VINCENT ELTSCHINGER, HELMUT KRASSER

SCRIPTURAL AUTHORITY, REASON AND ACTION

PROCEEDINGS OF A PANEL AT
THE 14TH WORLD SANSKRIT CONFERENCE,

KYOTO, SEPTEMBER 1ST–5TH 2009

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Foreword

The present volume deals with the questioning, challenging, evaluating and legitimatizing of revealed or inspired speech in connection with its authority in practically relevant matters (ritual, morals, soteriology, etc.). In other words, this book examines scriptural authorization as it has been dealt with in various media (political as well as philosophical discourse, myths, images, objects), in rhetorical strategies, and in finalities (doctrinal, apologetic, "heresiological," political, etc.). From very early times, India found itself in the situation of having a "market" of religions that had competing truth-claims and – could it be otherwise? – mutual rivalry with regard to sociopolitical legitimacy, economic support, and confessional predominance. As early as 400 BCE, the Buddhists, Jains and Ājīvikas (to name only three) had begun to contest the validity of the Vedic religion, as well as its soteriological relevance and normativity. Yet to come were numerous other groups that would challenge already existing denominations and attempt to negotiate or enforce positions of power both within and outside their own milieu of origin: Mahāyānists, Sāṅkhyas, Śaiva Pāśupatas and Kāpālikas, Vaiṣṇava Pañcarātras, Buddhist and non-Buddhist Tāntrikas, etc. All of them tried to create new space – space for rediscovered truths, space for conversion, space for power. And they all developed artistic, institutional and rhetorical means for enhancing their visibility and legitimizing their claims of truth. In ancient India maybe more than anywhere else, to exist and survive as a philosophic-religious denomination meant both defending oneself against external criticism and advertising one's monopoly on salvation.

We do not claim, however, to be providing a comprehensive analysis of these matters in this volume. Indeed, even if we limit our

scope to about 1,500 years of Indic history (c. 500 BCE–1,000 CE), it will only be possible to deal with the issue of scriptural authority and authorization in a manner that might be described as impressionistic. We have no illusions that to be all-inclusive or to offer overall theoretical relevance would be an unfeasible task. Nonetheless, when organizing the panel "Scriptural Authority and Apologetics in the Indian Religio-Philosophical Environment" for the XIVth World Sanskrit Conference (University of Kyōto, 1–5 September 2009, "Buddhist Studies" section), the conveners and now editors chose to invite specialists in as many Indic religio-philosophical traditions as possible. They were solicited with the following text:

"**1a.** *Scriptural/religious authority as a philosophical and epistemological issue.* – Which epistemological status can scripture/religious authority claim in the system of human knowledge? Is there a distinct jurisdiction (e.g., the *acintya*, or the *atīndriya*) for scripture, or does/can it overlap with other, empirical sources of knowledge? How can the truth or reliability of a given textual tradition be assessed? Is a concept of scripturally based rationality available? Can reason(ing) and scripture contradict each other? Can reason(ing) alone shape morals and goal-oriented practice? **1b.** *Scriptural/religious authority as a hermeneutical and exegetical issue.* – What does scripture consist of? What may lay claim to authority/canonicity, and on which basis? Does the issue of scriptural authenticity/authentication become a philosophical question? To what extent is exegesis (e.g., varying levels of interpretation) involved in settling philosophical questions? **2a.** *Apologetics and/in Indian philosophy.* – How developed is the apologetic concern in a given philosophical tradition or even a single text/author? In which way(s) does philosophy provide apologetics with methods, techniques or doctrinal agenda? How do philosophers and dogmaticians claim rationality for the scriptural tradition which they defend or promote? Are there forms of apologetic rhetoric other than appeals to credibility and claims of rationality? Can Indian philosophy (and philosophy in general) be easily dissociated from apologetic concerns? **2b.** *Apologetics and/in Indian history.* – Can non-philosophical, historical (social, political, economic, institutional) circumstances be interpreted as having been instrumental in the development of apologetic endeavours within a tradition? Have, e.g., the practice of debate, scho-

larly institutions, internal and external hostility, economic pressure or political events had a share in shaping certain apologetic agenda?"

As a result of these questions, the panel's programme, held on a long, hot and humid day (2 September 2009), was the following (excluding lunch and coffee breaks):

11^{00}–11^{30}	P. Skilling	Invoking the Buddha: The power of *buddhavacana* in *sūtra* and *dhāraṇī*
11^{30}–12^{00}	J. Walser	*sūtra* vs. *śāstra*: a sociological perspective
12^{00}–12^{30}	T. Horiuchi	Mahāyāna and Vaipulya: Focusing on the proof of the authenticity of the Mahāyāna
14^{00}–14^{30}	P. Balcerowicz	Omniscience of the Jina and the truth of Jainism
14^{30}–15^{00}	K. Kataoka	Transmission of scripture: Exegetical problems for Kumārila and Dharmakīrti
15^{00}–15^{30}	V. Eltschinger	Towards a genealogy of the Buddhist epistemologists' apologetics
15^{50}–16^{20}	H. Krasser	Dharmakīrti on the unreliability of scripture
16^{20}–16^{50}	S. Moriyama	On the relationship between scripturally based inference (*āgamāśritānumāna*) and the fallacious thesis contradicted by scripture (*āgamavirodha*)
16^{50}–17^{20}	S. McClintock	Kamalaśīla on scripture and reason: The limits and extent of 'practical rationality' in the *Tattvasaṅgrahapañjikā*
17^{40}–18^{10}	H. Marui	Examination of the meaning of '*prāmāṇya*' with special reference to its use for the Veda or 'verbal testimony' (*śabda*) in the *codanāsūtrādhikaraṇa* of the *Ślokavārttika* and some Nyāya texts
18^{10}–18^{40}	R. Torella	*prasiddhi* and *pratibhā*

In the end, however, the contents of the present volume diverge from this list of presentations. For various reasons, Hiroshi Marui and Toshio Horiuchi unfortunately had to withdraw their stimulating contributions, thus depriving us of important insights into Nyāya

philosophy and Mahāyāna exegesis and apologetics. It was of course not possible to replace the papers of these outstanding Japanese scholars with work by others covering similar areas. But luckily, it was the editors' good fortune to have been able to recruit contributions from two of the *fine fleur* of French specialists on Indian philosophy, namely, Isabelle Ratié, whose remarkable work on Utpaladeva and Abhinavagupta needs no further introduction, and Hugo David, an expert on Mīmāṃsā and Vedānta. The editors asked them (in July 2010 and December 2011, respectively) whether they would be willing to write papers on the topic in question despite deadlines that were threatening if not already passed. Thus, while the editors could not include examinations of the Brahmanical Nyāya and the Buddhist *Vyākhyāyukti*, they gained a significant work on early Vedānta and a second study on the Pratyabhijñā School. Since this school is regrettably quite an understudied field, the editors are especially happy to offer two outstanding papers dedicated to the Pratyabhijñā's highly original way of dealing with authority, competing religio-philosophical traditions, and the relationship between reason and scripture.

