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## Two Notions of Poverty in the Pāli Canon

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## INTRODUCTION

There are two notions of poverty in the Pāli Canon.<sup>1</sup> The first notion is associated with the idea of deprivation, the second with the idea of simplicity. These understandings of poverty are rooted in specific, but different, attitudes towards the possession of material resources. Both understandings of poverty have profound religious, social and political implications. Poverty that prevents an individual from participating fully in community life results in dehumanization that severely restricts, if not destroys, the possibility of spiritual progress. This is the notion of poverty as deprivation. Poverty undertaken for religious ends can promote spiritual development. It is a “blessing.” This is the notion of poverty as simplicity, referred to here as “religious poverty.” Thus, poverty must be understood as an individual matter (kammic)<sup>2</sup>, a social matter (related to communal life), and a religious matter (related to *nibbāna*).

The paper is divided into two sections. The first focuses on an analysis of the *Cakkavatti-Sīhanāda Sutta*, a *sutta* that provides the most extensive discussion of poverty as deprivation in the Nikāyas. Poverty in this text is primarily a socio-political issue that effects the spiritual development of all members of society. The second section of the paper focuses on the notion of poverty as simplicity, a notion associated with renunciators who are *akiñcana*, “without anything,” “lacking possessions”. Central to this section is an analysis of the *Aggañña Sutta*.

The theories of anthropologist Victor Turner play an important role in the second section of the paper. These views help us to move beyond a simple notion of poverty as “voluntary” or “involuntary” to a more complex understanding of it as symbolic of what it means to be human and in community. According to Turner, the rejection of family and wealth, foundations of the

renunciant life, is symbolic of the rejection of human relationships based upon differentiation and hierarchy. The values of renunciators are those of “*communitas*”, values that acknowledge our common humanity before differentiation and promote relationships of equality and compassion. The carriers of these values are monastic communities and the permanent presence of such renouncer-groups and their alternative values within the socio-political structure provide, not only an ongoing critique of unfettered structure but an infusion of vitality through the incorporation of the creativity engendered by *communitas*. In terms of a Turnerian analysis then, poverty as deprivation symbolizes all that divides us from each other; poverty as simplicity symbolizes all that unites us and reminds us of our mutual connection.

#### SECTION ONE: POVERTY AS DEPRIVATION

##### *The Cakkavatti-Sīhanāda Sutta*

The most significant discussion of poverty as deprivation (*dāliddiya*) and its effects upon both individuals and their society occurs in the *Cakkavatti-Sīhanāda Sutta* of the *Dīgha Nikāya*.<sup>3</sup> The *Cakkavatti Sutta* is composed of two parts: a monastic frame tale concerning how one can be an island to oneself, and an embedded story, deeply concerned with socio-political affairs, about the rise and fall of a mythical kingdom. The general scholarly view concerning the construction of the *sutta* is that it has been pieced together from two unrelated *suttas*.<sup>4</sup> Regardless of the history of the *Cakkavatti*, for the purposes of analysis I take it to be unitary and intentional. That is, while I do not dispute the theory that it is a composite, I assume that it was not arbitrarily assembled and that the compiler/s chose a particular frame tale from those available for this particular embedded story.

## Embedded Story

The embedded story deals with the demise and reestablishment of the kingdom established by King Daḷhanemi. The king, and each of seven successors, reestablishes the boundaries and prosperity of the kingdom through following a set of duties known as “the noble duty of the wheel-turning monarch” (*ariyaṃ cakkavattivattan*). A “wheel-turning monarch” (*cakkavattin*) is the ideal ruler, one whose rule is just and virtuous.<sup>5</sup> The noble duty consists in the following: becoming the embodiment of *dhamma* in all activities, providing shelter and protection for all segments of the realm including the animals and birds, ensuring that no wrongdoing occurs, providing wealth for those who are without wealth (*adhana*), being advised by the *religieux*, and avoiding anything that might cause the *religieux* to give up their practise. The eighth king, whom the text distinguishes by noting that he ruled “according to his own mind” (*samatena pasāsati*), does not follow this pattern and the kingdom fails to prosper. When instructed by his courtiers and other important citizens on his duties, he follows all with one exception—he does not give wealth to those who have none. As a consequence of this, poverty becomes widespread (*vepulaṃ agamāsi*). When cases of theft occur, the king initially provides the thieves with wealth and the injunction to use the wealth to care for themselves, parents, wives and children, to set up a business, and give gifts to the *religieux* that will benefit them here and lead to heaven. Eventually, however, a case of theft results in the public humiliation and beheading of the thief. The king reasons that if he simply keeps handing out wealth to thieves, he will be providing motivation for others to steal.

From the point at which poverty is introduced into society the process of social disintegration and human degradation proceeds rapidly via a sequence of action-reaction scenarios, each one worse than the one before.

So then, monks Because wealth was not given to those who had no wealth, poverty became widespread, because poverty became widespread, theft became widespread, because theft became widespread, weapons became widespread, because weapons became widespread, murder became widespread, because murder became widespread, lying became widespread, because lying became widespread their lifespan and pleasant appearance declined.<sup>6</sup>

This phrase, once introduced, recurs repeatedly and each time a new vice is added: informing, adultery, greed and lust, incest, lack of filial piety and respect for elders, and lack of religious piety. The constant repetition of this phrase after each stage of the degeneration serves to emphasize that the entire process of degeneration is a direct result of the king's failure to give wealth to those who had none. The absence of any reference to *kamma* is striking.<sup>7</sup> Poverty in this text does not arise because of *kamma*. What poverty does is provoke deeds that are kammically unproductive, that is, evil deeds. We see kammic effects in the people's loss of attractiveness and lifespan. All the people in the kingdom, rich and poor, suffer the effects of the evil deeds, raising the possibility of communal *kamma* or, at least, the confluence of *kamma*. The interpretation that follows from this is that the political structure (kingship) provides the context within which *kamma* operates, and poverty causes degeneration in both the individual and her/his society.

