

# PRE-MODERN INDIAN PERSPECTIVES ON GIVING, GIFTING, AND SACRIFICES: THE BRAHMIN

Harald Wiese, University of Leipzig

- Introduction
  - Privileges of Brahmins
  - Gift Based On Duty (*dharmadāna*) among other givings
- Definition of *śraddhā* and *śakti*
- Decision theory of *śraddhā* and *śakti*
- Giver or receiver initiative
- Conclusion: *dānadharma* invented by selfserving Brahmins?

# INTRODUCTION: PRIVILEGES OF BRAHMINS

## Āpastamba Dharmasūtra:

“The occupations specific to a Brahmin are

- studying
- and teaching the Vedas,
- sacrificing,
- officiating at sacrifices,
- giving gifts,
- **receiving gifts,**
- inheriting, and gleaning, as well as
- appropriating things that do not belong to anybody.”

## INTRODUCTION: SIX BASES OF GIFTING

Dānakāṇḍa within the nibandha Kṛtyakalpataru of Lakṣmīdhara:

“

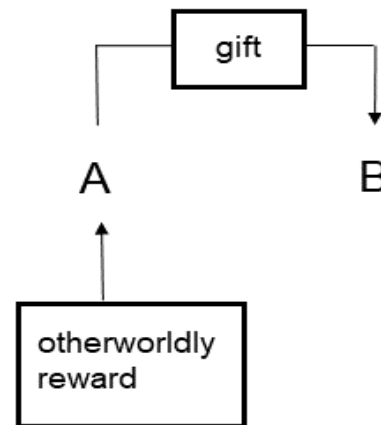
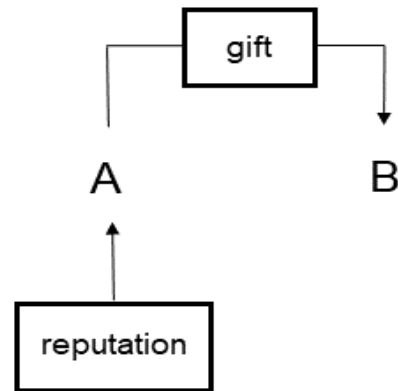
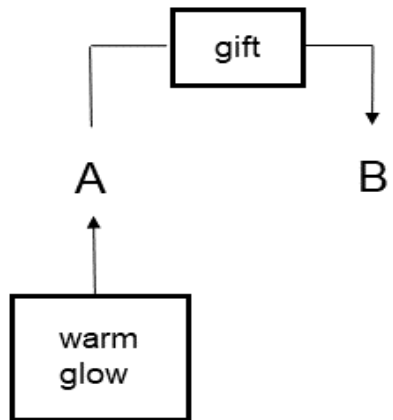
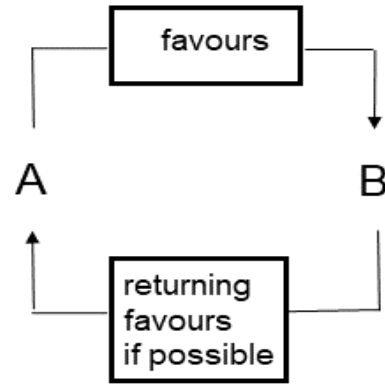
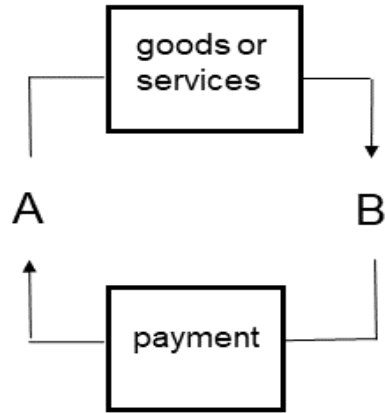
- **Duty** (*dharmā*),
- worldly gain (*artha*),
- passion (*kāma*),
- shame (*vrīḍā*),
- joy (*harṣa*), and
- fear (*bhaya*)—

these, they say, are the six bases of gifting.

When a person gives as a matter of routine obligation to worthy recipients independently of any specific purpose, it is called a **Gift Based On Duty** (*dharmadāna*).

When a person gives a gift as the occasion presents itself only dependent upon some particular purpose and motivated by worldly reward, they call it a Gift Based On Worldly Gain.”

# INTRODUCTION: PATTERNS OF GIVING AND GIFTING

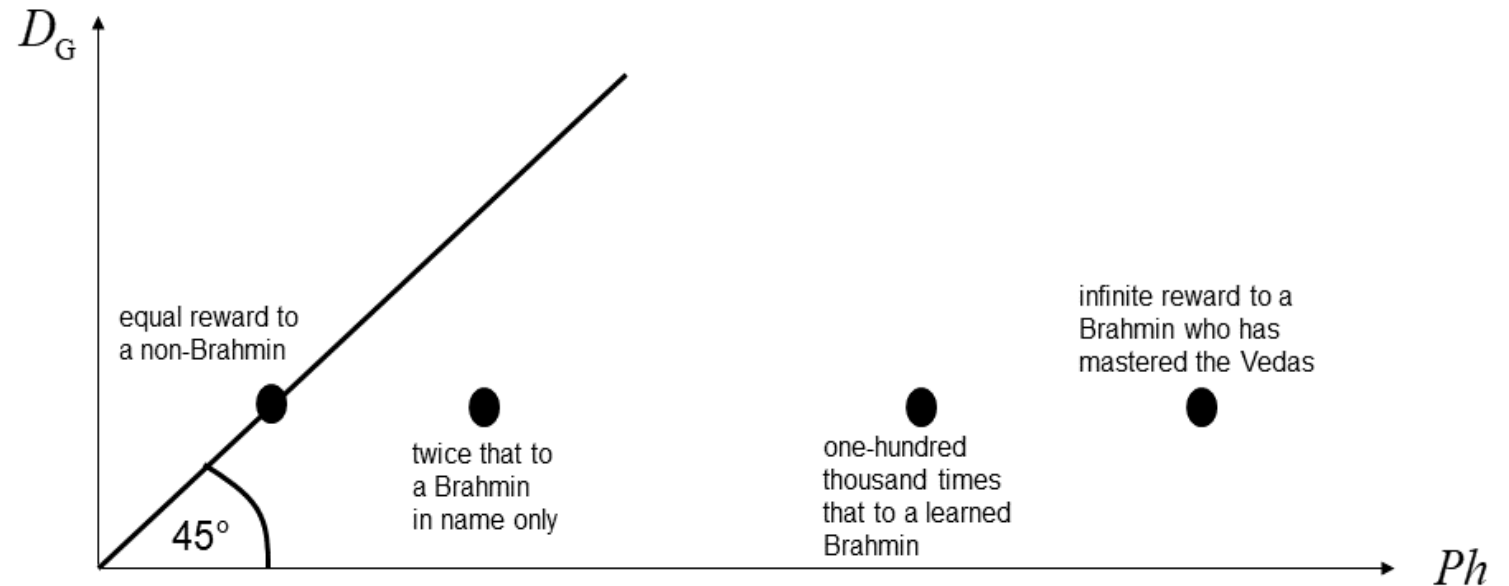
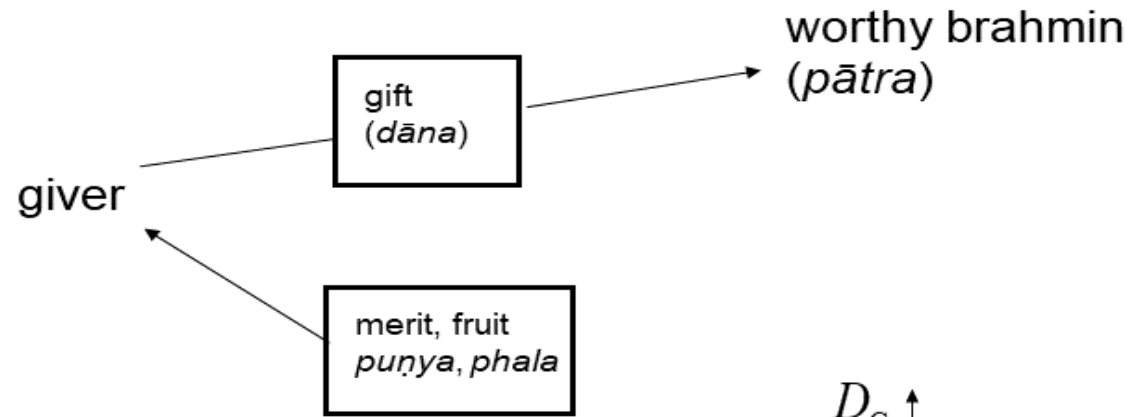


## INTRODUCTION: EXCELLENCE OF RECIPIENT, NON-RECIPROCITY

“Moreover a gift becomes greater and greater in accordance with the excellence of the recipient. Thus, one should know that when a gift is given to one’s teacher, one’s mother, one’s father, and a Vedic savant, each time the resulting merit or sin becomes increasingly a hundred-thousand times greater.”

