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# Buddhist Hermeneutics

Robert A. F. Thurman

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## ABSTRACT

“Hermeneutics” as a philosophical discipline of rational interpretation of a traditional canon of Sacred Scriptures authoritative for a religious community has usually been considered peculiar to the West. This notion is anchored only in the misconception that “Eastern” thought is somehow “non-rational,” or “mystical,” hence excused from the burden of reconciling the tensions between some forms of authority and philosophical reason. Buddhism in particular has been misconceived in this way, due to its emphasis on meditational experience and non-dualistic wisdom. These misconceptions are quickly cleared away when we examine the role of authority in Buddhist teaching, appreciating the predominantly pedagogic concerns of Śākyamuni during his long tenure as a teacher who sought to encourage the individual disciple’s ability to think for himself; the role of analytic reasoning in Buddhist practice, wherein a practitioner’s first task is to sift through the complexities of Doctrine to discover its inner meaning as relevant to his own experience and its systematic transformation; the role of hermeneutical strategies in guiding the practitioner’s analytical meditations, wherein the first two stages of wisdom (*prajñā*) are cultivated through a refined discipline of philosophical criticism of all false views (*dr̥ṣṭi*), such as naive realism, nihilism, etc., as to the nature of ultimate reality and of the self; and finally the role of transcendent experience, wherein the transcendence of verbalization is approached not as a non-rational escape into mysticism, but as an affirmation of empiricism, a rational acknowledgement of the fact that reality, even ordinary reality, is never, in the final analysis, reducible to what we may say about it. These four functions in Buddhism are traditionally expressed in an ancient rule of thumb known as the “Four Reliances”: “Rely on the Teaching, not the Teacher; rely on the meaning, not the letter; rely on the definitive meaning, not the interpretable meaning; rely on wisdom, not on consciousness.” To examine the traditional usage of these Reliances, we must trace the work of the Buddhist hermeneuticians, who, far from maintaining

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any “golden silence” beyond the silvery speech of philosophers, have kept alive over two and one half millennia an illustrious line known as the “Golden Speech” (Ch. *jin ko*) tradition, whose members include from among the sage-scholars of India, Tibet, China, and Japan, Śākyamuni himself (himself the first hermeneutician of his own Holy Doctrine!), Nāgārjuna, Āryadeva, Asaṅga, Chih I, Candrakīrti, Fa Tsang, Śāntarakṣita, and Tsong Khapa. This latter, working in the 14th and 15th centuries, was one of the greatest scholars of any of the Buddhist cultures, and his masterwork, *Essence of the Eloquent*, composed in 1407, provides a golden key with which the door to this tradition can be opened.

## I. Overview

In all the Buddhist traditions, faith is but a way to wisdom, doctrines but prescriptions for practices, and thus Scripture has less authority than reason. It should not be surprising therefore that hermeneutics, the science of interpretation of sacred doctrine (*saddharma*), should be central in the methodology of enlightenment, the unvarying goal, though variously defined, of all the Buddhist traditions.

In the early schools of the Hīnayāna, /1/ Theravāda, Mahāsāṃghika, and so on, the hermeneutical discourses of Śākyamuni’s direct disciples such as Śāriputra and Mahākātyāyana were collected into a group of texts that were accorded canonical status, namely, the *Abhidharma Canon*. The idea underlying the intensive hermeneutical activity of this period was that *Abhidharma* was itself pure wisdom (*prajñāmalā*) presented in analytical form as text that systematically described ultimate reality, just as the *Sūtra Canon*, the collection of Buddha’s sermons, was the direct outpouring of the Teacher’s own meditative experience. The main hermeneutical problems that developed during this period concerned the nature of the ultimate reality conveyed in the *Abhidharma*, the two main trends being a school of critical realism (Vaibhāṣika) and a school of critical nominalism (Sautrāntika). At least there was no problem of disagreement about the general definition of enlightenment as being an escape from the suffering of life.

With the emergence of the Mahāyāna into public prominence, starting about 100 B.C., the hermeneutical question became much more complex. Hīnayāna exclusive monasticism was challenged, the dualistic definition of enlightenment as escape into *nirvāṇa* was refuted, the bodhisattva ideal of love and compassion for all living beings was stressed, and nothing less than the full enlightenment of Buddhahood was deemed acceptable as a goal, an enlightenment that affirmed the ultimate nonduality of *samsāra* and *nirvāṇa*. The interpretation of this apparent contradiction was indeed a formidable task, but the great thinkers later known as the “Six Ornaments of India” managed to elaborate the two extraordinary systematic hermeneutical disciplines later known as Mādhyamika and Vijñānavāda, or the “Middle Way” and “Mind-Only” schools. These thinkers were namely Nāgārjuna (c. 100 B.C.–200 A.D.), Āryadeva his disciple, Asaṅga (c. 250–450 A.D.), Vasubandhu his brother and disciple, Dignāga (5th century) and Dharmakīrti

(6th century). The traditions founded by these great “heroes” (*mahāratha*) of philosophy were further refined and reformulated in different modes by numerous later Indian thinkers, noteworthy for our discussion being Śāntarakṣita (8th century) and Candrakīrti (7th century).

With the transmission of the Buddhist traditions to China, over the five centuries from c. 200 A.D. to c. 700 A.D., the hermeneutical problems were of great moment for the Chinese scholars who were concerned with the establishment of authentic practice on a solid Scriptural and philosophical basis. Chih I (538–597), founder of the T’ien T’ai school (itself based on the *Lotus Sūtra*), records no fewer than ten different hermeneutical systems prior to his own scheme of the “Five Periods.” Fa Tsang (643–720, the third patriarch of the Hua Yen school (based on the *Avatamsaka Sūtra*), refined Chih I’s hermeneutic to its highest degree in China, except perhaps for the rather unconventional hermeneutic of the Ch’an (Zen) school.

During the second millenium, Buddhist civilization was badly ravaged by the waves of invasions that swept down from the Central Asian steppes across the wide open wealthy areas of India and China. Fortunately, during the last flowering at the end of the first millenium, Chinese Buddhist traditions were transmitted to Japan, and the Indian Buddhist traditions were transmitted to Tibet. Thus, the great scholars of Japan and Tibet were left to preserve, organize, and clarify the various traditions. There are many striking parallels between the developments in Tibet and Japan, but they fit less with our concern than one striking difference. Since Japan was further, culturally as well as geographically, from India, a smaller number of texts actually reached there, and thus the Japanese scholars had less material to deal with. This may have been to their advantage in some respects, since they were able to stay firmly concentrated on practice. However, for our purposes in this paper, the Tibetan scholars are more important, since they inherited the full Scriptural and hermeneutical textual traditions from India; thus it is they who have been burdened with that problem in the last millenium.

