

The Question of Primitive Buddhism in the Closing Works of Stanisław Schayer

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Translator's Note

This is a translation of Constantin Regamey's article "Le problème du bouddhisme primitif et les derniers travaux de Stanisław Schayer" that was first published in the Polish journal *Rocznik Orientalistyczny* in 1957.¹ The issue included several contributions compiled to celebrate the work of the Polish Indologist Stanisław Schayer (1899–1941). Constantin Regamey (1907–1982) himself was by origin part Swiss and part Russian.² He studied in Poland under Schayer and later relocated to Lausanne. For the conceptual background to the present article see especially his *Buddhistische Philosophie*,³ a bibliographical tour de force with analytical import in which he contrasted the approaches of what he termed the Anglo-German, the Russian, and the Franco-Belgian schools of Buddhist studies. Regamey wrote that Schayer's methodological suggestions continue to be up-to-date and of interest for fruitful research, and this judgment may be as valid today as at his time of writing. In a nutshell, the approach under consideration suggests that certain features typical of the Mahayana are likely to have been present in early Buddhism and were not later accretions.

The original text of the article includes several lengthy quotations in German that have also been translated into English for the reader's convenience.

¹ Vol. 21 (1957), pp. 37–58.

² His surname usually appears without an acute accent, and he should not be confused with the artist Félix Régamey who accompanied Émile Guimet on his journeys in Japan.

³ In the series *Bibliographische Einführungen in das Studium der Philosophie* (Bern: A. Francke, 1950).

In general, original conventions have been retained, although bibliographical references in the notes have been completed where feasible. Similar considerations apply to terminology. Words such as “Absolute” sometimes remain capitalized depending on where they appear, as was usual at the time. Similarly, although writers might now prefer to speak of the problem of “original” or “early” Buddhism, the term “primitive” (*primitif*) in the phrase “primitive Buddhism” has been retained because it was widely used at the time both in French and English. The term “precanonical Buddhism” was Schayer’s preference and has a precision of its own.



PROMINENT among the questions which drew the attention of Stanisław Schayer during the closing years of his academic life was the problem of the reconstruction of primitive Buddhism. In the spectrum of works devoted to this controversial subject, Schayer’s “precanonical Buddhism”⁴ sided clearly with the “Franco-Belgian school” which was represented by Jean Przyluski, Louis de la Vallée Poussin, and their disciples, and supported in Germany by A. Weller and in England by A. B. Keith. This school, in contrast with that of Rhys Davids, Oldenberg, Hardy, and Winternitz, and also with that of Stcherbatsky, refused to consider the Pali Canon or Hinayana scholasticism as a faithful reflection of the teaching of the Buddha. Instead it sought to reconstruct precanonical doctrine on the basis of all available sources and by so doing it set up an image of primitive Buddhism which diverged notably from that to which the works of the older Anglo-German school have accustomed us. Regarded in this perspective, primitive Buddhism no longer appeared as a “purified” and rationalized extract of the canonical doctrines but as a religion of which several essential features recalled the Great Vehicle. It is clearly incontestable that in the 1930s these revisionist tendencies had the upper hand.

The war was to interrupt this work of revision in that it was a time when international academic contacts came to a halt. The resumption of contacts brought with it a significant readjustment in the field. The divergences between the two extreme tendencies were considerably reduced, although at the same time a general reversion to the older positions was in evidence. The German school, having been on the defensive before

⁴ *Archiv Orientalni* 7, no. 1/2 (1935), pp. 131–32.

the war,⁵ now went on the attack. While accepting a number of secondary results from the research of the Franco-Belgian school, most German authors considering the problem of ancient Buddhism took up in principle the ideas, and above all the methods, of Oldenberg, Pischel, and Geiger.⁶ Apart from the writings of H. von Glasenapp, to which we will return, we may refer in this regard to articles by Manfred Mayrhofer⁷ and Erich Frauwallner's *Geschichte der indischen Philosophie*.⁸ This latter, eminent author, commenting on his own account of ancient Buddhism, declares without beating about the bush:

My presentation of the teaching of the Buddha will seem out-of-date to many because it does not follow the trends which have been dominant in occidental Buddhist studies in the last thirty years. But in scholarly work, in my opinion, what is most recent is not always the best or most correct and it is for good reasons that I have not followed these trends.⁹

At the same time a partial abandonment of older positions is evidenced from the other side. Étienne Lamotte¹⁰ professes a more moderate scepticism

⁵ M. Winternitz, "Kann uns der Palikanon etwas über den älteren Buddhismus und seine Geschichte lehren?," *Studia Indo-Iranica* (1931) (*Ehrengabe für W. Geiger*), pp. 63–72; and "Problems of Buddhism," *Visva-Bharati Quarterly* 2, part 1 (1936), pp. 41–56. See also K. Seidenstücker, "Frühbuddhismus," *Zeitschrift für Buddhismus* 9 (1931), pp. 193–259.

⁶ As far as I know, the only postwar German publications which clearly diverge from this dominant tendency are G. Mensching, *Gott und Mensch* (Berlin: Vieweg Verlag, 1948), and Herbert Günther, *Das Seelenproblem im älteren Buddhismus* (Konstanz: Weller, 1949). These base the reconstruction of ancient Buddhism on translations or forced interpretations of Pali texts that, though some of Günther's general conclusions are plausible, do not stand up to philological criticism.

⁷ Cf. the very traditionalist account of Buddhism in the introduction to his *Handbuch des Pali* (Heidelberg: Carl Winter, 1951), p. 15ff; and the article "Einsicht" published in the neo-Buddhist Theravada journal *Vierteljahrshefte für Buddhismus* 5 (Buddhistischer Verlag Kreuzlingen, 1952), pp. 34–41, where the author proposes a "middle way" between the "pan-Pali-ism" of the old school and the extremism of the innovators. Cf. also Mayrhofer's article "Eine neue Darstellung der urspünglichen Buddhalehre" ["A New Account of the Original Buddhist Teaching"] in the same journal, 5 (1952), pp. 103–8. [This article is referred to below as "Mayrhofer 1952".]

⁸ E. Frauwallner, *Geschichte der indischen Philosophie*, vol. 1 (Salzburg: Otto Müller Verlag, 1953).

⁹ Frauwallner 1953, p. 464.

