

〈大学院特別セミナー 要旨〉

Sources of Authority in Buddhism and Buddhist Scholarship

Luis O. Gómez

The University of Michigan

Philology observes the authority of human
pronouncements, whence comes
consciousness of the certain.
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...Vico, *La scienza nuova*—

The President and the Dean of the Graduate School of Ōtani University have kindly invited me to lead a “seminar” or “workshop” on Buddhism and Buddhist scholarship at their university during the summers of 1993 and 1994.^② After I received this invitation, I thought of presenting three lectures, with accompanying readings, on three themes that occupied me at the time, and which have preoccupied me for a number of years. The three themes were linked together by one concern: finding new ways of understanding discourse about “Buddhism.” Three forms of discourse seemed especially problematic to me.

First, I sensed a paradoxical ambivalence towards narrative discourse among traditional Buddhist scholastics and modern scholars alike. On the one hand, certain narrative discourses (primarily sūtra texts) were used as authoritative texts. On the other hand, their literary qualities were ignored, the narrative being reduced to a pretext for doctrinal propositions. Both of these groups of intellectuals, the modern and the

traditional scholars of Buddhism, had apparently come to undervalue the uses of narrative in the shaping and preservation of religious truths, preferring the culling of proof texts and philosophical arguments, even as they relied on traditional narratives. While other fields in the humanities have begun to develop a new awareness of the narrative features of their discourse, Buddhist Studies remains somewhat isolated from the main streams of critical theory, in this respect—as it is probably in many other respects.

Second, and in the same vein, I had become fascinated by the persistence of historicism and the myth of origins in Buddhist Studies. It appeared to me that we seemed to revert inexorably to an affectation of “historical fact” and “textual evidence” that not only failed to perceive its shortcomings, but also failed to see the ground on which it stood and the conception of truth it advocated. I found our own naivete disquieting, for it seemed that much of the rhetoric of our field allowed an uncritical use and abuse of history and philology as unconscious substitutes for narrative truth. I was first made aware of this problem as I observed the way in which religious persons in the West conceive of Judeo-Christian faith in terms of historical fact and evolution. It did not take me long to realize that similar preferences existed in Buddhist scholarship—perhaps in part because of the so-called “Protestant presuppositions” of Buddhist scholarship,^③ but perhaps even more because of the long-standing tradition of demythologization in Buddhist scholarship and philosophy.

A third window on this problem opened up for me while I observed a peculiar turn of modern Buddhist apologetics. I noted that some Buddhists used various conceptions of “the two truths” in a manner that seemed to me disturbingly unaware of the exact propositional nature of appeals to “the doctrine of the two truths.” In this usage, or rhetorical convention, a metaphysical claim is presented as the conclusion of a philosophical argument, but is used as a sacred formula or an absolute truth claim. More specifically, a statement of a dilemma—

the doctrine of two truths—is presented as a solution to the dilemma.

Over the last few years I have become interested in various forms of these three rhetorical features of the discourse of Buddhist studies. (1) Regarding the question of the relation of doctrinal statement to sacred narrative, I took up the problem of the uses of myth and narratives in Buddhist scriptures, especially the way in which narrative settings and sequences seemed to express or convey the truth and authority of a scriptural text. (2) Regarding the question of the relation of history to religious truth, I became interested in the problematic use of categories such as “early” and “original” in Buddhist scholarship and in Buddhism as a religion. In case it is not already obvious from the present context, I should note that my interest lies in the use and rhetorical function of these two categories, not in the validity or reliability of the historical and philological arguments used to argue for chronological and genetic precedence.^④

Lastly, (3) regarding the thin line between persuasive arguments on the one hand, and absolutistic claims on the other, I set out to consider the uses and abuses of the doctrine of the two truths in modern Buddhist discourse. I became especially interested in the use of this doctrine as a preemptive strike, a mask for a claim of unquestionable authority. In other words, I hypothesized that the power of an appeal to a statement of a problem as a solution to the problem was to be found in the nature of religious appeals to authority and not in any particular epistemology or ontology.

I was considering these three topics when I was invited to lecture on the topics of “religion and authority” in Buddhism as part of a series of lecture sponsored by the Program on Studies in Religion at the University of Michigan. This invitation set off a chain of reflections that led to the conception that I have finally adopted for my workshops at Ōtani University. I realized that the above three themes were in fact only three among many other ways of claiming or establishing^⑤ “authority” in Buddhist scholastic discourse—traditional and modern.

It also became obvious to me that these topics could also be used to explore the interconnections between meaning and authority that had been suggested to me by readings in Foucault and Bourdieu.^⑥

The three issues that I had originally seen as problematic assumptions of Buddhist studies began to take a different meaning. In my eyes they were no longer only problems relevant to Buddhist studies and the specific textual history of Buddhism. Although the questions retained their specifically Buddhist content, they also appeared to be examples of the broader question of how we construct meaning and authority. Conversely, the three questions suggested to me a possible point at which Buddhism and Buddhist scholarship perhaps could speak to broader, contemporary issues of philosophical hermeneutics. Wishing to explore these possibilities, I chose to organize the series of lectures and seminar discussions at Ōtani University around the theme of “authority.”

I must admit that, like so many other of the ideas aggressively churned, enthusiastically handled, and quickly dispensed with in Western intellectual circles, the concern with authority may be short-lived. Our intellectual life, like the modern psychology of consumption, is moved by instant gratification, a premium on novelty, and a taste for a motley and ever new wardrobe. I would hope, nevertheless, that I can make the point that in spite of the surrounding cultural frivolity, the exploration of authority as a problem can illuminate the exploration of Buddhist traditions, and that, conversely, the exploration of Buddhist traditions can illuminate our understanding of authority in general.^⑦

Although the vocabulary used in the following pages reflects some of the jargon of critical theory, I intend to show that the problems we seek to bring into focus with these terms are problems with a long history. That is to say, although authority and the reception of meaning are fashionable topics these days in Europe and North America; they are not totally new to Japanese audiences, much less to the Buddhist tradition. Many scholars in Japan are also interested in these topics, and

are now reading authors like Foucault as avidly as some of their European counterparts. Perhaps hermeneutical theory is not a popular topic among those engaged in the more conservative disciplines of philology and Buddhist studies; but I am sure the ideas expressed and the issues raised in these pages will not come as a complete surprise to many of my readers.

The problem of authority is not only relevant to the West, although much of the recent discussion, and the rhetoric that accompanies it, is of Western, continental European, and especially French, vintage.[®] The theme of authority may be fashionable, but it is also vital, timely, and perennial. It is vital and timely, because it reflects a crisis that is not simply intellectual or metaphysical, but moral, social, and political. The seriousness and intractability of the problem is not the work of scholarly imagination, but the result of social and cultural realities. I believe Japanese society is facing many of these realities, and Buddhism in particular is being forced to face the disintegration of traditional authority within its own traditions and communities.

To the morally or civically minded person the crisis in authority may appear like an anomalous deterioration of mores, but the fragility of authority may be nothing more than the shadow of authority itself, since our need for authority reveals the precariousness of human certainty, and hence of authority itself. Of course, the crisis of authority is especially acute in our times. We seem to have lost not just particular forms of traditional authority, but authority, and with it meaning, in general, a loss of faith in traditional accounts of what it means to be human. This loss of "myth"—and with it, loss of roots, of certainty, and of self—has been used to describe so-called post-modern Europe, but it applies just as well to North America, and as the century comes to an end can be applied to other parts of the world, more recently including Japanese society—with its self-doubting, with the gradual erosion of the traditional family, and the paradoxical proliferation of new religions in the midst of growing secularism.

