

REVIEW ARTICLE

WAS THE BUDDHA A BUDDHA?

Tilman Vetter, *Der Buddha und seine Lehre in Dharmakīrtis Pramāṇavārttika*. Der Abschnitt über den Buddha und die vier edlen Wahrheiten im Prāmaṇasiddhi-Kapitel. Wiener Studien zur Tibetologie und Buddhismuskunde, Heft 12, Wien 1984. Price: ÖS 230, —. To be ordered from Arbeitskreis für Tibetische und Buddhistische Studien, Maria Theresien-Strasse 3/4/26, A-1090 Wien, Austria.

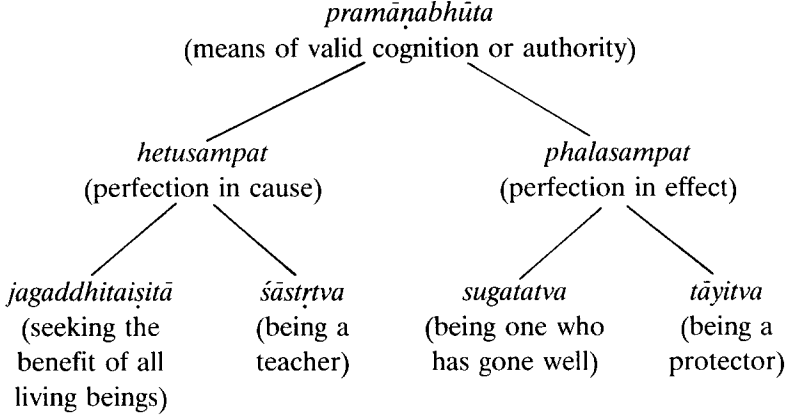
The four noble truths may be considered not only as the starting point of Buddhist philosophy, but also as a conceptual framework within which almost all Buddhist philosophical theories may be subsumed. The truth of suffering may include all theories answering the question what the world is in general and living beings (especially humans) in particular. The truth of the arising of suffering may include the theories of causality. The truth of the cessation of suffering may include theories of the absolute, that is, of Nirvana, of Buddhahood, of *tathatā*, etc. And the fourth truth may include theories of practice, especially ethics and theories of meditation. These are, roughly speaking, the traditional themes dealt with by Buddhist philosophers. However, it is less than obvious whether, and if so how, the Buddhist *pramāṇa*-school, which deals mainly with epistemological and logical problems, is to be related to this conceptual framework; all the more so as Dignāga, the founder of the school, as well as all the other logicians who came after him, did not recognize scripture or authoritative verbal communication (*āgama*, *śabda*) as an independent means of knowledge.

In a short but most edifying case-history Professor Steinkellner pointed out that the majority of modern scholars who dealt with the

spiritual place of epistemology and logic in the Buddhist tradition may be classified under two categories: Those, like Conze, who stressed the practical and religious ideas of Buddhism, and considered the epistemological tradition as a deplorable distortion and corruption of the basic Buddhist values; and those, like Stcherbatsky, who considered the epistemological tradition as the greatest achievement of Indian philosophy, but who equally considered it as un-Buddhistic in its spirit¹. “The assumption common to all these approaches”, concludes Steinkellner “is that the epistemological tradition presents an essential deviation from the spirit of Buddhism. And the methodical fault common to all these approaches is that none of them raises the question of the tradition’s self-understanding.”²

However, Steinkellner notes one important exception to these approaches, namely, that of Professor Vetter, who gave a “fully acceptable” explanation of this relationship in his *Erkenntnisprobleme bei Dharmakīrti*.³ Surprisingly enough, Vetter’s explanation has been ignored by the vast majority of scholars, and it is indeed disconcerting to observe that a book by a well-known and respected scholar, which was published in the well-known and easily available series of the Austrian Academy of Sciences, remains largely unknown; especially as Vetter’s book is, to the best of my knowledge, the one and only monograph on Dharmakīrti in any European language. Partly it is no doubt due to the fact that it was not written in English, and it might serve as an alarming indicator that German is becoming something of an esoteric language⁴. Partly it is also due to the extremely condensed style of the book which makes its reading an arduous task. Whatever the case may be, I sincerely hope that the book under discussion here will not share the fate of its predecessor, and will draw the attention it deserves as a major contribution towards the understanding of Dharmakīrti’s Buddhism.

The relation between the *pramāṇa* theory and Buddhist spirituality was laconically stated by Dignāga in the *maṅgalaśloka* of the *Pramāṇasamuccaya* and in the *Vṛtti* thereon. It consists of five epithets of the Buddha which stand in causal relation to each other. These are usually represented in the following scheme:⁵



It should be noted, however, that this scheme, albeit correct, is incomplete, for it fails to account for the relation among the four last epithets (*jagaddhitaṣṭā* etc.), as well as the relation between perfection in cause and perfection in effect. (Are they cause and effect of each other, or of a third and even fourth party?) Dharmakīrti, who raised the question, claimed that each of the four is a necessary condition for the next one (i.e., *jagaddhitaṣṭā* → *śāstrtva* → *sugatatva* → *tāyitva*), and this enables him to infer the epithets from each other in the following order: Because the Buddha is a protector (as is evident from his revealing of the four noble truths), he is *sugata* (the root *gam* is interpreted as “to know”, and together with the three meanings of *su-* it means that the Buddha’s knowledge is true, lasting and complete); because he is *sugata* (i.e., because he has far more knowledge than what is necessary for a simple *arhat*), he is a teacher; because he is a teacher (i.e., because he exerts himself for the sake of others), he is full of compassion, that is, seeking the benefit of all living beings. And because of all four taken together the Buddha is a means of valid cognition or authority.⁶ Note, however, that this inference does not account for the complexity of relations among the four terms; as far as the Buddha’s motivation is concerned, Dharmakīrti construes them in a different order: Because the Buddha is full of compassion he wants to become a protector, and the best way to become a protector is to

become a teacher, but in order to become a teacher one has first to experience the way and its result (i.e., to become *sugata*).

