly germane to the issue to be taken up here. Rather, the problem here is the nature of evil acts, and the type of recompense that Buddhist sources envision as possible. Could it be argued that the five sins of immediate retribution are not, in fact, the most serious moral offences imagined by Indian Buddhist theorists, since the highest criticism is instead reserved for the *icchantika*? To frame the question in this way is to mix categories that at least the systematic doctrinal texts keep distinct. Moreover, the harshest judgement, at least in this systematic literature, is reserved for another individual who is sometimes treated as distinct from the *icchantika*, the *agotraka*, the individual entirely bereft of the potentiality for Buddhahood.

⁵⁶ Quoted in the *Prasannapadā*, La Vallée Poussin (1903–1913: 374.6–7): *yas samā devaputra paramārthatas tathatā dharmadhātur atyantājātiś ca tat samāni paramārthatatāḥ pañcānantaryāṇi | yat samāni pañcānantaryāṇi tat samāni dṛṣṭikṛtāni*. I have not been able to identify the scriptural source of this passage.

⁵⁷ I similarly omit mention here of Tantric texts which employ intentionally shocking imagery suggesting that one may obtain liberation through such radical violations as the five sins of immediate retribution. This rhetoric too belongs to an entirely different discourse.

⁵⁸ The classic study which sets the frame for such discussions is Ruegg (1969). For some hint as to the considerable debate some of these materials have caused in recent years, see Hubbard and Swanson (1997).

One of the most important, and probably the earliest, of the Indian scriptural sources for the doctrine of the *icchantika* is the *Mahāyāna Mahāparinirvāṇa-sūtra*. However, the portrayal of the *icchantika* in this text is not thoroughly consistent.⁵⁹ Several passages illustrate a range of opinions:⁶⁰

Gentle son, an example: while a physician skilled in the eight branches of the Āyurveda can cure all varieties of illness, he is unable to cure what is incurable. Just so, while all the scriptures and concentrations can cure everyone afflicted with the illnesses of lust, hatred and delusion, and clear up even all the afflictions of the defilements, they are unable to cure those who commit a *pārājika* offence and those who commit the sins of immediate retribution.

[Another] example: while a physician who knows the supreme lore of the Āyurveda can cure the illnesses of all beings, even he is unable to cure an illness which has already killed [the patient]. Just so, while this very *Mahāparinirvāṇa-sūtra* can cure all the illnesses of the defilements of all beings, and fix them toward the attainment of awakening, this does not include the *icchantika* who resembles one who has already died.

[Another] example: If one born blind is not aware even of the moon, how can he see anything at all clearly? A great physician, however, may cure those of weak eyesight and cause them to see, but this does not include the individual born blind. Just so, while this very *Mahāparinirvāṇa-sūtra* may cure the eyes of all auditors and lone buddhas who resemble the visually impaired, quickly causing them to see the eye of the Mahāyāna, and fix toward awakening even those who commit a *pārājika* offence and those who commit sins of immediate retribution and cling to the belief that it is not necessary to make the aspiration to awakening, this does not include the *icchantika* who is completely blinded.

According to the first example here, those monastics who commit a *pārājika* offence, the most serious violation of the monastic code, and those who commit a sin of immediate retribution are incurable.⁶¹ This would suggest that we understand such offenders as essentially equivalent to the *icchantika*, since

⁵⁹ This is so even leaving aside the whole issue of the various versions of the text which, probably, evolved over time, and the impact this evolution and its subsequent transmission had on the development of Buddhist doctrine in China, as exemplified in the controversy involving Daosheng 道生 in the fourth century, on which see, for instance, Liebenthal (1955: 83–88, 1956: 95–97). For the sake of simplicity, here I refer only to the Tibetan translation.

⁶⁰ Lhasa Kanjur 122, *mdo sde, nya* 190a7–191a2; Derge Kanjur 120, *mdo sde, tha* 130b6–131a6; Peking Kanjur 788, *mdo sde, tu* 134b7–135a6; Mochizuki (1988: 433–435). Mochizuki (1988) edited a number of passages from the text on the basis of the Lhasa, Derge and Peking editions. However, at least his citations of the Derge edition, the only one to which I have access at present, are not always entirely accurately, and therefore I translate from the Derge edition directly, while citing his quotations for reference. For each passage Mochizuki also gives a Japanese reading of the Chinese translations, and a modern Japanese translation from Tibetan.

⁶¹ Or perhaps the text means, those who commit all four *pārājikas*—briefly, sex, murder, theft, unjustifiable public claims to supernatural powers—and all five sins of immediate retribution?

the latter is also incurable. This would certainly seem to be supported by several further passages in the same text:⁶²

Gentle son, an example: the tightly closed petals of a lotus flower bloom when struck by the rays of the sun. Just so, immediately upon hearing this *Mahāparinirvāṇa-sūtra* even all the beings who think even the production of the term “aspiration to awakening” unnecessary [much less actually producing the aspiration itself, and are thus “closed” to the possibility of awakening, like a flower with petals closed] will effortlessly inject the cause of awakening into all the hairs [of their body]. Although even *icchantikas* possess the *tathāgatagarbha*, still it is as if within a thick covering. An example: the silk worm surrounds itself and is unable to emerge [from its cocoon] without making an opening. Just so, even the *tathāgatagarbha* is not able to emerge from within the *icchantika* due to the fault of his karma. Therefore, as long as saṃsāra lasts he will not obtain the cause of awakening.

And again:⁶³

[A monk] asks: What is the *icchantika*?

[The Buddha] said: A monk, nun, male or female lay disciple may be one. One who having rejected the scriptures with unpleasant speech does not, subsequently, even ask for forgiveness has entered into the path of the *icchantika*. Those who have committed the four *pārājikas* and those who have committed the five sins of immediate retribution, who even if they are aware that they have entered into a fearful place do not perceive it as fearful, who do not attach themselves to the side of the true teachings and without making any efforts at all think “let’s get rid of the true teachings,” who proclaim even that that very [teaching] is blame-worthy—they too have entered into the path of the *icchantika*. Those who claim “There is no Buddha, there is no teaching, there is no monastic community” are also said to have entered the path of the *icchantika*. With the exception of the *icchantika*, it is praiseworthy to make donations to all (religious people).