“Non-reciprocal gifts are like milking a cow whose calf has died and which is consumed with thirst. Worldly matters do not pertain to the law; a giver obtains an unseen gift and is not seen enjoying that gift, since he does not return to this world and his gift is endless.”

# INTRODUCTION: GIFT BASED ON DUTY (*DHARMADĀNA*)



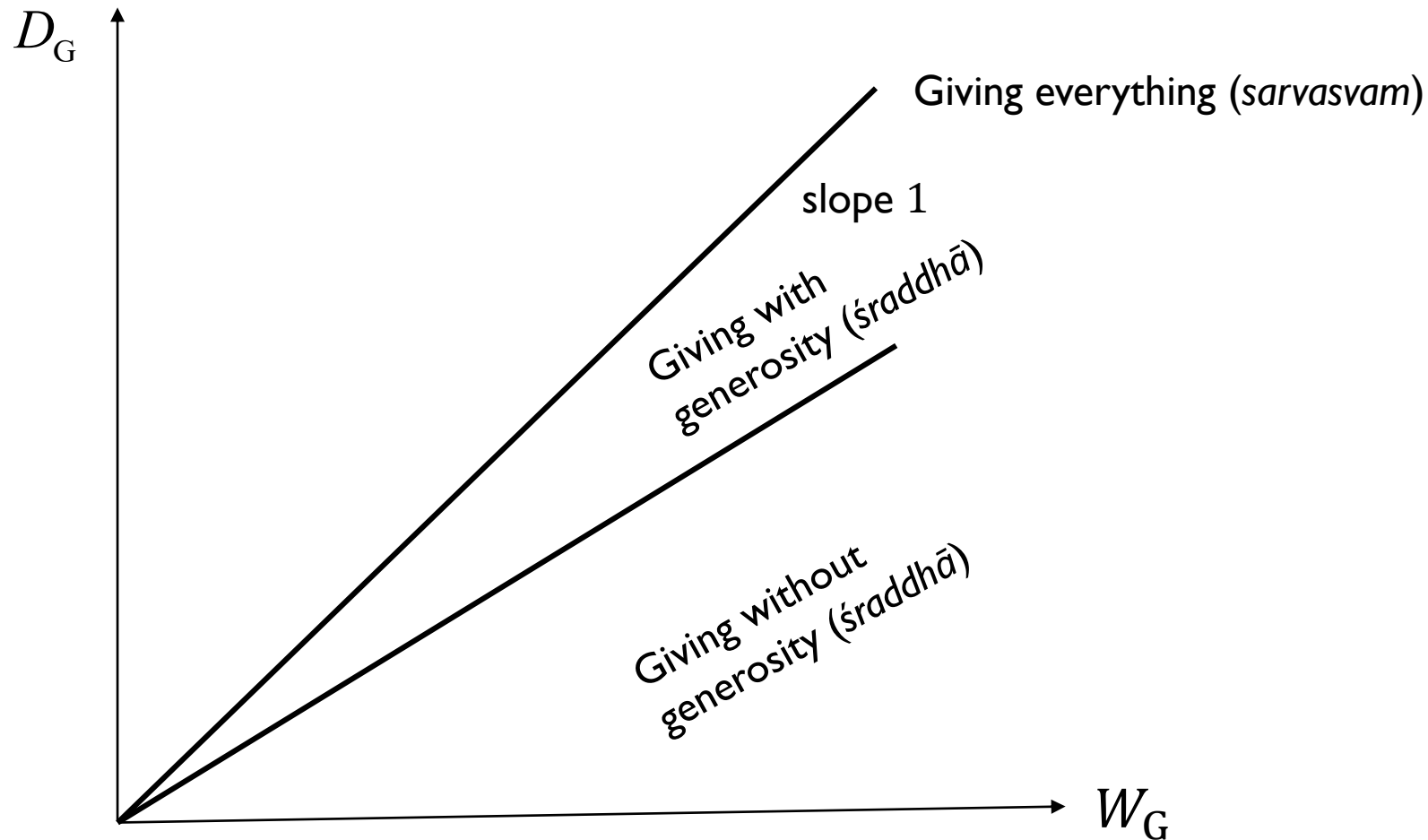
## DEFINITION OF DHARMIC GIVING: SPIRIT OF GENEROSITY (*ŚRADDHĀ*)

- Hemādri's gloss *āstikyabuddhi* trust or faith in the efficacy of prescribed ritual acts
- Madanasimha's gloss *phalāvaśyambhāvaniścaya* (“conviction about the certainty of rewards”)

Brick summarizes Köhler and explains *śraddhā*

- trust, confidence → trust or faith in the efficacy of prescribed ritual acts
- expressed by munificent gifts to priests and other persons
- *Śraddhā* soon begins to refer to a spirit of generosity or ‘joy in gifting’—the word’s second meaning in the *dāna* literature.
- cause and effect
- trust in the efficacy of prescribed ritual acts results in a spirit of generosity
- difficult to discern in which of these two meanings the term is being used

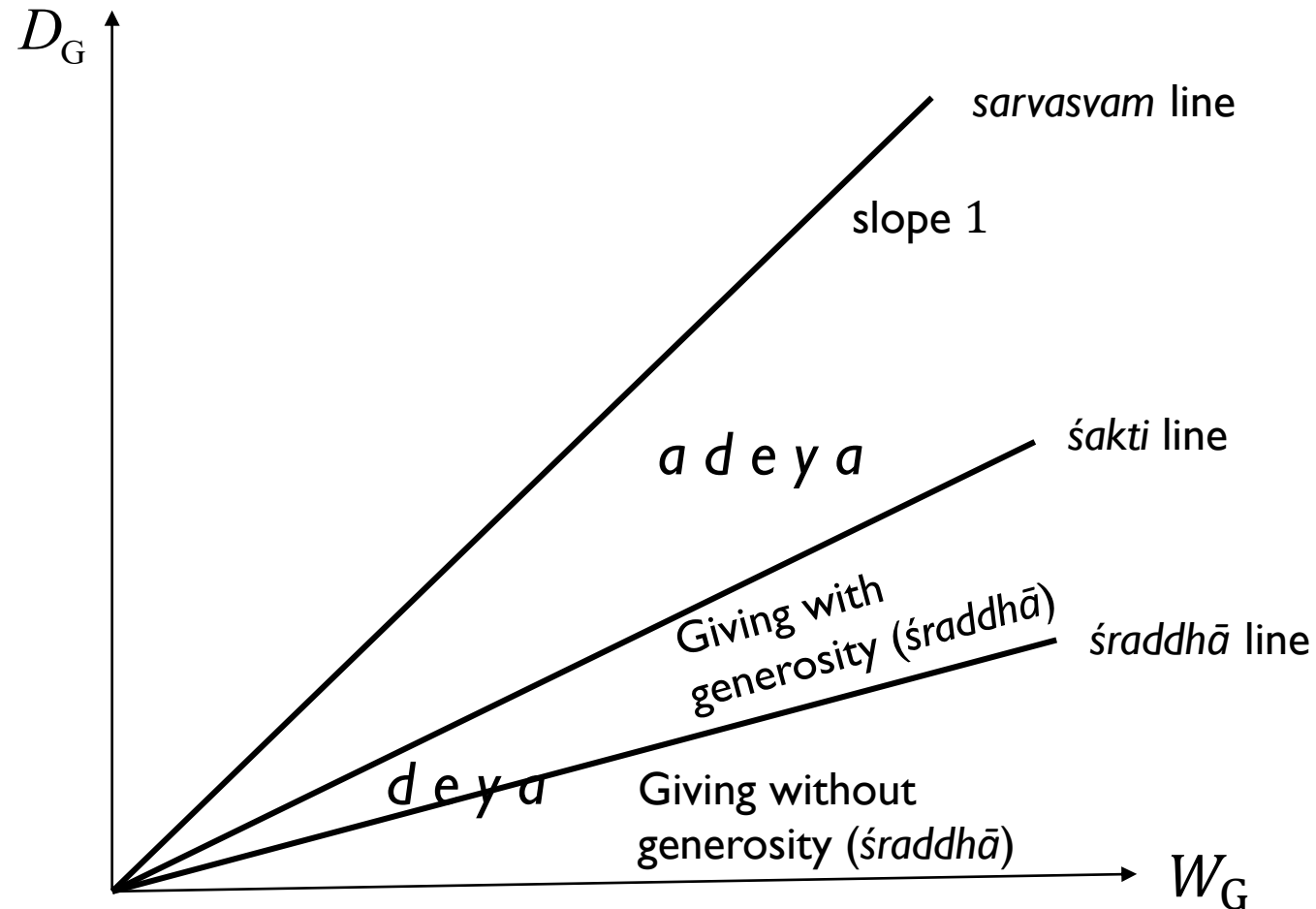
# DEFINITION OF DHARMIC GIVING: SPIRIT OF GENEROSITY (*ŚRADDHĀ*)



“Whether small or large, the size of a gift does not bring about its benefits, but rather the spirit of generosity (*śraddhā*) and the means available (*śakti*) to the donor associated with a gift—indeed, only these two things cause prosperity or ruin.”

