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D. SEYFORT RUEGG

Some Reflections on the Place of Philosophy in the Study of Buddhism

I

It is surely no exaggeration to say that philosophical thinking constitutes a major component in Buddhism. To say this is of course not to claim that Buddhism is reducible to any single philosophy in some more or less restrictive sense but, rather, to say that what can be meaningfully described as philosophical thinking comprises a major part of its procedures and intentionality, and also that due attention to this dimension is heuristically necessary in the study of Buddhism. If this proposition were to be regarded as problematic, the difficulty would seem to be due to certain assumptions and prejudgements which it may be worthwhile to consider here.

In the first place, even though the philosophical component in Buddhism has been recognized by many investigators since the inception of Buddhist studies as a modern scholarly discipline more than a century and a half ago, it has to be acknowledged that the main stream of these studies has, nevertheless, quite often paid little attention to the philosophical. The idea somehow appears to have gained currency in some quarters that it is possible to deal with Buddhism in a serious and scholarly manner without being obliged to concern oneself with philosophical content. One has only to look at several dictionaries to see that the European terminology so often employed to render Pali, Sanskrit and Tibetan technical terms is on occasion hardly coherent and did not reflect the state of philosophical knowledge even at the time these dictionaries were first published. This impression is reinforced by many a translation from these three languages as well as by some work on texts written in them.

This article is an expanded version of the presidential address delivered at the 11th International Conference of the International Association of Buddhist Studies at Mexico City in October 1994.

An example of such lexical incoherence is the rendering of Sanskrit *saṃjña* and Pali *saññā* "idea, notion" by the English word "perception" if, at the same time, the epistemological term *pratyakṣa* (*pramāṇa*) is to be rendered as "(direct) perception"; for if in a well thought-out and coherent terminology *saṃjña* is to be translated by "perception," *pratyakṣa* could not be, and conversely. A somewhat more difficult case is the rendering "form" for *rupa*, rather than the more precise "(elementary [*mahabhuta* = *dhatu*] and derived [*bhautika*], resistant) matter (for *rupaskandha*) / visible matter (having color and shape) (for *rupayatana*)." In the Abhidharma, *rupa* is the first of the five *skandhas* "Groups"; and in the *ayatana* classification of the Sarvastivadins, the *rupin* Bases are nos. 1–5 and 7–11, the *rupayatana* or visible matter Base being no. 7 which is the sense-object of the *cakṣurindriyayatana* (Base no. 1); and in the *dhatu* classification, the *rupin* Elements are nos. 1–5 and 7–11, the *rupadhatu* Element being no. 7 in relation to the *cakṣurdhatu* (Element no. 1) and the *cakṣurvijñanadhatu* (Element no. 13). Hence, when adopting the rendering "form" for *rupa* one is obliged to consider whether, in philosophical usage, this equivalent can actually bear the required meanings; a glance at a good dictionary of philosophical terminology will reveal that the term "form" in fact very seldom does.[1] These are, then, fundamental terms and concepts in Buddhist

1. In the list of *khandhas* / *skandhas*, even while rendering *saññā* by "idea" the philosopher K. N. Jayatilleke retained "form" for *rūpa* in his *Early Buddhist Theory of Knowledge* (London, 1963), e. g. p. 283. Conversely, Y. Karunadasa rendered *rūpa* by "matter" while continuing to use "perception" for *saññā* in his *Buddhist Analysis of Matter* (Colombo, 1967). Bhikkhu Ñāṇānanda, *Concept and Reality in Early Buddhist Thought* (Kandy, 1971), also kept "perception" for *saññā*. These translations were given in *The Pali Text Society's Pali-English Dictionary* (London, 1921-25), and earlier in R. C. Childers, *A Dictionary of the Pali Language* (London, 1875). Already in 1939 the *Critical Pāli Dictionary* (Copenhagen, 1924 ff.) s. v. *arūpa* had rendered *rūpa* by "corporeal, material" (beside "form"!); it however curiously conflated *saññā* and *viññāṇa*, translating both terms by "conscious(ness)" s.vv. *asañña* and *aviññāṇa*. The rendering "corporeality" for *rūpa*(*skandha*) was adopted by Nyanatiloka / Nyanaponika, *Buddhist Dictionary* (4Kandy, 1980), which used "perception" for *saññā*. Much earlier, T. Stcherbatsky had employed "matter," "ideas" and "consciousness" to render these three *skandha*-terms in his *Central Conception of Buddhism* (London, 1923), elaborating on results obtained previously by O. Rosenberg (see *Die Probleme der buddhistischen Philosophie* [Heidelberg, 1924], where the renderings "das Sinnliche," "Unterscheidung" and "Bewusstsein" have been used). L. de La Vallée Poussin has frequently used "matière" and "notion" in his translations. In his note "Saṃjñā," in C. Vogel, ed., *Jñānamuktāvali*, J. Nobel Commemoration Volume (New Delhi, 1959) 59-60, H. von Glasenapp sought to

thought for which no philosophically adequate translation has yet been agreed. Another kind of difficulty is presented by the Sanskrit term *pramaṇa*, which has been variously translated as right / correct knowledge / cognition, veridical awareness, valid knowledge, validating knowledge, epistemic norm, standard, and authority, all of which renderings are no doubt appropriate in some context either as denotations or, at least, as connotations of the word.[2] Until such problems associated with philosophical terminology and concepts have been first recognized to exist and then adequately investigated, lexicography and translation, as well as interpretation, will rest on insecure foundations, as will Buddhist studies in any full sense of this term.

In part, this situation might be though to be due to what could be called a philological fallacy were one to take the work philology exclusively in its narrow sense of textual study inclusive of content and context—a well-established sense that has long been recognized in classics for example. But since I understand the word philology in its full and comprehensive sense, I would reject the expression "philological fallacy" as a suitable tag for the problem in question. The fallacy has rather to do with the presumption that the study of the linguistic expression in texts can somehow be divorced from content.

Secondly, the issue has been complicated by the dichotomy between philosophy and religion that has been current in western thought, and accordingly in academic structures. In the western tradition, philosophy has indeed very often defined itself in opposition to religion, and the fact that scholars of Buddhism may regard the subject of their studies as both a religion and a philosophy has then led to the most extraordinary misunderstanding and confusion. If, for its students, Buddhism is both a philosophy and a religion in some meaningful sense of these two words, it is

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clarify the issue, distinguishing between "Unterscheidungsvermögen" for *saṃjña* ("wobei die Bedeutung 'separates Objekt einer Wahrnehmung oder Vorstellung' mitschwingt") and "Bewusstsein" for *vijñana*. Whilst rendering *saṃjña* by "perceptions . . . et les notions qui en résultent," J. Filliozat rendered both senses together by "prise de conscience" in *L'Inde classique*, vol. 2 (Hanoi, 1953) 340 with 521; on 519 he explained *rūpa* as "including everything which is material in the universe." In an early effort to understand Abhidharma / Abhidhamma thought, H. Guenther rendered *saññā* by "sensation" and *rupa* by "form" and "Gestalt"; see his *Philosophy and Psychology in the Abhidharma* (Lucknow, 1957) 58 and 151 (where only in his note did he provide a good explanation of *rupa*). For *saṃjñā*, cf. also D. Seyfort Ruegg, *Le traité du tathāgatagarbha de Bu ston Rin chen grub* (Paris, 1973) 76 n. 2, 117 n.1.

2. See below, § IX.

neither according to certain current definitions conditioned by the history of these subjects. Thus, Buddhist thought is not philosophy in the perspective of e. g. logical positivism or linguistic philosophy as it was generally practised earlier in this century. Nor has Buddhism normally been a religion in the sense of belief in a supreme being either as creator god or as a supernatural entity who can intervene in the natural order of things (thus giving rise to very difficult problems of theodicy). In addition, the problems of (self-)definition which the study of Buddhism has thus had to confront may have to do with the place apart in the humanities that philosophy and religious studies have so often been assigned—indeed with the place that they have sometimes been quite content to assign themselves.

Thirdly, the problem has no doubt been connected with the presumption that anything regarded as so quintessentially Greek, and hence "Occidental," as philosophy cannot possibly be found in anything "Oriental."[3] For—according to a widely held view—does not "Oriental thought" concern itself chiefly with the mystical and the irrational, or at best with what is called "wisdom" as opposed to reasoned philosophical thinking and the search for truth (defined in philosophy as the property of a proposition or state of affairs)?[4] Moreover, does not the interest evinced in mind by Indian and Buddhist philosophy place it outside the pale of true academic philosophy, so long at least as mind—that so-called "ghost in the machine"—was regarded as an epiphenomenon of the material, or of behavior, and was not held to be a suitable subject for genuine philosophical inquiry?

A further drawback for the study of Buddhist philosophy is the fact that it has all too often been studied in isolation from Indian thought as a whole, and from Indology. It should be clear that both in its structures

3. A discussion has turned round the question whether Sanskrit even has a word that corresponds precisely to "philosophy," and whether the concept of philosophy is an indigenous, "emic," category in Indian thought. See the valuable remarks in W. Halbfass, *India and Europe: An Essay in Understanding* (Albany, 1988); id., *Tradition and Reflection* (Albany, 1991), Chap. 7.

4. Confusion has probably been created, at least for non-specialists, by the translation of *prajñā* by "wisdom" when one of the chief meanings of this term is discriminative knowledge (*pravicaya = rab tu rnam par 'byed pa*) bearing on the *dharma*s. See e. g. Vasubandhu, *Abhidharmakośabhaṣya* i.2b and ii.24 (*prajña dharmapravicayaḥ*), and Prajñakaramati, *Bodhicaryavatarapañjikā* ix.1. This confusion has then been compounded by rendering *vikalpa* by "discrimination" when this term means "(dichotomic) conceptual construction." Even for *jñana = ye šes*, "wisdom" is a rather inadequate translation.

and its development Buddhist thought must be investigated to a considerable extent in its relation with Brahmanical and Jain thought.

Similarly, the study of Buddhist thought outside India must take account also of contextual factors such as Taoism, shamanism, Shintoism, Bon, etc.

But the undifferentiated idea of "Oriental thought," or "Asian philosophy," as some sort of monolithic entity, is of course a construct, a largely imaginary creature inhabiting the minds of some modern writers. At best, as often employed, the expression "Oriental thought" is of limited utility as a shorthand.

Still, very interestingly for us as students of Buddhism, to the extent that there really is substance in the idea of an "Asian philosophy," historically it is in large part constituted precisely by Buddhism. For it is Buddhism that has linked together so many Asian civilizations from Afghanistan and Kalmukia in the west to Japan in the east, and from the northern Mongol lands to Sri Lanka in the south. At the same time, however, we have in fact long known of the enormously large and diverse ways of thought represented in Asia, which is after all a geographical rather than a cultural entity. And amongst these ways of thought we have become familiar with a very considerable number of discrete Indian and Buddhist philosophies which require to be kept distinct.[5] Several of the latter have indeed embraced within themselves some form of what has been called mysticism, and certain trends may on occasion have proved themselves to be non-rational, irrational, even anti-rational. But, after all, these are not characteristics peculiar to Asian, or Buddhist, thought alone!

II

The view that philosophy is at best of only marginal and incidental importance in Buddhism, even that the historical Buddha did not profess being a philosopher at all, claims to have support from within the Buddhist canon itself.