Here the text can hardly be understood otherwise than as identifying with the *icchantika* those who are guilty of a variety of objectionable behaviors and attitudes. The first passage in particular, by saying that the reason for the *icchantika*’s inability to actualize his inherent but latent seed of awakening is his karma, certainly seems to be saying that it is the fault of some actions taken in the past that the *icchantika* is forever cut off from awakening. When, however, we return to the third item in the first set of examples (and the text continues with further instances in the same vein), we see an explicit

⁶² Lhasa Kanjur 122, *mdo sde, nya* 189b6–190a3; Derge Kanjur—120, *mdo sde, tha* 130b1–4; Peking Kanjur 788, *mdo sde, tu* 134a8–b3; Mochizuki (1988: 429–430).

⁶³ Lhasa Kanjur 122, *mdo sde, nya* 211b2–7; Derge Kanjur 120, *mdo sde, tha* 144a3–7; Peking Kanjur 788, *mdo sde, tu* 149a5–b1; Mochizuki (1988: 457–458).

distinction of the *icchantika* from those who commit a *pārājika* and those who commit a sin of immediate retribution. The latter are indeed curable, while the former is not. Another lucid example of this distinction is found in the following passage from the same text:⁶⁴

Because those who commit a *pārājika* offence and those who commit the sins of immediate retribution at the time of death do not suffer a loss of mindfulness, they will be reborn in the heavenly realm. Thus, because even those who commit a *pārājika* offence and those who commit the sins of immediate retribution at the time of death do not suffer a loss of mindfulness, they will generate the cause [which will lead them to] awakening, whether [they are reborn] in hell or the human realm—but this does not include the *icchantika*.

The conclusion we must draw is that at least two distinct ideas are expressed in the *Mahāparinirvāṇa-sūtra*.⁶⁵ Further light on the overall picture may be shed by noticing a few passages in other sources. Among them, perhaps the most important scriptural source after the *Mahāparinirvāṇa-sūtra* is the *Laṅkāvatāra-sūtra*, in which we find the following:⁶⁶

Again in this regard, Mahāmati, how is it that the *icchantikas* do not strive for liberation? Well, [there are two types of *icchantika*: those who are *icchantika*] because they have abandoned all their roots of goodness, and [those who are *icchantika*] because they have made a vow [to save all beings] from beginningless time. In that regard, what is [the *icchantika*] who has abandoned all roots of goodness? One who has cast aside the scriptures of the bodhisattvas, and has professed the calumny that these [scriptures] do not conform to the liberation [taught] in the canonical scriptures and vinaya. Due to having abandoned all his roots of goodness, [this individual] does not attain nirvāṇa. The second type, Mahāmati, is the bodhisattva-mahāsattva who, thanks to his earlier vow to remain in existence as a skillful means to liberate beings, says: “As long as there are beings who have not attained nirvāṇa, I will not attain nirvāṇa,” and so does not attain nirvāṇa. This, Mahāmati, is the reason [both] these [types] possess the quality of not having attained nirvāṇa, and through this they acquire the fate of the *icchantika*.

⁶⁴ Lhasa Kanjur 122, *mdo sde, nya* 192b3–5; Derge Kanjur 120, *mdo sde, tha* 131b8–132a2; Peking Kanjur 788, *mdo sde, tu* 136a1–3; Mochizuki (1988: 438).

⁶⁵ The complexities of the *Mahāparinirvāṇa-sūtra*’s treatment of the question of the *icchantika* are discussed by Shimoda (1997: 356–378), who also discusses several of the passages I have quoted here.

⁶⁶ Nanjio (1923: 65.17–67.1). The passage has been treated by Ruegg (1969: 75–76), and see the translation by Suzuki (1932: 58–59), which for this section is quite good. As is usual with this particularly difficult scripture, the philological problems are many. Although I have consulted the Tibetan translation, the preliminary result of this comparison suggests that any careful study of both the published Sanskrit text and the Tibetan translation (not to mention the Chinese sources) would require considerable time, effort and space. I am thus compelled to renounce this task, and simply translate the Sanskrit text as edited.

Once again Mahāmati asked: Which one of these, Blessed One, will never attain nirvāṇa?

The Blessed One said: The bodhisattva *icchantika*, Mahāmati, knowing that all entities are primally in the state of nirvāṇa will never attain nirvāṇa.⁶⁷ But this is not so for the *icchantika* who has abandoned all roots of goodness. For the *icchantika*, Mahāmati, who has abandoned all roots of goodness will once again, thanks to the spiritual power of the Tathāgata, sometime, somehow foster roots of goodness. Why? Because no beings, Mahāmati, are thoroughly abandoned by the Tathāgatas. So, for this reason, Mahāmati, it is the bodhisattva *icchantika* who does not attain nirvāṇa.

It is quite clear here that, whatever the relation may be between those who commit certain crimes, the *icchantika* in the ordinary sense of one devoid of roots of goodness is not permanently damned. Moreover, we see here an indication of the direction which the philosophical literature will take. One of the key concerns in both the scriptural materials and systematic treatises is, as one would expect from a tradition which considers intention the most vital element in karmic responsibility, mental attitude, rather than action as such. It is one's attitude that determines one's fate, rather than merely the actions one performs, and in this respect, most particularly one's attitude toward the truths of Buddhism. This is very well illustrated by a pair of verses from the central treatise of the Indian Tathāgatagarbha tradition, the *Ratnagotravibhāga* (Discrimination of the Jewelled Lineage):⁶⁸

Wise ones should not excessively fear fire, the terrible poison of a snake, a murderer, or even lightning strikes, as much as damage to the profound teaching. Fire, a snake, an enemy, and lightning may deprive one of life, but one will not on this account go toward the destiny of the extremely fearful Avīci hells.

