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Meditation and Metaphysics On their Mutual Relationship in South Asian Buddhism¹

It is well known that Buddhism developed and prescribed a large number of meditative exercises. It is equally well known that Buddhism developed some highly original metaphysical doctrines, such as the *anātman*-doctrine, i.e., the doctrine that there is no soul and no substance, the doctrine of momentariness, i.e., the doctrine that all things, even those that seem permanent such as stones and mountains, last for only a moment, the doctrine of Emptiness of the Madhyamaka according to which nothing really exists and all things are but an illusion, or the idealism of the Yogācāra which professes that the external world is merely an image in our consciousness. However, it may be less well known that all metaphysical doctrines of Buddhism have their correspondence in meditative practice, and some of them may even have arisen from such practice.

There are at least two main reasons for this state of affairs. First the general tendency in Indian thought to presuppose a correspondence theory of truth. In other words, if the objects visualized by the yogi during meditation are to be considered true, they must have a correspondence in reality. In this respect, the perception or awareness of yogis is not different from any other perception. The second reason is that in the majority of Buddhist traditions, Enlightenment, or liberating insight,

¹ I would like to thank Lambert Schmithausen very warmly for personal and written comments on a previous draft of this paper and I regret that he was unable to comment on this final draft. I am also indebted to Karin Preisendanz who read several versions of the paper and made highly perspicacious comments and suggestions at all stages. Further thanks go to Nobuyoshi Yamabe who kindly shared his thoughts with me about the nature of meditation and its relation to philosophical theories.

consists in a right insight into the true nature of reality.² And this profound insight into the absolute truth, it is generally assumed, cannot be achieved only by way of rational thinking which is connected to concepts and language, but has to be deepened in meditation. One should not only learn and think about the teachings of the Buddha, but also meditate upon them repeatedly. Thus, because Enlightenment is usually an insight into the true nature of the world, the metaphysical teachings were being taught as subjects of meditation, and their content was postulated as part of liberating insight. It goes without saying that this content differs from tradition to tradition. In a realistic tradition the liberating insight is an insight into the true nature of the final elements of existence (*dharmā*); in an illusionistic tradition it consists in the insight that precisely these elements are unreal.³

It is undisputed that there are close relationships between meditation and metaphysics in Buddhism. However, some scholars of Buddhism go as far as to claim that all metaphysical doctrines in Buddhism have arisen from meditative practice, and indeed this opinion seems to be widely spread. I will mention here only three of its most influential variants. Constantin Regamey claims that not only Buddhist philosophy, but Indian philosophy in general is the rational interpretation of mystical experience (Regamey 1951: 251):

Notre philosophie est née de la curiosité et du besoin de savoir, d'expliquer le monde d'une façon cohérente. En Inde la philosophie est l'interprétation rationnelle de l'expérience mystique.

This is the most sweeping generalisation on the subject that I have come across so far. According to Regamey one would have to assume that every Indian philosophical theory, from the atomism and ontological categories of the Vaiśeṣika to the logical developments of Navya Nyāya, is a rational interpretation of mystical experience. In a less

² This in contradistinction to Jainism, where the means of liberation consists in the elimination of karma, or certain theistic systems, where liberation depends on the grace of God, etc.

³ In addition to these two reasons, one may mention the subjective feeling of the meditating person, who sometimes feels transposed to another space (cf. for instance the case of the *dhyaṇa* meditation below). The journey of the spirit is a phenomenon well known from many cultures, even though the modalities of such journeys are not often theorized.

sweeping but similar manner Edward Conze, one of the most influential Buddhist scholars in the second half of the twentieth century, states (Conze 1967: 213):

The cornerstone of my interpretation of Buddhism is the conviction, shared by nearly everyone, that it is essentially a doctrine of salvation, and that all its philosophical statements are subordinate to its soteriological purpose. This implies, not only that many philosophical problems are dismissed as idle speculations, but that each and every [philosophical] proposition must be considered in reference to its spiritual intention and as a formulation of meditative experiences ... I cannot imagine any scholar wishing to challenge this methodological postulate ...

However, the most influential formulation of this hypothesis was put forward by Lambert Schmithausen in his renowned paper “Spirituelle Praxis und philosophische Theorie im Buddhismus” (Schmithausen 1973: 185⁴):

Es scheint sich somit bei dieser Entwicklung von philosophischen Theorien aus spirituell-praktischen Ursprüngen um einen Vorgang zu handeln, der für die buddhistische Geistesgeschichte geradezu t y p i s c h ist. ... Für die zentralen, das Ganze bestimmenden philosophischen Theorien gilt, dass sie, zum mindesten zum größten Teil, unmittelbar aus der spirituellen Praxis hervorgewachsen sein dürften.⁵

⁴ A shorter English version of this paper was published as “On the Problem of the Relation of Spiritual Practice and Philosophical Theory in Buddhism,” cf. Schmithausen 1976a. This shorter version was reprinted in Williams 2005: 242-254.

⁵ “It seems, therefore, that philosophical theories developing out of meditative exercises is a process that is really t y p i c a l for Buddhist intellectual history. It is valid to say that the central philosophical theories, which define the whole, may have directly arisen, at least for the most part, from spiritual practice (=meditative practice).”

The expression “spirituelle Praxis” can be understood, of course, in a very broad manner. Indeed, any mental activity can be so described. However, if this term is to describe something that is typical for Buddhism and to stand in contradistinction to philosophical theory, its scope has to be narrowed down. Schmithausen defines “spirituelle Praxis” (p. 162) as “die geistige Seite religiöser Übungen, d.h. solcher Übungen oder Handlungen, die direkt oder indirekt auf das Heil ausgerichtet sind. Im Falle des Buddhismus handelt es sich dabei vor allem um moralisch-ethische Übungen sowie um Versenkungspraktiken.” Since moral-ethical exercises are not further discussed in Schmithausen 1973 and 2005, and do not seem to be *directly* relevant to the arising of metaphysical theories, I will confine my remarks to “Versenkungs-

Unlike Regamey, Conze and others, Schmithausen does not only claim that philosophical theories in Buddhism arose from meditative practice, but actually attempts to prove that this is the case. I will, therefore, confine my remarks to his paper.⁶

Schmithausen's thesis is seductive because if it could be confirmed, it would capture an essential and special characteristic of Buddhism that would distinguish it not only from Western philosophies and religions, but also from other Indian traditions. However, the relationship between meditation and metaphysics is in my opinion more complex and heterogeneous, and I shall argue that its varieties cannot be reduced to a single homogeneous model.

Let me begin with two cases that fit Schmithausen's hypothesis well. The close relationship between meditation and metaphysics can be clearly seen in the case of *dhyāna*-meditation. This type of meditation is generally considered to belong to the earliest strata of the Buddhist canon (see, for instance, Vetter 1988: 3ff.), and it already appears within the framework of the four noble truths. The fourth truth laconi-

praktiken" which I translate as "meditative practice," "meditative state" or simply as "meditation." Regamey uses the term "expérience mystique" to refer, presumably, to the same meditative experiences. Cf. also Schmithausen 1973: 165 where he refers to Conze's thesis (Conze 1962: 251ff. cf. also May 1971) that the roots of Yogācāra are to be looked for above all (in erster Linie) in meditative practice, in opposition to Masuda's hypothesis that the Yogācāra developed as a reaction to the absolute Negativism of the Madhyamaka. In Schmithausen 2005: 247, Schmithausen also uses the expression "transphenomenal state" to refer to the Buddhist spiritual practice.

⁶ As I understand it, Schmithausen's thesis clearly implies that all the important or central philosophical theories in Buddhism arose mainly from meditative practice. However, in what follows I will examine a number of philosophical theories that are not discussed in his paper. In this respect, I may be going beyond his original intention. Ideally, one would have to determine first what Schmithausen considers central and what philosophy, but these are issues that I hope Schmithausen himself will clarify on a different occasion. In my opinion, all the philosophical doctrines discussed below are central to Buddhism, but it goes without saying that others may be of a different opinion. On the use of the term "philosophical" here, cf. n. 55 below. I am however not the first to criticize Schmithausen's thesis. An extensive criticism was formulated in Robert Sharf's impressive paper (Sharf 1995). A more limited criticism that concerns only the Yogācāra portion of Schmithausen's paper was voiced in Bronkhorst 2000: 77-93. But my approach here is different and, I hope, has not been made redundant by these previous criticisms.

cally describes the path of a person from the moment he meets the Buddha and comes to realize that life is fundamentally frustrating, painful and hopeless till the moment he reaches Enlightenment through meditation.

Right meditation, which is the culmination of the path, is divided into four stages. The first stage is characterized by bodily well-being (*kāyasukha*) and mental joy (*prīti*). This joy arises from the fact that one has succeeded in ridding oneself of one's desires. Conceptual thinking, that is, thinking connected with language, continues at this stage. When concentration further increases, one reaches the second stage, at which conceptual thinking ceases. Bodily well-being and joy continue, but they now arise directly from the power of meditation. When concentration increases even further, one reaches the third stage, at which joy is replaced by equanimity. Finally, at the fourth stage, even bodily well-being disappears and absolute equanimity and lack of sensation are reached. In this fourth *dhyāna* the mind becomes absolutely clear. One can remember one's own previous lives and see how certain deeds lead to certain results—good deeds to pleasant births, bad deeds to painful ones. Then, with the so-called divine eye one can observe the same phenomena for countless other living beings. Finally, after one perceives in this manner the entire *samsāra* both in time and in space, one reaches the certainty that the present life is one's final life, that one will not be born again.