Holders of this view have based it in particular on the smaller *Maluṅkyaputtasutta*, where it is related how the Buddha declined to answer questions put to him by the ascetic Maluṅkyaputta relating to the

5. But not totally isolated from each other. Thus the concept of "Buddhisms" (in the plural), which has recently gained popularity, seems only to displace the issues, and also to avoid the question as to why so many peoples with their various world-views have in fact called themselves Buddhists.

permanence and endlessness of the world (*loka*, of living beings), to the link between the body (*sarira*) and the life principle (*jiva*), and to the existence of a *tathagata* after death. In this text, these questions set aside and left unanswered by the Buddha are described as unexplicated (*avyakata* = *avyakṛta*) points, and the reason for the Buddha's refusal to answer them is there said to be that they are neither relevant (*atthasaṃhita* "goal-fitted, useful, salutary") nor linked fundamentally with pure practise (*adibrahmacariyaka*), and that they do not conduce to distaste (*nibbida*), dispassion (*viraga*), cessation (*nirodha*), calming (*upasama*), "superknowledge" (*abhiñña*) and Nirvaṇa. To illustrate this, the sutra employs a parable that has become famous, that of the man wounded by a poisoned arrow and of the doctor called by his friends and relatives to treat his wound. According to this parable, if before allowing the removal by the doctor of the poisoned arrow embedded in his body the wounded man were to insist on knowing just what sort of person it was who shot the arrow and precisely of what materials the arrow and the bow from which it was shot were made, he would die from his wound before all his curiosity was satisfied. But the Buddha is like a true doctor who immediately sets about removing the arrow from a wounded man's body without stopping to investigate irrelevant circumstances.[6] Here we see that the Buddha's teaching is supposed to work therapeutically—to have a salvific and gnoseological purpose—and that certain questions have been excluded from its purview because they do not serve the immediate need and are thus irrelevant.[7]

Another canonical text cited in support of the claim that the Buddha had no wish to profess himself a philosopher is the one in which he declines to reply to Vacchagotta's question as to whether an *atta* (*atman*) "self" exists or not, as well as to his question concerning the unexplicated questions (*avyakatani ditthigatani* / *avyakatavatthu=avyakṛtavastu*, which

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6. *Cūḷamaluṅkyasutta*, Majjhimanikāya I, 426-32. In this context E. Lamotte once wrote in his *Histoire du bouddhisme indien*, i (Louvain, 1958) 52: "La Loi bouddhique telle que la conçoit Śākyamuni relève de la morale et de l'éthique plutôt que de la philosophie et de la métaphysique"; Lamotte's formulation was more moderate than that of some others.

7. On medicine in Buddhism and the Buddha as physician, see e. g. *Hōbōgirin* s.v. "Byo." That the Buddhist *āryasatyas* were not, however, derived from a pre-existing medical teaching in India has been argued by A. Wezler, "On the quadruple division of the Yogaśāstra, the Caturvyuhatva of the Cikitsāśāstra and the "Four Noble Truths" of the Buddha," *IT* 12 (1984): 289–337; cf. also W. Halbfass, *Tradition and Reflection*, Chap. vii.

have been described as set aside, *thapita*, and excluded, *paṭikkhitta*).[8] In the case of the Buddha's silence concerning the *atman*, the tradition has sometimes regarded it as pedagogically motivated;[9] elsewhere, of course, the Buddha is shown teaching that the factors of existence are without self (*anatta, anatman*), without a permanent substantial essence.[10]

In deciding whether Buddhist doctrine—either as preceptive scriptural teaching (*deśanadharma*) or as a way of life to be practised (*adhigamadharma*)—is genuinely philosophical, much will of course depend on what we think philosophy is about. Were it to be considered to be unbridled speculative thought, or about the arbitrary construction of a metaphysical system, Buddhist thought would no doubt not be pure philosophy. And a doctrine like Buddhism that has represented itself as therapeutic, and soteriological, would not be counted as essentially philosophical so long as philosophy is understood to be nothing but analysis of concepts, language and meaning (though these matters do play an important part in the history of Buddhist thought too). But the fact remains that, in Buddhism, soteriology, gnoseology and epistemology have been closely bound up with each other. Indeed, as a teaching concerning the Path leading to the cessation of "Ill" (*dukkhanirodhagamini paṭipada*), Buddhism has not only had to develop a soteriological method that is theoretically intelligible and satisfying, but it has found itself obliged to identify what is this "Ill" (*dukkha*) from which liberation is sought, whence it springs (*dukkhasamudaya*), and what is the nature of the cessation of Ill (*dukkhanirodha*, i. e. Nirvaṇa as the Fruit of the Path). For the purpose of explicating these four Principles—the *aryasatyas*—Buddhist thinkers have brought to bear what can be described as philosophical theory and analysis alongside practise. Even

8. See the *Poṭṭhapādasutta* in Dighanikāya I, 187 f.; the *Pāsadikasutta, ibid.*, 135 ff.; the *Pārammaraṇasutta* in Saṃyuttanikāya II, 222 f.; the *Avyākatasaṃyutta, ibid.* IV, 374 ff. (including the *Vacchagottasutta, ibid.* IV, 395 f.); the *Cuḷamāluṅkyasutta* in the Majjhimanikāya I, 426 ff., and the *Vacchagottasutta, ibid.* I, 484 ff.; and the *Avyākatasutta* in the Aṅguttaranikaya IV, 68 ff. (on *inter alia* the *ariyasāvaka* who is *avyakaraṇadhamma* with regard to the *avyākatavatthus*).

9. See e. g. Saṃyuttanikāya IV, 400. Cf. Nāgārjuna, *Mulamadhyamakakārikā* xviii.6, xxii.12, xxv.21, and xxvii.8 (the problem of empty [null] subject terms is also taken up in Candrakīrti's *Prasannapadā* on this passage, as it is in ix.12).

10. A recent treatment of the unexplicated points is C. Oetke, "Die 'unbeantworteten Fragen' und das Schweigen des Buddha," *WZKS* 38 (1994): 84-120, which arrived too late to be addressed here.

their identification of a type of question (*praśna*) or matter (*vastu*) to be set aside (*thapanıya = sthapanıya = bžag par bya ba*, as unexplicated / undecided, *avyakata = avyakṛta*) beside other questions susceptible of explication either categorically (*ekaṃsa-vyakaraṇıya*), or after making appropriate distinctions (*vibhajja / vibhajya-vyakaraṇıya*) or after further questioning (*paṭipuccha ~ paripṛcchya-vyakaraṇıya*) is itself of philosophical significance.[11] In philosophy as well as in semantics and pragmatics, the principle of relevance (and the maxim of relation) is also acknowledged as essentially philosophical.[12]

The canonical text in which the Buddha is shown declaring that he does not dispute with the world but that the world disputes with him, also, does not appear to justify the supposition that the Buddha was somehow anti-philosophical. The context in fact indicates that what the wise agree on as the given must provide the starting point for philosophical discussion.[13] What is rejected, then, is disputing for the sake of disputing, rather than useful discussion and analysis. The latter are in fact amply evidenced in many a Buddhist sutra; and in so much of Buddhist tradition, scriptural authority (*agama*) is regularly accompanied by reasoning and argument (*yukti*). But for Buddhist thinkers reasoning (*yukti*) and disputation (*vivada*) are not automatically equivalent.

In sum, according to Buddhist traditions, if it is true that a Buddha does not hold back, so to say in a closed teacher's fist (*acariyamuṭṭhi = acaryamuṣṭi*), any relevant teaching required by his disciples, neither does he indulge in any utterance that is unwarranted and unjustified in a

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11. See e. g. the *Saṅgitisuttanta*, Dīghanikāya III, 229; Aṅguttaranikāya I, 197; and *Milindapañha*, 144-5. (Cf. K. N. Jayatilleke, *Early Buddhist Theory of Knowledge*, Chapter vi.) For the Sanskrit, see e. g. *Saṃgitisutra* (ed. Stache-Rosen) iv.26; and Vasubandhu, *Abhidharmakośa(bhāṣya)* v.22, with Yaśomitra's *Vyakhya*.

12. See for example P. Grice, *Studies in the Way of Words* (Cambridge, MA: 1989); and D. Sperber and D. Wilson, *Relevance* (Oxford: 1986).

13. See the *Pupphasutta* in Saṃyuttanikāya III, 138: *nâhaṃ bhikkhave lokena vivadāmi, loko ca mayā vivadati / na bhikkhave dhammavādi kenaci lokasmiṃ vivadati / yaṃ bhikkhave natthi-sammataṃ loke paṇḍitānaṃ ahaṃ pi taṃ "natthi" ti vadami / yaṃ bhikkhave atthi-sammataṃ loke paṇḍitānaṃ ahaṃpi taṃ "atthi" ti vadāmi /. . ..* For the Sanskrit parallel, and the context from the point of view of the Madhyamaka school, see Candrakīrti, *Prasannapadā* xviii.8 (370): *loko mayā sārdhaṃ vivadati nâhaṃ lokena sārdhaṃ vivadāmi / yal loke 'sti sammataṃ tan mamâpy asti sammatam/ yal loke nâstisammataṃ mamâpi tan nâsti sammatam /*; *Madhyamakāvatārabhāṣya* vi.81. Cf. also the *Trisaṃvaranirdeśaparivarta-mahāyānasūtra* of the Ratnakuṭa collection.

given philosophical and teaching situation.[14] And what he is shown as eschewing was disputatiousness and contentiousness masquerading as philosophy rather than discussion, reasoning and analysis.

III

One of the most recent investigations known to me of the appropriateness of speaking of "Indian philosophy," and of attaching the appellation of philosophy to Buddhism, is to be found in a book by the comparative philosopher Guy Bugault bearing the challenging title *L'Inde pense-t-elle?* which both provokes deeper thought on the matter and calls into question certain cultural shibboleths. There it is shown how—notwithstanding the very real differences between the traditions of philosophy in the west and in the Indian and Buddhist schools—there does exist a genuine sense in which we can, and indeed must, give due consideration to the philosophical dimension in the latter. Bugault's discussion turns round the questions whether what we find in India is "an other philosophy" rather than "something other than philosophy," and the extent to which a soteriology and therapeutic such as Buddhism is not wholly a philosophy but, nonetheless, a way of thinking that clearly comprises a philosophical dimension.[15]

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14. See *Milindapañha*, 144-5: *natth' Ananda tathagatassa dhammesu acariyamuṭṭhîti. abyakato ca therena Mâluṅkyaputtena pucchito pañho, tañ ca pana na ajananena na guhyakaraṇena. cattār' imāni maharaja pañhabyākaraṇāni . . . bhagava maharāja therassa Maluṅkyaputtassa taṃ ṭhapaṇiyaṃ pañhaṃ nabyākasi. so pana pañho kiṃkaraṇa ṭhapaṇiyo? na tassa dipanāya hetu va karaṇaṃ vā atthi, tasmā so pañho ṭhapaṇiyo. natthi buddhanaṃ bhagavantanaṃ akaraṇaṃ ahetukaṃ giraṃ udiraṇan ti.*

15. See Guy Bugault, *L'Inde pense-t-elle?* (Paris: 1994), Chap. 1 "La question préalable," 50-51: "Après avoir essayé de montrer qu'il existe une philosophie en Inde et aussi sa spécificité, nous laissons finalement le lecteur face à la question qui nous paraît l'essentiel : en quelle mesure est-ce une philosophie, en quelle mesure est-ce autre chose que de la philosophie? [. . .] Restent les mouvements qui ne relèvent pas des brâhmanes mais des śramanes : bouddhisme et jinisme. Si on les considère dans leur totalité organique, aucun d'eux n'est une philosophie. Ce sont des thérapies, des sotériologies, mais qui comportent une dimension philosophique."—G. Bugault is emeritus professor of Indian and comparative philosophy at the Sorbonne (Université Paris IV), the passage quoted being reprinted from his article "En quelle mesure et en quel sens peut-on parler de 'philosophie indienne'" in André Jacob ed., *Encyclopédie philosophique universelle I, L'Univers philosophique* (Paris: 1989) 1585.

