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## Early Buddhism, Asceticism, and the Politics of the Middle Way

*Oliver Freiberger*

Among the various religious and ascetic groups of ancient India, the early Buddhist community is well known for its critical stance toward asceticism.<sup>1</sup> While cultivating a certain “moderate” ascetic lifestyle themselves, early Buddhists are usually portrayed as being critical toward the severe ascetic practices of contemporary groups. This critical view is particularly manifested in the doctrine of the Middle Way, which describes the way between the “extremes” of indulging in sensual pleasures and of practicing severe asceticism. As a major issue of the Buddha’s first *dharma* talk, this concept can be considered a core doctrine of early Buddhism. In this chapter, I discuss aspects of the critical view that early Buddhists direct toward asceticism and juxtapose these respective accounts with early Buddhist statements that are in favor of severe ascetic practices. Examining this tension as a struggle between two camps in the early Buddhist community, I conclude by raising questions about the politics that may have shaped the doctrine of the Middle Way.

### The Early Buddhist Critique of Asceticism

In order to examine the critique of severe asceticism, I focus on ascetic practices collected in three lists, each of which is quoted several times in early Buddhist literature. The first list comprises

the ascetic practices performed by the Buddha-to-be before his Awakening; the second list is a collection of practices that are usually ascribed to non-Buddhist ascetics; and the third list contains the so-called *dhutaṅga* or *dhutaṅga* practices.

### *The Bodhisattva's Asceticism*

According to the Buddhist tradition, the Buddha himself had undergone extreme fasting practices before his Awakening, by which he had attracted five other ascetics to become his followers. Several passages in the canonical texts describe these ascetic practices (*duṣkaracaryā*) of the Bodhisattva,<sup>2</sup> as follows: While clenching the teeth and pressing the tongue against the palate, he subdues, restrains, and dominates the mind, all of which causes much bodily pain. He carries on by practicing the more painful nonbreathing meditation (*appānaka jhāna*). When he considers that he should desist from all food (*sabbaso āhārupaccheda*), gods appear and announce that they would keep him alive with divine essences if he ceased eating. Therefore he decides to take food little by little (*thokaṃ thokaṃ*). What follows in the text is a detailed description of how the body of the Bodhisattva begins to grow thin and weak. In his report, the Buddha vividly describes, for example, how he had wanted to touch the skin of his belly but took hold of his backbone instead.<sup>3</sup> While practicing this abstinence, the Bodhisattva recognizes that there is no worse asceticism than this. Eventually he realizes that, “[b]y this severe austerity, I do not reach states of further-men, the excellent knowledge and vision befitting the ariyans. Could there be another way to awakening?”<sup>4</sup> He remembers his childhood days when he once, while sitting in the shade of a tree, entered the first meditation (*jhāna*), and he immediately realizes that this was the right way to Awakening. He starts eating again, whereupon his five followers, disappointed, leave him alone. Shortly after, he sits down under the Bo-tree and finally attains liberation.

It is evident from this short sketch, and also from the respective textual contexts, that this description is meant to illustrate the soteriological uselessness of ascetic practices.<sup>5</sup> Another text continues the story of the Buddha.<sup>6</sup> After his Awakening, he meets the five ascetics who used to be his followers and delivers his first *dharma* talk, the famous “sermon of Benares.” This instruction basically consists of the emphasis of his newly gained status and of two well-known concepts, the Middle Way (*majjhimā paṭipadā*) and the four Noble Truths (*ariyasaccāni*). Seen in the context of the Buddha’s previous experiences, the concept of the Middle Way appears to be a clear and logical inference. Neither has he been capable of attaining liberation as a “worldly”

man, indulging in sense-pleasures, nor by extreme asceticism. The statement that by performing these ascetic practices one does “not reach states of further men” clearly implies a criticism of the practices; only after abandoning them does the Bodhisattva attain liberation.

### *The List of “Non-Buddhist” Ascetic Practices*

A second description of severe asceticism can be found in a list of practices that appears several times in the texts and is usually ascribed to non-Buddhist ascetics. In the *Mahāsīhanāda Sutta*, the Buddha himself claims to have performed those practices.

In that, Sāriputta, there was this for me through asceticism:

I was unclothed, flouting life’s decencies, licking my hands [after meals], not one to come when asked to do so, not one to stand still when asked to do so.

I did not consent [to accept food] offered to [me] or specially prepared for [me] nor to [accept] an invitation [to a meal]. I did not accept [food] straight from a cooking pot or pan, nor within the threshold, nor among the faggots, nor among the rice-pounders, nor when two people are eating, nor from a pregnant woman, nor from one giving suck, nor from one co-habiting with a man, nor from gleanings, nor near where a dog is standing, nor where flies are swarming, nor fish, nor meat [*na macchaṃ na maṃsaṃ*].

I drank neither fermented liquor nor spirits nor rice gruel. I was a one-house-man, a one-piece-man, or a two-house-man, a two-piece-man [. . .] or a seven-house-man, a seven-piece-man. I subsisted on one little offering, and I subsisted on two little offerings [. . .] and I subsisted on seven little offerings. I took food only once a day [*ekāhikaṃ*], and once in two days [. . .] and once in seven days. Then I lived intent on the practice of eating rice at regular fortnightly intervals.

I came to be one feeding on potherbs or feeding on millet or on wild rice or on snippets of skin or on water-plants or on the red powder of rice husks or on the discarded scum of rice on the boil or on the flour of oil seeds or grass or cowdung. I was one who subsisted on forest roots and fruits, eating the fruits that had fallen.

I wore coarse hempen cloths, and I wore mixed cloths, and I wore cerements [*chavadussāni*], and I wore rags taken from the dust

heap [*paṇṣukulāni*], and I wore tree-bark fibre, and I wore antelope skins, and I wore strips of antelope skin, and I wore cloths of *kusa*-grass, and I wore cloths of bark, and I wore cloths of wood shavings, and I wore a blanket of human hair, and I wore a blanket of animal hair, and I wore owl's feathers.

I was one who plucked out the hair of his head and beard, intent on the practice of plucking out the hair of head and beard. I became one who stood upright, refusing a seat; I became one who squats on his haunches, intent on the practice of squatting. I became one for covered thorns; [he uses a plank bed; he sleeps on the bare ground; he sleeps always on one side, he is a "dust-and-dirt-wearer"; he lives and sleeps in the open air (*abbhokāsika*); whatsoever seat is offered to him, that he accepts (*yathāsanthatika*); he is a "filth-eater"; he is a "non-drinker"]<sup>7</sup> and I was intent on the practice of going down to the water to bathe up to three times in an evening.