This loss of myth can be summarized in the words of Kearney: “we no longer *know* what truth is or what awaits us in the postmodern era when [our traditional] myths... have been destroyed. The demythologizer can only affirm what truth is *not*.”⁹ By a systematic critique of our myths (the so-called “imaginary”) we have lost truth (“the objective”) in a gradual process of self-doubt and self-erosion that was social and political before it was intellectual, technological and economic before it became reflexive. But with the loss of truth, we also lost the self. All basis for authority, and security have been subverted. And we find ourself trapped, unable to return to the safety of the old myths, but without a new home where we can abide securely.

In the words of Barthes, “if we penetrate the object, we liberate it but we destroy it; and if we acknowledge its full weight, we respect it but we restore it to a state that is still mystified.”¹⁰ Here the operant term is “respect.” It is, so to speak, an ontological awe, confidence that there is a true object mirrored in a true self. This confidence is not only the expression of a sense of security (or is it a hope that we may find security?). Confidence is barely separable from self-respect, mastery and control, which may nourish a sense of power, in short of authority—the solidity of object and self, are ultimately matters of authority, and simultaneously sources of authority. The focus of my seminars, can be seen as an attempt to address the contemporary malaise over authority, which I would describe as a disquieting state of suspension between a longing for mystifying authority and a fear of overpowering authority.

But the seminars will be further circumscribed to issues relating to Buddhist discourse and the discourse about Buddhism. For, prior to a frontal encounter with the post-modern loss of self and authority, we, as Buddhists and Buddhist scholars, would do well to stop and examine the conventions of authority that have formed and informed the object (the authoritative truth) and the subject (the authorized self) in traditions of Buddhist apologetics and Buddhist scholarship. In other

words, I will limit myself of the examination of some of the forms that authority claims take in Buddhism. This limiting of our object is essential if we wish to understand the ways in which traditional Buddhist conceptions of the recovery and preservation, dissolution and loss, of object and self can speak to and be spoken to by the cultural situations, the ideological and intellectual currents of today.

But I had also suggested that the problem of authority is not only timely, but perennial. Much in my presentation of the topic or issue of authority is made in the modern West, and exported, with its technology and values to other cultures; but the problem of authority is only a modern incarnation of a very ancient problem. I hope to demonstrate not only that it is an issue worthy of the attention of anyone living at the end of our century, but that it is in fact an issue that pervades the Buddhist tradition—to mention only one of the many religious and philosophical traditions we could study from this perspective.

But I also propose to demonstrate that the question of the ultimate source of authority permeates Buddhist discourse, and that the appeal to a foundational, unquestioned ultimate authority is in tension with a rhetoric of demythologization, iconoclasm, and individualism (yes, subjectivity and individualism) that has characterized many moments in the history of Buddhism. Of course, the cultural contexts in which Buddhism has thrived, and its religious rhetoric do not allow for a complete mapping of its own crises and conflicts of authority on to the parallel Western crisis. The reduction of the self to a linguistic construct, for instance, does not seem to have led to philosophical and cultural consequences parallel to those of the present Western crisis of self and authority. But I believe we can still argue that the Buddhist tradition, perhaps more than other traditions of Asia, has attempted to live with close analogues to these dilemmas through some of its most important doctrines.

One could make a good argument, in fact, for a long Buddhist

history of facing and negotiating times of social disintegration. In some ways, I would add, the various Buddhist traditions of demythologization and re-mythologization—from abhidharma to the denominations arising during the Kamakura period—could be understood as reaction to conditions of loss, to a series of crisis of truth, myth and authority.

Borrowing Authority from Etymology

Before I ask you to embark with me on a journey into authority in Buddhism and Buddhist studies, it might help if I describe the horizons of some of the most important concepts I wish to explore. And it might be helpful to describe those horizons as broadly as possible to allow for both divergence and overlaps.

Let me begin considering the roots and branches of this abstract notion, “authority.” We see some of them in words like *authoritarian*, *authorize*, *authorization*, and *authoritative*—some of which are used self-referentially in scholarship (e.g., “authoritative edition,” “an authority on the subject”), and most of which occur throughout the literature of and about religion (e.g., “the authority of the Papacy,” “canonical authority”). Of course, most of these usages bring to mind first of all *authority* in the sense of influence or hegemony exerted by one person or group of persons over another person or group (e.g., the priest on the laity). But I will invite my audience to reflect on the ways in which authority is something more than hegemony and power,^① on the many uses of the concept that suggest a wide semantic field that extends well beyond and under the more obvious meanings of this word.

One could begin this exploration with etymological reflection. For instance, “to authorize” is also to empower (hence authority also implies an investment or empowerment, as much as a taking away of power). Empowerment is further connected semantically with the concept of bringing to life and activating. The Latin term for authority (from which is derived the English word) is *auctōritāt-* (*auctō*

ritās), which is itself derived from the word *auctor*, “author, creator, progenitor.” This word is in turn related to the past passive participle *auctus*, “magnified,” from *augere*, “to increase.” Hence, etymologically (and by usage as well) to authorize is to empower, magnify, and create. Furthermore, authority also augments by granting validity, by making something true, or normative, hence, ultimately, by imbuing with meaning. Also pertinent are two other meanings that in English are perhaps in the realm of connotation, but which appear in Spanish and Italian as part of the core concept of authority: authority is also responsibility (in Spanish “el autor de los hechos”=the perpetrator), and dignity (in Spanish even “good character, noble demeanor”).

Giambattista Vico, one of the first proponents of a science of history (and as a corollary, the proponent of a metaphysics of truth based on a theory of the progressive evolution of culture), had no compunctions about revealing the grand ambitions behind his plan for a science of man. In *La scienza nuova* (1730), he asserts that authority is one of the central characteristics of scientific knowledge (in fact, it is the second of seven such characteristics; the first being that it is a “rational civil theology of divine providence”¹² !!). He explains the word *authority* (*autoritá*) as follows (§ 386):

Here begins also a philosophy of authority, which is another one principal aspects of this Science, taking the word “authority” in its original meaning of “property.”... The term “authors” [Italian *autori*, but referring to Latin *auctores*] was accordingly applied in Roman civil [law] to those from whom we derive the right of property [*dominio*]. And this word, [*auctor*], most certainly comes from [Greek] *autós*, meaning, [in Latin] “one’s own” [*proprius or suus ipsius*]....

This connection with property, of course, suggests to us today also that authority bestows identity, since the ownerships of property has been, until recently, part of the legal definition of a person—and even today for sure is part of the psychological definition of a person.¹³

But what are the sources of such authority? According to Vico, “authority was at first divine.” Subsequently human beings assumed the authority of free will, “the property of human nature which not even God can take from man without destroying him.” Next, reason became the ultimate source of authority and order. And reason is no other than Vico’s critical philosophy of history and his “philology”—the ultimate control on the disordered human will:

This philosophy of authority follows the rational civil theology of providence, because by means of the former’s theological proofs the latter with its philosophical [proofs] makes clear and distinct the philological ones... And with reference to the most obscure antiquity of the nations it reduces to certitude the human will, which is by nature most uncertain,...Which is as much as to say that it reduces philology to the form of a science. (§ 390)

Evidently inspired by Vico, Edward W. Said writes on authority and creative fiction, a topic that only on first glance may appear to be unrelated to the issues I wish to explore. Said takes the “author” (*auctor*) of Vico’s argument in a literary, as well as a legal sense.¹⁹ He (1975: 83) expands on the meanings of *authority* found in the *Oxford English Dictionary*. The word *authority*, he says,

suggests...a constellation of linked meanings: not only...“a power to enforce obedience,” or “a derived or delegated power,” or “a power to influence action,” or “a power to inspire belief,” or “a person whose opinion is accepted”; not only those, but a connection as well with *author*—that is a person who originates or gives existence to something, a begetter, beginner, father, or ancestor,... [An] *auctor*, according to Eric Patridge, is literally an increaser and thus a founder.