An interesting recent work analysing the conditions under which Indian philosophy first attracted attention in Europe, but then came to be largely for-

We know of course that individual strands within Buddhist thought have been compared—if only more or less atomistically and episodically—with Socratic maieutics, Stoic and Epicurean apathia and ataraxia, or Pyrrhonic skepticism; with Berkeley's pluralistic idealism, Locke's empiricism, Hume's views on causality and psychology, or Kant's transcendentalist idealism and criticism; with Schopenhauer, Nietzsche or Heidegger; with American transcendentalism or pragmatism; with Wittgenstein's linguistic analysis; with modern phenomenology and semiotics of various kinds; and, of course, with Derrida's deconstruction. However, although no doubt of use as intellectual exercises in a particular—and more or less limited—context, comparison of the type "Buddhism and X" or "Nagarjuna and Y" can only take us just so far. More often than not, it has proved to be of rather restricted heuristic value, and methodologically it often turns out to be more problematical and constraining than illuminating. In the frame of synchronic description this kind of comparison tends to veil or obliterate important struc-

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gotten there, is also by a philosopher: R.-P. Droit, *L'oubli de l'Inde, Une amnésie philosophique* (Paris: 1989). Reference has already been made in note 3 above to the valuable studies by W. Halbfass. An older classic in this field of intellectual history is R. Schwab, *La renaissance orientale* (Paris: 1950), published (under the sign of Edward Said's problematic campaign on the theme of "Orientalism," concerning the relation of which to Buddhist studies see the present writer's remark in *JIABS* 15 [1992]: 109) in English translation as *The Oriental Renaissance* (New York: 1984). Reference may be made further to G. Franci, ed., *Contributi alla storia dell'orientalismo* (Bologna: 1985). A. Tuck's *Comparative Philosophy and the Philosophy of Scholarship: On the Western Interpretation of Nagarjuna* (New York: 1990)—notwithstanding several good observations on would-be objectivity vs. cultural relativism and on unconscious "isogesis" (defined as "a "reading into" the text that often reveals as much about the interpreter as it does about the text being interpreted" [pp. 9-10], in contradistinction to exegesis as a conscious process)—seems to be attempting to offer more than it can deliver, not least because it excludes from consideration some philosophically significant western work on Nāgārjuna and the Madhyamaka published in this century: R. Grousset, S. Schayer, J. W. de Jong and J. May (to mention only some) appear neither in the index nor in the bibliography even if several of them are mentioned, casually, in the text. Cf. also the review of Tuck's book by J. Bronkhorst, *Asiatische Studien* 47 (1993): 501 ff.

For some observations on the relation—and the lack of it—between philosophical study on the one side and Buddhism on the other side, see also G. Chatalian, "Early Indian Buddhism and the Nature of Philosophy: A Philosophical Investigation," *JIP* 11 (1983): 167-222.

One of the most significant attempts in more recent decades to relate the study of "Early Buddhism" in the Pali sources with philosophy was provided by K. N. Jayatilleke, *Early Buddhist Theory of Knowledge* (above, note 1). For a critique see G. Chatalian, *loc. cit.*

tures in thought, whilst from the viewpoint of historical diachrony it takes little account of genesis and context. For however much a philosophical insight or truth transcends, *in se*, any particular epoch or place, in its expression a philosophy is perforce conditioned historically and culturally.

But when saying that it is historically and culturally conditioned, I most certainly do not mean to relativize it or to espouse reductionism—quite the contrary in fact. The often facile opposition relativism vs. universalism has indeed all too often failed to take due account of the fact that what is relative in so far as it is conditioned in its linguistic or cultural expression may, nonetheless, in the final analysis have a very genuine claim to universality in terms of the human, and hence of the humanities. It seems that this holds true as much when we postulate some "Western" or "Eastern" philosophy of this or that period as when we consider what is now termed human rights, which by definition must transcend specific cultures in time and place.[16]

Now, it has to be recognized that our studies in Buddhist thought must indeed proceed on a comparative basis, that is, on a methodologically and phenomenologically well-founded comparativism which is, needless to say, a regular feature of scientific investigation. But a well-grounded philosophical comparison of this kind will differ very significantly from the one alluded to above by being structurally and systemically oriented, and at the same time sensitive to differences in historical genesis and context.

In the last analysis, of course, everything will depend on exactly how we actually engage in comparative philosophy. To pursue this point further would lead far afield and I shall therefore not attempt to do so at this point.

IV

For the purposes of a philosophical study of Buddhism we are today in a probably more favorable position than formerly thanks to certain contemporary developments in the field of philosophy itself.

What is called the "linguistic turn" in philosophy and cultural studies has no doubt made investigators more aware of the complexity of linguistic issues, though one must beware of transforming this turn into a

16. Notwithstanding what some Pacific-rim politicians and entrepeneurs would have us believe about a so-called "Asian exception."

dogmatic strait-jacket or surrogate ready-made philosophy. The same applies to post-modernist relativism and to some current forms of deconstruction. At all events, Buddhist theories of interpretation and hermeneutics, and the associated problem of the canonical *vs.* the apocryphal, are in process of being addressed both more systematically and systemically, and doubtless more philosophically too. Such approaches will surely be fruitful provided they avoid the excesses of seeing so many things mainly as the expression of power relations between different trends in Buddhist thought and hermeneutics (in the wake of the "Hermeneutics and Politics" movement), or indeed between our academic disciplines. (Political forces may well have played a part in the history of Buddhist thought, but it will be a tricky task indeed to pinpoint these forces from the sutra and śastra sources as we now have them.)

In recent work in philosophy, some essays now collected together in the late Paul Grice's *Studies in the Way of Words* (1989) have no doubt contributed ideas and methods—not to speak of terms such as "implicature" (even if Grice's idea of the "conversational" in implicature would appear to have little relevance in Buddhist [and Indian] thought).[17]

It may also turn out that a recent book by another philosopher will not only help to make it philosophically respectable once more to address the question of the mind after the long reign of a certain Behaviorism and its reductionist cohorts, but also enable us to talk more clearly and meaningfully of consciousness and intentionality and of the mind/matter problem. I refer to *The Rediscovery of the Mind* (1992) by John Searle, who, while maintaining that the philosophy of language is in fact a branch of the philosophy of mind, has trenchantly elucidated issues in the mind / body problem while holding that monism and dualism are both false by arguing that the vocabularies and assumptions behind them are simply obsolete.

V

For my part, I am inclined to think that the approach to the understanding and analysis of our sources must initially be what has been termed

17. Cf. D. Seyfort Ruegg, "Purport, implicature and presupposition: Sanskrit *abhiprāya* and Tibetan *dgoṅs pa / dgoṅs gžï* as hermeneutical concepts," *JIP* 13 (1985): 309-25. The concept of implicature has since been taken up by C. Oetke, "Pragmatic implicatures and text-interpretation," *StII* 16 (1992): 185-233. See also below, p. 14.

"emic" rather than "etic."[18] That is, in the first instance, an effort has to be made, as far as is possible, to determine how the categories and terms of a culture relate to each other structurally and systemically, and so to place ourselves within the cultural contexts and intellectual horizons of the traditions we are studying, making use of their own intellectual and cultural categories and seeking as it were to "think along" with these traditions. This is much more than a matter of simply developing sympathy or empathy, for it is a an intellectual, and scientific, undertaking. And very clearly it is not one of merely converting from one religion to another.[19] Nor is it a matter of any one-sided, or absolute, preference for structural and systemic—or "emic"—analysis over the generalizing and comparative—or "etic"—one which would totally reject the comparative method at every stage of work. Rather, it is one of learning how intelligently and effectively to work with, and within, a tradition of thinking by steeping oneself in it while rejecting the sterile "us" *vs. "them"* dichotomy.[20] Structural and systemic analysis is in a position to allow due weight to the historical as well as to the descriptive, that is, it may be diachronic as well as synchronic. Here the observation might be ventured that careful "emic" analysis can provide as good a foundation as any for generalizing and comparative study, one that will not superimpose from the outside extraneous modes of thinking and interpretative grids in a way that sometimes proves to be scarcely distinguishable from a more or less subtle form of neo-colonialism. It should go without saying that in proceeding along these channels it will always be necessary to steer clear of the Scylla of radical relativism—which would wish hermetically to enclose each culture in its own categories—as well as of the

18. This terminology—inspired by the use in linguistics of terms ending in -etic as opposed to -emic—goes back to the "tagmemics" of K. L. Pike, *Language in Relation to a Unified theory of the Structure of Human Behavior* (The Hague: 1954-1960; 2nd ed., 1967).

19. This approach should therefore not become embroiled in the claim that a Buddhist is, as such, disqualified from lecturing on Buddhism in a university department of religion (where few seem, however, to be concerned about whether a Christian is disqualified from teaching courses on Christianity), nor need it enter into the opposite claim that only a Buddhist can be so qualified. These two positions are egregious examples of intellectually sterile arguments carried on with scant regard to the scientific (not to mention spiritual) issues involved.

20. The procedure may be compared with *epoché* or bracketing (Einklammerung, in relation to Einschaltung) in phenomenological method which has occupied a prominent place in the study of religion at least since the time of G. van der Leeuw's *Einführung in die Phänomenologie der Religion* (1925) and *Phänomenologie der Religion* (1933).

Charybdis of ethnocentrism, European or otherwise—which would study and judge all cultures by "our" standards—, these twin extremes being travesties of the "emic" and "etic" methods respectively.

It should be emphasized again that to say this is not meant to exclude bringing together different *epistemés* for comparative and heuristic purposes. Quite the reverse in fact.[21]

As for the frequently made—and in some circles popular—distinction between (genuinely philosophical) evaluative study and historical (and philological) study of a philosophy or philosopher, it is evident that the first rests and depends on a successful pursual of the second kind of study. The two may be theoretically distinguishable and belong to separable phases and modes of investigation, but they cannot be totally decoupled.[22]

The distinction between the "emic" and the "etic" approaches—which have to do with our modes of analysis and understanding—is no doubt parallel to the distinction drawn between the use of author-familiar as opposed to author-alien terminologies for the purposes of comparison and exposition. But these two sets of concepts do not appear to be identical because, for the expository and comparative purposes just mentioned, it may still be possible to employ author-alien terminologies even within an approach that is committed to "emic" analysis and understanding. For example, in explaining the Buddhist theory of spiritual classes or "lineages" (*gotra*) to the extent that it is based on a biological

21. Surprisingly, however, the (of course quite legitimate) procedures seeking to analyse and understand traditional materials with the help of contemporary theoretical and methodological concepts in anthropological, cultural, historical, literary, philosophical and religious studies—e. g. to understand the śastraic traditions of the Indian Paṇḍits through certain modern epistemes—is nowadays being referred to as contextualization by some Indologists. But since these procedures are by nature "etic" and comparative, it would seem that contextualization is exactly what they are not, and cannot be. For, surely, to contextualize something is to study it in its own cultural, systemic, and "emic," terms and context.