None of these interpretations seems particularly faithful to Dignāga. Unfortunately, however, we do not have any other commentatorial tradition except Dharmakīrti's, and, therefore, in order to understand Dignāga we should better look at his predecessors rather than his successors, for at least one could determine the direction from which his thought developed. One important passage which seems to bear directly on our subject matter here is found in the *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya* on 7.34, where Vasubandhu explains the similarities and dissimilarities among the different Buddhas. The similarities consist in the accumulation of all merit and knowledge, in having the *dharmakāya* and in being helpful to all living beings. These three are called perfection in cause, perfection in effect and perfection in means (*hetu-, phala-, upakārasampat*)⁷. Dignāga seems to have had this passage in mind while composing his *maṅgalaśloka*, although he uses the terms in a different sense and one to one relationship of the sub-divisions is difficult, not to say impossible, to establish. In any case the epithet *pramāṇabhūta* could correspond to perfection in means which is explained by Vasubandhu as perfection in liberating from the three bad destinies and from the suffering of *saṃsāra*, or, alternatively, in putting people in the three *yānas* (i.e., *śrāvakayāna* etc.) and in good destinies. As far as the term *pramāṇabhūta* itself is concerned, it could have been borrowed from the *Mahābhāṣya* where Pāṇini is thus called⁸. This could hint at Dignāga's aspiration to grant his epistemology the status of the highly respected science of *Vyākaraṇa*, and further perhaps to establish an epistemology which would be acceptable to, and used by different philosophical schools, just as is the case with grammar. But I shall leave the matter at that because Vetter's book is not about Dignāga, but about Dharmakīrti's interpretation of Dignāga, which is, as usual, something completely different.

The book consists of a most interesting, daring and intriguing introduction (pp. 13–35) and a translation of verses 131cd–285 of the *pramāṇasiddhi*-chapter⁹. Vetter's view of Dharmakīrti's view of the Buddha's career may be summarized as follows. There was a person who practiced compassion for a long time during many lives. None of the other perfections (*pāramitā*) known from Mahāyāna texts

is mentioned by Dharmakīrti, and, therefore, he considered that compassion alone is necessary for becoming a Buddha. The best way to help someone in the long run is to become his teacher. A good teacher has first to experience for himself what he teaches, and that is why the Buddha undertakes the necessary steps towards liberation, although he is not interested in liberating himself but only in liberating others. The Buddha already knew from tradition (*āgama*) and argumentation (*yukti*) that suffering has a cause, that this cause is not eternal, and that it is absent where the apprehension of Self, desire, etc., are absent; he also knew that their opposite (i.e., the apprehension of Selflessness etc.) had to be practiced in order to destroy them. However, he had to employ different methods in order to find out the best way for his purpose. He practiced many different methods for a long time, understood their advantages and shortcomings, and realized that the only definitive way to realize his aim is the apprehension of Selflessness (*nairātmyadarśana*). From this interpretation of the first three predicates Vetter reaches the conclusion that Dharmakīrti's Buddhism is unique of its kind (p. 19):

Bei der Erörterung des Prädikats 'das Heil der Welt suchend' war zu sehen, dass Dharmakīrti beim historischen Buddha keinen Mahāyāna-Weg zum Ziel der Buddhaschaft vor Augen hat und ebensowenig ein Bodhisattva-Ideal, dem möglichst viele zu folgen hätten. Auch diejenige Richtung des Hīnayāna, welche das Erscheinen des historischen Buddha als die Manifestation einer höheren Macht interpretiert — der sogenannte Lokottaravāda —, war auszuschliessen. Dharmakīrti ist auch nicht ohne weiteres der breiten Hīnayāna-Tradition zuzurechnen, zu der auch der Pāli-Kanon gehört. Entgegen diesem breiten Strom behauptet Dharmakīrti nämlich, dass der Buddha für sich selbst keine Erlösung suchte; er suchte die Erlösung nur, weil er in dieser wichtigen Sache gut Bescheid wissen musste, um anderen helfen zu können. Entgegen vielen Texten dieser breiten Tradition war der Inhalt seiner Lehre auch nicht das Ergebnis einer einmaligen Erleuchtung (*bodhi*). Nebenbei sei bemerkt, dass der bei uns gebräuchliche Name Buddha (der Erleuchtete oder Erwachte) von Dharmakīrti nie verwendet wird. Die wichtigsten Elemente der Lehre waren dem Buddha von der Überlieferung angeboten und von seinem Nachdenken gebilligt oder verbessert worden . . .

It seems to me, however, that Vetter's interpretation is improbable, for in the final analysis it would leave no room for the Buddha to innovate anything, not even to improve a previously existing way to liberation. According to Dharmakīrti the practice of apprehension of Selflessness is not only the best way to Nirvana, it is also the only way. And if it is