Although there were many great scholars in the Tibetan schools, the colossal figure of Tsong Khapa (1357–1420) dominates the landscape, partly because of his particular genius, and partly because of his perfect timing, coming as he did just at the moment when the various textual collections had been fully edited, organized, printed, and systematized. He studied with over forty-five teachers from all the previous schools and spent many hours in intensive religious discipline as well. In his voluminous writings, he ranges widely over the 4673 works in the Tibetan Canons, while his critical and comparative method is strikingly modern. It is his masterwork on the subject of Buddhist hermeneutics composed in 1407, called *The Essence of the Eloquent: The Elucidation of the Analysis of the Interpretable Meaning and the Definitive Meaning of the Scriptures of the Jina*, that opens up this question with the greatest thoroughness, subtlety, and precision /2/. Hence, this paper will follow his presentation, briefly attempting to impart some sense of the rare texture of his thought, as it represents the razor’s edge of the Buddhist hermeneutical tradition.

## II. The Problem

What need do the Buddhists have of a hermeneutical tradition?

Imagine for a moment that Jesus taught for about fifty years, to close disciples numbered in the thousands; that his pedagogical aim and skill were such that he formulated his doctrines to resonate precisely with the abilities and inclinations of each disciple; that, while recommending devotionism to many, he taught others to rely on the intellect, and still others to rely on works motivated by love and compassion; that he constantly demanded critical reflection on the deeper meaning of his teachings; that he sometimes even provided conceptual schemes with which to interpret his own doctrines, which schemes sometimes included dismissal of the ultimate validity of a teaching he had previously set forth unequivocally; that it sometimes happened that two such schemes referred each to the other as merely conditional, valid only in that other context; and that in spite of these apparent contradictions he had to be accepted as a supreme authority, incapable of self-contradiction; and finally that different groups of his disciples preserved traditional records of his promulgations in different places, some not even knowing of the existence of the others during certain periods during and after the Teacher's lifetime. It is easy to see that all this would result in the situation for later generations in which a bewildering profusion of doctrines, all embedded in hallowed scriptural traditions, is presented as uniformly authentic. If you can imagine such a situation at the outset of the Christian tradition, you will have gained a sense of the complexities involved right from the beginning of the two-and-one-half millennia long religio-philosophical tradition we may, I believe, quite properly call "Buddhist Hermeneutics" /3/.

According to the tradition, Gautama, the Śākyamuni Buddha, attained unexcelled perfect enlightenment during his thirty-fifth year, in c. 529 B.C., and spent the next half-century teaching the thousands of persons who sought his wisdom, coming from all over India as well as from foreign lands. The single aim of all his teaching was stated to be the evocation of enlightenment in living beings. The methods he used toward this end were as various as are living beings themselves, as it would not have served his purpose to preach a single message dogmatically. Rather, he exercised what is known as his "skill in liberative technique" (*upāya-kauśalya*), which is defined in the tradition as including all sorts of supernormal powers and knowledges such as clairvoyance about the past experience, present inclinations, and future destiny of disciples, but most importantly including an unimpeded eloquence in "turning the wheel of the Dharma," or instructing disciples in the nature of the supreme reality.

A Buddha's pedagogic versatility is well illustrated in a famous parable in the *Lotus Sūtra* about a man with many children who are playing in a burning house. They will not listen to his warnings at first, too absorbed in their play, so he changes his tack and instead tells them he has some marvelous toys for them outside and they should come and see. Knowing what each one likes, he tells some he has deer-carts for them, some he has horse-carts, and some bullock-carts. Out they rush pell-mell, only to discover that after all the man

has only bullock-carts for them to ride in. At the cost of a slight disappointment, they all escape the burning house in this way (Kern, 1963:72ff.).

In the Hīnayāna discourses, the Buddha speaks of real suffering and its real cessation, and urges his hearers to abandon the one by attaining the other (Goddard, 1970:22). He rejects any form of speculation that does not directly contribute to this goal. In the *Prajñāpāramitā* (or Transcendent Wisdom) discourses, he rejects the previous teaching, saying it was intended for those persons too narrow-minded to conceive of the magnificent aims of the Mahāyāna, to focus them on personal development to broaden themselves to undertake eventually the more universal path of the bodhisattva. He teaches that suffering and its cessation are ultimately empty or unreal, although empirically real, and that their ultimate unreality must be understood to transcend empirical suffering (Conze, 1974:96ff.). In the *Samdhinirmocana* discourses, he disclaims the ultimate validity of both of the former teachings, giving a new instruction that purports to steer a middle course between the naive realism of the first type of instruction and the apparently nihilistic skepticism of the second type (Lamotte, 1962:193ff.). Finally, in the *Laṅkāvatāra*, he disclaims the *Samdhinirmocana* type of discourse, saying he only resorted to it to render the picture of the ultimate reality less terrifying to the neophyte, to avoid either frightening him or letting him misconstrue it as nihilism (Suzuki, 1960:150ff.). And there are yet other hermeneutical schemes put forth by the Teacher himself in his various discourses /4/.

Now, all of these have scriptural status, all of them are spoken by the Buddha, the “Teacher of Men and Gods,” as he is called. And yet they appear to contradict one another. How is one to decide these questions? To completely reject as false any teaching of the Buddha is traditionally a grave sin, known as “abandonment of the doctrine” (*dharmaprahāṇa*). And yet, a practitioner must settle on one method, technique, or discipline. One can hardly set out to win liberation and enlightenment, or even to live properly in an ethical sense until one has decided which of these teachings is right, and what ways lead to their realization. Thus, it is clear that the hermeneutical enterprise in this tradition is an essential part of *praxis* on whatever level, an essential vehicle on the way of enlightenment. We should note that since the various scriptural passages are contradictory on the surface, scriptural authority alone will not fully settle the hermeneutical questions, since the scriptures are in a sense the basis of discussion. In the final analysis, rationality (*yukti*), inference (*anumāna*), or philosophical logic (*nyāya*) become the highest authority (*pramāna*) for deciding which scriptural passage is ultimately valid.

The main body of this discussion will be framed by the four traditional hermeneutical strategies called the “Four Reliances,” which are as follows:

1. Rely on the teaching, not the teacher(’s authority).
2. Rely on the meaning, not the letter.
3. Rely on the definitive meaning, not the interpretable meaning.
4. Rely on (non-conceptual) wisdom, not on (dualistic) cognition. /4/

### III. Rely on the Teaching, Not the Teacher

Tradition has it that the first words of the Buddha upon his enlightenment bespoke an outlook of pedagogical pessimism, to say the least: "Deep, peaceful, undefiled, luminous, and uncreated—I have found a Truth, like nectar of immortality! Though I teach it to them, no one will understand it—better I should stay alone in the forest in silence!" /5/. If we took him literally here, we should be most surprised to see how much he actually talked to how many people. So how are we to interpret his words? How are we to understand the fact that his culminating experience of supreme enlightenment appears not to have filled him with zeal to lead others thereunto? Contemplation of this question leads us to a sharp insight into the nature of revelation and authority in the Buddhist tradition. That is, the revelation is not accorded him by any external agency or supreme being, but rather is the spontaneous outflow of his own attainment of unexcelled perfect enlightenment as to the ultimate actuality of all things. Hence, his authority derives not from his investiture with a mission to save living beings, but rather from his own personification of full knowledge of reality. And his very first instruction to his fellows comes in his abstaining from proclaiming any dogmatic truth, but indicating by indirection that the truth must be realized by each alone, that one cannot install another in enlightenment, that mere authority is not a vehicle on the way to enlightenment.

