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Good or Skilful? *Kusala* in Canon and Commentary

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Abstract

This paper examines the use of *kusala* in the commentarial sources and finds that, although the commentators are aware of various senses of the word *kusala*, they tend to give primacy to meanings such as “good” or “meritorious”. A detailed examination of the canonical Pali sources gives a rather different picture. Sometimes *kusala* is found in association with the idea of *kamma* or related notions, but very commonly too it belongs in a distinctly meditational context and points towards the states of the Buddhist path produced by wisdom. An examination of the etymology of the word *kuśala* leads to the conclusion that Tedesco’s attempt to derive it from:

- a) *súkrta-*
- b) *sukṛtá*
- c) **sukṛta-* < *sukṛt-*

should be rejected. A revised version of Charpentier’s link to Got. **hug(s)*, etc. is preferred. The original meaning of *kuśala* in the sense with which we are concerned would then be “intelligent”. Its sense in early Buddhist literature would be “produced by wisdom”. The paper concludes with a brief discussion of the concept of *puñña*—“fortune-bringing action” rather than “merit”.

Kusala

Damien Keown comments that:

... the most natural translation for *kusala* when used in a moral context is “virtue” or “goodness”. It is very common for *kusala* to be rendered as “skilful”, but it should be recognised that this translation carries with it a specific implication for the nature of Buddhist ethics, namely that it is utilitarian.¹

In fact, I am not convinced that a utilitarian implication does in fact necessarily follow. Skill, let alone wisdom, can be valued for more reasons than utilitarian ones. Keown then distinguishes what he calls the moral and the technical senses of the word *kusala* and argues strongly against translating it as “skilful”:

Although I have no statistics to back this up there can be little doubt that in the *Nikāyas* the occurrences of *kusala* in a technical context are massively outnumbered by those in a moral context. So why, when translating the term into English, is the tail allowed to wag the dog and the moral sense suppressed in favour of the technical one ?

He goes on to point out:

The problem with using “skilful” as a translation of *kusala* is that whereas both “good” and “*kusala*” extend in their respective languages to both moral and technical commendation, the English word “skilful” does not. “Skilful” denotes approval in the technical sense only and does not figure at all in the vocabulary of moral discourse in English.

As Keown indicates, the use of “skilful” is stylistically slightly

unnatural here in terms of English usage. Perhaps, however, this only shows that Buddhist concepts are themselves unfamiliar to ordinary English usage and we should be cautious about adopting concepts with many hidden implications, deriving from a long history of European theological and philosophical debate. In fact I think that the use in the Buddhist literature is rather more complex than Keown allows and deserves to be investigated more fully. Here I shall look first at the commentarial account and then turn to the earlier sources.

Kusala in the commentarial sources

In the commentary to the *Dīgha-nikāya* Buddhaghosa gives five senses of the word *kusala*:²

<i>ārogya</i>	absence of illness, health
<i>anavajja</i>	(originally) not reprehensible, blameless; (later) faultless
<i>kosalla-sambhūta</i>	produced by skill
<i>niddaratha</i>	freedom from distress
<i>sukha-vipāka</i>	bringing pleasant results

The first of these he attributes to the *Jātaka* method of exposition (*pariyāya*) and in fact it is clear that this represents a normal Indian usage, rather than a technical sense of Buddhist thought.³ What is referred to is such expressions as *kacci nu kusalam* meaning “Are you well?” or something similar, usually found in verse texts. This usage is indeed particularly common in the *Jātakas*.⁴ The second meaning Buddhaghosa refers to as the *Suttanta* method of exposition; it is often applied by him in the exegesis of particular sutta passages.⁵ Sometimes this is referred to as the *Bāhitika-sutta(nta)* method of exposition.⁶

The remaining three senses are all attributed by Buddhaghosa to the *Abhidhamma* method of exposition. In fact the fourth: “freedom from distress” is rather unusual and seems to be dropped by the later

commentarial tradition.⁷ Indeed Buddhaghosa himself does not use it and the *ṭīkā* writer cannot offer a source passage to illustrate it.⁸ For present purposes we can disregard this meaning. The fifth we can also put on one side. The notion that skilful actions bring pleasant results is of course well-established, but it is noticeable that the commentators do not in fact often explain the word *kusala* as having this sense.⁹ It is clear that Buddhaghosa has placed it in an *abhidhamma* context because of the importance of this idea to understanding the first triplet of the *abhidhamma-mātikā*.

The *ṭīkā* writer's first comment on Buddhaghosa's explanation of *kusala* is to ask why the sense of *cheka* "skilled" is not given as a sixth meaning. This is indeed surprising; for this explanation is given by Buddhaghosa and other commentators in a number of contexts, including some cases where the word is used in what Keown calls its technical sense.¹⁰ However, the *ṭīkā* writer answers his own question by pointing out that this sense is included in the third meaning given by Buddhaghosa: "produced by skill" and hence is not taken separately. Skill of course is listed in the *abhidhamma* register for understanding (*paññā*) and so the intended meaning is "produced by wisdom". The *ṭīkā* writer explains this as equivalent to "caused by appropriate bringing to mind" (*yoniso-manasikāra-hetuka*).

In fact this explanation of *kusala* as "produced by skill" is used in non-*abhidhamma* contexts also, as well as in explanations of *akusala* "unskilful".¹¹ Moreover, there are also contexts where the sense of expert (*pañḍita*) is given, but seems to converge on the sense of "wise" or "knowledgeable".¹² Closely related to this are passages where the expression "skilful *dhammas*" is explained as referring to the *dhammas* which contribute to awakening (*bodhipakkhiya*).¹³

The author of the *Abhidhamma* commentary, probably a senior contemporary of Buddhaghosa,¹⁴ takes a slightly different approach.¹⁵ He offers just three senses: 1. health; 2. faultless; 3. produced by skill. He too relates the first to the *Jātaka* method of exposition and the second to the *Bāhitika-sutta* method of exposition. (He cannot explicitly relate it

to the *Suttanta* method, as he wishes to argue that it is found in *Abhidhamma*.) Again like Buddhaghosa, he links the third to the *Abhidhamma* method of exposition and then addresses the obvious problem that this creates; for wisdom would be expected to lead to consciousness connected with knowledge (*ñāṇasampayutta*), but not to that which lacks knowledge. Yet the term “skilful” in *abhidhamma* is also applied to two-rooted consciousness which is without knowledge.