Said adds that “*auctoritas*” is production, invention, cause, in addition to meaning a right of possession. Finally, it means continuance, or a causing to continue.”

Suggestive as these reflections are, I still find them limiting. Natu-

rally, one can extend the notion of author as creator to concepts of textual authority and the authority of origins. In such usages of the term, Said's observations lead me to reflect on three of the functions of authority that I wish to explore and expand in my lectures: authority as link, and authority as empowerment.

Yet, Said's presentation is colored by two problematic assumptions.¹⁵ One of these is problematic because it is culture-specific: the assumption that authority proceeds from the individual.¹⁶ This assumption may be time-specific, rather than culture specific—it is built into Vico's genealogy of authority, though before him it was ambivalently held by a millennium of Medieval thought. Whatever the history of the assumption, Said appears to have assumed that authority is control initiated by individual will. The other assumption is perhaps universal, but no less problematic: the idea that meaning and authority derive from intention. I part ways with Said on these two points, particularly on the first. He seems to me still too attached to the notion of authorial intention and control. Thus, he defines authority as “the power of *an individual* to initiate, institute, establish—in short to begin” (emphasis mine). Still writing on the subject of the novel and still relying on unexamined Western notions of what is a literary creation, he describes the power of authorial creation by stating “that this power is an increase over what had been there previously.” In my view this is where his interests and presuppositions do not match my own. Admittedly religious authority is not immune to “paradigm shifts” and innovations; but what is most characteristic of religious authority is the fact that it is seldom, if ever, conceived as an increase over what had existed previously—if anything it is the opposite.¹⁷ I will argue subsequently that, although religious authority can change in source and target, it is conceived as founded on what does not change. In a related context, in religion an individual may use or manipulate authority, yet the source of authority is—as noted by religious persons—in that which is not individual (and in the most radical formulations of this belief,

authority is seen as derived from that which is not the self).

The same can be said about Said's third claim, that "the individual wielding this power controls its issue and what is derived therefrom." Authority is self-referential: the capacity to create the illusion that one wields power is part of the inherent power of authority. As I shall argue in the course of my lectures, authority is often gained by a diminution of power—the less one feels individual control, the greater the power of religious truth and experience.

I would argue that his second and third claim are subverted by the fourth claim, "that authority maintains the continuity of its course." For, it is in residing outside of the individual that authority finds its power and its duration. Authority exists only insofar as it is allowed to exist outside the individual. The crisis in authority that characterizes the modern and post-modern eras is in part due to our incapacity (at least in some, mostly Western, societies) to believe in truth as external to ourselves.

If I may risk a short digression: by insisting on this point I do not intend to argue that truth or authority exists outside of culture and language. On the contrary, I am arguing that authority exists outside the individual, and in his or her community—or, if we accept at least provisionally the truth claims of religion, we would have to say that authority exists outside human agency.

More fundamentally, I part ways with Said on two grounds. First I wish to point to the process of authority claims in which both he and I have engaged so far. By quoting the ancients (e. g., Vico, and presently Greek and Indian classics) and by quoting dictionaries and etymologies, both Said and I are making authority claims. This is the best proof—as if we needed any—that authority is derived from community and tradition—and, at least, rhetorically from a source outside the self. But, what is more significant—albeit equally obvious—is that authority is undermined, shaken, molested, as it were, by the possibility of alternative etymologies (meanings) and alternative traditions (transmitters

and interpreters, the ones who grant us the right to own the property of words). This is the external threat, what creates a problem for authority—but a problem that derives from the nature of authority itself. That is, the presence of the authority of other human beings is always a threat for one's own—this is the condition that Vico, and with him the modern West, evaded by proposing the higher authority of his science.

It is ultimately my concern with this issue that leads me to the themes of this seminar—not only, and not immediately, the question of what does it mean to have a world without authority, but more immediately, what does it mean to have different claims on authority, and how are these expressed (explicitly or surreptitiously) in claims on authority that we refer to with the word Buddhism. But, even more central to our concerns, I also wish to raise the question of the meaning of authority in Buddhism.

The Reception of Authority

One can begin at least the rough outlines of such exploration with alternative concepts and etymologies. A brief look at concepts of authority in other languages may help clarify in what sense I believe the concept of authority is both more diffuse (less centered in the self) and more concerned with self-erasure than suggested by Said.

Authority derives from the concept of source, and from the capacity to exclude world segments (the destruction of the Titans, to borrow Vico's metaphor). I therefore begin by seeking ways to define the limits and the sources of authority in Buddhism. The concept I seek to circumscribe, however, is something more than authority as the power that compels submission, and it is something more than authority as the solid bedrock, the source or foundation, of truth. After all, is it not taught explicitly in classical Buddhism that each one must see truth directly, and is it not taught explicitly that there are no ultimate foundations? Buddhism, many would argue, seeks to undermine,

at least some, if not all foundations, beginning with the most fundamental of all, that of the subject. I shall not begin my analysis of authority in Buddhism from that direction—although I should like to return to this problematic dimension of Buddhist claims. I shall begin by looking at authority as the power to convince or persuade in general, and by extension as the power to inspire and fill with awe. Hence one can look at a wider meaning of authority by imagining it not so much as (in fact, it often is not) coercive power as persuasive power. Thus, the Indian concept of authority can be found in the law books, and in the tradition of the great commentators and textual scholars. But it is also found in the authority of the religious teacher (for the most part presumed to have some form of individual access to the ultimate source of authority), and the tradition of persuasion and argument that seeks to understand what are reliable and valid sources of knowledge (hence of persuasion—one cannot forget the rhetorical and polemical origins of logic, Indian logic in particular). Both of these sources of authority will be examined in the course of the seminar. In the present essay I would like to limit my argument to a cursory examination of the terminology associated with these forms of authoritative imagery and discourse.

Among the valid sources of knowledge (*pramāṇa*), of course, perception and inference seem to occupy privileged position in the Indian traditions. But we find in some of the Indian schools the concept of the authoritative witness or trust-worthy testimony (*āptavacana*). This might be a textual (or rather, trans-textual), eternal, word, the *śabda* of the Mīmāṃsā. Or it might be the word of the teacher, who is reliable and trustworthy. It is often the case that the validity of testimony is said to be derivative—that it is the result of the operation of other *pramāṇa*, such as perception and inference (see, e. g., *Yogasūtra-bhāṣya*, I. 7). This idea is especially common among the Buddhists, for whom even inference is sometimes suspect. Buddhist philosophers are unforgiving in their critique of the concept of authoritative sacred

word, especially in the form of the eternal *śabda* of the Mimāṃsikas.

But this is only the surface of the systems. After all, the strongest authority is the one that is understood, but not expressed. These same philosophers distract themselves from their own assumptions by attacking the *permanence* of the sacred word, not the concept of the sacred itself. Thus, they can argue—albeit with some ambivalence—for the omniscience of their own teacher and the validity of their scriptures, reinforcing them with rational arguments, but never questioning their foundational assumptions. Notwithstanding the protestations of any Buddhist philosopher worth his (or her) salt, Buddhists do rely on a surreptitious form of *āptavacana*.¹⁸ Omniscience (*sarvajñatā*) is of course the most obvious example, but there are others, perhaps more precious because they are less obvious. The Buddha's presence, in visions, in sounds, in his name, are all forms of irreducible authority—all the more powerful because it occupies the margins of discourse and language.

