

Tall tales, *tathāgatas*, and truth

On the “privileged lie” in Indian Buddhist literature

Richard F. Nance

1. Introduction

A standard-issue Buddhist view on the practice of lying is that it is harmful. Lies are not told by buddhas and they should not be told by properly observant Buddhists. Those who do tell them are said to suffer various horrid consequences: bad breath, being born without a tongue, and rebirth in hell realms.¹ Together with slander,

¹ The view is affirmed even in texts acknowledging that the harmful effects of lying may not be immediately apparent. A passage from the *Gāmaṇīsaṃyutta* (SN iv.47) suggests that while the long-term effects of lying are invariably negative, its short-term consequences may, in fact, appear to favor the liar:

“Then, headman, someone here is seen garlanded and adorned, freshly bathed and groomed, with hair and beard trimmed, enjoying sensual pleasures with women as if he were a king. They ask someone about him: ‘Sir, what has this man done?’ ... They answer: ‘Sir, this man amused the king with false speech. The king was pleased with him and bestowed a reward upon him. That is why the man is garlanded and adorned ... enjoying sensual pleasures with women as if he were a king.’” (trans. Bodhi 2000: 1364)

This scenario is immediately followed by one in which a speaker is severely punished for speaking falsely: having brought to ruin a householder or householder’s son by lying, the liar’s arms are bound behind him with strong rope, his head is shaved, and he is led through the streets to the outskirts of the city, where he is beheaded. So, the text concludes, one should not place confidence in “those ascetics and brahmins ... who say ‘Anyone at all who speaks falsely experiences pain and grief here and now’.” This is a false view

harsh speech, and idle chatter, lying is traditionally understood to be a form of unwholesome speech – and to engage in unwholesome speech is to bring pain upon oneself. “A person is born,” we are told, “with an axe in his mouth. One whose speech is unwholesome cuts himself with the axe.”²

Of the various forms of unwholesome speech, lying is sometimes singled out as particularly egregious. One who lies is “the banner of all vices, the producer of all evils: a singular source of darkness.”³ From the Pāli *Dhammapada*, we learn that “there is no evil that might not be done by a person who tells a lie.”⁴ The consequences of lying are sufficiently grave that in the *Ratnāvalī*, Nāgārjuna admonishes his royal addressee to stand fast against duplicity, even if doing so should cost him his life and kingdom: “For your own sake, always (*rtaḡ*, **nitya*) tell the truth – even if it should cause your death or ruin your governance. Do not speak otherwise.”⁵ In the *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya*, Vasubandhu counsels his audience that although they may have heard that some forms of lying are harmless – that “a jesting untruth does no harm – nor

– but rejecting such a view does not entail that one thereby rejects the notion that lies are harmful.

² Sn 657: *purisassa hi jātassa kuṭhāri jāyate mukhe, yāya chindati attānaṃ bālo dubbhāsitaṃ bhaṇaṃ*. This image recurs elsewhere inside and outside the Pāli canon (cf. SN i.149; AN v.174); *Udānavarga* viii.2 (Bernhard 1965, Vol. I: 161); *Dharmasamuccaya* 12.6 (Lin 1969: 372).

³ *Dharmasamuccaya* 12.7 (Lin 1969: 373): *sarvākāryapatākā sā sarva-pāpapasūtikā | tamasāṃ yonir ekā sa yo vācaṃ bhāṣate mṛṣā ||*

⁴ Cf. *Dhammapada*, verse 176 (= Iti 1.3.5): *ekaṃ dhammaṃ atītaṃ musāvādissa jantuno | vitiṇṇaparalokassa natthi pāpaṃ akāriyaṃ*; and 306ab: *abhūtavādī niraṃyaṃ upeti yo cāpi katvā na karomīti cāha*. The former passage is partially paralleled by *Dharmasamuccaya* 12.3 (Lin 1969: 371); the latter, by *Udānavarga* viii.1 (Bernhard 1965, Vol. I: 161). While the former passage is missing from the Gāndhārī *Dharmapada*, the latter has been preserved (Brough 1962: 161, verse 269).

⁵ Translation modified from Hopkins 1998: 129. The Sanskrit for this verse (#274) of the *Ratnāvalī* is lost. The Tibetan of Hopkins’s edition reads: *bden pa gang gis rang don la | ’chi ’am yang na rgyal po’i srid | nyams ’gyur de ni rtag brjod cing | de las gzhan du brjod mi bgyi*. Cf. Hahn 1982: 86: *bden pa gang gis rang [don la] | rgyal srid nyams par gyur na’ang de | rang gi don la rtag brjod cing | de las gzhan smra mi bgyi’o ||*

does one concerning women, one made at the time of marriage, or one made when one's life or all one's property is in danger" – such a view is both confused and false.⁶

The impression that one can get from such passages (and they could be multiplied) is that the Buddhist proscription against lying is absolute: that the tradition does not hold any lie to be "privileged" (i.e., excusable). This view has recently been voiced by the Indologist, comparativist, and legal scholar J. D. M. Derrett, who notes in a 2006 article in the *Journal of Buddhist Ethics* that for Buddhists, "lies are so injurious that no convenience can excuse lying," and hence that "privileged lies [are] ... totally missing from Buddhism."⁷ Yet, *pace* Derrett, Buddhist views on the subject of lying are far more complex than the sweeping remark above suggests. In what follows, some of these views and their complexities will be surveyed.

It may be useful to begin by getting clear on the terms at stake in the relevant Indic languages. The compound *musāvāda* (Sanskrit *mṛṣāvāda*) is sometimes translated into English as "false speech," sometimes as "lie." At first blush, these notions may appear to be interchangeable, but they are not. To say that someone has spoken falsely need not imply that she has lied. A person might wrongly presume things to be a certain way, and then go on to describe her erroneous impression accurately. In doing so, she will have spoken falsely – but she will not have lied.⁸ Moreover, to say that someone

⁶ *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya* on *Abhidharmakośa* iv.68 (Vol. 2: 538). The verse quoted by Vasubandhu here is also preserved in the *Mahābhārata* (1.77.16 of the BORI edition, Sukthankar 1933, Vol. 1, Part 1: 349): *na narmayuktam anṛtaṃ* (Sukthankar, though acknowledging this variant, here reads *vacanaṃ*) *hinasti na strīṣu rājan na vivāhakāle / prāṇātyaye sarvadhanāpahāre pañcānṛtāny āhur apātakānīti*. Cf. Müller 1883: 273.

⁷ Derrett 2006: 1.

⁸ This is not a possibility open to buddhas, since buddhas do not make such mistakes. The distinction between lying and speaking falsely can only be made if a certain kind of mistake is possible: one in which we (unknowingly) fail to grasp how things in fact are, and yet accurately report this mistaken understanding. Given that a buddha unfailingly grasps how things in fact are, the question of whether a buddha is capable of speaking falsely collapses into the question of whether a buddha is capable of lying.

has lied need not imply that she has spoken falsely. When a person lies, she misrepresents how she takes things to be – but the falsity of an utterance is typically a matter that has to do not with how a speaker takes things to be, but with how things in fact are.

Yet to say that lies involve no more than the misrepresentation of how one takes things to be is still insufficient, since a person can misrepresent how she takes things to be without lying. Such misrepresentations occur regularly for those just beginning the study of an unfamiliar language. Given an exercise in which we are asked to describe our immediate surroundings, we may falter: our descriptions may well misrepresent how we take things to be. These misrepresentations are hardly lies; if anything, they are simple mistakes. For these misrepresentations to become lies, what is required in addition is an element of deliberateness: we lie if, and only if, we deliberately misrepresent how we take things to be.

Similar concerns regarding deliberate misrepresentation are broached in Buddhist disciplinary (*vinaya*) texts, which stipulate a number of conditions that must obtain in order for a particular act of speaking to be judged in violation of proscriptions against *mṛṣā-(musā)-vāda*. These conditions clarify that what is at issue in such proscriptions is indeed the deliberate misrepresentation of how one takes things to be. At times, this element of deliberateness is made explicit. Far more often, however, such explicit signaling is absent – yet the context makes it clear that an element of deliberateness is being presupposed.⁹ What is typically at stake in discussion of *mṛṣā-(musā)-vāda* is, then, not simply false speech, but lying.¹⁰

⁹ One occasionally finds the compound *mṛṣā-(musā)-vāda* augmented by the term *samp(r)ajāna* to clarify that what is at issue is the knowing propagation of falsehoods. See, for example, MN 86 (*Aṅgulimālasutta*), ii.103 (trans. Ñāṇamoli and Bodhi 1995: 714), and the *pācittiya* proscription against lying (*sampajānamusāvāde pācittiya*). Yet, as noted below, when the term *samp(r)ajāna* is absent, an element of deliberateness is sometimes presumed to be signaled by *mṛṣā / musā* itself: Buddhaghosa, for example, glosses the term *musā-* as “intentionally misleading” (*visaṃvādanādhippāya*) (*Sumaṅgalavilāsinī* i.9).