¹⁰ Cf. for example É. Lamotte, "La critique d'interprétation dans le bouddhisme," *Annuaire de l'Institut de philologie et d'histoires orientales et slaves* 9 (1949), pp. 341–61.

with regard to the Pali tradition than his teacher de la Vallée Poussin. The postwar French and English buddhologists, without sharing the confidence of German authors with regard to this tradition, nevertheless prefer to abstain from hypothetical reconstructions of primitive Buddhism which diverge from canonical doctrine. Their attitude is well expressed in the words of Jean Filliozat:

If one takes indiscriminate account of all the divisions of all schools or sects of all times, some of which profess quite aberrant ideas, their common basis consists of rather little. If on the other hand one concentrates on the most important and ancient traditions, their fundamental agreement is evidently quite broad and is so detailed as to permit a theoretical reconstruction of primitive Buddhism. Such a reconstruction would however remain purely ideal. It would appear in the form of a system of concordances between the systems. Thus one would never exactly arrive at primitive Buddhism in the true sense of the word, that is, at the very thought of the Buddha. One would have a representation of it in systematic form, in other words in just such a form that the Buddha never gave to his teaching, offered as it was in separate pronouncements. Furthermore, it is possible that all our sources have lost certain primitive details which would then always be lacking in the restoration. One would not even arrive at the Buddhism of the primitive community; for just like their master they did not construct a doctrinal ensemble in systematic form. It contented itself with assembling the words of the Buddha as faithfully as seemed possible by collecting up witnesses and plausible reconstructions. . . . The canons of the diverse schools were however not all edited at the same time or in closed milieus. Secondary harmonizations may have occurred through mutual borrowings between the teachings of these schools. The itinerant lifestyle of the monks favored exchanges, emulation, and imitation between groups. It would therefore still be hazardous to claim that all that is common to the most ancient sources known to us issued entirely from one original stock. Instead of searching for such material by an arbitrary system of concordances, *it is better to take as a descriptive type the doctrine effectively attested by the best known school, namely that of the Theravadins in the Pali tradition.*¹¹ This can be complemented by signalling the existence

¹¹ Emphasis added by the writer [Regamey].

of parallel data in the related schools based on Sanskrit (or Tibetan) with due citation of the relevant technical vocabulary, and these schools themselves are to be studied in terms of their own potentially specific characteristics.¹²

This pragmatic approach, incidentally quite justified in any manual intended for teaching purposes in which personal or risky hypotheses should be avoided, amounts to agnosticism with regard to that subject for which we possess no direct evidence. And the choice of the Pali tradition as a basis for the description of the most ancient phase of Buddhism should not be understood here as an expression of the conviction that it is the most authentic tradition. This choice is only dictated by pedagogical considerations in that the Pali tradition is the most complete and the best known of the ancient evidence. While starting from very different premises, Edward Conze, author of the most original monograph on Buddhism published in recent times,¹³ arrives at a similar result. Wishing to present a lively overall image of Buddhism, he frankly admits that he does not know what the “original message” of the Buddha was, and treats all the presentations of doctrine documented in the course of the centuries as equally valuable sources. Thus, he leaves the more historical problem of how to reconstitute the precanonical teaching completely to one side.¹⁴

It might seem that today, from either point of view, efforts to reconstruct Buddhism behind the canonical sources are condemned to failure, or at least to being set aside as unprovable. It is however interesting to remark that of all the authors cited so far, the one who protests most energetically against these efforts, Erich Frauwallner, is at the same time the one who speaks the most of the teaching of the Buddha, and indeed gives a novel interpretation of it. Before considering the results of his research it may be underlined that Frauwallner’s objections against “innovators”¹⁵ are directed—albeit in a very general fashion—against the Leningrad school and against certain theses of Przyluski and de la Vallée Poussin, while the ideas advanced by

¹² *L’Inde Classique: Manuel des études indiennes*, vol. II (Paris and Hanoi: École française d’Extrême-Orient, 1953), p. 516ff.

¹³ E. Conze, *Buddhism: Its Essence and Development* (Oxford: Cassirer, 1951). (French translation by Marie-Simone Renou: *Le Bouddhisme dans son essence et son développement*; Paris: Payot, 1952.)

¹⁴ However, if only by the fact that he considers the Mahayana to be a development of the primitive doctrine and not as a degeneration or an ideological revolution, Conze links up indirectly to the prewar Franco-Belgian school.

¹⁵ Frauwallner 1953, pp. 464–66.

Schayer are not even mentioned.¹⁶ It is not difficult to see the reason for this silence. Schayer's most "revolutionary" opinions were set forth either in short, scattered articles¹⁷ published just before the interruption of contacts caused by the war and difficult to locate today, or in works written in Polish, the majority of these being works of popularization.¹⁸ The war and the premature death of the author did not allow him to present his ideas on precanonical Buddhism in a detailed study susceptible to wider diffusion. In an attempt to fill this gap I have made broad use of his suggestions in a study of Buddhism written for a collective history of religions.¹⁹ And it is precisely the chapter on precanonical Buddhism which, apart from some unmerited praise, has attracted the most energetic criticisms. H. von Glasenapp's review²⁰ of the three volumes of this publication is almost entirely taken up with refuting the "theism" of primitive Buddhism. One year later there appeared an important article by the same author, in which he examines the question in great detail and arrives at negative conclusions on all points.²¹ Exactly the same problem stimulated a lively reaction from

¹⁶ Frauwallner only cites one article by Schayer, namely his "Precanonical Buddhism," *Archiv Orientalni* 7, no. 1/2 (1935), pp. 131–32 (Frauwallner 1953, p. 469). This citation arises on account of a secondary reference and does not address the fundamental ideas in the article.

¹⁷ The previously mentioned "Precanonical Buddhism" (see preceding note): this was his only article which provoked lively resonance, notably in the reply by A. B. Keith in "Pre-Canonical Buddhism," *Indian Historical Quarterly* 12, no. 1 (1936), pp. 1–20, which surprisingly came to identical conclusions; "Notes and Queries on Buddhism," *Rocznik Orientalistyczny* 11 (1936), pp. 1–8, 206–13, and part 2, "Is Tathagata an Aryan word?," pp. 211–13. This was also the only article mentioned by Filliozat in the chapter on ancient Buddhism in his *L'Inde Classique*, vol. 2, p. 535 (1953); and "New Contributions to the Problem of the Pre-Hinayanistic Buddhism," *Polski Biuletyn Orientalistyczny* 1 (1937), pp. 8–17.

