Wisdom as a Way of Life. Theravāda Buddhism Reimagined. By Steven Collins. Edited by Justin McDaniel; Preface by Dan Arnold; Afterword by Charles Hallisey. 2020. Columbia University Press. ISBN: 9780231197205 (cloth), 9780231197212 (paperback), 9780231552042 (ebook)

Reviewed by Alexander Wynne

Steven Collins' final book, published posthumously, consists of two parts by the author and three sections supplied by his former friends and colleagues (Dan Arnold, Justin McDaniel and Charles Hallisey). McDaniel saw the book through to publication, after receiving a draft before Collins' death in February 2018. To make the book workable, McDaniel tells us (p.xxiii) he had to cut three sections from the original manuscript: a preface, an introduction and a chapter, although lengthy sections from these are cited in McDaniel's own introduction.

As the title suggests, the book reimagines the meaning of wisdom in Theravāda Buddhism. Part One, 'Wisdom', focuses on the Jātakas, which Collins opposes to the 'texts of systematic thought ("doctrine")', and claims are 'the heart and humanity of the Pali tradition' (p.2). He argues that the Jātakas exemplify the importance of living correctly and well, providing a person with the 'capacity of judging rightly in matters relating to life and conduct' (p.9). Part Two, 'Practices of Self', focuses on spiritual practice and although conceptually simpler, is more difficult to describe. According to McDaniel, Collins

> … firmly believed that Theravāda Buddhists had something important to offer intellectually to the project that modern historians and philosophers like Pierre Hadot, Michel Foucault, and Derek Parfit spent their lives investigating. He saw these Western philosophers as attempting to articulate what Theravāda Buddhists had been arguing for over two millennia – that the study

> of philosophy and ethics is largely "practices of the self," and therefore has to involve both textual study and an ascetic lifestyle. (pp.xxx-xxxi)

Part Two of the book is also an 'attempt [at comparison]' (p.xxxi) between Theravāda practice and Pierre Hadot's writings on 'spiritual exercises' or 'philosophy as a way of life', and Michel Foucault's 'practices/technologies of self' (p.87). According to Collins (p.xxxiii), 'practices of self' include the 'entire process of acculturation', which 'in all societies, all civilizations, all cultures, is the cultivation of a certain kind of self, a certain kind of subject of experience':

> This learning of specific forms of physical and mental self-control, this askēsis, from childhood on, and the introjection of culturally specific ideals, is part of what constitutes sanity in any given social context . . . the introjection and performance of certain basic components of human sociality (so-called Morality) can be seen as a kind of wisdom, promulgated at length in Buddhist texts. (p.xxxiv)

The argument seems to be that Theravāda Buddhism is not really or mostly about the meditative quest for Nirvana. It is rather a civilisational project, in which Jātaka type narratives are a guide to practical wisdom in everyday life, and in which 'practices of self' are part of a process of acculturation, a sort of wisdom leading to the creation of certain types of human subject. This would all amount to a bold reimagination of the Theravāda tradition, one which McDaniel would be correct to call 'revolutionary' (p.xxiv). Unfortunately, however, *Wisdom as a Way of Life* does not fulfil Collins' lofty ambitions.

1. In Part Two, 'Practices of Self', Collins struggles to say what he is trying to achieve. He begins by mentioning two intentions (p.85), and yet the pages that follow do not state what the first intention actually is. Collins does, however, state that practices of self are

> demographically tiny but civilizationally of great importance … the texts in which they are described and prescribed remain of great importance to the intellectual history of the Pali tradition. (p.86)

This suggests that the first aim of Part Two is to show that practices of self form part of elite Buddhist practice, or are derived from it, and so are a minority concern in any Theravāda society. The same is suggested when Collins wonders whether practices of self constitute 'an elite regimen of truth' (p.154). And yet a development from the 'worldly wisdom' focus of Part One, to an 'elite regimen of truth' in Part Two, is never made clear. The second aim of Part Two is more clearly stated:

> The second reason for writing this chapter, indeed for writing the entire book, is to provide some comparative material to the work of Pierre Hadot on – to use the standard slogans – "spiritual exercises" and "philosophy as a way of life," and to that of Michel Foucault on "practices/technologies of self" and "subjectivity of truth". (p.87)