The downward cycle of violence culminates in a period in which humans *aññamaññam miga-saññaṃ paṭilabhissanti*, “acquire animal consciousness towards each other;” that is, they perceive each other as animals and respond by slaughtering each other as if threatened by wild beasts. A few humans, however, appear not to be deluded about the fact that they are human, and they wish neither to kill nor be killed. They flee into the woods for some time and, when they later emerge, are instrumental in the regeneration of the kingdom. They make the connection between

evil deeds, violence and degeneration, and begin to reverse the trend through progressively refraining from all the vices that led to their downfall, beginning with murder. They are presented in direct contrast to other humans who, during the “sword-period,” are little more than beasts, humankind at its worst. This small group of humans indicates that even during the most catastrophic times some people are able to maintain their humanity and that, at its best, humankind is nonviolent, rational, consensual and morally active. Eventually, the kingdom again becomes prosperous and populous and the *cakkavatti* Saṃkha, who is described in the same way as Daḷhanemi, arises. Given the parallel drawn between Saṃkha and Daḷhanemi, *cakkavattis* appear to be the product of a moral populace. The *cakkavatti*’s duty is to protect and maintain this moral community and extend its righteousness to other regions.

#### Frame Tale

The frame tale, which cannot be analyzed or discussed in any detail here, consists of two sections. The first, which also serves to introduce the story of King Daḷhanemi’s kingdom, concerns an address by the Buddha to the monks concerning how they can “be your own island, be your own refuge, take no one else as a refuge, dwell [with] *dhamma* as [your] island, dwell [with] *dhamma* as your refuge, take nothing else as refuge.”<sup>8</sup> The Buddha makes two points. A *bhikkhu* should be mindful of body, feelings, thought and ideas, removing dissatisfaction and greed concerning the world. He should dwell attentive to *dhamma*, mindful of it, removing the covetousness and dejection about the world. Second, monks should walk in their own pastures, in the way of their father. If they do this Māra will not get an opportunity, a foundation.<sup>9</sup> Because of taking up good behaviour, this merit increases. The second part of the frame tale consists in a technical discussion that begins with

an exact repetition of the opening verse up to and including the exhortation to walk in their own pastures, the haunts of their father. If they do this they will increase their lifespan, attractiveness, happiness, wealth, and power. The Buddha then asks what lifespan, comeliness, happiness, wealth, and power mean for a *bhikkhu*, and answers the question by discussing the importance of the four *iddhis*, adherence to morality, restraint by the monastic code (*pāṭimokkha*), the practice of the four *jhānas*, the four *brahmavihāras*, and the extinction of the *āsavas*. The Buddha concludes the frame tale and the text by stating that no power is more difficult to overcome than that of Māra, but that good behaviour brings the required merit.

#### Narrative Structure

Any interpretation of a composite *sutta* like the *Cakkavatti* must take account of the dynamic that occurs between the frame tale and embedded story.<sup>10</sup> The process of framing one narrative by another is a fairly general narrative technique. It allows the compiler of the stories to form two or more stories into a whole. It is also, however, a process of re-creation. The embedded story no longer stands on its own. It becomes part of a larger story, and its interpretation becomes dependent upon the nature of the framing material. It is qualified, interpreted “in light of” the frame tale. In the case of the *Cakkavatti Sutta* the effect of the frame tale on the embedded story is to undermine the strong socio-political thrust of the embedded story. It becomes merely one example of what happens when people do not follow in the paths of the fathers. The focus shifts from the structures within which individuals function, structures that play an important role in facilitating or inhibiting certain types of behaviour, to isolated moral acts of individuals.

The concerns of the frame tale encompass the text and the embedded story is interpreted in light of those concerns. There are

two concerns: that one be mindful, and that one keep to one's own pastures and follow in the paths of one's father. The structure of the *sutta* establishes two parallel realms. There are two pastures and two fathers. The first pasture to be discussed is that of the lay world with the *cakkavatti* at its head. The second is that of the *bhikkhu/bhikkhunī* with the Buddha at its head. There is also a hierarchy established. The pasture of the world is subordinate to that of the monk/nun. Even the *cakkavatti* must leave lay life in order to attain *nibbāna*. In presenting the embedded story as an illustration of unmindfulness, ignorance regarding proper pastures, and the consequences of not following in the footsteps of one's father, the *Cakkavatti Sutta* reaffirms commitment to the religious life, encourages diligence and zeal in its practice, and a sense of urgency regarding renunciation. It also presents socio-political life as an obstacle to *nibbāna*.

#### Socio-Political Structures, Poverty and Soteriology

Although the frame tale encourages the hearer/reader to view socio-political life as an obstacle to *nibbāna*, the presentation of lay life and monastic life as two realms with practices and duties appropriate to each elevates socio-political life to a potentially soteriological level.

The key difference between ordinary lay life and that which is potentially soteriological lies in the role of political leadership. We can understand the view of political leadership by examining the place of poverty, taken as deprivation, within the text. Poverty and its consequences are manifest on three levels. The first level, highlighted by the mindfulness theme of the frame tale, is the personal. Deprivation causes individuals to steal, lie, and commit acts of murder. The consequence of these acts is not only a shorter and less attractive life but also the propensity to commit a wider variety of evil acts of an increasingly serious nature. The end result is



the creation of a being that can hardly be called human in any meaningful sense as its consciousness, the root of mind and thus mindfulness, is bestial. In Buddhist psychology consciousness must always be consciousness of something. The six types of consciousness are associated with the five senses and mind. The consciousness that perceives others as beasts is itself bestial. The ultimate consequence of poverty, then, is to remove an individual from the human realm, the only realm within which *nibbāna* may be realized.