Thus in many a way did I live intent on the practice of mortifying and tormenting my body. This then was for me, Sāriputta, through asceticism.<sup>8</sup>

Roughly summarized, this list comprises the violation of decencies; several restrictions concerning the acceptance, the amount, and the types of food; restrictions concerning the types of clothes; and a few other practices of mortifying the body. In his study on the ascetic exercises of the Bodhisattva, Julius Dutoit doubts that this description, contrary to the accounts mentioned in the section above, is an authentic report of the practices performed by the Buddha-to-be.<sup>9</sup> He notes that the multitude of practices could hardly be performed seriously within merely six years, and he points out that it was difficult to imagine one person performing the partly contradictory practices one after the other. It is, for example, indeed puzzling to note that the Bodhisattva lived "unclothed" (*acelaka*) and also wore a number of different ascetic garments. Dutoit's major argument is the fact that this list appears in other contexts where it makes more sense, describing practices of non-Buddhist ascetics. He believes that the compilers of the texts have ascribed the practices to the Bodhisattva to illustrate that their leader had passed through all the ascetic practices of the time and has eventually rejected them. According to Dutoit, it was a method to rebuff the allegation that Buddhists were not serious recluses. Although the latter may be debatable, it seems hard to dismiss Dutoit's former argument, that the description appears to represent

the practices of various types of ascetics rather than the ascetic career of one individual.

There are some other accounts of this list in the canonical texts. In the *Cūḷadhammasamādāna Sutta* of the *Majjhima Nikāya*, the list illustrates the “undertaking of *dhamma* that is both suffering in the present as well as resulting in suffering in the future.” The ascetic who performs these practices “at the breaking up of the body after dying, arises in a sorrowful state, a bad bourn, the abyss, Niraya hell.”<sup>10</sup> The *sutta* continues, saying that the other way leading to this bad fate is the indulgence in sense-pleasures. Contrary to these two types of behavior, entering the four meditations (*jhāna*) and being born in a heaven-world is described as the “undertaking of *dhamma* that is both happiness in the present as well as resulting in happiness in the future.”<sup>11</sup> Although the term is not mentioned, this last practice appears as the “middle way” between severe asceticism and indulgence in sensual pleasures.

A similar passage from the *Aṅguttara Nikāya* is explicit. There the practices of the above-quoted list constitute the way of “burning away” (*nijjhāma*), as opposed to the indulgence in sensual pleasures. The third way between them is the “middle way” (*majjhima paṭipadā*), which here consists of contemplating body, thoughts, feelings, and *dhammas*.<sup>12</sup> The directly following, parallel *sutta* declares further meditation activities and the Eightfold Path to be the “middle way.”<sup>13</sup> The close relationship of these passages with the sermon of Benares and thus the critical stance toward such ascetic practices is obvious.

The *Udumbarikāsīhanāda Sutta* contains the list as well. Here the ascetic (*paribbājaka*) Nigrodha meets the Buddha and asks him about his *dhamma* and the instructions to his followers. The Buddha prefers to discuss Nigrodha’s own doctrine. Nigrodha responds: “We, lord, profess self-mortifying austerities [*tapo-jigucchā*]; we hold them to be essential; we cleave to them. In what does the fulfilment, in what does the non-fulfilment of them consist?”<sup>14</sup> When in his reply the Buddha first presents the above-mentioned list of ascetic practices, Nigrodha’s confirms that they are indeed the *tapo-jigucchā* practices. This indicates that the Buddha is well aware of the ascetic lifestyle of his opponent; in the rhetoric of the instruction, he demonstrates his authority also for the following statements. The Buddha continues to claim that those practices can lead to various depravities (*upakkilese*) such as complacency, arrogance, disdain, envy, dishonesty, deceit, and hypocrisy.<sup>15</sup> Surprisingly, he adds that if the ascetic did not lapse into these bad attitudes, the ascetic practices could be regarded as “pure” (*parisuddha*). Again, Nigrodha confirms everything and declares that such a pure practice would reach its summit and its essence. The Buddha disagrees; he declares that the summit and essence of

asceticism consisted of the abandonment of violence, theft, lying, and craving for sensual pleasures. By this self-restraint the ascetic can continue his meditation upon the detachment from worldly desires; he overcomes the five hindrances, pervades with kindness, pity, sympathy, and equanimity the four quarters of the world; he attains knowledge about his former existences; and he becomes able to see with his divine eye all creatures as they arise and pass away according to their *kamma*. This, the Buddha claims, was the summit and essence of ascetic practice. Coming back to Nigrodha's first question, he declares that he instructs his own followers in matters of an even higher and more excellent degree. Hearing this, Nigrodha's companions exclaim that they knew of nothing higher beyond the teaching of their teachers.<sup>16</sup>

This *sutta* is particularly seminal for examining the critical stance toward asceticism. The Buddha argues that the ascetic practices collected in the above-quoted list, known as *tapo-jigucchā*, can easily lead the ascetic to bad attitudes such as arrogance and pride. Regardless of this obvious disadvantage, he does not entirely neglect them but states that they could be carried out "purely." We may assume that this is merely a rhetorical concession, for the Buddha immediately adds that the "true" *tapo-jigucchā* consists of other practices—that is, of ethical behavior and meditation. He thus reinterprets the term and replaces ascetic with ethical and contemplative practices. Only these, not the practices previously known as *tapo-jigucchā*, cause the positive effects.

In his argument, the Buddha silently deprives the severe ascetic practices of any value. Although not rejecting them in principle, he discusses their alleged disadvantages in great length and subordinates them under a self-defined "true" asceticism, which consists of Buddhist ethics and meditation and which is still subordinate to teachings of a "higher degree." At the end of the Buddha's argument, little is left of those practices.

In the *Kassapasihanāda Sutta* of the *Dīgha Nikāya*, we encounter a very similar way of dealing with severe asceticism. Here the Buddha rejects the view that the practices of the list quoted above constituted (true) asceticism (*sāmaññā/brāhmaññā*). Instead, he states, a person who has destroyed the *āsavas* (the "intoxications" of craving, hatred, and delusion) is to be considered a (true) *samaṇa* or *brāhmaṇa*.<sup>17</sup> In early Buddhist texts, "destruction of the *āsavas*," which is realized by ethics and awareness attained in meditation, is a synonym for attaining *nibbāna/nirvāṇa*. According to the Buddha, the hardness of asceticism lies not so much in the severity of ascetic practices ("It would be quite possible for a householder, or for the son of a householder, or for any one, down to the slave girl who carries the water-jar" to carry out this kind of asceticism), but rather in the truly difficult task of destroying the

*āsavas*.<sup>18</sup> The Buddha devalues ascetic practices and presents the accomplishments of Buddhist ethics and meditation as a harder but more efficient way to attain liberation.

These *suttas* reveal a rhetorical device of the Buddha that is encountered frequently in the texts. He contrasts bodily practices with meditative accomplishments, outward behavior with inward concentration, and descriptive accounts with normative statements. Needless to say, the latter always appear as superior to the former. It is certainly legitimate to doubt the fairness of this method, but contrasting the practices of the opponent with one's own norms has always been an efficient method to demonstrate superiority.<sup>19</sup>

It appears curious that the respective opponents in the *sutta* would not notice this obvious strategy and are so easily converted. We must therefore also take the function of these texts into consideration. They should not be considered accurate records of historical events but rather documents of a certain type of religious advocacy that was common in early Buddhism, perhaps even used by the historical Buddha himself. By demonstrating the methods of this advocacy, the authors provide Buddhists who study the texts with arguments against rival religious claims.