22. For a recent investigation, from a somewhat different point of view, of the relation between philological and philosophical study, see C. Oetke, "Controverting the *ātman*-controversy and the query of segregating philological and non-philological issues in studies on eastern philosophies and religions," *Studien zur Indologie und Iranistik* 18 (1993): 191-212 (a reply to observations made by J. Bronkhorst in *WZKS* 32 [1989]: 223-5.) This article came to my attention too late to be taken into account in the present discussion.

metaphor, one might evoke the idea of a (spiritual) "gene";[23] and in analysing the exegetical principle of an intended ground (*dgoṅs gźi*) to which an intentional (*neyartha*) utterance ultimately, but allusively, refers without explicitly expressing it, one might speak of an (hermeneutical) "implicature."[24] Of course, both the modern biological term "gene" and the still more recent coinage "implicature" are alien to our Indian and Tibetan sources, in which no lexeme is to be found with precisely the meaning of either of these two modern words. Yet it seems possible to evoke, *mutatis mutandis*, the ideas expressed by these new terms when seeking to explicate the theories in question. In other words, author-alien (or source-alien) terminology could very well be compatible with an "emic" approach to understanding, and it does not necessarily bring with it an exclusive commitment to the "etic" approach. (Conversely, it would in principle be possible to employ source-familiar terminology and still misconstrue and misrepresent a doctrine, thus infringing the requirement of an "emic" approach.) Furthermore, as already indicated, the use of a source-familiar terminology need not stand in the way of proceeding from "emic" to "etic" analysis.

In this connection, a parallel might perhaps be drawn with the questions, both musicological and musical, that today arise in recovering and performing (so-called) "early music" (mediaeval, Renaissance and Baroque), a field in which there is also much discussion of problems of retrieval and rendition, i. e. interpretation.[25] Thus, a piece of music may have to be retrieved or reconstructed from ambiguous documents in a way satisfactory to performer and musicologist (who may or may not be the same person), and it has then to be performed in a manner pleasing to performer and listener. In the case of instrumental music, this can involve using either original instruments contemporary with the music and of the same provenance, modern copies of such instruments, or modern instruments (for instance the piano for Bach). Any of these three methods may produce results that satisfy performer and listener, though the musicologist and the "purist" performer and listener would generally

23. Cf. D. Seyfort Ruegg, "The Meaning of the Term *gotra* and the Textual History of the *Ratnagotravibhāga*," *BSOAS* 39 (1976): 341-63.
24. Cf. D. Seyfort Ruegg, "Purport, Implicature and Presupposition: Sanskrit *abhiprāya* and Tibetan *dgoṅs pa / dgoṅs gźi* as Hermeneutical Concepts," *JIP* 13: 309-25.
25. The question of authenticity will be left out of consideration here because of the possible ambiguity of this concept and of the misunderstandings to which it can give rise.

prefer to use original instruments (if necessary rebuilt or reconstructed) or, if such are unavailable, modern reproductions (which may sometimes be unavoidably hypothetical).

Interpreters of classical Buddhist writings using the "emic" approach and source-familiar terminologies find themselves in a situation somewhat analogous to that of the performer of "early music" on contemporary instruments, or perhaps more accurately (because of the problems outlined above) in a position comparable with that of an instrumentalist using largely rebuilt instruments or copies. And interpreters using principally or exclusively the "etic" method and source-alien terminologies may well resemble the performer using modern instruments, and perhaps even a modern style of performance. As for the interpreter using the "emic" approach, yet perhaps having occasional recourse to source-alien terminology, he might be compared more with a musician using the first or, above all, second kind of instrument, rather than to one playing modern instruments in modern style. (To what extent it may be possible to compare the interpreter of ancient Buddhist writings with a modern vocalist performing "early music," where the question of old and modern instruments plays no part, is another matter. Just as it would no doubt be difficult for the modern vocalist totally to remove from his mind and technique all developments in singing in the time intervening since the production of the piece he is performing, so the modern interpreter of a Buddhist text may well experience difficulty in entirely eschewing all more modern forms of thinking and all more modern problematics. In both cases, the audiences might not desire such an exercise even if it were possible.) Like so many comparisons, the one offered here is of course not entirely on all fours with what is being compared, but it may at least help to illustrate the issues.

In any event, in its crudest inhibiting form as something in which the interpreter and scholar is so to speak imprisoned in his pre-understanding and in the limitations of his pre-judgments, the "hermeneutic circle" can, I think, be got out of if a real effort is made. And an analysis and critique in "etic" terms of philosophical thought will only become genuinely meaningful and useful once one has understood, as it were "emically," the concerns, presuppositions and intentions—i. e. the problematics—of texts and their philosopher-authors, in other words the horizons and

issues that have been theirs.[26] No valid principle of scientific objectivity is being thereby abandoned. And to raise this objection against "emic" methodology would be to demonstrate a rather simplistic and indeed naïve understanding of scholarly distance and objectivity—which is, as is well known, a not unproblematic thing even in the natural sciences—and a lack of awareness of certain implications of the theory of understanding in the humanities and of hermeneutics. The objection just mentioned would, then, be scientistic rather than truly scientific.

A more weighty objection against this approach is based on the hermeneutic principle that it is simply impossible for us today to project ourselves back into an age long past, that we cannot put ourselves in the skin, or in the mind, of a long-dead thinker in order to determine authorial intention—the *mens auctoris*—and that our understanding is determined by its historicality. This view has been powerfully argued by several modern writers on hermeneutics.[27] An "archaeology of the mind" is a highly challenging project indeed. But while fully acknowledging the formidable difficulties involved in any search for understanding, and while recognizing the weight of certain theoretical problems involved, I think that considerable progress can still be made in genuinely penetrating what the Buddhist tradition calls the intention (Sanskrit a*bhipraya*, Tibetan *dgoṅs pa*) of ancient authors and texts, and in understanding historically and contextually the evidence which we consider as historians of religion and philosophy. Thought forms, presuppositions, and prejudgments as well as language may be prison-houses of sorts. But it is possible to make progress in freeing ourselves from the shackles of our mindsets, and to a significant degree also of our historically and culturally conditioned limiting horizons, if only we will—and provided, of course, we refrain from imposing currently fashionable ideas on what we are

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26. By speaking of a crude and inhibiting form of the hermeneutic circle reference is being made here to the negative, imprisoning effect of the circle, not to the positive nature of the hermeneutic circle as understanding in contextuality and historicality.

27. On the circle in philosophical hermeneutics, see e. g. H.-G. Gadamer, *Wahrheit und Methode*[3] (Tübingen: 1960) and the works of Paul Ricoeur. The concept of the hermeneutic circle—found earlier with Friedrich Ast, Schleiermacher and Dilthey—is current also in theology (Bultmann) as well as in philosophy (Heidegger). Cf. R. Palmer, *Hermeneutics* (Evanston: 1969), and J. Bleicher, *Contemporary Hermeneutics* (London: 1980). Some aspects of contemporary trends in hermeneutics have been usefully criticized by E. Betti, *Die Hermeneutik als allgemeine Methodik der Geisteswissenschaften* (Tübingen: 1962), and by E. D. Hirsch, *Validity in Interpretation* (New Haven: 1967) and *The Aims of Interpretation* (Chicago: 1976).

studying (a process that can on occasion come very close to neo-colonialism, as mentioned above). Surely the "us" and "them" dichotomy has been somewhat overworked in the theory of understanding.

VI

Continuities, structured patterns and non-essentialist and lattice-like polythetic "family resemblances"—however underlying they may be—are no less interesting than discontinuities and disagreements in studying the history of thought.[28] We are, after all, trying to understand what a tradition has meant to its representatives, even in the face of synchronic intellectual and spiritual tensions and of diachronic heterogeneity present within it.

One may focus on tracing such patterns and continuities, first, within Buddhist thought and, next, between it and its Indian (Brahmanical and Jain) context and, then, between this Indo-Buddhist culture and its prolongation in the "Greater India"—l'Inde extérieure—of the Himalayan area, Inner Asia and East Asia. This kind of study has lead me to think that a very large sector of Tibetan civilization, although not simply reducible to the Indian, is *typologically (and structurally) Indic* in a number of highly interesting respects even though it has of course developed its own specific and very characteristic features and contains much that is not historically attested in India.[29]

Intercultural studies of course necessarily involve the careful clarification of the modalities of relations between two worlds of thought, between peoples whose civilizations are in contact. Thus it addresses the question of how one people (the Tibetans for instance) could adopt from its southerly neighbor and then thoroughly absorb and integrate a religio-philosophical system like Buddhism accompanied by the not specifically religious sciences—the *vidyasthanas* or *rig gnas*—with which this culture was closely associated in India, and with which it has continued to be linked in the Himalayan area and Inner Asia. This process of intercul-

28. See D. Seyfort Ruegg, foreward, *Buddha-nature, Mind and the Problem of Gradualism in a Comparative Perspective* (London: 1989). It is on this ground also that one can still continue to speak not of "Buddhisms" but of Buddhism. Compare below, §X.

29. The term "Indic" is used here not as an equivalent of "Indian" (as distinct from Amerindian, American Indian, "native American"), or of "Indo-Aryan," but rather to denote what is typologically and structurally Indian,without being attested (to the best of our knowledge) in our sources as having actually existed in India.

tural borrowing and integration raises the fascinating question not only of linguistic areas—the *Sprachbund* theory of areal in contrast to genetic relationship between languages—but also of cultural areas.[30]

VII

Let me now illustrate some of the above generalizations by a few examples relating to the philological and historical study of philosophical texts and to the philosophical and hermeneutical analysis of these texts.

Critical editions of philosophical texts

Following the publication in 1950 of the Sanskrit original of the *Ratnagotravibhaga*[31]—an important early Mahayana treatise counted as one of the Dharmas of Maitreya that had hitherto been known in the west mainly through E. Obermiller's work on the Tibetan sources relating to it[32]—, it became apparent that this text, together with the theories of the buddha-nature (*tathagatagarbha*) and of spiritual types or "genes" (*gotra*) expounded in it, could provide a valuable starting point for research which should prove to be of interest for Buddhist studies under the aspects of both philosophy and religion and historical-philological method.

Philologically speaking, the *Ratnagotravibhaga* (*RGV*) is of interest because the study of this work together with its extensive commentarial literature has urgently raised the question of how best to handle an old text which is available in both its original Sanskrit and in (Chinese and Tibetan) translations, and which, within the Tibetan tradition, has been the subject of a vast body of exegesis from the eleventh century to modern times. That is, this text is both a literary and historical record which is some 1500 years old and part of a living tradition. Work on it engages the question of the very nature of Indo-Tibetan (and Indo-Sinitic) philology and, more generally, what the scope and tasks of Indo-Tibetan studies are. A few decades ago these were questions that had by no means been adequately clarified, and even today uncertainty seems still to be rife concerning what Indo-Tibetan studies are about.

30. Cf. D. Seyfort Ruegg, *Ordre spirituel et ordre temporel dans la pensée bouddhique de l'Inde et du Tibet* (Paris: 1995).
31. *Ratnagotravibhāga Mahāyānottaratantraśāstra*, ed. E. H. Johnston and T. Chowdhury (Patna: 1950).
32. E. Obermiller, "The Sublime Science of the Great Vehicle to Salvation," *Acta Orientalia* 9 (1931): 82-306.