<div align="center">*</div>

The present volume opens with contributions focusing on two Buddhist strategies, in part narrative, that are designed to authorize (Buddhist) speech and speakers, namely, the Buddha's "long tongue of truth" (Peter Skilling) and the Buddhists' appropriation of high seats and daises as authorizing devices (Joseph Walser). Like the lion's roar, the Buddha's "exceptional, stupendous, and spectacular tongue," which belongs to the thirty-two marks of a "great man" (*mahāpuruṣa*), is "an outstanding and unique engine of authority in Buddhist narrative." As Skilling remarks, "the authority of the Buddha is established physically" by "extraordinary bodily features." The narrative device of the two hidden marks (the long tongue and the sheathed male organ) being verified by sceptical brahmins ⊠reflects a phase in the early social context of Buddhism, a period in which there was a need to demonstrate the superiority of the Buddha vis à vis the brahmins and other religious systems." In other narratives, "the display of the tongue" works "as a guarantee of truth, again to brahmins." Gradually, the preachers developed new priorities in

response to changing contexts: "The display of the tongue was no longer used to impress and convert brahmins; it came to figure in fully Buddhist contexts, and to be used for dramatic effect within Buddhist circles." In a similar way, the preaching chair or dais (Buddhism knows of at least three of these "important part[s] of the everyday furniture of the monastery": the *uccāsana* or "high chair," the *siṃhāsana* or "lion throne," and the *dharmāsana* or "dharma seat") is one of the "the physical props that frame and authorize a particular scripture *as Buddhist*." According to Walser, "the connection of the preaching seat with sovereign authority" represents "a sectarian iteration of a pan-Indian phenomenon," since "the trope of the throne and enthronement remains a fairly stable index of authority within the Indic cultural sphere." This, of course, is especially true of the lion throne, which was "designed to meld religious power to widely established images of political power." The author's thesis here is that "there was a culturally understood reciprocal authorization between the *sūtra* as a genre and the fact that its salient instantiation would have been framed by such a dais." In other words, "to have access to the dais becomes the best route to authorize a given message as legitimately 'Buddhist,' and for that reason one of the more important stakes in any ideological struggle."

The next group of papers are variously related to the so-called epistemological school, one of the most outstanding intellectual phenomena of late Indian Buddhism (500–1300 CE). At some point during the sixth century, Dharmakīrti laid the foundations of an exhaustive system of human rationality designed to cover both human judgement (the proper use of the *pramāṇa*s or "means of valid cognition") and human practice (successful purposive action), or equivalently, both *yukti*, "reason(ing)" (the realm of ascertained valid cognition as opposed to belief and faith) and *prekṣā*, *prudentia* (according to which religious belief *can* be rational provided certain conditions are fulfilled). In a genealogical vein, Vincent Eltschinger attempts to show how and why earlier Yogācāra notions in the areas of exegetics and soteriology came to coalesce around an apologetically relevant concept of human reason that broke with the aims and methods of earlier scholasticism. As has long been recognized, Dharmakīrti's ideas

concerning scriptural authority are strongly indebted to a short passage in Dignāga's *Pramāṇasamuccaya* (2.5ab and *Vṛtti*). Nonetheless, two generations of scholars have puzzled over the meaning and original Sanskrit wording of this passage. In his paper, Helmut Krasser suggests that a close comparison with Pakṣilasvāmin's *Nyāyabhāṣya* provides an important key to understanding Dignāga's ideas. But how is it that the two extant Tibetan translations of Dignāga's work as well as Jinendrabuddhi's commentary thereon have resisted all attempts at reconstructing a Sanskrit *wording* that is philologically satisfactory? According to Krasser, Dignāga's *Pramāṇasamuccaya* lends itself to the same conclusions as Dharmakīrti's *Hetubindu* and *Vādanyāya*: far from being (or reflecting) different exemplars of one and the same original (and duly published) composition, the texts we possess today are nothing but (more or less carefully edited) notes taken by these masters' *students*. Needless to say, such a conclusion has far-reaching consequences for our understanding of Indian philosophy as well as the very nature of textual criticism when applied to philosophical texts. As Eltschinger's and Krasser's essays make clear, the Buddhist epistemologists' approach to scriptural authority is chiefly evaluative. Evaluating what a given treatise has to say about empirical things is not particularly problematic. But how can one assess a scripture's discourse on transempirical matters, which are *ipso facto* unverifiable and unfalsifiable? This is the focus of the Buddhist philosophers' "scripturally based inference" (*āgamā-pekṣānumāna*), the subject matter of Shinya Moriyama's and Sara McClintock's contributions. The nature and the function of this type of inference, which these Buddhist philosophers regard as the only *rational* way of dealing with supersensible things, have long been misunderstood. Moriyama's paper clearly settles the matter by providing ample textual evidence showing that this type of inference, far from letting scriptural statements inform us absolutely about supersensible states of affairs, merely consists in the search for internal contradictions or inconsistencies in a given treatise or scripture. This search is based on one's provisional acceptance (*abhyup-agama*) of a treatise's description of a certain subject as being this or that. According to Moriyama, this and other features of this type of inference (which looks like "an updated version of the fallacious