### *The Dhutaṅga/Dhutagūṇa Practices*

The *dhutaṅga* or *dhutagūṇa* practices form a third list of severe ascetic practices.<sup>20</sup> Some of them are the subject matter of the famous story of the “evil *bhikkhu*” Devadatta. According to the report in the Cullavagga section of the Pāli *Vinaya Piṭaka*, Devadatta intends to split the monastic community (*saṅgha*). He insists that the Buddha should require all members to cultivate five practices throughout their lives: living as a forest-dweller (*ārañṇaka*), not in the neighborhood of a village; living as a beggar for alms (*piṇḍapātika*), instead of accepting invitations; wearing rag robes (*pamsukūlika*), instead of accepting a robe from a householder; living at the root of a tree (*rukhamūlika*), not under a roof; avoiding fish and meat (*macchamamsa*).

Devadatta expects the Buddha to reject all these practices, but receives a different instruction. The Buddha states that every member of the *saṅgha* is free to perform the first three practices, but not obliged to do so. He permits the fourth practice (*rukhamūlika*) for only eight months, obviously excluding the rainy season break in which *saṅgha* members are supposed to stay in one residence. And he declares fish and meat to be pure when the animals are not seen, heard, or suspected to have been killed for the sake of the *bhikkhu*. Despite this explanation, Devadatta declares that the Buddha did not allow these practices, which led to the first schism in the *saṅgha*. Only a little later



the prominent *bhikkhus* Sāriputta and Moggallāna were able to bring back Devadatta's 500 followers.<sup>21</sup>

This story contains another crucial demonstration of the early Buddhist critique of asceticism. According to this account, the Buddha refused to impose the *dhutaṅga* practices on the members of his community. For the most part, he declares the practices to be optional for Buddhist *bhikkhus* and *bhikkhunīs*, thereby demonstrating the contrast to other ascetics who propagate the imperative of severe asceticism. For the Buddha, such practices "are only worthwhile if they are undertaken to cultivate 'being content with little.' And that can be cultivated without stereotyped asceticism."<sup>22</sup> In this account, ascetic practices are not fully rejected; but because of their non-obligatory character, they lose their effectiveness for attaining the religious goal. The ascetic practices are criticized and rejected not as possible practices, but as requirements for liberation. Since the way to liberation is crucial in early Buddhist doctrine, they become in fact irrelevant.

In another passage of the Cullavagga, the criticism is more explicit. Here, the Buddha forbids wearing rag robes (*pamsukūla*), which is considered an offence of wrong-doing (*dukkata*).<sup>23</sup> This openly critical stance toward the *dhutaṅgas* is to be found also in the relatively late Vinaya supplement *Parivāra* and in the *Visuddhimagga*, an outline of "orthodox" Theravāda doctrine composed by Buddhaghosa in the fifth century C.E. Both works either question the motives of the ascetics, allowing only decent and law-abiding *bhikkhus* the cultivation of the *dhutaṅgas*, or deprive the practices of their severity by offering mild versions.<sup>24</sup>

### *Aspects of Criticism*

The early Buddhist critique of asceticism, as it becomes manifest in the way Buddhist authors deal with the three lists of ascetic practices, has several aspects. Regarding the contents of the criticism, the texts frequently point out the soteriological uselessness of such practices. The most authoritative account is that of the Buddha himself, having undertaken severe asceticism before his Awakening; if he was not able to attain liberation by performing these practices, no future Buddhist would be. The practices are also regarded as the incorrect way to behave religiously; they are as "extreme" as the indulgence in sensual pleasures. In favor of the Middle Way, both extremes are to be avoided.

While dealing with the critique of asceticism, we also have to consider the rhetorical dimension. We came across accounts that show the Buddha's refusing to reject the ascetic practices in principle, in order not to offend the sensibilities of his ascetic audience. Nevertheless, we saw how he silently deprives

asceticism of its value while arguing for a “true” asceticism instead, which basically consists of ethics and meditation. With this rhetorical device, he reportedly converted many from other ascetic groups.

Finally, we must not forget the didactical function of our texts. The *suttas* are composed and preserved not for any ascetics but for Buddhists themselves. By studying them, *bhikkhus* are trained to stand their ground in debates with opponents and, in our case, with advocates of severe asceticism.

### Ascetics among Buddhists

Given those strong reservations against severe asceticism, it is surprising to note that a number of passages in the same canonical texts seem to advocate it. We find practices from all three lists that are reportedly cultivated by members of the Buddhist *saṅgha*. I begin by discussing the *dhutaṅgas/dhuta-guṇas*, then examine the practices usually ascribed to non-Buddhist ascetics, and finally mention a method that enabled Buddhists to legitimize even the ascetic phase in the biography of the Buddha.

#### *The Dhutaṅga/Dhuta-guṇa Practices as Cultivated by Members of the Saṅgha*

The above-mentioned story of Devadatta, viewed from a different angle, can serve as the first account for asceticism among *saṅgha* members. In this story, the Buddha does not fully reject the *dhutaṅga* practices but allows its cultivation for those who tend towards a more radical way of life, for “monks of ascetic temperament.” We can conclude, at first glance, that early Buddhists considered the *dhutaṅgas* still within the frame of the Middle Way, although on the edge, as they are explicitly meant to be optional, not obligatory. Thus they seem to “represent a limit to what the Theravādin tradition will sanction by way of mortifying the flesh.”<sup>25</sup>

Looking at this text critically, however, we may also assume that the dispute between Devadatta and the Buddha reflects two voices within early Buddhism, one demanding more radical practices and one rejecting them. Reading the story in this way, we can sketch a profile of those opposing severe asceticism: they were not powerful enough to reject it completely but had the influence to arrange the story as a compromise that was still tolerable. The portrayal of Devadatta’s evil intention to split the *saṅgha* by demanding severe practices for all members clearly shows that the composers of this story are not in favor of the practices. But apparently they had to deal with a demand

for them. We can therefore assume that a group of *bhikkhus* and *bhikkhunīs*, in our story represented by Devadatta, in fact performed these practices. This group must have been significant; otherwise, the skeptical authors would not have had to compromise. The account thus seems to suggest that a number of *saṅgha* members lived “on the edge” of the Middle Way.

The *dhutaṅgas* are mentioned several times in the early Buddhist texts; the list of the Devadatta story is the shortest one but certainly not the oldest. The *Sappurisa Sutta* of the *Majjhima Nikāya* mentions nine practices, including the first four of Devadatta’s list: *ārañṇaka* (forest-dwelling), *paṃsukūlika* (wearing a rag robe), *piṇḍapātika* (alms-begging), *rukkhamūlika* (staying at the foot of a tree), *sosānika* (staying in a cemetery), *abbhokāsika* (staying in the open air), *nesajjika* (remaining in a sitting posture), *yathāsanthatika* (sitting on the seat offered), and *ekāsanika* (eating only once [a day]).<sup>26</sup> In this *sutta*, the Buddha focuses on persons who, because of certain qualities or expert knowledge, exalt themselves and disparage others. Nine of these mentioned persons are experts in the respective *dhutaṅgas*. Although the *sutta* claims that none of the qualities were essential for attaining liberation, the context clearly shows that practicing the nine *dhutaṅgas* was common and accepted among Buddhists of the time—in the same way that expert-knowledge in the Vinaya or the *suttas* was. This is true, furthermore, also for the accounts of the later works *Parivāra* and *Visuddhimagga*, mentioned previously. Regardless of their critical stance, the fact that they list even thirteen practices and deal with them in detail, shows that the *dhutaṅgas* must have been popular among members of the *saṅgha*.<sup>27</sup>