A man might constantly devote himself to evil friends, be committed to harming the Buddha, be one who performs the acts of murdering one's mother, father or an arhat, or be one who causes a schism in the best of monastic communities, but even for him liberation from that [sin of immediate retribution] would be rapid if he were to concentrate on the message of the teaching. But from where is there liberation for one whose mind is opposed to the teaching?

What keeps one from liberation, what binds one to saṃsāra and separates one from nirvāṇa, is not the commission of crimes, but the rejection of the truth of Buddhism. Quite a lot might be said (elsewhere) about the intolerance of this attitude, which might fairly be characterized as one of "my way or

⁶⁷ One way to understand this is to refer to the idea that because he has transcended the dichotomy of saṃsāra and nirvāṇa, the bodhisattva perceives no saṃsāra from which he must escape. He is then not cut off from nirvāṇa (much less bound to saṃsāra) so much as cut off from (the imaginary imposition of the concepts of) both saṃsāra and nirvāṇa.

⁶⁸ Johnston (1950: 118.15–119.4). See the translations in Takasaki (1966: 388–389, and 1989: 213, with notes on 381).

the highway.” What is important for us here, however, is the almost uniform Buddhist attitude toward the fate of sinners, namely that their punishment is not permanent, and thus even those guilty of the most serious crimes are not damned. The individual who is excluded from awakening forever, if there is such a being (a point upon which there is disagreement), is solely he who rejects the Buddhist teachings, clearly a different class of “offence” from patricide, matricide or the creation of a schism in the Buddhist monastic community. The same treatise presents one view of the nature of the *icchantika* systematically as follows:⁶⁹

Among [the three types of beings listed] the one who craves existence is to be understood as two-fold: those beings whose intentions are hostile to the path to liberation, who belong to the lineage of those separated from nirvāṇa, who wish for saṃsāra not nirvāṇa, and those who, though Buddhists, share the fate of those in the former group; some of these latter are enemies of the Mahāyāna.

These individuals are then classed as those who are “fixed in falsehood,” *mithyātvaniyata*.⁷⁰ Nevertheless, even for these people, who “belong to the lineage of those separated from nirvāṇa” (*aparīnirvāṇagoṭraka*), the *Ratnagoṭravibhāga*, in speaking of the obstacles they face in grasping the pith of the Tathāgata’s teaching (*tathāgatadhātu*), goes on to say:⁷¹

Hostility toward the Mahāyāna is the obstacle of the *icchantikas*, whose antidote is the bodhisattvas’ cultivation of faith in the Mahāyāna teachings.

The same idea is restated once more, when the text clearly says that hostility toward the Mahāyāna is the cause for being an *icchantika*, and is a temporary condition.⁷² All of this makes it clear that for the *Ratnagoṭravibhāga*, there is no such thing as any individual who is completely cut off from awakening. Some other philosophical texts, it is true, disagree,⁷³ but even traditions of interpretation which accept the possibility that some individuals may be thoroughly barred from awakening exclude from this class those who commit sins of immediate retribution, and even more radically, also those with

⁶⁹ Johnston (1950: 27.18–28.2): *tatra bhavābhilāṣiṇo dvividhā vedīṭavyāḥ | mokṣamārgapratihatāṣā aparīnirvāṇagoṭrakāḥ sattvā ye saṃsāram evaṇṇanti na nirvāṇam tannīyatīpatitāḥ cehadharmikā eva | tadekatyā mahāyānadharmavidīṣo*. Cp. the trans. in Takasaki (1966: 202, 1989: 49) (the latter of which has dropped the last clause).

⁷⁰ Johnston (1950: 29.1–2): *tatra ye sattvā bhavābhilāṣiṇa icchantikāḥ tannīyatīpatitā ihadharmikā evocyante mithyātvaniyataḥ sattvarāṣir iti*.

⁷¹ Johnston (1950: 29.8–9): *mahāyānadharmapratigha icchantikānām āvaraṇam yasya pratipakṣo mahāyānadharmādhimuktibhāvanā bodhisattvānām*. Cp. the trans. in Takasaki (1966: 205, 1989: 52).

⁷² Johnston (1950: 37.2–3): *mahāyānadharmapratigha icchantikatve hetur iti mahāyānadharma-pratighanivartārtham uktam kālāntarābhiprāyeṇa*, trans. in Takasaki (1966: 224, 1989: 64).

⁷³ For instance, the *Mahāyānasūtrālaṃkāra* (III.11), on which see Ruegg (1969: 80). For a peek at some of the complex abhidharmic background to these discussions, see Jaini (1959).

mistaken views (*mithyādr̥ṣṭi*), namely those whose roots of goodness are cut off (*samucchinnakuśalamūla*).⁷⁴ This leaves the class of the “damned” to comprise, oddly but consistently, those who have done nothing to motivate their inclusion.⁷⁵ According to this interpretation, those who are permanently disbarred from awakening, and the only individuals who can belong to this class, are born that way, and in this sense comparable to rocks and trees in thoroughly lacking the capacity to comprehend.⁷⁶

The end result is that for most Indian Buddhist authors, the most serious offence is to fail to believe in the Buddhist teachings, to reject the Dharma. Crimes such as the sins of immediate retribution are serious—and when improper behavior is the issue, it is consistently the sins of immediate retribution which are mentioned—but the tradition appears to be (nearly) unanimous in considering that they do not result in one’s permanent estrangement from ultimate awakening, bodhi or nirvāṇa.

The *icchantika* is either one who rejects the truth of Buddhism, or the individual who lacks the inborn, innate capacity to become a Buddha. He is therefore doomed to eternal rebirth in the realms of transmigration (*saṃsāra*), from which liberation in nirvāṇa is impossible.⁷⁷ On the other hand, he is in no way fated to rebirth in hell or any other unfavorable rebirth, as is the sinner who commits one or more of the transgressions of immediate retribution. What separates such a sinner from the *icchantika* is that, on the one hand, the sinner must suffer in an unfavorable rebirth, which the *icchantika* need not do, and on the other that his ultimate liberation is quite possible, if not inevitable,

⁷⁴ On the idea of those whose roots of goodness are cut off, and particularly the interpretation of this notion in the *Vibhāṣā*, see the detailed study of Buswell (1992).