The second level on which poverty and its consequences are manifest is sociological and systemic. Sociologically the material deprivation of some individuals causes the moral impoverishment of all. The connection between the sociological and the systemic is the king. The king is the symbol of community or social values. His final response to poverty, capital punishment, represents the values of the community. The poor have been, in effect, shut out of the community. Their deprivation prevents them from fulfilling the minimal responsibilities of any community member. They cannot take care of themselves, their families, or a business. Most crucial, they cannot make gifts to the *religieux*, and thus they cannot benefit from such gifts either now or in the future. Since it is such “cultural decencies” that define a wholly human existence,<sup>11</sup> and spiritual progress depends upon gifts to the *religieux*, the community they have been shut out of is the human community, the community of those who can attain *nibbāna*. Further, this exclusion is permanent, for the king’s failure to adequately address the problem of poverty creates a group of people who will always be deprived. They have no one to turn to for assistance. Their abandonment by the king symbolizes their abandonment by the human community. Poverty has become systemic. This is a crucial point. The text does not envision a society in which poverty never occurs. Even in the restored kingdom hunger (*anasanam*), a byproduct of deprivation, remains. But poverty need not be systemic. The crucial element of the *cakkavatti*’s duty is to remove poverty when

it occurs so that it will not become systemic.

This is the final level of the manifestation of poverty and its consequences, the level of political leadership. At this level the relationship is between individual rulership and rule according to the tradition of the *cakkavatti*. The eighth king, the one who rules by his own ideas, is not portrayed as inherently evil but as limited in his understanding of righteous leadership. He is personally moral. When informed by the leaders of the community about the noble duty he performs all of the duty with the exception of providing wealth for the poor. When first confronted by one thief, and then another, his response is to provide wealth. He is also a socially legitimate ruler, eldest son and a *khattiya*. All of these things prove to be necessary but insufficient to constitute the righteousness of a *cakkavatti*, or prevent the creation of systemic poverty. The frame tale encourages us to see his failure as the personal failing of one who has not followed in the path of his father. While this is true, his failure is a matter of socio-political, rather than personal, inadequacy.

The king responds to specific instances of poverty with individual acts of charity. That is, his provision of wealth to the poor is a gift from one individual to another rather than an expression of the communal reciprocity he is expected to embody. Implicit in the treatment of the king's failure and the moral degeneration of the people is the notion that poverty is a socio-political and moral concern. A further implication is that socio-political structure and religious potential are interrelated, and poverty is a threat to both. A stable polity requires law and order. Poverty makes law and order impossible. Socio-political structures play an important role in facilitating or inhibiting individual moral behaviour. Systemic poverty inhibits individual moral behaviour and erodes social cohesion. It is not enough that the king make a contribution to material prosperity. He must also ensure that there are no poor.

## Social Criticism in the Cakkavatti Sutta

The *Cakkavatti Sutta* is interesting, in part, because it contains two types of social criticism, both of which find support throughout the Nikāyas. The social criticism of the embedded story may be termed social criticism from the “inside.” The embedded story, and others like it—the *Kūṭadanta Sutta*, *Sigālovāda Sutta*, *Mahāsudassana Sutta* and the *Aggañña Sutta* in the Dīgha Nikāya, for example—or the *Kurudhamma Jātaka* and *Gaṇḍatindu Jātaka*, all generally accept the hierarchical, patriarchal social order with the king at its head. We find views that correspond to simple notions of social justice—everyone should have sufficient resources to care for themselves and others, and to make religious life possible—and the notion that these values should be incorporated into the political system. It is the king’s responsibility to ensure that everyone has sufficient resources. There is, however, even in heavily socio-political texts like the *Cakkavatti* and *Kūṭadanta suttas*, a strong undercurrent of a more radical social criticism, a criticism that rejects the social order. This more radical criticism is identified with the renouncer and may be termed social criticism from the “outside.”

## SECTION TWO: POVERTY AS SIMPLICITY

## Renunciation

While Buddhist renunciators are not outside society in any absolute sense, living close to a city or village and dependent upon the laity for all their needs, they are “outside” normal social structure.<sup>12</sup> They possess neither property nor family, and their mode of dress symbolizes their commonality and their rejection of wealth. Material resources play an important role in texts concerned with renunciation. Renunciators lack material resources—possessions,

wealth, family and the status and power inherent in them—because they have abandoned them. Clearly, the definition of poverty as “deprivation” or “insufficient material resources” is here inappropriate. Renouncers are not deprived because they assert that a lack of material resources is a positive aid to religious development. More appropriate here is a definition of poverty as “possessionlessness,” an understanding conveyed by the Pāli term *akiñcana* (“without anything,” “lacking possessions”), used almost exclusively throughout the Nikāyas with reference to renouncers.<sup>13</sup>

### Renunciation and “Communitas”

Victor Turner, an anthropologist whose major works were published from the mid-sixties to the mid-seventies, moved from “the study of ritual in an African tribal context to an analysis of processual symbols in cross-cultural and transtemporal terms”.<sup>14</sup> Turner is most remembered for his development of the notion of “communitas” and for his ideas concerning the relationship between “structure” and “anti-structure”. Communitas is that feeling of a common human bond with others that arises in liminal situations where structure, characterized by differentiation and hierarchy, is absent or minimal.<sup>15</sup> The experience of communitas is a spontaneous, immediate, concrete relation between people who are, at once, recognized to be unique in their individual attributes and abilities and common in their humanity.<sup>16</sup> Structure and communitas, as Turner has defined them, present two contrasting models of society, and while structure is worldly and pragmatic, communitas is often speculative, generating new philosophical or religious ideas and art.<sup>17</sup> Structure and communitas are both a part of society which, over time, moves like a pendulum between these two poles. Indeed, the institutionalization of communitas provides a vitalizing, if dangerous, enclave within structure.<sup>18</sup> The institutionalization of communitas occurs, Turner has argued, with increasing specialization of culture and complexity in division of

labour. The monastic and mendicant states of the world religions in which *communitas* becomes visible are evidence of this process.<sup>19</sup> While social-scientific theory has developed considerably since Turner's time, his notion of *communitas* and method of examining the dynamic between binary opposites such as structure and anti-structure or *communitas* provides a valuable tool for clarifying our understanding of renunciation and the role it plays within society.