It is interesting to note that this *dhyāna* meditation has (or better, has obtained in the late or post-canonical period) a cosmological correspondence. According to the *Ābhidharmikas* of the Conservative Buddhism, the world consists of three layers. The first, the layer of desire (*kāma-dhātu*), is the one we live in. On the top of it there is a second layer, the layer of desireless corporeality (*rūpa-dhātu*), and it corresponds precisely to the four stages of the *dhyāna* meditation (cf. AKBh 3.2). The sixteen, seventeen or eighteen subdivisions of this cosmic layer⁷ are divided into four groups that are also called *dhyāna*. Moreover, the first three *dhyānas* are further divided each into three layers which correspond to weak (*mṛdu*), middle (*madhya*) and intense (*adhi-*

⁷ On the different opinions concerning the number of layers, cf. La Vallée Poussin, chapter 3: 2-3.

mātra) concentrations. The fourth cosmic layer contains further layers, primarily those in which the Buddhist saints who no longer return to the layer of desire (*anāgāmin*) stay till their definitive disappearance into *nirvāṇa*.⁸

The highest cosmic layer, the *ārūpya-dhātu*, the layer that lacks corporeality, corresponds in its fourfold division to a division of stages of another type of meditation. In the *ārūpya* meditation, the yogi turns his mind to a succession of objects, each subtler than the preceding one. The starting point of this meditation is the so-called *kasina* exercise. The yogi concentrates on an object, such as a piece of earth or a patch of color, until he no longer observes a difference between the inner mental image and the immediately perceived image. In other words, the yogi sees the object just as clearly and vividly with closed as with open eyes. The yogi can then stand up and go elsewhere taking the image with him. Now he has to concentrate on this image until a second image is produced; i.e., the first image functions as the immediate image of the external object and it gives rise to a second mental reflex. When the yogi observes this secondary image for a long time, it disintegrates and fades away slowly, and in its place the incorporeal presentation of the infinity of space appears. Herewith the first stage of the *ārūpya* meditation is attained.

After meditating on the infinity of space (*ākāśānantya*), the yogi naturally moves on to meditate on the infinity of the mind or conscious-

⁸ Unfortunately I was unable to find a visual description of the three layers in Indian or Tibetan art. As a rule, only the lowest layer, the layer of desire, is depicted. This is understandable, for the abstract content of the layer of desireless corporeality (*rūpa-dhātu*) and of lack of corporeality (*ārūpya-dhātu*) cannot be easily illustrated. Martin Brauen, in his book *The Mandala: Sacred Circle in Tibetan Buddhism*, has generated a computer model according to the ancient descriptions. This model is basically the same as the one in the *Abhidharmakośa*, but differs in some detail because Brauen follows the Kālacakra cosmology. For instance, Mount Meru is round and not quadrangular. A reproduction of a modern painting of the three *dhātus* can be found in the catalogue of "The Tibet Exhibition in Japan 1983" (Tokyo: Mainichi Communications, 1983) plate nr. Tsu 77. According to the catalogue it is often placed at the entrance of Tibetan temples, paired with a *saṃsāracakra*. For sketches illustrating Buddhist cosmology according to the Pāli tradition, cf. Adolf Bastian 1894.

ness (*viññānānantya*);⁹ next the stage of nothingness (*ākāñcanya*) is reached, i.e., the meditation has no object whatsoever. Finally, without an object consciousness becomes so weak that it hardly deserves its name. Accordingly, this stage of meditation is called “neither consciousness nor non-consciousness” (*naivasamjñānāsamjñā*).¹⁰ When this meditation is further intensified, consciousness disappears altogether. The meditation now has neither subject nor object. This stage is called *samjñāvedayitanirodhasamāpatti*, i.e., the meditation which consists in the suppression of consciousness and feelings. Because at this stage all consciousness and feelings disappear, this state of meditation has no cosmological correspondence. At this stage the yogi is almost dead; his body is unconscious and numb like a corpse. Only by his bodily heat can one may know that he is still alive.¹¹

We thus see that the psychological aspects of the *dhyāna* meditation have a cosmological correspondence, whereas in the case of the *ārūpya* meditation there is cosmological correspondence to the object of meditation as well as to a special state of consciousness of the meditating person. What does this mean? In the first case, one could understand that the yogi or the yogi’s mind is transposed to the corresponding cosmological region through the attainment of a special state of mind. Further, all living beings inhabiting this region experience this state of mind or are somehow connected to it. In the second case, the content of the meditation in the first two stages corresponds to a cosmic realm and to cosmic (material, but not corporeal) elements; in the next two stages, by attaining a special state of consciousness, the yogi is transposed to a specific cosmic realm in a manner comparable to the case of the *dhyāna* meditation. The “suppression of consciousness and feeling,” where both object and subject are eliminated, has no cosmic or ontological correspondence because there is nothing left to be corresponded to.

⁹ Note that consciousness was considered to be a cosmic element which consists in subtle incorporeal matter, obviously even more subtle than space (or ether – *ākāśa*) which is also material but not corporeal. Cf. Langer 2001, esp. 43-50.

¹⁰ According to the Buddhist tradition, the Buddha practiced this meditation with his teachers Āraḍa Kālāma and Rudraka Rāmaputra. It thus may be a pre-Buddhist form of meditation.

¹¹ One more factor distinguishes the yogi from a corpse, namely, the power of life (*āyus*), but this factor is, of course, not observable.

The case of *dhyāna* meditation and at least the last two stages of the *ārūpya* meditation seem to confirm Schmithausen thesis. However, these practices cannot be taken to represent all meditations in Buddhism. There are other meditative exercises that have their metaphysical correspondences in the sense that they reflect the ultimate reality according to various ontological doctrines, for instance, the selflessness, the substancelessness and the momentariness of all existing things. Yet in the case of these exercises, Schmithausen's thesis does not work smoothly.

Schmithausen himself has retracted his thesis that the doctrine of momentariness of all things has arisen from spiritual practice (Schmithausen 1976b: 285f., and n. 5). But is this the exception that confirms the rule or is it the clear case that refutes it? I will argue for the latter alternative by pointing out that momentariness is not a single tree in the savannah. There are indeed other conspicuous doctrines that certainly qualify as "central philosophical theories" and which are not taken into consideration by Schmithausen in the above-mentioned paper. Two such doctrines that immediately come to mind are the doctrine of Dependent Origination (*pratītyasamutpāda*) and the Sarvāstivāda theory of existence of past and future objects. Concerning the former, there is hardly any need to argue that it did not directly arise from meditation or spiritual practice. Schmithausen himself has contributed a fundamental study of this doctrine, where he argues that the list of twelve members as we know it today is the result of three different lists that were put together in the course of a development that is reflected in the heterogeneous materials of the Pāli canon (cf. Schmithausen 2000). In this case, I assume, Schmithausen himself would argue for systematizations of earlier lists and redactional motives, rather than spiritual practice, as decisive for the origin of the doctrine. As for the doctrine of rebirth as such that is reflected in most if not all these lists, it is pre-Buddhist in origin and is presupposed and taken for granted in the earliest strata of the Pāli canon. Thus, it too cannot have arisen from meditation, at least not from Buddhist meditation.¹²

¹² Thus, it is excluded by Schmithausen from his investigation; cf. the beginning of his paper (Schmithausen 2005: 243): "Thus, the philosophical theories whose relation to spiritual practice I am going to discuss in this article are those which are exclusively Buddhists and which are freshly developed by Buddhism." Also uncertain would be

The Sarvāstivāda theory that all final elements of existence (*dharma*) exist in all three times (past, present and future) also presents a clear case of a central philosophical theory that was not developed from meditative practice. The *Abhidharmakośa* provides four reasons for this counterintuitive doctrine. The first reason is simply that the Buddha himself said so. In a similar vein, the second reason is that this doctrine is implied by certain statements of the Buddha. The third reason has to do with the tenet that every moment of awareness is supposed to have an objective support. Thus, recollection too requires such support, and that support must be a past object; similarly, certain cognitions have future objects and thus future objects must exist. Finally, past objects must be assumed in order to account for the functioning of the law of karma, more specifically, to account for the fact that a past act can produce its result in the future, long after the act was committed.¹³

In connection with this tenet, four philosophical theories of time were developed that aim to explain the difference between past, present and future objects (cf. Stcherbatsky 1923: 78-80). None of these theories seems to have arisen from spiritual practice. On the contrary, they seem to be theoretical reflections meant to reduce the difference between past, present and future objects to a bare minimum.

Similarly, the Sarvāstivāda theory that every element of existence is accompanied by four characteristic entities (*lakṣaṇas*) responsible for its arising, subsistence, decay and destruction and by four secondary characteristic entities (*anulakṣaṇas*) that play a part in the causation of the first four entities is clearly due to theoretical reflections about causality and the philosophical inclination to avoid infinite regress. They also reflect the rejection of the idea of a substance and a special hermeneutical approach towards the canonical writings, but there is no evidence to connect their origin to meditative practice.¹⁴

Furthermore, the postulation of the three eternal entities, space-ether (*ākāśa*), “suppression through careful consideration” (*pratisam-*

the assumption that the various lists found in the Pāli canon are “exclusively Buddhist,” but even if they are, whether they are due to mystical experience, introspection, rational investigation or other sources is anybody’s guess.

¹³ Cf. AKBh 5.24, p. 295, translated by de La Vallée Poussin, chapter 5 : 50-51.

¹⁴ Cf. AKBh 2.45cd-46ab, p. 75.19ff., translated by de La Vallée Poussin, chapter 2: 222ff.

khyānirodha) and “suppression without careful consideration” (*apratī-samkhyānirodha*), as well the factors dissociated from thought (*cittaviprayuktasaṃskāra*) could hardly be said to have arisen immediately from meditative experience. It seems rather that the Sarvāstivāda, like the Ābhidharmikas of other schools, were analytically striving to identify and systematize the final constituents of physical and mental reality in dependence on canonical materials.

This concern is also apparent in the so-called *abhisamayavāda* (“the doctrine of intuitive grasp”) of Dharmasīri with its ten “propensities” (*anuśaya*) and sixteen aspects of the four noble truths. According to Frauwallner, who made a detailed study of the historical development of this theory,¹⁵ it did not arise from spiritual practice. In fact, it is questionable whether the entire Abhidharma enterprise, from the early lists (*māṭṛkā*)¹⁶ to the later developments by Vasubandhu and Saṅghabhadra,¹⁷ can be said to have arisen from meditation or spiritual practice, rather than the collection, organization, systematization and theoretical development of canonical materials.