thesis called *pūrvābhyupagamaviruddha*" in Dignāga's *Nyāyamukha*)
make it structurally very similar to the Buddhist epistemologists'
antinomic reason (*viruddhāvyabhicārin*) and the Nyāya's "hypothet-
ical tenet" (*abhyupagamasiddhānta*) and "incoherency" (*viruddha*).
In other words, the Buddhist logicians' scripturally based inference,
anchored as it is in the Indian dialectical tradition, serves purely
evaluational and polemical purposes and was *never* designed as a
means for increasing one's knowledge of (definitionally) unascer-
tainable states of affairs. McClintock's contribution examines the
same inference within the general context of "practical rationality"
as defined and elaborated by the two eighth-century philosophers
Śāntarakṣita and Kamalaśīla in their *Tattvasaṅgraha(pañjikā)*. As
McClintock rightly emphasizes, the reason for their insistence on
this rhetorical device is that "one of the most important tasks of ra-
tional discourse is [...] to provide rational persons with rational jus-
tifications for seeking this soteriological goal [= perfect buddhahood
or omniscience]." But how does this epistemologically neglected
(and formally obscure) inference function? What is its place in the
general economy of human knowledge? To what extent can human
beings deal with religiously relevant things (such as the relation be-
tween acts and their results) without resorting to any scripturally
based knowledge of supersensible states of affairs? What are the
limits of human (practical) rationality? McClintock attempts to an-
swer these questions by translating and discussing some of the most
relevant excerpts from these two Nālandā scholars' important work.
It is indeed a fascinating thing to see how these champions of ratio-
nality dealt with traditionally handed down and at times mythical
accounts of cosmology, moral retribution, spiritual attainments and
soteriology.

This was of course not the exclusive concern of Buddhist in-
tellectuals, for all Indic religio-philosophical traditions faced the
same theoretical problems. The same topic was no less hotly debat-
ed among the Jainas in connection to both the Jina's omniscience
(which supposedly legitimizes authority of the Jaina scriptures) and
the plurality of the competing truth-claims (which questions this
very authoritativeness, at least as far as exclusivity is concerned).

According to Piotr Balcerowicz, the early medieval period marked, also for the Jainas, the "transition from a phase when the acceptance of the reliability of the original teachers was based primarily on belief to a phase when belief was either replaced or accompanied by the work of reason." And thus it is that the most outstanding Jaina logicians and philosophers (Siddhasena, Haribhadra, Akalaṅka, etc.) developed numerous strategies to authorize their scriptures and to demonstrate the Jina's exceptionality in cognitional, ethical and salvational matters. Balcerowicz's taxonomical approach to the many arguments devised by the Jains to demonstrate the validity of their scriptures does more than simply provide a list (the argument based on scripture, the argument based on the efficacy of the teaching, the argument based on progression, the argument based on potentiality, etc.). He also compares them to Western (Aristotle, Thomas Aquinas, Berkeley) and Buddhist (Dignāga, Dharmakīrti, Dharmottara) validity arguments and attempts to show, in a somewhat pessimistic vein, that "as it is usually the case in apologetic and religious literature, all the arguments to prove the authoritative character of the Jina and the Jina's teaching" suffer from logical flaws and inconsistencies (circularity, quantifier-shift fallacy, equivocation, confusion of modalities, etc.).

From the early sixth century onwards, the Mīmāṃsā, a school of Vedic hermeneutics with a strong apologetic leaning, was Buddhism's (and to a lesser extent, Jainism's) mortal enemy. The struggle between Vedic orthodoxy (or one should rather say "orthopraxy") and Buddhism involved much more than a disagreement about harmless philosophical technicalities. As Kei Kataoka's contribution shows, what most concerned the two major representatives of these traditions (Kumārila and Dharmakīrti) was defending their respective scriptures' authoritativeness and normativity. Authorizing the Vedic *smṛti*s, the normative works of *human* origin, without *ipso facto* providing the Buddhist or Jaina scriptures with the same kind of legitimation was one of the most serious hermeneutic problems faced by the Mīmāṃsā. Was one to postulate – as done also by the Buddhist Vaibhāṣikas and Mahāyānists – that there were lost Vedic recensions? Was one to make authority and normativity depend on

the legislators' personal motivations and/or social status? Kataoka's familiarity with these two traditions allows him to create a dialogue between Kumārila's and Dharmakīrti's most relevant texts, which allows him to give a penetrating account of the proper religious background and motivations of this philosophical rivalry.

But the sixth- to seventh-century Mīmāṃsā not only had to rebuke the Buddhist objections against Vedic authority. Within Brahmanism itself, and probably also within Mīmāṃsā circles, there were challenges to this school's nearly exclusive concern with Vedic injunctions (*codanā*, *vidhi*) and the modification of the "great" Upaniṣadic statements into mere explanatory sentences (*arthavāda*) devoid of any independent validity (*prāmāṇya*). The Mīmāṃsaka (a direct disciple of Kumārila?) and early Vedāntin Maṇḍana Miśra seems to have played a major role in this context. His contribution to these discussions is the subject matter of a concentrated and insightful essay by Hugo David. According to David, Maṇḍana Miśra's doctrine of injunctive discourse exhibits two features that "directly served an *apologetic* as well as *exegetical* purpose" and resulted in a "radical subversion" of the Grammarians' (especially Bhartṛhari's) analysis of *liṅ*, etc. The first characteristic, a strong move towards "depersonalization," was meant to "reconcile linguistic analysis with the possibility of an injunction by the authorless Veda," that is, "to provide a linguistic basis for one of Mīmāṃsā's most fundamental assumptions, the Veda's impersonality." In order to do so, Maṇḍana added a fourth element to the Grammarians' threefold analysis of injunctive speech. To command, request and permission, where the speaker apparently prevails, Maṇḍana added instruction (*upadeśa*). The specific content or import of instruction is (the knowledge of) *iṣṭasādhanatā*, "being a means for realizing a desired end." In other words, the "instruction" aspect of injunctive discourse exhausts itself by indicating an object that suits the pragmatic expectations of the hearer. In this innovative analysis, "the role of the speaker uttering an injunction (*vidhātṛ*) is reduced [...] to the mere transmission of a piece of information about a means of realization and its relationship to an expected result." Maṇḍana did not only add this fourth "meaning," but also universalized it so that the four meanings