Renouncers, as found in the Pāli texts, embody values that Turner identifies with *communitas*, and the structure of many renunciation texts reflects the struggle between structure and *communitas*. Kings and non-renunciant *brāhmaṇas* are presented as embodying structural values—family, wealth, and the status and power associated with them. The values of these kings and non-renunciant *brāhmaṇas* are presented as being in opposition to the views of renouncers and the views of renouncers are always portrayed as being superior. The radical criticism found in texts like the *Raṭṭhapāla Sutta*, *Sonaka Jātaka*, and *Kuddāla Jātaka*, then, appears to reject the current social order. Renunciation texts celebrate celibacy and poverty (*akiñcana*). Several texts, such as the *Bandhanāgāra Jātaka*, *Kumbhakāra Jātaka*, *Udāna II.vi*, and the most famous, *Vessantara Jātaka*, present family as objects of craving that lead to bondage. It is *communitas* that is sought through voluntary poverty.<sup>20</sup> The *Sonaka Jātaka* lists the “blessings” of religious poverty (*akiñcana*), and the *Kuddāla Jātaka* warns of the dangers of possessing even a spade. Both celibacy and poverty represent humanity before differentiation into male and female, rich and poor, the basis of conflict and violence.

## SECTION TWO: POVERTY AS SIMPLICITY (B):

*The Aggañña Sutta*

The *Aggañña Sutta* encapsulates and highlights the major themes found in these renunciation texts: the values that ground the social order are insufficient for liberation, and renunciation requires a reversal of values. The anti-Brahmanical frame tale, which sets forth and criticizes the values of structure, and the embedded story, a myth of origin which espouses the Buddhist view, illustrate the struggle between structural values and those of anti-structure. The myth of origin also sets out an ideal of the human person.

The *Aggañña Sutta* is well-known.<sup>21</sup> I will not present an analysis of it here but will simply draw out the elements that lend themselves to a Turnerian interpretation. The story is about two young men of *brāhmaṇa* background, Vāseṭṭha and Bhāradvāja, who have taken up the homeless life under the Buddha. In doing so they have violated Brahmanical religious understanding, brahmanic class solidarity, and the normal life of most young men in most societies, past, present, and future. Late one evening the Buddha engages them in conversation about how family and friends have reacted to their “going forth” (*pabbajjā*). The Buddha’s question indicates that he is well aware of the criticism they have endured, which has been, according to Vāseṭṭha, “copious, not at all stinted.”

The entire discourse—frame tale and embedded story—is designed to affirm the young men’s rejection of lay values and Brahmanical teaching. The embedded story, the story of origins, is told to the two young men as part of the Buddha’s refutation of Brahmanical pretensions. The story of origins is presented as ancient lore the *brāhmaṇas* have forgotten.

According to the myth of origins, the common ancestors of humans were “simply beings,” made of mind (*manomaya*), feeding on joy (*pīti-bhakkha*), self-luminous (*sayampabha*), travelling through the air (*antalikkha-cara*), and abiding in bliss

(*subhaṭṭhāyina*). In short, they are undifferentiated from each other (except for their *kamma*). When the earth becomes manifest one greedy and curious being tastes the earth and others follow this being's example. As they eat, they become differentiated from each other and those who are more attractive despise those who are less attractive. The process continues with each stage of differentiation bringing in its wake negative moral consequences. Differentiation into male and female causes lust and cohabitation which leads to the ostracism of the men and women involved due to the vile nature of the act—"Perish, unclean one, perish, unclean one: how can a being treat the body of another being this way?"<sup>22</sup> The establishment of the family unit is seen as part of a "fall" from an original state of purity. The establishment of society is viewed similarly. It is associated with laziness, hoarding, and the establishment of private property which leads to theft, blame, lying, and punishment. The downward cycle is halted only by the establishment of kingship.

The rejection of wealth and family is central to the myth of origins. Wealth and family are presented within the myth as evidence of a "fall," a degeneration of humans from an ideal state. It is here that Turner's theories prove helpful in understanding this rejection as part of a scrutinization of structural values that is the core of an alternative view of what it means to be human and in community.

#### A Notion of Community

The human ideal set forth in the text is individualistic. The renouncers in the *Aggañña Sutta* are portrayed as spending their days in solitary meditation, emerging from their huts only in the morning and evening to gather alms. Yet, this portrayal is not inconsistent with a view of community. What notion of community arises from the presentation of the renouncer as the ideal human? General notions of community are found scattered throughout the

Nikāyas in the attitude of renouncers towards each other and non-renouncers. In the *Cakkavatti Sutta* the beings who survive the holocaust greet each other with genuine joy and concern, they are reflective and self-aware. Together they review the connection between their bad deeds and the devastating consequences of them for society. These beings are moral. They refrain from bad deeds, and their example begins the restoration of a society that is active, moral, and prosperous. In short, the community espoused in the text is mindful and moral, and provides a positive model for the society in which it exists.