The Conservative Buddhists developed a considerable number of philosophical theories about matter, causation, space and time, and about epistemological, ethical and soteriological issues. Practically none of them were taken into consideration by Schmithausen (who probably did not consider them to be central) or by any of the other scholars who generalized the origin of Buddhist philosophical theories. It is sufficient to leaf through a work such as *Points of Controversy (Kathāvatthu)*¹⁸ to understand the extent of the disagreement among the various Buddhist schools, and to see how difficult, not to say impossible, would be the

¹⁵ Cf. Frauwallner 1971a; English translation in Frauwallner 1995: 149-184.

¹⁶ On the *māṭṛkās* and their relationship to meditation, cf. Gethin 1993. On the traditional account of the arising of *māṭṛkās*, cf. DN 33, where the Buddha asks Śāriputra to prepare lists summarizing his (the Buddha’s) teachings in order to prevent strife among his disciples after his death, as was the case among the disciples of the Jina. Thus, at least according to the traditional account, the *māṭṛkās* have not arisen from meditative experience, but from the practical necessity to determine, secure and summarize the Buddha’s teaching.

¹⁷ On Saṅghabhadra, cf. Cox 1995.

¹⁸ Cf. Aung and Rhys Davids 1969. An extensive list of theses of controversy among Conservative Buddhists was conveniently presented in Bareau 1955: 260-289. Note, however, that many of these points of controversy are not philosophical in nature.

task of anyone wishing to establish the origin of *all* philosophical theories in Buddhism, even if one were to limit oneself to the most important ones. Interestingly, meditation does not seem to play a role in the philosophical debates documented in the *Kathāvatthu*. (On the other hand, it plays a decisive role in the doctrines that are rejected as harmful in the *Brahmajālasutta*; cf. below.)

In what follows I shall mostly limit myself to those theories taken into consideration by Schmithausen. Perhaps the most important and typical theory of Conservative Buddhism is the *anātman* theory, the theory that there is no Self or Soul. This theory was indeed considered by Schmithausen, but the evidence he adduces for the hypothesis that it has its origin in meditative experience is rather meager. Schmithausen is one of the most learned scholars of Buddhism of our time, and yet for the negation of the Soul (*ātman*) in meditation he could find no earlier testimony than Candrakīrti's *Madhyamakāvatāra*,¹⁹ (sixth century CE), which was composed many centuries after the establishment of this doctrine. Furthermore, in recent times an alternative explanation of the origin of the *anātman* doctrine has been proposed, namely, that it developed not from spiritual practice, but as a reaction to the *pudgala* theory of the Vātsīputrīyas.²⁰ This hypothesis, however, was suggested after Schmithausen's paper was written and thus he could not take it into account while formulating his thesis. In any case, it is a reasonable alternative hypothesis that casts serious doubts on Schmithausen's assumption that the *anātman* theory was developed from meditative practice.

¹⁹ Cf. Schmithausen 1973, note 55 which quotes *Madhyamakāvatāra* VI 120.

²⁰ Cf. Steinkellner 2002: 183: "Die theoretische Lehre von 'Nicht-Selbst' (*anātmavāda*) als eines philosophischen Dogmas verdankt ihre Entstehung offenbar nicht dem Bedürfnis, diese Praxis ontologisch abzustützen, sondern der Notwendigkeit, eine einflussreiche Fehlentwicklung zurückzudrängen, nämlich die Lehre von der sogenannten 'Person' (*pudgala*), die ein Mönch Vātsīputra um 300 v.u.Z. vertreten hat." Possibly the same opinion, though formulated more vaguely and in a less committed manner, is expressed by Vetter 1988: 42-44. An earlier formulation—or at least by way of implication—of this opinion is to be found in Frauwallner 1971b: 121 (= [9]), where Vātsīputra's doctrine of *pudgala* is said to have broken the ice: "Damit war gewissermaßen das Eis gebrochen. Nun begann man auch andere Probleme zu überdenken und, wenn es nötig schien, die überkommenen Lehren weiterzubilden oder umzuformen." Cf. also the quotation in the next note.

This inevitably leads us to the question about the origin of the *pudgala* theory. Is there any evidence to connect its origin to meditative experience or was it motivated, as Frauwallner and others assume, by the need to fill a theoretical gap in the canonical materials?²¹ And while we are at it, is there any evidence to connect the origin of the doctrine of the five groups (*pañcaskandha*) of the empirical person to meditative practice? This concept is ubiquitously present in the Pāli canon, but we know nothing about its origin. For all we know, it may not even be Buddhist in origin.

The doctrine of *anātman* as we know it from the post-canonical literature must have meant at its first stage that human beings, or living beings in general, lack a permanent Self or Soul. However, sooner or later it was reinterpreted in a more general way to mean that all things lack substance. Could one maintain that the development of this more sweeping doctrine is due to meditation? Again, evidence is lacking and one could make up various scenarios all equally speculative.

To conclude the discussion on Conservative Buddhism, let us briefly consider the four noble truths. Surely, one may think, if any philosophical theory originated from meditation in an immediate manner, this so-called original message of the Buddha would be it. However, such an assumption is highly unlikely. Bareau, who closely studied all extant versions of the text, concluded that it is “not only apocryphal, but rather late.”²² This in itself need not refute the thesis that the four noble truths originated from meditation, but there are at least two reasons against such an assumption and they both concern the fourth truth. First, there is some evidence to suggest that this truth was added to the first three at a later stage.²³ But more importantly, the fourth truth presup-

²¹ Cf. Frauwallner1971b: 121: “Aber der Buddha ist ihr [der Frage nach dem Ich] ausgewichen, weil er wußte, daß sie zu endlosen theoretischen Streitigkeiten führen würde ... Dieses Vermeiden einer klaren Aussage hat sich im allgemeinen behauptet und auch bewährt. Aber es war nicht zu vermeiden, dass sich die Frage nach dem Ich schließlich doch wieder vordrängte.”

²² Cf. Bareau 1963 : 180: “[L]e texte de ce premier sermon, tel que nous le trouvons dans les trois *Vinaya*, est non seulement apocryphe, mais assez tardif.”

²³ The fourth truth is sometimes transmitted without the first three, notably in the *Dharmacakrapravartana-sūtra*, and it is also formulated in a different style. It is possible that the third truth was originally the truth of the path (i.e., the way to avoid suffering is to eliminate its cause, desire) and that the function of representing the

poses the *saṅgha* (monastic order), and its content has as much to do with monastic rules and the way of life befitting a monk (or a nun) as with meditative practice. Its eight members summarize the career of a monk from the moment he meets the Buddha and arrives at the right view that the Buddha's way is the right way towards eliminating suffering till the moment he reaches enlightenment by the right meditation.

Thus, it seems that in Conservative Buddhism *most* philosophical doctrines did *not* originate directly from meditative practice. However, can it be said that they originated *indirectly* from such practice? Before we can answer this question, we have to understand what could be meant by "originating indirectly." If we understand this phrase as originating primarily from philosophical reflection on meditative practice,²⁴ one could still maintain that most philosophical theories would not fulfill this requirement, or more precisely, that we lack decisive evidence that they do. If, on the other hand, we were satisfied to water down the qualification of "indirectly originating" to "origination somehow connected," the qualification may be true, but trivial. Everything is indirectly connected to everything, and nobody disputes that meditation is a central phenomenon in Buddhism.

Let us turn now to the fundamental metaphysical doctrines of the Mahāyāna. Shortly before or after the beginning of the Common Era something extraordinary happened in the history of Buddhism. A large number of apocrypha, the Mahāyānasūtras, were composed by Buddhist monks, or perhaps even lay persons, in which radically new teachings were attributed to the Buddha. These teachings stand in clear contradiction to what was known of the Buddha's teachings until then. The basic fundamental teaching of the Mahāyāna is the so-called illusionism, the doctrine that all elements of existence (*dharma*) are illusory, unreal, do not really exist. Even the Buddha himself was an illusion. Furthermore,

path was taken over by the fourth truth when it was appended to the first three. Needless to say, a thorough investigation would be required to prove such an assumption.

²⁴ In contradistinction to, say, being developed in a different context and later applied to spiritual practice (as could be the case of the five *skandhas*), or being due to systematization of older materials (as could be the case of *pratītyasamutpāda*), or a generalization of an already existing philosophical theory (as could be the case for the doctrine of no-soul to the doctrine of no-substance).

desire and suffering too are illusions, and this means that all living beings, who do not really exist, are also not really tormented by unreal suffering, which cannot arise from an unreal illusion. *Nirvāna* as the lack of suffering has thus always been there. Therefore, one may say that there is no difference between *nirvāna* and *saṃsāra*.

Of course, these new apocrypha caused protests and opposition from the Conservative Buddhists. However, it was apparently not so easy to prove that the new Sūtras were falsifications of the original teachings of the Buddha. The protests of the Conservative Buddhists (or Mainstream Buddhists, to use Paul Harrison's expression) could not prevail; even worse: the Conservative Buddhists were presented as fools. Their canonical sermons and other teachings ascribed to the Buddha which they transmitted orally and later on in written form were considered to be half-truths and thereby disparaged. Only the Mahāyānasūtras contain the absolute truth. The Hīnayānasūtras are merely addressed at monks who are not mature enough to receive the ultimate truth.