¹⁰ This is not, however, the only way in which the term *mṛṣā-* (or the Tibetan [*b*]rdzun pa, which is stipulated as a suitable translation in the *Mahāvvyutpatti* [#7313]) can be used. At times, the terms signal forms of deceptive-

We can thus rephrase Derrett's sweeping claim as follows: Buddhist doctrinal texts prohibit the practice of deliberately misrepresenting how one takes things to be, and they do so in absolute terms: there is no case in which such deliberate misrepresentation is held to be permissible. All lies, then, are held to be equally deserving of censure.

To say this does not, of course, entail that all lies are held to deserve equal censure – and Buddhist texts do indeed treat lies as falling into various categories, not all of which are judged equally blameworthy. Some lies constitute *pārājika* offenses, punishable by expulsion from the monastic community. These involve intentionally and falsely representing oneself as one who has seen or known things which are seeable and knowable only by persons of consummate attainment (*uttaramaṇuṣya*).¹¹ Most lies are not, however, punished so harshly. Lies that are not counted as *pārājika* offenses are most often counted as *pācittiya* (Skt. *pāyantika*) offenses.¹² These are much less onerous; a Buddhist monastic who commits a *pācittiya* / *pāyantika* offense may be absolved of fault after the offense is formally confessed.

In the *Milindapañha*, the Buddhist monk Nāgasena is asked about this distinction between forms of lying, and he offers a few clarificatory comments.¹³ According to Nāgasena, lies can be light (*lahuka*) or heavy (*garuka*); the gravity of a particular lie depends on its subject matter (*vatthu*). In this respect, Nāgasena insists, ly-

ness that are not intentional in the sense taken up here. So, for example, in the *Lives of the Eighty-Four Siddhas* (*Caturaśītisiddhapravṛtti*), attributed to Abhayadattaśrī, the siddha Thaganapa, unable to refrain from lying (*rdzun smra*), is counseled by a monk who tells him “you should contemplate everything as a single deception” (*khyod kyis thams cad rdzun gcig por sgoms shig*). There is no indication, however, that this practice of contemplation requires Thaganapa to posit a being that deliberately sets out to deceive. Cf. also *Ratnagotravibhāga* 1.86 (Prasad 1997: 55).

¹¹ Cf. the treatment of *pārājika* 4 in Pachow 2000. For the relevant Sanskrit, see Bannerjee 1977: 15.

¹² False claims made against fellow monastics for the purpose of bringing about their expulsion are, however, categorized as *saṅghādiseṣa* (Skt. *saṅghāvaśeṣa*) offenses.

¹³ See *Milindapañha* 192–3 (trans. Horner 1969, Vol. 1: 275–7).

ing does not differ from striking another person. Just as the punishment meted out to one who strikes a man on the street differs from the punishment meted out to one who strikes a king, so too are there different kinds of lies, meriting different kinds of punishment.¹⁴

Of course, simply knowing that lies are to be distinguished based on their subject matter does not help us to assess the gravity of any particular lie. How does one distinguish between lies that are light and lies that are heavy? The great Buddhist commentator Buddhaghosa offers something like a formal criterion: “when the welfare (*attha*) that it [i.e., a lie] destroys is slight, it is less blameworthy; when the welfare is great, it is more blameworthy.”¹⁵ For Buddhaghosa, assessing the gravity of a lie is not – or at least not simply – a matter of assessing what the lie is about; one must consider the lie’s impact on the welfare of others. And, as Buddhaghosa acknowledges, this impact may depend not only on the subject matter of the lie, but also on the context in which the lie is told. This context encompasses not only the aims or intentions of the liar – what he or she means to accomplish in telling the lie – but also the social situation in which the lie is uttered: Buddhaghosa notes that a lie told during a formal disciplinary proceeding will have a greater impact on the welfare of others than a lie told in jest.¹⁶

¹⁴ It is important not to misread the terms of the analogy here: Nāgasena is not implying that lies told to common people are less egregious than lies told to kings. The distinction marked does not derive from the social identity (or political clout) of those to whom a particular lie is told, but from the subject matter of the lie.

¹⁵ Trans. Bodhi 1978: 118. Cf. *Sumaṅgalavilāsīnī* 1.9: *so yam atthaṃ bhāṅjati tassa appatāya appasāvajjo mahantatāya mahāsāvajjo*.

¹⁶ Ibid., “When a householder, reluctant to part with a certain possession, denies that he owns it, it is of little blame; but when he is caused to witness and lies for the sake of destroying another’s welfare, then the blame is heavy. For monks the blame is light when they speak in jestful exaggeration, e.g. if after getting a little oil or ghee they say, ‘Oil flows like a river in the village today.’ But the blame is heavy when they claim to have seen something they did not see.” (*gahaṅṅhānaṃ attano santakaṃ adātukāmatāya natthītiādinayappavatto appasāvajjo, sakkhinā hutvā atthabhaṅjanatthaṃ vutto mahāsāvajjo, pabbajitānaṃ appakampi telam vā sappiṃ vā labhitvā*

2. Exceptions to the general rule

The claim that has so far served as a stalking horse – Derrett’s claim that privileged lies are totally missing from Buddhism – does not preclude the notion that Buddhist normative texts present certain lies as somewhat less blameworthy than others. The issue is not whether some lies are presented as less blameworthy, but whether any lie is presented as altogether blameless.

The answer to this question would appear to be “yes.” Consider the following, drawn from the *Śīlapaṭala* section of the *Bodhisattvabhūmi*:

Although a bodhisattva would not tell a deliberate lie even to save his own life, he speaks that which aims at saving the lives of many sentient beings, at freeing them from bonds, at protecting them from having their hands, feet, noses, or ears cut off, or their eyes gouged out – and [he does so] having individually reckoned the benefit to sentient beings. So, in brief, via this or that [means], a bodhisattva sees precisely [what is of] benefit to sentient beings; he does not see [what is] not [of] benefit to them. His mind is unconcerned with his own gain. And focusing on an idea that is prompted only by the desire to benefit sentient beings, he deliberately speaks in another way. In this way, he does not incur fault, and spreads much merit.¹⁷

It is difficult to see this passage as one that does not present certain lies as privileged – viz., lies told by bodhisattvas who, having judiciously appraised the circumstances at hand, are unconcerned with their own benefit, and solely intent on securing the

hasādhippāyena – ajja gāme telaṃ nadī maññe sandatīti pūraṇakathānayaṇa pavatto appasāvajjo adīṭṭhaṃ eva pana diṭṭhantiādīnā nayaṇa vadantānaṃ mahāsāvajjo.)

¹⁷ Emphasis added. *Bodhisattvabhūmi* pp. 114–115: *yathāpi tad bodhisattvo bahūnāṃ sattvānāṃ jīvitavipramokṣārthaṃ bandhanavipramokṣārthaṃ hastapādanāsākarṇachedacakṣurvikalībhāvaparitrāṇārthaṃ yāṃ bodhisattvaḥ svajīvitahetor api samprajānaṃ [sic] mṛṣāvācaṃ na bhāseta / tāṃ teṣāṃ sattvānāṃ arthāya pratisaṃkhyāya bhāsete / iti samāsato yena yena bodhisattvaḥ sattvānāṃ artham eva paśyati / nānarthaṃ paśyati / svayaṃ ca nirāmiṣacitto bhavati / kevalasattvahitakāmatānidānaṃ ca vinidhāya saṃjñāṃ samprajānaṃ [sic] anyathāvācaṃ bhāsete / bhāṣamāṇaḥ anāpattiko bhavati / bahu ca puṇyaṃ prasūyate.*

benefit of others. In telling such a lie, a bodhisattva not only incurs no fault (he is *anāpattika*); but he also spreads much merit (*bahu ca puṇyaṃ prasūyate*). Analogous claims are advocated in other Buddhist śāstric texts as well.¹⁸ Śāntideva's *Bodhicaryāvatāra* famously notes that "even what is proscribed is permitted for a compassionate person who sees it will be of benefit."¹⁹ The point is elaborated and clarified by Prajñākaramati, in his commentary on Śāntideva's text:

If someone should object, 'How can he avoid committing an offense (*āpatti*) while engaged in what is forbidden?' [The reply is that] the Lord has taught that what is forbidden may be performed by one who perceives with the eye of knowledge a special benefit for beings therein ... but the foregoing [exemption] does not apply to everyone: only to [cases of] the exercise of compassion in its highest degree by one who is of a compassionate nature, without a selfish motive, solely concerned with the interests of others and totally dedicated to this [ideal].²⁰

Prajñākaramati goes on to connect the violation of generally applicable ethical principles to the exercise of skilful means, tactical skill, or ingenuity (*upāya* or *upāyakauśalya*) – a concept that Damien Keown has associated with later forms of what he terms "Mahāyāna ethics:"

The Mahāyāna allowed monks a limited degree of flexibility ... subject to the twofold stipulation that (a) the act should benefit others; and (b) it should be performed from an irreproachable (*niravadya*) motive. Care is taken specifically to exclude from this provision acts of a grave

¹⁸ These claims may have informed the favorable stance taken by Jñānaśrīmitra (10th century) to certain philosophical claims made by Dharmakīrti – claims that Jñānaśrīmitra reads as only partially true, but nevertheless pedagogically useful (Patil 2007).