We also have positive evidence for this assumption. In the *Theragāthā*, the *thera* Bhaddiya claims to practice all thirteen *dhutaṅgas* (and even more). He contrasts this with his previous life in luxury, and it is obvious that Bhaddiya performs these practices wholeheartedly. For him, the *dhutaṅgas*, combined with meditation, constitute correct Buddhist practice.<sup>28</sup> Other *Thera-* and *Therīgāthā* report practices similar to or identical with the *dhutaṅgas*. Reginald Ray points out that “it is clear, that the *dhutaṅga*-type practices, in either classical or some other form, define the lifestyle of the forest renunciants of the *Theragāthā* and *Therīgāthā*.”<sup>29</sup>

In the *Mahāsakuludāyī Sutta* of the *Majjhima Nikāya*, the Buddha tells the wandering ascetic Udāyin that some of his (the Buddha’s) disciples performed certain ascetic practices, among them some *dhutaṅgas*: *paṃsukūlika*, *piṇḍapātika*, *rukkhamūlika*, *abbhokāsika*, and *ārañṇaka*. He points out that he does not cultivate them all the time and that they are thus not the reason why his followers revere him.<sup>30</sup> Despite this statement, the Buddha in this passage acknowledges the *dhutaṅgas* and those *saṅgha* members who practice them.

In the *Kassapa Saṃyutta* of the *Saṃyutta Nikāya*, the *bhikkhu* Mahākassapa portrays himself as practicing some *dhutaṅgas* (*arañṇaka*, *piṇḍapātika*, *paṃsukūlika*, *tecīvarika*), and he points out that such practice had equally good effects for himself and for future generations, who will try to live according to this model. The Buddha, described in this dialogue as wearing clothes given by householders and accepting invitations, agrees with Kassapa and encourages him to continue this lifestyle.<sup>31</sup> Throughout early Buddhist literature, Mahākassapa/Mahākāśyapa is portrayed as the typical *bhikṣu*-ascetic and revered as a Buddhist “saint” for the hard life he is leading.<sup>32</sup> We can infer from this fact and from the consenting *Saṃyutta Nikāya* dialogue that this hard life was well-accepted in early Buddhism, or, at least, in some early Buddhist circles who revered Mahākassapa. In some passages, the Buddha himself is portrayed as preferring lonely and silent places in the forest (*arañña*; one of the *dhutaṅgas*), as opposed to other wandering ascetics who “talk with loud voices, with noise and clamour, carrying on childish talk of various kinds. [. . .]”<sup>33</sup>

Another set of practices, very similar to the *dhutaṅgas*, are the four *nissayas*, which according to the *Mahāvagga* of the Pāli Vinaya have to be explained to a candidate during the ordination procedure. The formula says, “Going forth is on account of meals of scraps (*piṇḍiyālopabhojana*), [. . .] on account of rag robes (*paṃsukūlacīvara*), [. . .] on account of lodging at the foot of a tree (*rukhamūlasenāsana*), [. . .] on account of cattle urine as medicine (*pūtimuttābhesajja*).”<sup>34</sup> The second and third *nissayas* are identical with two of the *dhutaṅgas*, and the first one is similar to *pattapiṇḍika* (eating bowl-food). In this Vinaya text, each of the *nissayas* is supplemented by “exceptions,” which have the effect of relaxation and ineffectiveness of the practices.<sup>35</sup> Even clearer than in the Devadatta story, we recognize two voices, one demanding the radical life of the *nissayas*, the other intending to create loopholes, up to the point that the *nissayas* are not effective anymore.

We discern these voices also in a number of rules in the Suttavibhaṅga section of the Pāli Vinaya, where the actual *pātimokkha* rule for the individual behavior of *saṅgha* members is embedded in stories and commentaries that modify its meaning. One example may suffice here. The Pācittiya rule 58 says that when a *bhikkhu* obtains a new robe, a “disfigurement” (*dubaṇṇakarāṇa*) has to be undertaken; the *bhikkhu* is instructed to dye the robe dark green, mud-color or black, thus making it “ugly” (*dubaṇṇa*).<sup>36</sup> This “disfigurement” comes close to the *nissaya* and *dhutaṅga* practice of wearing rag robes, and it clearly aims at the demonstration of the *bhikkhu*’s ascetic humility. The introductory story to this rule, however, tells us that thieves had robbed Buddhist *bhikkhus* and other ascetics. When the king’s men caught them and wanted

to return the robes, the *bhikkhus* were not able to recognize their own robes. The Buddha then issued the actual *pātimokkha* rule, apparently in order to make the Buddhist robe uniform.<sup>37</sup> It is obvious that the story replaces the ascetic aim of the rule, humility, by an identity-forming objective, the uniformity of Buddhist robes. It has been pointed out various times that, in general, the Suttavibhaṅga context in which the *pātimokkha* rules are embedded (introductory story, commentary, etc.) is much younger than the rule itself, and this seems to be true in this case as well.<sup>38</sup>

These accounts show that *dhutaṅgas/dhutagūṇas* and similar practices (*nissayas* and other Vinaya rules) were cultivated by members of the Buddhist *saṅgha*. Since not only the criticism of ascetic practices but also a positive attitude toward this lifestyle is found numerous times in the canonical texts, we may conclude that it was equally well accepted among early Buddhists. In some texts, the critics were able to reinterpret it and even deprive it of effectiveness, but its existence in the *saṅgha* is nonetheless palpable.

#### “Non-Buddhist” Ascetic Practices within the Saṅgha

Let us turn to the second list of ascetic practices dealt with in the first part of this chapter, which is frequently ascribed to non-Buddhist ascetics, especially in descriptions of the Middle Way. Comparing it to the *dhutaṅga* list, we observe remarkable consonances. Of the fourteen<sup>39</sup> *dhutaṅga* practices, four are verbatim the same in both lists,<sup>40</sup> one is almost identical,<sup>41</sup> and three are very similar.<sup>42</sup> Thus eight of fourteen *dhutaṅga* practices appear to have been performed by other ascetics. Or, to put it conversely, eight severe ascetic practices, so strongly criticized or even condemned in other passages, are approved as *dhutaṅgas* for *saṅgha* members and performed by them. The remaining six *dhutaṅgas*, not mentioned in the other list, appear to constitute, at least for the most part, a type of asceticism even more radical than the others.<sup>43</sup>

The early canonical texts comprise further accounts of severe asceticism within the Buddhist *saṅgha*. In the Theragāthā, for example, the *thera* Mudita states,

I abandoned the world for the sake of life; having obtained ordination, then I gained faith; I made an effort, having strong energy. Let this body be broken willingly; let the lumps of flesh be dissolved; let both my legs fall from the knee-joints. I shall not eat, I shall not drink, nor shall I go forth from my cell. I shall not even lie down on my side while the dart of craving is not removed. See

my energy and efforts as I dwell thus. The three knowledges have been obtained, the Buddha's teaching has been done.<sup>44</sup>