The commentator argues that even this can be called skilful by convention. He gives the example of a palm-leaf fan which is still given that name even when made out of other materials. He agrees, however, that in terms of strict *abhidhamma* (*nippariyāyena*) only consciousness with knowledge can be called skilful in all three senses. In the case of consciousness without knowledge only the two senses of health and faultless strictly apply. The inclusion of the sense of “health” here is of course good hermeneutics; in fact, however, its inclusion as a sense of *kusala* must be a later development, derived from the kind of expression mentioned above.

Surprisingly, however, this is the *Abhidhamma* commentator’s second discussion of the meanings of the word *kusala*. In an earlier passage he gives four senses:¹⁶

<i>ārogya</i>	absence of illness, health
<i>anavajja</i>	not reprehensible, blameless; faultless
<i>cheka</i>	skilled
<i>sukha-vipāka</i>	bringing pleasant results

Exactly this list is given also by Buddhadatta and by Mahānāma.¹⁷ It seems to be standard for later writers.¹⁸ For most sources the third meaning is excluded for the main *abhidhamma* contexts¹⁹ and this view is adopted by many modern commentators.²⁰ The general acceptance of this set of three probably derives from its occurrence in the *Mahāṭīkā* to the *Visuddhimagga* (attr. Dhammapāla).²¹ Buddhadatta, however, allows only the two senses of “faultless” and “bringing wished for results” (*iṭṭha-*

vipāka).

Why then does the *Abhidhamma* commentary offer two different explanations ? This must be because in the earlier passage it is commenting on *kusalā dhammā* in the first triplet of the *Mātikā*, whereas the later passage refers to *kusalaṃ cittaṃ* in the *dhammuddesa* of the first type of consciousness i.e. that connected with knowledge. This will in part account for the inclusion of “produced by skill” as a meaning of *kusala*. However, it must also have been embedded in his source material;²² here, as elsewhere, the *Abhidhamma* commentary preserves material for us in a less digested form as against the more carefully styled writings of Buddhaghosa.

There is perhaps more to it than this. The Pali *abhidhamma* system is unusual in allowing skilful consciousness without knowledge. In the Sarvāstivādin system, for example, knowledge is a universal and so there cannot be skilful consciousness without it. It may be that at an earlier stage the connexion between the skilful and wisdom was felt more strongly. That said, the commentaries do preserve the link. In the mnemonic exegesis of the word *kusala*, the first two syllables are sometimes taken as a word *kusa*, meaning “wisdom” (cp. Skt *kuśāgra?*).²³ No doubt too the question of how far even skilful consciousness can be entirely unrelated to wisdom is closely connected to the issue as to whether faith (*saddhā*) that is not based on wisdom can occur.

In summary then, it seems that the commentators (except perhaps Buddhaghosa himself) would probably not have disagreed with Damien Keown’s remarks:

No-one would describe a simple act of generosity as a “skilful deed”, and who has ever heard of a boy scout doing his “skilful deed for the day” ? Instead, one naturally speaks of “good” or “virtuous” deeds.²⁴

Yet there are suggestive hints of an underlying connection to wisdom in the early Buddhist concept and it may be wondered whether a

widening of the meaning of *kusala* to refer to the “good” in general is in fact a later development. Edgerton defines the word *kuśala* (BHSD s.v.) as “good in a moral sense (not so in Sanskrit literature), merit, righteous action.” (I think he is right that this is not originally the usage in Sanskrit and will discuss this issue further below.) So the question arises as to whether in fact the earlier Pali texts already have this meaning or is it, largely or partially, something which only arises at a later date?

Kusala in the canonical literature

The use which Keown describes as the technical meaning of the word *kusala* occurs more than thirty times in the Canon.²⁵ In many of the passages in which it occurs it is simply a case of mentioning proficiency in some art or craft. However, in some places there is a little more to it than that; for the mention of such proficiency is directly linked to some further point. So when in the Mahāvagga Soṇa’s proficiency in getting the right sound from the strings of a harp (*vīṇā*) is mentioned, it is in order to emphasize the necessity to control vigour and balance the faculties (*indriya*).²⁶ In other words there is an underlying implication that meditation is an activity requiring a kind of skill.

When the simile of the skilled elephant tracker is given, it is to emphasize the qualities of wisdom which can recognize a *Tathāgata* and to compare the *jhānas* and higher knowledges to the footprints of an elephant.²⁷ Again Prince Abhaya’s knowledge of chariotry is adduced in order to compare it with the Buddha’s penetration of the *dhammadhātu* i.e. his wisdom.²⁸ Or Prince Bodhi’s proficiency in chariotry is compared to the Buddha’s ability to teach.²⁹ Or the skilled cook is likened to the monk who develops the four establishings of mindfulness in the right way.³⁰ The chariot-maker, skilled in the crookednesses of wood, is compared to the Buddha as an arahat skilled in crookedness of body, mind and speech.³¹

Around twice as frequent as passages where *kusala* is used in the sense of proficient are places where it has such meanings as expert, clever

or wise.³² In fact there is no clear dividing line between the two, just as there is no fixed line to be drawn between mundane cleverness and various kinds of superior understanding, whether in terms of understanding Buddhist theory or that involved in developing insight. A few passages concerned with mastery of *jhāna* or *iddhi* can also be mentioned at this point.³³ The notion of skill in theory or practice develops further both in the Pali commentarial literature and in the Mahāyāna.³⁴

This brings me to the very large number of passages in which *kusala* is linked with *dhamma*, either in the singular or more often in the plural. It is important to note that many of the passages here are meditational in their orientation. So in the *Mahāvagga* (Vin I 104) the Buddha declares that if a monk does not make known a *Vinaya* offence when the *Pātimokkha* is recited, this would be a deliberate lie and a deliberate lie is an obstacle. The text defines an obstacle (*antarāyiko dhammo*), first of all as an obstacle to achieving the first *jhāna*, then successively to the remaining *jhānas* up to the fourth, then various kinds of meditational experience are mentioned, ending (summarizing) with “to the achieving of skilful *dhammas*.” Similarly, in the discussion of the fourth *pārājika* (at Vin III 91), in the list of higher states which must not be falsely claimed by the monk these meditational attainments (*jhāna*, *vimokkha*, *samādhi*, etc.) are referred to as skilful *dhammas*.