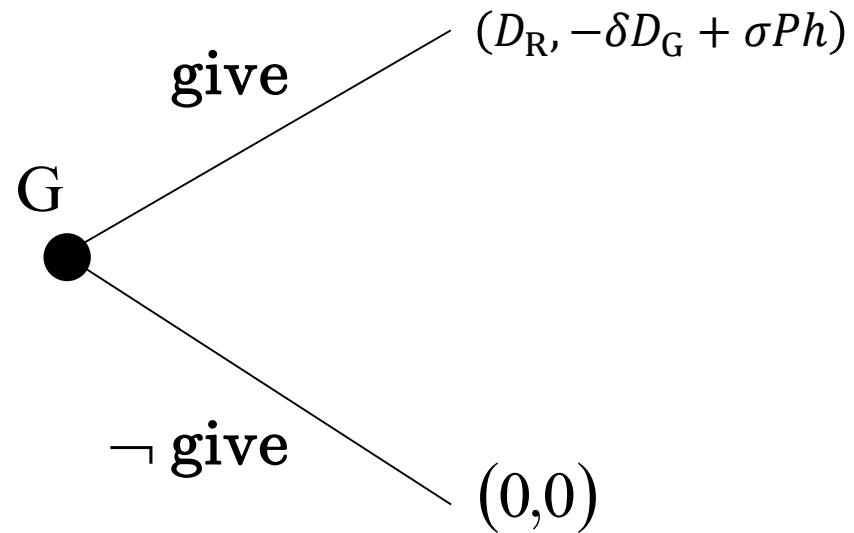
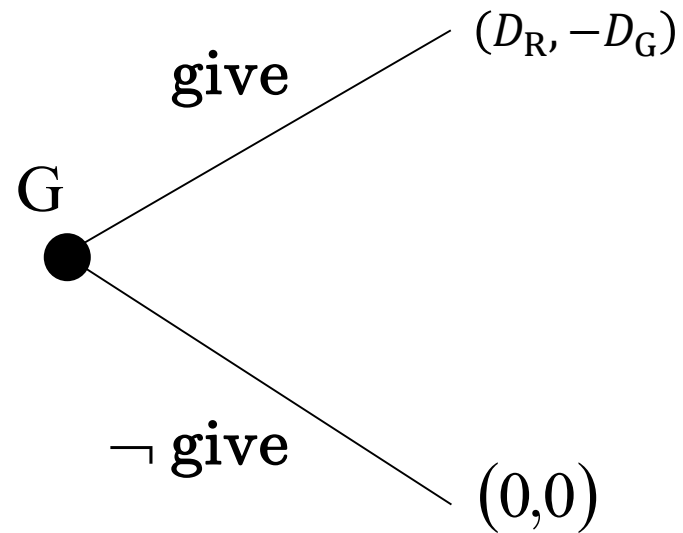


# DEFINITION OF DHARMIC GIVING: ŚRADDHĀ, CHECKED BY AVAILABLE MEANS (ŚAKTI)



“So long as it does not hurt his family, a man can give away any of his property except for his wife and his sons, but not the entirety of his wealth if he has descendants, nor anything he has promised to another.”

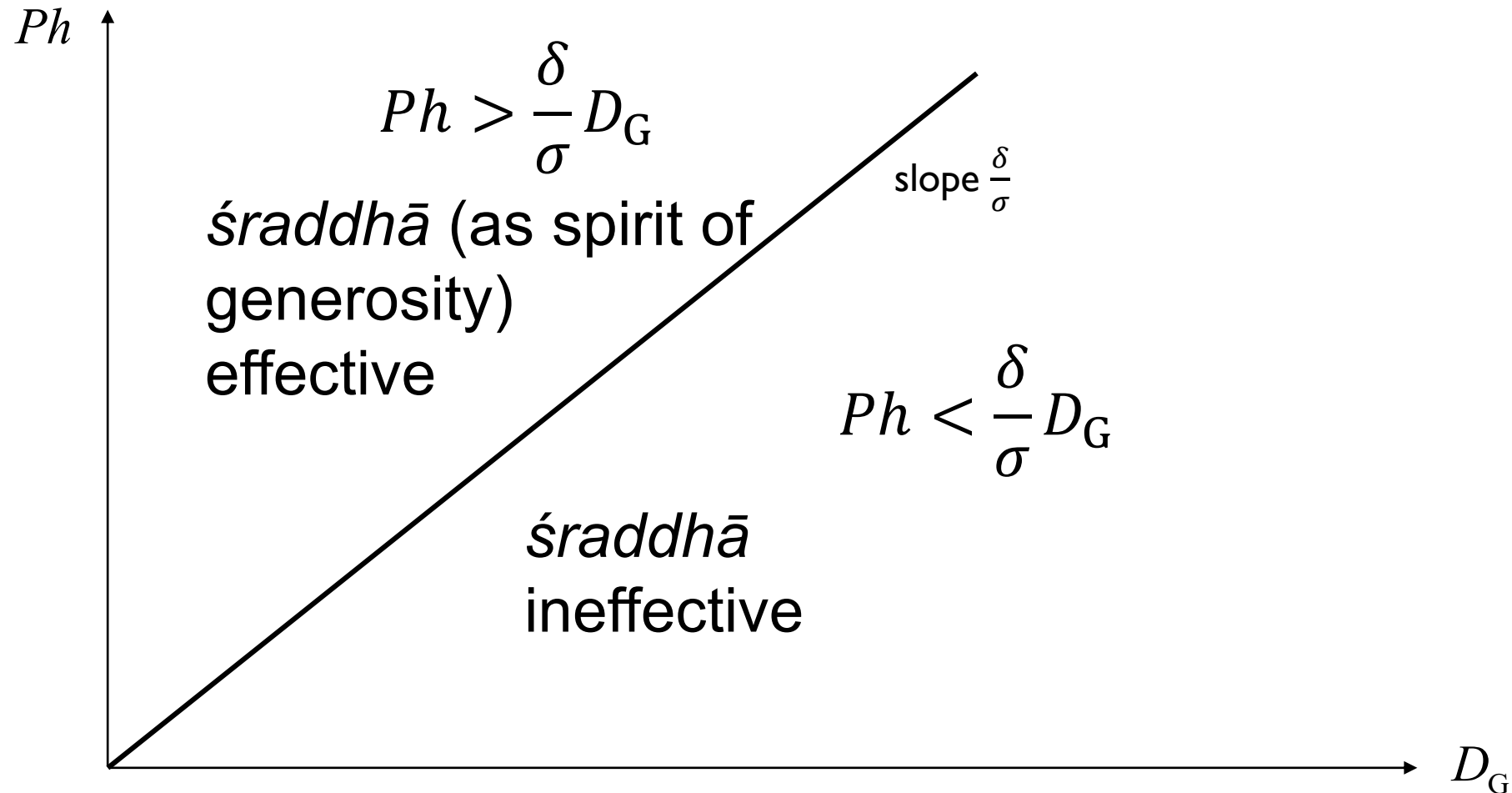
# DECISION THEORY OF *DĀNADHARMA*: HOW CAN GIFTING BE POSSIBLE?