This is different from the professed 'attempt [at comparison]' with Hadot/Foucault stated in the introduction (p.xxxi). It would seem that Collins never finally conceptualised what the purpose of Part Two should be. Indeed, although he goes on state that he wishes to correct Hadot's/Foucault's 'lack of attention to the social and institutional contexts of the ideas they were writing about' (p.87), he admits that he has 'provided no serious empirical study' (p.87). There is no serious institutional study either. Collins describes his personal experience of Pali chanting at Wat Suthat, Bangkok (section 2.4.1), but this is neither an empirical study nor an analysis of institutions. It is purely descriptive and unremarkable; chanting occurs in Buddhist temples, as everybody knows. The point that devotional ritual requires some degree of 'training' and 'concentration' (p.110-11) is a simple observation, and not part of any apparent argument. What are the implications of this practice for acculturation, and in what ways do social and institutional contexts affect it? Collins does not try to explain.

The same is true of other aspects of Theravāda practice covered in Part Two. These sections read as a descriptive overview of spiritual practice rather than a sociological or civilisational analysis. Collins neither shows how the study of philosophy and ethics is part of 'practices of the self' (pp.xxx-xxxi), nor explains how certain kinds of 'selves' are cultivated in the Theravāda context, 'from childhood on' (p.xxxiv). There is no meaningful comparison with the 'Spiritual Exercises' of Hadot or 'spirituality' of Foucault, and no exploration of how sociological or institutional contexts aid acculturation in Theravāda societies. Rather strangely, Collins does not explain why the expression 'practices of self' is any better than 'Buddhist meditation' or 'Buddhist spiritual practices'.

2. Just as Part Two fails to explain how Theravāda acculturation is a form of wisdom, informed by elite spiritual ideals, so too Part One fails to show how Buddhist narratives are a source of worldly wisdom. The discussion here is constructed around a simple dichotomy between the 'quotidian' and 'supererogatory' (p.2). Whereas the former consists of 'forms of wisdom and wisdom seeking that are matters of practice' (p.2), the latter are expressions of absolute Buddhist values which need not be practised by everyone: celibacy, asceticism, meditation and so on.

The distinction between the 'quotidian' and 'supererogatory' corresponds to the categories 'dhamma 1' and 'dhamma 2' (p.7), first made by Collins in *Nirvana and Other Buddhist Felicities* (1998). Dhamma 1 is defined as 'an ethics of reciprocity in which the assessment of violence is context dependent and negotiable' (p.7); Collins also states that it consists of 'the kinds of good moral character other than a basic civilizational necessity' (p.10), which differ from the standard lists of Buddhist virtue (i.e. *sīla*). In this sense dhamma 1 of the Jātakas is similar to Aśoka's Dhamma, which Collins claims is not 'specifically Buddhist' (p.11).

Collins also mentions that the distinction between the quotidian and supererogatory is 'implicitly between forms of wisdom and wisdom seeking that are matters of practice, or might be, or are textual tropes' (p.2), the latter being 'ideals and aspirations that will be matters of practice in actual life only for a minuscule proportion of any population in Theravāda civilization' (p.2). Since on the same page he contrasts the Jātakas, 'stories about wisdom', with 'the 'simple four truths, five aggregates and the rest' (p.2), it seems that supererogatory wisdom consists of orthodox Buddhist doctrine, and the spiritual practices which lead to it. Of course dhamma 2, 'exemplified and promoted in the *Discourses* (*Suttas*) and *Monastic Rules* (*Vinaya*) texts' (p.8), and which mostly consists in 'simply the living of a celibate monastic life, itself supererogatory' (p.10), cannot be mentioned in the Jātakas, which are tales about a mythic time before the Buddha. Nevertheless, Collins points out that asceticism is mentioned in relation to Paccekabuddhas (pp.17-18, 79-80).

The analytical structure of Part One is therefore rather rich and dense. The overall purpose is to portray the Jātakas as a sort of 'wisdom literature' (p.12), and an important part of court culture in South Asia and Theravāda kingdoms (pp.19-20). However, the various arguments advanced in support of these claims are not convincing. The Jātakas do not distinguish quotidian wisdom/

dhamma 1 from supererogatory wisdom/dhamma 2, and then advise the former. Indeed, the dichotomy between dhammas 1 and 2 is misleading; it overlooks the universalist agenda of the Jātakas, and so fails to notice what was the original Buddhist project in civilisation.