This ascetic approach appears to be even more radical than the practices of the list referring to non-Buddhist ascetics.<sup>45</sup> Some members of the *saṅgha* are reported to practice equally extreme forms, such as eating a leper's finger without disgust or doing without sleep.<sup>46</sup> One verse of the *Suttanipāta* says of the "wise *bhikkhu*" that, "[a]ffected by contact with disease, [and] by hunger, he should endure cold [and] excessive heat. Affected by them in many ways, not having any home, striving he should make a firm effort."<sup>47</sup> It is also recommended to "appear as a dull person [*jaḷa*] or a fool [*mūga*]," a habit equally well known to other Indian ascetic traditions.<sup>48</sup>

In texts of Buddhist schools other than the Theravāda, we also find evidence for this ascetic attitude. The *Mūlasarvāstivāda Vinaya* contains many accounts for ascetic *bhikkṣus*—for example, Mahākāśyapa who is not recognized as a Buddhist *bhikkṣu*, having long hair and beard and disreputable robes; he is thus turned away at the householder Anāthapiṇḍada's door. The composers of this Vinaya—unlike their Mahāyāna contemporaries<sup>49</sup>—were opposed to severe ascetic practices and tried to make its cultivation impossible, with methods similar to those discussed above. But it is telling that they mention issues like wearing shrouds, the *dhutaḡaṇa* practice of living in cemeteries, and others, while not categorically forbidding them. The ascetic reality they were facing was obviously too powerful to be ruled away.<sup>50</sup>

### *The Bodhisattva's Asceticism Reconsidered*

Interestingly, not even the strongest and most authoritative argument against severe asceticism remained undisputed. As Minoru Hara has shown, the Bodhisattva's ascetic practices have been reinterpreted in *Apadāna/Anavataptagāthā*(-like) texts. Here, the performance of these practices is explained as an expiation of evil deeds that the Bodhisattva had committed in his previous births.<sup>51</sup> Instead of being a useless and unprofitable practice and a wrong way to awakening, the Bodhisattva's severe asceticism is regarded as a step necessary for attaining liberation. Without it, these texts seem to suggest, the Bodhisattva would himself not have been ready for his Awakening.

This attempt to reinterpret the ascetic phase in the biography of the Buddha apparently reflects an attitude that is in favor of asceticism. The authors wished to provide a positive reason for the Bodhisattva's ascetic practice, and we may consider this an attempt to legitimize such practices; if it was

necessary for the Buddha to practice asceticism in order to get rid of bad *karma*, it is probably necessary for other Buddhists, too.

### The Criticism of Buddhist Ascetics and the Politics of the Middle Way

The accounts discussed thus far show that in early Buddhist literature we find statements both openly criticizing severe asceticism and clearly advocating it. How can we explain this tension? One approach could be to assume that the “authentic” teachings of the Buddha were affected by foreign influence (e.g., through ascetics entering the *saṅgha*).<sup>52</sup> In this case, however, it would be difficult to detect the “authentic” doctrine of the Buddha, and even if it were possible, it remains methodologically problematic for historians to declare that a doctrine that is advocated in Buddhist canonical texts was “non-authentic,” that is, non-Buddhist.

Another approach is to recognize a distinction between “forest Buddhism” and “monastic Buddhism” in early Buddhist history, assuming a forest-based Buddhist lifestyle as challenged by a process of “monasticization,” represented by *saṅgha* members settling down in “monasteries.”<sup>53</sup> Although for our purposes, we may wish to speak of “ascetic Buddhism” rather than “forest Buddhism”—*araññaka* is only one, not even the most common feature—this model turns out to be fruitful for our question. If the assumption of these “two Buddhisms” is correct, we are facing a struggle between Buddhists of settled monastic institutions and ascetic Buddhists performing all sorts of severe practices. In addition, our accounts of later texts indicate that despite “monasticization,” severe asceticism continued to exist throughout Buddhist history.

It is obvious from our texts that the monastic camp has a critical stance toward the radical practices. Monastic Buddhists regarded ascetic practices as incompatible with a functioning monastic institution and thus hardly acceptable. Probably because of the popularity of the ascetic *bhikkhus*, it was not possible to condemn or expel them, but they could be openly criticized.<sup>54</sup> However, we also have accounts from the other camp; *bhikkhus* complain about this criticism and the decadent life of their settled monastic colleagues.<sup>55</sup>

We saw that members of the Buddhist *saṅgha* cultivated a number of ascetic practices, which are elsewhere ascribed to non-Buddhists and criticized for being soteriologically useless. Beside the *dhutāṅgas*, some forms of asceticism within the *saṅgha* appear to be even more severe than any of the reported non-Buddhist practices. Seen in this light, it is likely that the early Buddhist

criticism of asceticism is targeted not only at non-Buddhist ascetics, but also at Buddhist ones.

If this assumption is correct, we can have a fresh look at the doctrine of the Middle Way. In order to define the “extreme” of self-torture, the authors frequently quote the list of “non-Buddhist” practices. They equate these practices with indulgence in sensual pleasures by ascribing to them the status of an “extreme” (*anta*). This rhetorical device has a polemical dimension; to be equated with those who lead a life in abundance certainly offends ascetics. However, the Middle Way doctrine ignores the fact that a number of those practices are also cultivated as *dhutaṅgas* by *saṅgha* members. These Buddhists are therefore equated with non-Buddhist ascetics and with people who indulge in sensual pleasures.

In its description, the doctrine of the Middle Way usually has a negative and a positive definition. In the negative definition, the Middle Way is contrasted with the two extremes; the positive definition describes the actual contents of the Middle Way. The contents, however, differ in their respective textual passages. To mention only some accounts discussed above: They are defined as the Eightfold Path (in the sermon of Benares); as the contemplation of body, thoughts, feelings, and *dhammas*; as certain meditation activities plus the Eightfold Path; and as entering the four meditations (*jhāna*) and being born in a heavenly world.<sup>56</sup> In addition to this, the negative and the positive definitions are factually unconnected; there is no reason why a certain meditation practice should have an inherently “middle” character or why the Eightfold Path should be a particularly “middle” one. The label “middle way” is thus derived only from the negative definition; the contents may vary.

A major reason why today the Middle Way is regarded as one of the core doctrines of early Buddhism is its prominent position in the first *dharma* talk of the Buddha, the sermon of Benares. As mentioned previously in this chapter, the sermon contains three major issues: the emphasis of the Buddha’s newly gained status, the doctrine of the Middle Way, and the Four Noble Truths. The Middle Way here contains the Eightfold Path, which is explained again a few paragraphs later as the contents of the fourth Noble Truth. This tautological account indicates that Buddhist redactors wished to link the Middle Way concept and the Four Noble Truths in the Buddha’s first talk.<sup>57</sup>

The sermon of Benares is almost as highly esteemed in textbooks on Buddhism as it is in the Buddhist tradition. Containing the major teachings of the Buddha in condensed form, it suits perfectly to evolve the major aspects of early Buddhist doctrine. This fact alone should make us suspicious regarding its historicity. It is likely that the depiction of this talk, as we have it, is not an authentic record but composed in a later period in order to present the



core doctrines in a systematic and condensed form. It seems reasonable to argue that the redactors were Buddhist scholars who felt responsible for the preservation of the word of the Buddha. As the texts have been transmitted within the monastery, it is likely that they were not members of the “ascetic camp.”