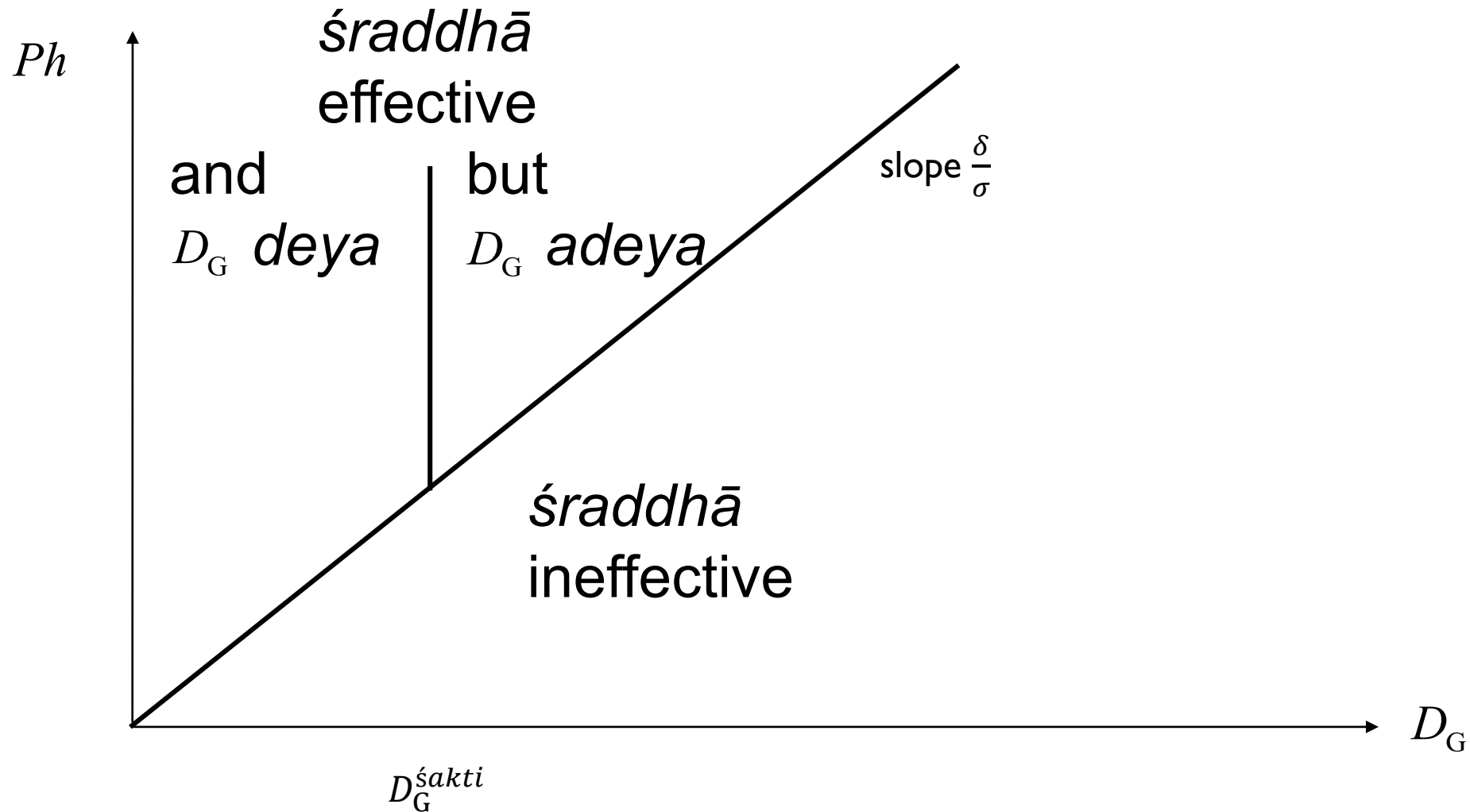
“An owner’s wealth is what he gives and what he eats, for others fool around with the wife and wealth of a dead man.”

Donating is worthwhile if the fruit-gift ratio is sufficiently large, i.e., if  $\frac{Ph}{D_G} > \frac{\delta}{\sigma}$

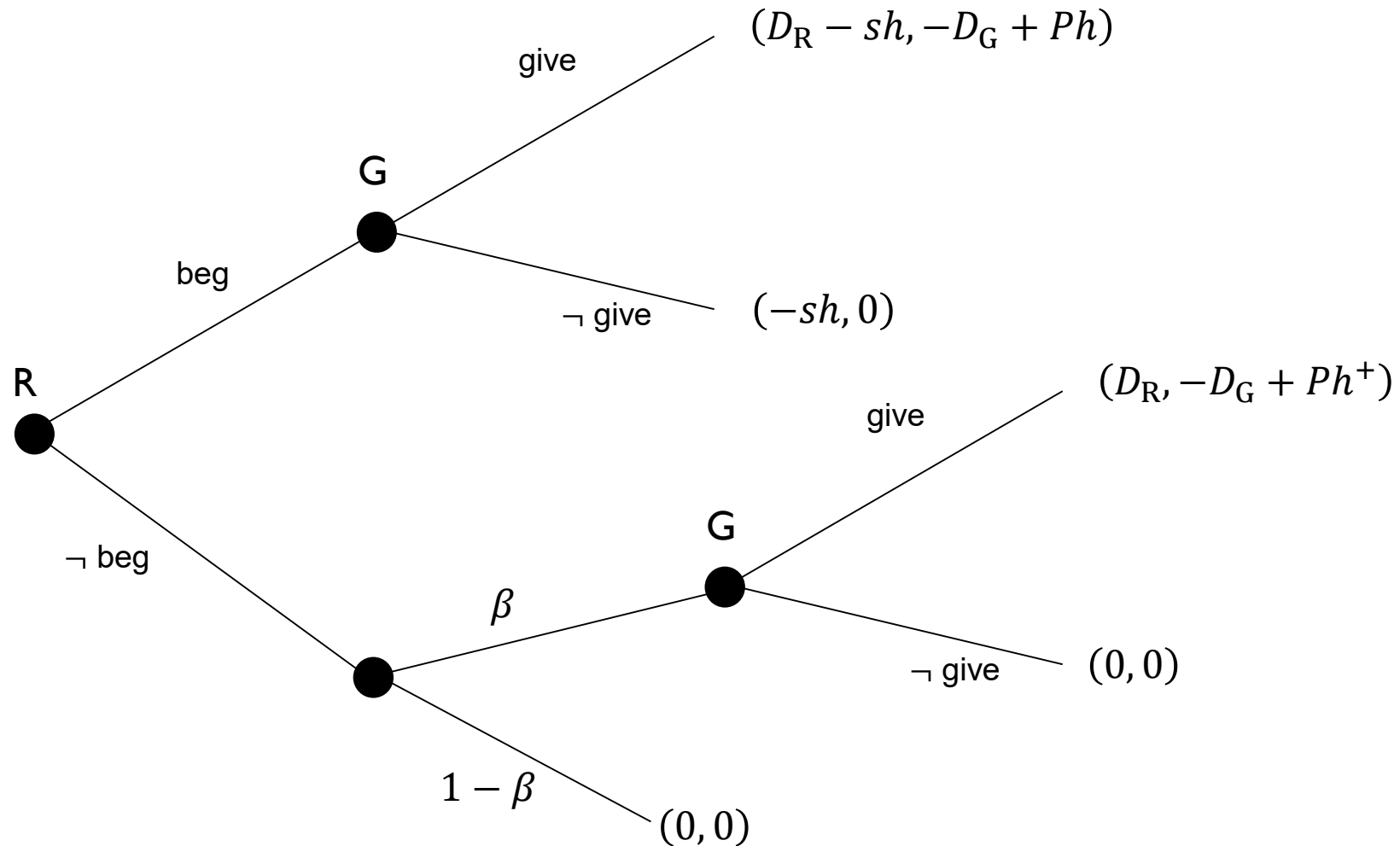
# DECISION THEORY OF *DĀNADHARMA*: CAUSE AND EFFECT!