Of course, he was not allowed to take his ease in the forest for very long, stirred, tradition has it, by his own great compassion (*mahākaruṇā*), as in the *Rāṣṭrapālāparipṛcchāsūtra*: "Living beings wander (from life to life) by their not knowing the way of voidness, peace, and uncreatedness—impelled by his great compassion for them, (a Buddha) turns them (toward it) with the methods of his liberative techniques and with hundreds of philosophical reasons" /6/. This verse makes several points. First, it is compassion that motivates a Buddha's teaching activity; he feels sympathetic about the trouble of living beings, he wishes they could feel at ease as he appears to do. Second, he does not see himself as installing them in liberation, but sees himself as turning them in the right direction. The progress is up to them. Third, he does not try only one way, but tirelessly invents different reasons and methods to help different beings.

Of all his liberative techniques, however, his teachings are most effective. As Tsong Khapa says, "Of all the Buddha-deeds, that of speech is supreme; therefore, wise men commemorate a Buddha from this point of view" /7/. Now the verbal teachings of the Buddha, called the Holy Dharma (*Saddharma*), were collected after his final liberation in three collections (called three "baskets," *tripitaka*), the "Ethics" (*Vinaya*), "Discourse" (*Sūtra*), and "Pure Science" (*Abhidharma*) collections. The most interesting point to note here is that the third collection, the *Abhidharma*, consists of scientific texts that do not claim direct authorship of the Buddha. They are rather the systematic analyses of the major topics and categories employed by the Buddha in his Discourses, composed by the major disciples, with the Buddha's authorization. It is highly noteworthy that these texts enjoy the

same scriptural status as do those that record the actual sayings of the Buddha. Furthermore, if we note their correspondence with categories of practice, the “Three Disciplines” (*trīśikṣā*) of Morality, Mind, and Wisdom, it can be seen that in some respects the Abhidharma collection is superior to the Sutra collection. The latter merely records sermons given in the context of personal interviews, whereas the former represents the abstract quintessence of all those sermons. Hence, the prefix “*abhi-*,” which means “super-,” is attached to Dharma as “doctrine,” giving “Super-Dharma.” Certainly the early monastic schools devoted most of their energy to study of the Abhidharma, considering it the elite teaching of greatest practical value. And it is the Abhidharma that contains the earliest forms of the hermeneutical concepts such as we will encounter below /8/.

In sum, the first Reliance alerts us to the fact that Buddha’s Dharma claims to stand on its own philosophical cogency, not requiring a personal authoritarianism for its legitimation. We are reminded of the famous goldsmith verse: “O monks—Sages accept my teachings after a thorough examination and not from (mere) devotion; just like a goldsmith accepts gold only after burning, cutting, and polishing” /9/.

#### IV. Rely on the Meaning, Not the Letter

The three disciplines exactly correspond to the three collections, constituting the “realizational” or “practical Dharma” (*adhigamadharma*), while the latter constitute the “verbal Dharma” (*āgamadharmā*). The point is that the essence of the teachings lies in the practice of them. This is a point that is generally understood about Buddhism, at least conceptually, and we need not elaborate here. Important to note in this regard, however, is that again in the threefold classification, it is wisdom (*prajñā*), here in its Abhidharmic meaning of analytic discernment of realities (*dharmapracicaya*), that is preeminent, not either meditation or ethical behavior, although all are of course needed in combination. And, in our special context, it is wisdom that is reached via the practice of hermeneutics. Finally, note that wisdom, presented as the culmination of the intellectual enterprise, as the perfection of analytic reason, the ultimate refinement of discriminative awareness, is considered a practice, considered to be experiential and realizational (*adhigamadharma*). Thus, there is no dichotomy between intellect and experience, the rational and the mystical, and so forth. Enlightenment as wisdom is perfected as the culmination of the most refined rational inquiry, not at the cost of reason.

#### V. Rely on Definitive Meaning, Not Interpretable Meaning

This brings us to the main subject: for, granted the meaning is more important than the mere letter, how is the meaning to be decided? What kind of meaning is to be accepted? Here we are in the realm of hermeneutical strategies.

The obvious and most simplistic approach to this question of interpretability and definitiveness is found in the Hīnayāna Abhidharma



tradition, where “definitive meaning” (*nītārtha*) is defined as “meaning acceptable as literally expressed” (*yathāruṭavaśena jñatavyārtham*), and “interpretable meaning” (*neyārtha*) as “meaning acceptable after interpretation” (*niddharetva grahitavyārtham*) (Poussin, V, 246, n.2). Thus the two can be aligned merely with explicit and implicit teaching, i.e., teachings wherein a teacher directly states his point, and those in which a teacher hints at his point, perhaps because his disciple is not ready for the explicit statement, or perhaps because the impact will be greater when indirectly approached. This interpretation of the two categories has been prevalent in Western scholarship to date, and most Buddhologists translate the terms simply as “implicit” and “explicit” meanings. Indeed, in the Abhidharma context these terms will do, but we shall see how they will fare in the Mahāyāna context. A final point about this type of scheme is that it has no historical dimension. That is to say, a Buddha might switch from interpretable meaning statement to definitive meaning statement in the same discourse, depending upon the context, and thus one would not necessarily consider the entire discourse to be interpretable in meaning or *vice versa*. This is a general characteristic of hermeneutical strategies that depend upon content rather than context.