Quoting a well known phrase, the *Lañkāvatāra Sūtra* explains the reluctance of the Mahāyāna Buddhist to commit himself to a definitive version of the teachings of the Buddha by simultaneously appealing to the mythical Silence of the Buddha and asserting the existence of a personal experience and an eternal reality that underlie that same silence:

The Blessed One said: “In the time from the night in which the Tathāgata awakened perfectly to the night in which he will be completely extinguished, the Tathāgata has not uttered a single syllable, nor will he ever pronounce [a single syllable]. A buddha's speaking is not speaking.” With what implied meaning was this said by the Tathāgata... that a buddha's speaking is not speaking?... I have said this, Mahāmati, implying a twofold dharma (*dharmadvayam*)... the reality of self-[realization] (*pratyātmadharmatā*) and the reality of primeval abiding (*paurāṇasthitidharmatā*).¹⁹

As explained in the text that follows, the “personal experience” of

realization is in fact the one experience of all buddhas, and it has only one object, the eternal presence of the reality of all dharmas, “the essence of being dharma” or Dharmatā.

The source of Buddhist truth, therefore, is ineffable only in the sense that it cannot be assailed by language, that it cannot be challenged, not in the sense that it is groundlessness of language. The authority of that truth is solidly grounded on a reality, albeit a reality that is not accessible to language :

Therefore, Mahāmati, a son or a daughter of good family should not be clever and persist [in understanding] meaning as if it were exactly as [presented] in words (*yathārutārthābhīniveśakuśala*), because reality is something that cannot be expressed in any syllables (*nirakṣara*). And [a son or a daughter of good family] should not be like one who looks at the finger-tip [instead of looking at the object to which the finger is pointing].

The finger is denied, but there is nevertheless something to which it is pointing. This is the pure presence, the powerful presence that cannot be expressed but can be referenced by deixis. As the sūtra itself explains, this abiding reality is in fact also the mystical person of buddhas, their own body. Hence, one can extrapolate, the impersonal reality that is experienced personally, the inexpressible that can be signaled, is also recognizable in the person of the holy, in the figure of a buddha. The Buddha is present (*pratyutpanna*), abiding (*sthita*) and internalized as that which is realized, seen in front of oneself (*sva-pratyātma-gati-gocara*).

For the Buddhist philosopher the foundation, the ultimate source of authority is therefore in the experience of those who are awakened—this is the source of the Buddha’s omniscience, the source of the truth of Dharma, nay, Dharma itself. And, again, this experience is taken to be the perfect reflection, or even embodiment of an ever present reality. It is also the ex post facto proof of the authority of presence. Although this foundational assumption is so central that it will have to be examined later in the course of these seminars, at this point suffice it

to say that the authority of validity is guaranteed by the experience of Buddhas—presumably guaranteed by the fact that they *are* Buddhas. And this is as much the transparent beauty of the Buddhist construction of authority as it is the crux of the matter and the disquiet, the trouble with Buddhist authority.

I shall not concern myself at this point with the circularity of the implicit “argument”: that an individual’s experience could be the source of supra-individual authority. This was already criticized by Kumārila many centuries ago. Rather I will only point to the importance of this circularity: the valid is valid because it is reliable (its locus, the experiencing person, is reliable), authentic, genuine; it is reliable because it is valid, true, real, abiding, beyond discourse.

Before taking the concept of presence one step further, it is also important to keep in mind, in this preliminary exploration of the etymological roots of the concept of authority, that secular concepts of influence and authoritative power are transferred to sacred conceptions. Thus the royal imagery implicit in concepts like *prabhāva*, *adhikāra*, *vāśa*, *bala*, and *aiśvarya* can be used to describe or define the attributes of buddhas and bodhisattvas. But, much like the king, the most perfect manifestation of the Buddha’s authority is in his capacity to induce submission—or, rather, in his capacity to inspire, to move, to overwhelm, to humble with awe.

Thus, at the other end of the spectrum from the discursive and content-oriented persuasion of the *pramāṇas*, is the power of the Buddha’s presence, his *adhiṣṭhāna* and *anubhāva*.² In these two terms is encapsulated an important concept of authority: the sacred is self-validated authority which validates the individual recipient of the right to own by humbling him, yes, but also by inducing a change of feeling (*anubhāva*)—shall we say it inspires? The sacred presence, moreover, also moves to action, literally “appoints” (*adhitiṣṭhati*) the observing faithful to a religious task—to the project of spirituality. In the family of terms associated with these concepts we find, then, the dimension of

authority that we missed in the literary ruminations of Said. This is the authority that is sensed as totally received, as passively acquired. It is, furthermore, the authority that is perceived (at least at the level of devotional metaphor and theological construct) as not of the self. Naturally, since the self is empowered in its humbling, basked as it were, in the aura of the awe inspiring object, the self participates in authority. But the syntax of authority remains one of passive recipient.

In the Chinese terms used to translate some of these Sanskrit notions, the double role of being humble and being empowered is associated with both sacred and royal imagery. Thus, the term 權 (*quan*), which means to weigh and to judge, but also implies to exert influence, to command respect (hence the common term for authority: 權力—*quanli/kenryoku*), is combined with 威 (*wei*=fear, awe, and as adjective, intimidating, awe-inspiring) in the compound 權威 (*quanwei/ken'i*) to mean authority, power, dignity, prestige. The authority based on communal trust is expressed by 威信 (*weixin/i-shin*), prestige, honor, authority. The Buddhist terms *adhīṣṭhāna* and *anubhāva* are sometimes translated by 威神 (*weishen*), imposing, majestic, a term that carries connotations of both royal and sacred power. Chinese 威神 (*weishen*) sometimes translates the concept of *anubhāva*, especially in the expression *buddhānubhāva*. This expression refers to what I consider to be one of the primary expressions of the Buddhist concept of authority: the persuasive power of internal conviction, expressed as the intrusion of sacred power into the individual's mind.^②

Sacred Power, Sacred meaning, and Hermeneutics

I hope I will not disappoint you by stating from the outset that my interest in the topic is not so much in the political ramifications of the question of authority, as in the moral and religious implications of the power of authority. The problem of authority as a dimension of the explicit application of political power is indeed a most interesting philosophical problem, but authority and power are more than that.

First, inseparable from authority, as two wings on a bird (to borrow an ancient Buddhist metaphor), are two forms of power: on one side the civil powers of state and society, and on the other side the power of self definition. And self definition (the self definition of communities as well as individuals) is today as vital an issue as it ever was. It is a vital issue for all of us—both my Japanese audience, and for myself. My audience, because Japan is at the crossroads—in fact, perhaps already several steps into a path that may lead to the disillusionment that has swept the modern world. For me, because I have experienced the disillusionment of the West, the disillusionment of one of its marginalized colonies, and the dilemma of freedom and authority. The question of “power” as self-power, as a form of caring for the self, is as important to me as the question of “power” as domination.

Second, both the political dimension of authority (that is to say, authority as a dimension of hegemony and domination) and the personal dimension of authority (that is, authority as a core of self-definition) are closely related to the perspective I bring to the issue of textual meanings. That is to say, the question of how do we derive meaning, or rather, the question of who knows what the meaning to be derived should be, is ultimately a question of both other-domination and self-definition—of the order and quality of hegemony and hierarchy, on the one hand, and of the nature and strength of self-boundaries, on the other. But at the moral and religious level, uncovering, clarifying, in short, defining the means by which humans arrive at authoritative meaning (which is ultimately the only meaning there is) affects the quality of authority, the quality of political orders—religious and non-religious.