# DECISION THEORY OF *DĀNADHARMA*: CAUSE AND EFFECT (INCLUDING *ŚAKTI*)?

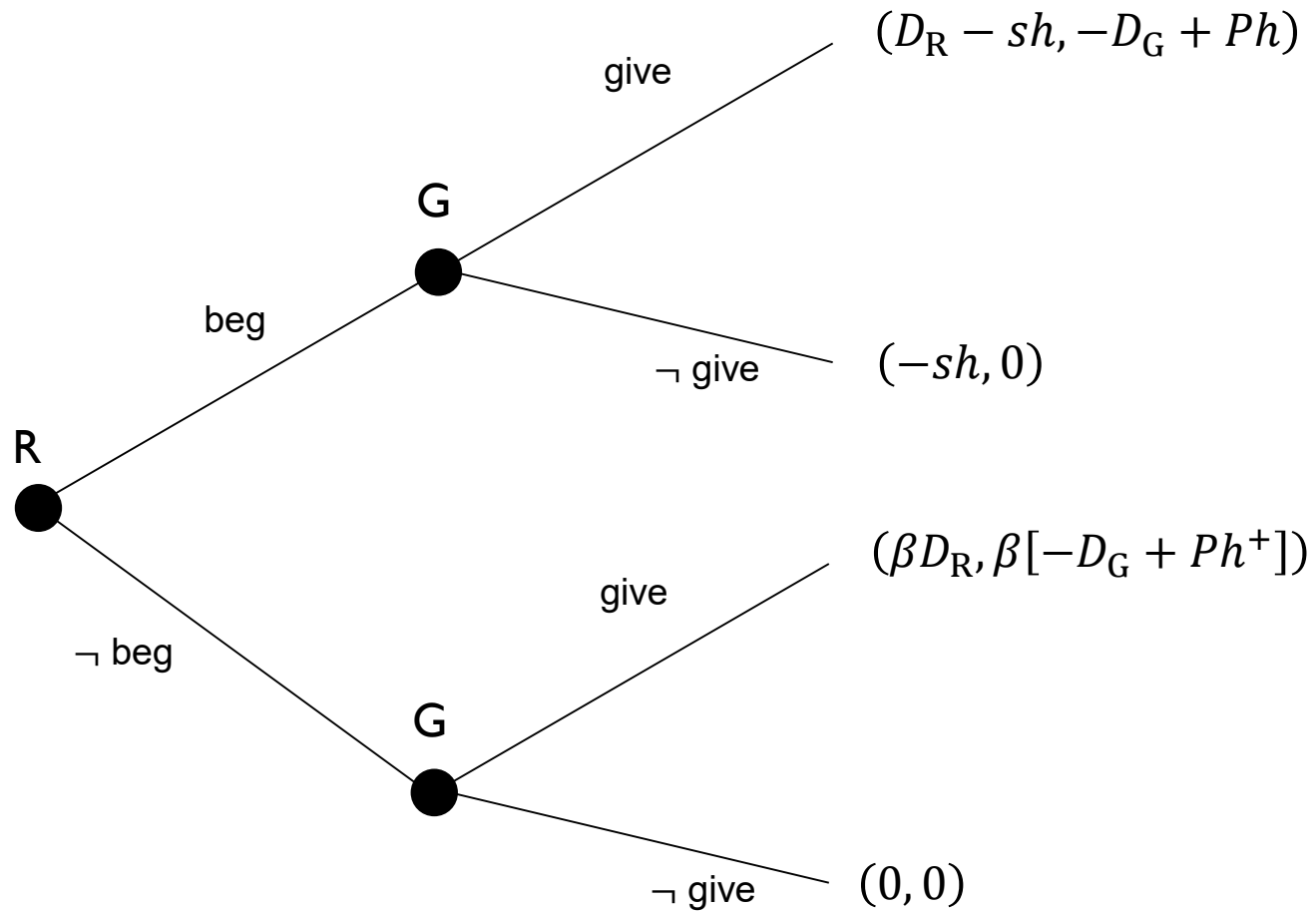


# DECISION THEORY OF *DĀNADHARMA*: GIVER OR RECEIVER INITIATIVE?

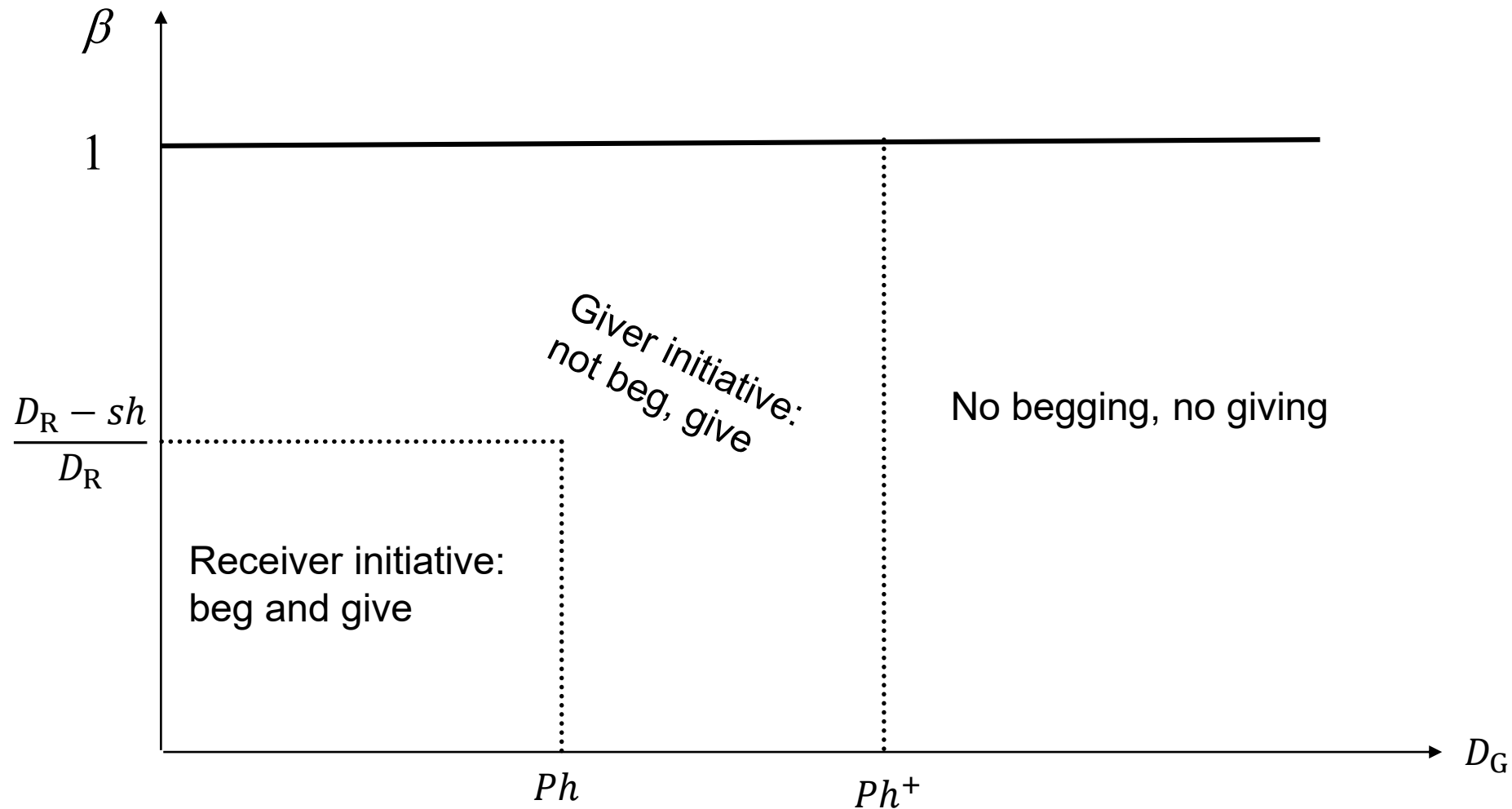


“If someone approaches a recipient and gives him a gift or gives a gift that has not been asked for, the merit from this gift will never end, though the ocean will.”

# DECISION THEORY OF *DĀNADHARMA*: GIVER OR RECEIVER INITIATIVE?



# DECISION THEORY OF *DĀNADHARMA*: GIVER OR RECEIVER INITIATIVE?



## CONCLUSION

### DĀNADHARMA INVENTED BY SELFSERVING BRAHMINS?

Brick:

Two fundamental motivations explain the prominence of the discussions of proper recipients within the *dānanibandhas* and the bulk of their contents.

- Desire to establish orthodox, Vedic Brahmins as the ideal recipients and in many cases as the sole legitimate recipients of gifts.
- Theoretical principle that the merit of a gift is directly proportional to the virtuousness of its recipient (with “virtuousness”, of course, here defined from a Brahmanical perspective).

The achievement of both of these desires would have been very much in the interests of the Brahmins who composed most of the *dānanibandhas*, including the Dānakāṇḍa ... .” Thus, according to the *dharma* texts, Brahmins

- as writers of these texts
- point to themselves as receivers of *dāna*.



## CONCLUSION

### *DĀNADHARMA* INVENTED BY SELFSERVING BRAHMINS?

But:

- selfserving interest: “definitions of a proper Brahmin” with “unambiguously high opinions of themselves and of their place in society” (Brick)
- “policing the Brahmin community by encouraging its members to aspire to the high standards of an ideal Brahmin lest they be deemed unfit to receive patronage” (Brick)

Indeed: the texts can also be read to contain tough requirements for a worthy recipient:

“Discipline, austerity, self-control, liberality, truthfulness, purity, vedic learning, compassion, erudition, intelligence, and religious faith—these are the characteristics of a Brahmin.”

“One can know a person’s virtue by living with him, his purity by interacting with him, and his wisdom by talking with him. A recipient should be tested in these three things.”

## CONCLUSION

### *DĀNADHARMA* INVENTED BY SELFSERVING BRAHMINS?

- *Dharmadāna* instrumental in allowing Indian religion/science etc. to be transmitted from generation to generation.
- Human traditions usually depend on presenting some elite group with the possibility to pursue scientific and religious work.

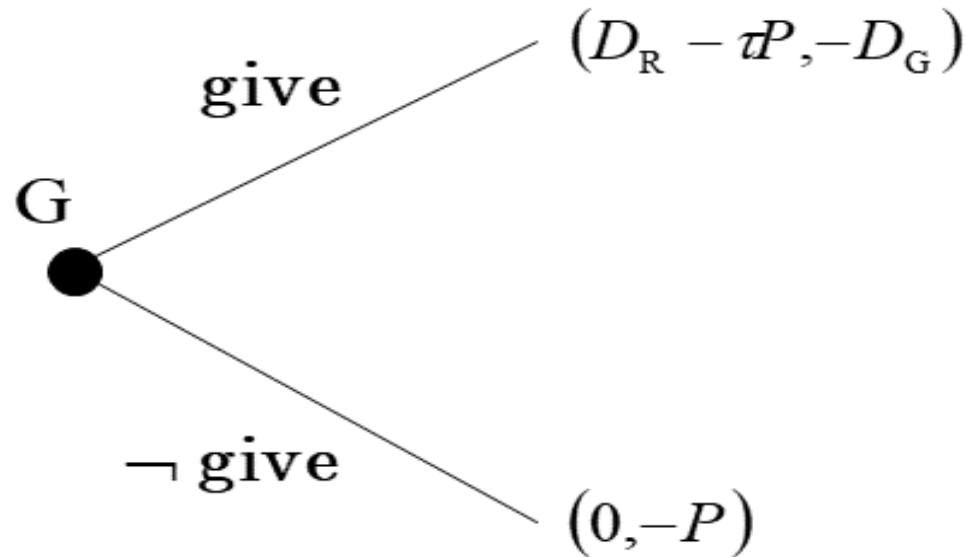
#### Yājñavalkya Smṛti:

*tapas taptvāsṛjad brahmā brāhmanān vedaguptaye |  
trptyartham pitṛdevānām dharmasaṃrakṣaṇāya ca ||*

Brahma, after performing ascetic toil, created Brahmans to protect the Veda, to bring satisfaction to ancestors and gods, and to safeguard dharma.