This kind of direct linkage between higher states and skilfulness is found in a number of contexts.³⁵ So in the *Samyutta-nikāya* we find the ascetic who wishes to attain a skilful *dhamma* and realize higher states (*uttari-manussa-dhamma*; *alam-ariya-ñāṇa-dassana*). In the *Lohicca-sutta* we meet the idea that if someone attains a skilful *dhamma*, he should not tell anyone else. Or the Buddha is asked if he has achieved this skilful *dhamma* for a long while. Again in the *Aṅguttara-nikāya* we learn of the six factors which make a monk fit (or unfit) to attain a skilful *dhamma*: he is skilful in coming, skilful in going, skilful as to means (*upāyakusala*), he arouses the purpose (*chanda*) of attaining a skilful *dhamma* which has not been attained, he guards skilful *dhammas* which have been attained and is successful in constant action. Compare too passages in

which are found the expression: (he succeeds in) the method, the *dhamma* that is skilful (... *ñāyaṃ dhammaṃ kusalaṃ*).³⁶ Usually this makes the point that, whether householder or renunciant, he can succeed if he follows the right way i.e. the eightfold path.

Similar usages occur in the plural too.³⁷ So in the *Majjhima-nikāya*, when the Jains admit to not knowing: “the arousing of skilful *dhammas*”, the reference must be to the apparent absence of the higher *jhānas* in the Jain system.³⁸ Or, in the *Anguttara-nikāya*, when skilful *dhammas* explicitly refer to mental peace (*cetosamatha*) within and insight into *dhammas* from the standpoint of wisdom (*adhipaññādharmavipassanā*). In the *Paṭisambhidā-magga* we are even told that all skilful *dhammas* lead in the direction of the liberations (*vimokkhānuloma*).

There are a great many places in which skilful *dhammas* are referred to briefly or without much qualification, where it is not possible to be sure whether the intention is to refer specifically to meditational states. Nevertheless, this is probably the meaning which should be assumed in the majority of cases. I do not wish to argue that a broader usage which includes other desirable states is entirely excluded, only that in such cases the expression points primarily to meditational practice. This makes translation by such expressions as “good states” misleading; for such renderings point first and foremost to the ordinary ethical dimension and only secondarily to meditational experience. By contrast I believe the intention of the Pali texts in these passages is to point first to the *jhānas* and the states later known as the *dhammas* contributing to awakening (*bodhi-pakkhiya*). In other words the use of *kusala* in these contexts is concerned with the fact that these are special states which are, directly or indirectly, produced by wisdom. That is why they are called “skilful”.

There are equally a great many passages where the meditational context is beyond real dispute. One example of this is the occurrence of skilful *dhammas* in the formula of the four right efforts and in related formulae concerned with vigour (*virīya*), such as descriptions of effort (*vāyāma*) in the eightfold path.³⁹ This of course is simply a specific case

of the *bodhi-pakkhiyas* in general and indeed the seven sets are sometimes cited in relation to *kusala*:

But, Venerable sir, there is another incomparable quality (*ānuttariya*): how the Lord teaches *dhamma* as regards skilful *dhammas*. As to that, the skilful *dhammas* are as follows: four establishing of mindfulness, four right efforts, four bases of success, five faculties, five powers, seven factors of awakening, the noble eightfold path ... That, Venerable Sir, is an incomparable quality as regards skilful *dhammas* ... there is nothing further to be known by higher knowledge, such that another mendicant or brahmin, knowing by higher knowledge, would know more deeply i.e. as regards skilful *dhammas*.⁴⁰

Sometimes the link is made directly to the first of the seven sets: the four establishing of mindfulness.⁴¹ So for example in the *Janavasabha-suttanta* we are told by Brahmā Saṇḍakumāra that the four establishing of mindfulness were made known for the purpose of attaining the skilful — here the reference must be to the remaining six sets. Some at least of the discourses, where things *kusala* are mentioned in a context which lead up to a culmination with the eightfold or the tenfold path, probably belong here.⁴² Compare also the *Kāya-gatā-satisutta* where we are told, in relation to the person who has brought into being, made much of and immersed himself in mindfulness of the body, that whatever skilful *dhammas* he has are connected with the knowledges (*vijjā-bhāgiya*) i.e. lead to the three knowledges.⁴³

When in the *Mahā-hatthi-padopama-sutta* Sāriputta tells (M I 184) us that all skilful *dhammas* are included in the four noble truths, we should again interpret skilful *dhammas* here as referring to meditational states. Indeed, this is made clear later in the *sutta* by the references to equipoise connected with the skilful. More generally, there are many passages in which skilful *dhammas* are spoken of in association with *bhāvanā* “bringing into being” or some form of the verb *bhāveti*.⁴⁴ In

most of these what is implied is the technical sense of these words, as referring to the bringing into being of the eightfold path in particular or the *dhammas* which contribute to awakening in general i.e. the fourth noble truth. This is even more likely to be the case when the skilful to be brought into being is contrasted with the unskilful “to be abandoned” i.e. the corresponding function of the second noble truth.⁴⁵ No doubt closely related to this is the idea of achieving a stage of fixity in relation to skilful *dhammas*, an idea closely related to some interpretations of what is meant by stream-entry.⁴⁶

There are a number of passages which refer to someone who is (not) applying insight (*vipassaka*) to skilful *dhammas*.⁴⁷ Sometimes this probably refers to a type of insight meditation.⁴⁸ However, it also merges into contexts where skilful *dhammas* or the skilful is simply the object of doubt or wisdom.⁴⁹ We also have the idea of the monk who abides in the measureless mental concentration (*ceto-samādhī*) even as he enjoys the four requisites. It is not easy to measure the amount of *puñña*, of the skilful, of pleasant results, etc. which will flow from this.⁵⁰ The same comment is made in relation to, for example, *dāna* to a noble disciple. So this brings us to the other major cluster of concepts associated with the skilful i.e. those concerned with future results.

Naturally there are a considerable number of contexts in which *kusala* is, explicitly or implicitly, associated with *kamma* and many more which could be interpreted in such terms. There are some too where it is related to *puñña* in some way (see below) and others where it is connected with good conduct (*sucarita*) or precepts (*sīla*). Since there is no real doubt that, whatever *kusala* is, it can be explained as bringing pleasant results, I will not attempt to explore these here. But we should bear in mind that even the *kamma* which arises from non-greed, non-hate and non-delusion: “that *kamma* is skilful, blameless and bringing pleasant results, that *kamma* conduces to the cessation of *kamma*, that *kamma* does not conduce to the origination of *kamma*.”⁵¹

Many passages are, as previously suggested, ambiguous. If the *kusala* is simply recommended or spoken of in terms of something which

can increase or decline, we cannot really tell what exactly is meant. Even the *abhidhamma* references to the triplet of the skilful, unskilful and the undeclared (*avyākata*) or to *kusala-citta* can refer either to a context of *kamma* and result or to a meditational frame. This is most obvious in the *Dhamma-saṅgaṇi* which, like others of the canonical *abhidhamma* works, uses a framework which is strongly meditation-orientated. The list of the fifty five *dhammas* present in the first kind of skilful consciousness with knowledge is quite sufficient to establish that: nearly all of them are either the classic subjects of insight meditation (aggregates, etc.) or connected with the *bodhi-pakkhiya dhammas*.⁵²

Of greater interest for the present purpose are those passages in which *kusala* is linked with groups of apparent synonyms. So we have the context where (e.g. in the *Mahāvagga*) someone has “done the auspicious (*kalyāṇa*), done the skilful, done what protects from fear (*bhīrutāṇa*), not done what is ill-fortuned (*pāpa*), not done things dreadful (*ludda*), not done things which are filthy (*kibbisa*).”⁵³ This seems usually to be in a situation where death is envisaged as nearby. It is in any case obvious that in this context the *kusala* is very much to do with future consequences.