¹⁹ *Bodhicaryāvatāra* 5.84cd: *niṣiddham apy anujñātaṃ kṛpālor arthadarśinaḥ*. Translation from Crosby and Skilton 1995: 41.

²⁰ Trans. Keown 1992: 149–50. *Bodhicaryāvatārapañjikā* p. 84: *pratiśiddhārthe pravṛttau kathaṃ na sāpattika iti cet / na / kvacin niṣiddham api sattvārthaviśeṣaṃ prajñācakṣuṣā paśyataḥ karaṇīyatayānujñātaṃ bhagavatā / ... / tac cāpi na sarvasyāpi tu kṛpāloḥ karuṇāprakarṣapravṛttitayā tatparatantrasya parārthaikarasasya svaprayojanavimukhasya /*

or serious nature, and there is no suggestion that a breach of the fundamental moral precepts would be countenanced. The further development of the principle enunciated here is to be found in the notion of Skilful Means, which can, perhaps, be regarded as the outcome of an attempt to extend the exemption granted in respect of minor offences to serious offences.²¹

The picture Keown presents is one of change over time: Beginning with an initial reluctance to admit that certain moral precepts – those proscribing great offenses – should ever be suspended or violated, the adherents of Mahāyāna gradually shifted to a view according to which actions previously classed as great offenses may, under certain circumstances, be performed without their performer thereby incurring serious karmic debt. Keown associates the trope of skilful means with this putatively latter stage of Mahāyāna ethical reflection; *upāya*, used in this specific sense, thus appears on the scene as a consequence of a peculiarly Mahāyāna attempt to reassess the moral dimension of certain actions proscribed in Buddhist Vinaya literature.²²

Keown's description of the way in which the concept of *upāya* is deployed is surely correct for at least some passages in which the term appears. *Upāya* does, in certain texts, appear to constitute something like a license to commit actions that would otherwise be impermissible.²³ Yet closer examination of the source texts reveals that the notion of skilful means is itself somewhat fluid: Mahāyāna texts differ in their assessment of what practices the notion of skilful means can accommodate. Indeed, when one goes back to look at a story that has become something of a *locus classicus* for the presupposition that skilful means affords a bodhisattva permission to lie – the Lotus Sūtra's "Parable of the Burning House" – one finds something like the opposite view expressed. According to the

²¹ Keown 1992: 149–50.

²² The term *upāya* is used in many different ways in Mahāyāna texts, as Nattier (2003: 154–6), among others, has pointed out. Cf. Harvey 2000: 135; Keown 1992: 158–60; Pye 1978: 1–17.

²³ On the use of *upāya* in the sense above, see, for example, certain illustrative stories recounted in the *Upāyakauśalyasūtra* (trans. Tatz 1994: 34–5; 73–5; cf. Chang 1983: 433–4; 456–7).

analysis presented in the *sūtra*, one *cannot* simultaneously lie and engage in skilful means.²⁴

3. Returning to a house on fire

The “Parable of the Burning House” is quite well known, and for this reason I will sketch it only very schematically here.²⁵ It is a parable placed into the mouth of Śākyamuni himself. He tells us of a father who lures his three children out of a burning house to safety by promising to give each of them different gifts once they emerge. All the children, in the end, do receive a gift – but they all receive the same thing: a gift that had previously been promised to one child, but not to the others. Thus, though all the children do receive gifts, two fail to receive what they were told they would receive – and so might well be read to have been lured from the house under false pretenses.

Such an interpretation is floated in the *sūtra*, and quickly dismissed. Having finished his parable, Śākyamuni asks his audience – Śāriputra – whether the father in the parable should not be understood to have told a lie (*mā haiva tasya puruṣasya mṛṣāvādaḥ syāt*). Śāriputra answers immediately and negatively: such a man would not be a liar (*sa puruṣo na mṛṣāvādī bhavet*); instead, we should understand the man to have saved his children via skilful means. Note, then, that Śāriputra is not advocating the notion that lying is one form that skilful means can take. On the contrary, he is presenting the two as alternatives: one *either* lies, *or* one engages in skilful means.

²⁴ The story is told twice, in prose and in verse, and there are interesting divergences between these two tellings, though these divergences are of little consequence to my concerns in this paper. It is, of course, true that the parable clearly serves more than one function in the *sūtra*. The *sūtra* itself encourages us to understand the parable as an allegory for the claim that apparently disparate Buddhist paths are unitary: while the Tathāgata may appear to teach many paths to liberation, he in fact teaches only one. However, this aspect of the story is not directly relevant to the points I am working to make here, and so may safely be left aside.

²⁵ For the Sanskrit, see Vaidya 1960: 51ff. (cf. Kern and Nanjio 1908–12: 72ff.; Wogihara and Tsuchida 1934: 69ff.; Dutt 1953: 54ff.)

Why, then, should we think of the father's action toward his children as an instance of skilful means rather than lying? Śāriputra's account of his reasoning on this issue is sketchy at best, but he works to justify his view by presenting two separable arguments. The first builds on the traditional assumption that lying involves the deliberate misrepresentation of a speaker's intention. Śāriputra notes that the father's intention in speaking was precisely to save his children from suffering by the use of some skilful means. The father succeeds in his aim – and thus should not be thought to have told a lie.²⁶

This argument is supplemented by a second: Śāriputra tells us that the father should not be considered a liar, since his actions serve to benefit his children. The reason offered here would seem to be irrelevant to the question of whether the father lies, unless Śāriputra also presumes that lying is incompatible with benefit.²⁷ If he does presume this, then we can fill in the contours of his argument quite easily: given the premises that an utterance cannot be both a lie and a source of benefit, and that a particular utterance is a source of benefit, the conclusion naturally follows that the utterance is not a lie. This argument is valid, but it is likely to strike most of us today as less than sound.

It would seem that Śāriputra's response collapses two separable issues. One has to do with what we might call the moral status of the father's behavior: whether the father is “doing the right thing” in speaking the way he does to his sons. Śāriputra would, I think, answer this question positively: the father *is* doing the right

²⁶ This argument is obviously specious, eliding as it does a distinction between what an utterance is about and the work that it is intended to do – a distinction that informs discussions of *abhidheya* and *prajojana* in Buddhist śāstric literature.

²⁷ See below, section 4, and cf. Kambala, *Ālokamālā*, verse 37: “Even if a statement which leads to injury were to be accurate (*bhūta*), it would be false (*mṛṣā*). What is the sense of [categorizing statements] as true or untrue? That [statement] which brings benefit to others is true!” (*bhūtam apy upaghātāya yad uktaṃ syān mṛṣaiva tat / satyāsatyena ko 'rthārthas tat satyaṃ yat parārthakṛt ||*)

thing, because his actions benefit his sons.²⁸ So the father's actions ought to be affirmed. The other issue has to do with descriptive adequacy: how best to capture what sort of "right thing" the father is doing. To describe the father's speech as an instance of *mṛṣāvāda* is to commit oneself to the view that certain instances of *mṛṣāvāda* ought to be affirmed. But to affix the label of *mṛṣāvāda* onto an utterance is already to impugn it – and thus render such affirmation impossible.

It may seem that what we are faced with here is simply an instance of the privileged lie under another name. And perhaps we are – but the attempt at redescription is itself revealing. It suggests that those responsible for the composition of the Lotus Sūtra felt a degree of discomfort with the notion that *upāya* is finally compatible with *mṛṣāvāda*: that skilful means can, in fact, be reconciled with the practice of lying. This looks to be a rather different view from the one expressed in the *Bodhisattvabhūmi* passage cited above – a passage that appears rather more relaxed about claiming that lies can and should, in certain circumstances, be told.²⁹

Both of these views may be mingled in a single text. Consider, for example, the following passage, drawn from the Mahāyāna *Mahāparinirvāṇasūtra*:

O good man! It is because of all beings that although the Tathāgata knows all things, he says he does not know; although he sees all things, he says he does not see. Why? Because the Tathāgata clearly sees the capacities of individual beings. O good man! Although the Tathāgata speaks in this way, he does not lie. Why not? Because lies involve faults (*skyon*, **doṣa*). How could the Tathāgata lie, being completely free of all blameworthy faults? Although the Tathāgata does not lie, yet in certain cases he may lie for the purpose of benefiting sentient

²⁸ Whether Śāriputra's view ought to be branded a species of consequentialism is an issue that I will leave to others to debate.