The next strategy we will consider is set forth in the *Samādhinirmocana Sūtra*, a Mahāyāna Scripture, believed by Mahāyānists to record the actual words of the Buddha. This Scripture was highly regarded by Asanga, one of the greatest Buddhist philosophers, known as the “hero” (*mahāratha*) of the expansive stage of the path (that emphasizing love and compassion [*maitrikaruṇā*]), and he founded the hermeneutical strategy of the Vijñānavāda school upon it. The strategy is that known as the Three Wheels of the Dharma (a Buddha’s teaching is metaphorically called a “turning of the wheel of Dharma”) and, in the Scripture’s words, runs as follows:

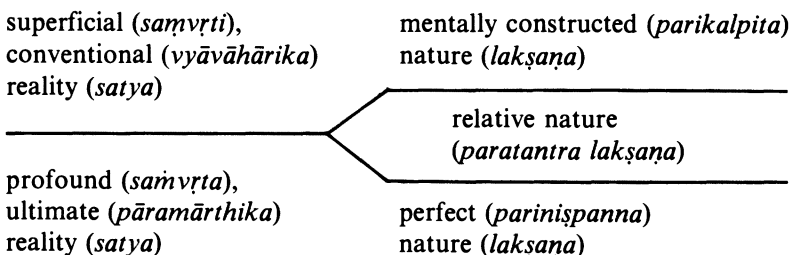
First of all, in the Deer Park at Rshipatana in Varanasi for the sake of those involved in the disciple vehicle, the Lord turned a wonderful, amazing wheel of Dharma, such as had never before been turned in the world by men or gods, and he showed the (sixteen) aspects of the Four Holy Truths. Yet even that wheel of Dharma turned by the Lord was surpassable, provisory, interpretable in meaning, and subject to dispute. Then the Lord, for the sake of those involved in the Mahāyāna turned a second wheel of Dharma even more wonderful and amazing, by proclaiming voidness, starting from the fact of the unreality, uncreatedness, ceaselessness, primordial peace, and natural liberation of all things. Nevertheless, even this wheel of Dharma was surpassable, provisory, interpretable, and subject to dispute. Finally, the Lord, for the sake of those involved in all vehicles turned the third wheel of Dharma, by showing the fine discrimination (of things), addressing the fact of the unreality, uncreatedness, ceaselessness, primordial peace, and natural liberation of all things. And this turning of the wheel of Dharma by the Lord was unsurpassed, not provisory, definitive in meaning, and left no room for dispute. (Lamotte: 85, 206)

Of course, the “first wheel” here is the Hīnayāna teaching, teaching the truth of suffering of *samsāra* and the truth of its cessation in *nirvāṇa* and so on. It presupposes the truth-status of things, both mundane and transcendental, and hence is suitable for the realistically minded. The “second wheel” is the *Prajñāpāramitā* or “Transcendent Wisdom” type of Mahāyāna teaching, teaching the fundamental truthlessness of persons and things, which is called their absolute emptiness. It aims to free its disciples from attachments and ignorance, but can be dangerous if taken too literally and interpreted nihilistically. Therefore, the “third wheel” is the supreme one, being the teaching of the *Saṃdhinirmocana* itself, known as the “subtly discriminative” type of Mahāyāna teaching.

What are the “fine distinctions” drawn in the third wheel that make it “subtly discriminative”?

At stake primarily is the interpretation of the frequent statements of the Buddha in the Mahāyāna scriptures to the effect that all things are empty, often phrased as straight negations, i.e., “there is no form, no feeling, no Buddha, no enlightenment, no non-enlightenment . . .” and so forth. The Mādhyamikas supply the qualifier “ultimately” in all contexts other than the *100,000-Line Prajñāpāramitā*, where the qualifier is in the text. But for the Vijñānavādins, Buddha considered this insufficient, and hence devised a scheme known as the “three natures” (*trilakṣaṇa*). Things have three natures, a mentally constructed (*parikalpita*) nature, a relative (*paratantra*) nature, and a perfect, or absolute (*pariniṣpanna*) nature. When all things are said to be empty of intrinsic substance, this only applies to them in their mentally constructed nature—they continue to exist as relative things, and their ineffable relativity devoid of conceptual differentiation is their absolute nature. Thus, the insertion of the relative category between the conceptual (*parikalpita*) and the absolute (*pariniṣpanna*) insulates the practitioner against nihilism.

The following diagram illustrates the relation of the three natures with the Mādhyamika two reality theory. Using this hermeneutical scheme, the disciple of the third wheel can follow exactly what is said and attain the highest goal, without any hermeneutical dilemma, free of the dangers of naive realism or nihilism, and thus this teaching is definitive in meaning.



It is noteworthy that this scheme of the *Samdhinirmocana*, fundamental in the Vijñānavāda school, is both historical (as relating to Buddha's biography) and philosophical, as relating to the content of the teaching. It seems to present a rather logical progression from the elementary to the advanced. Tsong Khapa (Thurman, 1978: 102ff.) points out that it treats the interpretability of the first two wheels differently, since the first wheel is plainly misleading as it stands, as things are not intrinsically real as they appear, and hence the mode of interpretation involved must justify its teachings as purely pedagogic techniques. Thus, in teaching that wheel, the Buddha expounds the analysis of the elements of internal and external reality in order to convey the message of personal selflessness, leaving intact for the time the hearer's false notions concerning the truth-status of such objects. On the other hand, the second wheel is much closer to the definitive teaching, since it does not actually presume upon any naive realism about external objects, but only falls short of definitiveness by failing to demonstrate explicitly precisely how things are empty. However, once the distinctions brought out in the third wheel are understood, the second wheel can be understood in the light of its intention, and it has great value in practice once one is safe from the danger of a nihilistic extremism. As Tsong Khapa says: "Thus (this Vijñānavāda system) states the *Mother Scripture* (i.e., *Prajñāpāramitā*) to be interpretable not because its meaning is the indiscriminate ultimate unreality of all things, but rather because it requires further explanation, as it is not fit to be literally accepted, hence is not definitive as it is" (Thurman, 1978: 104).

While this system is far more elaborate than the Hīnayāna hermeneutic given above, the literal acceptability or unacceptability of a Scripture still seems to be the basic criterion for its interpretability or definitiveness. Indeed, the Vijñānavāda thinkers did still invoke scriptural authority for the establishment of literally definitive Scriptures. They give three types of literally definitive Scriptures, those that so establish themselves, those that are so established by another Scripture, and those established both by themselves and by others, exemplified by the *Laṅkāvatāra* and the *Samdhinirmocana*, by the *8000-Line Prajñāpāramitā*, and by the *18,000-Line Prajñāpāramitā*, respectively (Thurman, 1978: 109).

There are two main criticisms of this Vijñānavāda hermeneutic. First, mere literal acceptability is an inadequate criterion of definitiveness, since there are varieties of interpretability, some involving symbolism, some involving intention, some involving context, some merely involving restoring abbreviated expressions, and so forth. Hence the criterion is too rigid and simplistic to cope with the intricacies of the teachings. Second, for all its claims to fine analytic discrimination, three nature theory and all, this hermeneutical strategy is still itself scripturally justified—it is after all the scheme set forth in the *Samdhinirmocana* Scripture. No abstract rational rule or criterion to distinguish between scriptural claims is disclosed, and hence the obvious circularity of invoking a Scripture's own claim of definitiveness as proof of its own definitiveness. The great Mādhyamikas, especially

Candrakīrti and Tsong Khapa, level these criticisms at the Vijñānavāda hermeneutic, before setting forth their own strategies. But before we take these up, we should consider briefly the Chinese tradition.