There is also a passage which occurs in the famous story of the Buddha-to-be Vipassin (and traditionally all Buddhas) seeing the four sights which motivated him to renounce the confines of the household life. The fourth sight is of course “a shaven-headed man, wearing brown, who has gone forth” i.e. a religious mendicant. In the story Vipassin who has presumably never seen such an individual, asks who and what he is. He is given as the explanation for such a mendicant the comment: “good (*sādhu*) is the practice of *dhamma*, good is the practice of tranquillity (*sama*), good is the doing of the skilful, good is the doing of *puñña*, good is absence of harming (*avihiṃsā*), good is sympathy for beings.”⁵⁴

In the great majority of cases, however, whatever other terms are associated with *kusala*, the term which is always present, usually immediately next to *kusala*, is blameless (*anavajja*).⁵⁵ It is then not surprising

that Buddhaghosa preserves for us the tradition that this is precisely the Suttanta method of exposition. The commentaries clearly understand this to be in principle distinct from the sense of “having pleasant results” which often occurs in conjunction with “blameless”. It is doubtful whether the explanation of this was ever meant to imply that this is only found in *Suttanta* works, as opposed to *Abhidhamma*. Conversely, the description of “produced by skill” as the *Abhidhamma* method of exposition does not mean that it is found only in the *Abhidhamma-piṭaka*. Rather, it is intended to suggest that this is in some way a higher or more profound explanation of *kusala*, or at least one which is more strictly correct.

This is perhaps born out by analysis of the terms associated with *kusala* and *anavajja* in the passages I have cited. In fact they are not synonyms — just as *kusala* here means “skilful” and *anavajja* means “blameless”, but these are not the same thing. Of course, a skilful action i.e. one produced by wisdom is indeed likely to be one which could not be criticized by a knowledgeable person. Similarly, both are indeed likely to bring pleasant results (*sukha-vipāka*; *sukhudraya*; *kalyāṇa*), both in terms of common sense and in the light of the theory of *kamma-vipāka*. They are also “appropriate to the saint” (*alaṃ-ariya*), refined (*pañīta*) and “do not cause harm” (*avyāpajjha*, cf. *avihiṃsā* above). Naturally, they are also “to be followed” (*sevitabba*) and are “praised by the wise”.

Kuśala in Sanskrit sources

The use of *kuśala* in Classical Sanskrit sources is conveniently surveyed by P. Tedesco in a useful article.⁵⁶ The word appears first in late portions of the *Aitareya-brāhmaṇa* and the *Śatapatha-brāhmaṇa* and then in several *Upaniṣads* and in Pāṇini. In general it has two main uses in Sanskrit, both already attested by Pāṇini (2.3.40 and 2.3.73):

1. (As an adjective) “skilful, experienced”;
2. (As a neuter substantive) “welfare, well-being”.

Slight variations on these do occur, but some of Tedesco’s attempts to find additional meanings in the oldest sources seem forced.

In what may be the oldest extant source (Ait. Br. 7.18: ... *na te kuśalaṃ menire*), where Tedesco and others seek to see the meaning “right”, it is equally possible that the meaning is “wise” — closely related to such notions as “skilful or expert”. Another early passages that he cites is the *Chāndogya-upaniṣad* (4.10.2 and 4), but, as Tedesco admits, this can be understood as “expertly” or for that matter wisely. I do not understand why he thinks that tending the sacrificial fire would be understood as involving dutifulness rather than (ritual) skill. The only other passages which Tedesco is able to cite for this meaning are three from the *Gobhila-gr̥hya-sūtra*.⁵⁷ All are debatable and were not understood in the way Tedesco requires either by the commentaries or by the first translator. In sum, then, the root meaning of the word is most likely to be connected either to “wise” or to “skilful”. The latter sense occurs already in the *Śatapatha-brāhmaṇa* and in others of the earliest sources.⁵⁸

The etymology of *kuśala* is uncertain. Tedesco suggested a derivation from **śukala-* by metathesis, but this seems unlikely for so common a prefix as *su-*. This would represent three distinct Vedic forms:

- a) *śukṛta-*
- b) *sukṛtá*
- c) **sukṛta-* < *sukṛt-*

a) adj. “Well made, well done”; b) n. “a well made work, a good deed, righteousness, virtue, merit”; c) “doing good, skilful, pious”. On his first proposed explanation *kuśala-* would have come from a Māgadhī form such as **śukala-* which with metathesis would give *kuśala*. However, this explanation requires the entry of a Māgadhism into Sanskrit at a rather early date. His second (and preferred) suggestion involves successive assimilation and dissimilation (**kusata* > **kuṣata* > **kuśata*).

It is clear that part of Tedesco’s motivation for this approach lies in an understanding of the Pali sources. He cites the *Pali Text Society’s Dictionary* (PED) favourably as evidence that “the use of the word in Pāli differs considerably from that in Sanskrit.”⁵⁹ In particular he claims:

“But the most frequent meaning of Pāli *kusala-* is one that in regular Sanskrit is virtually unknown: adjectival “(morally) good, right” ... and substantival “a good deed, virtue, the good (bonum) ...” However, the evidence cited above would suggest that it is not necessary to recognize this kind of sense in the earliest Pali sources; it is rather a subsequent development, associated with the later identification in Buddhism (and in Jaina sources) of the *kusala-* and the *puñña-*. Tedesco and PED have both been misled by a commentarial exegesis based on later developments.

If Tedesco’s approach is rejected, what then is the historical etymology of *kuśala*? Turner tentatively suggests a relationship with a word in the Germanic dialect of Romany: *kušlo* “choir-leader”, but this might derive from *kuśala-*.⁶⁰ This leaves only a suggestion of Charpentier.⁶¹ He refers to Gothic **hug(s)* (attested gen. *hugis*; used to translate *nous* at Eph. 4, 17) and to various related forms in other Germanic languages, all of which have the two meanings of “intelligence, thought, understanding” (*sinn, gedanke*) and “gladness” (*freude*). He suggests that this would naturally derive from an Indo-European

*kuk-ŋ-

which would also be the ancestor of *kuśala*. (For the final syllable of *kuśala-*, Charpentier refers to the derivation of *-lo-* from *-n-* stems or alternatively to *-la-* as the diminutive suffix.)