RESTERAMPE

# SIN TRANSFERENCE

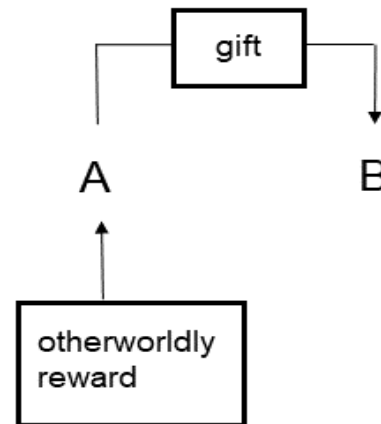
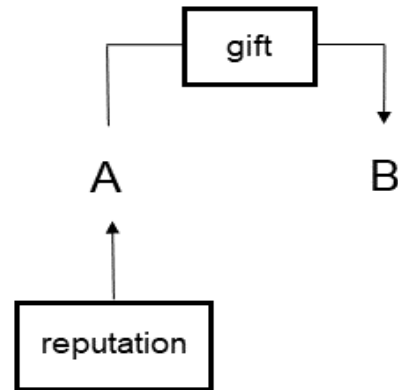
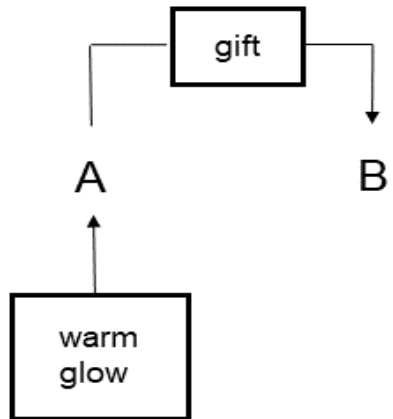
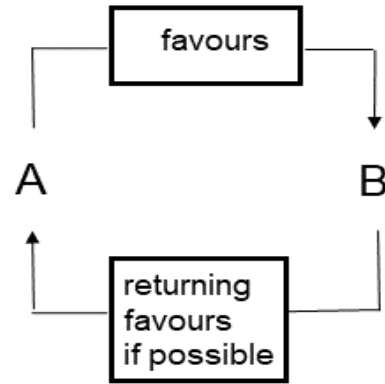
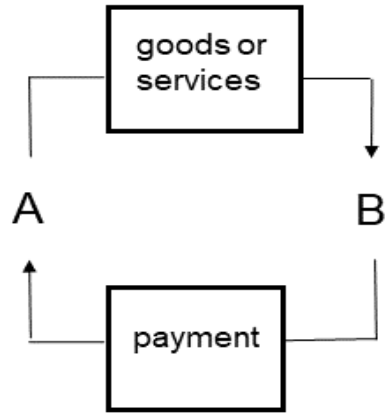


Think of  $\tau$  as a positive number smaller than 1:

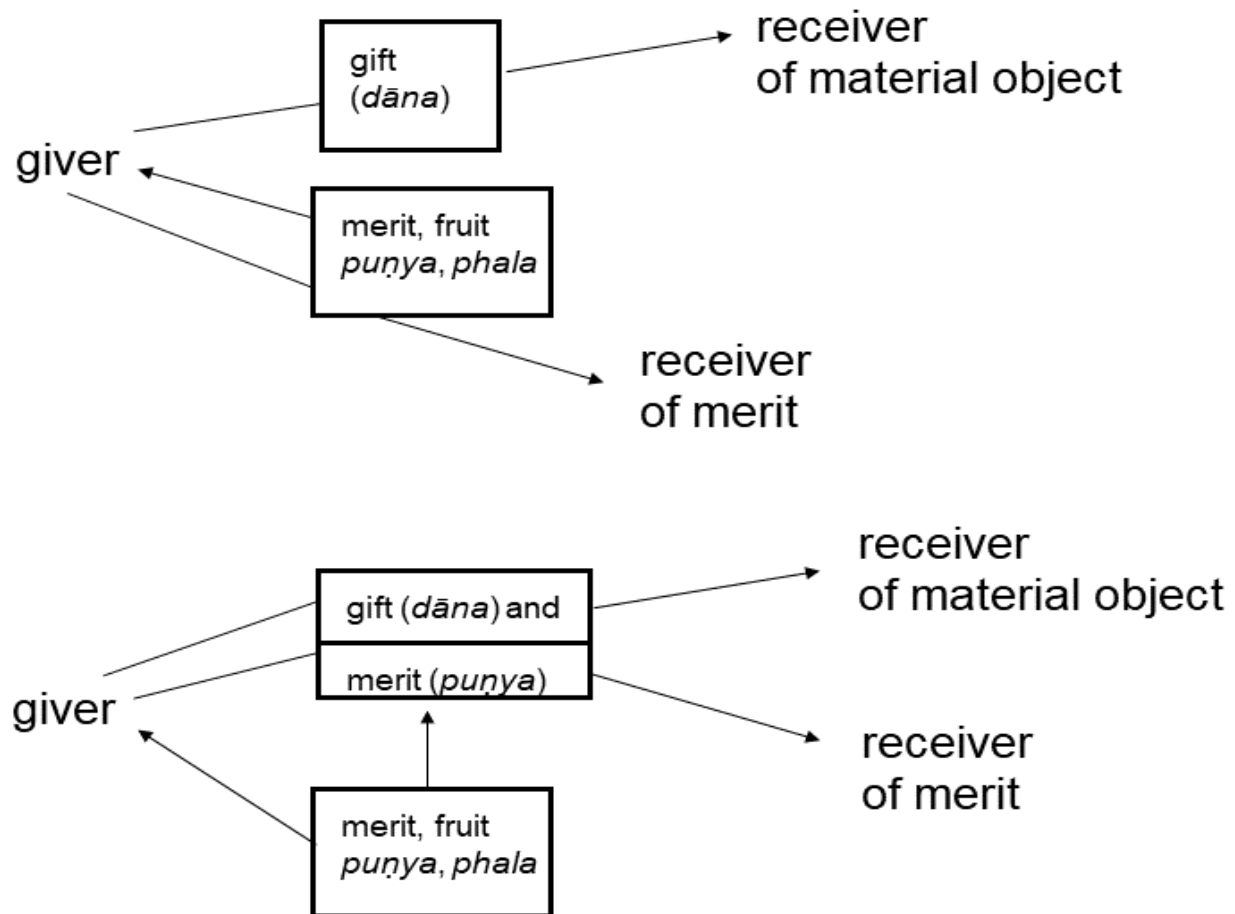
The receiver may absorb the sin at relatively small cost to himself.

Giving is welcomed by both donor and donee if  $D_G < P < \frac{D_R}{\tau}$  holds.