²⁹ Note, however, that the terms used shift over the course of the paragraph, so that explicit reference to the practice of lying drops out. Bodhisattvas do not deliberately tell lies, but a bodhisattva may focus on an idea and deliberately speak in another way (*anyathāvācaṃ bhāṣate*) in order to bring benefit to others.

beings by means of the dharma: he teaches and speaks to them with skilful means, as appropriate.³⁰

Two *prima facie* incompatible assumptions are voiced here. According to the first, lying constitutively involves fault. Hence, the Tathāgata cannot lie, since to admit that he could lie would be to admit that he possesses a trace of fault. According to the second, lying does not constitutively involve fault. Hence, the Tathāgata may lie; in doing so, he practices skilful means. The passage thus immediately juxtaposes both of the standpoints toward lying discussed above; having done so, it appears in the end to accept the notion that the idea of skilful means can accommodate *mṛṣāvāda*. Against Śāriputra's assessment in the Lotus Sūtra, this passage strongly suggests that lying is one form that skilful means can take.³¹

Mahāyāna *sūtra* texts would thus appear to differ on the question of whether *upāya* and *mṛṣāvāda* can be reconciled. For this reason (among others), we should be cautious about presuming there to be a single “Mahāyāna” attitude to lying – and, by extension, a single

³⁰ *rigs kyi bu de bzhin gshegs pa ni sems can thams cad kyi phyr chos thams cad mkhyen kyang mi mkhyen ces gsung ngo / chos thams cad gzigs kyang gzigs pa med do zhes gsung / ... / de ci phyr zhe na / de bzhin gshegs pas ni sems can so so'i dbang po gsal bar gzigs pa'i phyr ro / rigs kyi bu de bzhin gshegs pa ni de skad gsung yang brdzun ma yin no / de ci phyr zhe na / brdzun du smra ba ni skyon dang bcas pa yin te / de bzhin gshegs pa ni nyes pa'i skyon thams cad yongs su bral ba yin na brdzun du smra ba ga la zhig yod / rigs kyi bu de bzhin gshegs pa la brdzun du gsung ba med mod kyi / ji ste sems can dag la brdzun du smra ba'i rkyen gyi / chos kyis phan pa'i don du 'gyur na / ci rigs pa'i thabs kyis de la ston cing gsung ngo //*

³¹ Interestingly, the parable of the burning house is also invoked in the Mahāyāna *Mahāparinirvāṇasūtra*, though in a highly abbreviated and rather different form – one in which the topic of skilful means is not broached: “For example: a fire rages in the house of a householder, and he emerges from the house. Yet his sons do not escape, remaining inside the house. Then the householder, though unquestionably aware of the conflagration, enters into the house in order to extract his children. It is the same with the Bodhisattva-Mahāsattva.” (*dper na khyim bdag cig khyim du me shor na khyim de nas phyr rol tu 'byung ngo / ji ste khyim bdag de'i bu rnams khyim gyi nang du lus te me las ma thar na / khyim bdag de de'i tshen na gdon mi za bar mes tshig par 'gyur bar shes kyang bu rnams gdon pa'i phyr khyim de'i nang du 'jug go / byang chub sems dpa' sems dpa' chen po yang de dang 'dra ste /*)

Mahāyāna ethics (or single “later” Mahāyāna ethics).³² In fact, the Indian Buddhist textual corpus presents a range of views regarding the permissibility of lies. The view expressed in a particular text is not inferable from the knowledge that the text is classed as Mahāyāna. And, importantly, the same point holds true for non-Mahāyāna texts as well. In the texts of the Pāli canon, for example, divergent views on the subject of the privileged lie do occasionally surface, though such views are sometimes implied rather than stated outright.

4. Buddhas as perfected speakers: on truth and benefit in Pāli texts

As is well known, texts of the Pāli canon repeatedly affirm the Buddha’s truthfulness. Yet it is also suggested in various places that to speak truthfully does not entail that one has thereby spoken wholesomely. In a passage preserved in the *Aṅguttara Nikāya*, Gotama advises that a person should not speak of what he or she has seen, heard, sensed or understood, if doing so should cause unwholesome (*akusala*) states to increase and wholesome (*kusala*) states to decrease. Apparently, the truth can hurt – and hurt in ways that impede the practice of the path. In such circumstances, one is better off saying nothing.³³

On a first reading, this sentiment might appear to be similar to one expressed in *Manusmṛti* 4.138 – a verse that stipulates what it calls an “eternal dharma” (*sanātano dharmah*) concerning appropriate brahmanical speech. A brahmin, the text tells us,

Shall say what is true (*satya*); and he shall say what is agreeable (*priya*).

He shall not say what is true, but disagreeable;
nor shall he say what is agreeable, but wrong.

This dharma is eternal.³⁴

³² Cf. Silk 2002.

³³ AN ii.172–3 (*Vassakārasutta*).

³⁴ Jha 1999, Vol. 1: 378: *satyaṃ brūyāt priyaṃ brūyān na brūyāt satyam apriyam / priyaṃ ca nānṛtaṃ brūyād eṣa dharmah sanātanaḥ*.

However, the *prima facie* similarity here is, I think, misleading. What is at stake in the passage from the *Aṅguttara Nikāya* is not the *agreeability* of an utterance, but the wholesome effects it brings in its wake: the *benefit* it confers.³⁵ And these two things are not the same, as the tradition acknowledges in the following rather complex passage of the *Abhayarājakumārasutta*.

Now on that occasion a young tender infant was lying prone on Prince Abhaya's lap. Then the Blessed One said to Prince Abhaya: 'What do you think, prince? If, while you or your nurse were not attending to him, this child were to put a stick or a pebble in his mouth, what would you do to him?'

'Venerable sir, I would take it out. If I could not take it out at once, I would take his head in my left hand, and crooking a finger of my right hand, I would take it out even if it meant drawing blood. Why is that? Because I have compassion for the child.'

'So, too, prince, such speech as the Tathāgata knows to be untrue (*abhūta*) incorrect (*ataccha*), and unbeneficial (*anattasamhitaṃ*), and which is also disagreeable (*appiya*) and unwelcome (*amanāpa*) to others: such speech the Tathāgata does not utter. Such speech as the Tathāgata knows to be true and correct but unbeneficial, and which is also disagreeable and unwelcome to others: such speech the Tathāgata does not utter. Such speech as the Tathāgata knows to be true, correct, and beneficial, but which is also disagreeable and unwelcome to others: the Tathāgata knows the time to use such speech. Such speech as the Tathāgata knows to be untrue, incorrect, and unbeneficial, but which is agreeable and welcome to others: such speech the Tathāgata does not utter. Such speech as the Tathāgata knows to be true and correct but unbeneficial, and which is agreeable and welcome to others: such speech the Tathāgata does not utter. Such speech as the Tathāgata knows to be true, correct, and beneficial, and which is agreeable and welcome to others: the Tathāgata knows the time to use such speech. Why is that? Because the Tathāgata has compassion for beings.'³⁶

³⁵ Cf. the discussion of truth (*bhūta / taccha*) and benefit (*attasamhita*) pertaining to covert speech (*rahovāda*) at MN 139 (*Araṇavibhaṅgasutta*), iii.234 (Ñāṇamoli and Bodhi 1995: 1083–4).

³⁶ Translation modified from Ñāṇamoli. MN 58, i.394–395: *Tena kho pana samayena daharo kumāro mando uttānaseyyako abhayassa rājakumārassa aṅke nisinno hoti. Atha kho bhagavā abhayaṃ rājakumāraṃ etadavoca:*

In this passage, benefit is explicitly distinguished from both agreeability and truth. An utterance's agreeability (or lack thereof) is presented as irrelevant to the question of whether the utterance is appropriate for a buddha. The salient issue is rather one of benefit: if an utterance is beneficial, a buddha will utter it, whether or not it is also agreeable (and it may not be).