2a. Value Conflicts

In support of the idea that the Jātakas teach a quotidian dhamma 1, Collins claims that one of their most important themes is value conflicts:

> Human life, apart from systems of specialist askēsis, contains irresolvable value conflicts. The Birth Stories can be enjoyed and admired by everyone, for many different reasons, without being subjected to the classificatory categories of, for example, "the eightfold path," "conditioned co-origination," and still less – since in The Birth Stories it does not occur – nibbāna (nirvana). They express many of the aspirations of Theravāda civilization, and thence of its intellectual history. (p.3)
>
> So there are stories that offer examples of quotidian wisdom, some of which confound and challenge the reader/audience by offering perhaps irresolvable ethical and value dilemmas. (p.35)
>
> [S]ome of the stories challenge the most revered of Buddhist values, just as does the great Vessantara, which has even greater in-your-faceness, if I may put it that way, with no convincing solution, or indeed no solution at all, to its central moral dilemma. (p.75).

The conflict between kingship and renunciation is of course explored with great skill in the *Vessantara Jātaka* (Ja 547). The same is true of the *Temiya Jātaka* (Ja 538), in which the Bodhisatta feigns being deaf, mute and crippled to avoid accruing the bad karma of kingship (p.37ff). And yet it is important to note that other Jātakas resolve the conflict between kingship and renunciation. Both the *Mahā-Janaka* and *Nimi Jātaka*s (Ja 539, 541), for example, navigate this conflict through a temporal sequence: the king rules justly first and renounces second, 'after fulfilling his duties as ruler' (Appleton and Shaw, 2015: 54). This ideological solution proved useful later on in Indian civilisation, when it was utilised within Brahmanism in the sequential form of the four *āśramas* (Olivelle, 1993: 117ff).

Even if the dilemma between kingship and renunciation is an important theme of the Jātakas, the other stories Collins cites in this context have nothing to do with values: when the monkey deceives and so evades the crocodile (Ja 208, pp.28-29), when the mouse kills the jackal (Ja 128, p.34), or when the crane eats some fish, but is then killed by an avenging crab (Ja 38, p.35), the Jātakas deal with conflicts of interest rather than conflicts of value. Their general point is that individual conflict is endemic in human life, a fairly obvious Buddhist extension of the principle of *dukkha* that is not accompanied by words of advice. Collins further claims (p.35) that value conflicts emerge from the redaction of Jātakas in collections:

> I want to stress that [*The Birth Stories*], like proverbs, fables, and other genres, what I will call in 1.4 "wisdom literature" as a cross-civilizational phenomenon, almost always were and are redacted in collections. This means that as well as their internal nature, which may and often does itself contain problematizations and conflicts of values, a collection as a whole clearly does this. Yes, perhaps individual stories, especially the long ones, were read or heard separately, but they would necessarily have been read or heard as coming from a collection, many or most of which the readership/audience would have been familiar with and remembered.' (pp.12-13)

Collins does not elaborate on this claim, despite saying (p.21), with reference to collections, that he will 'return to the issue of diversity and unity in the conclusion (1.4.1).' Elsewhere, he puts the task off into the future: 'The kind of comparative project I am envisaging would compare and contrast the kinds of collection and context in which such wisdom literature circulated – both literary form and narrative content' (p.56). Perhaps a redactional analysis of the Jātakas, supplemented by anthropological and historical work, will one day show that Jātakas were transmitted, recited or performed in groups to highlight value conflicts. But Collins does not provide any reason to believe that this might be the case. And since he provides no evidence for value conflicts, apart from that between kingship and renunciation, his comparative project would appear dubious.

2b. Kingship

With regard to kingship, Collins claims that the Jātakas sometimes adopt a more pragmatic approach which exemplifies dhamma 1:

> Buddhist advice to kings in dhamma 1 tells them to not to pass judgment in haste or anger, but appropriately, such that the punishment fits the crime. (p.7)

In connection with this Collins notes that in 'a number of places in Pali an executioner's block, gaṇḍikā, is, astonishingly, prefixed with dhamma-, so that the compound is perhaps best translated here as "block of justice".' (p.8). Although Collins does not return to this topic – despite claiming 'I shall tell one of these stories below' (p.8) – his previous book, *Nirvana and other Buddhist Felicities* (1998: 459), refers to the use of the *dhamma-gaṇḍikā* in the *Janasandha Jātaka* (Ja 468). Collins there claims that this story 'is a striking example of how different are the meanings of the word Dhamma in Mode 1 and in Mode 2.'