turn out to be nothing other than "different modes of presentation of a single, universal meaning, which does not always appear with the same degree of clarity." In other words, "*all* (Vedic and worldly) injunctions" have an identical content. We thus see how Maṇḍana Miśra achieved his second ambition, reducing prescription to description and injunctive speech to declarative discourse. But in doing this, Maṇḍana "paved the way for a specifically Vedāntic interpretation of the nature and object of the Vedic *corpus* as a whole" by providing the "distinction between 'injunctions' (*vidhi*, such as 'Let him who desires heaven sacrifice!'), 'explanatory statements' (*arthavāda*) and 'sentences of the Vedānta' (*vedāntavākya*, such as 'Brahman is consciousness, bliss')" with an exegetical foundation. According to Maṇḍana Miśra's view of injunctive discourse, the Vedic injunction and the Upaniṣadic assertion ultimately amount to the same thing (and are endowed with the same independent validity): an *upadeśa*, that is, a statement indicating an existing object (the sacrifice, Brahman) which is desirable inasmuch as it is beneficial.

In tenth-century Kashmir, the Śaiva philosophers Utpaladeva and Abhinavagupta were the promoters of the non-dualist Pratyabhijñā ("Recognition") School – an allegedly "new path" that resorted to rational enquiry alone and confined the Śaiva scriptures to a purely corroborative role. But, asks Isabelle Ratié, how can such autonomy be claimed for human reason by authors who, like Bhartṛhari and the Naiyāyikas before them, regard perception and inference as ultimately resting on, subordinate to, and made possible by *āgama* itself? Here as elsewhere, the Pratyabhijñā philosophers introduce subtle semantic and conceptual distinctions. What they have in mind in this regard is *āgama* in the sense of *prasiddhi* (literally, "common knowledge/usage"), a "kind of a priori certainty" that is anterior to reasoning and experience and conditions both. It is not simply a "speech or text considered authoritative by a certain religious tradition" – which would make their initial claim contradictory. According to them, *āgama* is, first and foremost, a "strong, nonperceptual and noninferential realization (*vimarśa*)," that is, Śiva's own self-realization or self-awareness, of which the various religious traditions are ultimately nothing but more or less adequate expressions. Inter-

estingly enough, these philosophers consider these allodox and al-loprax scriptures unobjectionably authoritative for the practitioner who puts faith in them, and *as long as* (s)he does put faith in them. Does this amount to a relativistic or perspectivistic approach to religious authority? Certainly not, according to Ratié, provided one regards the empirically existing scriptures as "included within an Ur-*āgama*" representing Śiva's self-realization and as hierarchically ordained according to their relative faithfulness to this self-realization. Not surprisingly, the hierarchy "culminates in the Śaiva non-dualistic all-encompassing scriptures," a feature that clearly ensures the system's inclusivistic stand and makes any contradiction between scriptures impossible. Indeed, "hierarchy ensures non-contradiction because lower scriptures can be seen as partial or incomplete aspects of the ultimate *āgama*." In other words, "all scriptures can be considered valid means of knowledge" for those who believe in them, "and yet all scriptures but the Śaivas' are ultimately erroneous because they are partial aspects of Śiva's self-awareness." Thus it is that Ratié's masterful study allows us to fully appreciate the true meaning and function of autonomous reasoning in the Pratyabhijñā system: "The Pratyabhijñā philosophers thus present reason's power as merely cathartic: reason can only *eliminate* wrong opinions that distract the individual from his or her own most inner and undeniable experience, and it can do so by *purifying* experience from wrong philosophical theses."

This is reminiscent of the Buddhist understanding of philosophy as a critical examination (*parīkṣā*). According to Raffaele Torella, Utpaladeva's and Abhinavagupta's doctrine of *prasiddhi* ≈ *āgama* likely targeted, above all, the Mīmāṃsaka Kumārila, who vehemently dismissed any form of *prasiddhi* as a criterion of *dharma* and *adharma*: "Kumārila must have seen the 'universalistic' approach to revealed scripture as upheld by Bhartṛhari as being very dangerous. It is true that Bhartṛhari focuses on the Veda, but, apart from the corpus of texts in which the Veda is embodied, he envisages a higher level, a kind of subtle Veda made of *pratibhā* and *śabdatattva* which lies in the depths of all men, or even of all living creatures." Defending Bhartṛhari's views against Kumārila's, while using a term unknown

to Bhartṛhari and discarded by the great Mīmāṃsaka, might have been the purpose of the Pratyabhijñā philosophers. Whatever the case may be, *prasiddhi/āgama* is an "open structure" siding with "action" rather than "cognition," something that is "not bound to remain an inner belief, but enacts specific practical behaviours." As already pointed out above, there is "a single ultimate source for all *prasiddhi*s," in which they are all contained, viz. Parameśvara or Bhairava. And indeed, *prasiddhi* "coincides with the very voice of the Lord," while the Lord constitutes the innermost essence of all creatures. In other words, "[t]his active divine presence […] has the form of the innate language principle which imbues all cognitions and actions. It is the Voice (*vāc*) of the Lord that speaks in living beings." As we have already seen, all *prasiddhi*s are equally authoritative, but "of the totality of *prasiddhi*s that are contained in the creature, those that gradually appear or 'emerge' match the spiritual level reached by the individual subject, or […] are in accordance with its specific ends." As Torella nicely puts it, "[a] continuous line runs from the individually oriented *prasiddhi*s which are at work in the everyday experience of living beings and the progressively higher *prasiddhi*s, which give shape to the various world views, that is, the various *āgama*s – from the Veda to the Bauddha, the Pañcarātra, the Śaiva – culminating in the all-encompassing *eka āgama*."

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Let it be noted, finally, that the editors may – and actually do – disagree with some of the views expressed in the present volume. In their opinion, however, censure of any sort is worse than possible erroneous views (of course as long as such views do not threaten either society or individuals – which is no real danger in the case of classical Indology and Buddhist Studies). As a consequence, they have opted for a fairly liberal and non-invasive approach to editing their friends' and colleagues' papers – not requesting additional arguments or textual evidence despite sometimes feeling that the offered evidence is insufficient, refraining from regarding a given philosophical tradition (say… analytical philosophy) as owning property rights over words and concepts, and accepting that English is a second (and sometimes even a third or a fourth) language for many of

us. (Publication deadlines and financial restrictions made it impossible to have all the papers written by non-native English speakers systematically checked by native speakers.) In the same spirit, the editors have decided not to unify the authors' styles, bibliographical conventions and editorial practices as long as these have been consistent.