In other texts, the model of community found in the examples of renouncers and *arahants* is that of an “intentional” community. Members of the community are not joined by ties of kinship but by a common dedication to achieve liberation through a process of purification. Purification is achieved through disassociation from things (wealth/family) and mental states (lust, hatred, and delusion) that are harmful to personal and communal life. The recognition of common humanity, repeatedly stressed in the *Aggañña Sutta*, makes membership in the community potentially open to all humans, and fosters relationships characterized by compassion (*karuṇā, anukampā*).<sup>23</sup> Steven Collins notes that “The monk expresses his essentially individual nature in the virtue of self-sufficiency, and his social existence in that of friendship,” and he further notes that “in all cases the virtue of friendship can be linked with its wider role in society.”<sup>24</sup> Several texts speak about the importance of friendship and the power of example, and the *saṅgha* is portrayed as turning outward to the community, particularly in its teaching, and its reception of gifts.<sup>25</sup> This ideal of community is a natural extension of Turner’s notion of *communitas*.



Structure and Communitas in the *Aggañña Sutta*:  
A Turnerian Perspective

The rejection of wealth and family represents a radical rejection of social distinction and social hierarchy as eternal and unchanging aspects of human life. The rejection of wealth as a rejection of possession symbolizes a rejection of the tendency to treat others as objects of desire or hatred rather than as human and valuable in their own right. The description of our common origin presents us with an ideal to which we can return, or which we can aspire to recreate in our present lives. Those who adopt the homeless life reject wealth and family and treat them as the root of greed and evil deeds. They view social distinction between humans as the source of envy, hatred, and lust. Through this rejection of possession and marriage, and through their meditation, they hope to recreate in their own lives the human ideal.

Extolling the superiority of the religious life, the renouncer affirms anti-structural values, values that stress communitas. Despite the renouncer's apparent rejection of the social order, the struggle between the values of structure and anti-structure in the *Aggañña Sutta* is presented as an inherent part of structure itself. Both the *brāhmaṇa* and the *samaṇa* groups emerge as a natural part of the social structure. Structure *per se* is not rejected. While it is seen as part of human decline, the election of the king halts the degeneration and provides the foundation for religious groups to emerge through establishing a stable social order. The implication is that communitas and the values that arise out of it such as compassion and equality can be understood or enveloped within structure itself. What is being proposed, then, is not an entire alternative system but a set of alternative values. The permanent presence of renouncer groups within the social order ensures that the critique of structural values that lays the basis for communitas to emerge is always present and available to society as a whole.

*Saṅgha*: Ideal and Real

According to Turner, monastic groups like the Buddhist *saṅgha* are an attempt to institutionalize a permanent realm of liminality in order to provide ongoing access to *communitas* and the critique of structure from which *communitas* issues. In order to function in this manner there must be no compromise with the *saṅgha*'s foundational values of celibacy and poverty; it must maintain its purity. Threats to the *saṅgha*'s purity are posed by the inclusion in the community of individuals who are either unable or unwilling to seriously pursue the religious path, or live up to the standards of the monastic community. This problem is dealt with ritually through declarations of communal purity that precede all major ritual occasions, the initiation ceremony (*upasampadā*), the periodic recitation of the rules (*pāṭimokkha*), and the reception of new robe material after the rains (*pavārāna*).<sup>26</sup>

Wealth poses a particular problem. Indeed, the *saṅgha*, the community of *communitas*, is dependent upon the continued existence of structure. Without the wealth structure provides the *saṅgha* could not exist without compromising its purity through labour. Yet, as the *Kuddāla Jātaka* indicates, even simple possession of the tools for self-sustenance is dangerous. Wealth is necessary but polluting. The spiritualization of giving in *dāna* allows the *saṅgha* to accept wealth without compromising its purity.

Giving (*dāna*) to religiously worthy people is considered to be itself a religious act (*puñña kamma*), part of sound moral conduct (*sīla*). As the *puñña* generated is proportional to the purity of the recipient, the *saṅgha* is the ideal recipient. The gifts are made to the ideal *saṅgha*, “the *Saṅgha* of the Four Quarters” (*cātuddisa bhikkhu-saṅgha*). The actual *saṅgha* is entitled to use these gifts because it has brought itself into conformity with that ideal through the *upasampadā*, *pāṭimokkha*, and *pavārāna* rituals. Thus, the ideal *saṅgha* acts as a filter between the material resources donated and

the actual *saṅgha* that appropriates them.

The spiritualization of giving also incorporates the reception of gifts by the *saṅgha* into the *saṅgha*'s mandate to assist in the spiritual development of others. In its readiness to accept gifts it becomes a “field of merit” where the laity may reap the kammic benefit of religious giving. *Dāna* is the foremost means by which the *saṅgha* discharges its duty to care for the spiritual welfare of others. The *saṅgha* shows its appreciation for the gifts by giving a religious discourse that usually focuses on the Five Precepts.

The *saṅgha* symbolically maintains its stance as a wealth-rejecting community in the face of its reception of gifts through the Four Requisites, and an attitude of indifference toward lay gifts. It is the possession of the Four Requisites by which the *saṅgha* demonstrates its attitude concerning wealth: food from begging, robe from a dustheap, dwelling at the foot of a tree, fermented cattle urine as medicine.<sup>27</sup> These represent the minimum required to sustain life. This is poverty defined as simplicity. While the Four Requisites provide an outline of acceptable gifts to members of the *saṅgha*, food, clothing, shelter, and medicine, the sparse definition of the categories implies that monks/nuns are expected to maintain an indifference towards the actual quality or quantity of the gifts, and, with exceptions only for illness, they are forbidden from making specific requests. And, as is the case with all material resources, the monk/nun possesses but does not own the requisites. They are the property of the *cātuddisa bhikkhu-saṅgha* and are simply appropriated by monk/nun. At death, all goods revert to the ideal *saṅgha*.<sup>28</sup>