This is not an accurate interpretation of the *Janasandha Jātaka*, however, in which Prince Janasandha destroys the executioner's block (Ja IV.176: *dhamma-gaṇḍikaṃ bhedāpetvā*). Since the Bodhisatta is here an agent of non-violence opposed to capital punishment, it would seem that this Jātaka promotes the triumph of absolute Buddhist values (dhamma 2) over the norms of Indian kingship (dhamma 1). The same is true of the *Maṇicora Jātaka* (Ja 194), in which a wicked king wishes to behead the Bodhisatta, but is himself beheaded through the intervention of the god Sakka. The story does not advise the use of the *dhamma-gaṇḍikā*, but shows that it is used against the evil-doer; the principle of direct karmic retribution is implied.

These two stories undermine Collins' claims about dhamma 1. But Collins also points out that the principle of reciprocity, a subtler form of dhamma 1 not confined to kingship, is also mentioned in the Jātakas:

> Justified violence is, of course, explicit in all the stories where a king hands out justice. The ethical and narrative principle of reciprocity, central to dhamma 1, requires it, since crime is inevitable in the quotidian world. (p.34)

Although *Wisdom as a Way of Life* does not elaborate the principle of reciprocity, the same argument can be found in *Nirvana and other Buddhist Felicities*. Once again, however, the Jātakas which Collins believes advise the principle of reciprocity do nothing of the sort. Collins claims (1998: 451) that in the *Puṭabhatta* and *Godha Jātaka*s (Ja 223, 333) the Bodhisatta teaches reciprocity: to 'respect someone who respects (you), share with someone who shares with you; do a favour for someone who returns it' etc. These stanzas on reciprocity certainly exist in Ja 223/333 (Ja II.205, III.108) but they are not given as advice. They are instead words of warning, which the Bodhisatta uses to shock a selfish king into seeing the error of his ways. The principle of reciprocity is merely a stratagem, a sort of 'skill in means', in other words, used to elicit core Buddhist values of pity and compassion, as befits the occasion.

2c. Aśokan Dhamma

The principle of reciprocity is also mentioned in Collins' discussion of the *Sāma Jātaka* (Ja 540), 'a fairy story that expresses and celebrates an important virtue of dhamma 1, caring for parents' (p.34). Parental care is frequently mentioned in Jātakas which urge individuals (often kings) to 'practise Dhamma' (*dhammaṃ cara*) in the sense of acting righteously towards such groups as one's parents, children and wives, ascetics and Brahmins, towns and countries, friends and associates, elephants and army, villages and towns, kingdoms and countries, birds and beasts and so on.[1] These teachings obviously resemble Aśoka's Dhamma, but this does not mean that they are not 'specifically Buddhist'.

The injunctions to 'practise Dhamma' are nothing more than elaborations of the *Sigālovāda Sutta* (DN 31). This foundational 'skill in means' discourse generalises Buddhist values into a non-denominational form, using a set of categories similar to those used in the Jātakas (parents, children, wives etc.). Although the layman Sigāla continues to carry out his ritual acts as before, by following the Buddha's teachings on how to do it properly he acts in accord with Buddhist values.[2] The same is true of the Jātaka advice to 'practise *dhamma*': it is a way of behaving like a Buddhist without knowing it; when applied to rulers it becomes almost a charter for Buddhist kingship.

[1] E.g. Ja I.152, Ja IV.421.

[2] Gombrich (2006: 81): 'the Buddha constantly slips new ethical wine into the old brahminical bottles: pretending to interpret traditional ritual, he in fact abolishes it.'