¹⁸ See *Religie Wschodu*, Traska Evert and Michalski Warsaw, eds. (1938), p. 191ff.; "Buddyzm jako religia i jako filozofia," *Sprawozdania z czynnosci i posiedzen* (SPA) 43, no. 2 (1938), pp. 31–32; "Mit, kult i etyka buddyzmu," *Przegląd Współczesny* 194 (1938), pp. 362–92.

¹⁹ "Der Buddhismus Indiens," in *Christus und die Religionen der Erde: Handbuch der Weltreligionen*, vol. 3, Franz König, ed. (Vienna: Verlag Herder, 1951), pp. 229–303 (especially pp. 244–64).

²⁰ *Orientalistische Literaturzeitung*, pp. 11–12 (1953).

²¹ *Buddhismus und Gottesidee: Die buddhistischen Lehren von den überweltlichen Wesen und Mächten und ihre religionsgeschichtlichen Parallelen* (Akademie der Wissenschaften und der Literatur, Abh. der geistes- und sozialwissenschaftlichen Kl. Nr. 8), Mainz, 1954, pp. 395–525. This *mémoire* presents a broad reworking of the article published by the same author in *Scientia* (Milan, 1941), pp. 77–83. I would not presume to claim that my study might have stimulated the eminent Tübingen professor to take up and develop his older work, but if that should be the case (and the coincidence of the dates is rather eloquent) then

M. Mayrhofer²² who, while writing extremely kindly vis-à-vis the present writer whom he seeks to detach favorably from the rest of the Franco-Belgian school, also opposes the general method applied in my reconstruction of primitive Buddhism, but probably without realizing how much this method was inspired by the works of Schayer.

If I permit myself a reply, with considerable delay and at some risk of repetition, it is not to defend myself but only in order to dissolve certain misunderstandings about the work of our departed teacher that probably arose because of my own insufficiently clear presentation of his thought. This rectification is all the more necessary, I believe, because the ideas and methods put forward by Stanisław Schayer in his last writings are not of merely historic interest; even today they continue to be up-to-date and can serve as a point of departure for fruitful research. It goes without saying that in order to demonstrate this I cannot restrict myself to a mere repetition of his ideas, and—since it is impossible to guess how he himself would have responded to the objections—I will have recourse to my own arguments and will use supporting ideas from the writings of others, even from some who seem to have opposed the tendencies represented by Schayer. Among them I include in the first place Frauwallner, for in spite of his totally different perception of the problem and his clearly expressed opposition to the methods of the school to which Schayer belonged, this author ended up, in the work referred to above, with conclusions on a number of essential points which are not at all incompatible with Schayer's theories and which often merge with them in a surprising manner.

The critical points regarding the reconstitution of primitive Buddhism which I have sketched out on the basis of Schayer's work are, above all, as follows:

1. The giddy concept of an indefinable *nirvāṇa* is probably of late scholastic origin. The same term, if it existed in primitive Buddhism, probably had a simpler and more traditional connotation, namely that of a persisting immortality conceived as a sojourn in a sphere from which "one no longer falls back" (*acyuta pada*) and which constitutes the pinnacle of the *dharmadhātu*. This will have been equivalent to a kind of impersonal Absolute, cosmic, yet not radically incommensurable with the impermanent world in which it is reflected in the form of the eternal *vijñāna* or in the person of the Buddha.

I can only rejoice over having contributed indirectly to the appearance of this remarkable monograph that also provides a mass of precious information for non-Indian fields.

²² Mayrhofer 1952 (see note 7 above).

2. The famous negation of the soul or of an imperishable *vijñāna* would not have been a dogma of the primitive teaching and only became a pillar of Buddhism at a later period, after the elaboration of scholastic systems. Certain layers at least of the primitive community admitted *vijñāna* as the non-impermanent center of the living person and as an absolute element plunged into contingency.

3. The Buddha was not considered by the faithful as a man who had discovered truth, but as a supernatural being who personified the mythic concept of tathagata, pre-Buddhist in origin, and thus as the earthly manifestation of the absolute (*dharma*).

4. The adherence of the faithful was not brought about by a simple personal conviction of the truth of the revealed teaching, but by trust in the spiritual authority of the one who declared himself to be a tathagata. The first link in the “eightfold path,” *samyagdr̥ṣṭi*, is therefore not “perfect comprehension” but an act of faith.

The first point, conceived in a more or less radical manner by various authors (the extreme expression of it being the denial of the very existence of the concept of *nirvāṇa* in primitive Buddhism, which would thus only have known the ideal of a paradise, the *svarga* of the Edicts of Aśoka) is a well-known thesis of the Franco-Belgian school. The three other theses are the more particular property of Schayer. All four propositions were bound to upset the supporters of the traditional interpretations. M. Mayrhofer²³ adopts a more conciliatory position than von Glasenapp in that he recognizes the possibility of the existence of a popular religion in the most ancient form of Buddhism, side by side with the severe auto-soteriological teaching which we also find in the Pali Canon. This popular religion would be characterized precisely by the ideal of *svarga*, being more accessible than that of *nirvāṇa*, by belief in an individual soul (*pudgala*), and by the elaboration of the altruistic ideal of the bodhisattva. However, according to him, this religion would only have been a “simplified edition” of the original doctrine, a concession to lay followers dictated by the requirements of missionary propaganda. Von Glasenapp is not disposed to regard this “popular edition” as going so far back. According to him, the aristocratic and elitist gnosis which was Buddhism did not come to be transformed into a universal religion of a more popular kind until the age of Aśoka.²⁴

²³ Mayrhofer 1952, pp. 104–5 (see note 7 above).