In Buddhist studies, critical philologically based editions are of course required of any Indian materials that may still be extant as well as of the relevant translated texts in the Chinese and Tibetan canonical collections containing sutra and śastra sources. In the course of this work it is necessary, *inter alia*, to draw on any proto-canonical, paracanonical and commentarial traditions having preserved textual variants that have to be taken into account for a genuinely critical edition. By *commentarial traditions* I mean both Indian commentaries—either in their original language or as now available to us only in translation—and commentaries composed by non-Indian authors. By *proto-canonical* traditions I refer, in the frame of Indo-Tibetan studies, to textual material belonging to the time antedating the constitution of the known bKa' 'gyurs and bsTan 'gyurs, such as that found in the Tibetan Dunhuang manuscripts (going back to the ninth century) and in inscriptions and manuscripts from Ta pho (going back to c.1000).[33] And by *paracanonical traditions* I refer, in the same frame, to versions of a sutra or śastra text in editions postdating the constitution of these bKa' 'gyurs or bsTan 'gyurs, which may differ more or less from the readings found in the "standard versions"—printed or manuscript—of these two canonical collections.[34] Even when

33. In Dunhuang Tibetan rule lasted until 848. Aurel Stein dated the sealing of the caves to 1035. A. Fujieda, "The Tunhuang manuscripts," *Zinbun, Memoirs of the Research Institute for Humanistic Studies* 10 (Kyōto: Zinbun Kagaku Kenkyusho, 1969): 17 ff., dated (p. 22) the Tibetan materials to 782-848 (cf. *JA* 1981: 65-68, where Fujieda dated the closure of the caves to shortly after 1002). But see A. Róna-Tas, "A brief note on the chronology of the Tun-huang collections," *AOH* 221 (1968): 313-16. See in general, L. I. Čuguevskii, "Touen-houang du VIII^{e} au X^{e} siècle," *Nouvelles contributions aux études de Touen-houang*, ed. M. Soymié (Geneva: 1981) 1-56; and for a recent very brief survey, see L. Petech, "The Silk road, Turfan and Tunhuang in the first millennium AD," *Turfan and Tunhuang, The Texts*, ed. A. Cadonna (Florence: Orientalia Venetiana IV, 1992) 1-13.

On the Ta pho / Tabo inscriptions and manuscripts, see E. Steinkellner, "A report on the 'Kanjur' of Ta pho," *East and West* 44 (1994): 115-36, as well as the articles by E. De Rossi Filibek, J. L. Panglung and H. Tauscher, *ibid.*

34. For information on the bKa' 'gyur manuscripts and printed editions, see in particular the recent work of H. Eimer, P. Harrison, P. Skilling and J. Silk. The standard (printed) editions of the bsTan 'gyurs are those of Beijing, sNar thaṅ, sDe dge and Co ne, to which must now be added the so-called "Golden Tanjur" commissioned by the *mi dbaṅ* Pho lha nas bSod nams stobs rgyas and recently published in facsimile in China (see P. Skilling, "A brief guide to the Golden Tanjur," *Journal of the Siam Society* 79 [1991]: 138-46).

In the case of the *Ratnagotravibhāga*, its translation in the Chinese canon (available also in the edition by Zuiryu Nakamura published in Tōkyō in 1961) has been treated by J. Takasaki, *A Study on the Ratnagotravibhāga (Uttaratantra)* (Rome: 1966); some of his text-critical conclusions concerning

already accessible, these are materials that have often been neglected when preparing editions of texts, something that is of course understandable in view of their very great abundance.

In sum, the textual transmission of fundamental works such as the *Ratnagotravibhaga* and Candrakirti's *Madhyamakavatara(bhasya)* proves to be appreciably more complex than had been foreseen by their first editors earlier in this century.[35] And for any truly critical edition of a sutra or

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its Indian Ur-text have however had to be reconsidered (cf. D. Seyfort Ruegg, "The Meanings of the Term *gotra* and the Textual History of the *Ratnagotravibhāga*," *BSOAS* 39 [1976]: 341-63). Even though the very useful edition of the Tibetan text with trilingual indexes published in Japan in 1967 by the Suzuki Institute was not a fully critical edition based on all existing textual materials, it had the merit of making use of the Beijing, sNar thaṅ and sDe dge editions of the bsTan 'gyur and referring in addition to the commentaries by rGyal tshab Dar ma rin chen and Koṅ sprul Blo gros mtha' yas.

As an example of the evidence for variant readings to be extracted from Tibetan commentaries, reference may be made to the comment on the *RGV(V)* by rGyal tshab Dar ma rin chen (1364-1432). There (f. 42a) we find a very significant variant reading not attested in the Beijing and sNar thaṅ bsTan 'gyur editions of this text translated by rNog Blo ldan šes rab (1059-1109), but which is not only suggested by the sense but is actually confirmed by both Johnston's Sanskrit text of the *RGVV* (i.12, p. 12.14) and by another bsTan 'gyur edition (sDe dge). This variant is *ñon moṅs pa'i sbubs las ma grol ba* = *avinirmuktakleśakośa* instead of *ñon moṅs pa'i sbubs las grol ba* = *vinirmuktakleśakosa* in a sutra passage defining the relation between the *tathāgatagarbha* and the *dharmakāya*: *ayam eva ca bhagavaṃs tathāgatadharmakāyo 'vinirmuktakleśakośas tathāgatagarbha ity ucyate*. Because it concerns the crucial matter of this relation, and since traces of both doctrinal views can be found in the Chinese tradition, the variant appears to be a doctrinally significant one and not to be explicable solely in terms of the textual transmission of the Tibetan bsTan 'gyur. See D. Seyfort Ruegg, introduction, *Le traité du tathāgatagarbha de Bu ston Rin chen grub* pp. 37-45.

As for the precise contents of the concepts of the proto-canonical and paracanonical, they will be further clarified by continuing research in respect to the history of the bKa' 'gyur and bsTan 'gyur.

35. The Tibetan translation of the *Madhyamakāvatāra* and *Bhāṣya*—the only version of these texts now accessible—, was published by L. de La Vallée Poussin, *Madhyamakāvatāra* (St. Petersburg: Bibliotheca Buddhica IX, 1907-1912) (evidently on the basis of the Beijing and sNar thaṅ bsTan 'gyurs). La Vallée Poussin referred also to the translation of the *Kārikās* alone by Nag tsho in the bsTan 'gyur and to a "paracanonical" edition which he described (p. ii) as "beaucoup plus correcte que celle du Tandjour"; but since he included no critical apparatus in his edition, it is difficult to make out what use he made of this additional material known to him. In the Beijing edition of the bsTan 'gyur are found both a translation of the *Madhyamakāvatārakārikās* ascribed to Krṣnapaṇḍita and Nag tsho Tshul khrims rgyal ba (b. 1011) as revised by Tilakakalaśa and Pa tshab Ñi ma grags (b. 1055) (no. 5261) and one ascribed to Tilaka and Pa tshab (no. 5262, executed in Kaśmīr),

śatra text in the Indo-Tibetan tradition, alongside the printed and manuscript bKa' 'gyur and bsTan 'gyur editions, the commentarial traditions, and any paracanonical traditions available, have to be taken into account as important *testimonia*.

The need in philosophical study for such critically constituted texts of course requires no demonstration.

Historical study of doctrinal content

With respect to the contents of the *Ratnagotravibhaga*, the historical-philological problems revealed by the examination of the *tathagatagarbha* and related concepts have turned out to be no less challenging and interesting. These are some of them:

(i) It has been necessary to trace the sources of the relevant Mahayanist concepts in many branches of literature, Buddhist and non Buddhist, including in particular any possible anticipations in the earlier scriptural sources of the Śravakayana.[36] This search in turn raises the problem of continuities and discontinuities between the Mahayana and the Śravakayana.

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as well as a translation of the same text together with Candrakirti's autocommentary ascribed to Tilaka and Ñi ma grags as revised by Kanakavarman and Ñi ma grags (no. 5263, also executed in Kaśmir). And in the sDe dge edition there are found a translation of the *Kārikās* ascribed to Tilaka and Pa tshab (rather than Nag tsho) as revised by Kanakavarman and Pa tshab (no. 3861) and a translation of the *Karikas* together with the autocommentary ascribed to Tilakakalaśa and Pa tshab as revised by Kanakavarman and Pa tshab (no. 3862). In Žu chen Tshul khrims rin chen's dKar chag to the sDe dge bsTan 'gyur (p. 785 of the Lhasa reprint of 1985), the information on no. 3861 very strangely conflates the names of Kṛṣṇa and Tilaka and the names of Pa tshab and Nag tsho, as if reflecting a problem which is, however, not resolved. There exists in addition a paracanonical edition from the Lhasa Žol par khaṅ of Pa tshab's translation of the *Kārikās* of the *MA*. In his comment on the *MA(Bh)*, the *dGoṅs pa rab gsal*, Tsoṅ kha pa has on several occasions preferred readings from Nag tsho's translation (prose as well as verse) over the "standard" translation by Pa tshab.

36. As suggested by the present writer in *JIABS* 15 (1992): 110-13, the term Hinayana had best be reserved as a technical one applying to cases where the *arhat* concept and the corresponding Path of the doctrinal schools (*nikaya*) is being distinguished from, and opposed to, the Path of the bodhisattva and the buddha ideal of the Mahāyāna / Bodhisattvayana. When this is not the case, and in particular when it is the teachings of so-called Early Buddhism that are being referred to, the (non-pejorative) term Śrāvakayāna is usually a more suitable term than the potentially pejorative Hinayāna. Needless to say, Śravakayana is not coextensive with the narrower term Staviravada and the even more narrow term Theravāda.

(ii) It has been necessary to trace the interrelations between the forms of these concepts found in the *Ratnagotravibhaga* together with its direct sutra sources and those found in other Mahayana sutras, in particular the Prajñaparamita sutras, and in the *Abhisamayalaṃkara*—another treatise traditionally regarded in Tibet as a Dharma of Maitreya. This in turn raises the question of a "Maitreya-tradition" in early Mahayanist thought.

(iii) In connection with the concept of the *tathagatagarbha*—or the Buddha-Element (*tathagatadhatu*)—as empty (*śunya*) of all heterogeneous, extrinsic and relative factors, but as not empty (*aśunya*) of its intrinsic, constitutive and informing (*buddha-*)dharmas, there arises the crucial and vexed question of the historical relationship between the principle of Emptiness of self-nature (*raṅ stoṅ, svabhavaśunyata*) in the Madhyamaka and its sutra sources such as the Prajñaparamita and the Ratnakuṭa, and the idea of Emptiness of the other (*gžan stoṅ, *para[bhava-]śunya*) in some of the *tathagatagarbha* literature.

(iv) In connection with the concept of buddha-nature, there arises the complex question of the historical relation between the traditions of Buddhism in India and Tibet and those of East Asia. According to the former, only sentient beings (*sattva* = *sems can*)—the *sattvaloka*—have the capacity of becoming buddhas, whereas East Asian traditions have attributed the capacity for buddhahood also to the grasses, trees, mountains and rivers—i. e. to the so-called *bhajanaloka*.