The Mahāyāna movement is undoubtedly one of the most successful religious movements ever. Nowadays it is still alive in Tibet, in Mongolia and East Asia (China, Korea, Japan). One of the reasons why the Mahāyāna apocrypha could be so successful is that the composition of Buddhist apocrypha had begun much earlier.²⁵ Next to the canonical collections, independent works (*muktaka*) were always circulating, some of which were designated as apocrypha, lit., 'superimposed' (*adhyāropita*). This phenomenon is mentioned already in the Pāli canon. Lamotte (1974: 180) refers to two passages, in Samyuttanikāya (II, 267) and Aṅguttaranikāya (I, 72-73),²⁶ in which the Buddha prophesizes that the authentic sūtras will disappear and that people will believe in apocrypha composed by poets (*kavikata*).

The oldest Mahāyānasūtra is considered to be the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā*, The Perfection of Wisdom in Eight Thousand verses.²⁷

²⁵ The authenticity of treatises and sermons ascribed to the Buddha was a problem that all schools of Buddhism (including Madhyamaka and Yogācāra) had to face, and several attempts were made to formulate criteria for the authenticity of Buddhist sūtras; cf. Lamotte 1988, Skilling 2000 and Mathes forthcoming.

²⁶ Both references are to the editions of the Pali Text Society.

²⁷ For an extensive summary, cf. Conze 1975.

It is a relatively extensive work; an English translation would probably run for more than a thousand pages. The Sūtra was translated into Chinese already in 179 CE by Lokakṣema. Now, what is the perfection of wisdom that is repeatedly praised in this Sūtra? It is the insight that all final elements of existence (*dharmas*) are unreal, and this insight is realized during a meditation that causes the suppression of all consciousness and feelings. In other words, when the perfection of wisdom is attained, the world disappears; all *dharmas* vanish and nothing remains: neither objects, nor feelings, nor consciousness. This state is similar to the one attained in the *nirodhasamāpatti* mentioned above, but there is one important difference: the content of this meditation corresponds to absolute reality. When the yogi emerges from the meditative state, he generalizes his experience: Just as all final elements of existence do not exist during meditative state, they not exist outside of it. The whole world is but an illusion; it contains elements of existence that only appear to be real, but in fact are empty and unreal. The correspondence between the content of the meditation and the metaphysical truth is clear: The absence of the final elements of existence during meditation reflects their inexistence in reality.

Can we conclude that this counterintuitive doctrine has arisen from meditative practice? I fail to see that there is evidence for such a conclusion. There are at least three possible hypotheses that may account for the development of the Perfection of Wisdom. One based on philosophical reflection: One may claim that qualities can only exist as something supported by a substance, and if substances do not exist, qualities cannot exist either. And if there are neither substances nor qualities, nothing exists. Alternatively, one may explain the origin of the Mahāyāna Illusionism as a generalization of the meditative “experience” in the *nirodhasamāpatti*. A third hypothesis was proposed by Frauwallner, who assumed that the Mahāyāna philosophy is due to the mystical experience of the highest Being (höchstes Sein) and the tendency to assume that only this Being is real (cf. Frauwallner 1994: 144). As far as I can see, the question whether philosophical reasoning or spiritual practice is responsible for the arising of the Mahāyāna illusionism cannot be answered because the relevant materials are lacking. The

doctrine is absent in the old canonical literature,²⁸ and it is already presupposed by the earliest Mahāyānasūtras. In other words, either the evidence that may have let us determine the origin of this doctrine is no longer available, or the doctrine came into the world like the *aupapādukas*, or Athena from Zeus' forehead, in a fully developed form and thus provides no clues for determining the context of its arising. Therefore, it seems preferable in this case to suspend judgment and refrain from putting forward hypotheses about its origin.

On the basis of the Prajñāpāramitāsūtras, Nāgārjuna (fl. 2nd-3rd c. CE) developed the Madhyamaka philosophy, especially in his *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā*, which is considered the foundational text of this school. Schmithausen is silent on the Madhyamaka philosophy. *Prima facie*, however, it would be rather difficult to prove that the argumentative philosophy of Nāgārjuna is the result of meditative experience, especially after a series of studies by Claus Oetke that bear on this subject (for instance, Oetke 1988).

However, Schmithausen's *pièce de résistance* is no doubt the Yogācāra system and the doctrine of *viññaptimātratā*. It seems, in fact, that Schmithausen first developed his thesis in the context of his investigations into the *Yogācārabhūmi* and then extended and generalized it as being typical for Buddhism as a whole. Schmithausen's hypothesis about the origin of *viññaptimātratā* has already been criticized in some detail by Johannes Bronkhorst in his monograph *Karma and Teleology. A problem and its solution in Indian philosophy* (cf. Bronkhorst 2000: 77-93). Bronkhorst argues in some detail that the materials presented by Schmithausen can be better explained in relation to the karma theory. It seems to me that Bronkhorst's arguments are as inconclusive as Schmithausen's, but I will not attempt to discuss the matter here.²⁹ Instead, I would like to take a closer look at the method employed by Schmithausen and examine how it could be applied to the Yogācāra texts.

²⁸ The use of illusory terms in the Pāli canon (e.g., SN III 95 (3) *Phenam*, pp. 140ff.) in respect to the final elements of existence cannot be taken by itself as pointing at the origin of the Mahāyānistic notion of emptiness, for they are used there to express the worthlessness of *dharmas*, not their inexistence.

²⁹ For a more thorough criticism, though from a different perspective, cf. Robert Sharf's paper (Sharf 1995).

Schmithausen states that he wants to prove his thesis by means of a rigorous historic-philological method (“nach streng historisch-philologischer Methode” Schmithausen 1973: 163) and explains that “[f]or this purpose, the oldest sources for a given philosophical theory have to be made available and the context in which the theory appears examined” (“Hierzu müßten für eine gegebene philosophische Theorie die älteste Quellen ausfindig gemacht und der Zusammenhang, in dem die Theorie dort erscheint, geprüft werden.”).

Similarly, in the English version of his paper (Schmithausen 2005: 243) he says: “[T]here is still much work to be done from the point of view of a strictly *historiophilological method*. In order to arrive at reliable results, one has to find the oldest sources for each philosophical theory and to check the context in which the respective theory appears there.”

However, “the oldest sources” is a relative term. What if the earliest source for a given theory is centuries later than the theory itself? In the main part of his paper Schmithausen examines the *Sandhinirmocanasūtra*, which may be as late as the 4th century CE because it is later than the *Daśabhūmikasūtra*, which was translated into Chinese in the last decade of the third century (cf. Schmithausen 1973: 172, Schmithausen 2005: 248). To what extent can one rely on this source, which is not a historiographic source and which perhaps originated two centuries after the theory of *viññaptimātratā*, in order to draw a conclusion about its origin? On the other hand, the *Pratyutpannabuddhasammukhāvasthitasāmādhisūtra*, which is the oldest source for the *viññaptimātratā* doctrine, and was translated into Chinese as early as 179 C.E., receives less attention from Schmithausen. In the following I will confine my remarks to this work, as it is indeed our earliest source for the *viññaptimātratā* doctrine.³⁰

³⁰ In Schmithausen 1984: 438 (see also Schmithausen 2005: 245) it is stated that *Sandhinirmocanasūtra* VIII.7 is “in all probability, the oldest extant passage announcing, by the very term, the doctrine of *viññaptimātra*, i.e., the central doctrine of Yogācāra-Vijñānavāda.” It is actually quite possible that the *Pratyutpannabuddhasammukhāvasthitasāmādhisūtra* uses only the term *cittamātra* and not *viññaptimātra* (the original Sanskrit of both texts is now lost), but in any case both terms refer to the idealistic doctrine and I fail to see why Schmithausen considers the later passage of the *Sandhinirmocanasūtra* to be the oldest occurrence of the *doctrine*. I use “vi-

Like the *Aṣṭasāhasrikāprajñāpāramitā*, this Sūtra too was also translated by Lokakṣema and counts as one of the earliest Mahāyānasūtras. While the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā* is considered to be a source for the Madhyamaka philosophy of Nāgārjuna, the *Pratyutpannabuddhasammukhāvasthitasāmadhisūtra* is assumed to be a foundation of the idealism of the Yogācāra. In the type of meditation described and praised in this Sūtra, the yogi visualizes one, or even several present Buddhas, foremost Amitābha, the Buddha of Immeasurable Light/Luster. When he reaches the highest degree of concentration, he perceives the Buddha(s) face to face. Only after he emerges from the state of meditation does he understand that he did not go to the Buddha, nor did the Buddha come to him. The whole encounter took place only in

jñaptimātratā doctrine” above to refer to the doctrine that the so-called external objects are in reality images in one’s consciousness, no matter whether this doctrine is referred to by *cittamātra*, *viñaptimātra*, or by another term. Schmithausen seems to distinguish between Mahāyānasūtras and Yogācāra texts; thus, while recognizing that the *Pratyutpannabuddhasammukhāvasthitasāmadhisūtra* is considerably earlier than the *Sandhinirmocanasūtra*, he still considers the latter to be the earliest Yogācāra source. Even if the distinction is cogent, it raises difficulties for Schmithausen’s analysis of the *Sandhinirmocanasūtra*. Either the authors of this Sūtra already knew the doctrine from the *Pratyutpannabuddhasammukhāvasthitasāmadhisūtra* or from another source and borrowed it, or the doctrine has originated twice, each independently of the other. In the former case, the *Sandhinirmocanasūtra* would hardly qualify as the earliest available source of the doctrine, and even if one were to assume that in the Yogācāra texts/school the doctrine was borrowed in the context of spiritual practice, that would hardly imply that it originated in this context. If, on the other hand, the latter is assumed, one would have to face the charge of *kalpanāgaurva*. Assuming, as Schmithausen seems to do (e.g., 1984: 455, 2005: 250) that *cittamātra* is an older term than *viñaptimātra*, what does the introduction or occurrence of a new term for an older doctrine tell us about origin of this doctrine? According to my understanding, even if we accept all of Schmithausen’s conjectures and assumptions, the change in terminology indicates an attempt to put an idea that is not new (that is, it may be new only in Yogācāra context, not new as such) into an old garb. In that case, the *Sandhinirmocanasūtra* could tell us at most when/where the doctrine was borrowed, not when/where it originated. Yet Schmithausen (1984: 454) does not seem to assume that the doctrine has been borrowed, but that it has been newly incepted: “[The double entendre in *Sandhinirmocanasūtra* VIII.7] can be appreciated as purposeful only in the context of the introduction of a new idea on which its discoverer wanted to confer as much of a traditional garb as was available.”