accepted by tradition that certain persons reached liberation before the Buddha, it follows that they also reached it by practicing the very same method. This, however, implies that they also knew and understood its presuppositions, such as the five *skandhas* being suffering, etc. The only thing left for the Buddha to do was to give his approval to a way with the discovery of which he had nothing to do. In other words, not only are the four noble truths not originally discovered by the Buddha, they were not even rediscovered by him. Though it is not explicitly stated, I think Vetter will actually accept this conclusion in some form or another, as he says (p. 18): “Der Buddha wusste zwar durch *Āgama* und Argumentation (*yukti*), dass das Leid eine Ursache hat, und dass diese Ursache keine ewige Natur hat (132c–133b, vgl. 179) . . . und was die Ursache ist (132c–134, vgl. 183–185) . . . er wusste damit auch, dass die Gegensätze zu diesen Fehlern zu üben seien.” Such a belittling of the Buddha seems odd, but before pronouncing any judgement on it one should, of course, ask what Vetter adduces as evidence for it. As far as I can see, his evidence amounts to one single word — *Āgama* — in v. 132: *yuktyāgamābhyām vimṛśan duḥkhaḥetum parīkṣate*/ “Reflecting with [the help of] reason and tradition he examines the cause of suffering.” Vetter, however, translates as follows: “Forschend mit Hilfe von Argumentation und Überlieferung stellt er die Ursache des Leides fest.” Of course, there is some difference whether one examines something with the help of tradition or whether one determines something with the help of tradition. And obviously the role of tradition is strengthened under the latter alternative. However, the rendering of *parīkṣate* with “stellt fest” is very strange; as far as my reading experience goes, I never saw it used that way, and none of the dictionaries available to me (I checked the *MW*, *PW*, *Apte* and *Renou*) glosses the word in this meaning. I do not doubt for a minute that Vetter knows what the verb usually means, and, therefore, I fail to understand why — if he wanted to convince us that Dharmakīrti uses the verb in this highly unusual meaning — he did not adduce some evidence for it, or add a few words of explanation¹⁰. Failing that, one could suspect that Vetter twists the text to support his theory.

But even if we assume, at least for the sake of argument, that Vetter is correct in his translation, this would still not be enough for his far-

reaching conclusions. For Dharmakīrti does not say that the four noble truths are a part of the tradition referred to in the verse; as a matter of fact he does not say anything about the content of this tradition. Moreover, I must admit that I do not know what Vetter means by tradition (or rather the tradition, since he uses the definite article). Does it mean that the four noble truths were common knowledge, at least among certain groups of renouncers? If so, how is this compatible with the epithet *pramāṇabhūta*? For one of Dharmakīrti's criteria for being a *pramāṇa* is to reveal something which was not previously known (*ajñātārthaprakāśa*).^{10a} Or should we assume that we deal with a secret tradition which was made public by the Buddha? Should we connect this tradition with the ancient belief, found already in the Pāli canon, that there were other Buddhas before the historical Buddha? Is it possible that the term "tradition" refers to non-Buddhist tradition? Could it refer to the theories of the teachers of the Buddha, or to other theories (such as the *śāśvatavāda* and the *ucchedavāda* or all the other theories which appear in the *Brahmajālasutta*) which were rejected by the Buddha as too extreme, dangerous, or inappropriate? Couldn't it be that Dharmakīrti used *yuktyāgama* as a ready-made expression without taking into account all its implications? Finally, is it not possible (or even likely) that the subject of this verse is not the Buddha? Dharmakīrti's laconicism does seem to leave room for more than one interpretation.

Furthermore, there is another problem which immediately arises in this context: One of the things which distinguish a Buddha from a simple Arhat is that a Buddha reaches enlightenment by himself: For all Buddhas are said to have gained their knowledge without having received instruction (cf. for instance *AKBh* on 7.34 p. 415.23: *jñānasampat punaś caturvidhā — anupadiṣṭajñānam . . .*; de la Vallée Poussin:¹¹ "Perfection de savoir: 1. savoir non enseigné . . ."; cf. also Yaśomitra ad loc.¹²: *anupadiṣṭajñānam iti svayamabhisambodhanārthena* — "Untaught knowledge [is used] in the meaning of becoming enlightened by oneself"). Thus Vetter's interpretation of *Āgama* is incompatible with one of the most important characteristics of a Buddha. Vetter may have been aware of this problem when he says that according to Dharmakīrti the Buddha's teaching is not the result of a single enlightenment, and that Dharmakīrti does not use

the word Buddha. If I understand him correctly, what he actually claims is that the Buddha was not a Buddha and the four noble truths (give or take a few minor improvements) are not originally his own. (All this in the name of Dharmakīrti, of course.) This is a very strong and interesting claim indeed, but, unfortunately, I do not see that Vetter has any conclusive evidence for it. As for the fact that the word Buddha never occurs in the *Pramāṇavārttika* ¹³, this, of course, does not prove anything.

Although it is not explicitly stated, it is clear from the context that Vetter draws his conclusion from v. 136:

*bahuśo bahudhopāyaṃ kālena bahunā'sya ca/
gacchanty abhyasyatas tatra guṇadoṣāḥ prakāśātām//*

“Ihm, der intensiv (*bahuśo*) und über eine lange Zeit hin (*kālena bahunā*) auf vielerlei Weise (*bahudhā*) ein Mittel übt [um die aus Überlieferung und Nachdenken gewonnene Einsicht zu verwirklichen und dann diese und die zu ihrer Verwirklichung einsetzbaren Mittel anderen zu lehren], gelangen diesbezüglich [d.h. bezüglich der verschiedenen Mittel] die Vor- und Nachteile zu [voller] Klarheit.”

However, Vetter's interpretation is certainly not the only possible one. While commenting on this verse, Prajñākaragupta explicitly mentions the Buddha's enlightenment, for he considers that the verse refers to the time after the Buddha's enlightenment, or more precisely, when the enlightenment unfolds or blossoms (*prabodhavikāsa*). (The biographies of the Buddha usually mention four, or sometimes seven ¹⁴, weeks.) Although the Buddha is free from suffering, he further practices different means and perfects his qualities as a teacher; e.g., he exerts himself to eliminate his imperfections of speech etc. Or, alternatively, although his suffering is destroyed, the Buddha is not yet omniscient ¹⁵. Nothing in this implies or suggests that the content of the Buddha's teachings is not the result of a unique enlightenment.

Devendrabuddhi and Manorathanandin, on the other hand, do not mention the enlightenment at all, because they consider that the practice during long time refers to the time when the Buddha was not yet a Buddha, i.e., when he was still a Bodhisattva. Nothing in their

interpretation implies anything unusual in their understanding of the future Buddha's enlightenment.