(v) In the Sanskrit expression *tathagatagarbha*, its Tibetan equivalent *de bžin gšegs pa'i sñiṅ po* and the Chinese term *ju-lai-tsang*, even the terms *garbha / sñiṅ po / tsang* have been understood somewhat differently, *garbha* being usually interpretable in the Indian and Tibetan traditions as Embryo or Seed, or as Essence (*sñiṅ po*), whereas in the Sino-Japanese tradition the value of Womb (*tsang*) has become established. This is not to say that the Sino-Japanese tradition's use of the word *tsang* to render *garbha* was wrong. But it has to be recognized that it has introduced a metaphor which is largely absent in the Indian and Tibetan sources, and that it is therefore quite inappropriate to import this new metaphor into the original Indian sources as is sometimes being done nowadays. This is, then, a difference that has often been overlooked in modern discussions of the doctrine of buddha-nature.

Philosophical and hermeneutical study

On the level of philosophical interpretation and hermeneutics, the *tathagatagarbha* theory and the related problem of Emptiness of the other (*gžan stoṅ: *para[bhava]-śunya*) in relation to Emptiness of self-nature (*raṅ stoṅ: svabhavaśunya[ta]*) has given rise over recent years to a number of discussions among writers on the subject.

Thus, the doctrines of *raṅ stoṅ* and *gžan stoṅ* have tended to be represented simply as opposed theories located on the same level of discourse,[37] but with no investigation being made of the religio-philosophical question as to the extent to which they might be complementary (as part of the Tibetan tradition has indeed thought), or whether they might perhaps be considered as what is today termed incommensurable (that is, located on different levels, or within distinct universes, of religious and philosophical discourse). What is needed in Buddhist studies is not enlistment in campaigns and polemics with other schools of Buddhist thought, but careful descriptions and analyses of the various traditions establishing their sources and religio-philosophical problematics and identifying how each dealt with the philosophical and hermeneutical questions that arose in their respective schools.

In Tibet from the thirteenth century at the latest, the *raṅ stoṅ* theory has been associated with dominant "majority" schools such as the "mainstream" Sa skya pas and dGa' ldan pas / dGe lugs pas, whilst the *gžan stoṅ* theory has been adopted by "minority" schools such as the Jo naṅ pas and some currents within the rÑiṅ ma pa and bKa' brgyud pa schools.[38] Then, in the seventeenth century during the reign of the Fifth Dalai Lama, the Jo naṅ pa school in Central Tibet was suppressed and its books sealed at the time of a conflict between on the one side the central authorities of the dGa' ldan pho braṅ, who were inseparably linked with the dGe lugs pas, and on the other side the king of gTsaṅ, who was associated with the Žva dmar Karma pa hierarchs of the bKa' brgyud pa school. Here we have a case where considerations of state do appear to impinge on philosophical and religious ideas; and the question arises whether the Jo naṅ pas—whose center was in gTsaṅ province and who

37. See for example S. Hookham, *The Buddha Within* (Albany: 1991), who regards the advocates of the *raṅ stoṅ* as having denigrated and distorted the *gžan stoṅ*, which she then sets out to defend.

38. The words "majority," "mainstream" and "minority" have been put between inverted commas because they tend to be subjective descriptions with little scientific content or value—the more so when proper statistics are hard to come by—and cannot in any case constitute the decisive criterion for understanding and evaluating religious, philosophical and hermeneutical ideas.

were protected by the king of gTsaṅ—were in fact suppressed for political or for ideological reasons. Perhaps, however, it would be an error to opt exclusively for either of these explanations. Reasons of state may have predominated; but it is not impossible that the ideological and the political in fact reinforced each other. In any case, in a land such as Tibet where "church" and "state" were so closely interlinked, the modern dichotomy religious *vs.* political—or sacred *vs.* profane—loses much of its relevance. And an explanation that completely subordinates one of these concepts to the other might well be too culture-bound and reductionist, and thus a travesty of the "etic" approach. The task of the historian will surely be to take account of both factors in an "emic" understanding of Tibetan Buddhist civilization—something that is admittedly not always an easy undertaking.

"Inherent Enlightenment" vs. "Critical Buddhism" as a philological, historical and hermeneutical undertaking

In recent years it is in Japan that the most striking controversy revolving round the *tathagatagarbha* and buddha-nature theory has come to the fore in discussions on "Critical Buddhism." There two respected scholars in Tokyo—Professors Hakamaya Noriaki and Matsumoto Shiro—have characterized the buddha-nature doctrine as in some way non-Buddhist.[39] According to them it represents what they have labeled by the newly coined Sanskrit term "dhatu-vada," i. e. the *hongaku* [*shiso*] (*pen-chiao* [*hsing*]) theory of "original / inherent" enlightenment in Chinese and Japanese Buddhism. And this doctrine they hold to be incompatible with the principle of *pratityasamutpada* "origination in dependence." Now, origination in dependence is indeed a fundamental concept in Buddhist thought. And in their critique of the buddha-nature doctrine these two scholars may well be justified in reacting against a superficial or simplistic version of it current in Japan or elsewhere. But in totally rejecting this doctrine as non-Buddhist they seem to have overshot the mark by giving scant attention to the explications of the *tathagatagarbha* theory

39. See recently N. Hakamaya, *Hongaku shisō hihan* [Critique of the thought of inherent enlightenment] (Tōkyō: 1989), and *id.*, *Hihan bukkyo* [Critical Buddhism] (Tokyō: 1990); and S. Matsumoto, *Engi to ku—nyoraizo shiso hihan* [Causality and emptiness—A critique of *tathagatagarbha* thought] (Tokyō: 1989; 3rd ed., 1993), and *id.*, "The Mādhyamika philosophy of Tsong-kha-pa," *Memoirs of the Research Department of the Toyo Bunko* 48 (1990) (English reworking of an article published in the *Tōyō Gakuhō* 62 [1981]).

by Buddhist thinkers who, outside Japan, have at the same time accepted *pratītyasamutpada* as basic.[40]

In western reports on this recent Japanese debate, moreover, we find the Sanskrit term *tathagatagarbha* being translated as "womb of the Buddha"—a meaning which (as mentioned above) this expression simply does not have in the relevant Sanskrit texts, any more than does its Tibetan equivalent *de bžin gšegs pa'i sñiṅ po*. And we find repeated the assertion that the Japanese technical term *hongaku* (Chinese *pen-chiao*) "original, inherent" has no Sanskrit correspondence.[41] But in point of fact, in the Sanskrit and Tibetan terms *prakṛtiviśuddhi / pariśuddhi = raṅ bžin gyis rnam par dag pa / yoṅs su dag pa* that are well attested in the *Ratnagotravibhaga*-Commentary and the related literature as expressions referring to the natural purity of ordinary beings on the level of the Ground (*gži*)—as opposed to the purity that is actualized on the resultant level of buddhahood or the Fruit (*'bras bu*) (*vaimalyaviśuddhi / pariśuddhi = dri ma med pa'i rnam par dag pa / yoṅs su dag pa*)—, the word *prakṛti* (= *raṅ bžin*) is very near indeed to the Sino-Japanese term *pen-chiao / hongaku* "original, inherent."[42]

In sum, while acknowledging the contribution this debate has made to cultural and social criticism in Buddhism, it surely behoves students of Buddhist thought to refrain from carrying on a discussion of such significance for Buddhist studies as a whole on an overly narrow basis, and without paying due attention to what major Buddhist thinkers elsewhere have had to say on the philosophical and hermeneutical issues involved in the theory of the *tathagatagarbha* and buddha-nature. The whole topic of the significance of the buddha-nature theory cannot be investigated in a vacuum, as if it concerned only Japanese Buddhism or, at the most, the Sino-Japanese traditions of Buddhism.

In this regard, reference may be made to the thought-provoking systemic (rather than historical) exegesis of the philosophical and hermeneutical problem of the *tathagatagarbha* in relation to *śunyata* offered for example by Guṅ thaṅ dKon mchog bstan pa'i sgron me (1762-1823), an outstanding Tibetan scholar who built on earlier interpretations of it current in the Indo-Tibetan tradition, and who at the same time accepted

40. See below on the exegesis by Guṅ thaṅ dKon mchog bstan pa'i sgron me.
41. Cf. P. L. Swanson, "'Zen is not Buddhism': Recent Japanese critiques of 'Buddha-nature,'" *Numen* 40 (1993): 115-49.
42. See D. Seyfort Ruegg, *Théorie du tathāgatagarbha et du gotra: Etudes sur la sotériologie et la gnoséologie du bouddhisme* (Paris: 1969).

the doctrine of *pratityasamutpada* (on which he also wrote) without considering that it annuls the *tathagatagarbha* theory.[43]

It does not seem, then, that the *tathagatagarbha* doctrine can be represented as blurred and undifferentiated mysticism issuing in uncritical syncretism or in indifferentism, much less in naturalism. And it is imperative carefully to distinguish superficial syncretism of incompatible positions—not to speak of coercive inclusivism of totally disparate ideas —from the philosopher's treatment of intellectual and spiritual tensions existing since early times between various strands of Buddhist thought and from his hermeneutical awareness of their possible complementarity (or, eventually, of their incommensurability). By fragmenting Buddhist studies—and in this case treating (Sino-)Japanese interpretations of buddha-nature in isolation from the history of the *tathagatagarbha* theory as a whole—we render ourselves no longer able clearly to discern the

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43. See D. Seyfort Ruegg, *op. cit.*, 393 ff. Guṅ thaṅ indeed composed a treatise on *pratityasamutpāda* (included in vol. ga of his gSuṅ 'bum).

On the *tathāgatagarbha* and buddha-nature in the Chinese Madhyamaka thought of Chi-tsang, see M.-W. Liu, *Madhyamaka Thought in China* (Leiden: 1994) 86, 160 ff., 171 ff.

In his interesting article entitled "What is Buddhist logic?" in S. Goodman and R. Davidson, eds., *Tibetan Buddhism: Reason and Revelation* (Albany: 1992) 25-44, K. Lipman has rightly pointed to the historical-philological fallacy that is incurred in rejecting a given hermeneutical interpretation both because it is held to be "later" rather than "original" and because it is assumed to "favor" one Buddhist "harmonizing" exegetical tradition (objections expressed by L. Schmithausen in his critique of the present writer's *Théorie* in *WZKS* 17 [1973]: 136-7). But concerning my observations of 1969 in *Théorie*, Dr. Lipman criticizes my having (supposedly) sought "the solution" where he apparently assumed I did, writing "I do not believe that the dGe-lugs-pa interpretation is the 'solution' Ruegg was seeking, and perhaps through the study of rNying-ma, Sa-skya, and bKa'-brgyud materials of the period, the dGe-lugs-pa approach will be seen in a less adequate light"(p. 25). In fact, however, the point in my book was not that, e. g., the dGe lugs pas rGyal tshab Dar ma rin chen and Guṅ thaṅ had found *the* "solution" (and *a fortiori* the last word) to any contradiction there may be between the *tathāgatagarbha* and *śunyatā* theories—indeed I am not certain that there exists any one single "solution" to this tension which is both synchronic-systemic and diachronic—but that they had something significant to say about it in terms of philosophical hermeneutics and *Wirkungsgeschichte*. This philosophically crucial point appears to have been overlooked.

It should go without saying that, in philosophy and hermeneutics, the interest and value of what an author has to say are not simply a function of whether the author is or is not a member of a certain school (e. g. the dGe lugs). It is most regrettable that this basic principle is becoming overshadowed by sectarian likes and dislikes of investigators.

significance in the history of Buddhist thought of an overarching set of fundamental religious–philosophical issues.