Charpentier seems to see the base meaning as connected with “gladness”, “well-being” and “health”. More probably the root meaning is that of “thought”, “intelligence” or “mind”. *Kuśa* given in the exegetical tradition as “wisdom” is then not far of the mark. If we take a possible early *kuśa* as “intelligence”, then *kuśala* will mean “intelligent” (cf. the *paṇḍita* of some of the commentaries) which is easily extended to anything done intelligently or “with *nous*”. The second old meaning of the Sanskrit: “well-being” must derive from the extended senses of the Germanic languages — mind in the sense of “heart” taken as referring to

“feeling” and “affection” and subsequently giving rise to the notions of “joy” and “gladness” referred to by Charpentier.⁶² Tedesco dismissed Charpentier’s view with the comment: “since the meanings have almost nothing in common, this etymology is without foundation.” In fact, however, Charpentier’s etymology, with the slightly different semantic development suggested here, seems to fit very well the meanings “wise, skilful” and “welfare, health” that seem to be the best attested in the oldest Sanskrit and Pali sources.

Buddhist Sanskrit sources use *kuśala* in a similar way to the Pali. So in the commentary to the *Arthaviniścaya-sūtra* ignorance as to skilful and unskilful *dharmas* is defined as ignorance in relation to the *dharmas* which contribute to awakening and their opposites and we are told that the *dharmas* which contribute to awakening are *kuśala*: “in the sense of peace (*kṣemārthena*) and because they have a wished for result (*iṣṭaphalatvāt*)”.⁶³ The *Abhidharmāvatāra* of Skandhila defines *kuśala* as peace (*kṣema*) and as skill,⁶⁴ while in the *Abhidharmasāra* we read that: “the term wholesome is used when clean thoughts bring about a lovely fruit.”⁶⁵ It is worth citing the French translation of the former in full:

Le bonheur (*kṣema*) est synonyme de bien (*kuśala*). Celui-ci produit des existences agréables (*iṣṭabhava*) et des germes de délivrance. L’habileté (*kausālya*) suscitée par une étude accomplie signifie également le bien (*kuśala*). (En effet), c’est grâce à l’habileté qu’on est à même de composer de belles images et que l’on proclame (l’artiste) bon en tant que maître de dessin (*citrakara*) réalisateur de belles images.

Clearly in this passage Skandhila is raising some of the same issues that were discussed earlier in this paper. So *kuśala* is defined as peace (or happiness), but is seen as leading both to fortunate rebirth and as

contributing to the development of the path that leads to liberation. Significantly he also stresses the sense of skill in an artistic sense. Clearly for him there are similarities between the one kind of skill and the other.

Puñña

Space does not permit a detailed discussion of *puñña* here. I would like to suggest, however, that what is often translated “merit” originally refers to the fortune-bringing or auspicious quality of an action, not, as Keown would have it, to the “felt consequences” of the act.

The etymology of the word *puṇya* from which the Pali *puñña* derives is not entirely clear. It probably comes from a form < **puṇya*, but it is uncertain precisely which of several possible roots it is related to. Senses such as “protecting” or “satisfying” may be implied. The Indian grammatical tradition usually links it either to a root PUN in the sense of “(performing) *śubhakarman*”⁶⁶ or to the root PU “cleanse, purify”. Dhammapāla gives both the second explanation and one which relates *puñña* to *pūjā* or *pujja*.⁶⁷ Earlier the author of the *Abhidhamma* commentary gives the same two explanations as Dhammapāla and also one which links *puñña* to the root PR.⁶⁸ In the earliest (pre-Buddhist) literature (*R̥g-veda* and *Atharva-veda*) it appears first with the senses of “happiness” or “good fortune” as a noun and “pleasant” or “happy” as an adjective.⁶⁹ Initially, there seems to have been no suggestion that this was necessarily the result of anything done by the individual.⁷⁰ Such a wider sense of the word remains current in later Sanskrit literature, although the meaning which associates the term more closely with acts and their results tends to become predominant.

Already in the pre-Buddhist period the word had developed in its usage and become part of the brahminical cultus, both sacrificial and more general. So what was earlier probably simply “good fortune” came to refer to whatever brings fortune and hence to the rites and practices intended to assure good fortune. The sacrifice is precisely an act intended to provide protection and happiness in the future. Naturally then

with the process of ethicization that occurs in Buddhism and other contemporary religious traditions, just as the true sacrifice is now the act of generosity, so the true fortune-bringing action is no longer seen in terms of ritual action. Instead it is precisely the skilful actions of the precepts and the meditative process which bring good fortune.

The PTS Dictionary gives only the sense of “merit, meritorious action, virtue” for Pali, but this may not be correct in all of the oldest passages. Indeed, Dhammapāla (It-a I 73f.) gives the following meanings for *puñña*:

- | | | |
|----|---|---|
| 1. | <i>puñña-phale</i> | “in the sense of result of meritorious action” |
| 2. | <i>kāma-rūpāvacara-sucarito</i> (sic) | “in the sense of <i>kāmāvacara</i> and <i>rūpāvacara</i> good conduct |
| 3. | <i>sugati-visesa-bhūte upapatti-bhave</i> | “in the sense of rebirth existence which consists of a specific good destiny” |
| 4. | <i>kusala-cetanāyaṃ</i> | “in the sense of skilful volition” |

Buddhaghosa too seems to extend the meaning of *puñña* to results of *kamma*.⁷¹

What is clear, if one examines the canonical use of the word *puñña*, is that it occurs both much less frequently than *kusala*⁷² and, on the whole, in a more restricted context. Especially in the earlier texts, it is found mainly in connection with *dāna* and other activities of the lay life. Indeed it is quite commonly used in an expression which describes a motive for a monk to backslide: he can enjoy life’s pleasures and still perform acts which bring good fortune (*puññāni*).⁷³ It also occurs quite often in direct connection with heavenly or other future lives.

P.D. Premasiri has sought to differentiate the usage of *puñña* and *kusala*.⁷⁴ Essentially I agree with him that, although there is some overlapping, *puñña* is most often used in regard to actions intended to bring about results of a pleasant kind in the future. It is almost exclusively *kusala* which is used in relation to the Buddha’s path. Indeed one may

go further and suggest that *puñña* was almost certainly not a technical term in the thought of the Buddha and his early disciples. It was no doubt a part of the background of beliefs current at the time, although there is certainly no reason to suppose that they objected to the notion as such. Of course their understanding as to what constitutes *puñña* would not necessarily be the same as that of all their contemporaries.