The interpretation of v. 136 bears directly on the problem of *āgama* in 132cd. For, if I understand them correctly, according to Devendrabuddhi and Manorathanandin the Buddha used *āgama* only in his previous lives when he was a Bodhisattva. This is probably the simplest solution to the problem. Cf. *Pramāṇavārttikavṛtti* (ed. D. Shastri. Varanasi 1968) p. 51.12–15: *etaṃ duḥkhaḥetum tadvipakṣaṃ cāgamād upaśrutyānumanān niścityā* [*niścitya* or a lacuna?] *bahuśo 'nekaśo bahudhopāyam anekaparakāram kālena ca bahunāsyā bodhisattvasyābhyasyato bhāvayatas tatra duḥkhaḥetau tadvipakṣe ca guṇadoṣā yathāyogaṃ prakāśatāṃ gacchanti*. “Having heard the cause of suffering and its opposite from tradition [and] having determined [these two] by inference, the advantages and shortcomings in respect to the cause of suffering and its opposite as it fits (i.e., in reversed order) become clear to the Bodhisattva who is practicing, [i.e.] meditating, manifoldly (intensively?) in many different ways and for a long time on the means [to destroy suffering through its cause], which has many different forms”¹⁶. This seems a perfectly sound solution. In any case, one cannot simply ignore it the way Vetter does.¹⁷

It is only according to Prajñākaragupta's understanding of Dharmakīrti that the role of *āgama* becomes problematic; and he proposes two different interpretations. According to the first, *āgama* makes known objects which are beyond the scope of perception and inference¹⁸. According to the second, — and this is the one on which Vetter bases his interpretation (cf. p. 40, n. 1) — the examination of suffering etc., is done in a threefold succession of tradition, inference and meditation (*āgama*, *yukti* and *bhāvanā*¹⁹).

The issue is quite complicated, and many questions have to be raised and answered before a definitive solution can be accepted. Vetter has certainly given some thought to the subject, but unfortunately he does not share his deliberations with his readers. Failing that, one may assume that he was led astray by Prajñākaragupta.

The problem of the originality of the Buddha has arisen long before Dharmakīrti, and he must have been aware of its traditional solution. Had he anything original, not to say revolutionary, to say on the

subject, I would expect him to state it explicitly, as he does in many other cases, and not to hide it behind such remote implications. It seems to me, therefore, that Devendrabuddhi's and Manorathanandin's interpretation does better justice to Dharmakīrti's original intention, for if it is accepted, the problem of *āgama* does not even arise in the context of v. 132cd. As far as I can see there is nothing in Dharmakīrti's words to indicate the innovations which Vetter reads in them, and inasmuch as the Buddha is considered as a person, and not as an abstract principle, Dharmakīrti probably followed the traditional Buddhist doctrine, as it appears for instance in the *Milindapañha*²⁰, namely, that there were many Buddhas, and they all have exactly the same teaching, but each of them discovers the way by himself.

The *pramāṇasiddhi*-chapter is anything but a systematic treatise, and Vetter has accomplished a veritable *tour de force* in reconstructing a whole system out of it. By the very nature of things he had to rely on odd bits and pieces scattered here and there; sometimes not even directly there, but only hinted at or alluded to by the employment of certain terms, by omission of what could be expected, etc. The reconstruction is indeed fascinating in certain aspects, but from the very nature of things highly speculative, and I feel that Vetter, in spite of his experience and intimate knowledge of Dharmakīrti, ought to have been more cautious. For instance, how much can one read into a simple "etc."? Discussing the sixteen aspects of the four noble truths Dharmakīrti mentions the first four by name and then adds "etc." (cf. v. 270). Vetter observes that the remaining twelve are not convincing and are merely a by-product of the first well-functioning four, which is a legitimate opinion for any modern scholar, but to say that Dharmakīrti's "etc." corresponds *exactly* to this appreciation, is a bit far-fetched. Cf. p. 26–7:

Die nicht als solche genannten 12 falschen und 12 wahren Aspekte von den insgesamt 16 sind wenig überzeugend und wohl eher Ausfluss der bei der ersten edlen Wahrheit gut funktionierenden Reihe von vier Aspekten; Dharmakīrtis blosses "usw." entspricht genau dieser Einschätzung.²¹

One of the most provocative parts in Vetter's interpretation of the

pramāṇasiddhi-chapter concerns the epistemological presuppositions of the way to Nirvana. Contrary to the usual affiliation of Dharmakīrti to the Yogācāra school, or more precisely to the Sautrāntika-Yogācāra school, Vetter claims that for the last stages of the way to Nirvana Dharmakīrti assumed a realistic theory of knowledge (p. 32):

Auch ist hier — im Gegensatz zu Höhepunkten der Theorie in den Wahrnehmungskapiteln von Pramāṇavārttika und Pramāṇavinīścaya — nichts von einem Einfluss des Idealismus späterer Yogācāra-Texte zu merken. Das passt gut zu der Beobachtung, dass Dharmakīrti — anders als sein Kommentator Prajñākaragupta (siehe Anm. 1 zu 139) — dem Erblicken der Irrealität der Gegebenheiten keinen Platz im Erlösungsweg einräumt. An diesem Höhepunkt der Praxis scheint sogar eine realistische Erkenntnistheorie nötig zu sein. Denn das ist doch wohl der Hintergrund der vor dieser Lehre vom leuchtenden Geist stehenden Behauptung, dass es eine Eigenschaft des Erkennens sei, das Objekt so zu erfassen, wie es ist. Diese Behauptung kann man wegen der dabeistehenden Umschreibung, dass das Objekt mittels eines wirklich bestehenden Wesens die Erkenntnis hervorrufe, kaum in einem anderen als in einem realistischen Sinne verstehen.