Agreeability and benefit are thus presented here as wholly autonomous notions (i.e., the presence of either one implies nothing about the presence of the other). The same autonomy is presented as characterizing agreeability and truth as well. Yet the text's stance on the conceptual relation between benefit and truth is left somewhat murky. There are four possibilities: An utterance might be untrue and unbeneficial (in which case, a buddha will not utter it); alternatively, an utterance might be true and unbeneficial (in which case, again, a buddha will not utter it); an utterance might be true and beneficial (in which case, a buddha will utter it). Finally, an utterance might be untrue and beneficial. The latter would seem, at least, to be a logical possibility – but it is a possibility that is conspicuously absent from the text; Gotama does not so much as consider it.

taṃ kimmaññasi rājakumāra, sacāyaṃ kumāro tuyhaṃ vā pamādamanvāya dhātīyā vā pamādamanvāya kaṭṭhaṃ vā kaṭṭhalaṃ vā mukhe āhareyya, kinti naṃ kareyyāsīti āhareyy' assāhaṃ bhante. Sace ahaṃ bhante na sakuṇeyyaṃ ādiken' eva āhattuṃ vāmena hatthena sīsaṃ pariggahetvā dakkhiṇena hatthena vaṅkaṅgulīṃ karitvā salohitampi āhareyyaṃ. Taṃ kissa hetu: atthi me bhante kumāre anukampā ti. Evameva kho rājakumāra, yaṃ tathāgato vācaṃ jānāti abhūtaṃ атаcchaṃ anattasaṃhītaṃ, sā ca paresaṃ appiyā amanāpā, na taṃ tathāgato vācaṃ bhāsati. Yampi tathāgato vācaṃ jānāti bhūtaṃ tacchaṃ anattasaṃhītaṃ. Sā ca paresaṃ appiyā amanāpā, tampi tathāgato vācaṃ na bhāsati. Yañca kho tathāgato vācaṃ jānāti bhūtaṃ tacchaṃ atthasaṃhītaṃ sā ca paresaṃ appiyā amanāpā, tatra kālaññū tathāgato hoti tassā vācāya veyyākaraṇāya. Yaṃ tathāgato vācaṃ jānāti abhūtaṃ атаcchaṃ anattasaṃhītaṃ sā ca paresaṃ piyā manāpā, na taṃ tathāgato vācaṃ bhāsati. Yampi tathāgato vācaṃ jānāti bhūtaṃ tacchaṃ anattasaṃhītaṃ. Sā ca paresaṃ piyā manāpā, tampi tathāgato vācaṃ na bhāsati. Yañca kho tathāgato vācaṃ jānāti bhūtaṃ tacchaṃ atthasaṃhītaṃ. Sā ca paresaṃ piyā manāpā, tatra kālaññū tathāgato hoti tassā vācāya veyyākaraṇāya. Taṃ kissa hetu: atthi rājakumāra tathāgatassa sattesu anukampā ti.

Why is this possibility ignored? It is hazardous to engage in speculation here, but the passage from the *Manusmṛti* quoted above suggests one possible rationale. In the *Manusmṛti* passage, there are likewise four possibilities, only three of which are considered explicitly. (It can, it would seem, go without saying that a brahmin should not utter speech that is both disagreeable and untrue). Is something like the same thing happening in the *Abhayarājakumārasutta*? Is the notion of a beneficial untruth, or of a buddha's uttering beneficial untruths, so obviously untenable that it can safely be passed over in silence? If so, then the sutta would appear to present a view of benefit and truth that sees them as distinct but not wholly autonomous notions. In keeping with the view advocated in the *Aṅguttara Nikāya* passage discussed earlier, truth does not imply benefit – but benefit does imply truth.³⁷ When considering whether an utterance is appropriate for a buddha, all one needs to ask is whether the utterance benefits others; if so, it is *ipso facto* true.

³⁷ Cf. the following passage from the Mahāyāna *Mahāparinirvāṇasūtra*: “All the world loves right speech. I never utter words that are untimely, contrary to the dharma, unbeneficial and non-virtuous. O good man! Certain words are also fundamentally harsh and false, in addition to being untimely, contrary to the dharma, disagreeable to one who hears them, unbeneficial and non-virtuous. I never speak such words either. O good man! Certain words, even though they may be fundamentally harsh, are true and not false; they are timely, concordant with the dharma and bring benefit and virtue to all sentient beings, even though they are disagreeable to one who hears them. I speak such words. And why is that? Because the Buddha, the Blessed One, possesses knowledge: because he knows skilful means.” (*yang dag par smra ba la ni 'jig rten pa thams cad 'dod do / dus ma yin pa dang chos ma yin pa dang / phan pa dang bde bar mi 'gyur ba'i tshig ni nam du yang mi gsung ngo / rigs kyi bu tshig kha cig ni shin tu brlang zhing rtsa ba la brdzun pa yang yin te / dus ma yin pa dang / chos ma yin pa dang / gang gis thos kyang mi 'dod pa dang / phan pa dang / bde bar mi 'gyur ba ni ngas nam du yang ma gsungs so / rigs kyi bu tshig tu gsung ba kha cig ni brlang zhing rtsa ba kyang yang dag pa mi brdzun pa ste / dus dang ldan pa / chos dang ldan pa / sems can thams cad la phan pa dang bde ba ste / thos pas mi dga' bar 'gyur ba yang nges par gsung ngo / de ci phyir zhe na / sangs rgyas bcom ldan 'das ni mkyhen pa dang ldan pa ste / shin tu thabs mkhas pa dang ldan pa'i phyir ro //*).

Perhaps something like this assumption underlies Śāriputra's peculiar response to Śākyamuni's question regarding the protagonist of the Parable of the Burning House. Did the father lie? No: given that he benefited his sons, he *could not* have lied; the very fact that he benefited his sons entails that he told the truth.

In distinguishing between benefit and truth and emphasizing the salience of the former in deciding on what is and is not appropriate speech for buddhas, the *Abhayarājakumārasutta* arguably makes room for a certain ambivalence toward truth *per se*.³⁸ This ambivalence is also arguably present in the Pāli *jātaka* literature, to which we now turn.

5. Deception in the Pāli *jātaka* literature

In Richard Robinson's well-known and widely used introduction to Buddhism *The Buddhist Religion*, originally authored in 1972 and now in its fifth edition (having been substantially revised and re-titled as *Buddhist Religions*), one finds the claim made – and made repeatedly (Robinson et al. 2005: 69, 113) – that although the Pāli *jātaka* tales present occasions in which the bodhisattva is shown violating various precepts, he is never portrayed as violating the precept against lying.³⁹ If this claim were true, then the *jātakas* would appear to be the wrong place to look for privileged lies. But the claim is misleading at best, as becomes apparent upon close investigation of the relevant literature – a corpus of texts that comprises not only the skeletal canonical *jātaka* verses themselves, but the paracanonical *Jātakatṭhakathā* commentary that elaborates the stories traditionally assumed to surround them.

³⁸ Cf. Bhāviveka's insistence, in the *Tarkajvālā*, that “[t]he Blessed One seeks the welfare of the world, so he does not always favor reality,” transl. Eckel (2008: 199). The corresponding Tibetan (Eckel 2008: 376) reads: *bcom ldan 'das kyi rtsom pa ni 'jig rten la phan pa yin pa'i phyir yin pas de kho na nyid mchog tu 'dzin par mi mdzad*.

³⁹ This claim should probably not be attributed to Robinson himself, as it is not present in the first edition of Robinson's text, but appears to have been introduced in a subsequent edition.

Here, I want to consider two of these stories. One – the *Dummedhajātaka* – has been largely ignored by modern scholarship, despite the fact that a story quite similar to it is among those anthologized in the well-known *Jātakamālā* of Āryaśūra.⁴⁰ The other – the *Vessantarajātaka* – needs no introduction to scholars of Buddhism; it is perhaps the most widely known and beloved *jātaka* tale throughout the Buddhist world.⁴¹

In the *Dummedhajātaka*, the *bodhisatta* is born as a prince named Brahmadata. As the story opens, he is 16 years of age. Educated at Takkaṣilā, he is properly versed in the various branches of brahmanical learning, and is well aware of the protocols for Vedic sacrifice. He is also disturbed by these protocols, insofar as they demand the killing of animals. So he makes a vow: when he comes to power, he will, without harming a single being, cause this killing to stop by means of a stratagem (or a trick: *upāyena*).⁴²

One day, Brahmadata is outside the city on his chariot when he notices a crowd of people gathered around a tree, making offerings to the *devatā* dwelling there. Brahmadata descends from his chariot and does the same. As time passes, he continues to return to the tree and engages in *pūjā* “like a worshipper.”⁴³ When he finally attains sovereignty, he calls together the brahmins and householders of the region to remind them of his practice of worshipping the tree-*devatā*. He then tells them that he has vowed to offer a sacrifice to the tree on the occasion of his becoming king, and that he will need their assistance in preparing the sacrifice. The sacrifice is to consist in the flesh and blood of one thousand people – specifi-

⁴⁰ On the version of the story preserved in the *Jātakamālā*, see below, note 44. The title *Dummedhajātaka* is given to two distinct stories preserved in the Pāli *jātaka* corpus; the story under consideration here may be found in *Jātaka*, Vol. 1: 259–6; trans. Cowell et al. 1895–1907, Vol. 1: 128–8.