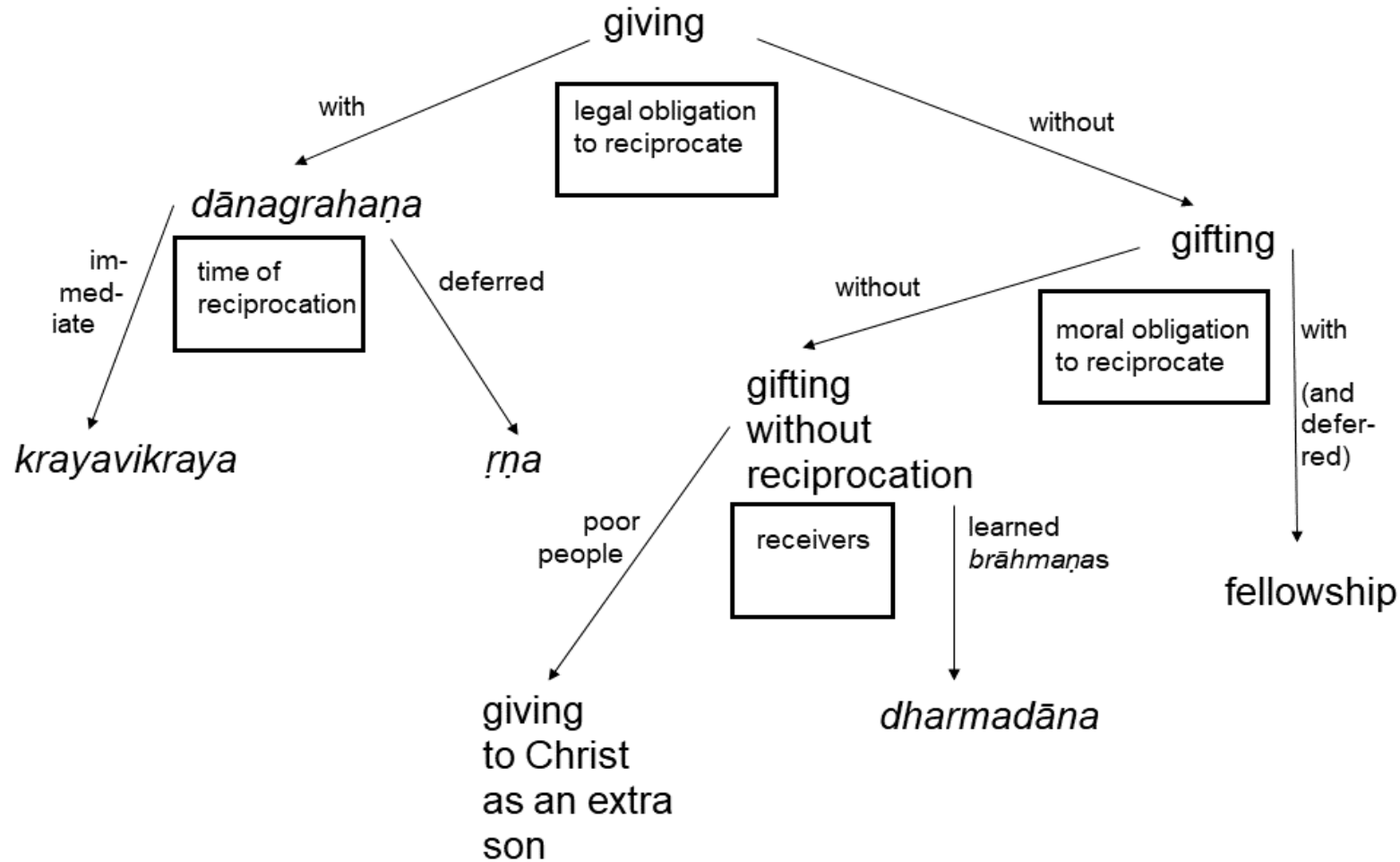
# PATTERNS OF GIVING AND GIFTING



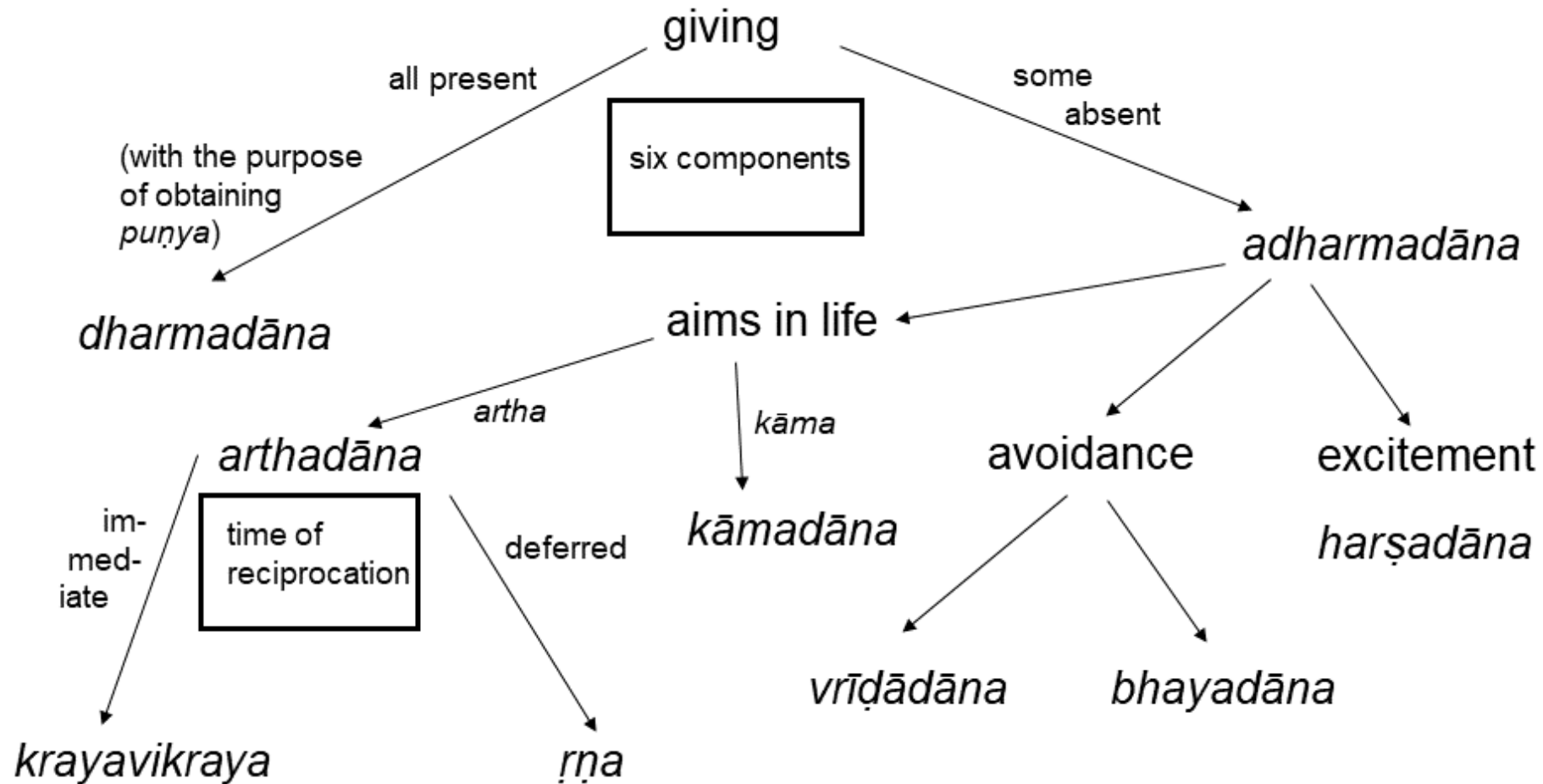
# MERIT TRANSFER



# MAIN CATEGORIES OF GIVING

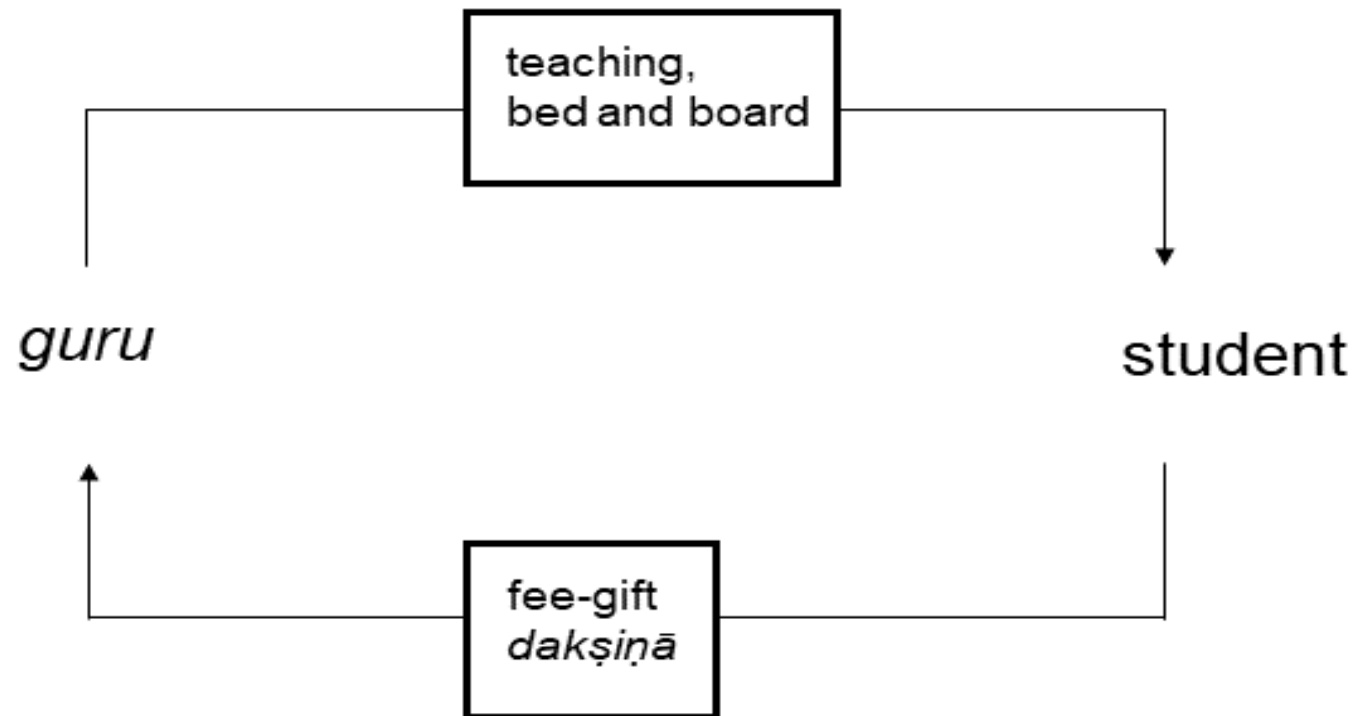


# THE SIX BASES OF GIVING

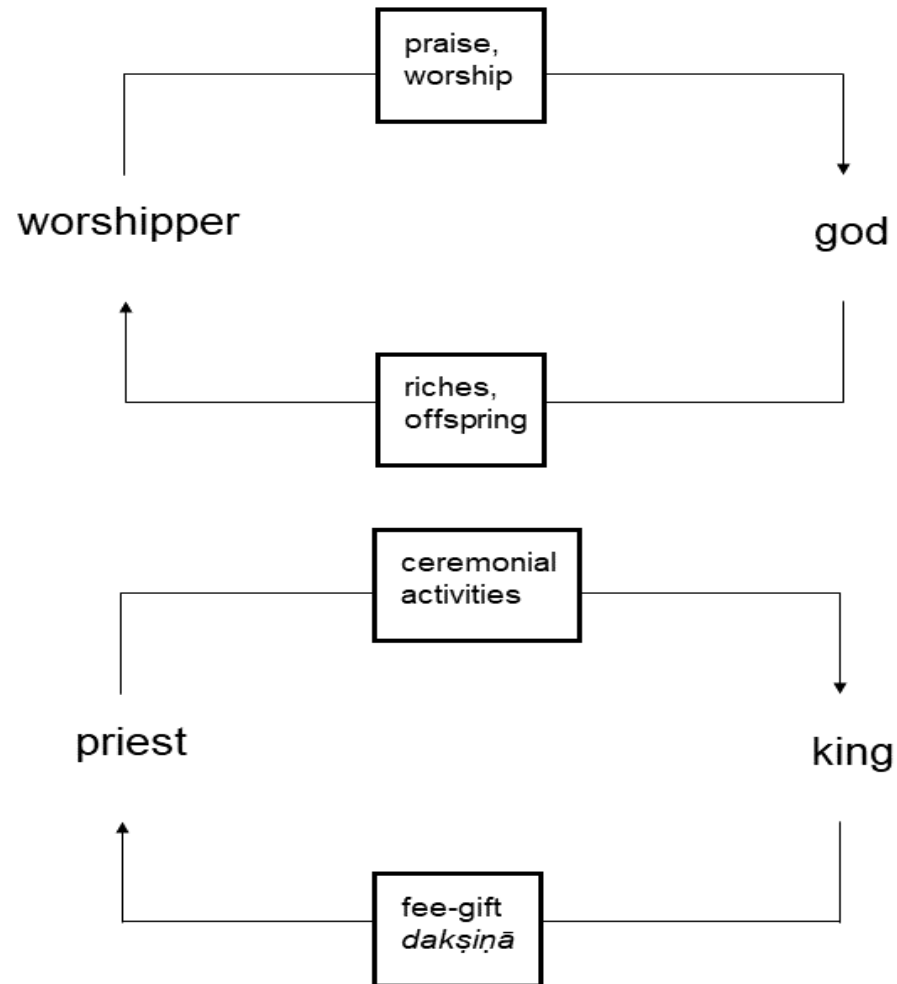