As we move along in our discussions and readings, we will see that this is not different from the question of how do we construct meaning. Meaning is inextricably connected to authority and legitimation. Authenticity and truth are ultimately aspects of authoritative discourse.

The focus of the seminar, however, will be on another dimension of

authority and meaning. As already intimated in the above incursion into Asian etymologies, authority and meaning are constructed and maintained by sacred presence, by the humbling of the self to that presence, and simultaneously by the assent and ascent of the will in the presence of the holy. This dimension of authority, of course, is inextricably connected with the subterranean strata of political authority—the dispensing, wielding, engineering and exploitation of meaning. Therefore, I wish to take a brief detour to suggest ways in which meaning itself takes its own detours between surface and deep strata of authority.

The study of the meandering of meaning is what we call “hermeneutics.” This term lends itself easily to misunderstanding (not surprising for a term that wants to stand outside of understanding—a term that often bestows or preserves authority for the person invoking it). The word has become associated, perhaps through a soft reading of Gadamer, with the idea that there are no constraints to the readings of texts. I believe there are those who use the term as a facile solution to the problem created by the plurality and conflict of meanings that we must face today to a degree unknown to most societies of the past. This is the soft reading that some believe will allow them to hold on to beliefs that are otherwise threatened, to hold on to interpretations that mold the text to the reality of present values and aspirations. Others see in such readings a threat to their own, more conservative values of epistemological objectivity and certainty.

Accordingly, it is important that I distance my usage of the term from the usage of these two groups.² I use the term “hermeneutics” to refer to the critical, self-conscious, reflection on the process of acquiring and transmitting meaning. Insofar as this process reveals the hidden procedures, the subterfuges, as it were, of the quest for objective certainty and authority, hermeneutics is indeed a challenge to those who silence the plurality of voices. However, the scandalous and precarious interplay of shame, honesty, and half-truths in which *we all*

engage in our quest for authority is not justified by any hermeneutical procedure. There is a confession of arbitrariness in the unmasking of the precariousness of objectivity. But, insofar as this critical self-examination also seeks to uncover, reveal, and unmask even the quicksand upon which each one of these words rests, the hermeneutical project is also a quest for constraints. Insofar as the hermeneutical project is a quest for the sources of meaning, it is also a quest for authority, albeit a quest that often undermines authority.

Hermeneutics and philology are therefore not exact opposites, although hermeneutical reflection subverts some of the most dearly held values of traditional philology. By the same token, hermeneutics and belief are not at odds. Yet, hermeneutical reflection undermines much of what goes for philosophical certainty, and certainly much of what goes for orthodoxy and “original truth.”

A Greek Myth of Meaning

Let me tell a story, by way of illustration—or rather as a mythical argument. This is a story made of fragments of Greek stories. Paul Ricoeur (in *Freud and philosophy*) traces the origins of hermeneutical discourse to Aristotle, but then, in one of those etymological plays by which philosophers and philologists seek authority, he connects the term *hermeneutics* to its mythical roots in the Greek god Hermes.² As the messenger of the gods, Hermes was their interpreter—hence, the mythical primordial philologist.

But Hermes was not only a messenger, in the sense of one who carries words back and forth, for he also would carry the offerings of sacrifice (a much difficult type of interpretation, which reminds us of Agni’s vital priestly role). Hermes is also credited with performing the first flesh-sacrifice to the gods. Hence, if we are to think of the first interpreter of ritual as the creator of ritual, perhaps we can also think of the interpreter as the creator of meanings.

Lest we confuse mediation with idealized “communication and under-

standing,” the story tells us that Hermes was crafty and deceitful. This does not mean that he lacked charm, after all, he was a skillful musician “ingenious, eloquent, and persuasive.”

The connection of Hermes with deceit is not only amusing, it suggests something about a certain attitude towards knowledge, and communication. When Zeus discovered Hermes’s trickery, Hermes brazenly asked Zeus to appoint him messenger of the gods. The complexity of his duties, and privileges, is expressed in the following dialogue :

[Hermes said to Zeus,] “...make me your herald, and I will be responsible for the safety of all divine property, and never tell lies, though I cannot promise always to tell the truth.”

“ That would not be expected of you,” said Zeus. “ But your duties would include the making of treatises, the promotion of commerce, and the maintenance of free rights of way for travellers on any road in the world...”

That the herald of the gods, the protector of divine property, treatises, commerce, and rights of way should not be expected to tell the truth is either a cosmic absurdity or an insightful observation regarding the nature of knowledge and meaning. I take it to be both : it suggests the scandal, the disquiet that is implicit in the need to guarantee truth, and as such embodies the cosmic absurdity that truth is necessary in part because there are lies. At the same time, the story suggests to me the sacredness of the absurdity—that the illusion is itself divine, that the groundless trust is itself sacred.

But the task of transmitting and preserving meaning also includes the art of divination, for

Afterwards the Thriae showed Hermes how to foretell the future from the dance of pebbles in a basin of water ; and he himself invented both the game of knucklebones and the art of divining by them. Hades also engaged him as his herald, to summon the dying gently and eloquently, by laying the golden staff upon their eyes.

He then assisted the Three Fates in the composition of the Alphabet, invented astronomy, the musical scale, and the arts of boxing and gymnastics, weights and measures, and the cultivation of the olive tree...[⊗]

This allusion to a Greek myth, is meant to serve four interrelated purposes in the present essay. First, it is meant to illustrate the breadth of the concept of “the art of the messenger,” that is the complexity of the concept of the transmission and reception of meaning. Second, it is also meant to hint at the interconnections between meaning and other important categories of interpretive discourse: authority, passage, text, ritual and order, prediction and divination, death and deception. As part of this item, the story also suggests the endless variety of forms in which meaning—hence, persuasion and authority—can be embodied.

Third, the introduction of the Greek myth is also meant as an illustration of the use of a quasi-sacred symbol to give authority to secular claims on meaning—a roundabout way of expressing some presuppositions and expectations of these lectures.... And a roundabout way of pointing to my own meanderings, especially in the pursuit of the elusive authoritative narrative that gives meaning.

Fourth, and closely related to the third intention, is the matter of establishing both a contrast and a connection with some of the Western perspectives that underlie my arguments and traditional Buddhist perspectives—which I will presently illustrate with the appropriate narratives.

Buddhist Myths of Meaning

This fourth purpose can be highlighted with contrasting parallels. I have already mentioned the importance of presence and omniscience as figures for the supra-individual qualities of authority and meaning. I will return to these two points later in the lectures as both of them are central to Buddhism, and to the Buddhist encounter with the West.

In this paper, and by way of approaching a conclusion, I will focus on three aspects in the Hermes myth that can be used as foils or contrasting background for a consideration of several Buddhist myths of meaning.

The three aspects that concern me here are death, deception, and the receipt of meaning. The protection and transmission of meaning requires that some constraint be imposed on deception. At the very least (and most commonly) one must act in ways that signal honesty, even if the grounds for honesty are not self evident. Yet, death, as a reminder of passage, fragility, finality, transformation, and decay, is also a reminder that meaning itself is fragile. In the Hermes myth, the terror of the loss of meaning (through death or deception) is transformed into the pranks of a divine messenger of doubtful credibility.