⁴¹ On the popularity of the *Vessantarajātaka*, see Cone and Gombrich 1977: xv; Collins 1998: 497–8.

⁴² *Jātaka*, Vol. 1: 259: *ahaṃ pitu accayena rajjaṃ labhivā ekam pi akilametvā upāyen’ eva paṇavadhaṃ kātuṃ na dassāmīti*. Interestingly, in the version of the tale presented in Āryaśūra’s *Jātakamālā*, no reference is made to *upāya*.

⁴³ *Ibid.*: 259–60: *devatāmamgaliko viya pūjaṃ karoti*.

cally, those who engage in the five or ten immoral actions. He orders the assembled brahmins and householders to make known that anyone who behaves immorally will be killed and offered to the *devatā*. They do so, striking fear into everyone. Duly cowed, the community halts the practice of harming living beings and committing any other infraction. Thus, the *bodhisatta* fulfills the terms of his original vow.

This story offers a rather disturbing portrait of righteous kingship. Brahmadata does succeed in halting the killing of animals, but he does so by enacting a reign of terror. The *bodhisatta*'s stratagem – his *upāya* – appears to involve protracted play-acting at *pūjā*, in order to set up the conditions under which his subjects will take seriously the issuance of what amounts to a zero-tolerance policy against ethical infraction, punishable by death. While we, as readers, know that Brahmadata does not approve of the killing of animals or the harming of human beings, Brahmadata's subjects do not. In order for the stratagem to be effective, they need to believe that they will be killed if they behave immorally – even if, given the objections to violence Brahmadata raises in his vow, no killing will in fact occur. Brahmadata is thus plausibly read as lying to his subjects. The lie is portrayed as facilitating an end that the tradition affirms – but it is no less a lie for that.⁴⁴

⁴⁴ In Āryaśūra's version of the tale – preserved under the title *Yajñajātaka* (Kern 1891: 67–73 = Vaidya ed.: 70–6; trans. Speyer 1895: 93–104; Khoroché 1989: 74–80) – the bodhisattva, born as a king, faces the problem of drought, and seeks advice on what to do from senior brahmins. Not surprisingly, they tell him that he needs to prepare a sacrifice such as those described in the Veda – a sacrifice in which many animals will need to be slaughtered. On hearing this answer, the king is appalled; his advisors appear to him “pathetically weak-minded and gullible, unquestioning in their faith and blindly devoted to tradition” (Khoroché 1989: 75). Yet, feigning eagerness to undertake the sacrifice (*yajñārambhasamutsuka iva nāma*), he agrees to the proposal – with one modification: instead of an animal sacrifice, he will sponsor a human sacrifice (*puruṣamedha*) in which one thousand victims will be killed. He then calls together the populace of his kingdom and tells them that they should watch what they do, since he will be watching them: he plans to circulate spies around the kingdom who are “sharp-eyed, tireless, and alert.” Persons whom these spies observe behaving unethically will be arrested and added to the pool of sacrificial victims.

Turning to the *Vessantarajātaka*, one finds an apparent lie portrayed as facilitating the *bodhisatta*'s perfected virtue of selfless generosity. The passage in question occurs just after Vessantara's wife Maddī awakens from a harrowing dream, and approaches Vessantara to relate it and ask him what it means. Cone and Gombrich translate the passage as follows:

She went to the leaf hut of the Great Being and knocked at the door ... when she had told him [the dream], just as she had experienced it, the Great Being understood the dream, and knew that he would fulfill the Perfection of giving, and that a suppliant would on the next day come and beg his children from him. He decided to console Maddī and sent her away. 'Your mind must have been agitated because you were lying uncomfortably, or because of something you had eaten, Maddī. Do not be frightened.' So he deceptively consoled her (*mohetvā assāsetvā*), and sent her away.⁴⁵

We do not find the compound *musāvāda* invoked in this passage – and its absence prompts questions. Vessantara has certainly *misled* Maddī – but has he lied to her? Perhaps not: Maddī's dream could

Agents are dispatched to monitor the public, and repeated announcements of the impending sacrifice are made: the population knows that it is being watched very carefully, that a zero-tolerance policy is in effect, and that the consequence of immoral behavior is death. As a result, the text tells us, "all inclination to misbehave left them, and instead they were all eager to vow themselves to a life of virtue. In their readiness to love and respect one another, they turned their backs on petty feuds. Quarrels and disputes ceased, and they abided by their elders' decisions. Sharing became commonplace, and hospitality too. They took pride in behaving with politeness and modest reserve. It was as though they were living in the Golden Age ... no one lapsed at all" (Khoroché 1989: 77–8). The drought is thus brought to an end, the crops are restored, and everyone lives happily ever after. Because he has so successfully modified his subjects' behavior, the king never has to hold the human sacrifice: he has accomplished a sacrifice without bloodshed – a sacrifice according to the law (*dharmayajña*).

⁴⁵ Cone and Gombrich 1977: 54. Cf. *Jātaka*, Vol. 6, p. 541: *paññasālam gantvā Mahāsattassa pañnasāladvāraṃ ākoṭesi ... sā attanā diṭṭhaniyāmen' eva kathesi, M. supinam pariḅhaṅhitvā 'mahyaṃ dānapāramī pūrisati, sve mahyaṃ yācako āgantvā putte yācissatīti, Maddiṃ assāsetvā uyyojessāmīti' cintevā 'Maddī tava dussayanadubbhojanehi cittam āluḷitam bhavissati, mā bhāyīti' mohetvā assāsetvā uyyojesi.*

conceivably have been caused by one or both of by the very conditions that Vessantara identifies as potentially prompting it. Even if the dream turns out to portend future events (as it does), it could indeed have been caused by an awkward physical posture, or by something she ate – and Vessantara might be aware of this. So, in telling Maddī not to worry – that it was just something she ate – Vessantara could conceivably be offering Maddī an accurate account of the antecedent material conditions that prompted the occurrence of her dream.

This, however, seems a stretch. Given the scenario as presented here, it seems much more natural to take Vessantara as deliberately misrepresenting how he takes things to be. Vessantara has lied. In doing so, he has not engaged in an action that is ever explicitly identified as blameworthy. The deception of Maddī is not mentioned again – but its effects are important to the narrative: Maddī, having been deceitfully consoled, leaves the children alone with Vessantara the next day, and Vessantara gives them away – thereby fulfilling the perfection of giving.⁴⁶

6. Concluding reflections

The above remarks barely scratch the surface of some of the issues raised in Buddhist doctrinal texts – and those familiar with such texts will note also certain complexities have been avoided altogether (e.g., the claim, made in the *Laṅkāvatārasūtra*, the *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā* and elsewhere, that buddhas do not in fact speak at all). But I hope that the material presented here has been sufficient to show that the sweeping claim that has served as the paper's stalking horse – the claim that Buddhism (or, more precisely, normative Buddhist doctrine) has no notion of the privileged lie – needs to be seriously reconsidered. So, too, does the claim that the bodhisattva is never portrayed in the *jātaka* literature as violating the precept against lying. Both of these claims are false. Buddhist doctrine does not, in fact, advocate a uniform stance on

⁴⁶ Interestingly, the versions of the story presented in Kṣemendra's *Avadānakalpalatā* (Vol. I: 172–5) and Āryaśūra's *Jātakamālā* (55–69) omit any reference to Maddī's dream and her subsequent deception.

the permissibility of lying – nor is a uniform stance on lying implied by the actions of the *bodhisatta* in the *jātakas*. One finds, instead, different views stated and implied in the literature – and, as we have seen, such differences emerge even when one confines oneself to the canonical texts of a “single” Buddhist tradition. Lies, though generally discouraged by the tradition, do appear to be presented as blameless in certain circumstances. Despite the *prima facie* absolutism of certain Vinaya precepts, Buddhist texts suggest that the moral status of lying can be read as varying from case to case.

This is a substantive point – but there is also a methodological point at stake here that, although it has been raised before, is worth raising again. Over the past decade, the field of Buddhist studies has seen an explosive growth in searchable e-texts. With the click of a mouse, I can know that the term *musā-* occurs 653 times in the Pāli canon. This is a salutary development for research in the field – but in addition to the rewards it brings, it also carries with it certain risks. As noted above, certain canonical and paracanonical Pāli texts portray the *bodhisatta* as engaging in intentional deception (verbal and otherwise). None of these instances is signaled by the term *musā-*; each would be missed in even the most comprehensive e-text survey of the term and its cognates. For all of the benefits provided by e-texts – and they are considerable – they cannot substitute for the hard work of reading through, and thinking with, these texts. This is especially true if one is interested in detecting conceptual undercurrents: ideas that are not explicitly acknowledged *topoi* for the tradition. The privileged lie would appear to be one such idea; there is no Sanskrit or Pāli term for it, and this fact has perhaps contributed to the elusiveness of the idea under the philological gaze. Without downplaying the importance of rigorous philological work (we could get nowhere without it), we should, I think, heed the recommendation of the texts themselves, and continually remember to attend not only to their phrasing (*vyañjana*), but also to their meaning (*artha*).