The tendency to read Aśoka's Dhamma as non-Buddhist just because it does not mention Buddhist doctrine (the Four Truths and so on) is fundamentally mistaken. Aśoka's edicts are saturated with Buddhist references,[3] which is hardly surprising given his claim to have received instruction from the Buddhist Sangha, and even his listing of a few favourite texts.[4] When Aśoka advises his officials to 'practise the middle' (*majhaṃ paṭipādayema*),[5] what else could it be but a political extension of the Middle Way?

It is unrealistic to suppose that Aśoka formulated 'his' Dhamma all by himself. A more plausible interpretation is that Aśoka's Dhamma was an elaboration of the approach to Buddhist values found in the Jātakas, itself a reworking of the *Sigālovāda Sutta*.[6] Thus the Jātaka advice to 'practise *dhamma*' with regard to parents etc. is not an example of dhamma 1, but was an extension of Buddhist 'skill in means' which came to be applied by Aśoka across India. Both the Dhamma of the Jātakas and Aśokan Dhamma are quintessentially Buddhist, the former providing an ideology for kingship realised by the latter.

2d. Paccekabuddhas

Collins claims that Paccekabuddhas teach 'what is right in everyday human life … In *The Birth Stories* pacceka buddhas do teach dhamma. However, this is dhamma 1' (p.17). While it is true that Paccekabuddhas do not teach the Eightfold Path or the Four Truths – a concern of Buddhas alone – in all other respects Paccekabuddhas are connected to 'supererogatory' rather than 'quotidian' values. As Appleton (2018: 4-5) has pointed out, these include the benefits of renunciation, the importance of dispassion, the necessity of controlling the sense faculties, the avoidance of attachment to sensual pleasure and so on. Collins provides no evidence to support his claim that Paccekabuddhas were a means of introducing non-Buddhist values into the Jātakas.

[3] See Sujato & Brahmali (2015: 103ff) and Wynne (2015: 103-04) on the psychological aspect of Aśoka's edicts.

[4] See MRE 3 (Bairāṭ); Sujato & Brahmali (2015: 105).

[5] RE 13, Kalinga; Sujato and Brahmali (2015: 104).

[6] See Gombrich (2006: 131): 'Some scholars have questioned Asoka's Buddhism on the grounds that he never mentions nibbāna or other key concepts of Buddhist soteriology. Our description of Buddhist lay religiosity, both in the Canon and after, proves that this objection is foolish.'

2e. A False Dichotomy and Buddhist Universalism

In his preface, Dan Arnold notes that 'in *Wisdom as a Way of Life*, the basic distinction between systematic and narrative thought remains central' (p.xiii). This distinction is indeed a major underlying feature of Part One. It forms the basis of the binary opposition between the Suttas and Vinaya, on the one hand, and the Jātakas on the other; whereas the former are the source of transcendent aspirations expressed in systematic form (dhamma 2), the latter are narratives without a Buddha, and exemplify a different set of values (dhamma 1):

> Paññā in quotidian dhamma 1 is skill is some particular domain. In The Birth Stories there is no Buddha, so naturally no dhamma 2 of the kind exemplified and promoted in the Discourses (Suttas) and Monastic Rules (Vinaya) texts, although the motif of renunciatory askēsis certainly is. (p.8)

Collins draws a sharp distinction between the Jātakas and the Buddha/canonical teaching. But this is a false dichotomy. The Pali Suttas are concerned with much more than transcendent or ascetic values, and are also mostly expressed in a narrative form; they frequently narrate tales of piety, faith, devotion, stream-entry and so on. The Jātakas extend this Suttanta style of spiritual teaching, and are not typologically or didactically distinct from it.

A good example of this is the 'ten *dhamma*s of a king' (*dasa rājadhamma*): giving, virtue, liberality, honesty, gentleness, austerity, non-anger, non-violence, forbearance and concord.[7] Collins states (p.33) that this list is a 'very common motif throughout the Birth Stories'. But he fails to see that it is a broadly ascending set of virtues which bridges lay and ascetic ideals, and so brings absolute Buddhist values into the domain of kingship. It could perhaps be regarded as an example of what Max Weber called 'inner-worldly asceticism', and is typical of the universal nature of early Buddhist teaching.