²⁴ So characterized already in *Der Buddhismus in Indien und im fernen Osten* (Berlin and Zürich: Atlantis, 1936) and more recently in “Der Buddhismus in der Vorstellungswelt der

The difference [*le différend*] is therefore reduced to simple alternatives. Is it more probable that a simple, ancient religion would develop over the course of time into an ever more subtle and elaborate theology and scholasticism, or that an elitist philosophical teaching would, during its gradual expansion, become popularized and diluted in forms more accessible to the masses? These alternatives are equally possible and probable, and one could debate them endlessly if it were thought necessary to settle the difference *a priori*. Supplementary arguments must therefore be found, but it is precisely there that the discussion about primitive Buddhism becomes the most difficult. In his critique of diverse hypotheses about the concepts of the nature of the Buddha that the primitive community may have held, von Glasenapp declares:

All of these mutually very diverse attempts . . . are speculations which find no support in the texts and are without historical foundation. Whoever assumes such a great divergence between the teaching of the founder of a religion and that of the older texts is logically obliged to show in detail how this revolutionary change came about. Since [the] Buddha himself left nothing in writing, and since his sayings are not known from stenographic documents or gramophone recordings but only from the late documentation of centuries-old oral tradition, it will never be possible to identify with certainty what he himself taught. If on the other hand we ascribe any authenticity at all to the canonical writings which have come down to us, then it has to be regarded as the most probable that [the] Buddha's position over the question of God was not essentially different from that of the whole of the later literature.²⁵

To this may be replied, to start with, that von Glasenapp's theory that Buddhism was from the first the elitist gnosis of a small group of philosophers also has no basis in the canonical texts. Quite to the contrary, most of the biographical or historical texts seem to indicate that Buddhism was mostly presented to simple mortals without distinction of caste, social status, or learning, and that it was a veritable mass movement which opposed the religion of the Brahmans, a religion which indeed was elitist and esoteric

Hindus," *Asiatica: Festschrift Friedrich Weller* (Leipzig: Harrassowitz, 1954), p. 174; and in *Buddhismus und Gottesidee* (see note 21 above), p. 457.

²⁵ *Buddhismus und Gottesidee* (see note 21 above), p. 431.

as far as ordinary people were concerned. And then we may also ask ourselves whether it is possible to completely avoid speculation when seeking to reconstruct a teaching for which we have no written documents. Does not the last sentence of the passage quoted arise as a speculation based on a tacitly accepted premise? The canons, and not “the whole of the later literature” (because we find the most divergent answers to this particular problem precisely here), are the most secure source for our knowledge of primitive Buddhism.

Similarly, when Mayrhofer rejects speculations about primitive Buddhism not confirmed by the canon by defining them as “thoughts for the acceptance of which the arguments simply do not suffice,”²⁶ one can reply: Do we have enough arguments for considering the Pali Canon as our most authentic source? Indeed, the canons are the most ancient written documents relating to Buddhist teachings which we possess.²⁷ No “innovator” [in Buddhist studies] has denied their importance for the reconstruction of primitive Buddhism. The principal question is not so much about their authenticity as about the method which should be applied for extracting information about the teaching prior to their redaction. Even the most convinced supporters of the doctrinal validity of these collections are obliged to make a choice in that regard. Sections are found there which belong to distinct chronological layers, and there are many divergences and contradictions to be noted. It is not so much a question of contradictions between different canons—in the case of the baskets of the vinaya and the sutras they are not really of great importance—but of clear divergences within one and the same canon. Confronted with these variants the method of the older Pali-leaning authors does not seem to me to be commendable. Their procedure depended either on statistical considerations—giving preference to the statements most frequently set forth, which is not necessarily proof of their greater antiquity—or on completely arbitrary criteria such as their own intuition regarding the authenticity, or the simplicity, or conversely the precision of the teaching; and so they arrived at coherence in what was claimed to be the primitive doctrine in a quite artificial manner and without being aware of the deception involved. The method proposed by Filliozat (cf. the passage cited above) appears to be sounder in that it does not impose on the

²⁶ Mayrhofer 1952, p. 104 (see note 7 above).

²⁷ The edicts of Aśoka, even though of inestimable and many-sided informative value, can never be considered an explicit source of doctrine. It would be justifiable, *a priori*, not to expect any “theological” or philosophical givens in documents of this kind.

primitive doctrine that systematic aspect which it seems not to have possessed. Frauwallner proposes a very novel solution to these divergences: he attributes them to changes which the Buddha might have brought about in his teaching, developing and correcting, in the course of his long life, that first vague idea of the truth which he envisaged beneath the bodhi tree.²⁸ This is undoubtedly a very ingenious and attractive hypothesis; it confers a very concrete and human light on the personality of the one who founded Buddhism. However, in spite of numerous, often very suggestive arguments invoked by Frauwallner in favor of this conception, it still remains unprovable. Numerous aphorisms and canonical text passages may bear the undeniable mark of a sage (though rarely one suggestive of important doctrinal developments)—and if that sage was not the Buddha, to whom should we attribute them? However, we have no possible way of being sure that all these statements, though very probably pre-scholastic, in fact go back to the person of the founder. In this Frauwallner is bolder than the authors whom he criticizes. The latter, and above all Schayer, never spoke of the teaching of the Buddha or even of the doctrine of the most ancient community, but rather, and much more prudently, of precanonical Buddhism.

However we may conceive of the divergences and contradictions appearing between the canons, they do not present the main difficulty in the utilization of the scriptures for the reconstruction of the precanonical teaching. The greatest difficulty arises from the fact that in the canons the teaching appears above all in the form of terms, formulas, or bare patterns—*anityatā*, *nirvāṇa*, *saṃskṛta*, *asaṃskṛta*, *pratītya-samutpāda*, *aṣṭāṅgika mārga*, and so on—that are not only susceptible to the most diverse interpretation but indeed had already been interpreted quite divergently not only by occidental scholars but already in the Buddhist sects [of the time].²⁹ Those who wish

²⁸ Frauwallner 1953, p. 243ff. He also insists on the unsystematic character of the primitive teaching (p. 179): “The rejection of all theory, and restriction to just a few chains of thought, led to the fact that no unified system of ideas was formed in which the various parts were carefully integrated with each other. And there is no evidence for thinking that there might have been such a system of ideas but that it was not expounded by the Buddha in order to avoid unnecessary and distracting disputes. What we do have are quite isolated strings of ideas intended to provide the indispensable theoretical basis for the path of liberation, but which were never forged into a unity.”

²⁹ Cf. Frauwallner 1953, p. 159: “The teaching of the Buddha is essentially limited to just a few doctrines intended to explain entanglement in the cycle of being and the possibility of release from it. Moreover, these doctrines mainly appear in the form of fixed formulas that are in the main obscure and lead to numerous difficulties of explanation. This feature . . . arises on account of the characteristic form of Buddhist tradition in which similar items are

to avoid “speculations” just accept these formulas somehow and attempt to translate them either “naturally,” guided by “common sense,” or by recourse to etymological analysis. Is it necessary to insist on the dangers and weaknesses of this so-called positive method? There is no lack of convincing examples to show that Indian “common sense” is not always identical with occidental “common sense.” And as for etymological approaches, these turn out to be impotent, not only when confronted by terms such as *nirvāṇa*, *dharma*, or *pudgala* (especially if one compares the significance of the last two in Buddhism and in Jainism), but also with respect to the most widely current Buddhist terms.