Buddhism, on the other hand, offers us the heroic figure of a man who defeats the terror of death (technically of birth and death, but more about this later). But, the Buddhism that forms the focus of this seminar, textual Buddhism, is an extremely sanitized form of ideology. The sociopolitical causes of this process of sanitation have been discussed many times, beginning with Weber; but the process of abstraction leaves much intact, after all, the ground upon which the rational edifice is built cannot be removed. Hence, with the image of the Victorious (Jina) comes the image of the defeated, Māra. As the embodiment of desire, deception, and death, Māra represents the forces that Buddha crushes and routes with all the solemnity a human being is capable of.

In this contrast we can see the degree to which the Buddha's presence, the narrative of his struggle, the image of his serene countenance and straight back, all exude authority... victory over deception and death, hence guaranteed reception and transmission of one form of meaning—the meaning guaranteed by transcendence.

It has come to happen, then, that early in the history of Buddhism death and deception have been doubly displaced—first by the pre-Bud-

dhistic doctrine of transmigration, death and deception became metaphysical, rather than personal. This is the abstraction that creates the theodicy called by Max Weber “the most sophisticated theodicy” in the history of the world.

Second, by the introduction of the figure of Māra, and by his total defeat, death and deception are banished from the circle of enlightenment. But let us not forget that one of Māra’s favorite apparitions is that of a monk, or even the form of the Buddha himself. Thus, deception returns, doubt returns to haunt the Buddhist community. And with doubt comes the inescapable question of authority and meaning.

Canonical Buddhism lacks a figure as ambiguous as Hermes. Māra takes upon itself, appropriates, as it were, all of death and deception, whereas Buddha, as the centrally sacred, the ideal being, reserves for himself omniscience, unerring truth, and therefore absolute authority. Hence, the role of the messenger is displaced, if not dispensed with—at least temporarily. When truth is isolated, objectified, and embodied in one person, truth can speak for itself—at least within the place and time of the sacred narrative. As long as the direct experience is accessible, and as long as the words of the Master are accessible, meaning needs no interpreter.... or so it seems. For, in the first place, the imaginal world of the sacred narrative is in some way a confession of the absence of truth as object, its presence as narrative, its detachment in the distance of the origins and the distance of an isolated absolute. Secondly, the direct experience and the *ipsissima verba* call for interpretation the moment they are experienced. They call for interpretation in part because the power of authority is precisely in the absence and detachment of the absolute, it is silence, so that, paradoxically, the awesome power of the ineffable is also the source of the weakening power of exegesis.

At least in principle the Buddha is his own messenger of the sacred, and messenger of the self, and as such appears to be a mediator that has nothing to mediate. The Buddha as the one who both sees and

tells the truth does not need an interpreter. He embodies presence.²⁹

The problem of mediating authority and meaning arises only when (or, to be more honest, I should say “arises immediately=the moment”) the Buddha’s presence, or silence, or words call for an explanation. For, even if, within sacred narrative, the Buddha himself explains himself, he himself creates the plurality of interpretations. In the case of Buddhism, in fact, we have perhaps a more honest hermeneutics and exegesis within the revelatory text itself: witness the many doctrines and myths that speak of skillful means, of the plurality of teachings adapted to the needs of different living beings. Such narrative and doctrinal statements can be seen as a recognition of the nature of meaning itself—plurality, ambiguity, and opposition as essential to conveyance and mediation of meanings. The cynic (in whose company I do not count myself, but whose voice I take into account) could see in such stories either an apologetic ploy or an inability to contain the plurality of meanings. Even if we concede this last point, however, the fact remains that Buddhist tradition has canonized hermeneutic pluralism, tying it masterfully and very appropriately with the dignified silence of the authoritative figure, the ineffability of truth, and the diversity of human aspirations.

The Philologist and the Buddha

The Buddhist canonization of pluralism and ambiguity of the authoritative voice, however, is always defended, propped, as it were, with an ultimate appeal to orthodoxy. The philologist, on other hand, is, at least in theory, exempt from any obligations to orthodoxy. Thus, the philologist would be the first one to note that in the cacophony of canons, languages, schools, and commentaries, the scandal, the disquiet of authority shines through in Buddhism as it does in other traditions. But, as suggested in the previous paragraphs, philologists do not invent philology, the believer, nay, even the Buddha, generate the task of philology the moment they express their truth (I would argue, in fact,

that it occurs the moment they contemplate that which the *Lañkāvatāra* calls the *pratyātma-dharmatā*).

In other words, the Buddha became the first philologist the moment he spoke. The claims of silence, alas, are “claims”... The authority of silence, alas, is a comment on language. Paradoxically then, the seer, the awakened one, sees authority itself, yet cannot escape the message of authority. He cannot avoid becoming a Hermes of sorts—with the danger of deception, yes, but above all with the scandal of uncertainty. The philologist, who secretly may aspire to know the mind of the text, seeks the unmoving pivot, the unmovable mover, the foundation for a doctrine of no-foundation. But in this quest he is not only forgetting the ground on which he stands (language), he is also forgetting that in seeking the authority of origins (the foundation and the source) he has relinquished his own power to know meaning, to recognize authority.

The critique of the text, can be followed or preceded by a critique of self, a humbling before the authority of doubt and uncertainty. That the experience of critical thought can be a form of authority that undermines authority is nothing new. The Buddhist tradition has inklings of this notion. This may sound like a paradox, but it is not. The reason authority in itself is disquieting, the reason why the investigation of meaning is doomed from the beginning, is precisely the humbling reality of uncertainty and distance.

In Said’s discussion of authority which I mentioned and quoted earlier, he reflects on the illusion or shame of the authority of the written text. He speaks of the problems inherent in this illusion as the “molestations” of authority. Without delving too deeply into what Said means by “molestation,” I will use the term sparingly³⁰. I rather substitute the term with one or both of two terms that express other dimensions of the illusion: the humbling of authority and the circle of authority. Or I will refer to the disquiet and the scandal of authority.

By using these four terms I wish to remind my audience of four dimensions of authority. Although all four can be generalized, the first two I derive from my reflections of Buddhist forms of authority. The “humbling of authority” (that is *by* authority) reminds me of the fact that authority needs the other, that which or the person whom we approach with awe and reverence. The emphasis is not on the abasement that may accompany the gestures of reverence, but on the loss of self that is demanded by the aw[e]-ful[l] and the sublime. The circle of authority, on the other hand, emphasizes the role of the one who is humbled. The circle intimates not only the self-validating power of authority but also the validation of authority in the observing, receiving, humbled self.

The disquiet of authority refers to the fear of losing authority—a fear that manifests itself in a wide range of forms, from authoritarian behavior to the emotions of the scholar writing a review, from the feeling of discomfort, mortification, in short, molestation that results from the preconscious knowledge of the fragility of authority and the authorized self. The scandal of authority refers to the many paradoxes that constitute and sustain authority, from the circle of authority to the death of the author, from the arrogance of authority to the fears of the disquiet of authority.

In the course of these seminars, I will invite my audience to explore with me the foundations and modalities of authority in Buddhism and Buddhist scholarship. Whereas the myth of authority is based on the isolation of an autonomous, invariant source, the examination of authority entails the investigation of relationships and change. To investigate authority is to experience the disquiet of authority. But, paradoxically, Buddhism itself has a long tradition of critical inquiry, a long history of privileging the authority of self-examination. In this sense Buddhism too shares in the scandal of authority.

It may be that in the self-undermining of Buddhist authority we will find new meanings to Buddhist authority, and it may be that we will

not. Critical inquiry can be humbling and humbled. Will the investigation of Buddhism and Buddhist scholarship also prove humbling, and humbled...? And will Buddhism itself come out humbled?