It is the editors' pleasant duty to express their heartfelt gratitude to all those who participated, actively or otherwise, in the Kyōto panel, and to those who, by taking on the enormous task of organizing an event as large as the Kyōto conference and by shaping its specific sections, made both this panel and this book possible. In this we are thinking especially of Akihiko Akamatsu, Akira Saito and Kazunobu Matsuda.

Vincent Eltschinger and Helmut Krasser

Vienna, October 2012

The *tathāgata* and the long tongue of truth

The authority of the Buddha in *sūtra* and narrrative literature

Peter Skilling

> Many in this world claim to be teachers,
> And though many say they've presented bondage and freedom,
> All they've done is show, as the path to peace,
> A method that strengthens the root of cyclic existence.
> Whose teaching, for those desiring liberation,
> Is the supreme and nondeceptive entryway?
> Only the Sugata's teaching,
> So the Buddha alone is an authority.[1]

The Buddha is the sole authority – he is the *pramāṇapuruṣa*, a term about which much has been written.[2] In his *Prasannapadā*, Candra-kīrti (seventh century) states that,

> The discerning proclaim that the word of the Blessed Buddhas alone is a *pramāṇa*, because it is reliable inasmuch as it is supported by argu-

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[1] *Grub mtha' shel gyi me long*, p. 14.7: *'jig rten 'di na ston par khas 'che zhing, 'ching grol rnam bzhag smra ba mang mchis kyang, srid pa'i rtsa ba brtan par byed pa'i thabs, zhi ba'i lam du ston pa sha stag ste, gang gi bstan pa thar pa 'dod rnams la, bslu ba med pa'i 'jug ngogs mchog gyur pa, bde bar gshegs pa'i bstan pa kho na'i phyir, sangs rgyas nyag gcig tshad ma'i skyes bu yin*. Translation Sopa/Chávez/Jackson 2009: 45.

[2] See most recently, with reference to earlier studies, Eltschinger 2010: 426–428 (= § 13b).

ments (*sopapattika*). And therefore, it is established that only the word of the perfectly awakened ones is a [nondeceptive] scripture (*āgama*). [It is scripture first] because it comes (*āgata*) from credible [persons] who have eliminated all defilements; [second,] because it ascertains (*āgamayati*) in that it causes one to thoroughly understand the true reality; [third,] because it goes in the direction [of the goal] (*abhimukhād gamanāt*) in that it is by relying on it that the world reaches nirvana. On the contrary, it is established that the doctrines that differ from it are not a *pramāṇa* and [just] pseudo-scriptures because they lack any arguments.[3]

The epistemologies of authenticity and authority have been debated for centuries in India and Tibet; this is a fascinating and inexhaustible (*akṣaya*) topic in itself, but I do not intend to recapitulate it here. Rather, I will sketch some of the ways in which *sūtra* literature seeks to establish the Buddha's authority. It seems to me that the early *sūtra*s – those collected in the Āgamas and the Nikāyas – establish authority in a variety of ways, which include dialogue, debate, narrative, panegyric, and assertion. The configuration of authority depends, self-evidently, on intended audience, on context. There are many examples of dogmatic or logical demonstration, for example the *Caṅgīsutta* (*Majjhimanikāya* No. 95), but this is not the only or even the primary method.[4] The relation between dogma and authority is multifaceted, and there is a continuity between the Buddha's authority as a Teacher (*śāstṛ*) and as a locus of power (*ānubhāva*), energy (*tejas*), and protection (*paritrāṇa*), that is, between didac-

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[3] *Prasannapadā*, p. 268.1–269.3: *buddhānām eva bhagavatām vacanaṃ pramāṇam ity upavarṇayanti vicakṣaṇāḥ sopapattikatvenāvisaṃvāda-katvāt. ata eva cāptebhyaḥ prahīṇāśeṣadoṣebhya āgatatvāt, āgamayatīti samantāt tattvaṃ gamayatīti vā, abhimukhād* [em.: *ābhimukhyād* ed.] *gamanād vā tadāśrayeṇa lokasya nirvāṇagamanāt sambuddhavacana-syaivāgamatvaṃ vyavasthāpyate, tadanyamatānāṃ tūpapattiviyukta-tvān na prāmāṇyam āgamābhāsatvaṃ ca vyavasthāpyate.* See La Vallée Poussin's detailed notes and cross-references. I thank Vincent Eltschinger for his help with this difficult passage.

[4] For fragments of a Sanskrit counterpart of undetermined school affiliation in the Schøyen collection, see Braarvig/Liland 2010: 2–5.

tic and apotropaic functions.[5] We cannot easily or neatly divide the Buddha's authority into the philosophical/rational versus magical/majestic/narrative without clumsily rumpling and shredding the fabric of the Buddhist thought-world.

The question of authority revolves around the figure of the Buddha and the transmission of his word. The tension of transmission is central to both traditional and contemporary understandings of the Buddha's legacy. Transmission of "Dharma-Vinaya" descends through a series of councils, which guarantee authenticity within a school or lineage. There were two "universal" councils in the century that followed the Buddha's death; after this the expanding Saṃgha solidified into several lines of transmission.[6] What we have today are *some* of the end-products of *some* (by no means all) of these lines of transmission.

Tathāgata and truth

What can one say about "the figure of the Buddha"? The Buddha is presented as a person who sought, who realized, and who taught the truth. One of his central epithets is *tathāgata*, and by definition *tathāgata*s speak the truth.[7] In the Sanskrit *Mahāparinirvāṇasūtra*, King Ajātaśatru (ruler of Magadha, a younger contemporary of the Buddha) enunciates this principle as "*tathāgata*s, worthy ones, truly and fully awakened Buddhas are speakers of what is not false."[8]

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[5] This may be seen from the nature and use of the texts in the various Paritta collections: the texts are memorized and recited in order to teach and to protect and bless.