More than thirty years ago, the Leningrad school demonstrated the complete insufficiency of such methods in the study of Buddhism and replaced it with the interpretation of texts in the light of authentic Buddhist tradition, that is, according to commentaries and expositions from India, Tibet, China, and Japan. We know how much this method advanced our understanding of Buddhist philosophy. However, this too turned out to be dangerous for the problem of identifying primitive Buddhism because of the temptation to import scholastic interpretations already determined by elaborated philosophical systems just randomly into the ancient period.

So, is the situation in this field one of total desperation? Must we profess with respect to the precanonical teaching the same agnosticism which seems to have inspired the Buddha over questions of ontology? Such pessimism may be exaggerated, for there are still other methods which are able to help us over this difficult terrain. A cluster of procedures which would guarantee maximum probability in the correct understanding of the ancient terms and technical formulas has been proposed by Maryla Falk in a study which is unfortunately not sufficiently known,³⁰ and she herself has demonstrated the efficacy of these methods in an important monograph.³¹ Rejecting literal or etymological interpretations, she considers it essential to study each technical term monographically throughout its history, where the maximal number of contexts permits the delimitation of precise values and

repeated in the same fixed form.” See also p. 185: “As to . . . the noble eightfold path, this is not a clearly set out way but only a vague framework of generally colorless expressions.”

³⁰ “Indologie auf den Wegen und Abwegen vergleichender Religionsforschung,” *Polski Biuletyn Orientalistyczny* 1 (1937), pp. 18–37.

³¹ “Il mito psicologico nell’ India antica,” in *Memorie della R. Accademia nazionale dei Lincei, Classe di scienze morali, storiche e filologiche, ser. 6, v. 8, fasc. 5* (1939), p. 336. *Nāma-rūpa and dharma-rūpa: Origin and Aspects of an Ancient Indian Conception* (Calcutta: University of Calcutta, 1943).

the observation of fluctuations of meaning. This is in fact a development of the method of the Leningrad school, but provided with one essential corrective, namely that of consistently taking account of the diachronic evolution of significances. The function which a term has assumed several centuries later can be very valuable for determining its value in an ancient period, but only if one considers the ancient form as an earlier evolutionary stage, and not as identical with what it later became. The interpretations obtained by this method are “constructed,” being based on extrapolations and comparisons, and they rest, so to speak, on a sustained speculation. Yet, the steady confrontation of each term with its earlier and later meanings, and looking as far as parallels in contemporary systems, gives a security of interpretation which is much greater than any translation based only on a knowledge of grammar and etymological dictionaries.

This method allows us to discern an incontestable continuity of teaching in the Indian religious and philosophical traditions, a continuity much greater than that in Europe because in India the philosophers and religious teachers do not strive for personal originality as much as is usual in occidental thought. Even when innovating, it is always the same mold which they fill with new content. This continuity is so striking that it became, in turn, one of the criteria to guide research. Accordingly, indications of the presence of “Mahayanist” tendencies in the most ancient Buddhism, however indirect, receive confirmation by the very fact of the appearance of the Great Vehicle several centuries later. Without these “germs,” the flowering of the Mahayana would be inexplicable because, despite all speculative acrobatics deployed by Buddhists themselves to demonstrate the contrary, it hardly derives logically from the Hinayana but appears much more like a brusque ideological revolution. And even if one admitted the possibility of such a revolution, which in India would not be very likely,³² one would not be able to comprehend why a teaching, and above all a form of religion without any basis in tradition, could claim to derive from Buddhism, or why mystics like Nāgārjuna and Asaṅga would seek to express their fundamentally different ideas by means of the same terms and formulas as the rationalists of the Small Vehicle.

³² H. von Glasenapp has himself demonstrated that one could not attribute the monism of the Mahayana, in its radical opposition to the pluralism of the Lesser Vehicle, to Brahmanical influence. The similarities between the Mahayana and Vedānta are the result of an inverse influence; it is Buddhism which has the priority. See “Vedānta und Buddhismus,” *Akademie der Wissenschaften, Abhandlungen der Geistes- und sozialwissenschaftlichen Klasse* 11 (1950), pp. 1011–28.

The complex method that has just been set out can be complemented—for cases where the contexts are lacking, or where the prehistory of a teaching is sought—by a very ingenious procedure proposed and applied by Schayer. This is a method which profits from precisely that which had embarrassed other researchers, namely the internal contradictions which are evident in the canons. We have seen that the existence of variants within one same canon can be regarded as the faithful reflection of divergent traditions in the Buddhist community prior to the redaction of the canon. It has been suggested that the Buddhist canons are comparable in this respect to the Upanishads, where there is such a multiplicity of divergent doctrines that W. Ruben for example, though not without some exaggeration, believed it possible to find within the five oldest ones the ideas of 109 distinct philosophers.³³ However, unlike the authors of the Upanishads, the compilers of the Buddhist canons were motivated by a stronger concern for orthodoxy. The effort was made to assess sources critically,³⁴ and this critique was carried out from the point of view of the tendencies predominant within monastic Buddhism at the time of compilation. How can one explain the presence in these canons, not just of variants but of doctrines which openly contradict this orthodoxy, such as *pudgalavāda* in the *Sutra of the Burden Carrier*, the affirmation of the eternity of *vijñāna* in the *Ṣaḍdhātu Sutra*, the identification of the Absolute with *viññānaṃ anidassanaṃ anataṃ sabbato paṃhaṃ* in *Dīghanikāya* 11: 85, and so on? Schayer gives the only plausible explanation: these sources were too ancient and too venerable to be simply eliminated from the canon.³⁵

This is the point which I consider to be Schayer's most important methodological contribution in his work *Religie Wschodu* [Religions of the East]. Being aware that this proposal was drowned in a work of popularization in Polish, which specialized scholars had no chance to read, I gave it

³³ W. Ruben, *Die Philosophen der Upanishaden* (Bern: Francke, 1947).