The dichotomy between dhamma 1 and dhamma 2 is false, therefore, and obscures the fact that the Jātakas merely extend the style and content of Suttanta teaching. A good example of this is the *Kukkura Jātaka* (Ja 22), a tale in which the Bodhisatta is reborn as leader of a pack of stray dogs. When the stray dogs get set up by the palace dogs for a crime they did not commit, the king issues an order to have them killed. The Bodhisatta-dog then sneaks into

[7] E.g. Ja III.274, III.320, III.412, V.378 etc.

the palace to fix the conflict of interest (not values), but initially hides under the throne, just like a scared animal, before emerging to teach the king.

This Jātaka is a parable showing that conflicts of interest are inevitable, but can be difficult to understand and so often result in poor judgments and bad policy. But there is no worldly wisdom for aspiring rulers. Instead, the Bodhisatta-dog advises the king to 'practise *dhamma*' with regard to one's parents etc., before establishing him in virtue (*sīla*), a ubiquitous feature of the Jātakas. The king thereupon grants safety to all creatures (Ja I.178: *sabbasattānaṃ abhayaṃ datvā*), makes merit for the rest of his life and on death ascends to heaven. This Jātaka thus teaches a sort of moral spirituality that harmonises with Buddhist cosmology; like the Jātakas in general, it is standard Buddhism in all but name.

The *Kukkura Jātaka* is a good guide to the nature of Dhamma in the Jātakas. Collins' claim (p.55) that these tales belong to 'wisdom literature as a cross-civilizational category' is simply a mistake, and a very strange one at that. Historical studies have shown that rulers used the Jātakas for ideological rather than practical purposes. Thai monarchs, going back as far as King Lithai in the Sukothai period (c.1361 AD), valued the Jātakas in so far as they allowed kings to portray themselves in the image of the Bodhisatta, and so promote an ideal of royal authority and charisma based the Bodhisatta's accumulation of 'spiritual perfections' (*pāramī*).[8] No doubt Buddhist monks provided some of the statecraft and worldly wisdom which kings needed, in the forms of Nīti and Dhamma-sattha texts. The Jātakas served a different end, one that was more ideological and specifically Buddhist.

3. Collins' claims about dhamma 1, which amount to a misunderstanding of the Jātakas, are difficult to understand. But a couple of digressions in *Wisdom as a Way of Life* suggest that the problem stems from a faulty text-critical method.

3a. The Middle Way

In section 2.4.2, Collins discusses the First Sermon with reference to an article by Oliver Freiberger (2006). Freiberger argues that the 'middle way' of this sermon really deals with two early Buddhist tendencies: extreme asceticism versus monastic laxity (2006: 250-51). Collins uses this analysis to 'set right what is an extraordinary mistake made in so many secondary sources' (p.115).

[8] Jory 2016, particularly the section entitled 'The Doctrine of Perfections (*barami*)' in chapter 2.

This mistake is apparently to understand the Middle Way as a path 'between the life of a householder, given over to sense pleasures, and that of extreme self-mortificatory asceticism' (pp.115-16). As Collins points out, the Middle Way is advice for renouncers (*pabbajita*); the recipients of the teaching are ascetics.

Collins does not state which secondary sources have misunderstood this rather obvious point. But it leads to a very strange mistake of his own. In the First Sermon, the adjective *gammo*, 'belonging to the village (life), common, vulgar' (DOP s.v.), is used to describe 'sensual indulgence' (*kāmasukhallikānuyogo*). The commentary then interprets *gammo* as *gāmavāsīnaṃ santako* (Spk III.297), 'the property of village dwellers'. But Collins somehow believes that *gammo* qualifies 'renouncers' rather than 'sensual indulgence': 'Santako ("the property of") is satirical: these renouncers haven't renounced, they are owned by the villagers they depend on so closely for a living' (p.117). This is a bizarre error, which leads to the following claim:

> As Freiberger suggests persuasively, given that this is something specifically not to be followed by renouncers, it must refer to some kind of asceticism that the Buddha is saying should be avoided. Most likely this is a familiar South Asian stereotype: scruffy layabouts who live close to villages for the sake of an easy life and a free lunch… (p.117)

This is an unfortunate misreading of Freiberger's argument, which understands the First Sermon as a warning against non-institutional modes of asceticism, and monasticism which strays too close to household comforts. Collins' interpretation of the First Sermon in terms of modern Indian layabouts is a peculiar piece of Orientalism.