his mind. And again the yogi generalizes: Just as during the meditation all objects were mere images in my mind or consciousness, so are all external objects: they are nothing but images in one's mind. The external world, i.e., the world outside consciousness, does not exist.³¹

It is worthwhile noting that in this case there is no one-to-one correspondence between the content of the meditation and a metaphysical doctrine. The yogi in meditation does not have an insight into the true nature of reality. On the contrary, the objects of his meditation, the Buddha(s) that he visualizes, are false. Epistemologically speaking, they have the same status as an illusion. Only after the state of meditation, from without, does the yogi reach the correct conclusion. As the text states, he did not go to the Buddha, and the Buddha did not come to him. (Nevertheless, the meditation is not entirely without foundation in reality because the mind of the Buddha indeed operates from a distance directly on the mind of the yogi.³²)

Therefore, when Schmithausen states that the metaphysical doctrines in Buddhism arose in an immediate manner from spiritual praxis (“unmittelbar aus der spirituellen Praxis hervorgewachsen sein dürfen”), he uses the expression “arose in an immediate manner” in different meanings. In one case, the expression refers to the molding of meditative experience into a philosophical or religious doctrine, in the other case to the molding of the experience into a doctrine that contradicts it because the experience in the state of meditation is declared to be false.³³

Next, let us consider the meaning of “checking the context.” According to the *Pratyutpannabuddhasammukhāvasthitasāmādhisūtra* the yogi attains an understanding of a metaphysical doctrine after and on the basis of his experience during meditation. Can we rely on this

³¹ For an English translation, cf. Harrison 1990, esp. chapter 3.

³² Three factors are necessary for the obtaining of the vision of the Buddhas (Harrison 1990: 41): “[t]he might (Skt. *anubhāva*) of the Buddha, the application of the force of their [the Bodhisattvas'] own wholesome potentialities, and the power [which is the result] of attaining *samādhi*.” Cf. also *ibid.*, pp. 49 and 51 where it is stated that the Bodhisattvas are established in the *samādhi* while being supported by the Buddha.

³³ In a personal communication Schmithausen informs me that he would now withdraw the adverb “unmittelbar” (“in an immediate manner”), but still maintains that philosophical theories arise in a mediate manner from meditation.

presentation of the context and draw historical conclusions about the origination of this metaphysical teaching from it? The Mahāyānasūtras are obviously not historical narratives or reports in the sense that they provide information on the historical situation in which their teachings came into being. In other words, if a Mahāyānasūtra narrates that a certain yogi reached the right view about *viññaptimātratā* in meditation, this would hardly allow us to infer that this was in fact the way the doctrine came into being, even if the contextual connection in the Sūtra seems smooth. Besides, the Mahāyānasūtras in general and our Sūtra in particular do not describe the meditating yogi as discovering anything that was not already taught by the Buddha. The yogi does not enter meditation as a *tabula rasa*, but only after studying (or “hearing”) what has to be practiced during meditation. Thus, the Sūtra’s own account does not leave any room for innovation. Rather, one could say that no matter how a metaphysical doctrine arose, the Mahāyānasūtras present it as the Buddha’s word and as an object of meditation. The mode of presentation has more to do with religious topology and literary conventions than with an actual historical situation. If we were to take the Mahāyānasūtras as historical accounts, we may just as well start looking for the origin of Mahāyāna theories on the Vulture Peak in Rājagṛha.

It would also not be advisable, as some scholars attempted only a generation ago³⁴ with respect to the Sūtras of Conservative Buddhism, to discard those parts of the *Pratyutpannabuddhasammukhāvasthitasāmādhisūtra* that are obviously mythical and assume that what remains corresponds to a historical reality. Such a procedure was applied, for instance, to the biography of the Buddha, with results that seem more and more doubtful. Imagine subtracting the wolf from Little Red Riding Hood and assuming that the rest of the story corresponds somehow to historical reality.

Moreover, even if one were to accept that the presentation in this particular Sūtra is a true and faithful mirror of its origin, this still does not lead to conclusive results in this case, or better, it leads to more than one result. The crucial passage adduced as evidence for the thesis that the doctrine of *viññaptimātratā* originated in meditative practice can also be adduced as evidence that the same doctrine was developed as a result

³⁴ Indeed, not only a generation ago; cf. Schumann 2004.

of thoughts about the reflection of light in mirrors and similar shiny objects. Let us have a look at the passage to understand how precarious the textual material is (Harrison 1990: 41-42):

[3K] ‘For example, Bhadrāpāla, there are certain women or men with a natural bent for washing their hair and putting on jewelry, who might decide to look at themselves in a vessel of clear oil, or a vessel of clear water, or a well-polished round mirror, or a patch of ground smeared with azurite[?]. If they see therein their own form, Bhadrāpāla, what do you think? Does that appearance of the form of the men or women in the vessel of clear oil, or the vessel of clear water, or well-polished round mirror, or patch of ground smeared with azurite mean that there are men or women who have gone inside those things or entered them?’

Bhadrāpāla said:

‘No Reverend Lord, it does not. Rather, Reverend Lord, because the oil and the water are clear and undisturbed, or the mirror is highly polished, or the patch of earth smeared with azurite is clean, the reflections stand forth; the bodies of the men or women have not arisen from the water, oil, mirror, or patch of earth, they have not come from anywhere nor gone anywhere, they have not been produced from anywhere, nor have they disappeared anywhere.’

[3L] The Lord said:

‘Well done, well done, Bhadrāpāla! You have done well, Bhadrāpāla! So it is, Bhadrāpāla. As you have said, because the forms are good and clear the reflections appear. In the same manner, when those *bodhisattvas* have cultivated this *samādhi* properly, those *Tathāgatas* are seen by the *bodhisattvas* with little difficulty. Having seen them they ask questions, and are delighted by the answering of those questions. In thinking: ‘Did these *Tathāgatas* come from anywhere? Did I go anywhere? They understand that the *Tathāgatas* did not come from anywhere. Having understood that their bodies did not go anywhere either, they think: ‘Whatever belongs to this triple world is nothing but mind (*~cittamātram idaṃ yad idaṃ traidhātukam*). Why is that? Because however I imagine things, that is how they appear.’

I’m afraid that nothing decisive can be concluded from this or similar passages. Furthermore, in the same chapter of the same Sūtra (chapter 3) the doctrine that all final elements of existence are illusory is presented in connection with the phenomenon of dreams. After a dream, one generalizes and comes to the conclusion that the experience in a dream is the same as all everyday experience and the illusory character of dreams is extended to the latter.³⁵ This connection between dreams

³⁵ Cf. Harrison 1990: 39: “‘Bhadrāpāla, formerly in the past, a certain man travelled into deserted wilderness, and having become hungry and thirsty was overcome by

and *viññaptimātratā* is also contextually smooth and given the significance of dreams in Indian culture, apparent already in the Vedic period, one could even argue for certain plausibility in its favor.³⁶

However, here Schmithausen would object, as he kindly did in a personal communication, that his method consists in examining the *oldest source* for a *key term* (“Schlüssel-Terminus”)³⁷ in a *specific meaning* (“in einer bestimmten Bedeutung”) and asking whether the occurrence of the term in its context is plausible,³⁸ i.e., whether the in-

torpor and lethargy; he fell asleep, and in a dream obtained a great quantity of food and drink. On obtaining it he ate his fill, and his hunger and thirst vanished. When he awoke, neither his body nor his belly had grown any larger, and so he thought: ‘There exist certain dharmas which are so, that is, like a dream;’ understanding that to be so he obtained the patient acceptance of the fact that dharmas are not produced (Skt. *anutpattika-dharma-kṣānti*); and he also became unable to regress from the supreme and perfect awakening.”

The text continues that in the same manner the Bodhisattvas who “concentrate their thought on the Tathāgata in that quarter, they will obtain a vision of the Buddha. They should not entertain the apperception of an existing thing, but should entertain the apperception of an empty space.”

³⁶ The connection between the *viññaptimātratā* doctrine and dreams in the context of this *sūtra* has already been pointed out by Sharf (Williams 2005:287-288, n. 10). He quotes Schmithausen 1976: 246 who compares the Bodhisattva’s understanding that he has not met the Buddha in his meditation to “a man, awaking from a dream, comprehends that all phenomena are illusory like dream visions.” He then adds: “Remarkably, Schmithausen cites this text in support of his claim that, ‘the thesis of universal idealism originated from the *generalisation* of a situation observed in the case of objects visualized in meditative concentration, i.e., in the context of *spiritual practice*’ (ibid.: 247). Yet this scripture suggests quite the opposite, in so far as it succeeds in explicating a doctrinal point by drawing an analogy to dreaming.”

³⁷ This emphasis on a key term does not yet appear in Schmithausen’s 1973 paper and in the English version of 1976, but is formulated in his *Ālayaviññāna* (Tokyo 1987) § 1.4, pp. 9-10; cf. note 39 below.