Viewed through a Turnerian lens, it is by the ritualized exchange of gifts that the values of *communitas* pass into structure, primarily through teaching. In the ritualized exchange laity exchange the values of structure (wealth and family) for the wisdom of the renouncer (*dhamma/kamma*). The manner in which these ideals are expected to manifest in socio-political life are evident in texts like the *Cakkavatti-Sīhanāda Sutta*, the *Kūṭadanta Sutta*, and

the *Sigālovāda Sutta*. The *saṅgha* as the bearer of *communitas* also exerts pressure on the social structure by providing individuals with the opportunity to access *communitas* directly through initiation into the community of monks and nuns. Should sufficiently large numbers of people choose to do this, the entire structure may be threatened. Finally, the high visibility of the *saṅgha*, its poverty and celibacy, present an ever-present critique of the social order that has the potential for initiating or supporting social change. Ideally, in Turnerian terms, the confrontation with or infusion of non-hierarchical, egalitarian, and compassionate values into structure provides the balance necessary to prevent the worst abuses of structural rigidity such as despotism and rejuvenates structure through a regeneration of the principles of classification.

The application of Turner's views concerning *communitas* and the relationship between *communitas* and structure provides valuable insight into the relationship between the two, apparently dissimilar, types of social criticism contained in the Pāli Nikāyas—that from the “inside” and that from the “outside.” This is important because a proper understanding of this relationship discloses the ethical framework in the texts within which poverty is understood and its significance assessed.

## CONCLUSION

The ethical system presented in the texts is clearly grounded in the anti-structural values of the renouncer. The religious life is consistently portrayed as the best and the most productive life. The *saṅgha* is the repository of those values, and the description of them in the texts is consistent with what Turner calls the values of *communitas*, values that affirm the commonness of all humans while acknowledging their individuality and interdependence. When activated, *communitas* values produce a community that is

dedicated to the development of all its members and which is characterized by inclusiveness, friendship, compassion, and a high standard of individual moral behaviour. The presentation of this notion of community in the texts is visionary and, I would argue, self-consciously so. There is no notion in any of the texts examined that the values of *communitas* can be fully realized within the social order. Even the *cakkavatti*, the most religiously developed layman, must abandon socio-political life in order to attain liberation.

While the radical social criticism of the renouncer is visionary, the milder social criticism of the socio-political texts is pragmatic. Kingship, the *Aggañña Sutta* implies, is necessary to stop the inevitable degeneration of humans due to greed, lust, and violence. And, a point that frequently goes unnoticed, the social contract between the king and the people in the *Aggañña Sutta* gives the king the right to use coercion. The manner in which the king exercises his power, however, is to be guided by *dhamma*, righteousness, the values of *communitas*. These require that he treat people fairly, regardless of their station in life, and that he maintain a peaceful, stable social order through appropriate means. The core of that duty lies in ensuring that there are no poor (according to the *Cakkavatti-Sīhanāda Sutta* and the *Kūṭadanta Sutta*). In the *Kūṭadanta Sutta* the king is also seen as promoting the creation of wealth through job creation and fair wages for public service.

The texts present us with a paradoxical view of wealth. Those with a socio-political theme present the social order and its values of family and wealth in a positive light. Wealth, according to these texts, promotes peace and harmony, and wealth expended in the care of others or for the common good is itself seen as a religious observance. Most important, wealth makes possible the creation of the community in which the values of *communitas* can be fully realized, the *saṅgha*. The renunciation texts, however, view wealth as an obstacle to the religious life.

Given the presence of both these views in the same texts, as

in the *Cakkavatti-Sīhanāda Sutta* and the *Kūṭadanta Sutta*, I would argue that the Pāli Nikāyas make no attempt to ignore or minimize this paradox. Indeed, the presence of both attitudes towards wealth in the same text, and the care taken in the Vinaya to ritually establish and maintain the *saṅgha*'s separation from wealth, serve to emphasize the paradox. The *saṅgha*'s need for wealth in order to survive precludes it from providing a complete alternative to structure. In Turnerian terms, as structure must take the vision of *communitas* into account when formulating its categories, so too must *communitas* come to terms with structure. This accommodation takes two forms. Ritually, the *saṅgha*, through the *cātuddisa bhikkhu-saṅgha*, symbolically provides a filter between itself and the pollution that wealth brings with it, and the spiritualization of giving turns the receipt of gifts into a means by which the *saṅgha* exercises its mandate to assist others in their spiritual development. Further, through its receipt of *dāna*, moral teaching (*dhamma/kamma*), and views on kingship, the *saṅgha* attempts to infuse the laity with the values of *communitas* that will encourage them to aspire to incorporate those values in their socio-political life. It is within this framework that we must place any understanding of poverty.

From a Turnerian perspective, in the Nikāyas poverty understood as deprivation signifies all that divides us from each other; it signifies the abuses that arise from unbounded structure. Possessionlessness, religious poverty, signifies all that unites us and reminds us of our connection with each other, the natural world, and the cosmos. As poles apart they signify the paradox of human existence. The dynamism created from their struggle with each other signifies the human struggle towards a better vision of what it means to be human and in community.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Thanks to Graeme MacQueen and Ellen Badone for reading a draft of this article and for their suggestions. Thanks also to Steven Collins for his comments on the dissertation from which this article is taken and for his correction of some of my translations.

<sup>2</sup> Discussion of *kamma* in this article is minimal. The relationship between *kamma* and poverty is not a straightforward one. There are several instances in the Nikāyas which suggest that poverty is the kammic result of a failure to give, particularly to the *religieux*; however, *kamma* as the cause of poverty is noticeably absent from texts in which extended discussions of poverty-related matters occur. A survey of texts that refer to *kamma* indicates that statements about *kamma* in the Nikāyas are themselves inconsistent. Because of this, I set aside the commonly held belief that early Buddhist texts hold *kamma* to be the sole cause of all poverty and focus my attention on those texts that appear to attribute poverty to non-kammic causes.