We may therefore conclude that the concept of the Middle Way was a rhetorical tool against severe asceticism; its polemical power was more important than its (varying) contents. Apparently it was created, or at least used, to criticize not only non-Buddhist ascetics but also Buddhist ones. And it is possible that monastic redactors have included this concept into the Buddha’s most authoritative first talk and linked it with the Four Noble Truths in order to strengthen their argument. This consideration does not necessarily imply that the concept of the Middle Way has been created only in the period of settled monasticism and that it does therefore not belong to the oldest Buddhist teachings; however, it is likely that the monastic scholars who were responsible for the preservation of the texts wanted to emphasize this doctrine in order to attack asceticism—non-Buddhist as well as Buddhist.

In early Buddhist literature, the ascetic practices of the three lists discussed in this chapter are often ascribed to non-Buddhists and criticized. Taking into consideration other accounts, we also observe affirmations of those and other severe ascetic practices; they are approved and endorsed by the Buddha, and members of the *saṅgha* are reported to have performed them. One plausible way of explaining this obvious tension in the texts is to assume a struggle between “ascetic Buddhism,” which advocated a forest-based, individual lifestyle, and the emerging “monastic Buddhism,” which is manifest in communities settled in monasteries. Obviously, both camps were influential enough to be represented in the texts that were handed down to us.<sup>58</sup>

If we accept such a historical situation, we may assume that the criticism of asceticism arose in the monastic camp. These Buddhists criticized ascetic practices not only of non-Buddhists, but also of their colleagues, the proponents of “ascetic Buddhism.” Likewise, the doctrine of the Middle Way may have served as a means to attack severe asceticism both within and outside the *saṅgha*; its inclusion into the first *dharma* talk of the Buddha may be regarded as a strategy to implement a moderate lifestyle in the doctrinal core of Buddhism.

The criticism has thus two directions: outward and inward. Its proponents regard severe ascetic practices as a wrong lifestyle, which, in principle, does not lead to liberation, regardless of the religious affiliation of the practitioner. Apart from this religious motivation, there may have also been sociopolitical

and economic motives for the criticism of Buddhist ascetics in particular. Individual Buddhists living an ascetic and independent life were certainly a threat to the flourishing monastic institution. Uncontrollable, they frequently called into question the alleged ongoing “secularizing” tendency of Buddhist monasticism. And despite—or because of—the monastery’s close connection to “the world,” ascetic Buddhists enjoyed great veneration from the laity, a fact that may have had a negative effect on material support for the monastery.

Sure enough, these are motives sufficient for campaigning against severe ascetics in the *saṅgha*. The Middle Way concept was a powerful tool for this, but it may have had yet another function. Based on inscriptions and other sources, Gregory Schopen has shown in various studies that members of the Buddhist *saṅgha* led a life quite different from what the canonical texts, especially the rules of the Vinaya, seem to suggest. In social reality, they were involved in “worldly affairs” of various kinds and engaged in ritual, they owned property, and they made considerable donations to Buddhist devotional sites.<sup>59</sup> Our accounts show that the opposite lifestyle, severe asceticism, was also present in all periods of early Buddhist history. While assuming that the Middle Way doctrine is targeted also at Buddhists, it is tempting to consider the possibility that the other “extreme” mentioned there, the indulgence in sensual pleasures, points to *saṅgha* members as well. The creators (or advocates) of this doctrine may have had to deal with both abhorred “extreme” practices among their own colleagues.

The politics of the Middle Way have been very successful in several respects. Eliminating the “extremes,” at least in theory, certainly was a suitable way to profile Buddhism against other religious movements and attract followers. Since the Middle Way became a major Buddhist doctrine, it has undoubtedly contributed to the great success of Buddhism in history, not unlike St. Paul’s elimination of the “extreme” ritual precepts and practices of Judaism, a strategy that enabled Christianity to become a “world religion.” Finally, it has determined the way modern scholars tend to present early Buddhists, that is, as strongly opposing severe ascetic practices and sensual pleasures and as following the Middle Way between both extremes. The textual accounts show that this description merely refers to one of several lifestyles in early Buddhism.

#### NOTES

1. I would like to thank Edeltraud Harzer for valuable comments and suggestions.

2. *Majjhima Nikāya* (MN) I 242,23–247,16; repeated in MN II 93 and MN II 212. The following description is to be found in a very similar form also in Sanskrit

works, the *Lalitavistara* (ed. Salomon Lefmann [Halle/S.: Verlag des Waisenhauses, 1902], 246–60: Adhyaya 17) and the *Mahāvastu* (ed. Émile Senart, vol. II [1890; reprint, Tokyo: Meicho-Fukyū-Kai, 1977], 121–31). Julius Dutoit compares and analyzes all these passages in his work *Die duṣkaracaryā des Bodhisattva in der buddhistischen Tradition* (Strassburg: Trübner, 1905). In this chapter, I use Pāli and Sanskrit terms generally in accordance with the respective sources. Abbreviations follow a usual standard; see Heinz Bechert, ed., *Abkürzungsverzeichnis zur buddhistischen Literatur in Indien und Südostasien*, Sanskrit-Wörterbuch der buddhistischen Texte aus den Turfan-Funden, Beiheft 3 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1990).

3. MN I 246,3–5.

4. “Na kho panāhaṃ imāya kaṭukāya dukkarakārikāya adhigacchāmi uttarim manussadhammā alamariyañāṇadassanavisesaṃ, siyā nu kho añño maggo bodhāyāti.” MN I 246,28–30; translation: *The Collection of the Middle Length Sayings*, vol. 1, trans. I. B. Horner (Oxford: Pali Text Society, 1954), 301.

5. My application of the term of *soteriology* is not based on a certain concept of Christian theology. Rather than from the Greek *sotēr* (“savior,” which refers to God or Jesus Christ in Christianity), I prefer to derive the word from *sotēria*, “salvation,” and use it on a meta-level, in a general and very broad sense that may also represent the common application of the term in the academic study of religion.

6. *Vinayapīṭaka* (Vin) I 9,11–11,31.

7. The whole list is slightly longer in other accounts, describing practices of non-Buddhist ascetics. This inserted passage is taken from *Dīgha Nikāya* (DN) I 166,2–167,13; translation: *Dialogues of the Buddha*, vol. 1, trans. T. W. Rhys Davids (London: Pali Text Society, 1899), 231f. Willem Bollée analyzes this list in detail and points to parallels in Jain, Brāhmanical, and other traditions; see his “Anmerkungen zum buddhistischen Häretikerbild,” *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft* 121 (1971), 70–92. Bollée translates a few terms differently, for example, the *vekaṭika* (“filth-eater”) as one who drinks boiled water (73, 89); but he generally agrees with the given translation concerning the practices discussed in this chapter. See his article for more details.

8. MN I 77,28–78,22; trans. Horner, *Middle Length Sayings I*, 103–105 (similarly also in *Lalitavistara*, ed. Lefmann, 248,13–251,5).