Abbreviations and bibliography

General abbreviations

- D – *The sde dge mtshal par bka’-’gyur and bstan’-gyur*. Delhi: Delhi Karmapae Chodhey Gyalwae Sungrab Partun Khang. Consulted in digital format via the Tibetan Buddhist Resource Center: (http://www.tbrc.org/#library_work_Object-W22084, last visited 07-09-2011) and (http://www.tbrc.org/#library_work_Object-W23703, last visited 07-09-2011).
- G – *Bstan ’gyur gser gyi lag bris ma*. Tianjing. Consulted in digital format via the Tibetan Buddhist Resource Center: (http://www.tbrc.org/#library_work_Object-W23702, last visited 07-09-2011).
- Mahāvvyutpatti* – Sakaki, R. 1916. *The Mahāvvyutpatti, a Buddhist Dictionary Originally Translated into Sanskrit and Tibetan, Later into Chinese and Japanese*. Kyōto: Shingonshū Kyōto Daigaku. Consulted in digital format, in an edition prepared by Mitsuahara, H. et al., eds. 2002. *Mahāvvyutpatti* (<http://texa.human.is.tohoku.ac.jp/aiba/archive/mvyut/open/>, last visited 07-09-2011).

Primary sources in Pāli

- AN – Aṅguttara-Nikāya. Morris, R. (Vols. 1–2) and E. Hardy (Vols. 3–5), eds. 1961–81 [1885–1900]. *The Aṅguttara Nikāya*. 5 Vols. London: Pali Text Society.
- Dhammapada* – Von Hinüber, O. and K. R. Norman, eds. 1994–5. *Dhammapada*. London: Pali Text Society.
- Iti – Windisch, E., ed. 1975 [1889]. *Itivuttaka*. London: Pali Text Society.
- Jātaka* / *Jātakaṭṭhakathā* – Fausbøll, V., ed. 1990–1 [1877–96]. *The Jātaka Together with its Commentary, Being Tales of the Anterior Births of Gotama Buddha*. 6 Vols. London: Pali Text Society.
- MN – Majjhima-Nikāya. Trenckner, V. et al., eds. 1991–94 [1888–1902]. *The Majjhima Nikāya*. 4 Vols. London: Pali Text Society.
- Milindapañha* – Trenckner, V., ed. 1986 [1880]. *Milindapañha*. London: Pali Text Society.
- SN – Samyutta-Nikāya. Feer, M. L., ed. 1973–80 [1884–1904]. *The Samyutta Nikāya of the Sutta-piṭaka*. 6 Vols. London: Pali Text Society.
- Sumaṅgalavilāsinī* – Rhys Davids et al., eds. 1968–71 [1929–32]. *Dīghanikāya Commentary: Sumaṅgalavilāsinī*. 3 Vols. London: Pali Text Society.
- Sn – *Suttanipāta*. Andersen, D. and H. Smith, eds. 1990 [1913]. *The Suttanipata*. London: Pali Text Society.

Primary sources in Sanskrit

- Abhidharmakośa* and *-bhāṣya* (Vasubandhu) – Dwārikādās Śāstrī, S. ed. 1998. *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya*. 2 Vols. Varanasi: Bauddha Bharati Series 5–8.
- Avadānakalpalatā* (Kṣemendra) – Vaidya, P. L., ed. 1959. *Avadāna-Kalpalatā*. 2 Vols. Darbhanga: The Mithila Institute of Post-Graduate Studies and Research in Sanskrit Learning.
- Ālokamālā* (Kambala) – Lindtner, C., ed. and trans. 2003. *A Garland of Light: Kambala's Ālokamālā*. Fremont: Asian Humanities Press.
- Bodhicaryāvatāra* (Śāntideva) – Dwārikādās Śāstrī, S., ed. 2001. *Bodhicaryāvatāra*. Varanasi: Bauddha Bharati Series 21.
- Bodhicaryāvatārapañjikā* (Prajñākaramati) – Vaidya, P. L., ed. 1960. *Bodhicaryāvatāra of Śāntideva with the commentary Pañjikā of Prajñākaramati*. Darbhanga: The Mithila Institute of Post-Graduate Studies and Research in Sanskrit Learning.
- Bodhisattvabhūmi* (attributed to Asaṅga) – Dutt, N., ed. 1966. *Bodhisattvabhūmi: Being the XVth Section of Asaṅgapada's Yogacarabhūmi* [sic]. Patna: Jayaswal Research Institute.
- Caturaśītisiddhapravṛtti* (Abhayadattaśrī) – Sanskrit lost. Tibetan: not incorporated in D; G 3090 rgyud 'grel lu 1b1–102a6.
- Dharmapada* – Brough, J., ed. and trans. 1962. *The Gāndhārī Dharmapada*. London: Oxford University Press.
- Dharmasamuccaya* (Avalokitasimha) Ch. 12 – Lin, Li-Kouang et al., ed. and trans. 1969. *Dharmasamuccaya: Compendium de la Loi. Recueil de Stances Extraites de Saddharmasmṛtyupasthāna-sūtra par Avalokitasimha*, Vol. 2 (Annales du Musée Guimet 68). Paris.
- Jātakamālā* (attributed to Āryaśūra) – Vaidya, P. L., ed. 1959. *Jātakamālā*. Darbhanga: The Mithila Institute of Post-Graduate Studies and Research in Sanskrit Learning.
- Mahābhārata* (Ādiparvan) – Sukthankar, V. S. et. al., eds. 1933. *The Mahābhārata; for the first time critically edited. Vol. 1: Ādiparvan*. Poona: Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute.
- Mahāparinirvāṇasūtra* – Sanskrit fragments in Yuyama, A., ed. 1981. *Sanskrit Fragments of the Mahāyāna Mahāparinirvāṇasūtra I: Koyasan Manuscript*. Studia Philologica Buddhica, Occasional Paper Series, IV. Tokyo: The Reiyukai Library; Bongard-Levin, G. M., ed. 1986. *New Sanskrit Fragments of the Mahāyāna Mahāparinirvāṇasūtra (Central Asian Manuscript Collection at Leningrad)*. Tokyo: International Institute for Buddhist Studies. Tibetan: D 119 mdo sde nya 1b1–ta 339a7.
- Prātimokṣasūtra* – Bannerjee, A., ed. 1977. *Two Buddhist Vinaya Texts in Sanskrit: Prātimokṣa Sūtra and Bhikṣukarmavākya*. Calcutta: World Press Private Limited.

- Ratnagotravibhāga* (attributed to Asaṅga/Maitreya) – Prasad, H. S., ed. 1997 [1991]. *The Uttaratantra of Maitreya*. Delhi: Sri Satguru Publications.
- Saddharmapuṇḍarīkasūtra* – Vaidya, P. L., ed. 1960. *Saddharmapuṇḍarīkasūtra*. Darbhanga: The Mithila Institute of Post-Graduate Studies and Research in Sanskrit Learning; Kern, H. and B. Nanjio, eds. 1908–12. *Saddharmapuṇḍarīka*. Bibliotheca Buddhica 10. St. Petersburg; Wogihara, U. and C. Tsuchida, eds. 1934–5. *Saddharmapuṇḍarīkasūtram* = *Kaitei Bonbun Hokekyō* (3 Vols). Tokyo: Seigo-Kenkyūkai; Dutt, N., ed. 1953. *Saddharmapuṇḍarīkasūtram, with N. D. Mironov's readings from Central Asian MSS*. Calcutta: Asiatic Society.
- Tarkajvālā* (Bhāviveka) – Sanskrit lost. Critical edition of Chapters 4 and 5 in Tibetan translation in Eckel, M. D., ed. 2008. *Bhāviveka and His Buddhist Opponents (Harvard Oriental Series, Vol. 70)*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Udānavarga* – Bernhard, F., ed. 1965. *Udānavarga*. 2 vols. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht.
- Upāyakauśalyasūtra* – Sanskrit lost. Tibetan: D 261 mdo sde za 283b2–310a7, D 82 dkon brtsegs cha 30a1–70b7.