The Wealth and Poverty of Philology

By the same token, we can expect that the critical investigation of philology will uncover the underlying disquiet of authority. I would argue, in fact, that the quest for “origins” and “originals,” which is the guiding principle of historical and textual philology, is a quest for an escape from the disquiet produced by the fragility of authority. The philologist returns from the long nights of textual research with a treasure, “the original,” but the quest for this treasure is motivated by the fear that the plurality of meanings will cause the dissolution of truth. This fear is philology’s greatest danger, its inherent poverty, at the same time that it is its greatest strength.

As a strength, it embodies respect for the authority of the past, and a careful concern for not disturbing the strata discovered by philological archeology. As a weakness, this fear is the impulse to rearrange the strata, the impulse to privilege one stratum over the other. And thus philology has its own fundamentalism, which presents itself as the light of correctness, but which projects, rather than erases, the shadows of reckless abandon, careless reading, and religious enthusiasm. In its extreme form correctness of reading is no less an attempt to take possession of truth, no less an attempt to exclude other voices except that of one’s own self-will, than religious enthusiasm.

It is by accident that a Greek expression meaning “love of words” was coined in order to describe the task of philology^③. The issue is not only that we may imitate those who the *Laṅkāvatāra* says are “clever and persist [in understanding] meaning as if it were exactly as [presented] in words” (*yathārutārthābhīniveśakuśala*). That danger is indeed very real, but we may encounter other perils. For in our passionate quest for certainty we confuse words and self-love, words

and love for others. But, what is more of a scandal for philology, in our quest for certainty we confuse the fixation of words with the establishment of authority, the clarity of words with the privilege of truth. In this philology (and, by extension, Buddhist studies) takes on the role of the Buddhist and follows the patterns set by its canons.

The manner in which this happens, and the significance of this mutual appropriation of roles will be the theme of the seminars I will lead. As I think about these seminars, and write on the topics I outline below, I wonder again and again on the task of the philologist, and on the future of Buddhist studies... and Buddhism, in an age when truth seems to elude us. And I wonder what is the best way to understand the dictum of Vico that I have used as the epigraph to this paper. I invite you to reflect on both its surface meanings and on the underlying problems. The complete passage (§ 138), freely translated, reads :

Philosophy contemplates reason, whence comes the science of truth.

Philology observes the authority of human pronouncements
(*arbitrio*), whence comes consciousness of what is certain.[®]

Whose consciousness of what certainty? Philologists are, according to Vico, “all the grammarians, historians, and critics who concern themselves with the knowledge of the languages and deeds of peoples.” I can only wonder if perhaps it would be better to read (or misread, for at this point the difference is no longer pertinent) these wise words as their own undoing : philology observes the authority of the human will and the human voice, but all human voices create consciousness of the certain... and the certain arises among many voices. Philology then is the great unmasker, lifting the disguise of human consciousness, even as it dresses human beings in the motley garb of a plurality of human voices.

How then is a Buddhist to make sense of the possibilities and multiplicities of human deeds and languages in general, and at the same time make sense of the possibilities of Buddhist deeds and languages ?

In other words, what is there to be said in the common domain (*gocara*) lying between Buddhism, Buddhist Studies, and the humanities? How can a Buddhist be a philologist and how can a philologist study Buddhism? What sorts of claims are those of the philologist who believes he can discover meaning in Buddhist texts? What sorts of claims are the claims of the Buddhist who believes he can use philology to recover or preserve meaning? Whose authority is this? Whose molestation?

Appendix : The Ōtani Seminar

Since this article is being published partly as an announcement of the seminar, it seemed to me appropriate to append to the present lecture an outline or plan of the series—to serve as a “syllabus” to the course.

General description of topic

I am interested in the question of how one constructs meaning in the presence and in the absence of authority. But I am also interested specifically in the Buddhist tradition. Buddhism and Buddhist scholarship, therefore, serve as instances of the uses of authority generally. But, at the same time, the general question of authority is used as a pre-text for my understanding of ways in which we can make sense of Buddhism.

For instance, I seek to understand why we quote Buddhist scriptures, and what do we mean when we claim to be talking about “Buddhism”—whether we do so in the cautious language of the scholar concerned with “textual authority,” or with the commitment of one who would quote “the words of the Master,” and whether it is the Buddha “himself” or another, living, Master that we use as the source of our own authority.

These issues are of course closely related to the question of religious experience, especially so-called “direct” or “unmediated” experiences. What do we mean, and what do we seek to achieve when we refer to

“the experience of enlightenment”? Why do we feel the need to demonstrate the truth of particular textual interpretations when, at the same time, some among us claim that the ultimate source of authority is ineffable and personal?

Furthermore, I wish to explore the ways in which scholars make use of the discourse of authority when they speak about Buddhism. Is it possible to escape the trap of authority masquerading as history, the trap of fact or origin serving the functions of “truth”? In what sense does knowing the origin entail knowing the truth?

Lastly, towards the end of the series, I will explore with you the problem of the need for authority. How is it possible to maintain some semblance of communication and meaning once a foundational authority is subverted (by time or philosophical argument)? What form of language can persuade, restrain, and bestow meaning? And can such language ever be critical, honest, and self-limiting?

Plan of the workshops

In 1993, I will deliver six lectures, each followed by discussions of the lectures and the recommended readings:

A. General introduction

1. Lecture 1—published above as an introductory article

B. Two introductory topical lectures

2. Lecture 2: *The Voice of the Master*—On the question of authority

3. Lecture 3: *The Presence of the Book*—On the text as authoritative

The theme presented in these two lectures will then be developed in the following four:

C. Forms of self-evidence

4. Lecture 4: *The Authority of Silence*—On the claims of unmediated experience

5. Lecture 5: *The Authority of Paradox*—On Madhyamaka and the oppositions of language

6. Lecture 6: *Source is Foundation*—On the authority of origins
 In 1994, I will continue with the same general theme, but I will then discuss five additional aspects of Buddhist claims to authority:

A. Self-evidence revisited

1. Lecture 1: *Senses of the Spirit*—On the authority of visions and immediacy.

B. Autonomy, change and invariance

2. Lecture 2: *The Constraints of Freedom*—On the authority of autonomy and liberation

3. Lecture 3: *Repeated Truth*—On the authority of performance and rehearsal

4. Lecture 4: *Timeless Reflection*—On the authority of memory and omniscience

C. Surrendering the self

5. Lecture 5: *The Limits of Acceptance*—The authority of compassion and suffering

A final lecture will summarize both workshops and discuss.

6. Lecture 6: *Self-consuming Words*—On the authority of self-transformation

Notes

- ① The *Seconda scienza nuova*. Vico, 1730, § 138.
- ② I have agreed to allow the publication of a draft of this paper before the beginning of the lecture series partly as a way of introducing the series and its topics to my colleagues in Japan. The paper is still an integral part of the lecture series, however, and stands alone only as any introductory piece could be said to stand alone.
- ③ The term is Gregory Schopen's, in his essay "Archaeology and Protestant presuppositions in the study of Indian Buddhism." *History of Religions*, 31, 1–23.
- ④ The notion of proper historical methodology has been challenged recently. See, for instance, Keith Jenkins, *Re-thinking history*, London: Routledge, 1991.
- ⑤ The term "scholastic" is used here as a general term for the rational-

izations of culture, belief, and ideology that are produced by educated elites. Hence, the term covers both the authors of the “shastric” (*sāstrika*) tradition and the modern scholar.