³⁸ Plausibility is, of course, a rather vague criterion. What is plausible for one observer is implausible for another. If one believes that philosophical theories in Buddhism arise from meditative experiences, it seems plausible that this is also the case in the *Pratyutpannabuddhasammukhāvasthitasāmadhisūtra*; if, on the other hand, someone, like Bronkhorst or Sharf, does not share this belief, this would seem implausible. What seems plausible to us is bound to become implausible to the next generation. Dumezil once gave a wonderful answer to the question whether he was right about the tripartite ideology: J’ai raison, mais j’aurai tort! (“I am right, but I will be wrong!”)

roduction of the term in the relevant meaning is reasonably motivated, as he has done with regard to the term *ālayavijñāna*.³⁹

The emphasis on a key term raises the question whether a given theory and the term that designates it coincide. In the case of the terms *vijñaptimātra* or *cittamātra* we know this *not* to be the case. Schmithausen himself pointed out that the term *cittamātra* was first used to negate emotional and volitional factors beside the mind, not the existence of real objects.⁴⁰ The expression *prajñaptimātra* was used in the *Bodhisattvabhūmi* and *Bodhisattvabhūmiviniścaya* in the sense of “mere denomination,” i.e., alluding to a nominalistic theory that denies the correspondence between human concepts and things in reality, but does not deny that things exist in reality. In another use of the same term, it refers to a theory which maintains that false conception *really* produces things (outside the mind).⁴¹ The statement that the whole world is just mind (*cittamātram idaṃ yad idaṃ traidhātukam*) in the *Daśabhūmikasūtra* can be understood as denying the Self (*ātman*), not the existence of real objects.⁴² So what can be concluded from the fact that *vijñaptimātra* or *cittamātra* occur in the Sūtra in a different (not necessarily new) meaning? What can be inferred from the fact that they denote here an idealistic doctrine? Do the terms tell us how this doctrine arose? The terms are after all descriptive of a certain tenet; they do not wear a tag saying how the tenet they refer to came about.⁴³

³⁹ “Aber ich gehe nicht von einer beliebigen Stelle aus, sondern vom *ältesten* erreichbaren Beleg eines *Schlüssel-Terminus* in einer *bestimmten* Bedeutung, und frage mich, ob dessen Auftreten dort im Kontext plausibel ist, d.h. die Einführung des verwendeten Terminus in der relevanten Bedeutung einleuchtend motiviert (vgl. *Ālayavijñāna* § 1.4).” Does the word ‘Einführung’ imply that the term was used there for the first time? Surely that would be an unlikely assumption. Considering the state of available materials, the assumption that such a source did not survive is more plausible. Schmithausen clearly says “erreichbaren Beleg.” Note the (unintended?) switch from the neutral “Auftreten” to “Einführung,” which is not neutral.

⁴⁰ Schmithausen 1976: 244.

⁴¹ Schmithausen 1976: 245.

⁴² Schmithausen 1976: 249.

⁴³ In the case of the term *ālayavijñāna* one may argue that its literal meaning reflects its first function because the term was coined with that function in mind. However, such an inference is not possible in the case of *cittamātra* or *vijñaptimātra*; they do not disclose the context of their origin.

Furthermore, couldn't one assume that a doctrine existed before a specific term was adopted to refer to it? And couldn't it be that a source where a technical term does not yet appear indicates an earlier stage of development before the theory was crystallized and obtained a special designation? Consequently, is it not possible that a source where a technical term does not yet appear gives us a better clue as to how the theory in question originated? Imagining two passages proclaiming the same idealistic theory, one using the key term *vijñaptimātra*, the other not referring to it, do we have to conclude that the first passage gives us the decisive clue as to how the theory arose and not the second?⁴⁴

To conclude the examination of the issue of *vijñaptimātratā*, we may say that although there is some evidence for the arising of this theory from meditative experience, though certainly not in an immediate manner, the evidence is inconclusive and the methodology used by Schmithausen uncertain.

One should also recall that Schmithausen's theory is not, so to speak, the only one on the market. Following Paul Harrison, the idealistic teachings of the *Pratyutpannabuddhasammukhāvasthitasāmadhisūtra* can be seen as an attempt to harmonize a certain meditative practice with the Mahāyāna teachings which stand in contradiction to it, namely, the practice of the visualization of the Buddha with the doctrine that everything, including the Buddha himself, is unreal. If this hypothesis were confirmed, the doctrine did not arise from meditative practice, but from the need to harmonize contradictory theories: a previously existing doctrine and/or practice of meditation being adjusted to

⁴⁴ Consider for instance two passages that refer to the Sāṃkhyistic doctrine of the three *guṇas* as constituent parts of all matter. I do not think that anyone would argue that the passage where the technical term *guṇa* or the technical terms for the specific *guṇas* appear for the first time in the available sources is necessarily older and gives us a better clue about the origin of the doctrine. To take another example, the doctrine of the Tathāgatagarbha referred to below appears in rudimentary form, and without association with a technical term, in the Lotus Sūtra in connection with the eccentric monk Sadāparibhūta. Should one, therefore, conclude from a *methodological* point of view that the passage where the key term occurs for the first time, rather than the one where it does not occur, gives us the key about the origin of the doctrine?

a new philosophical theory.⁴⁵ One may also speculate that the *buddhānusmṛti*-Meditation was first harmonized with a previously existing *viññaptimātratā* doctrine, because the author of the Sūtra emphasizes that the *buddhānusmṛti* functions within the frame of the *viññaptimātratā* doctrine by assuming a mutual influence between the mind of the meditator and that of the Buddha. Then, in a second stage of development, the *viññaptimātratā* doctrine was integrated into Mahāyāna Illusionism, according to which even the mind and its images are unreal.⁴⁶

Furthermore, the *viññaptimātratā* doctrine is the only Yogācāra doctrine that is examined by Schmithausen. However, there are other philosophical doctrines associated with this “school,”⁴⁷ such as the doctrine of the three natures (*trisvabhāva*), the transformation of the basis (*āśrayaparivṛtti*),⁴⁸ a special theory of Buddhahood,⁴⁹ Nirvāṇa (*apratiṣṭhitanirvāṇa*) and *tathatā*, and indeed of the general Mahāyāna ideal of Bodhisattva.⁵⁰ It remains to be proved that all these theories—which do not seem less central than the *viññaptimātratā*—arose from meditative experience or from spiritual practice. As far as I can see, it would even be hard to prove that theories about meditation arise from meditative practice (cf. below).

My skepticism about the role of meditation in the formation of philosophical theories is not alleviated when I consider the most impor-

⁴⁵ Cf. Harrison 1978. One could argue perhaps that even in this case the *viññaptimātratā* doctrine arose *indirectly* from meditation, namely, from thinking about the compatibility of *buddhānusmṛti*-meditation with Mahāyāna Illusionism. However, I do not think that Schmithausen would argue for this hypothesis because what is decisive here is the philosophical desire for coherence, not the spiritual practice as such.

⁴⁶ As far as I know, the doctrine of *viññaptimātratā* without connection to Mahāyāna general illusionism or *tathatā* Monism appears only in later works such as the *Triṃśikā* of Vasubandhu. This does not mean, of course, that this doctrine (i.e., that the final elements of existence are mental *dharma*s that are *not* themselves illusory) originated with Vasubandhu.

⁴⁷ The notion of school is rather problematic in the Indian philosophical context; I use this term here merely for the sake of convenience, cf. also Franco 1997: 89-92.

⁴⁸ Cf. Sakuma 1998.

⁴⁹ Cf. Griffiths 1995.

⁵⁰ Cf. Dayal 2004. How much of the Bodhisattva doctrine can be said to have arisen from spiritual (moral-ethical or meditative) practice?

tant individual Yogācāra philosophers, Maitreya⁵¹ and Asaṅga. Frauwallner described Maitreya's philosophy as follows (Frauwallner 1994: 297-298): "Im großen gesehen ist die Lehre Maitreya'nāthas ein kunstvolles Gebäude, in dem die verschiedenen älteren Lehren mit wertvollen eigenen Gedanken zu einer Einheit verschmolzen sind." Among the older teachings, Frauwallner mentions the theory of the highest Being of Sāramati, earlier Yogācāra ideas ("Anschauungen") and various elements from the Madhyamaka. These diverse elements were systematized to form a philosophical system which may be termed idealistic monism. What I fail to see, however, is that the conception of this system is the result of meditative experience. To be sure, liberating insight is said to be attained only in a state of meditation, but one cannot show that the philosophical or mystical doctrine realized in this state actually arose from it or was conceived on its basis. The systematization of older materials into a coherent and new philosophical system hardly requires or presupposes meditative experience. Similarly, when one considers the writings attributed to Asaṅga, the assumption that they arose from meditation becomes doubtful, for his basic work consists in patient reorganization and reworking of older Hīnayāna Abhidharma materials within the new framework of Yogācāra idealism.⁵²

The next Mahāyāna tradition I would like to consider is the Tathāgatarbha, the so-called Buddha-embryo school. According to this school all living beings are potential Buddhas and, even though it will certainly take much time, will eventually become Buddhas. In other words, all living beings are Buddha embryos that will grow to become fully developed Buddhas or—according to another meaning of the word *garbha* which may mean not only "embryo" but also "womb"—all living beings represent wombs in which Buddhas will grow. The *Tathāgatarbhasūtra* is presumably the earliest source in which the Tathāgatarbha doctrine is expressed in association with this term itself.⁵³ Michael Zimmermann, to whom we owe the most extensive study of this

⁵¹ The historicity of Maitreya is dubious, but there is no need to discuss this issue here because it does not affect my argument.

⁵² Cf. Frauwallner 1994: 328: "Für sein System ist ... vor allem die Übernahme der Begriffswelt der Hīnayāna-Dogmatik kennzeichnend."

⁵³ The Ekayāna doctrine, however, which is presupposed or implied by the Tathāgatarbha philosophy, predates the *Tathāgatarbhasūtra*. Cf. also note 44 above.

Sūtra, also investigated its origin and I cannot but fully agree with his conclusion (Zimmermann 2002: 75):

Of course, we cannot know whether the idea of the Buddha-nature in living beings resulted from a novel meditative experience or because the authors felt the need to assert its existence in order to improve an unsatisfactory worldly or philosophical state of affairs, or whether it is based on other experiences. All this is mere speculation.

