Mil 3.3.3 — 3. Question on the Discernment of an End Point

English translation by John Kelly.
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Text

Milinda’s Questions

Examination Chapter

3. Question on the Discernment of an End Point

The king asked: “Venerable Nāgasena, concerning that which you said, ‘No earliest point can be discerned,’ what is this earliest point?” “That which is time in the past, your majesty, is the earliest point.” “Venerable Nāgasena, concerning that which you said, ‘No earliest point can be discerned,’ is it that all earliest points cannot be discerned?” “Some can be discerned, your majesty, and some cannot be.” “What can be discerned, venerable sir, and what cannot?” “That earliest point cannot be discerned, your majesty, where earlier than this no ignorance was existing at all, by any means, or in any way. That which having not existed arose, and having existed disappeared again, that earliest point can be discerned.”

“Venerable Nāgasena, that which having not existed arose, and having existed disappeared again would it not, having been cut off at both ends, be entirely destroyed?” “If, your majesty, having been cut off at both ends, it was entirely destroyed, is it possible, being cut off at both ends, to grow?” “Yes, it is possible for it to grow. I am not asking that, venerable sir; is it possible for it to grow from that end?” “Yes, it is possible for it to grow.”

“Please give me an analogy.” The elder made him an analogy of a tree, “The aggregates are the seeds of this whole mass of suffering.”

“You are clever, Venerable Nāgasena!”

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