Again, how does Vetter substantiate his assumption? As far as I can see his evidence is very meager. His main argument is that the cognition whose basis is transformed, and which apprehends the object correctly with no conceptualization, arises from the capacity of the thing (*vastubaloṭpatti* or similar expressions). But Dharmakīrti does not say that the thing has to be a material object; at any rate Vetter produces no evidence to that effect. On the other hand such expressions as *vastubaloṭpatti* can easily fit in an idealistic epistemology where they would refer to the apprehension of the mind by itself, that is, a moment of cognition arises from the previous moment of cognition, carries the latter's form and apprehends this form as its object. It seems, therefore, that in this case, just as in many other cases, Dharmakīrti is consciously using terms which are ambiguous enough to allow both realistic and idealistic interpretation. And, of course, it is the idealistic interpretation which reflects a higher level of truth.

Vetter wants to support his argument by the fact that Dharmakīrti does not mention the apprehension of the unreality of the elements (*dharmanairātmya*) as a necessary condition for liberation. This could have been at most an argument from omission, but in fact one does not even expect Dharmakīrti to include the unreality of the elements

as a part of the way; on the contrary, it would have been very surprising if he were to include it, because — unlike in Yogācāra properly speaking — in Sautrāntika-Yogācāra, or what should better be called Yogācāra with certain Sautrāntika presuppositions, as we know it for instance from the *Viṃśatikā* and *Triṃśikā*, the mental elements are the final absolute reality. In other words, there is no relativisation of the mental elements into a higher level of reality usually called *tathatā*. This is in fact one of the most important criteria to distinguish the two schools. There is no place for the unreality of elements in Sautrāntika-Yogācāra, and, therefore, there is no reason to assume that Dharmakīrti deviates from it towards a realistic theory just because he does not mention it. (As for the term *dharmanairātmya*, when it appears in Sautrāntika-Yogācāra texts, it has a completely different meaning, namely, that cognitions lack the manifold nature of apprehending, apprehended, etc., but they do not lack the real unexpressible nature which is apprehended by the Buddhas.²²) Furthermore, Vetter admits that the *pratyakṣa*-chapter in the *Pramāṇavārttika* does contain clear influence of later (i.e., idealistic) Yogācāra texts, but he does not attempt to reconcile the two chapters. Are we to understand that Dharmakīrti changed his mind in the time between writing the two chapters? Or that he was a crypto-realist?

To conclude, it seems to me that Dharmakīrti's religious ideas are not so much original as they are reductionist. This is probably due to the logician's mind which looks everywhere for the necessary and sufficient conditions, and has a distaste for encumbering a subject matter with unnecessary or superfluous factors. This tendency can be observed on several occasions, which have been duly noted by Vetter, though I am not sure whether he would agree with me in drawing from them a general conclusion, and in calling Dharmakīrti a reductionist. Thus, we have the reduction of the perfections to compassion; the reduction of all faults (*doṣa*) to one single cause, namely, *satkāya-drṣṭi*, and its equation with *avidyā* (cf. p. 22); the reduction of desires to one main desire responsible for suffering, namely, the desire for existence (instead of the traditional three: *bhava-trṣṇā*, *kāma-trṣṇā* and *vibhava-trṣṇā*); the reduction of the eightfold path to one main member, namely, *samyag-drṣṭi* (which changes its meaning accordingly, cf. p. 26); the consideration of all spiritual exercises except *nairātmya*-

darśana as meaningless (cf. p. 27), etc. I think Dharmakīrti's touch is best seen in these things. In theory of knowledge he reduced inferential relations into two (*tādātmya*, *tadutpatti*), and the objects of valid cognition into one (*svalakṣaṇa*), and one can feel that it is the same mind which now works in a religious field, trying to put some order into the world — making it metaphysically somewhat poorer, but as simple and coherent as possible. However, a note of caution should be added, for in developing these theses Vetter relies very heavily, almost exclusively, on an argument *ex silentio*.

Now, as far as the translation is concerned, let me start by emphasizing that it is very good, and that it is a real help for the reader who tries to wrestle with Dharmakīrti's Sanskrit. However, I must admit that it is not as good as I expected. I believe that every translation — even by the best of scholars — and especially of such a difficult text as the *Pramāṇasiddhi*, should be meticulously checked by at least another pair of eyes before it goes into print. This has apparently not been done in this case, and accordingly the translation contains some simple mistakes, which are probably due to momentary lack of concentration, and which could have been easily avoided. For instance, *hetu* (cause) in v. 139 is translated as “suffering” (“Leid”). I presume Vetter wanted to translate “cause [of suffering],” and that it somehow slipped his mind. This trivial mistake is indeed unfortunate, because Vetter drags it on for the next three verses as well, considering the giving up of suffering as the subject of the discussion where, however, one would simply expect the explanation of the particle *su-* (well) in the predicate *sugata* (well-gone). Such cases, however, are rare. The problematic part of the translation lies not in the literal rendering of words but in their interpretation which is added in brackets, and which is sometimes three and four times as long as the translation itself. For instance v. 222:

*prahāṇīr icchādvēṣāder guṇadoṣānubandhinah/
tayor adṛṣṭer viṣaye na tu bāhyeṣu yaḥ kramah//*

(Note that Vetter reads *adṛṣṭer* against all Sanskrit editions which read *adṛṣṭir*; from the Tibetan translation one would expect an instrumental.)

Verlangen, Hass usw. werden, [da] sie sich an Vorzüge und Nachteile [eines Objekts] heften, aufgegeben durch das Nichtsehen von [Vorzügen und Nachteilen] beim Objekt. Die Methode [um von der letztlich auf das Selbst gerichteten begehrenden Liebe als solcher und nicht bloss von dieser oder jener auf ein bestimmtes Objekt gerichteten Manifestation dieser Liebe frei zu kommen] ist aber nicht [dieselbe wie bei den] auf äussere [Objekte gerichteten Emotionen; man kann sie nämlich nicht dadurch aufgeben, dass man die nachteiligen Folgen, die aus ihr selbst hervorgehen, betrachtet].