<sup>3</sup> The noun *dāliddiya* (poverty) is used infrequently in the Nikāyas. The adjective *dalidda* (translated “poor”), used as a noun, is much more frequent. Other common terms used to refer to people who are “poor” (deprived) are *adhana*, *duggata*, and *kapana*.

<sup>4</sup> Maurice Winternitz, *History of Indian Literature*, 2 vol(s)., trans. by V. Srinivasa Sarma (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1988), 2:43; Richard Gombrich, *Theravāda Buddhism: A Social History from Benares to Colombo* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1988), 83.

<sup>5</sup> The term *vatta* (nt) may be translated as “custom, duty, or service” and has a secondary meaning of “observance, vow, virtue” (*The Pāli-English Dictionary*, 597). The term *ariya* may be translated as “right, good, ideal” (*The Pāli-English Dictionary*, 77). The “wheel turning monarch” is, then, the ruler who sets rolling the wheel (*cakka*) of *dhamma*. The *Pāli-English Dictionary* refers to such a ruler as a “just and faithful king” (259).

<sup>6</sup> Iti kho bhikkhave adhanānaṃ dhane ananuppadiya-māne daḷiddiyaṃ vepullam agamāsi, daliddiye vepulla-gate adinnādānaṃ vepullam agamāsi, adinnādāne vepulla-gate satthaṃ vepullam agamāsi, satthe vepulla-gate pāṇātipāto vepullam agamāsi, pāṇātipāte vepulla-gate musā-vādo vepullam agamāsi, musā-vāde vepulla-gate tesam satānaṃ āyu pi parihāyi, vaṇṇo pi parihāyi. T. W. Rhys Davids and J. Estlin Carpenter, ed(s), *The Dīgha Nikāya*, 3 vol(s)., London: Pāli Text Society, 1890-1911; repr. ed(s). 1975-1976; all references are to repr. ed) 3:68. All translations mine unless noted otherwise.

<sup>7</sup> It is incorrect to assume that all cases of poverty may be attributed to *kamma*. There is no consistent doctrine of *kamma* in the Pāli Nikayas. See Mavis L. Fenn, “Unjustified Poverty and Karma (Pali Kamma),” *Religious Studies and Theology* (Alberta), vol. 11, no. 1 (1991): 20-26; on *kamma/karma* see James McDermott, *Development in the Early Buddhist Concept of Kamma/Karma*, New Delhi: Munshiran Manoharlal, 1984. For a critique of the doctrine of *karma* see Paul J. Griffiths, “Notes Towards a Critique of Buddhist Karmic Theory,” *Religious Studies* 18, no.3 (Sept. 1982): 277-291.

<sup>8</sup> atta-dīpā bhikkhave viharatha atta-saraṇā ananna-saraṇā, dhamma-dīpā dhamma-saraṇā ananna-saraṇā. *Dīgha Nikāya*, 3:58.

<sup>9</sup> I follow Ling in seeing Māra as a symbol of all obstacles to liberation. He embodies the ills of human existence, and their hidden roots, greed, desire, attachment. Māra is conquered by the same means by which *nibbāna* is obtained, with special emphasis on mindfulness (*sati*) and meditation (*samādhi*). Only the Buddha or an *arahant* can see Māra because only they see the realities of the world. Trevor O. Ling, *Buddhism and the Mythology of Evil* (London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd., 1962).

<sup>10</sup> This discussion draws heavily on Graeme MacQueen, unpublished paper, “The Interpreter’s Dilemma: Qualification in Early Buddhist Narrative,” presented at the annual meeting of the Canadian Society for the Study of Religion, June 1992.



<sup>11</sup> Regarding popular notions of social justice see: Barrington Moore, Jr., *Injustice: The Social Bases of Obedience and Revolt* (White Plains: M.E. Sharpe, 1978); James Scott, *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985); E.P. Thompson, “The Moral Economy of the English Crowd in the Eighteenth Century,” *Past and Present*, 51 (1971): 76-136.

<sup>12</sup> Louis Dumont, “World Renunciation in Indian Religions,” *Contributions to Indian Sociology*, vol 4 (1960): 33-62; Ilana Friedrich Silber, “Dissent Through Holiness: The Case of the Radical Renouncer in Theravāda Buddhist Countries,” *Numen*, XXVII, no.2 (1981): 165-193; Steven Collins, “Monasticism,” 106; Sukumar Dutt, *Buddhist Monks and Monasteries of India: Their History and Their Contribution to Indian Culture* (London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd., 1962), 45.

<sup>13</sup> The *Pāli-English Dictionary* notes that *kiñcana* (indefinite pronoun), literally “anything, something” may refer to anything that obstructs liberation and is usually defined as the three impurities of character. It has a moral connotation. It is clear from the use of *kiñcana* throughout the Nikāyas that “possessing nothing” (*akiñcana*) refers not only to material possessions left behind by the *bhikkhu* but to the desire and attachment from which they originated. Thus, *akiñcana* is sometimes used to refer to the state of the *arahant* who is “stainless” or free from desires and obstructions (D.iii.165, *Sangāra Suttas* [A.v.232,253], S.v.24 and Dh.p.vi.10-14, for example). *Akiñcana* occurs most frequently in the *Suttanipāta*, sections of which appear to represent the oldest strata of Buddhist texts. Its verses deal primarily with renunciation. It is used almost exclusively to refer to the possessionlessness of renouncers. I found only two instances where *akiñcana* was used to mean “destitute,” the *Sigālovāda Sutta* (where *adhana* is also used), and the *Kunāla Jātaka*.