³⁴ Cf. E. Lamotte "La critique d'authenticité dans le bouddhisme," *India Antiqua: A Volume of Oriental Studies Presented to J. P. Vogel* (Leyden: Kern Institute, 1947), pp. 213–22.

³⁵ Once again the only author to come close to Schayer on this particular methodological point, and then strikingly, is Frauwallner, who writes, "Many phenomena of this kind are obviously best so explained in that various starting points or developmental stages in the teaching were left standing side by side. And, given the nature of the oldest Buddhist teaching, this is easy to understand; for a teaching that claims to have finally perceived and to proclaim eternal truths cannot take back and contradict what has once been said. There is therefore no alternative but simply to place new perceptions alongside the older ones" (Frauwallner 1953, p. 178).

special emphasis in my account of precanonical Buddhism³⁶ and am all the more surprised that no reviewers even mentioned it. Yet it is a rather striking procedure and one which is the inverse of that usually applied in the work of reconstruction. It is not the concordance of sources which guarantees for us the antiquity of a certain conception (for such could be the result of an innovation common to all the canons) but precisely the fundamentally untypical character of a doctrine.³⁷

If these doctrines and questions were, as suggested by von Glasenapp and Mayrhofer, nothing more than a kind of popular deformation of the original teaching, then why would they have been treated in the canons as the very words of the Buddha? On the other hand, if one was prepared to commit such a deception for propagation purposes, why are passages of this kind not more numerous? Von Glasenapp demands, with reference to the passage quoted earlier, that one explain the reasons for the transformation undergone by the primitive doctrine during the compilation of the canons. But it is rather the anomalies mentioned above which require explanation, while the appearance of more subtle and abstract ideas in the canons results quite naturally out of the philosophical development of the monks engaged in ontological speculations.

One might rather anticipate another objection: if, with a view to safeguarding the continuity of development, the “innovators” postulate the presence of germs of the Mahayana in ancient Buddhism, why do they at the same time accept the creation of equally brusque and important innovations in the Hinayana that with respect to their hypothetical primitive Buddhism would constitute a rupture in continuity? But there is no essential rupture. The Hinayana teachers, or rather the compilers of the canons, changed practically nothing which they considered to be the word of the Buddha; they only innovated in the *interpretation* of these formulas; they filled with philosophical content the spaces left empty by the Master; they played on the polyvalence and imprecision of terms such as *anātman*, *nirvāṇa*, and so on, and they amplified and completed certain clichés, often in a very mechanical way. The monastic nature of the Buddhism which they represented favored the flowering of speculations. There are enough passages in the canon itself to demonstrate that the tendency in the primitive teaching was pragmatic and agnostic, that the Buddha preferred to respond with silence or with a refusal to explicate those “idle” questions which had no direct reference to

³⁶ “Der Buddhismus Indiens,” pp. 248–49.

³⁷ A similar method is employed in the study of the Old Testament today in order to reveal the most archaic beliefs of the Israelites.

the question of deliverance. And yet the same canons are full of speculative developments. As E. Conze put it, “If one says something—and it is astonishing to find how much the supporters of the Aryan silence had to say—it is justified only by what they called ‘skill in means.’ In other words, one says it because it may help other people at a certain stage of their spiritual progress.”³⁸ It goes without saying that the deployment of *upāyakaśalya* [skill in means] is posterior to texts advocating agnostic silence. If, when examining these two kinds of texts, one sought to assign a later origin to the passages of agnostic tendency, the insertion of these passages into the canon by monks inclined to speculation would be absurd. These passages are there because they are protected by their venerable antiquity. It is the doctrinal developments which represent the innovations.

As for the Mahayana, it too innovated. None of the “innovators,” and least of all Schayer, ever asserted that the complicated buddhology of the Great Vehicle, the cult of the bodhisattvas, or the giddy metaphysical conceptions of the Mādhyamika or Yogācāra were already to be found in primitive Buddhism. But, in developing within lay circles, the Mahayana is thought to have better conserved the religious and mystical side of primitive Buddhism that was veiled by the rationalist tendencies of the monks of the Small Vehicle.³⁹

In passing now to the examination of points attacked by reviewers, I wish to underline that my presentation of these theories, being necessarily concise in view of the nature of the publication for which it was a contribution, may have imposed an unduly categorical form on Schayer’s opinions. He himself always insisted on the inevitably hypothetical character of his reconstructions and, while signalling certain specific traits of pre-canonical Buddhism, he never asserted that these traits constituted exclusive theses of the primitive teaching or that they were ordered in a coherent system. It is however quite understandable that he occupied himself above

³⁸ Conze 1951, pp. 16–17. [Regamey quoted from the French translation named in note 12 above, pp. 14–15.]

³⁹ However, the opposition between a rationalistic Hinayana and a mystical Mahayana should not be exaggerated. The Small Vehicle would not be Buddhist if it had completely eliminated the mystical perspective. It does after all attribute the supreme role among the routes of salvation to *dhyāna*, and the practice of Theravadins today is much more mystical than Western neo-Buddhists would care to admit. But this mysticism is implicit; its content is relegated, along with issues such as that of *nirvāṇa*, into the domain of the inexpressible and the unanalyzable. The doctrines of the Small Vehicle, being rationalist, concern themselves above all with the analysis of contingency. It is only the Mahayana which, oriented essentially in the direction of transcendence, would succeed in providing a speculative explanation for the results of mystical experiences.

all with elements which distinguished precanonical Buddhism from the Hinayana.