3b. The 'Rhinoceros Horn' Sutta

Another peculiarity occurs in Collins' treatment of the *Khagga-visāṇa Sutta* (pp.123-24). This verse text, third poem of the *Suttanipāta*, famously likens the wandering *bhikkhu* to the Indian rhino, in the refrain 'one should wander alone, like a horned rhinoceros (or 'like the horn of a rhinoceros')'.[9] Collins interprets as follows:

> The "One Horn of the Rhinoceros" poem certainly seems to recommend in many verses that "he [the monk] should live his life

[9] Sn pp.6-12: *eko care khagga-visāṇa-kappo*.

> alone, like the one horn of a rhinoceros." The verb is carati, which almost all translators take, literally and naïvely, as "wander," which is only one of its meanings. I discussed this verb in the previous section: cariyā is one's way of being, one's way of life. "Wander" suggests that the idea is that the monk moves around, but in fact it refers to a monk's psychological way of life, his inner mode of being, not his behavior in the outer world. (p.123)

Collins reads the verb *carati* according to the use of the noun *cariyā* in the *Visuddhimagga* (Collins, p.121), where it means something like 'mode of being'. And yet the poem betrays no trace of settled monasticism, let alone an urban context, and is not obviously addressed 'to monks who live in busy, bustling city monasteries' (Collins, p.124). It instead offers quite literal injunctions to 'resort to remote lodgings, and live/wander alone like a rhinoceros horn'.[10] What would it mean to 'live' or 'behave' like a rhino in a monastery anyway? The verb *carati* must have the sense of 'wander', the only thing about a rhino's lifestyle that a Buddhist *bhikkhu* could conceivably do.

Collins also overlooks ancient Buddhist interpretations of the poem. As Norman has pointed out (1992: 144), the poem was a source of the oldest Pali commentary, the *Niddesa*, which is so old that it is included in the Pali canon.[11] This antiquity is confirmed by the existence of another recension of the poem in the *Mahāvastu* of the Mahāsāṃghika-Lokottaravādins.[12] Both of these ancient interpretations attribute the poem's celebration of anti-monastic wandering to pre-Buddhist Paccekabuddhas. Should we understand that both wings of the ancient Buddhist tradition, Theravāda and Mahāsāṃghika alike, took the verb *carati* 'literally and naïvely'? Or is it more likely that both inherited a way of interpreting an awkward text from pre-monastic times? No doubt Theravāda monks in bustling monastic centres have long drawn inspiration from the poem. But this has nothing to do with its original meaning, which Collins was unable or unwilling to see.

4. Synchronism and the 'Pali Imaginaire'

In his consideration of the *Khagga-visāṇa Sutta*, Collins ignores facts about the text's antiquity and ancient interpretation, choosing instead to synthesise its use

[10] Sn v.72 (p.12): *sevetha pantāni senāsanāni, eko care khaggavisāṇakappo.*

[11] For the interpretation of the Niddesa, see Bodhi (2017: 420ff).

[12] For the interpretation of the *Mahāvastu*, see Senart (1882: 359) and Jones (1949: 305).

of the verb *carati* with the noun *cariyā* from the *Visuddhimagga*, a text nearly 1000 years younger. The synchronic approach to Pali texts has its uses. In *Selfless Persons* (1983) it resulted in a more sophisticated understanding of Buddhist doctrine; in *Nirvana and other Buddhist Felicities*, Collins conceptualised textual synchronism in terms of the 'Pali imaginaire', which resulted in original and useful ways of considering Buddhist values. But this method is not always appropriate; sometimes it is unhelpful and misleading to think of Buddhist texts in terms of the Pali imaginaire, which consists of

> … any and every text written (or translated into) Pali. I think it is a matter of empirical fact that, as far as the grand issues of life, death, suffering, and nirvana are concerned, all texts in Pali show a remarkable consistency, and can be treated as a single whole. (2010: 4–5)

We have seen that a synchronic approach fails when applied to canonical texts such as the *Khagga-visāṇa Sutta*. The same is true of the Jātakas. Instead of regarding this collection as a northern Indian composition stemming from pre-Aśokan times, Collins follows the interpretation found in *Nirvana and other Buddhist Felicities*, which discusses the Jātakas alongside medieval Nīti texts (manuals for Buddhist kingship) to form an overall impression of Theravāda advice to kings. In *Nirvana and other Buddhist Felicities* this makes some sort of sense, since Buddhists have used the Pali canon in all sorts of ways, including political instruction, and Nīti texts draw upon the Jātakas.[13] But in *Wisdom as a Way of Life*, when the Jātakas are the focus and Nīti texts have faded away into the background, the use of the Pali imaginaire involves abstracting the Jātakas from their historical context and understanding them almost as medieval manuals for kingship.