⁷⁵ Sometimes, although inconsistently, they are called the *agotraka*, those lacking in the essential quality of susceptibility to awakening (and therefore in this respect understood differently than in the *Mahāparinirvāṇa-sūtra* passage we noticed above, in which the *icchantika* does possess the *tathāgatagarbha*, here equivalent to the *gotra*, but cannot actualize it).

⁷⁶ This, in any case, is the interpretation of Sthiramati’s commentary to the *Mahāyānasūtrālaṃkāra* in his *Sūtrālaṃkāravṛttibhāṣya*, cited by Ruegg (1969: 80–81, n. 3). This also appears to be close to the position taken by Asaṅga in the *Abhidharmasamuccaya*, according to Ruegg (1969: 482) (the passage to which he refers is that numbered §52(2) in the recent comprehensive edition of the text corpus by Hayashima [2003]).

⁷⁷ One fundamental difference between this concept and that of essentially Christian ideas of eternal damnation is that the *icchantika* does not reach this state as a result of some action on his part, and most sources very clearly distinguish the *icchantika* even from one who commits the five sins of immediate retribution. Rather, this state is, so to speak, his birthright, the way he is constructed, lacking an essential component from the beginning of beginningless time, an idea which is, once more, entirely different from the Christian notion of original sin. This component, the buddha-nature (variously expressed as *buddhagotra*, *buddhatva* and so on), is what allows almost all beings to eventually—and according to this interpretation, inevitably—attain awakening.

while for the *icchantika*—at least as most radically conceived—the impossibility of his liberation is what defines him.⁷⁸

This principle of the temporary nature of the punishment attendant on even the most serious transgression is well illustrated by a story of the eminent monk and direct disciple of the Buddha Mahā-Moggallāna, in which it is related that in a former life he murdered both of his parents. The story, offered in explanation for his murder by robbers in the present life, is found in both the commentary to the *Dhammapada* (Words of the Teaching) and that to the *Jātaka* (Stories of the Buddha's Former Lives), the latter version importantly different from the former. The *Dhammapada* commentary version reads as follows:⁷⁹

Once upon a time there was a young man of social status, a resident of Benares, who looked after his parents by himself, taking care of the household duties such as pounding rice, cooking and so on. One day his parents said to him: “My dear, you’re exhausting yourself taking care of the household and outside duties all by yourself; we’ll bring a young woman for you.”

He refused them, saying: “Mom, Dad, there’s no need to do such a thing for my sake. I’ll serve you with my own hands as long as you both live.” Again and again they begged him, [and in the end] they brought him a young woman [for his wife].

She served them for only a few days, but from then on was unwilling to bear even the sight of them, telling him with annoyance “I can’t live together in the same place with your parents.”

The wife then tricks the husband into thinking that his aged, blind parents are littering the house with dirt and bits of food, which she cannot tolerate, such that

even such a one as he, who had fulfilled the Perfections, broke off relations with his parents. “Let it be!” he said. “I’ll discover what’s to be done with them.” And having fed [his parents], he said: “Mom, Dad, in

⁷⁸ It is true that there are sources which appear to exclude those who perpetrate the five sins of immediate retribution from salvation. A famous example (although how important it may have been in India itself is questionable) is found in the nineteenth vow of Dharmākara, the bodhisattva who became the buddha Amitābha, in the foundational scripture of Pure Land Buddhism, the *Sukhāvatīvyūha*. Dharmākara vows to save all who believe in him (Kagawa, 1984: 120, §8-g, vow 19) *sthāpayitvānantaryakāriṇaḥ saddharmapratikṣepāvaraṇāvṛtānś ca sattvān*, “except those who commit the sins of immediate retribution, and those beings who are obstructed by their hostility to the true teaching.” We notice here that from the perspective of other materials we have studied, there appears to be some conflation of what other texts treat quite separately, namely sinful actions on the one hand and apostasy or disbelief on the other. In this light, I have some doubts about Gómez’s interpretation of this exception clause (1996: 232), since he appears to take notice only of the first of the pair of disqualified individuals.

⁷⁹ Norman (1906–1914: iii.68,1–69), 10 = Burmese Sixth Council edition (Dhammagiri-Pāli-Ganthamālā 51 [Dhammagiri, Igatpuri: Vipassana Research Institute, 1995]): 39.8–26. Cp. the translation in Burlingame (1921: ii.306–307). The story was noticed by both Malalasekera (1938: II.546–547), and Hecker in Nyanaponika and Hecker (1997: 102–103).

such-and-such a place relations of yours are asking for you to come for a visit. Let's go there." And putting them in a cart, he went along with them. When they reached the middle of the woods, he said: "Dad, take the reins. The oxen will go [by themselves as if they were] aware of the goad. Robbers dwell in these parts. I am going to alight." And giving the reins into his father's hands, he alit. As he went away, he made noises, producing a yell like [a band of] robbers. His parents heard the sounds, and thinking "There are robbers," said "Dear, we are old, just protect yourself!" Making the robbers' yell, he beat his parents who were crying out to him like that, and killed them, throwing [their bodies] into the forest and going home.

This version of the story is presented without ambiguity: in a former life, the great monk Moggallāna, one of the chief disciples of the Buddha, renowned for his magical powers as well as his wisdom, murdered his parents deliberately, cold bloodedly and with premeditation. Perhaps demonstrating some discomfort with this directness, the more compact version of the same story recounted in the commentary to the *Jātaka* has Moggallāna repent at the last minute:⁸⁰

Once long ago, harkening to what his wife said, he wanted to kill his parents. Leading them into the woods in a cart, he made it seem as if robbers had appeared, and he beat and struck his parents. Deprived of their ability to see shapes by their poor eyesight, they did not recognize that he was their own son, and thinking "Robbers have come!" they wailed only for his sake: "Dear, some robbers are killing us. Get away!" He thought to himself: "Although they are being beaten by me, they wail only for my sake. What I'm doing is not right." Then taking care of them he pretended that the robbers had fled. He rubbed their hands and feet and said: "Mom, Dad, don't be afraid. The robbers have fled." And he led them back home.