What I am less happy with is the use by many scholars of the translation “merit” or “meritorious”, at least for the earlier literature. The notion of merit seems to imply the notions of “deserving” or “being entitled”. To the extent that this is so, it seems inappropriate for *puñña*, which simply means fortunate or happy. As a noun it is applied either to an act which brings good fortune or to the happy result in the future of such an act. Of course the early Buddhists certainly taught that the kind of act which brings good fortune is precisely one which is blameless and praiseworthy, one which is skilful in the sense that it is produced by wisdom or at all events because it is the kind of thing that a wise person would do or approve. As we read in the *Cakkavatti-sīha-nāda-suttanta*:⁷⁵

By reason of the undertaking of skilful *dhammas*, monks, in this way this good fortune increases (*kusalānaṃ bhikkhave dhammānaṃ samādāna-hetu evaṃ idaṃ puññaṃ pavaddhatī ti*)

In an interesting paper Martin Southwold discusses the question as to whether Buddhism possesses a concept of evil.⁷⁶ He adapts Grayson’s distinction between descriptive and moral evil (applied to early Hebrew literature) to the Buddhist context and distinguishes a weak and a strong sense in the case of moral evil. I agree with him that the strong sense is not found in Buddhism; it seems to be associated historically with some forms of monotheism. The distinction between the descriptive and the moral can, I suggest, be applied equally to *puñña*. The descriptive mean-

ing alone can be found in the earliest Indian literature; essentially *puñña* and *pāpa* are simply that which causes happiness or harm respectively.

Semantic development

Returning to *kuśala*, the semantic evolution I see is:

1. An original meaning of “intelligent” or “wise”;
2. Expert in magical and sacrificial ritual (in the *Brāhmaṇas*); for brahmins, of course, this would precisely constitute wisdom.
3. A) Skilled in meditational/mystical (/ascetic?) practices (in the early Pali sources and, no doubt, in other contemporary traditions), including skilled in the kind of behaviour which supports meditation, etc. i.e. *sīla*, etc.
B) Skilled in performing *dāna* and *yañña*, now interpreted in terms of Buddhist ethical concerns; and associated with keeping the precepts and so on.
4. *Kusala* in later Buddhist and Jain sources becomes generalized to refer to something like wholesome or good states.

So there is no reason to doubt that by a later period (i.e. in the commentaries and perhaps later canonical sources) *kusala* in non-technical contexts meant something which could be translated as “good”.

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Notes

Abbreviations used in this paper are those of the Critical Pāli Dictionary. An earlier version of this paper was presented at a conference on “Buddhism and Peace: Theory and Practice” (Honolulu, June, 1995). A printed version is to appear in a conference volume (University of Hawaii Press, 1997). Thanks are due to Professor D.J.Kalupahana for permission for prior publication in JBE.

¹ Damien Keown, *The Nature of Buddhist Ethics*, London, 1992, p. 119.

² Sv III 883.

³ It is rarely used by Buddhaghosa himself, but cf. Paṭis-a III 576; JA III 411; Vv-a to Vv 26.

⁴ e.g. J IV 427f.; V 323; 348; 377; VI 418; 515; 532; 542; 569; but see also: Sn 981; Nidd II 1; Vv 25; 45; Cp 93. Also unrelated to the specifically Buddhist senses is the expression *icc' etaṃ kusalaṃ*, common in the Vinaya, but occurring a few times elsewhere e.g. M III 129.

⁵ Sp II 436; Sv I 286; Ps III 443; Mp III 203; IV 123; V 1; 30. Compare JA I 275; cf. III 411; IV 223; VI 175; Nidd-a II 373; It-a I 173; Th-a III 77.

⁶ Buddhaghosa has *Bāhiya-suttanta*, but this is probably an error in view of the *ṭīkā*s. The *Mūlaṭīkā* (C^e 1938) 21 and Sp-ṭ to Sp II 489 (Mahidol CD), however, interpret the *Bāhītika-sutta* as illustrating *kusala* in the sense of health.

⁷ At Dhs-a 63 it is subsumed in *anavajja*.

⁸ The only commentarial passage where it is used to explain *kusala* is:

Vibh-a 14, but it is given by Mahānāma in a different context (to explain *upasama* and *asāraddha*) at Paṭis-a I 96; II 483.

⁹ But cf. Spk III 141.

¹⁰ Sp VII 1360; 1377; Ps III 323; Mp III 132; Vibh-a 290; Pj II 433; Nidd-a I 199; 240; II 292; Paṭis-a I 277; JA II 298; V 326; VI 260; Th-a III 160; Bv-a 49; Ap-a 283; 286. Note also the use of *cheka* in apposition to *pāpaka* at Nidd I 467.

¹¹ Spk III 141; Mp III 161; Vibh-a 289; Nidd-a I 219; II 306; 439; Th-a III 69; Paṭis-a I 168; 329; Vism-mhṭ (B^e 1977) I 155 and in relation to *akusala*: Sp I 135; II 404; Ps III 346; Nidd-a I 65; Ud-a 220.

¹² Sp V 1391; VII 1360 (*ñāṇapāramippatta*); Pj II 574; Nidd-a II 284; Paṭis-a III 549 (*ñāṇa*); JA III 210; cp. V 66.

¹³ e.g. Ps III 244ff.; Mp II 45ff.; Dhs-a 405f.; Vibh-a 289ff.; Pj II 503; cf. JA I 275; II 22; *Mūlaṭīkā* (C^e 1938) 21; cf. R.M.L. Gethin, *The Buddhist Path to Awakening. A Study of the Bodhi-Pakkhiyā Dhammā*, Leiden, 1992, p. 75.

¹⁴ In the introduction to the first two volumes the author states that he was asked to write the commentary by the bhikkhu Buddhaghosa. It seems very unlikely that, if the author's name was Buddhaghosa, he would have referred to another Buddhaghosa without some designation to indicate the difference. Such differentiations are frequent in the commentaries. The names of the early Sinhalese monks are conveniently collected by Sodō Mori in two papers originally published in 1987–88 in *Bukkyo Kenkyu (Buddhist Studies)*, cf. Sodō Mori, *Studies of the Pali Commentaries. A Provisional Collection of Articles*, Saitama, Japan, 1989, pp. 21–105. Many examples of distinguishing epithets could be cited from the lists given there. If there were two Buddhaghosas in the same monastery, then a distinguishing name would have been in use. The same applies in case this Buddhaghosa was not the famous Buddhaghosa. Most probably then it was Buddhaghosa himself who requested the author to compose this commentary.