Vetter's interpretation is highly improbable, for it is clear from the context that Dharmakīrti is replying in this verse to an opponent who claims that one does not have to give up the notion of Self, but only desire; for the Self is free from all faults, it is only desire which is faulty (cf. v. 221ab: *snehaḥ sadoṣa iti cet tataḥ kiṃ tasya (scil. ātmano) varjanam*). Against this opponent Dharmakīrti argues that one cannot give up a faulty desire in the manner one gives up a faulty object. One can give up a faulty object by seeing its faults, but in order to give up desire one has to see not the faults of the desire itself, but the faults of the object towards which the desire is directed. Therefore, as long as no faults are seen in the Self, the desire towards it cannot stop. In other words, what Dharmakīrti has in mind is not, as Vetter claims, a distinction between two kinds of desire, the one, desire as such, which in the final analysis is directed towards the Self, the other, a manifestation of the former, directed towards an external object. The distinction he made is simply between desire and external object. This is also how Devendrabuddhi, Prajñākaragupta and Manorathanandin understood Dharmakīrti, and I fail to understand why Vetter did not follow them. Furthermore, Dharmakīrti himself elucidates his argument in the next half-verse in a manner which hardly leaves any room for misunderstanding: *na hi snehaguṇāt snehaḥ kiṃ tv arthaguṇadarśanāt*/ "For desire does not [arise] from the qualities of desire, but from seeing the qualities of an object."

The weakest point of the translation is due, I think, to Vetter's unusual relationship to Dharmakīrti's commentators. Dharmakīrti was, no doubt, a great philosopher, but, as Collingwood once said of Kant, the stylist in him was not equal to the philosopher, and the way he expresses himself could sometimes make you wish he said what he meant in a simpler and clearer manner. Tradition tells us that he knew he would not be understood already by his contemporaries and recognized the need even for a simple word to word explanation of

the *Pramāṇavārttika* — how much more so for his philosophical ideas, but for that purpose even his own disciples were not good enough for him²³. Whether the sad stories about Devendrabuddhi are true or not — they certainly have a ring of truth to them — it is clear that we cannot understand Dharmakīrti without some help by the commentators. This does not mean, of course, that we have to accept everything they say, but as a methodological rule I think they should be given the benefit of the doubt and considered innocent until proven guilty by using sound criteria. That holds especially for Devendrabuddhi's commentary which is supposed to have been approved by Dharmakīrti himself. And even if this is just a legend, at least this commentary has the advantage of being the oldest, and of not being written by an original and relatively independent philosopher like Prajñākaragupta. Of course, if one has some sound reasons, whether philosophical, philological, contextual or whatever, to disagree with a commentator, one should do so by all means. But if all three, Devendrabuddhi, Prajñākaragupta and Manorathanandin, agree on an interpretation of a certain verse, and Vetter proposes a completely different one, I would certainly expect him to state his reasons why he thinks they are all wrong, and explain in what manner his interpretation deviates from the traditional one; and the least he could do is to warn the reader about it. I checked the *Pramāṇavārttikālaṅkāra* and *-vṛtti* (which almost always agree with each other²⁴), and occasionally Devendrabuddhi's *Vṛtti* (or *Pañjikā*); and it is clear that Vetter deviates from them in dozens of cases.

As a rule the traditional interpretation is simpler than Vetter's, often more convincing, and I cannot help feeling that Vetter complicated things unnecessarily. Sometimes the difference between Vetter and the commentators is so great, you can hardly believe they were reading the same text. For instance v. 168cd–169ab, directed against the Cārvākas:

*bhūtānāṃ prāṇitābhede 'py ayaṃ bhedo yadāśrayaḥ/
tan nirhrāsātīsayavat tadbhāvāt tāni hāpayet//*

[Im allgemeinen führt ihr das Belebte sein auf eine Besonderheit in der Zusammensetzung der Elemente zurück.] Wenn nun trotz des unterschiedslosen Belebtheits (prāṇitā-abhede 'py, Tib. *srog chags khyad med kyañ*) der [den Körper formenden] Elemente dieser Unterschied [in Begierde usw. da ist, dann muss] die [Sache], worauf

sich [dieser Unterschied] stützt, [ebenfalls] ein Weniger oder Mehr besitzen [und kann nicht identisch sein mit der besonderen Zusammensetzung der Elemente, die eurer Meinung nach für das Belebte sein sorgt]. Da es diese [Sache — das durch Hegung stärker oder schwächer seiende Residuum von Begierde usw. —] gibt, soll man die [Elemente und ihre Zusammensetzung als eine doch nicht befriedigende Erklärung] aufgeben.

There are several problematic things here, but let us concentrate on the last three words (*tadbhāvāt tāni hāpayet*). Devendrabuddhi comments (Derge ed. 73b 6–7): *gañ las ñams par 'gyur že na / de yod pa las te* (= **tadbhāvāt*) / *'dod chags la sogs pa dañ ldan pa ñid las so* (= **rāgādīmatvāt*) / *de ltar na 'ga' žig skye bžin pa ñid ni / sdug bsñal dañ bde ba la sogs pa med pa dañ ldan pa dañ / 'dod chags dañ bral ba dañ / že sdañ dañ / phrag dog dañ ser sna dañ bral ba skye bar 'gyur ro* // Prajñākaragupta does not comment on these words directly and the text is partly corrupted, but nevertheless it is clear that he understands them in a similar manner (129.5–6): *yataḥ kāraṇād bhūtātīśayātvād* (read with the Tibetan translation²⁵: *-atīśayād*) *bhedas tathā* (*tasya* ?) *nirhrāsātīśayam antare* (read with the Tib. trans.: *-atīśayasambhave*) *'tyantāpacayo 'pūti vitarāgaḥ syāt*. Manorathanandin also follows Devendrabuddhi (p. 61.13): *tadbhāvād rāgādīmatvāt tāni bhūtāni hāpayed bhraṃśayed iti nīrāgo 'pi kaścit sattvaḥ syāt*. According to all three commentaries one should translate as follows: “Although there is no difference of vitality in the elements [which constitute a living being] (i.e., one living being is not more alive or less alive than another), there is this difference [in desires] (i.e., some living beings have stronger, some weaker desires); its basis (i.e., cause), which is characterized by increase and decrease, could make the [elements] loose that [property of possessing desire, etc.; thus, there could be a living being without desire].”