The context within which both accounts are presented, and the fact they are meant to explain, involve what we might call the "karmic fruit loop." Moggallāna, the tale goes on to recount, is beaten to death by robbers, now, in the story of the present, in recompense for his beating of his own parents, related as a story of the past. This pattern of a present fact being explained by a past circumstance is the standard formula which essentially defines the *Jātaka* and *Avadāna* story literature. In the *Dhammapada* commentary version of our story, it is explicitly stated that his repeated experience of being beaten to death through hundreds of lives is in addition to, not instead of, his suffering numberless rebirths in hells. This is a typical application of the idea we may term "conformable multiplied recompense," wherein the karmic fruit of an action resembles the action itself (a sort of *lex talionis*), but in much increased intensity, so that even a small act of generosity produces later wealth, for instance, or causing a certain form of harm results in one suffering a much

⁸⁰ *Jātaka* 522 (Sarabhaṅga). Fausbøll (1877–1896: v.126), 11–20 = Burmese Sixth Council edition (Dhammagiri-Pāli-Gaṇṭhamālā 74 [Dhammagiri, Igatpuri: Vipassana Research Institute, 1998]): 122.22–123.2. Cp. the translation in Cowell et al. (1895–1907: v.65).

multiplied reflex of that harm oneself. This sort of narrative illustration of the laws of karma, in both positive and negative forms, is ubiquitous in the story literature. Even a sin so grave as the murder of one's parents, constituting two of the sins of immediate retribution (one for each parent), does not prompt the application of principles other than those already in general use. This story, therefore, illustrates the limited effects of even the worst sort of karma. Once the fruits of any act have ripened, to borrow an Indian metaphor, the seeds which gave rise to that fruit vanish.⁸¹

Since personal identity is not something limited to one physical incarnation in one life (even in the absence of a "self"), even restrictions placed upon an individual do not follow him into death, and thus are not in any sense permanent in this "long view." An illustration of this principle appears in what may at first seem an unlikely context. The five sins of immediate retribution find a place in the rules and rituals of monastic ordination, since in all traditions of Buddhist monasticism it is forbidden to ordain a specified variety of individuals. A general principle of vital import in the compilation of the list of those who may not legally be ordained imposes restrictions on any individual who has either a previous social or economic responsibility, or who might damage the reputation of the monastic community, or who might become a burden to that community. Therefore, slaves, royal servants and soldiers, for example, must not be ordained, since they owe an obligation to their owners, to the king, or to some other individual, respectively.⁸² Likewise, those who are ill and whose ordination, if permitted, would tend to turn the monastic community into a vast hospice for the sick and dying are to be denied admission. Even the ugly, who might discourage lay people from drawing near and offering their generosity, are to be denied ordination.⁸³ If it is discovered after ordination that a monk does, in fact, belong to one of the banned categories, the appropriate response differs, but in the more serious cases it is stipulated that the offender be expelled, if for no other reason than that the presence of those who belonged to such groups would tend to bring the monastic community into disrepute. The five sins of immediate retribution are offences which impede ordination and which, if discovered later, call for expulsion. Or at least this is what the theory appears to stipulate.

⁸¹ Conversely, at least from the point of view of systematic theory, the same applies to the fruits of positive actions, which likewise can never have more than a temporary, hence limited, effect. That is to say, theoretically speaking one cannot escape the circle of transmigration, *samsāra*, and attain *nirvāṇa*, the sunnum bonnum, through karmic action, since the results of the latter function only within the limited and endless flux of birth and rebirth. How this putatively original "pure" idea may have been adapted and modified in practice, if this is indeed what happened, is a question requiring separate treatment, but it is certainly true that some sources do suggest that liberation is accessible through good actions.

⁸² These lists, however, require further study. For instance, the treatment of debtors is considerably more complicated than it might at first seem, as discussed by Schopen (2001).

⁸³ A long list of physical deformities which debar one from ordination is given at Oldenberg (1879–1883: i.91,7–22) (*Mahāvagga* I.71). For a study of the list in the Pāli Vinaya and its commentary, see Sasaki (1996).

It is one of the conceits of the literature of the Buddhist monastic codes, the Vinayas, that they record case law: they cite a story of the paradigmatic event which precipitated the promulgation of the rule in question. The story illustrating the rule is usually the story of the first offence.⁸⁴ The attribution of such stories sometimes appears to be fictitious, and different Vinaya texts of the different sects sometimes attribute to the same rule different origin stories. Caution would suggest that such stories be read and interpreted in terms other than as reports of actual incidents which historically led to the promulgation of particular rules of the Buddhist monastic codes. With this understanding of the nature of this material, we may turn to the following origination story presented in the *Pravrajyāvastu* (Section on Monastic Ordination) of the *Mūlasarvāstivāda* Vinaya in illustration of the prohibition of matricides from ordination.⁸⁵

[Once] there was a certain householder in Śrāvastī. He took a wife from a suitable family, and he had sex, made love and coupled with his wife, and from that sex, love making and coupling, a son was born.

He said to his wife: “Dear, we have had born to us a remover of our [spiritual] debt and a taker of our [material] wealth.⁸⁶ I will take my wares and go to another county [to conduct my business of trade, so that we may survive].”

She said: “Lord, do so.”

So taking his wares he went to another country, and there met with disaster.

⁸⁴ More accurately, the story illustrates what will become the offence. The first “offender” is not an offender, since the rule to be promulgated does not yet exist, and there is no retrospective imposition of the new rule.

⁸⁵ I translate here from the Sanskrit text established by Nāther (1975: 46.19–48.24 = 2003: 30.12–31.33). Nāther’s text improves upon the readings given by Lévi (1932: 27.23–29.7) and Dutt (1939–1959: iii.4.53.18–56.16); the Tibetan translation is edited in Eimer (1983: 309.6–312.13); the Chinese is found in T. 1444 (XXIII) 1038c27–1039b18 (*juan* 4)—this translation appears to be rather free, or perhaps based on a somewhat different original. Translations from the Sanskrit are found in Nāther (1975: 90–93) (in German; now also in English in [2003: 45–48], due to Claus Vogel and Klaus Wille), and Lévi (1932: 37–39) (French), and another from Tibetan is found in Feer (1883: 94–96) (also French). The latter was, however, characterized by Lévi (1932: 25) in the following terms: “Unfortunately, the translations of Feer are, here as they usually are, replete with errors, and they cannot serve as the base for a systematic comparison.”