[6] For the councils and other aspects of the question of authenticity, see Skilling 2009 and Skilling 2010.

[7] For Pali sources (*Dīghanikāya-aṭṭhakathā* and *Ṭīkā*) on the meaning of *tathāgata*, see Bodhi 1978: 50–53 and 331–344. See also *Traité* I 126 (with a survey of the variety of interpretation up to *ca.* 1944); *Traité* III 1340–1341; Endo 1997: 195–206; Manda 2005.

[8] *Mahāparinirvāṇasūtra* §1.7: *avitathavādino* [em.: *avitathāvādino* ed.] *hi bhavanti tathāgatā arhantaḥ samyaksambuddhāḥ*. Waldschmidt restores the fragment by comparing the Tibetan: *de bzhin gshegs pa dgra bcom pa yang dag par rdzogs pa'i sangs rgyas rnams ni log par gsungs pa*

The Pali version states more simply, "*tathāgata*s do not speak false-hood."[9] The theme of *tathāgata* runs through Buddhist literature, for example in the "Discourse on the World" (*Lokasutta*), a short *sutta* in prose and verse on the nature of the world, which in Pali is included in both the *Aṅguttaranikāya* and the *Itivuttaka*.[10] Associated terms with *tathā* elaborate on this epithet and the truths and realities that the Buddha discovered, as for example in the *Vajracchedikā*:

> A *tathāgata*, O Subhūti, is one who speaks what is real; he is one who speaks the truth, he is one who speaks what is. A *tathāgata* does not speak what is not; a *tathāgata* does not speak falsely.[11]

The Buddha's teaching is the Dharma, and his authority lies in the Dharma. Dharma is a multivalent term fundamental to Indian thought, religion and statecraft.[12] It is invoked in our earliest documents, for example in Aśoka's Pillar Edict II:

> Dhamma is good. And what is Dhamma? It is diminution of sin,[13] abundance of good deeds, mercy, liberality, truth, and purity.[14]

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ma yin no. For a translation, see Weber 1999: 106.

[9] *Dīghanikāya* II, p. 73.3: *na hi tathāgatā vitathaṃ bhaṇanti*.

[10] *Aṅguttaranikāya*, *Paṭhamapaṇṇāsake Uruvelavaggo Tatiyo*, pp. 30.5–31, antepenult.; *Itivuttaka*, *Itivuttake Catukkanipātassa Paṭhamavaggassa Terasamasuttaṃ*, pp. 321.8–323.2 (last *sutta* in the collection). The keyword of the *uddāna*s is *loka*. Cf. also *Pāsādikasutta*, *Dīghanikāya* III, pp. 134.11–135.22.

[11] *Vajracchedikā* §14f: *bhūtavādī subhūte tathāgataḥ satyavādī tathāvādy ananyathāvādī tathāgataḥ*, *na vitathavādī tathāgataḥ*.

[12] For a recent collection of essays on Dharma, with contributions on Buddhism by Rupert Gethin and Collett Cox, see Olivelle 2009. Most recently see Hiltebeitel 2012, which deals specifically with Aśoka's Dharma.

[13] A century ago, Smith (1909: 62) remarked that "Scholars differ concerning the derivation and precise meaning of this word *āsinave*," which also occurs in Pillar Edict III. See further Woolner 1993: 64, s.v. *apāsinave*; Basak 1959: 86. The meaning and derivation remain obscure, and my translation is a guess.

[14] Text from Bloch 1950: 162: *dhaṃme sādhū. kiyaṃ cu dhaṃme ti. appāsinave bahukayyāne dayā dāne sacce socaye*.

Aśoka lived between one hundred and two hundred years after the Buddha (depending on whether one favours the short or the long chronology). Aśoka's Dharma is a programme of ethics and principles. As ruler, he uses his authority to foster and promote Dharma, but his authority does not, as such, *derive* from Dharma, except insofar as he rules righteously (*dhaṃmena*).[15] Ethics is one of the primary acceptations of Dharma in Buddhist texts, but prominent also are the senses of "reality" and "true nature," which bear directly upon the person and authority of the Buddha (Aśoka's ethical or socio-political Dharma does not, at least explicitly, carry these senses).[16] A Buddha's authority comes from truth (*satya*) and *dharmatā* (true nature). Neither the Buddhas nor anyone else created the world or the laws of nature.[17] The nature and principle of reality (*dharmatā dharmasthititā dharmaniyāmatā dharmayathātathā / avitathatā ananya-*

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[15] Cf. Pillar Edict VII, in Bloch 1950: 161: *esā hi vidhi yā iyaṃ dhaṃmena pālanā dhaṃmena vidhāne dhaṃmena sukhiyanā dhaṃmena gotti*. The admonition to rule righteously is, not unexpectedly, recurrent in Buddhist literature, and the trope of the righteous king or ruler remains potent up to the present.

[16] In his *Vyākhyāyukti* (21.9–22.8), Vasubandhu gives ten meanings for *dharma*. The passage is cited by Bu ston in his long treatment of the term *dharma* (Tib. *chos*): see Obermiller 1931: 18–24.

[17] *Nidānasaṃyukta*, *sūtra* 17.3, *na bhikṣo mayā pratītyasamutpādaḥ kṛto nāpy anyaiḥ*; Tibetan version cited by Śamathadeva (Zhi gnas lha) in his *Upāyikāṭīkā* (Otani Cat. No. 5595, Repr. Vol. 118, *mngon pa'i bstan bcos*, *tu*, 162a2). The Chinese *Saṃyuktāgama* version (*sūtra* No. 299) is translated in Choong Mun-keat (Wei-keat) 2010: 49–50, and summarized in Kalupahana 1975: 91–92. This short *sūtra*, which does not have a Pali counterpart, was well known in the Sarvāstivādin tradition and is regularly cited. Pūrṇavardhana and Sthiramati call it the *Buddha-sūtra (Sangs rgyas kyi mdo). It is invoked, for example, in the *Yogācārabhūmi* (229.7); by Vasubandhu (Dbyig gnyen), *Pratītyasamutpādādivibhaṅganirdeśa* (Otani Cat. No. 5496, Repr. Vol. 104, *mdo tshogs 'grel pa*, *chi*, 69a8); by Pūrṇavardhana (Gang ba spel ba), *Abhidharmakośaṭīkā-lakṣaṇānusāriṇī-nāma* (Otani Cat. No. 5594, Repr. Vol. 117, *mgnon pa'i bstan bcos*, *ju*, 349a4, *sangs rgyas kyi mdo las*); and by Sthiramati (Blo gros brtan pa), *Abhidharmakośabhāṣyaṭīkā-tattvārtha-nāma* (Otani Cat. No. 5875, Repr. Vol. 147, *ngo mtshar bstan bcos*, *tho*, 54b5, *sangs rgyas kyi mdo las*).