Although Leon Hurvitz makes no mention of the fact in his important study of Chih I, our first Chinese hermeneutician, the *Samdhinirmocana* was well known in China before his time, having been translated during the fifth century both by Guṇabhadra and by Bodhiruci (Nanjio: 49, 68). It is almost certain that the ten schools mentioned by Chih I as preceding him in elaborating hermeneutical strategies were influenced by this Scripture, as their main categories, “sign-doctrine” and “signless doctrine” correspond precisely to the *Samdhinirmocana* characterization of the first two wheels respectively. However, according to Hurvitz the *Laṅkāvatāra* and the *Mahāparinirvāṇa* were the most important scriptural sources for the Chinese hermeneuticians, which discipline they called “doctrinal analysis” (Hurvitz: 214ff.). Most important for Chih I was the parable of the five stages of milk in the *Mahāparinirvāṇa*:

It is just as from a cow one extracts milk, from milk one extracts cream, from cream butter, from butter clarified butter, and from clarified butter the essence of clarified butter. The essence is the best of these. If anyone take it, his ailments shall all be cleared away, and all medicines that are shall enter his system. Good Sir! The Buddha is also like this. From the Buddha are extracted the twelve kinds of scriptures, from them are extracted the (Mahāyāna) sutras, from the (Mahāyāna) sutras are extracted the Expansive (Vaipulya) Scriptures, from the Expansive Scriptures is extracted the *Prajñāpāramitā*, and from the *Prajñāpāramitā* is extracted the *Mahāparinirvāṇa*. (Hurvitz: 217)

We note immediately that Chih I’s doctrine of the five periods follows this scriptural theme almost exactly, with the differences that Chih I reverses the order of numbers one and two, taking the general “sutras” as the *Garland (Avatamsaka) Scripture*, and that he includes the *Lotus Scripture* in the final category, which he takes to be supreme, as teaching the eternality of Buddhahood, the universality of Buddha-nature, and the happiness and bliss of *nirvāṇa*. Of course, the *Garland Scripture*, according to Chih I, has already conveyed this message from the moment of the Buddha’s enlightenment, but only a very few were able to realize its meaning at that time.

Now, although this scheme, like the three wheels of Dharma theory of the *Samdhinirmocana*, is historical in using the Buddha’s biography as framework, Chih I’s analysis of it is somewhat more sophisticated. First, while each period is dominated by the teaching it is associated with, the other teachings may be given to some disciples during any of the periods, as the Buddha’s capacities are ever adaptable to the pedagogical necessities. Second, Chih I coordinates the context-classification to a methodological classification, known as the “Four Methods of Conversion,” which consist of 1) the sudden teaching, which corresponds to the first period of the *Garland Scripture*, which conveys instantaneous enlightenment to those with the

necessary ability, 2) the gradual teaching, corresponding to the second through fourth periods, giving the stages of progress of Hinayāna and Mahāyāna disciples, 3) the secret indeterminate teaching, which is Buddha's method of teaching a number of different disciples different teachings simultaneously without knowing each other, and 4) the express indeterminate teaching, which is Buddha's method of doing the same to different disciples in the same assembly. The two latter methods are practiced in the first four periods. Finally, Chih I also coordinates the historical context and the methodological scheme with a content-scheme, known as the "Four Principles of Conversion," namely, 1) the storehouse teaching, or the Hīnayāna, 2) the Pervasive (Transitional) teaching, including the Mādhyamika and general analytic counteractive to Hīnayāna notions, 3) the Separate (Discriminate) teaching, which consists of the Vijñānavāda, and 4) the Round teaching, which consists of the teaching of the ultimate nonduality of the world of common experience with the ultimate reality, the Dharma-body, the containment of infinity in an atom, of eternity in an instant, and so on. We may again note here that the first three Principles correspond quite precisely to the three wheels of Dharma of the *Saṃdhinirmocana*.

This latter classification of Chih I is further refined by Fa Tsang, who pays less heed to the historical approach, although he does not contest it. He puts the last four of Chih I's categories into his first three, adds a new one which is a scriptureless, meditational school, later identified with Ch'an or Zen, and places his own beloved *Garland Scripture* with its miraculous view of reality at the very top. Fa Tsang was one of the greatest philosophers of all of Chinese philosophy, and his elaboration of a hermeneutic is extremely refined and detailed, dealing as it does with most of the major problems of the tradition. These schemes can perhaps best be conveyed in the following diagram (Fig. A).

In general, the Chinese tradition was essentially extremely Scripture-oriented, as relatively few of the myriad Indian scientific treatises (*śāstra*) were translated into Chinese. Thus, while the hermeneutical strategies were extremely refined in some respects, they still based themselves finally on a particular Scripture, Chih I on the *Lotus*, Fa Tsang on the *Garland*, others on the *Pure Land*. Their hermeneutics' main thrust was to place their favorite Scripture at the apex of a doctrinal pyramid. In contrast, of course, was the Ch'an school, which eschewed the whole enterprise, purporting to cast aside all Scriptures ultimately, although this is perhaps one of the most important of all hermeneutical strategies, certainly eminently rational. But I will return to this in a final section.

Now for the final hermeneutical strategies we proceed to those of the Mādhyamikas of India and Tibet, which are the most content-oriented perhaps, although they too depart from a scriptural basis, though one with a difference.

In the *Akṣayamatīrdeśa Scripture* there is the following famous passage:

Which scriptures are definitive in meaning? And which interpretable?  
Those teaching superficial realities are interpretable, and those

(Figure A)

SCRIPTURE-BASED HERMENEUTICAL SCHEMES

<p>Three Wheels of Dharma from the <i>Samādhirimocana</i></p>		<p><i>Chih I's T'ien Tai</i></p>	<p><i>Fa Tsang's Hua Yen</i></p>
<p>1. Hinayāna, at Deer Park, for disciples, realistic, on Four Holy Truths.</p>	<p>Historical</p> <p>1. <i>Garland Sutra</i>, at Bodhi tree for three weeks; sudden teaching.</p> <p>2. Hinayāna, twelve years; gradual teaching.</p>	<p>Philosophical</p> <p>1. Storehouse teaching (Hinayāna)</p>	<p>1. Hinayāna</p>
<p>2. Mahāyāna, <i>Prajñāpāramitā</i>, at Vulture Peak, for bodhisattvas, emptiness, signlessness, interpretable to avoid nihilism.</p>	<p>3. General Mahāyāna to correct Hinayāna narrowness, eight years; gradual teaching.</p> <p>4. <i>Prajñāpāramitā</i>, twenty-two years, on emptiness; gradual teaching: secret and express indeterminate teachings in 1 through 4.</p>	<p>2. Pervasive teaching (Mādhyamika)</p>	<p>2. Preliminary Mahāyāna (including Chih I's historical Nos. 3 and 4).</p>
<p>3. Mahāyāna, <i>Samādhirimocana</i>, at Vaiśālī and in heaven, for bodhisattvas, three natures, fine distinctions, definitive in meaning, etc.</p>	<p>5. <i>Lotus Sutra</i>, for eight years; <i>Mahāparinirvāna</i> for twenty-four hours, supreme teaching of universal enlightenment; sudden teaching again.</p>	<p>3. Discriminate teaching (Vijñānavāda)</p> <p>4. Round teaching (<i>Lotus Sutra</i>, etc.)</p>	<p>3. Final Mahāyāna (including Chih I's No. 5 i.e., <i>Lotus Sutra</i> and <i>Mahāparinirvāna</i>).</p> <p>4. Instantaneous Enlightenment; Scriptureless school, later identified with Ch'an.</p> <p>5. Round Doctrine of the <i>Garland (Avataṃsaka) Scripture</i>; one in one, all in all, one in all, all in one, etc.</p>