Precisely this same story is found in the fourth century *Dharmapada* commentary in Chinese, the *Chuyao jing* 出曜經 (T. 212 [IV] 627a29–c4 [*juan* 4]), quoted from there in the sixth century compendium *Jinglü yixing* 經律異相 (T. 2121 [LIII] 237c29–238a22 [*juan* 46]), the latter translated by Chavannes [1910–1911: iii.269–270] [§478]), and again (almost certainly independently) in the 11th century *Nārakapūrvikāvadāna* of Kṣemendra’s *Bodhisattvāvadānakalpalatā* (§82, Das & Vidyābhūṣaṇa, 1888–1918: II.680–691. See also the summary version in Tucci [1949: 517], and the translation of Padma Chos ’phel’s *Ston pa’i skyes rabs dpag bsam ’khri shing* in Black [1997: 371–373]), and probably upon this basis subsequently in the *Bhavaśarmāvadāna* of the *Aśokāvadānamālā* (edited in Iwamoto [1978: 217–230]; see Mejer [1992: 108, n. d.]).

Note that in the *Mūlasarvāstivāda* Vinaya the prohibition of patricides from ordination, which immediately follows the prohibition of matricides (though when first introduced [Eimer, 1983: 142.7–8] they are in the opposite order), is illustrated with precisely the same story, *mutatis mutandis* (translated in Nāther [2003: 52ff] from Tibetan, since the Sanskrit manuscript does not bother to repeat the story, saying only [Nāther, 1975: 52.13–14 = 2003: 34.13–14] *yathā mātṛ-ghātaka evaṃ pītṛghātako vistareṇa vaktavyaḥ*).

⁸⁶ See now the observation in Schopen (2001: 139, n. 1) (and note the Ṛgvedic term [6.61.1] *ṛṇacyút*).

And [his wife] raised, nourished and fostered her son with the aid of her relatives and with her own hands.

On one occasion, accompanied by a friend, [the son] went to someone's nearby house. A young girl was living in that house, and she threw down a garland to him.⁸⁷ And he saw her.

His friend said to him: "Friend, I hope you have not made an assignation in this house."

He said: "Yes, I have made an assignation."

He said: "Friend, this house is dangerous. You must not go in, lest we⁸⁸ meet with disaster."

After being made to wander around for the whole day, [the boy] was led [by his friend] before his mother.⁸⁹

"Madam, this son of yours has made an assignation at that house. I have watched over him for the whole day. Now you watch over him for the night. That house is dangerous. He must not go into it, lest the two of you meet with disaster."

She said: "Young man, you did right to tell me about this."

She provided [her son] with a bed in an inner apartment of the house, and she brought two vessels, and placing water and earth in that inner apartment arranged her own bed at the door, and went to sleep.

[Half-way through the night]⁹⁰ he said: "Mother, open the door!"

"Why, son?"

"I have to urinate."

She said: "Son, I put out a jar; urinate in that."

After a short time he said: "Mother, open the door!"

"Why?"

"I've got to go to the toilet."

She said: "Son, I put out a jar and water and earth;⁹¹ go in that."

Again, after a short time, he said: "Mother, open the door!"

She said: "Son, do you think I don't know where you want to go? There's no way I'm going to open the door."

"Mother, I'm going to kill you."

She said: "Son, I'd rather be dead than watch my son be killed."

—There is indeed no evil act that one giving himself up to lust will not commit.—⁹²

With a pitiless heart, forsaking the other world, he unsheathed his sword and cut her head off from her neck, and it fell to the ground. Having killed her he

⁸⁷ See Silk Forthcoming b.

⁸⁸ Chinese: you.

⁸⁹ Chinese: His friends went around with him, keeping him out of trouble.

⁹⁰ Added after the Chinese translation.

⁹¹ These are, of course, for the use to which we put toilet paper.

⁹² This has the look of a narrative interjection, not uncommon in this literature.

left. The evil being was shaking,⁹³ and that young girl said to him: “Good sir, do not be afraid! There is no one else here but this young woman.”

He thought, “I’m going to tell her what happened, and I’ll become her favorite,” and so he said: “Dear, for your sake I killed my mother.”

She said: “The wet nurse or your birth mother?”⁹⁴

He said: “My birth mother.”

She thought, “Good god, if this guy is so oblivious to moral character that he would kill his own mother, what’ll happen to me when he gets mad at me?” And so she said: “Good sir, stay here—I’m just going to run upstairs and I’ll be right back.”

He said: “Okay.”

She went upstairs, and yelled “Thief! Thief!”

He got scared and fled in fear. Going to his own house, he threw down the sword at his door and cried: “This one’s the thief who killed my mother and fled.”⁹⁵

He performed the obsequies for his mother, and went away.

But the performer of evil deeds found no rest, and he visited a number of holy spots, groves of ascetics,⁹⁶ and asked them: “Honored ones, what action might one perform to destroy evil karma?”

⁹³ The transition from this sentence to the next (or internally in this sentence itself) is very abrupt, and suggests that some text may be missing. While the Tibetan translation agrees with the Sanskrit (Näther, 1975: 47.25, 2003: 31.3; Eimer, 1983: 310.22; trans. Feer, 1883: 95), Chinese 1039a19–20 adds: “Then he went to the wealthy man’s house. After he arrived there, he saw that young woman, and his body trembled,” 即詣長者家、既至彼已、見其少女、身形戰掉。There seem to be two basic possibilities: (1) Yijing’s text contained material missing from the extant Sanskrit text, and from the source of the Tibetan translation (because it was lost in those traditions or because Yijing had a different recension), or (2) Yijing sensed the discontinuity, and patched the text. There are also other cases where the same question might arise. (My suspicion is that the second possibility is the more likely. Further careful comparative studies of Yijing’s translation, which here as elsewhere often appears to be rather free, will shed light on this question.)