¹⁵ Dhs-a 62–3; cf. Moh 6.

¹⁶ Dhs-a 38ff.

¹⁷ Abhidh-av v. 11; Paṭis-a I 129; 205–6; Bv-a 49. At Pj II 503 we have the same number of senses, but with *iṭṭha-phala* in place of *sukhavipāka* and *kosalla-sambhūta* instead of *cheka*.

¹⁸ e.g. Moh 5. But Dhammapāla occasionally explains *kusala* in terms of *khema* or *khemin* e.g. Th-a I 100; It-a I 93. This perhaps reflects influence from Buddhist Sanskrit writers or from lexicographical sources.

¹⁹ e.g. Dhs-a 38.

²⁰ See for example U Nārada's discussion: Nārada, U, *Conditional Relations (Paṭṭhāna)*, Vol. I, London, 1969, pp. cviii–cix.

²¹ Vism-mhṭ (B^e 1977) II 113f. But note that this text adds *na ... kosalla-sambhūtaṃ* in the immediately following exegesis of *akusala*.

²² That this is so is perhaps suggested by the need of Mahānāma, in his second treatment of the subject, to refer also to the threefold definition of *kusala*: Paṭis-a I 206; cf. 271.

²³ Dhs-a 39; Abhidh-av v. 9 (pṭ and t); Vism-mhṭ (B^e 1977) II 113f.; cp. Abhidh-k-vy I 29: *kutsitās' chalitā gatā apakrāntā iti kuśalā; prajñā vā kuśa iva tīkṣṇeti kuśaḥ, taṃ lānti ādadata iti kuśalāḥ*.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Vin II 201; V 64 = 158; D II 183; A I 116f.; II 185; 186; Sn 321; Dhṃ 44f.; Th 1139; Pp 42; J II 162; 298; III 477; IV 469; V 148; 157; 326; 490; VI 25; 77; 85; 87; 213; 260; 475 and the following six notes.

²⁶ Vin I 182 = A III 375.

²⁷ M I 178ff.

²⁸ M I 395f.

²⁹ M II 94f.

³⁰ S V 149–52.

³¹ A I 112f.

³² Vin V 130; 197; 216; 216 ?; D II 136 ?; M I 226f.; II 144; III 5; S I 35; 169; A II 46; 138; III 201; 431; V 96; 98; Kh 8 = Sn 143; Sn 48; 591; 881; 1039; 1078; Nidd I 69; 71–72; 105; 325; 177; 450; II 9; 127; 128; Th 251; Pv 4; 44; Bv 62; J III 210; 348; V 65; VI 356; Ap I 26; 29; 43; II 499; 518; 570; Vibh 310; Kv 170ff.; 176ff.; 180ff.; 190ff.;

³³ S III 264–77; A III 311; IV 34; Th 1183; Paṭis I 48f.

³⁴ See Ulrich Pagel, *The Bodhisattvapīṭaka. Its Doctrines, Practices and their Position in Mahāyāna Literature*, Tring, 1995, Index s.v. skill and p. 258ff.; Peter Skilling, “Vimuttimaggā and Abhayagiri: the form aggregate according to the Saṃskṛtāsāṃskṛtaviniścaya,” *JPTS*, XX, 1994, 171–210.

³⁵ S IV 337–39; D I 224–29; M I 318; A I 115f.; III 431; cp. Vin V 148.

³⁶ M I 514–22; II 181–84; 197ff.; S V 19; A I 69; cf. M I 502.

³⁷ M I 93; II 215; 217; A V 17–21; 26–29; 96–98; 99ff.; 123–28; Paṭiṣ II 70; note too passages where *sīla* or *adhisīla* is defined as the *mukhaṃ pamukhaṃ kusalānaṃ dhammānaṃ samāpattiyā*: Vin I 103; Nidd I 39; 148; 270; 348; cf. 365; Vibh 246 and compare S V 143; 165; 187; 188.

³⁸ In later Jainism, at least, states of consciousness without *vitarka* and *vicāra* seem to have been considered only possible just prior to liberation.

³⁹ D II 312; III 221; 237; 268; 285; M I 124 ?; 356; II 11; 95; 128; S III 364; V 9; 197 f.; 225; 244–47; 268; A I 39; 117; 153; 244ff.; 296; II 15; 74; 93; 95 ?; 250f.; 256; III 2; 11; 65; 135; 152–55; 310; IV 3; 153f.; 234; 291; 352; 357f.; 462–63 (expand); V 15; 24; 27; 90f.; 339; Ud 36f.; Nidd I 477; II 96f.; 104; Paṭiṣ I 41; 103f.; II 15; 17; Vibh 105; 208–14; 216–19; 235. To these could probably be added some passages related to *appamāda*: D III 272; S I 89; V 45; 91; A I 11; Nidd II 90. Compare also with *chanda*: A V 99–100; 104–05; Nidd II 90.

⁴⁰ D III 102; compare Nidd I 13–14; 361f.; 468f.; 486; II 200; cf. Th 900.

⁴¹ D II 216; cp. S V 171f.; 186 f.; 187; 188.

⁴² e.g. M II 24–29; cf. A V 215f.; 241.

⁴³ M III 94; cp. A I 43f.

⁴⁴ M III 76f.; 94; S V 402; A I 58; II 40; 182; IV 109–11; 120–22; 353; V 215–16; Sn 66; It 9; 10; 21; Th 83; Thī 9; J I 275; 278; II 22.

⁴⁵ Of course, whether a usage is to be taken as technical or not, may depend in part on the age of the text concerned. Many scholars believe that some of the technical usages of the *abhidhamma* and commentaries only develop in the later portions of the *sutta* literature. This may of course be so (and must be in some cases), but there is as yet no real

consensus as to the course of development of early Buddhist literature. For present purposes this problem will not in any case greatly affect the overall picture, as many of the passages concerned are probably not among the earliest *sutta* texts.

⁴⁶ Usually something like: *okkamati niyāmaṃ kusalesu dhammesu sammattaṃ* cf. A I 121f.; III 174f.; 435f.; Paṭis I 124; Vibh 341–42; Kv 94; 309; Pp 13; 28.

⁴⁷ In association with the term *bodhi-pakkhiya*^o*ika*: Vin III 23; A III 70f.; 300f. In other contexts: It 41; Paṭis I 58; 60; 70; II 27–29.