The last philosophical tradition I would like to examine here is the so-called Pramāṇa School. How much of the Buddhist philosophy presented in the *pramāṇa* works can be said to have arisen from meditative practice? We are relatively well informed about the origin of this tradition and its philosophical theories, and it seems that they do not have anything to do with meditation. Rather, in the first stage (as reflected in the **Tarkaśāstra*, **Upāyahṛdaya*, the final part of the *Spitzer Manuscript*,⁵⁴ and fragments from Vasubandhu's lost works *Vādavidhi* and *Vādavidhāna*), the Buddhists borrow very heavily from Brahminical manuals of debate, adding, modifying and developing here and there. In the later period, from the sixth century onwards, Buddhist philosophy, focusing mainly but not exclusively on epistemology, logic and theory of language, is developed above all in response to and in controversy with the Brahminical philosophers from the Nyāya and Mīmāṃsā traditions. It is clear that when Schmithausen speaks about philosophical theories, he thinks primarily of ontological theories and leaves aside epistemology, logic, theory of language and to large extent even ethics.⁵⁵ Dignāga, Dharmakīrti, Dharmottara, Prajñākaragupta, Śāṅkaranandana and Jñānaśrīmitra are generally considered the most outstanding Buddhist philosophers, but one cannot point at anything in their writings as having originated from meditation. For all we know,

⁵⁴ Cf. Tucci 1929 and Franco 2004.

⁵⁵ It is also clear that Schmithausen's understanding of the term "philosophy" is not restricted to philosophy in the technical sense, which is characterized by the use of special reasons and arguments. It is only by following Schmithausen's usage of the term "philosophy" that I used here "philosophical theory," "philosophical doctrine" and similar expressions while referring to Buddhist Sūtras and Abhidharma literature.

these Buddhist philosophers may not have practiced meditation at all,⁵⁶ or if they did, perhaps only for short and insignificant periods of time.⁵⁷ At this point it may be worthwhile to raise the question how the Buddhist tradition itself considered the relationship between meditation and metaphysics. I mentioned above that meditation plays a decisive role in the doctrines that are rejected as harmful in the *Brahmajālasutta*. This Sūtra, which is placed first in the collection of sūtras in the Pāli canon, discusses some sixty-four⁵⁸ erroneous views held by various ascetics and Brahmins. A large number of these false views arise directly from meditative experiences. I will mention only two such views, one claiming that the world is finite, the other that it is infinite. It is clear that the

⁵⁶ We have practically no biographical data about the Buddhist philosophers. Prajñākara Gupta was probably a lay person (*upāsaka*) (cf. Taranātha 1997: 296) and Śāṅkaranandana was perhaps not even a Buddhist; cf. Krasser 2001 and Eltschinger forthcoming. A pertinent observation by Eltschinger is worth quoting in this connection (2008: §16): “Le bouddhisme indien nous confronte donc à la situation suivante. D’un côté, des sectes nombreuses dont les spécificités disciplinaires et doctrinales nous sont plus ou moins bien documentées; de l’autre, des discours philosophiques plus ou moins bien connus eux aussi, mais dont l’ancrage institutionnel sectaire nous échappe. En d’autres termes, ces deux ordres de réalité, l’institutionnel et le philosophique, ne coïncident ou ne se superposent qu’en de très rares cas en l’état actuel de nos connaissances.” I would only want to add that even if we knew more about the sectarian and institutional affiliation of the Buddhist philosophers, we would still not know if, and to what extent, an individual philosopher followed such disciplinary and doctrinal specifications in practice.

⁵⁷ To these, one may add perhaps Vasubandhu, whose strength, so it seems, lies more in his ability to systematise and expound various theories than in conceiving original philosophical doctrines. There is a biography of Vasubandhu by Paramārtha, which is, to be sure, partly legendary. Yet it is interesting that Paramārtha never depicts his hero meditating. Rather, Vasubandhu studies the Buddhist writings, summarizes them, refutes them, argues by means of logical reasoning and on points of grammar, and engages in debates with teachers of rival schools, both Buddhists and non-Buddhists, on the whole not unlike modern philosophers. Cf. Takakusu, 1904: 269-296. One should add perhaps that Paramārtha also describes Aśaṅga as encountering Maitreya in Tuṣṭita-heaven. In any case, it is hardly possible to determine the origin of philosophical doctrines from hagiographies.

⁵⁸ Sixty-four is a number that designates a certain completeness (cf. the sixty-four arts and crafts [*kalā*]). While there are certainly more than sixty-four wrong views in the world, the author nevertheless seems to be striving for an exhaustive enumeration of all views concerning the world (*loka*) and the self (*atta*).

author(s) of this Sūtra distrust(s) meditative visions and trances as a source for philosophical theories (Anonymous 1987: 32):

He [a certain *samaṇa* or *brāhmaṇa*] says thus: “This world is finite. It is circumscribed. Why can it be said so? It can be said so because having achieved utmost mental concentration by dint of ardent, steadfast, persevering exertion, mindfulness and right attentiveness, and having established my mind in highest concentration, I abide in the view that the world is finite. Based on this, I know that the world is finite and that it is circumscribed.”

Exactly the same formulation is used to substantiate the contradictory view that the world is infinite:⁵⁹

He [a certain *samaṇa* or *brāhmaṇa*] says thus: “This world is infinite, with no limit. Those *samaṇas* and *brāhmaṇas* who assert that the world is finite and that it is circumscribed are wrong. In fact, this world is infinite, with no limit. Why can it be said so? It can be said so because having achieved utmost mental concentration by dint of ardent, steadfast, persevering exertion, mindfulness and right attentiveness, and having established my mind in highest concentration, I abide in the view that the world is infinite. Based on this, I know that the world is infinite, with no limit.”

As mentioned above, both views are rejected by the Buddha (or more precisely, by the author of the Sūtra), however, not because he rejects that the meditating persons achieved “utmost mental concentration by dint of ardent, steadfast, persevering exertion, mindfulness and right attentiveness,” that is, not because he questions the quality of their meditative practice, but because meditative visions, such as recollections of numerous past lives, are not in themselves a sound basis for the formation of metaphysical doctrines.

The topic of the special perception of yogis is extensively dealt with in the Buddhist epistemological tradition, where it is intimately related to the fundamental issues of the Buddhist religion, such as the reliability and omniscience of the Buddha. According to this tradition, as well as most, if not all Buddhist traditions, the Buddha already discovered everything one needs to know in order to achieve Enlightenment. Therefore, theoretically the yogi cannot innovate anything on the basis of his meditative experiences, at least not anything soteriologically true and useful, but has to meditate on the content of the Buddha’s

⁵⁹ The same formula is adduced as a reason for the false claims that the world is permanent, impermanent, partly permanent, etc. Cf. *ibid.*, pp. 19, 21, 22, etc.

words.⁶⁰ The characterization of the special perception of yogis in the *Pramāṇasamuccaya*, the foundational work of the Pramāṇa tradition, may seem surprising at first sight: “The yogin’s intuition which is not associated (*avyavakīrṇa*) with any conceptual construction of the *āgama* (the authoritative words of the teachers) and which apprehends only a thing in itself is also perception.”⁶¹ Read as such, this statement may create the impression that the perception of yogis has, by definition, nothing to do with the Buddhist authoritative writings (*āgama*), but in fact the contrary is the case. What Dignāga means, and this is also how his followers understood him, is that the yogi studies the Buddhist teachings, meditates on them and in the process of meditation casts away all conceptual constructions, all cognitions related to language, and arrives at an immediate, non-conceptual understanding of these very teachings, perceiving them as vividly as one perceives an object in front of one’s eyes. Therefore, the characterization of Dignāga in fact limits the scope of perception of yogis to the content of the Buddhist works which profess the Buddha’s word (or if Dignāga also had non-Buddhist yogis in mind, to the scope of the authoritative teachings of the respective traditions).⁶² In other words, it is theoretically impossible that the yogi will discover anything new and true in his visions that is not already included in his authoritative tradition.

The literature of the Buddhist epistemological tradition is particularly interesting because it also provides us with theories about meditative trance. Here we can learn not only what the yogis perceive in a trance, but also about the nature of trance, how it arises, what its distinctive qualities are and so on. Moreover, we possess the individual writings of the most important philosophers of this tradition and can thus see how their theories were developed. The topic of meditation or perception of yogis (*yogipratyakṣa*), as it is usually called, became an

⁶⁰ In this respect Robert Sharf is certainly right when he points out that the Buddhist tradition distrusted any new meditative experiences.

⁶¹ Cf. PS on I.6cd: *yoginām apy āgamavikalpāvyavakīrṇam arthamātradarśanaṃ pratyakṣam*. The translation is taken from Hattori 1968: 27.

⁶² At least according to Dharmakīrti and later commentators, only the Buddha’s teachings, mainly the four noble truths, are an appropriate object of meditation. Non-Buddhist meditations do not count as yogic perceptions, but as mere delusions; cf. Franco forthcoming.

important issue of controversy in the epistemological tradition to the extent that Jñānaśrīmitra (ca. 980-1040), the last important Buddhist philosopher in South Asia, devoted a special treatise to it.⁶³ However, yogic perception and related issues were hotly debated for hundreds of years before that, especially with the Mīmāṃsā philosophers, who recognized the potential danger yogic perception posed to the authority of the Veda.⁶⁴ In addition, epistemological problems inherent in the notion of yogic perception were independently raised. Already Dharmakīrti (ca. 600-660) was faced with the problem how abstract statements, such as those that constitute the four noble truths, could be perceived in an immediate manner, that is, without involving concepts (cf. Franco forthcoming). Later generations were particularly concerned with the problems related to omniscience. Is it really possible for a yogi, such as the Buddha, to know everything? What is the object of an omniscient cognition? Can one really know all individual things in a single act of awareness? Or is it only possible to know the essence of one thing and from that knowledge understand the essence of all things?⁶⁵

Another problem concerns the veracity of yogic perception. If yogic perception is to be considered true, its object must exist, just like the object of any other perception. However, yogis in the Indian (not just Buddhist) tradition are believed to have direct perceptions of past and future objects.⁶⁶ Accordingly, Prajñākaragupta (ca. 750-810) argues that past and future objects must exist. This tenet, in its turn, leads to a development in the theory of time, which must account for the difference in the mode of existence of past, present and future objects. Prajñākaragupta maintains that time taken as an independent and permanent entity does not exist. He seems to conceive of time as a relational property. Speaking of time as a separate entity, for instance, when one says: “the time of this thing,” is similar to saying “the body of this

⁶³ For a general introduction to the topic of yogic perception in the Pramāṇa literature and a summary of the *Yoginimāya*, cf. Steinkellner 1978.