<sup>14</sup> Victor Turner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure* (Ithaca: Cornell Paperbacks, 1977, repr. ed. 1987, first pub-

lished 1969 by Aldine Publishing Co.; all references are to repr. ed.), 109.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 127,177. See also Victor Turner, *Dramas, Fields, and Metaphors: Symbolic Action in Human Society* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1974), 251, 269, 274.

<sup>16</sup> Turner, *Ritual Process*, 127, 133, 177.

<sup>17</sup> Turner, *Dramas*, 243, 253, 269, 235; *Ritual Process*, 129.

<sup>18</sup> Turner, *Dramas*, 243; *Ritual Process*, 107, 167. Turner notes that *communitas* become visible in counter-culture. For a description and analysis of *communitas* in counter-culture movements see Graeme MacQueen, “Marking and Binding: An Interpretation of the Pouring of Blood in Nonviolent Direct Action,” *Peace and Change*, vol.17, no.1 (An.1992): 60-81.

<sup>190</sup> Turner, *Dramas*, 266.

<sup>20</sup> There are several good discussions/analyses of the *Aggañña Sutta*: Frank Reynolds, “Multiple Cosmogonies and Ethics: The Case of Theravāda Buddhism,” in *Cosmogony and Ethical Order*, ed. by Robin M Lovin and Frank Reynolds (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985), 203-225; Richard Gombrich, “The Buddha’s Book of Genesis,” *Indo-Iranian Journal*, 35 (1992): 159-178; Steven Collins, “The Discourse on What is Primary,” *Journal of Indian Philosophy* 21(1993):301-393.

<sup>21</sup> Nassa asuci, nassa asuciti. Kathaṃ hi nāma satto sattassa evarūpaṃ karissatiti? *Dīgha Nikāya* 3:89.

<sup>22</sup> For a discussion of *karuṇā* and *anukampā* see Harvey B. Aronson, *Love, Compassion, Sympathetic Joy and Equanimity in Theravāda Buddhism*, University of Wisconsin, 1975.

<sup>23</sup> Collins, “Monasticism,” 101.

<sup>24</sup> Sunīta (Thag 620) is inspired by seeing the Buddha, Sumedha by a recluse (Jātaka), and the Bodhisatta in the *Kumbhakāra Jātaka* by four *paccekabuddhas*. Kisāgotami (Thig 219-220) talks of the importance of good friends in becoming wise, and Candā (Thig.122) talks of the importance that receiving food, ordination and encouragement from a nun had in her becoming an *arahant*.

*Discipline*, 116-124.

<sup>25</sup> I am currently revising for publication a paper on the physical exclusions from ordination in *Mahāvagga I* that develops this idea through an analysis of the *upasampadā* (and other rituals) along lines developed by Mary Douglas [*Purity and Danger: An Analysis of the Concepts of Pollution and Taboo* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1966)]. The paper focuses on the rules as symbolic of notions of purity and holiness rather than as practical responses to social problems. A draft was presented at the 1995 meeting of the AAR under the tentative title “Protecting the Body of the Buddha: A Study in Holiness/Wholeness”. For an interpretation of the *upasampadā* rules from a practical stance see Holt, Bones of Contention: More on Monastic Funerals and Relics in the *Mulasarvāstivāda-Vinaya*,” *Journal of Indian Philosophy*, 22 (1994): 31-80.

<sup>26</sup> Whether monks ever lived in strict accordance with these requisites is not clear. It has generally been believed that the earliest monks were eremitic and that monasticism developed in a linear fashion: Sukumar Dutt, *Early Buddhist Monachism* (London: Kegan Paul, Trench and Trubner and Co. Ltd., 1924), 121. This view has come under challenge: Patrick Henry and Donald Swearer, *For the Sake of the World: The Spirit of Buddhist and Christian Monasticism* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1989), 83; Mohan Wijayratna, *Buddhist Monastic Life According to the Texts of the Theravāda Tradition*, trans. by Claude Grangier and Steven Collins (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1960), xiv-xvi. Swearer, Wijayaratna and Collins (in his introduction to *Buddhist Monastic Life* argue that, given the evidence of texts like the *Mahāvagga* which shows the Buddha accepting gifts of residence very early in his career, it is more likely that, while some monks/nuns were eremitic, most lived and travelled in groups that grew around specific teachers such as Sāriputta or Moggallāna. Early texts such as the *Suttanipāta* contain frequent praises of the eremitical life and the tradition of the thirteen austerities is ancient: wearing robes

made from refuse heaps, having only three robes, eating only alms, not discriminating between givers, that is, going from each house to the next in order, eating only one meal a day, eating only from the begging bowl, not eating more than sufficient even when given by a layperson, living in seclusion from towns and villages, living near a cremation ground or cemetery, being willing to sleep anywhere and living with three postures (standing, sitting, walking) without lying down to sleep. My opinion is that the early community likely contained both ways of life with predominance going to group life.

<sup>27</sup> For a discussion on the disposition of monks' property see Gregory Schopen, "On Avoiding Ghosts and Social Censure: Monastic Funerals in the *Mulasarvāstivāda-Vinaya*," *Journal of Indian Philosophy*, 20, no.1 (1992): 1-39, and "Ritual Rights and Bones of Contention: More on Monastic Funerals and Relics in the *Mulasarvāstivāda-Vinaya*," *Journal of Indian Philosophy*, 22 (1994 (1994): 31-80.

<sup>28</sup> Historically, it is clear that the *brāhmaṇas* recognized the danger posed by the *śramaṇa* groups. See Padmanabh Jaini, "Śramaṇas: Their Conflict with Brahmanical Society," *Chapters in Indian Civilization*, vol.1 ed. George Elder (Kendall: Hunt Pub. Co., 1970):39-81.