VIII

The question of the relation between the traditions of Buddhism in South, Central and East Asia has also brought into the lime–light the issue of the transcendence *vs.* the immanence of buddha-nature and buddhahood (*buddhata*). In this context, it has been supposed that East Asian tradition has generally opted for immanence, with buddhahood being thought of as inborn, whereas more westerly traditions of Buddhism tended on the contrary to emphasize transcendence, with buddhahood to be reached only through a progressive and protracted spiritual and mental training. This difference has furthermore been linked with the distinction between intellectual analysis and meditative non-conceptualization, and between Gradualism—a tendency also supposed to characterize most of Indian and a large part of Tibetan Buddhism—and Simultaneism (or Subitism)—which has, by contrast, frequently been deemed a specific feature of East Asian Buddhism and of certain Tibetan traditions influenced by the latter.

Now, whether we look at these sets of contrasts only from the view point of the *tathagatagarbha* theory, or whether we additionally bring in the theme of the Great Debate of bSam yas in late eighth-century Tibet together with the subsequent Tibetan discussions of the issues involved, the theoretical problems have turned out to be highly complex and nuanced, perhaps even somewhat intractable. At all events, it is no longer possible in this connection simply to speak of some Sino-Indian cultural frontier, and of the Great Debate of bSam yas as a Sino-Indian controversy, as Paul Demiéville once did in his great pioneering work on the subject.[44] This is so because the traditions of Buddhism in South, Central and East Asia are anything but monolithic, and each of them often embraces the ancient philosophical and religious polarities and tensions alluded to above.

The Buddhist traditions themselves have of course been very alive to the philosophical and religious issues involved even if, naturally enough, they have not used our categories and vocabularies.

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44. See P. Demiéville, *Le concile de Lhasa* (Paris: 1952).

One old attempt at clarification was by way of developing a taxonomy of the scriptural teachings attributed to the Buddha which is based on distinguishing "Wheels" (*chos kyi 'khor lo* = **dharma-cakra*), i. e. phases, of the doctrine together with a system of textual exegesis and systemic scriptural hermeneutics founded on differentiating a definitive, deep-level meaning (the *nītartha* = *ṅes don*) from a provisional, surface-level one that requires to be further interpreted in a sense different from the *prima facie* one (the *neyartha* = *draṅ don*). This differentiation is sometimes also expressed by saying that a given scriptural text is intentional (*abhiprayika* = *dgoṅs pa can*)—or that it is non-literal (*na yatharuta-* = *sgra ji bžin ma yin pa*)—because (i) it has an intended ground or purport (*dgoṅs gži*) only alluded to by indirection in the Buddha's teaching, because (ii) it is determined by some special motivation (*dgos pa* = *prayojana*) on the part of the Buddha who uttered it, and because (iii) its meaning is incompatible with the true meaning (*dṅos la gnod byed* = *mukhyarthabadha*) accepted as being the Buddha's final and definitive intention (*abhipraya* = *dgoṅs pa*) within a given doctrinal system (or **dharma-cakra*).[45]

This hermeneutical distinction may be used in a classificatory fashion, that is, as a taxonomy. But it has sometimes also been employed in order to subordinate one body of teachings to another, as in some Chinese *p'an-chiao* classifications;[46] and this last use of the taxonomy may then include a polemical dimension.

But recourse to the distinction between *neyartha* and *nītartha* has not been the only possible approach to systematic hermeneutics in Buddhism. And it has been seen by some philosophically minded hermeneuticians that this division between a provisional "surface" *neyartha*-meaning and a definitive "deep" *nītartha*-meaning is not actually required to resolve every problem of conflicting meanings encountered by the philosopher-interpreter. Thus, it has been concluded that even when we take as *nītartha* the two doctrines of (*svabhava*)*śunyata* and the *tathagata-*

45. See recently D. Seyfort Ruegg, "Purport, implicature and presupposition: Sanskrit *abhiprāya* and Tibetan *dgoṅs pa / dgoṅs gžī* as hermeneutical concepts," *JIP* 13 (1985): 309-25; "An Indian Source for the Tibetan Hermeneutical Term *dgoṅs gžī* 'Intentional Ground,'" *JIPh* 16 (1988): 1-4; and "Allusiveness and Obliqueness in Buddhist Texts: *saṃdhā, saṃdhi, saṃdhyā* and *ab-isaṃdhi*," *Dialectes dans les littératures indo-aryennes*, ed. C. Caillat (Paris: 1989) 295-328.

46. See recently e. g. D. Lopez, ed., *Buddhist Hermeneutics* (Honolulu: 1988); and M. -W. Liu, *Madhyamaka Thought in China*, index s. v. "*p'an-chiao*."

garbha it may still be possible to develop an interpretation—a "reading"—that allows both doctrines to be understood as congruent and compatible, without there being any need to suppose that one or the other has to be *neyartha* and canceled by the other. This is what Guṅ thaṅ has done in his exegesis to which reference has already been made above (26). Although attention was drawn to it long ago, this very important line of traditional interpretation has received virtually no attention in most recent work on the *tathagatagarbha* and *raṅ stoṅ* theories and on Buddhist hermeneutics.

IX

The matter of *pramaṇa* mentioned already at the outset (p. 3) takes us on to a further point which is of both lexical and religious-philosophical interest. This is the study of some of the things in Buddhist thought which can be subsumed—more or less "etically"—under the idea of authority current in contemporary European languages, notwithstanding the fact that Buddhism is a tradition that has regularly placed great emphasis on people's own endeavor, on their *karman* and its ripening, and on their direct understanding of reality. Thus, in the old canon we read that one has to be one's own refuge (Skt. *atmadvipa*), or one's own lamp (Pali *attadipa*). And we are repeatedly told that, in the final analysis, spiritual realization must be unmediated and independent of any communication received from another (*aparapratyaya*), in other words that ultimate reality is to be directly realized within oneself (*pratyatmavedaniya, sakṣatkartavya*). Furthermore, irrespective of whether Tathagatas appear or not, it is the principle of Origination in Dependence (*pratityasamutpada*) that represents the timeless stability and fixedness of Dharma (*dharmasthitita, dharmaniyamata*).

Yet, at the same time, the Buddhist does take refuge in the Buddha and the Community (*saṃgha*) as well as in the Teaching (dharma). And the Buddha's word (*buddhavacana* = *saṅs rgyas kyi bka'*)—*agama* (*luṅ*) or scripture—is regarded as trustworthy (*apta* = *yid ches pa*), even as a cognitive standard or norm (*pramaṇa* = *tshad ma*).[47] Indeed, the Bhagavant or Buddha—the teacher (*śastṛ* = *ston pa*)—is himself described as *pramaṇabhuta* (*tshad mar gyur pa*).[48] So, in sutra Buddhism as well as in the Vajrayana, the teacher—indeed the entire line of teachers extending

47. See e. g. Candrakīrti, *Prasannapadā* xv.6, p. 268.
48. See Dignāga, *Pramāṇasamuccaya* i.1.

back to the Buddha—play a central and crucial role in Buddhist theory and practise. The spiritual master—both the proximate "root" Guru (*rtsa ba'i bla ma*) who is one's immediate teacher and the more remote ones belonging to one's spiritual lineage (*brgyud pa'i bla ma*)—is accordingly no less important to a Buddhist than he is for example to a Hindu.

These two sets of propositions within Buddhist thought appear to belong to distinct levels of religio-philosophical discourse. Hence, although they would thus not be contradictory in the strict sense, they evidently do reflect a real tension in the idea of what we in modern parlance call authority. This is accordingly a worthwhile and fruitful subject for both lexical and religio-philosophical clarification. And the question of the function of *pramaṇa* in relation to authority proves to be of very considerable interest in attempting to demarcate what is essential to Buddhist thought intrinsically—and "emically"—from what we sometimes import into Buddhism with our own conceptual baggage when we superimpose on it either our culture-bound categories, interpretative grids and terminologies or, alternatively, our comparatively arrived at "etic" categories.

In the Buddhist theory of knowledge, the term *pramaṇa*—though often rendered by our word "authority"—basically denotes right / correct cognition / knowledge. In the first place, it may refer to direct perception (i. e. *pratyakṣa* = *mṅon sum*), a form of cognition which is defined as "congruent"—i. e. non-delusive and indefeasible / veridical (*avisaṃvadaka* = *mi[b]slu ba*) and hence reliable—and also as free of conceptual construction (*kalpanapoḍha* = *rtog pa daṅ bral ba*); and its scope belongs to what is cognitively accessible immediately (*pratyakṣa* = *mṅon gyur*). Secondly, the term *pramaṇa* may denote inferential knowledge (*anumana* = *rjes dpag*), i. e. that form of right cognition whose scope belongs to what is in part cognitively inaccessible (*[iṣat]parokṣa*: *cuṅ zad lkog gyur*) to us because of epistemologically extrinsic obstacles such as distance, as in the case of fire the presence of which on a distant hill can be inferred from observing smoke there, in accord with the homologous example (*sapakṣadṛṣṭanta*) of smoke regularly accompanying fire in a kitchen: "no smoke without fire." Now, according to the Buddhist Pramaṇa-school of Dignaga and Dharmakirti, *pramaṇa* has only these two basic forms of direct perceptual knowledge and inferential knowledge. Even scriptural authority (*agama* = *luṅ*) as reliable testimony (*apta* = *yid ches pa*) is not regarded as a separate and independent means of correct knowledge, but is included under that form of inferential knowledge (*anumana*) the scope of which belongs to what is totally con-

cealed (*atyantaparokṣa* = *šin tu lkog gyur*) for epistemologically intrinsic reasons connected with the transcendent nature of its cognitive object.

Still, the Buddha—though a person—does function like a *pramaṇa*, for he is stated to be *pramaṇabhuta* in Dignaga's great treatise on epistemology and logic, the *Pramaṇasamuccaya* (i.1). And a thoroughly competent teacher such as Nagarjuna is described as a **pramaṇabhuta-puruṣa* (*tshad mar gyur pa'i skyes bu*) by the Madhyamaka master Candrakırti (*MABh* vi.2). For this and related reasons such as their compassion, the Buddha and other trustworthy masters are then thought of as persons in whom one may place confidence, so that we may legitimately describe them as authorities. Thus the idea of the Teacher or Guru as an authority is not restricted to the Vajrayana form of Buddhism alone.

In the Buddhist concept of *pramaṇa* we accordingly meet once again—this time in a perhaps somewhat unexpected context—the contrast between immediacy and mediacy already encountered in the quite different contexts already mentioned above of the theory of the *tathagatagarbha* and buddha-nature (on the level of Ground, *gži*) and of the distinction between the Gradual and the Simultaneous (on the level of the Path, *lam*). For in the case of (*pratyakṣa*)*pramaṇa* the criterion is the immediacy of right knowledge free of conceptual construction (*kalpanapoṛha*). And one prerequisite for being a truly trustworthy—and thus authoritative—teacher is the possession of this immediate knowledge of reality. That is, if the Buddha or other reliable teachers are "authorities"—i. e. *pramaṇa*s, *pramaṇika* or *pramaṇabhuta*, as they indeed are for Buddhists—, their being authoritative is in fact secondary and derivative in as much as it results from their having access to—even being so to say constituted by—right knowledge or *pramaṇa* relating to ultimate reality. Hence, if *pramaṇa* were to be understood as authority, this conception will inescapably involve indirectness and mediacy. For if a teacher is an authority for another cognizer, this necessarily makes the latter cognitively dependent on this outside authority (i. e. *parapratyaya*) as an external, and hence indirect, source for his own knowledge. On the contrary, being direct right / correct cognition / knowledge (*pratyakṣa*) *pramaṇa* is characterized precisely by its cognitive immediacy for the knower. For the Buddha, or another reliable teacher, the *pramaṇa* in question is constituted by their direct awareness (*sakṣatkara*) of reality.