⁶⁴ Cf. McCrea's and Taber's papers in this volume.

⁶⁵ Cf. McClintock 2000, Moriyama 2004, Moriyama forthcoming, Franco forthcoming.

⁶⁶ The perception of past and future objects is already mentioned in the *Yogasūtra* as one of the “accomplishments” or supernatural powers (*siddhis*) of yogis. Cf. *YS* 3.16.

torso.” Past or future objects are, therefore, objects that are not seen at present. And to say that yogis perceive the past or the future means that they perceive what is not being seen, that is, not being seen by other ordinary people. Therefore, being a past or future entity depends on its not seeing by ordinary people. The yogi himself perceives past and future objects as present; only after emerging from the state of meditation does he determine them as past or future.⁶⁷

When one follows this discussion in detail, it is clear that the deliberations are purely philosophical. It is in fact quite certain that Prajñākaragupta developed the theory of the existence of past and future objects in the context of his proof of life after death and merely adapted a ready-made theory to the context of yogic perception. It can also be observed that the discussion of meditation in general in the Buddhist epistemological tradition is not related to actual experience in meditation.⁶⁸ To what extent this was also the case in the earlier Abhidharma tradition cannot be determined because the mode of presentation in the Abhidharma texts is impersonal and does not provide a context for possible personal innovations by individual philosophers. It is doubtful whether the authors of the Mahāyānasūtras, the *Yogācārabhūmi* or manuals of meditation⁶⁹ were themselves practicing yogis or whether

⁶⁷ PVABh, 113,7–9: *tasmād atītādi paśyatīti ko 'rthaḥ? anyenādrīṣyamānaṃ paśyati tad drīṣyamānatayā vartamānaṃ eva tāvatā tad iti na doṣaḥ. anyāpekṣayā tasyātītāditvam. tasmād yat sāksāt-kṛtaṃ tad evāstīti nātītā<āv> akṣavyāpāras tasya sāksāt-kṛtatvenāst[h]itvāt.*

⁶⁸ It is symptomatic that the example of the infatuated lover who sees his beloved as if she were standing right before his eyes is based on Dharmakīrti's exposition and that it is repeated for hundreds of years. However, the poverty of examples, i.e., the fact that the same old examples are repeated again and again and hardly any new ones are introduced into the philosophical discourse is typical for Indian philosophy in general.

⁶⁹ For an example of a Buddhist manual of meditation, cf. Schlingloff 2006. Schlingloff points out that the purpose of the manual is not to teach the methods and techniques of meditative practice (their knowledge is presupposed), but to present the individual visions systematically, and classify and underpin them dogmatically (Schlingloff 2006: 30): “Dieses [das Yogalehrbuch] hat die Aufgabe, die einzelne Visionen als systematische Übungen darzustellen, zu gliedern und dogmatisch zu untermauern.” “The practical part” (der praktischer Teil) too is anchored in the tradition; just as Maudgalyāyana penetrates heaven and earth, the yogi too visualises them, etc. (*ibid.*). On the whole, the meditation manual leaves little or no room for

they were not rather systematizing the experiences of others. The latter state of affairs would hardly be typical for Buddhism alone. For as Grinshpon repeatedly emphasizes, the author of the *Yogasūtras* was a Sāṃkhya philosopher who certainly was not actively practicing yoga (cf. Grinshpon 2002 *passim*).

To conclude, I would like come back to Schmithausen's thesis. In the above-mentioned paper, Schmithausen attributes the peculiarity that all central theories in Buddhism arise immediately from spiritual practice to the Buddha himself: „Der Grund für diesen Unterschied [zwischen Buddhismus auf der einen Seite und europäischer und hinduistischer Philosophie auf der anderen Seite] liegt gewiss letztlich in der Person des Buddha selbst, der mit einer wohl einmaligen Konsequenz und Radikalität alle für das Heil irrelevanten theoretischen Spekulationen abgewiesen hatte.“ [“The reason for this difference [between Buddhism on the one hand and European and Hindu philosophy on the other] certainly lies, in the final analysis, in the personality of the Buddha himself, who rejected once and for all, and with unique consequence and radicalness, all theoretical speculations that are irrelevant to salvation.”]⁷⁰

Schmithausen's thesis could be crucial for Buddhist studies. If it could be shown to be true, he would have discovered an essential driving force that played a crucial role during the entire history of Buddhism. One could almost see the Hegelian spirit entering Buddhist philosophy and determining it in a decisive manner and to a surprising degree. Not being a Hegelian myself, I find it difficult to accept that in the long and complex history of Buddhism in South Asia the causal relationship between meditation and metaphysics was in all central cases one-directional, spiritual practice always being the cause and metaphysics always the effect. As I have tried to show above, this as-

personal innovations. The language is both descriptive and prescriptive; it not only describes what the yogi supposedly sees, but also what he should see. The individual spontaneous visions are in fact modelled after the Buddha's biography and other canonical materials. The same hold good for other manuals and descriptions of meditations, cf. Yamabe 1999 and forthcoming, Bretfeld 2003.

⁷⁰ The historicity of the Buddha and our ability to extract his original teachings from the canonical writings are clearly presupposed in this passage and need not be spelled out. Those were obviously more optimistic times.

sumption involves a number of problems and there are considerations clearly speaking against it. On the whole, it is simply not provable. Indeed, it would be difficult to prove that spiritual practice is the cause of something when the spiritual practice itself is all but unknown to us.⁷¹

As far as I can see, the relation between meditation and metaphysics in Buddhism cannot be reduced to a single model. In the final analysis, one cannot avoid the conclusion that certain philosophical theories arose from meditative experiences and certain others did not, and that the origin of still others cannot be determined, in which case it seems preferable to suspend judgment. On the basis of the examples mentioned above, I would say that the *dhyāna* meditation and the higher levels of the *ārūpya* meditation (at least the last two levels), which incidentally are not mentioned by Schmithausen,⁷² seem to fit his model very well. The cosmic layers that bear the same name seem to have been conceived as cosmological parallels to the content as well as the psychological characteristics of the corresponding visions. This is clear already from the terminology. On the other hand, the theory of momentariness, as Schmithausen himself conceded, seems to have been developed out of philosophical considerations. The same can be maintained for the doctrine of the *puṅgala* and the *anātman* doctrine. The doctrine of *pratīyasamutpāda* seems to have arisen as a systematization of older canonical materials, and perhaps redactional reasons were the primary driving force behind it. Reflection on the law of karma and the phenomenon of memory, as well as textual considerations, seem to have led to the Sarvāstivāda assumption of past and future objects. The question whether meditation or philosophical reasoning caused the arising of the Mahāyāna doctrine of emptiness cannot be answered because relevant unambiguous materials are lacking. The same holds true for the *vijñap-*

⁷¹ This difficulty is relevant not only for Schmithausen's thesis, but also for recent attempts to use Pierre Hadot's interpretation of Greek philosophy as a model for Buddhist philosophy; cf. McClintock 2002: 6-8 and Kapstein 2003: 3-16. The problems and shortcomings of this approach are discussed in Eltschinger 2008. Eltschinger rightly concludes (§ 20): "... nos textes [i.e., les textes de la philosophie bouddhique] ne se laissent pratiquement *jamais* reconduire à leurs conditions historiques de production, ne quittant jamais le terrain de l'argumentation et du raisonnement purs."

⁷² The reason for this is not clear to me; perhaps he does not consider them to be Buddhist in origin.

timātratā doctrine. To be sure, there is some evidence that connects this doctrine to the visualizations of the Buddha(s), but I fail to see how one could determine whether this doctrine arose from reflections on such visualizations or whether it originated independently and was applied to the meditative context to show that visualizations of the Buddha(s) are meaningful even within the Mahāyāna illusionistic context.

Furthermore, even if we were to assume for the sake of argument that all central philosophical theories in Buddhism were developed *indirectly* by reflection on spiritual practice, one could still argue that the dichotomy between spiritual practice and philosophical theory as such is not always tenable. For what happens when a philosopher thinks about spiritual practice—quite possibly without first-hand experience of this practice—and develops a new theory? Could it be said that in this case the doctrine arose from spiritual praxis in contradistinction to philosophical and theoretical considerations?

Finally, it is worth repeating that the yogi, even if he were to arrive at a new metaphysical doctrine on the basis of meditation, does not enter meditative experience in the state of *tabula rasa*. It is highly unlikely that a Buddhist yogi will meet God the Creator in his visions, nor that a Jewish mystic or a Sufi will experience the *anātman*-doctrine. Even the purest meditative experience is culturally and linguistically bound, and is engrossed in a tradition.⁷³

ABBREVIATIONS AND BIBLIOGRAPHY

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| AKBh | Abhidharmakośabhāṣyam of Vasubandhu. Ed. P. Pradhan. Patna 1975. |
| Anonymous 1987 | <i>Ten suttas from Dīgha Nikāya</i> . Rangoon 1984. Repr. Varanasi 1987. |

⁷³ In this connection one has to note especially the extensive work of Stephan Katz. He argued convincingly and repeatedly that mystical experiences are determined to a considerable degree by language and culture, e.g. Katz 1992: 5: “[Mystical experiences] are inescapably shaped by prior linguistic influences such that the lived experience conforms to a pre-existent pattern that has been learned, then intended, and then actualized in the experiential reality of the mystic.” Cf. also Katz 1983: 3-60.

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