We have two completely different interpretations of the same verse; which one is to be preferred? I cannot evaluate Vetter's interpretation, because he does not say what led him to it, nor why he thinks that Devendrabuddhi, Prajñākaragupta and Manorathanandin are so completely off the mark. I do see, though, that the traditional interpretation has the advantage of accounting better for the use of the causative (*hāpayet*).

Vetter seems to be aware, at least to some extent, of this problem

as he says in the preface (p. 7) that “Man hat das grösste Recht, von mir zu erwarten, dass ich auch in jedem Punkt Rechenschaft ablege über die Meinung der frühen Kommentatoren Devendrabuddhi (7.Jh.?) und Prajñākaragupta (8. Jh.). Nur für Prajñākaragupta kann ich diese Erwartung zum Teil erfüllen.” This statement, however, could be misleading by its modesty, for it could give the false impression that Vetter uses only partly Prajñākaragupta’s commentary, and not at all Devendrabuddhi’s and Manorathanandin’s commentaries. A quick glance at the notes, however, reveals that Vetter does use all three commentaries (Manorathanandin is referred to several times; Devendrabuddhi seems to be used only occasionally and he is mentioned, I believe, only once in p. 156). Moreover, when one compares the translation with the commentaries, one sees clearly that Vetter relies on them quite heavily; sometimes he even brings *utsūtras* into the brackets. (Personally I would prefer *utsūtras* to be in footnotes — for which there is plenty of unused space in the book — and not as an integral part of the translation, for sometimes they do distort Dharmakīrti’s arguments.) One has to conclude, therefore, that in those cases where Vetter deviates from the commentators he is conscious of that (at least in respect to Prajñākaragupta and Manorathanandin), and for this reason it is unexplainable to me why he proceeded the way he did. The trouble is that Vetter hardly ever tells you whether he follows one of the commentaries or whether he goes his own way, and when he deviates from the commentaries, he often proposes interpretations which are far from being self-evident, but with very few exceptions he never explains how he arrived at them.

In spite of its shortcomings, and those mentioned above are not meant to be exhaustive but only a few of the most conspicuous ones, Vetter’s book is undoubtedly an important contribution towards the understanding of Dharmakīrti’s Buddhism. A perfect translation and interpretation of Dharmakīrti is not likely to be achieved by a single scholar in a single stroke, and Vetter’s study is certainly not, nor was it meant to be, the last word on the subject. However, it does form a solid starting point, and as such it is a considerable achievement. Therefore, one can only be grateful to Professor Vetter for a book which is interesting, stimulating and which will occupy, I am sure, a central position in future Dharmakīrti-studies.

NOTES

¹ Cf. E. Steinkellner, "The spiritual place of the epistemological tradition in Buddhism," *Nanto Bukkyu* 49, 1982, pp. 1–18. To the second category Steinkellner adds modern Indian scholars like Sukumar Dutt, who share Stcherbatsky's positive approach, but unlike the latter who made a case for the compatibility of Buddhist "atheism" with Marxism-Leninism, are motivated by nationalistic ideology, discovering in the epistemological tradition the dawn of a Western-like rational secularism within the monastic culture.

² Ibid., p. 6.

³ Wien 1964.

⁴ Cf. Conze, *The Memoirs of a Modern Gnostic*, Part I, Sherborne 1979, p. 12: "... , and one of the greatest benefits of my return to England has been that I have been able to do my Buddhist work in English and not in German, a language scarcely worth writing in any longer on scholarly matters concerning the East."

⁵ Cf. Hattori, *Dignāga, On Perception*, Cambridge 1968, n. 1.2 (p. 74).

⁶ I cannot enter here the *anuloma-pratiloma* controversy in all the details which it implies. The conflicting positions of Devendrabuddhi and Manorathanandin have been clearly explained by M. Inami and T. J. F. Tillemans in "Another Look at the Framework of the Pramāṇasiddhi Chapter of Pramāṇavārttika", *WZKS* 30, 1986, pp. 123–142. I believe they are methodologically right to prefer Devendrabuddhi's interpretation, according to which the *pratiloma* starts in v. 146, to Manorathanandin's who situates the break in v. 280. (The difference is not as big as it may seem; it depends on the answer to the question whether the section on the four noble truths is the last part of the *anuloma* or the first part of the *pratiloma*.) It seems to me, however, that in this particular case exception should be made, for Manorathanandin's division of the text is more elegant, and further, it is more natural to interpret v. 146b (*tāyo vā catuḥsatyaprakāśanam*) as an alternative to v. 145a (*tāyaḥ svadṛṣṭamārgoktiḥ*), rather than as a beginning of the *pratiloma*-part. As for Prajñākaragupta's interpretation, in order to accept the claim that it is quite possible that he situated the break in v. 146 and not in v. 280 (cf. *ibid.*, pp. 125–126, n. 7), one has to have some reason why he should refer to this break while commenting on the latter and not on the former.

⁷ Cf. *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya* of Vasubandhu, ed. P. Pradhan, 2nd ed., Patna 1975, p. 415.14f: *tribhiḥ kāraṇaiḥ sāmyaṃ sarvabuddhānām. sarvapūṇyajñānasambhārasamud-āgamato dharmakāyapariniṣpattiḥ 'rthacaryayā ca lokasya . . . etām eva ca trividhām sampadam manasikurvāṇena viduṣā śakyam buddhānām bhagavatām antike tīvra-premagauravaṃ cotpādayitum* (perhaps: *-premaṃ gauravaṃ cot-*) *yaduta hetu-sampadam phalasampadam upakārasampadam ca*.