teaching ultimate realities are definitive in meaning. Those teaching various words and letters are interpretable, while those teaching the profound, the hard to see, and the hard to understand are definitive. Those introducing the path are interpretable. Those introducing the fruit are definitive. Those scriptures that teach as if there were a lord in the lordless, using such expressions as “ego,” “living being,” “life,” “soul,” “creature,” “person,” “human,” “man,” “agent,” “experiencer,” etc., are interpretable. And those scriptures that teach the doors of liberation, the emptiness of things, their signlessness, wishlessness, inactivity, birthlessness, creationlessness, beginninglessness, lifelessness, personlessness, and lordlessness, and so on, are definitive in meaning. You should rely on the latter, not the former. (Thurman, 1978: 111) /10/

Here we note a new hermeneutical strategy whose essence is the alignment of the categories of interpretable and definitive with the epistemological and ontological categories relative/absolute, superficial/ultimate, i.e., the two realities (*satya dvaya*) of Buddhist philosophy /11/. This is a departure from the equation of the Vijñānavāda, namely, interpretable/definitive = implicit/explicit, since now a non-explicit teaching that concerns itself with the ultimate reality is definitive in meaning, whether or not it requires some verbal interpretation due to its indirectness, figurativeness, or laconicness. On the other hand, a completely explicit statement that concerns itself with some superficial, mundane state of affairs is interpretable in meaning, even if it can be understood literally as it is, since it fails to communicate the ultimate condition of said state of affairs. For example, a statement such as “there is no Buddha,” which often occurs in the *Transcendent Wisdom Scriptures*, is definitive in meaning, since its meaning, i.e., that in terms of ultimate reality there is no such relative thing as even a Buddha, concerns the ultimate condition of a Buddha, even though it requires the verbal interpretation of supplying the phrase “in the ultimate,” since it does not mean that there is no such thing as a Buddha in the relative, superficial, conventional and mundane realm. Indeed such statements are often made by the Buddha himself, and obviously on the relative level he is making the statement, and thus is there, as it were. Further, as an example of the second type, the statement “the sprout is born from the seed” is interpretable in meaning, even though it is true on the relative, conventional level, since it fails to communicate the ultimate condition of the sprout and the seed, neither of which exist ultimately, while the sentence seems to assume that they do indeed have objective existence.

The philosophically minded will here object that there appears to be a lack of parity at work in the analysis of the statements. After all, the latter statement can be interpreted by supplying the qualification “conventionally” (just as we have supplied the qualification “ultimately” in the first case), which would then make the statement definitive in meaning, while the former statement could be said to be assuming the “reality” of a Buddha in the course of denying it. The mistake that gives rise to this objection is the idea that there is indeed parity between the two realities, i.e., the relative, and the ultimate.

However, the ultimate takes precedence over the relative, not intrinsically or ontologically, as it were, since the “two” realities are in fact merely presented as a conceptual dichotomy, but epistemologically, since the mind’s orientation toward the absolute is more beneficial and liberating than is its orientation toward the relative, which after all includes suffering and ignorance, and so on. Thus, the statement “there is no Buddha” contains the negation of the truth-status of a Buddha, among all other relative things, and points to his ultimate status which is truthlessness, or realitylessness, or emptiness. The directionality of our cognition here is correct, does not need further correction, even though a word might be supplied here and there, since it aims at the absolute, as it were, aimed by an absolute negation. On the other hand, the statement “the sprout is born from the seed” confirms our habitual unconscious assumption of the intrinsic reality of sprout, seed, birth, etc., and brings us no closer to the ultimate, and hence the directionality of our cognition is wrong, we are confirmed in our “naive realism” about persons and things, i.e., our habitual clinging to their objective substantiality, and although the interpretive correction with the supplied qualification “conventionally” may give us pause by having us think “ah, that means not ultimately,” this is secondary and the statement remains interpretable according to this strategy.

Thus, in this system, “interpretation” involved in “interpretable meaning” does not mean any sort of trivial verbal interpretation or qualification, but only that type of interpretation that brings out the ultimate relevance, meaning, reality of things. And the only type of verbal statement that does not require such interpretation is that which is absolutely negative, an absolute negation in the logical sense of only negating its negandum without establishing or implying anything else. Therefore, to apply this scheme to the three wheels of Dharma, the middle wheel of Dharma, that of the *Prajñāpāramitā*, is seen to be the most definitive, although the third and even the first contain some statements that can be accepted as definitive. Such flexibility is there because on this interpretation, the subject matter, the concern, superficial or ultimate, is all-important.

Of course, not all Mādhyamikas were agreed among themselves on the precise ramifications of this principle. Of the two main sub-schools, the Svātantrika and the Prāsāngika /12/, the former drew back from the rigorously critical position of the latter and attempted to syncretize the Mādhyamika system with the Vijñānavāda system. Thus Śāntaraksita and Kamalaśīla took the interesting position that in a strong sense both the second and third wheels of Dharma were definitive in meaning (Thurman, 1978: 150ff.). Indeed, according to the latter, it is the *Samdhinirmocana* interpretation of the *Prajñāpāramitā* message of pure negation that renders the *Prajñāpāramitā* definitive in meaning. For, he reasons, the *Prajñāpāramitā* negations are often laconic, failing to mention the qualification “ultimately,” and the *Samdhinirmocana* type of interpretation through the three nature theory enables us to remember the constant need to assume the qualifier “ultimately” as understood. Thus, a nihilistic skepticism,



or “repudiation” (*apavāda*), is avoided by negating the literalness of negations, and a naive realism, or “presumption” (*samāropa*), is avoided by negating the truth-status of the relative. On this latter point, he differs from the Vijñānavādins, who believe the relative nature to be ultimately real, as distinct from the constructed nature, which is unreal. The type of reality involved here is called by the Vijñānavādins “intrinsic identifiability” (*svalakṣaṇasiddhatvam*), and is distinguished from “objective reality” (*svarūpasiddhatvam*). Kamalaśīla reorganizes somewhat these different types of reality-status, by denying the ultimacy of the relative and perfect natures, i.e., seeing the relative/absolute formula as a conceptual, mentally constructed dichotomy, while affirming the intrinsic identifiability of both of them on the conventional level, as he thinks this necessary to avoid the extremism of repudiation (*apavāda*), or nihilistic skepticism. Thus, not only does he use the *Samdhinirmocana* to interpret the *Prajñāpāramitā* in order to discover the latter’s definitiveness (i.e., not to prove its interpretability as did the Vijñānavāda), but he also uses subtle logical reasoning to interpret the *Samdhinirmocana* itself, taking the emptiness of mentally constructed things (*parikalpitalakṣaṇa*), defined as “nature-unreality” (*lakṣaṇaniḥsvabhāva*), to mean that the relative and the perfect lack ultimacy, instead of to mean that the relative and the perfect gain their ultimacy when distinguished from the ultimately unreal mentally constructed, which is how the Vijñānavāda takes it, and is what is explicitly said in the *Samdhinirmocana* itself. In essence, the Svātantrika tactic is to reconcile the Vijñānavāda with the Mādhyamika by accepting the three nature theory as conventionally, not ultimately, valid.