⁹⁴ The relation between *dhātṛī* and *janitrī* deserves to be explored. Notice that in *Nāradaśmṛti*, for instance, to have sexual relations even with a wet nurse (among others) qualifies as incest (*gurutalpaga*) (Larivière, 1989: 184, *Strīpumsayoga* 72–74; trans. 157). The treatment in the *Viṣṇuśmṛti* (36.4–7), while similar, does not mention the *dhātṛī*.

Employing the technical terms of kinship studies, we might translate the question “your mater or your genetrix?” But the Sanskrit terminology is in no way marked as particularly technical, and most (I would say all, but I work in a university) of those with whom we normally converse do not use specialized words like “mater” and “genetrix” in ordinary, much less emotionally charged, discourse.

⁹⁵ It is not entirely clear who is being designated with *ayam sa* here. The sequel, in which the son and true murderer is free to perform his mother’s funeral and simply depart, suggests that he is not confessing his own guilt here (in which case we might expect **so ’ham* instead). Rather, it may be that he is reporting his friend who tried to prevent him from meeting the girl as guilty of the crime, or simply that he is implicating some (in fact non-existent) thief in the murder he in reality committed. Feer (1883: 96) understood the Tibetan text differently: “Lui, effrayé, épouvanté, prit la fuite et s’en retourna chez lui. (En trouvant) le glaive qu’il avait placé près de la porte, il dit: Ce voleur, le voici, (c’est moi qui), après avoir tué ma mère, me suis enfui.”

⁹⁶ The Sanskrit here is appositional: *sa tāni (tāni) tīrthāni tapovanāni gatvā*, but the Tibetan translation takes the two places serially: *de mu stegs can gyi gnas dang | dka’ thub kyi gnas* de dang de dag tu song ste*. * Although Eimer prints *gnas*, he seems to suggest reading *nags* here, as do Vogel and Wille in Näther (2003: 47, n. 76).

To this one said: “Enter the fire,”⁹⁷ another “Fall down a cliff,” another “[Throw yourself]⁹⁸ into water,” another “Hang yourself with a rope and die.” All of them pointed out means to kill oneself, but none a means to salvation.

Then on another occasion he went to the Jetavana, and saw there a monk reciting to himself:

Whose evil action is covered over by good

Shines here in the world like the moon released from clouds.

He thought, “It is possible to cover over one’s evil actions. I will renounce the world in this [community].”⁹⁹

He approached a monk, and said: “Noble, I want to become initiated.” [The monk] initiated and ordained him,¹⁰⁰ and he began to recite with the excessive energy of a beginner; and through that recitation and rehearsal he learned by heart the Tripiṭaka, and became a Tripiṭaka master, a reciter of the teachings, one quick and ready in eloquence.¹⁰¹

The monks asked him: “Reverend, why do you strive with such energy?”

He said: “I will get rid of evil karma.”

“What evil karma have you done?”

“I killed my mother.”

“Your wet nurse or your birth mother?”

He said: “My birth mother.”

The text continues by presenting the Buddha’s order that the offender be expelled from the monastic community, and his subsequent promulgation of the prohibition against ordaining a matricide.¹⁰² It is remarkable that the story goes

⁹⁷ Here only Tibetan adds: another said “eat poison,” *dug zo shig*.

⁹⁸ This is specified in Tibetan, *chur mchongs shig*, and in Chinese.

⁹⁹ As printed the Sanskrit text reads rather: He thought, “It is possible to cover over one’s evil actions, but not to destroy them. I will renounce the world in this [community] and destroy [my evil karma].” Vogel and Wille in Nāther (2003: 47, n. 82), suggest that the expressions “but not to destroy them,” *no tu kṣapayitūṃ*, and “and destroy [my evil karma],” *kṣapayīṣyāmi*, are interpolations in the text. It is true that they lack a Tibetan equivalent (and Chinese differs here), and from one point of view hardly make sense. I provisionally accept the emendation. However, I nevertheless wonder whether it might be possible to understand *no tu kṣapayitūṃ* as “without destroying them,” so that the thought of the sinner is: I can hide these sins, without destroying them, that is, make them appear to be non-existent, without actually erasing them. Then only the subsequent *kṣapayīṣyāmi* (which, in any case, without connective *ca* is uncomfortable directly after the likewise finite verb form *pravajāmi*) would be an intrusion.

¹⁰⁰ Since this story is offered in illustration of the prohibition of matricides from ordination, the narrative conceit assumes that the postulant is not questioned about this matter prior to being granted ordination. It is only as a result of the problems occasioned by the ordination described here that such an inquiry is made a requisite part of the procedure of granting entry into the monastic community.

¹⁰¹ On the stock phrase here, see La Vallée Poussin (1923–1931: vii.91, n. 2).

¹⁰² Nāther (1975: 48.26–27 = 2003: 3134–35): *nāśayata yūyaṃ bhikṣavo mātṛghātakaṃ pudga(la)m asmād dharmavinayāt*, with the subsequent stipulation being that one must inquire of an individual seeking ordination *māsi mātṛghātaka*, “you’re not a matricide, are you?”