⁸ Cf. *The Vyākaraṇa-Mahābhāṣya* of Patañjali, ed. Kielhorn, repr. Osnabrück 1970, vol. I, p. 39.10: *pramāṇabhūta ācāryaḥ . . .* (as opposed to *pramāṇikaraṇa* *ibid.*, p. 39.4). I owe this reference to Professor A. Wezler.

⁹ Throughout this paper I follow Vetter's numbering of the verses; the numbering in other editions differs slightly, but the correspondence is easily made: Vetter's 131cd–132ab = Miyasaka's 132, *Pramāṇavārttikārikāra* 133 and *Pramāṇavārttikavṛtti* 134.

¹⁰ Nor could this be a slip of pen, for Vetter uses "feststellen" consistently throughout the translation.

^{10a} Cf. *PVV*, p. 9.15–16: *tadvad bhagavān pramāṇam; yathābhihitasya satyacatuṣṭa-yasyāvisamvādanāt, tasyaiva parair ajñātasya prakāśanāc ca*.

¹¹ Cf. *L'Abhidharmakośa de Vasubandhu*. Paris/Louvain 1923–31, vol. 6, p. 82.

¹² *Abhidharmakośa and Bhāṣya of Ācārya Vasubandhu with Sphuṭārthā Commentary of Ācārya Yaśomitra*, ed. D. Śāstri. Varanasi 1981, vol. II, p. 1097.19.

¹³ Cf. Y. Miyasaka, "An Index to the Pramāṇavārttika-kārikā," *Acta Indologica* III, 1974, pp. 1–157.

¹⁴ Cf. E. Lamotte, *Histoire du Bouddhisme Indien*, repr. Louvain 1967, p. 18. More specifically, Prajñākaragupta may have had the first week in mind; cf. next note and *Lalita Vistara*, ed. S. Lefmann, Halle a. S. 1902 (repr. Tokyo 1977) vol. I, p. 351.15f.: *prathame saptāhe bhikṣavas tathāgatas tasmīn eva bodhimande niṣaṇṇo 'sthāt . . . samanantaraprāpte khalu punar bhikṣavo bodhisattvena sarvajñatve . . .*

¹⁵ Cf. *Pramāṇavārttikālikāra* (ed. R. Sankrityayana, Patna 1953) p. 110.20–23: *tato vāgvaigūṇyādikam api nivartayitum prayatate . . . atha vā yadi nāma duḥkhoprahāṇam tathāpi na sarvajñātvaṃ bhavati . . .*

¹⁶ Cf. also Devendrabuddhi's *Vṛtti*, Derge ed. No. 4217, fol. 56b7f.: *ji srid du ma lus par thugs su chud pa med pa de srid du ston pa ñid phun sum tshogs pa rdzogs pa dan ldan pa ma yin pa de ltur na skyes bu chen po dag gis dus rin por goms par mdzud pa 'bras bu med pa ma yin no . . . grol bar bzed pa (≈ *muktikāma) 'dis kyan bdag med pa mthoñ ba dus rin por rnam pa du mar goms par byed pa yin no*. Devendrabuddhi and Manorathanandin probably understood the practicing of means as one of the Bodhisattva's perfections, namely, the *upāyakaṃśālyā* (cf. H. Dayal, *The Bodhisattva Doctrine in Buddhist Sanskrit Literature*. London 1932, p. 248ff.). This interpretation is quite possible for Dharmakīrti as well.

¹⁷ As a matter of fact, Vetter does refer the reader to the above quoted passage (cf. p. 40, n. 1), but the reference is done in such a way that the reader is misled to assume that Manorathanandin supports Vetter's interpretation.

¹⁸ Cf. PVA, p. 109.1: *anumānāgocare cāgamah, atindriyapratyāyanahetuḥ*.

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 109.1–6. Cf. also G. Tucci, *Minor Buddhist Texts*. Part II, The First Bhāvanākrama of Kamalaśīla. Serie Orientale Roma IX, 2. Roma 1958.

²⁰ Cf. *Milindapañhāpālī*, ed. Dwarikadas Shastri. Bauddha Bharati Series 13. Varanasi 1979, pp. 156–157. (Rhys Davids' transl., vol. II, p. 13f.).

²¹ Cf. also p. 27: "Evident ist jedoch, dass das Gegenteil der sechzehn falschen Aspekte geübt werden soll, eigentlich **nur** der vier ersten falschen Aspekte . . ." (my emphasis).

²² Cf. *Viṃśatikā Vijñaptimūtratāsiddhi*, ed. S. Lévi, Paris 1925, p. 6 (on 10d): *yo bālair dharmanām svabhāvo grāhyagrāhakādih parikalpitas tena kalpitenātmanā teṣāṃ nairātmyam na tv anabhilāpyenātmanā yo buddhānām viśaya iti*.

²³ Cf. Frauwallner, "Devendrabuddhi," WZKSÖ 4, 1960, pp. 119–123 (reprint in *Kleine Schriften*, ed. by G. Oberhammer and E. Steinkellner, Wiesbaden 1982, pp. 842–846).

²⁴ In fact these two commentaries help us understand one another. Manorathanandin helps us to see how Prajñākaragupta's general comments can be read into Dharmakīrti's verses, whereas Prajñākaragupta's deliberations provide the rational behind Manorathanandin's short glosses. I did not read enough of Devendrabuddhi's *Vṛtti* in order to be able to generalize about it, but from the few cases I checked there seems to be a strong unity among all three commentaries.

²⁵ TTP, vol. 132, Te 142b8.