Secondary sources

- Bodhi, B., trans. 1978. *The Discourse on the All-Embracing Net of Views: The Brahmajālasutta and its Commentaries*. Kandy: Buddhist Publication Society.
- Bodhi, B., trans. 2000. *The Connected Discourses of the Buddha: A Translation of the Samyutta Nikāya*. Somerville, MA: Wisdom Publications.
- Chang, G., et al., trans. 1983. *A Treasury of Mahāyāna Sūtras: Selections from the Mahāratnakūtasūtra*. University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press.
- Collins, S. 1998. *Nirvāṇa and Other Buddhist Felicities: Utopias of the Pali Imaginaire*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Cone, M. and R. Gombrich, trans. 1977. *The Perfect Generosity of Prince Vessantara*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Cowell, E. B. et al., eds. and trans. 1895–1907. *The Jātaka: or, Stories of the Buddha's Former Births*. 6 Vols. London: Pali Text Society.
- Crosby, K. and A. Skilton, trans. 1995. *The Bodhicaryāvatāra (Oxford World Classics)*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Derrett, J. D. M. 2006. “Musāvāda-virati and ‘privileged lies’.” *Journal of Buddhist Ethics* 13: (<http://blogs.dickinson.edu/buddhistethics/files/2010/04/derrett-article.pdf>, last visited 07-09-2011).
- Hahn, M., ed. 1982. *Nāgārjuna's Ratnāvalī, Volume 1: The Basic Texts*

- (Sanskrit, Tibetan, Chinese). Bonn: India et Tibetica Verlag.
- Harvey, P. 2000. *An Introduction to Buddhist Ethics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Hopkins, J., ed. and trans. 1998. *Buddhist Advice for Living and Liberation: Nāgārjuna's Precious Garland*. Ithaca: Snow Lion.
- Horner, I. B., trans. 1969 [1963–4]. *Milinda's Questions*. 2 Vols. London: Pali Text Society.
- Jha, G., trans. 1999. *Manusmṛti with the Mahubhāṣya of Medhātithi*. 10 Vols. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass.
- Keown, D. 1992. *The Nature of Buddhist Ethics*. Houndmills: Macmillan.
- Kern, H. 1891. *The Jātaka-mālā: Stories of Buddha's Former Incarnations, Otherwise Entitled Bodhisattva-avadāna-mālā, by Ārya-çūra (Harvard Oriental Series, Vol. 1)*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Khoroche, P. 1989. *Once the Buddha Was a Monkey*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Müller, F. 1883. *India: What Can it Teach Us?* London: Longmans, Green, and Company.
- Ñāṇamoli, B. and B. Bodhi, trans. 1995. *The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha: A New Translation of the Majjhima Nikāya*. Boston: Wisdom Publications.
- Nattier, J. 2003. *A Few Good Men*. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press.
- Pachow, W. 2000. *A Comparative Study of the Prātimokṣa on the Basis of Its Chinese, Tibetan, Sanskrit, and Pāli Versions*. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass.
- Patil, P. 2007. "Dharmakīrti's White Lie – Philosophy, Pedagogy, and Truth in Late Indian Buddhism" In Kellner, B. et al. 2007. *Pramāṇakīrtiḥ: Papers Dedicated to Ernst Steinkellner on the Occasion of his 70th Birthday*. 2 Vols. Vienna: Arbeitskreis für Tibetische und Buddhistische Studien. Vol. 2, pp. 597–619.
- Pye, M. 1978. *Skilful Means: A Concept in Mahāyāna Buddhism*. London: Duckworth.
- Robinson, R. 1972. *The Buddhist Religion: An Historical Introduction*. Belmont, CA: Dickinson Publishing.
- Robinson, R. et al. 2005. *Buddhist Religions: A Historical Introduction (Fifth Edition)*. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth.
- Silk, J. 2002. "What, if Anything, is Mahāyāna Buddhism? Problems of Definitions and Classifications" *Numen* 49, pp. 355–405.
- Speyer, J. S., trans. 1982 [1885]. *The Jātakamālā, or Garland of Birth-Stories of Āryaśūra*. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass.
- Tatz, M. 1994. *The Skill in Means (Upāyakauśalya) Sūtra*. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass.

JIABS

Journal of the International
Association of Buddhist Studies



Volume 33 Number 1–2 2010 (2011)

The *Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies* (ISSN 0193-600XX) is the organ of the International Association of Buddhist Studies, Inc. As a peer-reviewed journal, it welcomes scholarly contributions pertaining to all facets of Buddhist Studies. *JIABS* is published twice yearly.

As announced at the XVIth IABS Congress in Taiwan, the *JIABS* is now available online in open access at <http://archiv.ub.uni-heidelberg.de/ojs/index.php/jiabs/index>. Articles become available online for free 60 months after their appearance in print. Current articles are not accessible online. Subscribers can choose between receiving new issues in print or as PDF. We are kindly requesting all authors that could be opposed to this decision to inform the Editors by June 2012.

Manuscripts should preferably be submitted as e-mail attachments to: editors@iabsinfo.net as one single file, complete with footnotes and references, in two different formats: in PDF-format, and in Rich-Text-Format (RTF) or Open-Document-Format (created e.g. by Open Office).

Address books for review to:
JIABS Editors, Institut für Kultur- und Geistesgeschichte Asiens, Apostelgasse 23, A-1030 Wien, AUSTRIA

Address subscription orders and dues, changes of address, and business correspondence (including advertising orders) to:

Dr Jérôme Ducor, IABS Treasurer
Dept of Oriental Languages and Cultures
Anthropole
University of Lausanne
CH-1015 Lausanne, Switzerland
email: iabs.treasurer@unil.ch
Web: <http://www.iabsinfo.net>
Fax: +41 21 692 29 35

Subscriptions to *JIABS* are USD 55 per year for individuals and USD 90 per year for libraries and other institutions. For informations on membership in IABS, see back cover.

EDITORIAL BOARD

KELLNER Birgit
KRASSER Helmut
Joint Editors

BUSWELL Robert
CHEN Jinhua
COLLINS Steven
COX Collet
GÓMEZ Luis O.
HARRISON Paul
VON HINÜBER Oskar
JACKSON Roger
JAINI Padmanabh S.
KATSURA Shōryū
KUO Li-ying
LOPEZ, Jr. Donald S.
MACDONALD Alexander
SCHERRER-SCHAUB Cristina
SEYFORT RUEGG David
SHARF Robert
STEINKELLNER Ernst
TILLEMANS Tom

Cover: Cristina Scherrer-Schaub
Font: "Gandhari Unicode"
designed by Andrew Glass (<http://andrewglass.org/fonts.php>)

© Copyright 2011 by the
International Association of
Buddhist Studies, Inc.

Print: Ferdinand Berger & Söhne
GesmbH, A-3580 Horn

JIABS

Journal of the International
Association of Buddhist Studies

Volume 33 Number 1–2 2010 (2011)

Articles

William CHU

*The timing of Yogācāra resurgence in the Ming dynasty
(1368–1643)* 5

Vincent ELTSCHINGER

Ignorance, epistemology and soteriology – Part II 27

Richard F. NANCE

*Tall tales, tathāgatas, and truth – On the “privileged lie” in
Indian Buddhist literature.* 75

Alexander WYNNE

*The ātman and its negation – A conceptual and chronologi-
cal analysis of early Buddhist thought* 103

Indian Buddhist metaethics

Contributions to a panel at the XVth Congress of the International
Association of Buddhist Studies, Atlanta, 23–28 June 2008

Guest editor: Martin T. Adam

Peter HARVEY

*An analysis of factors related to the kusala/akusala quality
of actions in the Pāli tradition* 175

Abraham VÉLEZ DE CEA

Value pluralism in early Buddhist ethics 211

Martin T. ADAM

*No self, no free will, no problem – Implications of the Anatta-
lakkhaṇa Sutta for a perennial philosophical issue* 239

Bronwyn FINNIGAN

Buddhist metaethics 267

Stephen JENKINS

On the auspiciousness of compassionate violence 299

Jay L. GARFIELD

*What is it like to be a bodhisattva? Moral phenomenology in
Śāntideva's Bodhicaryāvatāra* 333

Tom J. F. TILLEMANS

Madhyamaka Buddhist ethics 359

Miracles and superhuman powers in South and Southeast Asian Buddhist traditions

Contributions to a panel at the XVth Congress of the International
Association of Buddhist Studies, Atlanta, 23–28 June 2008

Guest editor: David V. Fiordalis

David V. FIORDALIS

Miracles in Indian Buddhist narratives and doctrine 381

Bradley S. CLOUGH

The higher knowledges in the Pāli Nikāyas and Vinaya. 409

Kristin SCHEIBLE

*Priming the lamp of dhamma – The Buddha’s miracles in the
Pāli Mahāvamsa* 435

Patrick PRANKE

*On saints and wizards – Ideals of human perfection and
power in contemporary Burmese Buddhism* 453

Rachelle M. SCOTT

*Buddhism, miraculous powers, and gender – Rethinking the
stories of Theravāda nuns.* 489

Luis O. GÓMEZ

On Buddhist wonders and wonder-working. 513

•

Notes on the contributors 555