thā bhūtaṃ satyatā tattvatā yathātathā aviparītatā aviparyastatā)
is nothing other than the fact of conditionality, conditioned aris-
ing, *idaṃpratyayatā pratītyasamutpādānulomatā*.[18] Whether or not
*tathāgata*s arise, this true nature abides, the element of the princi-
ples of reality; having known and understood this directly by him-
self, the *tathāgata* declares and teaches it.[19]

Buddhas come and go, but Dharma remains; Buddhas realize Dhar-
ma and reveal Dharma. In this hierarchy, a Buddha is subordinate
to the Dharma. And even in contexts where, by metaphysical sleight
of hand, the Buddha rebounds and recovers ultimate authority, this
is because he is the Dharmakāya. The *Mahāyānottaratantraśāstra*
asserts that Buddhahood alone is the refuge for the world, because
of the Sage's Dharmakāya.[20] Tibetan scholars return to this theme
repeatedly; an early example is Gampopa (1079–1153) in his "Jewel
Ornament of Liberation."[21]

Dharmatā and *pratītyasamutpāda* have remained touchstones
of authenticity over the millennia. Tibetan scholasticism has fol-
lowed Indian exegesis – not only in the Madhyamaka but also in the

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[18] A classical source for these terms is the *Nidānasaṃyukta*, *sūtra* 14.6
(Tibetan version cited by Śamathadeva in his *Upāyikāṭīkā*, *mngon pa'i
bstan bcos*, *tu*, 157a6); see also the citation in Yaśomitra's *Kośavyākhyā*
452.20 ad *Kośa* 3:28ab.

[19] *Nidānasaṃyukta*, *sūtra* 17.4–5: *api tūtpādād vā tathāgatānām anutpā-
dād vā shtitaiveyaṃ dharmatā dharmasthitaye dhātuḥ*, *taṃ tathāgataḥ
svayam abhijñāyābhisambuddhyākhyāti prajñapayati* …; partial citation
in the *Kośabhāṣya* (137.15). The formula "Whether *tathāgata*s arise or
whether they do not arise" (*utpādād vā tathāgatānām anutpādād vā
tathāgatānām*) is deployed in a variety of contexts, including Mahāyā-
na *sūtra*s, to authenticate a subordinated statement. For examples see
Traité I 157, n. 1.

[20] *Mahāyānottaratantraśāstra* 1:21: *jagaccharaṇam ekatra buddhatvaṃ
pāramārthikam*, *muner dharmaśarīratvāt tanniṣṭhatvād gaṇasya ca
* (*dam pa'i don du 'gro ba yi*, *skyabs ni sangs rgyas nyag gcig yin*; *thub pa
chos kyi sku can phyir*, *tshogs kyang de yi mthar thug phyir*).

[21] See Sgam po pa Bsod nams rin chen's *Dam chos yid bzhin gyi nor bu
thar pa rin po che'i rgyan*. See Guenther 1970: 99–111; Khenpo Konchog
Gyaltsen Rinpoche/Ani K. Trinlay Chödron 1998: 137–146.

Yogācāra/Cittamātra schools of philosophy[22] – in emphasizing dependent arising up to the present. Recent Thai teachers like Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu (1906–1993) and Phra Prayudh Payutto (1939–) have highlighted it as well, each in his own way. Buddhadāsa emphasizes the fact of conditionality, *idapaccayatā*. This term had not received much attention in mainstream Thai teaching, or even in the mediaeval Pali exegesis and manuals of the Theravādin tradition, which developed a distinctive and complex theory of causality based on twenty-four conditions (*paccaya*), which in certain contexts eclipsed the old *paṭiccasamuppāda* formulary.[23] Buddhadāsa's book *Paṭiccasammuppāda* has two parts, (1), "What is dependent arising?" and (2), "Conditionality as the highest thing in the Buddha's teaching."[24] In the second part, Buddhadāsa writes that:

> If you reflect, you will see that we [the Thai] have never been interested in the subject of conditionality (*idapaccayatā*), even though it is the heart of the Buddha's teaching … To Thai ears, "conditionality" is an unfamiliar word, a foreign sound – even if we are members of the Buddhist community, we are members of a Buddhist community which does not yet understand the heart of the Buddha's teaching.[25]

Payutto's magnum opus is *Buddhadhamma* (*Phutthatham*).[26] It contains a long section on dependent origination called "How did life

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[22] See Skilling 2007.

[23] See Karunadasa 2010: Chap. 18, "Conditional Relations."

[24] Teaching here is *śāsanā*. *Buddhaśāsanā* is also translated as "Buddhism."

[25] Buddhadāsa, n.d., pp. 130–131. This short book is abridged – I do not know the circumstances or principles – from *Idapaccayatā*, BE 2515 [CE 1972], Dhammadan Munlanithi, Sixth printing, 2549 [2006], 529 pages. The importance accorded to dependent arising by Buddhadāsa may be seen from the publication *Paṭiccasamuppāda chak Phra Ot* [Dependent Arising from the Holy Lips (*phra oṣṭha*)], Sixth Printing, 2553 [2010], a collection of *sūtra*s on dependent arising translated from Pali into Thai, which is 941 pages long (including detailed indexes).