Candrakīrti, the greatest of the Prāsāngika philosophers, was dissatisfied with any such attempt of the Svātantrikas. He considered the *Akṣayamatiniḥśeṣa* statement to mean just what it said, that only statements concerning the ultimate are definitive, and that all statements concerning any aspect of the superficial, conventional, social, relative reality are interpretable. Thus, the whole interpretive scheme of the three natures is unacceptable to him and is itself interpretable, and he will not allow any intrinsic identifiability in the relative at all. But the full impact of his hermeneutic will be explained under the final heading below.

## VI. Rely on (Non-conceptual) Wisdom, Not on (Dualistic) Consciousness

The fourth step of the Buddhist hermeneutical movement serves as a reminder of the unwavering dedication to practice of the Buddhist teaching. Thus, even after having discerned the definitive meaning of the Scriptures as consisting of an absolute negation of the truth-status, intrinsic reality, selfhood, etc., of all things, relative and absolute, having discerned it with a critical consciousness that is properly called “intellectual wisdom” (*cintāmayīprajñā*), one still has not concluded the hermeneutical enterprise. In fact, it cannot be concluded until enlightenment is attained, until intellectual wisdom concerning the ultimate has been combined with one-pointed concentration, which combination leads to the holy knowledge of the space-like equipoise (*ākāśavatsamāhitajñāna*), the meditative wisdom

(*bhāvanāmayīprajñā*), the nondual knowledge, etc. Thus, even though one has reached a profound intellectual knowledge of the definitive meaning of the Scriptures, one must go on cultivating this knowledge until it permeates one's deeper layers of consciousness. Of the utmost significance is the fact that at no point is the intellectual study merely cast aside. On the contrary, reason is pushed to its utmost and held there by the cultivated power of concentration (*samādhi*). To rephrase this in hermeneutical terms, we must remember that the hermeneutical rule that the definitive teaching is that which concerns the ultimate, is itself a teaching concerning the superficial. It is a teaching concerning teachings, it is not itself a pure negation pointing to the ultimate reality. Thus, although Candra aligns himself with it, he does not dogmatically base his position on it as authority. Authority for him is reason, and reason is consummated only in enlightenment.

To make this point in another way, while conceptual, analytic wisdom is absolutely indispensable to attain a correct cognition of ultimate reality through an accurate understanding of the absolute negations that are definitive in meaning, it will not produce the experiential transformation called enlightenment unexcelled and perfect, unless it is combined with a systematically cultivated one-pointedness of mind. Ultimate reality eludes encompassment in any concept, no matter how hallowed, and hence the hermeneutician would betray his craft and avocation if he were to rest forever on the intellectual plane, no matter how refined his understanding. Thus, the Buddhist hermeneutical tradition is a tradition of realization, devoid of any intellect/intuition dichotomy. Authority here gives way to intellect, yet never lets intellect rest in itself, as it were, but pushes it beyond toward a culminating nondual experience.

It is remarkable how this hermeneutic of the Prāsaṅgika-Mādhyamika tradition (i.e., the alignment of interpretable and definitive with the conventional and ultimate realities, respectively), coming as it does as the culmination of a philosophical development of many centuries, as the supreme refinement of the critical analysis that leaves no dogmatic attitude unscathed, uses such rigorous reasoning to affirm the unswerving practicality at the heart of the tradition. It is further worth noting, *contra* notions of "mysticism," that this hermeneutic is identical in an exact manner with the principal strategy of the Ch'an/Zen tradition, even though that school is rightly called by Fa Tsang, as mentioned above, the "Scriptureless School." For while the Mādhyamikas may seem at first glance to be based on the *Prajñāpāramitā*, the "Mother of All Buddhas," what finally does it mean to be based on a Scripture that constantly repeats the litany, "There is no Buddha, no Dharma, no attainment, no attainer, no ground, no grounded. . ." and so on? As Vimalakīrti says to Mañjuśrī (Thurman, 1976: 58): "Mañjuśrī, when something is baseless, how can it have any root? Therefore, all things stand on the root which is baseless." Thus, to stand on the *Prajñāpāramitā* is to stand ultimately on groundlessness, i.e., to belong to the "Scriptureless School." In relation to the important citation given above from the *Akṣayamatīnirdeśa*, this is of course a scriptural passage and is taken by the Mādhyamikas as

authoritative, yet if we follow the sense of it, it self-destructs as dogma, stating that teachings about teachings, which include its own hermeneutical statements, are *all* interpretable in meaning, and that only teachings about absolute, ultimate reality, i.e., pure negations such as “all things are empty of intrinsic reality,” etc., are definitive in meaning. Finally, it is eminently thought provoking here that these two traditions, when we examine them in the light of the above taxonomy of hermeneutical strategies, emerge as not at all “mystical,” as scholars have so commonly misinterpreted them, but as rationalistic, non-authoritarian, and empirically pragmatic, while the various types of Scripture-based traditions emerge as “mystical” insofar as dogmatically attached to sacred authority in the final analysis.

Nāgārjuna, in the climactic chapter of his “*Wisdom*”: *Basic Verses of the Middle Way* in which he analyzes the concept of “*nirvāṇa*” and finally equates *nirvāṇa* and *samsāra*, anticipates the objections of those who will consider him to have made some authoritarian statement about *nirvāṇa* by listing a version of the “Fourteen Unpronounced Verdicts” / 13/ of the Buddha and concluding with the following extraordinary verse: “The Dharma is that bliss which is the quiescence of all perceptions and elaborations—not a bit of it was ever taught by any Buddha for anyone anywhere (Vaidya, 1960: 236) / 14/. Instead of settling for the usual platitude about Nāgārjuna’s alleged “mysticism” here, we can clearly see this hermeneutically as his steadfast refusal to allow any verbal formula to be misconstrued as authoritarian dogma. Precisely the same point is made most forcefully by the great Ch’an Master Pai Chang (720–814) to his disciple Nan Ch’uan (747–834), as recorded in the *Blue Cliff Record* (Cleary: 181):

Nan Ch’uan went to see Master . . . Pai Chang.