on to narrate how the monk, apparently merely on his own volition, does not in fact return to lay life, but instead travels to a remote region.¹⁰³ He converts a householder, who is so taken with him that he has a monastery constructed for the matricide, which must have been a sizable establishment rather than a mere hut, since monks come from far and wide to dwell there, and “many directly realized the state of arhatship through his instruction.”¹⁰⁴ The story continues with the eventual illness and death of this matricide. One of his disciples, who is an arhat and therefore endowed with various supernatural powers, begins to wonder where his preceptor (*upādhyāya*) has been reborn. Using his supernatural sight he is able to survey the realms of transmigration (*saṃsāra*), beginning with that of the gods and, when he does not locate him there, descending through the realms of humans, animals and hungry ghosts. It is only when he examines the lowest realm, that of hell, that he discovers his teacher in the great Avīci hell, and upon seeking the cause of his fate learns of his master’s earlier crime of matricide. This conforms perfectly with theory, which stipulates that one who commits a sin of immediate retribution will immediately be reborn precisely in the Avīci hell. Upon the matricide’s death in that hell he is, thanks to his positive state of mind (*kuśalacitta*) at the moment of his death, reborn among the gods. He goes to hear the Buddha preach and, in the formulaic fashion common in this literature, thanks to a sermon on the Four Noble Truths “smashes with the cudgel of wisdom the stone mountain of the mistaken philosophical view of belief in a real self,”¹⁰⁵ thereby attaining the stage of “Stream Winner,” *srotāpattiphala*, the initial and lowest of the advanced stages of the path to complete awakening which culminates in arhatship. When his erstwhile disciple the arhat once again surveys the realms of transmigration in search of his former teacher, he this time finds him vanished from his former abode in hell, likewise in ascending order from the realms of animals, hungry ghosts and men, and instead dwelling now among the gods. The disciple then proclaims: “How wonderful is the Buddha, how wonderful the Dharma, how wonderful the Saṃgha, how wonderful the recitation of the Teachings, such that now even such evil-doers as these, who have experienced descent [into hell], attain a collection of virtues conducive to awakening such as this!”¹⁰⁶

This story, like the story of Moggallāna above, does not make a fuss or commotion over the thorough redemption of the matricide. And this is quite consistent with general Buddhist doctrine. Once he has died, the offender serves his time in hell, which the text mentions here quite routinely, and then, thanks to a mere (or we had better say “crucial”) positive mental state at the time of his death in hell, our anti-hero the matricide manages to be reborn in

¹⁰³ Nāther (1975: 49.2–3 = 2003: 31.39–40): *sa saṃlakṣayati kim idānīm avappravajīṣyāmi pratyantaṃ gaṇchāmīti*.

¹⁰⁴ Nāther (1975: 49.6 = 2003: 32.2): *tasya cāvavādena prabhūtaṃ arhatvaṃ sākṣātṛtam*.

¹⁰⁵ Nāther (1975: 50.15 = 2003: 33.4): *satkāyaḍṣṭīśailaṃ jñānavajrena bhi(t)tvā*.

¹⁰⁶ Nāther (1975: 51.26–29 = 2003: 33.34–36): *aho buddha \ aho dharma aho saṃgha : aho dharmasya svākhyātātā yatredānīm evaṃvidhā api pāpakāriṇo vinipātāṃ gatāḥ evaṃvidhaṃ guṇagaṇaṃ adhi-gacchantīti*. It is not clear to me why the evil-doers are referred to here in the plural. Is it possible it is a plural of respect (see Renou, 1975: 276 §207) which the arhat uses in deference to his preceptor?

one of the highest realms of transmigration, whence he is able to hear the Buddha preach and steadfastly set out himself on the correct path. Once again, the results of even severely evil actions are strictly temporary.

The Abhidharma literature specifically takes up the question of why it is possible for even such a criminal as a matricide to transcend this sin and attain to spiritual heights. While Vasubandhu's *Abhidharmakośa* and its auto-commentary assert that one guilty of a sin of immediate retribution has thereby forfeited the opportunity to create further merit during the lifetime in which he committed the crime, it then goes on to quote a scripture (so far not positively identified) as saying:¹⁰⁷

This person is not fit to connect himself to the roots of goodness in this present life, but he will certainly connect himself to those roots of goodness when he has died [and been reborn] in the hells, or upon being born [in the intermediate state between lives].

One might be tempted to see traces of a radical idea here. Unlike other karmic seeds, which may lay dormant, as it were, for any number of lifetimes, the sin of immediate retribution must bear fruit directly after death. The process from sin to redemption, then, in these five most severe cases is promised to be quicker than the equivalent process might be for less serious offences, although the punishment is also correspondingly more acute. I do not know whether traditional sources take note of this dynamic, and if so what they have made of it.¹⁰⁸

Our survey of the five sins of immediate retribution has brought us full circle, from perdition to redemption. Indian Buddhist tradition speaks of a set group of crimes which it considers the most serious imaginable. But even such crimes do not have permanent effects; every act, no matter how criminal, evaporates as its results become manifest. This is a direct reflection of the overwhelmingly positive ethics of Buddhism, which stems from its most basic metaphysics. Nothing lasts forever, and even the worst evil will, inevitably, make room for the very highest good, in the end.

¹⁰⁷ My translation includes in brackets the commentary's gloss. *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya* ad IV.80d, Pradhan (1975: 250.20–22): *abhavyo 'yaṁ pudgalo dṛṣṭa eva dharme kuśalamūlāni pratisamdhāturiṇi niyatam ayaṁ narakebhyas cyavamāno vā upapadyamāno vā kuśalamūlāni pratisamdhāsyatīti*. Saeki (1887: 711) (17a4,9) identified the quotation as from *Madhyamāgama juaṇ* 37, a quick look at which did not turn up an equivalent passage. However, Pāsādika (1989b: 89) (§342) cites—with “?”—the suggestion of Fujita Kōtatsu that the sentence corresponds to T. 26 (I) 601a25 (*juaṇ* 27—suggesting that Saeki's reference is misprinted), but I confess that I cannot see the putative connection there either. However, as Saeki already pointed out, precisely the same point is made in the *Vibhāṣā* as well (T. 1545 [XXVII] 184b89 [*juaṇ* 35], with the larger discussion beginning at 184a1 and continuing).

¹⁰⁸ Of a quite different nature is the idea behind passages such as the following from the *Guhyasamājatantra* V.3 (Matsunaga, 1978: 15, and see the trans. in Snellgrove [1987: 170]): “Even those who commit great evils such as the sins of immediate retribution and so on attain success in this Buddha vehicle, the great ocean of the Mahāyāna,” *ānantaryaprabhṛtayo mahāpāpakṛto 'pi ca | sidhyante buddhayāne 'smin mahāyānamahodadhau* ||. Likewise, some Buddhist theologians have discussed the salvation of those who commit the five sins of immediate retribution—on the case of Hōnen, see Maeda (2003).

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