This misapplication of the Pali imaginaire can only be regarded as a form of hermeneutical extremism. In *Nirvana and other Buddhist Felicities* (1998: xx), Collins recognised the historical difference between canonical Pali texts ('c. fourth-third C. BC') and their commentaries ('fifth-sixth C. AD, some perhaps later'). But *Wisdom as a Way of Life* rejects these necessary historical foundations. In an introductory section entitled 'On early Buddhism and Buddhaghosa's Fantasy' (p.l), Collins writes as follows:

[13] v. Hinüber (1996: 195).

> What did Buddhaghosa do, apart from writing commentaries and The Path of Purification? He created, or better put together, no doubt at least from some earlier materials, a make-believe world of the time of the Buddha, when the Great Man walked the earth and Enlightenment was readily available, sometimes after a single sermon, sometimes even after he uttered a single telling phrase. Bliss was it in that dawn to be alive. Although some pre-Buddhaghosan textual sources in languages other than Pali do exist – all of them from the first five centuries AD – almost all modern scholarly accounts of Early Buddhism, with only a very few exceptions, rely on the Pali Canon (usually translations of it, of course). I call this "Buddhaghosa's fantasy" not because I wish to criticize it or be supercilious about it, but simply as a phrase depicting the Pali Canon as a roseate textual world of the imagination collected and constructed by Buddhaghosa, as "The Early Days" … (p.lv)

The notion that Buddhaghosa 'collected and constructed' the Pali canon, and so created 'a make-believe world of the time of the Buddha', is simply wrong.[14] But it can be discounted as a strange bias, for as Justin McDaniels notes, Collins' attacks on the study of early Buddhism were virtually 'a vendetta' (p.lii) which led him to 'lash out at times at his former self and his early training. It seemed almost to me like a type of reckoning, a settling of scores with youthful indulgences and hesitations' (p.li). Unfortunately for Collins, this vendetta, and the resulting ahistorical approach to Pali texts, undermines *Wisdom as a Way of Life*. Prose stories must have accompanied the Jātaka verses from the beginning; they were not invented by Buddhaghosa or any other redactor of the commentaries.

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Despite these problems, *Wisdom as a Way of Life* is not without its merits. Collins is right to stress the literary merit of the Jātakas, and the subtle problems these stories address, such as the conflict of values between worldly life (especially kingship) and renunciation, which suggests an ironic awareness of the tradition's sacred ideals. Even if Theravāda kings used the Jātakas for ideological purposes, their charm and meaning resides largely in the real-world scenarios envisioned

[14] On the antiquity of the Pali canon see Sujato and Brahmali (2015) and Wynne (2005, 2018).

(if animal stories can be regarded as realistic). Collins was right to notice this, but misguided in conceptualising it in terms of 'dhamma 1'. It is also true that the civilising impetus of Buddhism is often overlooked; Theravāda studies would certainly benefit from further contributions from this perspective. Moreover, such things as modes of piety and bodily deportment are often overlooked in studies of Buddhist meditation. The 'Theravāda civilisations project' is a good idea, and Collins has pointed towards fruitful lines of future enquiry.

But these positives must be balanced against other regrettable aspects of the book: the many mistakes of fact and perspective, the misconceived analysis of Part One, the lack of analysis in Part Two, and the general disconnection between the two parts. Above all, Collins' rejection of textual history is a serious mistake. The synchronic study of the Pali canon, especially as essentialised into the 'Pali imaginaire', is a blunt tool of analysis that can be easily misapplied. In *Wisdom as a Way of Life* this approach has resulted in a misreading of the Jātakas. And this in turn obscures what was the original project in Buddhist civilisation: the elaboration of Buddhist universalism in the Jātakas, and its appropriation by Aśoka into a state ideology which changed the culture of classical India and beyond.

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