This is how it is with the famous problems about *nirvāṇa* and the denial of the soul. How do these appear in light of the criteria which have just been discussed? *A priori*, the nonspeculative, agnostic character of ancient Buddhism makes it unlikely that from the very beginning there was an elaboration of concepts as abstract as an indefinable *nirvāṇa*, defying all imagination, or a negation of the soul that required a radical revision of the mechanism of transmigration and the retribution of deeds. Such revision was too interesting and too provoking for the occidental mind for it not to become, in the minds of scholars, one of the fundamental characteristics of Buddhism in general. It is therefore natural that they should have interpreted every *anattā* that they found in the canon from the point of view of a-personalism, thus falsifying the image of the canonical teaching which otherwise professes an agnostic attitude to this question.⁴⁰

The mechanical translation of every *anattā* and *anātman* by “non-self” or “without soul” is a clear, typical example of the danger of literal translations. This interpretation would give an absurd sense to not a few canonical expressions such as *sabbe dhammā anattā* (*Dhammapada* 279), *rūpā suññā attena vā attaniyena vā* (*Samyuttanikāya* 35: 85), *anattaṃ rūpam . . . anatte saṅkhāre . . . ti yathābhūtaṃ na pajānāti* (*Samyuttanikāya* 22: 85, 46), and so on. The systematic study of this term across the whole of the Indian religious literature contemporary with or anterior to ancient Buddhism shows us that *anātman* is not a word invented for the polemical needs of Buddhist a-personalists. Rather, it was a generally known term which took on a specific meaning during the time of Upanishadic speculations, namely that of “non-absolute,” or not participating in the nature of universal *ātman*. In asserting that empirical realities (including the bodily and psychological elements of living beings) are *anātman*, the Buddhists wanted to assert above all that these elements are contingent, not absolute. H. von Glasenapp sees this quite clearly, but he conceives of this meaning as an expansion of the term which originally meant “lacking soul.” He wrote:

Used as a philosophical concept, *attan* refers to the *individual soul* as this is presupposed by the Jainas and other schools, but rejected

⁴⁰ Basing his argument entirely on canonical texts, Frauwallner arrives at the conclusion that the problems of *nirvāṇa* and, in particular, of the individual soul were “held strictly at bay, and rejected, except insofar as the doctrine of release made attention to them unavoidable” (Frauwallner 1953, p. 219; cf. also p. 217).

by Buddhism. . . . With this heretical idea in mind, the Buddhists assign to “self,” or *ātman*, the meaning of an eternal, permanent individual being, or that is, what European metaphysics refer to as a “substance.” . . . In the philosophical usage of the Buddhists therefore, *attan* refers to any entity which unbelievers falsely assume to exist independently of all others and to have self-sufficient being.⁴¹

Apart from the epithet “individual being” [*individuelle Wesenheit*] for which there is no textual basis, this concluding assessment is perfectly justified, but it is not clear why, in order to arrive at this signification common to the whole Indian tradition contemporary with the beginnings of Buddhism, the Buddhists should have had to pass through Jainism alone to arrive at a meaning which the term had never had elsewhere.⁴² An inverse development is by contrast easily explained. As soon as the doctrine of the negation of the soul was elaborated, the Buddhist teachers could easily use the term already available by playing with the polyvalence of the Indian words; they were even able, without changing anything in the venerable, ancient formulas, to assign a new, narrower meaning to *anātman*, which had originally signified “contingent.”

Nobody would seek to deny that the canon abounds in discussions of a very archaic kind which have the object of proving that the five *skandha*

⁴¹ *Vedānta und Buddhismus*, pp. 1020–21.

⁴² When von Glasenapp speaks of “other schools” he is possibly thinking of the Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika, the Sāṅkhya-Yoga, or the Mīmāṃsā (cf. his *Vedānta und Buddhismus*, 1950); but these schools did not yet exist at the time of precanonical Buddhism. Moreover, it cannot be asserted that the *ātman-puruṣa* of the Sāṅkhya was *individual*. In spite of their multiplicity, the *puruṣa* are not individualised—because they are identical. They always represent the same Absolute in an infinite number of individual cases.

Again, I cannot follow von Glasenapp when he asserts that “the word *anātman* also occurs in the Sanskrit of the Brahmans with the meaning of ‘what is not the soul (or spirit)’” (*Vedānta und Buddhismus*, p. 1021, citing: *Bhagavadgītā* 6, 6; *Śankara zu Brahma Sutra* 1:1:1, *Bibliotheca Indica*, p. 16; *Vedānta-sāra* §158). In the stanza cited from the *Bhagavadgita*, we have a double use of the term *ātman* which designates now the universal *ātman* and now its reflection in the individual being:

bandhur ātmātmanas tasya yenātmaivātmanā jitaḥ
anātmanas tu śatrutve vartetātmaiva śatruvat

But above all the term *anātman* is used here only in the sense of “one who has not impregnated (or disciplined) his soul with the universal *ātman*,” and thus one “who lacks the universal *ātman*” though not his individual soul.

Anātman in the paragraph cited from the *Vedānta-sāra* has the still more precise meaning of “not pertaining to *ātman*, non-absolute.”

are not the “I.” Does this mean one has to draw the conclusion that this is a denial of the soul? Here is Frauwallner’s reply:

It must be said that, following the above argumentation, there have been various attempts to read a denial of the self by the Buddha. But that certainly goes too far. Every attempt to find more in it goes beyond its purpose and misconstrues it. . . . In any case it is never stated in this connection in the texts of the Buddhist canon that an “I” does not exist, but only that it cannot be conceived.⁴³

An explicit refutation of the existence of the soul cannot be found except in indubitably late parts of the canon, in texts such as the *Milindapañha* or the commentaries.

Must it be admitted, however, that total agnosticism over this problem was dominant in popular Buddhism, or that there was no idea, not even a vague one,⁴⁴ about this enigma? The preservation of the *Sutra of the Burden Carrier* gives the answer to these questions. If the *pudgalavāda* implicitly contained in this text is nothing more, as Mayrhofer suggests, than a concession to the imagination of the laity, its admission into the canon would be inexplicable. It is quite conceivable that the Hinayanist teachers would admit the popular ideal of *svarga* [heaven, paradise] alongside the superior ideal of *nirvāṇa*; the two concepts are not contradictory, for *svarga* is only a stage, even if to certain groups of believers it may have seemed to be the final one. But *pudgalavāda* stands in total contradiction to a-personalism. If it is nevertheless preserved in the canon this must be because it reflects a very ancient belief.

Nor is it a question of Brahmanical influence. *Pudgala* is an artificial term used to avoid the word *ātman*. And if not *ātman*, what element would correspond to this archaic conception? Drawing on another “nonstandard” text, the *Śaddhātu Sutra*, Schayer identifies it with *viññāna*. Indeed, in this text, while enumerated along with impermanent elements, *viññāna* is the only item to possess the quality of eternity. If it is acceptable to identify this *viññāna* with that of *Dīghanikāya* 11: 85, described as the Absolute = *nirvāṇa*, then it would be a conception very close to that of the *ātman* of the Upanishads, for this Buddhist *viññāna* seems to constitute at one and the

⁴³ Frauwallner 1953, p. 224.