Here we are thus confronted by a curious tension—even a certain lack of perfect fit—between the above-mentioned uses of the Sanskrit word *pramaṇa* and its Tibetan equivalent *tshad ma* as (1) right / correct cognition / knowledge and (2) authority. These two well-attested values of the

word—which are in fact quite distinct—come very clearly to our attention when we seek to translate *pramaṇa* into a language like English which, unlike Sanskrit and Tibetan, makes this religiously and philosophically vital distinction by employing etymologically unrelated words to express the two values.[49]

In this way, concepts which we for our part might include under the idea of authority have in Buddhism distinct philosophical (i. e. epistemological and gnoseological), religious, religio-social and sometimes even religio-political aspects. It is therefore necessary to reflect closely on the extent to which the contemporary "standard average" idea of authority is really adequate to embrace what, basically, is cognitively direct, immediate and (in the first place) free from conceptual construction like the (*pratyakṣa*)*pramaṇa*—something that is epistemologically "normal" or "standard" rather than an "authority" in the usual sense of this word.

X

It has been argued that studies in Buddhist thought may be viewed as constituting a unitary discipline even if they are also, inevitably and legitimately, multidisciplinary and, one may hope, interdisciplinary.

When considering Buddhist traditions extending from South through Central to East Asia and beyond it has, however, often been customary to think in terms of national Buddhisms (conceived of sometimes as more or less uniform and even monolithic entities). In so doing we risk falling prey to modern preconceptions. It is of course true that Buddhists themselves have not hesitated to engage very closely with and to absorb the various cultural traditions of different peoples as the Buddha–Dharma spread first within India and then further abroad. (The Buddha is in fact reported to have himself authorized his hearers to make use of their own particular languages.) Yet, even if Buddhism reveals no single and universal monothetic essence throughout, its traditions show overarching continuities and what may be called lattices of polythetic "family resemblances." And it is just this that makes it possible to speak of Buddhism at all, even while recognizing that it is not a single uniform entity on the horizontal plane of its geographical diffusion in space.

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49. See D. Seyfort Ruegg, "*Pramāṇabhūta, *pramāṇa(bhūta)-puruṣa, pratyakṣadharman* and *sākṣātkṛtadharman* as epithets of the *Ṛṣi, Ācārya* and *Tathāgata* in grammatical, epistemological and Madhyamaka texts," *BSOAS* 57 (1994): 303-20; and "La notion du voyant et du 'connaisseur suprême' et la question de l'autorité épistémique," *WZKS* 38 (1994): 403-19.

As for the vertical axis of chronology, when investigating the Buddhist traditions which have presented themselves in such diverse garb over the centuries, it has been customary for scholars to think in terms of layers of textual material where one stratum is set off from and supersedes another. Certainly, in many a case, this stratigraphical model for the history of Buddhism is appropriate. But such a quasi geological paradigm should not be allowed to mislead. In the case of structurally contrastive oppositions—such as those between immediacy and mediacy, between inborn buddha-nature and progressively achieved buddhahood, between cataphaticism and apophaticism, between the non-analytically meditative and the analytically intellectual, between direct understanding by oneself and instruction communicated from outside by another—, there seem rather to exist intellectual and spiritual polarities and tensions which are not best understood as conditioned only by chronology, i. e. stratigraphically. Not only have these been present in Buddhist thought from early times, but they may well be inherent to Buddhist thought throughout its history—indeed perhaps even to the Buddha's teaching as he gave it to his disciples of varying capacities and propensities.

Hence it does not seem possible simply to generalize the stratigraphical paradigm of higher criticism and to speak, in such cases, only of textual layers opposing, succeeding and eventually superseding each other in time. If a method of textual analysis based on the stratigraphical model loses sight of its own inherent limitations, it runs the risk of postulating diachronically successive strata while overlooking the complex systemic and synchronic philosophical processes and spiritual tensions involved in the history of Buddhism. Historicist positivism does not always make good history.

XI

This last point can have a bearing as much on postulated diachronic sequences in what has been termed Earliest Buddhism, and in the doctrines of the early schools (*nikaya*), as it does on the later phases in the history of Buddhism with which the preceding remarks have been concerned.

When attempting to determine what may have constituted "original" or "earliest"—that is, "precanonical" or proto-canonical—Buddhism, let us then reflect on the circumstance that we sometimes find ourselves engaging in what may, no doubt unavoidably, be rather impressionistic inferences and atomistic reconstructions. Unless one is quite clear about the

eventual role of systemically structured—and hence synchronic rather than exclusively diachronic—polarities and tensions in philosophical and religious thinking, the possibility will exist that any atomistic identification in the sources of (putative) doctrinal inconsistencies and contradictions in content—and also of formal incoherence in the textual pericopes—can, *per se*, offer no sure and reliable guide to the reconstruction of doctrinal developments that could be datable absolutely, or even relatively. (The earliest attestation of a doctrine or other piece of evidence can of course be employed as a *terminus a quo*, provided the fallacy of argument from silence is avoided.) Hence many a reconstruction, inextricably bound up as it in practise is with theoretical presuppositions and prejudgments and with methodological options, may turn out to be as unfalsifiable as it is unverifiable in view of the very nature of the evidence available. And one must then carefully consider just what their scientific value and function can be. If, however, they are clearly recognized to be simply working hypotheses with a certain (albeit circumscribed) heuristic value, there may be no harm in them.[50]

Finally, an approach prepared to envisage the possible unanswerability of the question as to what "original" Buddhism was because of the very nature of our documentation should not necessarily be thought to amount to agnosticism, to relativism or to indifferentist ahistoriscism.

By Buddhist tradition the crucial problem of the authenticity of a text or doctrine has been raised not so much in the form of the question whether Doctrine x is "original"—i. e., that the historical Buddha Gautama Śakyamuni taught it at such and such a time—as in that of the question whether a given teaching is attested in the corpora of sutra and Vinaya (as in the canonical *mahapadesa*s),[51] and whether it is both justifiable and intelligible in terms of the Buddha's soteriological purpose and his

50. At all events, recourse in such matters to arguments claiming to be based on what is rational, or plausible, will be of little avail, and often examples of methodologically naïve question-begging, unless of course it has first been possible satisfactorily to establish what, in each case, is to be considered rational and plausible. The watch-word of rationality is hardly an open-sesame, a universal pass-key which can be used anywhere. Rather, in order to avoid circularity, the relevant "rationale(s)" is (are) what has first to be discovered by investigation of the evidence in each individual case.

51. See E. Lamotte, "La critique d'authenticité dans le bouddhisme," *India antiqua* (J. Ph. Vogel Felicitation Volume, Leiden: 1947) 213-222. See also R. M. Davidson, "An introduction to the standards of scriptural authenticity in Indian Buddhism," *Chinese Buddhist Apocrypha*, ed. R. Buswell (Honolulu: 1990) 291-325.

philosophical intention as expressed in his *nitartha* statements. In Buddhist tradition, it has been considered that if these last criteria are fulfilled a statement will be buddha-Word (*buddhavacana*).

In other words, the criterion has generally not been what the historical Buddha taught at a given time *t* in the 45 years said to have intervened between his Awakening and his Parinirvaṇa taking place *n* years before the present.[52] For, finally, the criterion of authenticity was the idea that what is Buddhistically well-formed (*subhaṣita*) is *buddhavacana* / *buddhabhaṣita* "buddha-word." Conversely, buddha-word is *subhaṣita* in the sense of being well-formed in the philosophical meaning of this term—i. e. correctly formulated—rather than just well-turned and eloquent in a literary sense. Then, in the last analysis, whatever is Buddhistically well-formed (i. e. *dharmopasaṃhita, arthopasaṃhita,* etc.) has—so to say by definition—become Buddha-word.[53]

Needless to say, this will not have to be the point of view of the historically minded modern student of Buddhist thought. Yet, in addition to being about identifying historical origins, religious or doctrinal develop-

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52. Attempts to answer such questions do, however, exist within Buddhist tradition, for example in the Kalacakra system and (to a lesser degree) in the taxonomy of the three Wheels of the Dharma (**dharma-cakra*).

53. See the *Uttaravipattisutta* in Aṅguttaranikāya IV, 164: *evam eva,devānam inda, yaṃ kiñci subhasitaṃ sabbaṃ taṃ tassa bhagavato vacanaṃ arahato sammāsambuddhassa*; and the *Adhyāśayasaṃcodanasutra* cited in Śāntideva's *Śikṣāsamuccaya* (ed. Bendall) 15, and in Prajñākaramati's *Bodhicaryāvatārapañjikā* ix.43ab: *yat kiṃcin maitreya subhāṣitaṃ sarvaṃ tad buddhabhaṣitam*. On the idea see E. Lamotte, *Le traité de la Grande Vertu de Sagesse*, i (Louvain: 1944) 80 n. 2; D. L. Snellgrove, *BSOAS* 21 (1958): 620-1; R. Davidson, *op. cit.*, 310; S. Collins, "On the Very Idea of the Pali Canon," *JPTS* 15 (1990): 94-95; and D. Lopez, "Authority and Orality in the Mahayāna," *Numen* 42 (1995): 27.

The parallel idea that whatever the Buddha said is well-said is frequently attested. See e. g. the *Subhasitasutta* in *Suttanipāta* iii.3 (p.78-79), with the *Amagandhasutta* in *Suttanipāta* ii.2.14 (verse 252, p. 45)and the *Kiṃsilasutta* in ii.9.2 (verse 325, p. 56); Saṃyuttanikāya IV, 188-9. The idea is attested also in Aśoka's Bhabra inscription (ed. J. Bloch, 154): *e keci bhaṃte bhagavatā buddhena bhāsite savve se subhāsitevā*.

Although *subhāṣita* = *legs* (*par*) *bšad* (*pa*) has often been translated by "eloquent" or "eloquence," this rendering can be somewhat misleading. What is in the final analysis intended is the well-formulated, and well-formed, on the content-level (though the level of expression is, presumably, not entirely excluded in the view of the tradition; cf. F. Edgerton, *BHSD* s.v.). In the passage just cited of the *Adhyāśayasaṃcodanasutra, pratibhāna* "intelligent / insightful / inspired expression" (rather than just "elocution")—one of the four *pratisaṃvid*—is also mentioned: *caturbhiḥ kāraṇaiḥ pratibhānaṃ sarvaṃ buddhabhāṣi*[*tam jñātavyam*].

ments and successive textual strata, the study of Buddhist thought is also about understanding structurally and systemically the ideas we find in the sources together with the underlying (and often unexplicit) presuppositions with which the Buddhist traditions have operated in developing these ideas. For this purpose, Buddhist hermeneutics with its theory of a "deep" definitive meaning (*nītartha*)—as distinct from a provisional "surface" meaning requiring to be further interpreted in a sense other than the *prima facie* one (*neyartha*)—offers very considerable interest. In the philosophical study of Buddhist thought hermeneutics too can therefore assume a place of central importance.