9. Dutoit, *Die duṣkaracaryā des Bodhisattva*, 48f.

10. MN I 307,21–308,19.

11. MN I 308,32–309,14.

12. *Āṅguttara Nikāya* (AN) I 295,1–296,15. See also AN II 205,24–211,29, where the authors attribute the practices to the self-tormentor (*attantapa*), in contrast to the “tormentor of another,” the “tormentor both of self and another,” and the “tormentor neither of self nor of another”; the last one, of course, is the person who follows the moral precepts of the Buddha and attains liberation. It may be noted that the descriptive statements about other ascetics are contrasted with the normative statements about the Buddhist way to liberation. This gives the impression of the latter’s superiority. See Oliver Freiberger, *Der Orden in der Lehre:*

*Zur religiösen Deutung des Saṅgha im frühen Buddhismus* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2000), 131f. See also DN III 232,22–233,2.

13. AN I 296,17–297,17.

14. DN III 40,23–26; translation: *Dialogues of the Buddha*, vol. III, trans. by T. W. and C. A. F. Rhys Davids, (London: Pali Text Society, 1921), 37. For the term *tapo-jigucchā* see Bollée, “Anmerkungen,” 71, and Freiburger, *Der Orden in der Lehre*, 121.

15. In the *Nivāpa Sutta* of the *Majjhima Nikāya* (MN I 156,17–32), several ascetic practices of the list are similarly portrayed as leading not to liberation but only to a backslide into craving (in an allegory as a herd of deer that is captured by the deer-feeder, the evil Māra). We find the same view in the *Mahāsaccaka Sutta* (MN I 238,12–35), where the Jain Saccaka states that three (Ājīvaka) ascetics performed a number of severe practices (a short version of the list) but has to admit that they had a copious meal from time to time.

16. DN III 40,27–52,31.

17. DN I 167,14–168,12.

18. DN I 168,13–169,38.

19. A good example of this method is one *sutta* on “aloofness” (*paviveka*) in the *Aṅguttara Nikāya* (AN I 240,25–242,29). Here, other ascetics are portrayed to be aloof from clothes, food, and lodging; the Buddha presents several practices we know from the above-mentioned list. Buddhist *bhikkhus*, on the other hand, are presented as being aloof from immorality, from wrong views, and from the *āsavas*. The method of contrasting descriptive information with normative statements is very obvious in this *sutta*. See Freiburger, *Der Orden in der Lehre*, 130f.

20. See Jean Dantinne, *Les Qualités de l'Ascète (Dhutagaṇa): Etude Sémantique et Doctrinale* (Bruxelles: Editions Thanh-Long, 1991).

21. Vin II 196,27–200,35; except for the last twist, the story is to be found also in the introduction to the rule *Saṅghādisesa 10* (Vin III 171,1–172,14), which deals with the issue of schism of the monastic community (*saṅghabedha*). The Vinayas of other Buddhist schools contain similar versions of this story; see Max Deeg, “The Saṅgha of Devadatta: Fiction and History of a Heresy in the Buddhist Tradition,” *Journal of the International College for Advanced Buddhist Studies* 2 (1999): 184f.

22. Richard F. Gombrich, *Theravāda Buddhism: A Social History from Ancient Benares to Modern Colombo* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1988), 94.

23. Vin II 115,4–13.

24. Vin V 131,9–132,6, see also Vin V 193,1–20; *Visuddhimagga* (Vism) I 59–83. See Reginald A. Ray, *Buddhist Saints in India: A Study in Buddhist Values and Orientations* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 303–307.

25. Gombrich, *Theravāda Buddhism*, 95.

26. MN III 40,23–42,18.

27. See above, note 24. In addition to the nine practices in MN III 40–42, the following are mentioned: *tecīvarika* (wearing three robes), *sapadānacārika* (begging uninterruptedly), *khalupacchābhattika* (refusing food given at the wrong time), *pattapiṇḍika* (eating bowl-food). Also the para-canonical work *Milindapañha*

(Mil) mentions these thirteen practices (Mil 359,18–22); see Ray, *Buddhist Saints in India*, 303–307. Max Deeg has shown that probably in the period of the Kuṣāna empire, a group of Buddhists institutionalized itself as the “*saṅgha* of Devadatta,” cultivating Devadatta’s severe ascetic practices; Deeg, “The *Saṅgha* of Devadatta.”

28. *Theragāthā* (Th) 842–65. See also the canonical *Suttanipāta* commentary (*Mahā Niddesa* (Nidd), in which the *dhutaṅgas* are referred to as *vatta* (“custom, virtue”) (Nidd I 188,24–27). As Reginald Ray has shown, this positive attitude toward the *dhutaṅgas* is found also in the post-canonical Theravāda work *Vimuttimaggā* by Upatissa and in the Mahāyāna *Aṣṭasahasrikāprajñāpāramitā Sūtra*. The fact that Buddhaghosa’s *Visuddhimaggā* as well as the Mahāyāna work *Mahāvīyūtpatti* have a critical view once more shows that a dividing line cannot be drawn between “Mahāyāna” and “Hīnayāna.” Ray, *Buddhist Saints in India*, 298–303, 308–12, 316.

29. Ray, *Buddhist Saints in India*, 82. Ray analyzes these practices regarding wandering, dwelling in the forest, robe and appearance, seeking alms, solitude, speaking little, and the endurance of rigors (82–85). Some examples are Th 315–19 and Th 393–98 (staying at a cemetery); Th 127–28 (wearing a rag robe and, in addition, using a funeral bowl [skull?], *chavasitta patta*); Th 1057 (the four *nissayas*; see notes 34 and 35 below); Th 1120 (forest-dwelling, alms-begging, staying at a cemetery, wearing a rag robe). In Th 1087, Mahākassapa explicitly claims that he was “outstanding in the *dhutaṅgas*.” These practices can be found also in other texts; see, for example, *Dhammapada* (Dhp) 99 (*āraṇṇa* life of a *bhikkhu*); Dhp 395 (*paṃsukūladhara*, one who wears a rag robe, as the “true” Brahman); *Suttanipāta* (Sn) 958 (*rukhamūla*, the foot of a tree, and *susāna*, the cemetery, as resorts for the *bhikkhu*). It has to be noted that the authors of the *Theragāthā* are not unanimously praising severe asceticism. The *thera* Jambuka, for example, views his former ascetic life as “leading to a bad transition” (*duggatigāminam*); Th 283–86.

30. MN II 7,10–9,11.

31. SN II 202,7–203,26. The same practices are cultivated by the *bhikkhu* Aṅgulimāla in MN II 102,12f.

32. See Ray, *Buddhist Saints in India*, 105–18. See also Liz Wilson, “Beggars Can Be Choosers: Mahākassapa as a Selective Eater of Offerings,” in *Constituting Communities: Theravāda Buddhism and the Religious Cultures of South and Southeast Asia*, ed. John Clifford Holt, Jacob N. Kinnard, and Jonathan S. Walters (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2003), 57–70.

33. DN III 37,28–38,6; translation: *Dialogues of the Buddha* III, 34f. In the *Milindapañha*, the *thera* Nāgasena even claims that for attaining arahantship, it was required to have practiced the *dhutaṅgas* (Mil 353,6–8). The context suggests that this may refer also to former lives, but the significance of the practices expressed here is nevertheless remarkable.