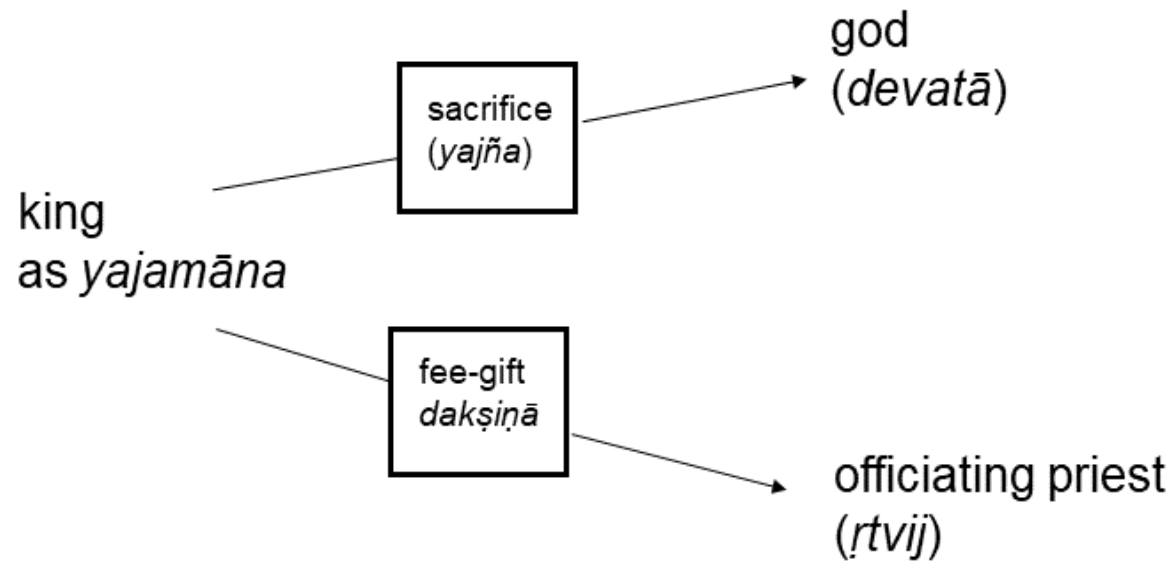
# RECIPROCITY BETWEEN TEACHER AND STUDENT



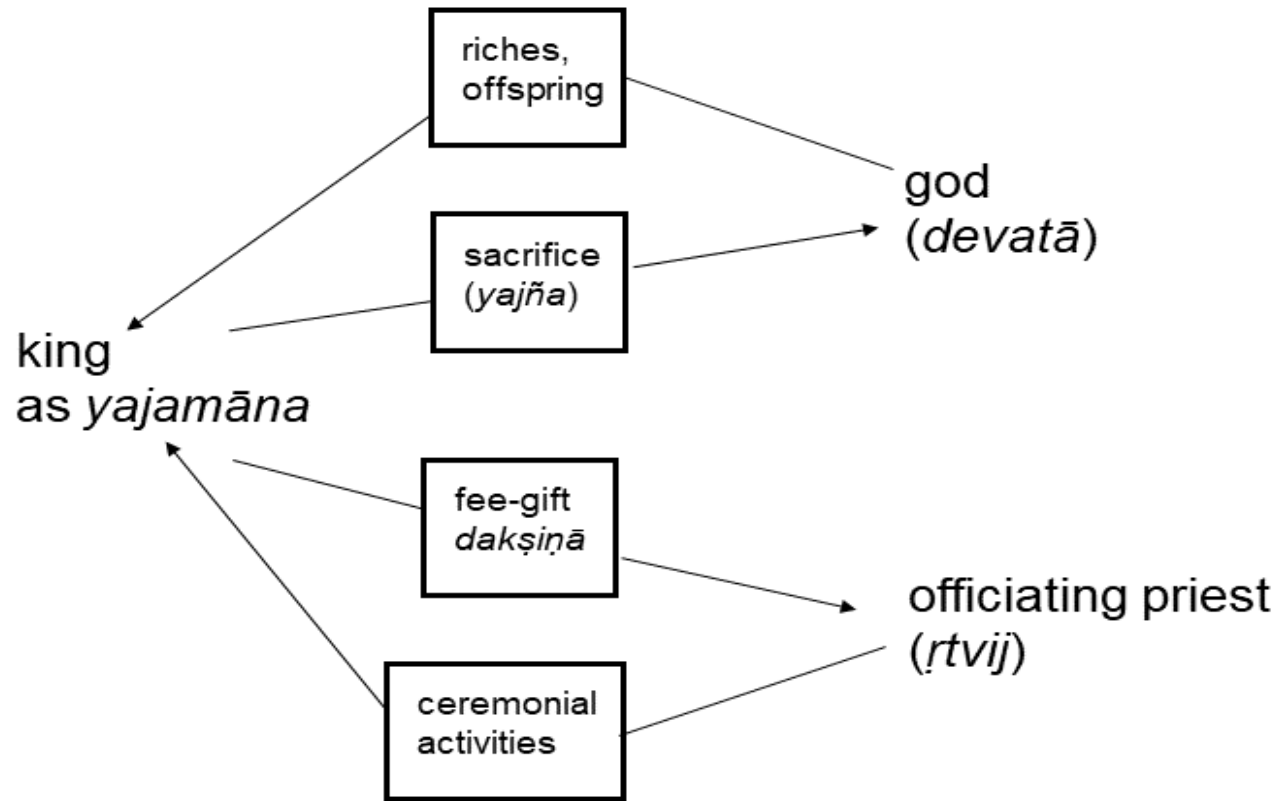
# SACRIFICIAL EXCHANGES



# KING AS PATRON OF SACRIFICE



# TWO RECIPROCAL RELATIONSHIPS



# MAHĀDĀNA