⁴⁸ Note the link to the word *bodhi-pakkhiya*, etc. For a full discussion of the eighteen or so canonical contexts in which this term is found, see Gethin, *op. cit.*, pp. 289–98.

⁴⁹ This is common in the standard formula for the fifth hindrance: D I 71, etc.; M I 181; 269; 275; 347; III 3; 136; 251; A II 211; III 93; IV 437; V 207; Vibh 245; 256; Pp 59; 68, but also in relation to wisdom or questioning: D I 24f.; II 214–16; 222f.; 228; III 61; 157; Pp 30f.; cf. 65.

⁵⁰ A II 54f.; 56f.; cf. III 51f.; IV 245–47; S V 391–92; 399–402; Kv 346.

⁵¹ A I 263.

⁵² It must be noted that the six pairs, unique to the Pali system as far as we know, are simply an expansion of the fifth *bojjhaṅga*: tranquillity.

⁵³ Vin III 72; M III 164; A II 174f.; It 25. Note that the two halves of this follow the rule of “waxing syllables”. On this see now: Mark Allon, “Some stylistic features of the prose portions of Pāli canonical *sutta* texts and their mnemonic function,” Ph.D., Cambridge, 1995.

⁵⁴ D II 28f.; cp. (without the last two items) S I 101f.; V 456. Note that by the rule of “waxing syllables” *puñña-kiriyā* is out of place.

⁵⁵ D I 163–65; II 83f.; M II 115f.; S V 104; 106; A I 97f.; 104; 129; 189–91; 194f.; 263; 293f.; III 165; IV 363f.; V 240–45; Paṭis I 80; II 79; Pp 65; Kv 344f.; 439f.; 442f.; 481f.; 484; 577. Note, however, M I 416–19; A II 36f.

⁵⁶ P. Tedesco, “Sanskrit *kuśala*- “skilful, welfare”,” *JAOS*, 74, 1954, 131–42.

⁵⁷ Gobh. Gṛh. 1.5.26; 1.7.7.; 2.1.1.

⁵⁸ Śat. Br. 11.4.2.1, 4, 13; Chānd. Up. 1.8.1; Kaṭha. Up. 2.7; Pāṇ. 2.3.40 (refs from Tedesco).

⁵⁹ op. cit., p. 133.

⁶⁰ CDIAL s.v. He also suggests a link to *kuṣṭhava*- “bard, actor, mimic” (Manu, etc.).

⁶¹ See: Jarl Charpentier, “Etymologische beiträge. 1. Got. hugs: ai. kúçala;” *Beiträge zur Kunde der indogermanischen Sprachen*, XXX, 1906, 153–55. The etymology of *hug(s) and related words is generally given in the literature as uncertain. For other suggestions which have been put forward, see: Sigmund Feist, *Vergleichendes Wörterbuch der gotischen Sprache*, 3rd ed., Leiden, 1939, p. 272f.

⁶² e.g. Richard Cleasby et al., *An Icelandic-English Dictionary*, 2nd ed., Oxford, 1957 s.v. *hugr*, *hyggja*, *hugga*, etc.

⁶³ N.H. Samtani, ed. *The Arthavinīścaya-sūtra & its Commentary (Nibandhana)*, Tibetan Sanskrit Works Series Vol. XIII, Patna, 1971, p.108.

⁶⁴ Marcel Van Velthem, *Le Traité de la Descente dans la Profonde Loi (Abhidharmāvatārasāstra) de l’Arhat Skandhila*, Louvain, 1977, p. 19.

⁶⁵ Charles Willemen, *The Essence of Metaphysics*, Brussels, 1975, p. 16; cp. p. 106.

⁶⁶ cp. Dhātup p. 19: *puṇa kammani subhe*; and Dhātum p. 41: *puṇo subhakriye*. Also Amg-D Vol. 5 p. 661ff.

⁶⁷ It-a I 78; II 23; Vv-a 19 (for the reading *pujja*-, see Trsl. p. 38 n. 143; C^e 1925 (p. 15) also reads this.) Compare also Bv-a 67; Vism-mhṭ (B^e 1977) II 117; Sp-ṭ to Sp II 399; Maṅg (Mahidol CDRom).

⁶⁸ Vibh-a 142 (DD I 174): “it fulfills the (store of good) inclination”. So too Vism-mhṭ (B^e 1977) II 258 and Paṭis-a III 633.

⁶⁹ See Jean Filliozat, “Sur le domaine sémantique de Puṇya,” in *Indianisme et Bouddhisme. Mélanges offerts à Mgr Étienne Lamotte*, 101–116, Louvain-La-Neuve, 1980.

⁷⁰ The case is probably similar for the opposite concept. See James W. Boyd, *Satan and Māra. Christian and Buddhist symbols of evil*, Leiden, 1975, p. 157 where *pāpa* is explained as “that which is essentially mis-

erable, full of suffering and inferior”.

⁷¹ e.g. Ps II 283: *āyatim vipāka-kkhandhā ti attho*.

⁷² The Mahidol CD (Budsir 4.0) counts 150 word forms beginning with *puññ-* in the *tipiṭaka* (211 from °*puññ-*) as against 323 beginning with *kusal-*. In total some 1,285 occurrences are listed for *puññ-*, as against 7,526 for *kusal-*. The latter figure is inflated by references in the *Abhidhamma-piṭaka*, but *kusal-* is still more frequent in the earlier texts. For example *kusalam* occurs 105 times in Vin, as against 12 times for *puññaṃ*, and 191 times in the first four *nikāyas*, as against 119. *Puññ-*, however, is more frequent in the *Khuddaka-nikāya*, if Paṭis is excluded (as being an *abhidhamma* text).

⁷³ e.g. Vin I 182.

⁷⁴ P. D. Premasiri, “Interpretation of Two Principal Ethical Terms in Early Buddhism,” *Sri Lanka Journal of the Humanities*, 2, 1, 1976, 63–74.

⁷⁵ D III 58; 79; cp. 73f. Here, for the layfolk, the skilful *dhammas* which are undertaken are the *kamma-patha*, beginning with not killing and so on and the good fortune is longer life and better looks, by implication also children and enjoyable things, even the power of the universal monarch. For the monks the skilful *dhammas* are the four foundations of mindfulness, while the good fortune is the *iddhi-pādas* (long life), the observance of the training rules of the *Pātimokkha* (good looks), the four *jhānas* (happiness), loving-kindness and the other three immeasurables (enjoyable things) and arahatship (power). So for the laity the *puñña* is fortunate results, while for the monks it is new, fortunate actions.

⁷⁶ Martin Southwold, “Buddhism and evil,” in *The Anthropology of Evil*, ed. David Parkin, 128–41, Oxford, 1985.