Chang asked, “Have all the sages since antiquity had a truth that they haven’t spoken for people?”

Ch’uan said, “They have.”

Chang said, “What is the truth that hasn’t been spoken for people?”

Ch’uan said, “It’s not mind, it’s not Buddha, it’s not anything.”

Chang said, “You said it.”

Pai Chang here tested his advanced friend with the fundamental hermeneutical question, probing to see if Nan Ch’uan still felt there was any dogmatic doctrine, even an esoteric one. Ch’uan bravely sallied forth by standing up for what he took to be the tradition, thinking to get off easily since it was a “traditionless tradition” wherein the truth was nothing at all, yet somehow still there, and still possessed by the sages. Chang powerfully refutes him with the humorous reference to the fact that this was indeed not “unspoken truth” at all, since Ch’uan himself had just easily said it. Ch’uan realizes he has missed it, and becomes insecure and attempts to defer to Chang’s authority.

Ch'uan said, "I am just thus. What about you, teacher?"  
 Chang said, "I am not a great man of knowledge either; how would I know whether it has been spoken or not?"  
 Ch'uan said, "I don't understand."  
 Chang said, "I've already spoken too much for you."

Whatever other depths or surfaces of meaning may be here, for our purpose one thing is abundantly clear: Pai Chang completely refuses to set himself up as authority for his disciple, leaving him entirely on his own at the conclusion of the encounter. The commentator on the case interestingly relates it to the above idea of Nāgārjuna's, saying, "Old Śākyamuni appeared in the world and in forty-nine years never said a single word" (Cleary: 184).

In conclusion, let me offer a striking image for this Mādhyamika/Ch'an hermeneutical tradition, the gift of one of its eminent members, Master Pa Ling (10th century) (Cleary: 88):

A monk asked Pa Ling, "What is the school of Kaṇadeva (Āryadeva)?"  
 Pa Ling said, "Piling up snow in a silver bowl."

## NOTES

/1/ I use "Hinayāna" here to designate the teachings aiming at self-liberation from suffering by separate individuals, philosophically subdivided into eighteen schools during the centuries after Śākyamuni's death. "Theravāda" is not serviceable for this purpose, as it represents only one of these eighteen schools, being the Pali form of Sanskrit *Sthāviravāda*. Lest any reader be offended by any presumed derogatory tone implied in the term, let me make clear that I mean "individual" (not "inferior") by "Hīna-," and "universal" (not "superior") by "Mahā-" of Mahāyāna. The former aims at *individual* liberation, not stressing the cultivation of love and compassion (*maitrīkaruṇā*). The latter aims at *universal* liberation, heavily stressing those virtues, but also including the necessity for individual liberation at the same time.

- /2/ This text is translated by the author in a forthcoming work (Thurman, 1978).
- /3/ This striking contrast in the lengths of teaching tenure of Jesus and Śākyamuni complements a no less striking similarity in the spreads of the traditions, the Christian westward through the Hellenic/Roman/European world, completing its cultural conquest in about 1000 years, and the Buddhist eastward throughout Asia as far as Mongolia, Japan, and Indonesia over roughly the same time span.
- /4/ A typical formulation of these rules, though differently ordered, is (Sakaki, 19: — 124): Skt. *arthapratisaraṇena bhavitavyaṃ na vyañjanapratisaraṇena / dharmapratisaraṇena bhavitavyaṃ na pudgalapratisaraṇena / jñānapratisaraṇena bhavitavyaṃ na vijñānapratisaraṇena / nītārthasūtrapratisaraṇena bhavitavyaṃ na neyārthasūtrapratisaraṇena //*
- /5/ Skt. *gambhīra śānto virajaḥ prabhāsvaraḥ prāptomi dharmo hyamṛto 'saṃskṛtaḥ / deśeya cāhaṃ na parasyajane yannuna tuṣṇi pavane vaseyam //* (My translation follows the Tibetan version's slight variance.) (Vaidya, 1958: 286).
- /6/ Skt. *sūnyaśca śānta anutpādanaya avijanād eva jagad udbhramati / teṣāṃ upāyanayayuktiśatair avatārayasi api kṛpālutaḥ //* (Vaidya, 1961: 154).
- /7/ Tibetan: / *mḍzad pa kun las gsuñ gi ni //* / *mḍzad pa mchog yin de yañ ni //* / *de ñid yin phyir mkhas pa yis //* / *de las sañs rgyas rjes dran byos //* (Tsong Khapa, 1399).
- /8/ Vasubandhu's famous definition of "ultimate (*paramārtha*) Abhidharma" is pertinent here: *prajñāmalā sānucārā*, i.e., "pure wisdom, with its correlates."
- /9/ Skt. *tāpācchedācca nikaśāt suvarṇam iva paṇḍitaiḥ / parikṣaya bhikṣavo grāhyaṃ madvaco na tu gauravāt //* (Śāntarakṣita, v. 3587).
- /10/ Partial Sanskrit (Vaidya, 1960: 14): *ye sūtrāntā mārgāvatārāya nirdiṣṭā imā ucyante neyārthāḥ / yeṣu sūtrānteṣu ātmasattvajivapoṣapurūṣa-pudgalamānujamaṇyākāvedakanānāśabdair ākhyāyante yeṣu cāsvāmikāṃ sasvāmikātvena nirdiṣṭāṃ te neyārthāḥ / ye sūtrāntāḥ phalāvatārāya nirdiṣṭā imā ucyante nītārthāḥ / yāvad ye sūtrāntāḥ sūnyatānimitāpranīhitānabhisamskārajātānutpādābhāvanīrātmāniḥsattvanirjivāniḥpudgalāsvāmikavimokṣa-mukhanirdiṣṭāḥ te ucyante nītārthāḥ /*
- /11/ In this context, *satya* is often translated as "truth." I prefer "reality," to stress the ontological nature of the categories, as they are defined traditionally as "objects of knowledge" (*jñeya*) rather than merely propositions.
- /12/ The Svātantrika branch is named after the school of interpretation stemming from the c. 6th century Master, Bhāvaviveka, and the Prāsangika branch after the school stemming from Candrakīrti. The names themselves were applied by Tibetan scholars, on the basis of Candrakīrti's discussion of his differences with Bhāvaviveka in Chapter I of the *Prasannapadā*.
- /13/ The famous *avyākṛtavastunī*, namely, 1) Buddha exists after death, 2) does not, 3) both does and does not, 4) neither, 5) the world is limited, 6) is not, 7) is both limited and infinite, 8) is neither, 9) the world has a beginning, 10) has not, 11) both, 12) neither, 13) the self is the same as the body, 14) the self is different from the body.
- /14/ Skt. *sarvopalambhopaśamaḥ prapañcōpaśamaḥ śivaḥ / na kiṃcikasya-citkāściddharmo buddhena deśitāḥ //*

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