34. Vin I 58,10–22.

35. See Patrick Olivelle, *The Origin and Early Development of Buddhist Monachism* (Colombo: Gunasena, 1974), 58; Ray, *Buddhist Saints in India*, 294f.

36. Vin IV 120,21–25; translation: *The Book of the Discipline (Vinaya-Piṭaka)*, vol. II, trans. I. B. Horner (London: Pali Text Society, 1940), 406–409.
37. Vin IV 120,2–20.
38. See Dieter Schlingloff, “Zur Interpretation des *Prātimokṣasūtra*,” *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft* 113 (1964), 536–51; Oskar von Hinüber, *A Handbook of Pāli Literature* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2000), 13–15. In the *Cīvaravastu* of the *Mūlasarvāstivādinaya*, we find a similar story legitimizing the uniformity of Buddhist robes; here king Bimbisāra venerates an Ājivika ascetic, mistaking him for a Buddhist *bhikṣu*. See Gregory Schopen, “A Well Sanitized Shroud: Asceticism and Institutional Values in the Middle Period of Buddhist Monasticism,” in *Between the Empires: Society in India, 300 B.C.E.–400 C.E.*, ed. Patrick Olivelle (New York: Oxford University Press), forthcoming.
39. These are the “classical” list of thirteen plus the practice of vegetarianism demanded by Devadatta, not included there.
40. *Paṃsukūla/ika; abbhokāsika; yathāsanthatika; na machaṃ, na maṃsaṃ* (the last *dhutaṅga* is mentioned not in the “classical” list of thirteen but only in the list of five brought up by Devadatta).
41. The *dhutaṅga* practice *ekāsānika* (eating only once [a day]) corresponds to the practice of “taking food only once a day” (*ekāhikaṃ pi āhāraṃ āhāreti*). See also Sn 165, where the practice of “eating little” (*appahāra*) is mentioned.
42. Living as an alms-beggar (*piṇḍapātika*) and eating bowl-food (*pattapiṇḍika*) correspond to the statement “I did not consent [to accept food] offered to [me] or specially prepared for [me] nor to [accept] an invitation [to a meal]” (*nābhīhataṃ na uddissakataṃ na nimantaṇaṃ sādiyāmi*). Note that Devadatta in his demand explicitly rules out the acceptance of invitations. The *dhutaṅga* practice of staying in a cemetery is closely related to the practice of wearing cerements (*chavadussa*). See also Schopen, “A Well Sanitized Shroud.”
43. The remaining six are *ārañṇaka* (forest-dwelling), *rukkhamūlika* (staying at the foot of a tree), *nesajjika* (remaining in a sitting posture), *tecīvarika* (wearing three robes), *sapadānacārika* (begging uninterruptedly), and *khalupacchābhattika* (refusing food given at the wrong time).
44. Th 311–14; translation: *Poems of Early Buddhist Monks (Theragāthā)*, trans. by K. R. Norman (Oxford: Pali Text Society, 1997), 38f.
45. Certainly, compared to the active self-mortification and ritual suicide in East Asian Mahāyāna Buddhism, these practices may still appear rather mild; see Christoph Kleine’s contribution to the present volume.
46. Th 1054–56; Sn 926 (*niddaṃ na bahulikareyya*).
47. Sn 966; translation: *The Group of Discourses (Sutta-Nipāta)*, vol. 2, rev. trans. K. R. Norman (Oxford: Pali Text Society, 1992), 109.
48. Th 582. In the Brāhmanical *Samnyāsa Upaniṣads*, for example, it is frequently stated that a renouncer should outwardly behave like a fool or a dumb person (*jaḍa, mūka*; the same terms as in Th 582) or like a madman (*unmatta*); see *The Minor Upaniṣads*, vol. I (*Samnyāsa Upaniṣads*), critically ed. by F. Otto Schrader (Madras: The Adyar Library, 1912), 149,9; 184,9; 69,6; 154,9; 184,6.

49. Early Mahāyāna Buddhism had strong ascetic features. See Gregory Schopen, "The Mahāyāna and the Middle Period in Indian Buddhism: Through a Chinese Looking-Glass," *The Eastern Buddhist* 32.2 (2000), 1–25.

50. See Schopen, "A Well Sanitized Shroud."

51. See Minoru Hara, "A Note on the Buddha's Asceticism: The Liu du ji jing (Six Pāramitā-sūtra) 53," *Bauddhavidyāsudhākarah: Studies in Honour of Heinz Bechert on the Occasion of His 65th Birthday*, ed. Petra Kieffer-Pülz and Jens-Uwe Hartmann, *Indica et Tibetica* 30 (Swisttal-Odendorf: Indica et Tibetica Verlag, 1997), 249–60.

52. This approach has been advocated, with regard to Jain elements in early Buddhist texts, by Johannes Bronkhorst and Richard Gombrich. See their "gentlemen's controversy" (Nalini Balbir), in which they, although differing about other points, agree about this method. See Johannes Bronkhorst, *The Two Sources of Indian Asceticism* (Bern: Peter Lang, 1993); Richard Gombrich, "The Buddha and the Jains: A Reply to Professor Bronkhorst," *Asiatische Studien/Études Asiatiques* 48 (1994), 1069–96; Johannes Bronkhorst, "The Buddha and the Jains Reconsidered," *Asiatische Studien/Études Asiatiques* 49 (1995), 333–50; and, most recently, Johannes Bronkhorst, "Asceticism, Religion, and Biological Evolution," *Method and Theory in the Study of Religion* 13 (2001), 386.

53. See Ray, *Buddhist Saints in India*, 396–404 and *passim*. Ray implies a historical development that is difficult to detect in the early texts; but the basic idea of two camps in the Buddhist *saṅgha* remains plausible. See Kevin Trainor's review of Ray's book in *History of Religions* 37 (1997): 96–98.

54. See Schopen, "A Well Sanitized Shroud."

55. Th 920–80; see also Th 142, 153, 209, and 245; *Saṃyutta Nikāya* (SN) II 208,13–210,22. See Ray, *Buddhist Saints in India*, 96–99, 112–14.

56. See above, notes 11 and 12.

57. This double account of the Eightfold Path in the first talk of the Buddha is to be found in the *Mahāvagga* of the *Theravādavīnaya* (see note 6 above), in the Sanskrit *Catuspariṣatsūtra* of the Sarvāstivāda/Mūlasarvāstivāda school, and in the Tibetan and Chinese versions of the *Mūlasarvāstivādavīnaya*; see Ernst Waldschmidt, *Das Catuspariṣatsūtra: Eine kanonische Lehrschrift über die Begründung der buddhistischen Gemeinde*, part 2 (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1957), 140f.

58. Similar tensions within ascetic-monastic traditions are examined by Andrew Crislip (early eastern Christianity) and Martha Newman (medieval Cistercianism) in their contributions to the present volume.

59. See, for example, the studies in Gregory Schopen, *Bones, Stones, and Buddhist Monks: Collected Papers on the Archaeology, Epigraphy, and Texts of Monastic Buddhism in India* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1997); and Gregory Schopen, *Buddhist Monks and Business Matters: Still More Papers on Monastic Buddhism in India* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2004).

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