- ⑥ M. Foucault, *L'archéologie du savoir*, Paris: Gallimard, 1969; *The order of things: An archeology of the human sciences*, London: Tavistock, 1970. Pierre Bourdieu, Génèse et structure du champ religieux, *Revue française de sociologie*, 12 (1971), 295-334; Le langage autorisé: Note sur les conditions sociales de l'efficacité du discours rituel, *Actes de la recherche en sciences sociales*, 5-6 (1975), 183-190 [English version in the next item]; *Language and symbolic power*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard, 1991; and *The logic of practice*, Stanford, 1990 (originally Paris, 1980). Also, D. LaCapra, Culture and ideology: From Geertz to Marx, in *Soundings in critical theory* (pp. 133-154), Ithaca: Cornell, 1989.
- ⑦ The workshop focuses primarily on the problem of authority *and* meaning, abstracting authority, at least provisionally, from the quest for a privileged claim to authenticity and finality.
- ⑧ As I will argue presently, we who practice the métier of Buddhist studies should look more closely at our own feet, in other words, at the ground on which we stand... the hidden motives and agendas, and the cultural presuppositions of our scholarship. But the same can be said of Western critical theory and Western reflections on the hermeneutics of meaning and authority: they too need to reexamine their presuppositions. In a different context I have been as critical of Western methodological fashions (and their culture-bound presuppositions) as I am of Buddhist studies. See my comments on Faure's *Rhetoric of immediacy* (typescript of a panel presentation for the November 1992 meeting of the American Academy of Religion), and my article on Jung's “Orientalism” in D. Lopez's forthcoming volume on the topic (*Curators of the Buddha*). It is possible to argue that the ephemeral character of intellectual fashions in the West reflects creative ferment. I would not deny that it does. Still, the mercurial rise and fall of ideas (witness the short duration of our interest in Gadamerian hermeneutics and structuralism, for instance) may also be symptomatic of an intellectual tradition too afraid to commit itself, an intellectual tradition that can make grandiloquent pronouncements of the world outside academia only because it truly has very little connection to that world.
- ⑨ Richard Kearney, describing the way Barthes and Foucault conceive the post-modern predicament, in *The wake of imagination* (Minneapolis: University

of Minnesota Press, 1988), p. 273.

- ⑩ Roland Barthes, *Mythologies*, as quoted in Kearney, loc. cit.
- ⑪ On this point see the insightful reflections of LaCapra in the article referenced above note ⑥.
- ⑫ Vico, § 385: “...quindi questa Scienza incomincia, per tal principal aspetto, ad essere una teologia civile ragionata della provvidenza.”
- ⑬ Note the similarity with the Buddhist semantic cluster of *aham*, *mama*, *ātman*, *ātmiya*, and *parigraha*. Part of the implicit argument is that, in spite, or even because of, the Buddhist metaphysical critique of the reality of these concepts, the Buddhist is still generating a concept of authority, and hence a sense, if not a concept, of private property, as it were. I interpret the continuous attempts to reestablish or redefine no-self in Buddhist philosophy as so many recognitions of the inability of the denial of the self to dispense with concepts of authority that entail a sense of self.
- ⑭ As I will also play on the ambiguities of Vico’s “philology” in the latter part of this essay.
- ⑮ In all fairness to Said, I must note that the assumptions are useful, and, as I intend to argue in subsequent lectures, necessary. But to me these assumptions are part of the molestation of Western critical theory.
- ⑯ Above I have argued that authority claims bolster or prop the individual. This is *not the same thing* as saying that authority derives from the individual. I would argue that the strongest authority is the one that derives from no human being at all, the second strongest the one that derives from the community.
- ⑰ And I suspect there might be ways in which this is true of creation in general—that its greatest suasive power and aesthetic appeal might lie in its capacity to share in that which is not individual, particular, personal, or new.
- ⑱ I will address this problem in much more detail, and with some concrete examples, in the second and third lectures of the series.
- ⑲ Bunyiu Nanjio, ed., *The Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra* (pp. 142-143). Kyoto: Otani University Press, 1956, Bibliotheca Otaniensis, vol. 1.
- ⑳ Op. cit., p. 196.
- ㉑ The connection between *adhiṣṭhāna* and wonder-working will not escape the reader who is familiar with Mahāyāna sūtra literature. This connection is indeed most significant for our understanding of the way Buddhism constructs authority. I shall return to this issue in my lecture on myth

and authority.

- ②② The term is also closely associated with concepts associated with thau-maturgic powers such as 神通, and ultimately with concepts associated with meditation and the power of the mind.
- ②③ I call the attention of my readers to the operations that I am myself carrying out at this point. These are typical strategies of authority. First, I *create* two opposing groups (insofar as these are caricature-like depictions of these groups, I am inventing them). Then, I distance myself from the two groups—which, after all, are almost allegorical representations of two extremes that exist in me as well.
- ②④ From the adjective *herméneutikos*, “skilled in interpreting,” itself from a verb *herméneuō*, “to interpret, to make clear,” also related to *herméneús*, “interpreter,” and *herméneia*, “interpretation,” but also, “word, speech, eloquence.”
- ②⑤ Robert Graves, *The Greek myths* (2 vols., New York: George Braziller, 1959), vol. 1, p. 65.
- ②⑥ Graves, loc. cit.
- ②⑦ For a different reading of the myth, see Norman O. Brown, *Hermes the thief: The evolution of a myth*. New York: Vintage, 1969 (reprint). This study emphasizes the role of Hermes as trickster.
- ②⑧ Graves, loc. cit.
- ②⑨ At this point there is no need to comment on this term except to remind the reader of its more recent use in the work of J. Derrida (*De la grammatologie*, Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 1967; Différance, in *Marges de la philosophie*, Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 1972). My use of the term intends to be descriptive of the relationship of Buddha (as idea, vision, and icon) to the faithful. As I argue already in this first essay, underlying this presence is also the presence of a foundational reality. But since at least some Buddhist philosophers would agree that this is not presence of a thing in itself as much as a particular transformation in the believers consciousness, I focus here more on that sense of presence. Of course, such philosophical explanations can be used surreptitiously to posit precisely the kind of extra-linguistic reality Derrida is trying to describe with the term presence—witness the quotations from the *Lañkāvatāra* above. At this point in my argument, however, I do not wish to evoke Derrida’s peculiar use of the terms; I will do so later in the course of my lectures, highlighting then the differences, as well as the overlap, between sacred consciousness,

sacred presence, and ontological pre-sence.

- ⑩ From the point of view of American English, this is a poor choice of words. This idea is that the authority of creation (specifically that of the writer of fiction) is not a trouble free privilege, but rather a major embarrassment and annoyance. For, authority is based on an illusion (Said, pp. 84–92). It refers (to use some of Said’s own terms) to the bother, the responsibility, the prodding, and the jolt that the writer feels when he becomes conscious of his task, especially of the sham entailed by his task.
- ⑪ As a term for a particular approach to the study of texts, the word *philology* is of recent coinage, probably going back only to the work of Friedrich August Wolf (second half of the eighteenth century). In Classical Greek a *philó-logos* was someone who loved talking, not some one who was interested in the study of ancient texts. As a matter of fact, the term denotes a person who enjoyed arguing, discoursing, or discussing, more a dialectician than a scholar. On the role of philology in the creation of the Western (and Eastern, for that matter) view of the Orient, see E. Said, *Orientalism*, New York: Vintage, 1979.
- ⑫ In this passage the word *arbitrio* is ambiguous. Its semantic range includes “will” (even capricious human will) as well as “judgement.” In the translation of Bergin and Fisch, this is translated as “human voice”—Thomas Goddard Bergin and Max Harold Fisch, trans., *The new science*, of Giambattista Vico, translated from the 3rd ed., 1744. Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 1948.