[26] *Phutthatham* is the Thai pronunciation of what is written in Pali as *buddhadhamma*. The original edition, published in Thai 2514 [1971], was 206 pages long. I use here the revised and expanded version, originally published in 2525 [1982], third printing (Bangkok: Mahachulalongkorn

come to be?"[27] As in all of P. Payutto's works, his treatment is ground-
ed in a profound understanding of Pali literature, especially the
Suttapiṭaka, although it also offers insights into later strata of Pali
exegesis. Payutto's lucid explanation of the topic in Thai relates de-
pendent origination to ethical and practical behaviour in daily life.
He opens (p. 79) by stating that dependent origination is one of the
principles which the Buddha taught as a law of nature (*kot thamma-
chat*, *kaṭ-dhammajāti*), or a principle of reality which exists by nature,
independently of whether a Buddha arises. He equates dependent
origination and conditionality, defining the latter with the formula
"when this exists, that is; from the arising of this, that arises" (p.
81, *imasmiṃ sati idaṃ hoti*, *imassuppādā idaṃ uppajjati*). He relates
this to one method of thought – thought according to conditionality,
which means to examine processes or to find solutions to problems
by finding the relations and causes from which they have developed
(p. 676). This means to see the reality that things do not arise inde-
pendently and do not exist on their own: they arise dependently on
causes and conditions, and they cease, or can be stopped, through
the cessation of causes and conditions (p. 711).

Korean Master Seongcheol (1912–1993), drawing on entirely
different sources through the medium of Chinese translations (al-
though with comparison of Pali and other sources), taught that:

Although dependent origination is much taught by the Buddha, he did
not invent it. Whether the Buddha lived in this world or not, dependent
origination is there to be discovered. The causal relatedness of "this" to
"that" denotes mutual interdependence. That is to say, birth depends on
death, while death depends on birth … The nature of dependent origina-
tion seems to be encapsulated in the expression "it just continues and
exists within the world of Dharma" [cited from the *Pratyayasūtra* in
the Chinese *Saṃyuktāgama*]. In other words, dependent origination is
closely associated with the *dharma-dhātu*, which implies the Mahāyāna
idea of the world of Dharma (*dharma-dhātu*) as the state of being as it
is (*bhūta-tathatā*). By "things just continue" is meant the existence of

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Ratchawitthayalay 2529 = 1986), which is 1,145 pages long. 11,010 cop-
ies were printed.

[27] Payutto 2529: 79–222.

things in accordance with dependent origination, while the qualification that things are "empty" explains that things arising in this way lack inherent existence.[28]

It may be incautious to assert that *pratītyasamutpāda* has been important in all periods and through all transformations of Buddhism, but it is worthwhile to investigate the degree to which this might be the case. Certainly, conditioned arising has had an enduring epigraphic, ritual, liturgical, and metaphysical presence.

Truth and communication

Is truth an inner affair? Does truth exist in itself, in its own right? Many would say so. Can it be communicated? And if so, how can it be communicated? A straightforward answer is that the truth *can* be communicated, and that it is communicated by speaking the truth. "Having known and understood that directly by himself, the *tathāgata* declares and teaches it ..."[29] The use of terms may seem not a little circular, but the associations of the thick terminology and the very circularity reinforce the logic of ideas.

Truth, the true nature, is beyond words, beyond the work of thought. Ultimately it is inexpressible. How, then, can truth be taught? One answer to this dilemma is to posit two truths or levels of reality, worldly conventional truth, and ultimate truth. The former can be expressed, the latter is beyond words. "Without resorting to everyday usage, the ultimate meaning is not taught; without reaching the ultimate meaning, nirvana is not realized."[30]

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[28] Hwang Soon-il/Covill 2010: 45–46.

[29] *Nidānasaṃyukta*, *sūtra* 17.4 *taṃ tathāgataḥ svayam abhijñāyābhisam-buddhyākhyāti prajñapayati...*

[30] Nāgārjuna's famous maxim, *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā* 24.10: *vyavahāram anāśritya paramārtho na deśyate, paramārtham anāgamya nirvāṇaṃ nādhigamyate.*

Royal endorsement, hierarchical templates

But on the highroad of ideas, truth is a product, and it needs endorsement. Textual tradition agrees that the Awakened One's first patron was King Bimbisāra at Rājagṛha, the capital of Magadha. A range of texts, especially *Vinaya*s, promote this notion. The narrative of the Buddha's post-awakening meeting with Bimbisāra is central to the Mūlasarvāstivādin tradition, which places it in the "Chapter on the Division of the Order" (*Saṃghabhedavastu*) of the *Vinayavastu*. In *sūtra* literature, the narrative is incorporated, in virtually the same words, into the "Sūtra on the Four Assemblies" (*Catuṣpariṣatsūtra*) of the *Dīrghāgama*, the "Sūtra on Bimbisāra's Reception of the Buddha" (*Bimbisārapratyudgamanasūtra*) of the *Madhyamāgama*, and the "Sūtra on the Going Forth" (*Abhiniṣkramaṇasūtra*), a long and apparently independent or extra-*Āgama sūtra*. The "Sūtra on Bimbisāra's Reception of the Buddha" circulated as one of a liturgical/didactic group of "Great Sūtras" (*mahāsūtra*), and the story is related in the narrative collection *Karmaśataka* (No. 122, *Khyab ʼjug*),[31] and Aśvaghoṣa's *Buddhacarita* (Chapter XVI) seems mainly to follow a Mūlasarvāstivādin tradition for this event.

The story might be described as the first charter or the blueprint of relations between the Buddha – and the Saṃgha – and royal or temporal power.[32] In summary, it runs as follows:

> Having heard that the Buddha had arrived, King Bimbisāra left Rājagṛha in a grand procession and went to see the Buddha at Yaṣṭivana in the outskirts of the city. When he came near, he alit from his carriage and continued on foot; as soon as he saw the Buddha from afar, he left his regalia behind, and went before the Blessed One. The king and the leading citizens of Rājagṛha – the brahmins and *gṛhapati*s – all assembled before the Buddha. At that time, the matted-hair ascetic Urubilvā Kāśyapa, who had recently been converted and had achieved the state of arhat, was seated beside the Buddha. The assembly could not decide: which one is Master, which one is disciple? In order to show who was

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[31] See Feer 1901: 479–482.

[32] For texts and references see Skilling 1994: 58–245 and Skilling 1997: 267–333.