⁴⁴ That is, one of “the indispensable theoretical bases” referred to by Frauwallner in the passage quoted above (note 28).

same time the permanent substrate of the individual and a kind of eternal cosmic reality.⁴⁵

Our summary of this question will possibly be more prudent than that of Schayer. It does not follow necessarily from the preservation of texts in the canon which clearly prefigure the *Vijñānavāda* that the concept of a permanent *vijñāna*, participating in the ontology of the Absolute, was predominant or exclusive in the Buddhism which preceded the Hinayana. It may have coexisted with other concepts which were necessarily vague because the general tendency was agnostic. But it seems very unlikely that the doctrine of the negation of such a substrate of the personality, the famous a-personalism, could have been the pivot of Buddhism from the beginning. Those who assert this apply nonspeculative procedures in appearance only. In reality they base their point of view on a series of premises accepted without proof: (a) that the canon faithfully reflects the primitive teaching; (b) that the denial of the soul is the only doctrine attested in the canons; and (c) that the term *anātman*, before taking on its more general meaning, only designated “non-self,” that is, not having or not being the “individual soul.”

The discussion about *nirvāṇa* is too well known for there to be any need to discuss it in all respects. I will limit myself to the points which have been particularly highlighted by Schayer. The negative definitions of *nirvāṇa* are as easily explained by the general agnosticism of primitive Buddhism as by the concern to underline the contrast between this ideal and the empirical world, a contrast which was emphasized more strongly in what was an essentially soteriological teaching than in the other teachings of the time. But, as for the concept of “the soul,” there also had to be a positive conception of this ideal in primitive Buddhism. And texts are not lacking which describe *nirvāṇa* not as a state of deliverance but as a place (*pada*) or as an

⁴⁵ To return once more to the debate with Frauwallner’s book, reference may be made to pages 202–3, where the author seems to be too cautious. Although signaling the central and special character of *vijñāna*, in spite of the efforts of the compilers of the canons to reduce it to the level of the other physical and psychological elements, and even while translating the whole passage from *Dīghanikāya* 12: 85 where *vijñāna* is held up as the Absolute, Frauwallner concludes timidly: “These facts leave only one interpretation open, namely that perceptive knowledge [*Erkenntnis*] is not just a psychological process like feeling or consciousness but an essential component of personality and as such a psychological organ.” However, “essential component” and “organ” seem to me to be definitions which come close to the idea of a permanent *vijñāna*, participating in the quality of absoluteness, rather than to the classical conception of a simple, perpetual chain of moments of consciousness.

entity, in short, as an Absolute. Based on texts of this category (a criterion for texts which do not conform to the official doctrine of the canons), Schayer succeeds in reconstructing a precanonical ontology that opposed the eternal, absolute reality (*dharma*) to the world of impermanent contingency (*rūpa*). “Dharma” was not a *Weltgesetz* [cosmic law] (like the Vedic *ṛta*)⁴⁶ but rather an ontological entity identified with the radiant *viññāna*. In cosmology this duality was represented by *dharmadhātu* and *kāmadhātu*, to which was added an intermediary sphere, the *rūpadhātu*. That the individual *viññāna* was also regarded as eternal, however, proves that ancient Buddhism admitted a certain interpenetration between the two spheres. The *viññāna* with absolute nature was plunged into the *kāmadhātu*, being considered soiled by *rūpa*. Deliverance was the result of a gradual purification of this *viññāna* which finally attained the summit of *dharmadhātu* from where it “no longer fell.”

None of these assertions is the result of gratuitous speculations. They are based on the interpretation of canonical passages which had hitherto not been sufficiently considered or juxtaposed with each other and whose comprehension was obscured by the fact that people had seen them as nothing more than poetic metaphors. The assertions find their confirmation according to the criterion of continuity. It is only on this basis that one can understand the use of the term *dharma* for an Absolute in the Mahayana as an entity and not only as “Law.” This usage would be completely incomprehensible if it were supposed to derive from the acceptance of the term *dharma* in Hinayanist scholasticism, all the more as *dharma*, in the sense of an Absolute, does not appear in the Mahayana as a philosophical term such as *śūnyatā*, *tathatā*, and so on, but as a religious notion like *dharmakāya* or *dharmadhātu*. A striking coincidence may be noted between the definition of the Absolute, at once religious and nonphilosophical, in the Mahayana phrase *cittam prabhasvaram* and the otherwise known phrase *viññānaṃ sabbato pabham*. Equally, the tendency may be noted to efface the separation between the Absolute and the contingent which will lead into their total identification as in *nirvāṇa-saṃsara*.

This identification of incommensurable aspects of reality is only possible in the mystical attitude to be found in primitive Buddhism as much as in the Mahayana. The rationalist attitude of the Hinayana inevitably led to the radical separation of these two aspects. As a result, the Absolute was relegated to the domain of the indefinable (because all our definitions

⁴⁶ Or rather, the meaning of “Law” in the sense of “Truth revealed by the Buddha” is only one aspect of this Absolute.

belong to the domain of contingency) and designated for preference by the negative term *nirvāṇa*; *vijñāna* on the other hand was deprived of its connections with the Absolute and downgraded to the rank of the contingent and impermanent elements, while the term *dharma* (in the singular) only kept its restricted sense of “Law” or was used to refer to the factors of contingency.⁴⁷

In this theory, the fluctuations in the signification of the term *dharma* are clearly of capital importance. And this whole argumentation would not have a sufficient base if it were not for the monograph which Maryla Falk devoted to the history of the concepts of *dharma* and *rūpa*.⁴⁸ This remarkable work provided an amply documented confirmation of Schayer’s hypotheses, demonstrated that they fitted harmoniously with the general evolution of the ancient religious metaphysics of India, and provided *en passant* the solution to numerous other obscure questions. It is a work too rich in new ideas for me to summarize here. I will simply concern myself briefly with one of the results, namely the undeniable rapport which she discovers between the Buddhist *dharma* and the Brahman of the Upanishads.

It is not for the first time that one has sought to identify the Absolute in Buddhism with *ātman-brahman*. In *Vedānta und Buddhismus* (1924), von Glasenapp reacts violently to the efforts of J. G. Jennings⁴⁹ and H. Günther⁵⁰ to prove it. Frauwallner is less forceful; he signals several points in common between the Buddhist and the Brahmanical Absolute.⁵¹ The connections, if only genetic, between precanonical *dharma* and Brahman do indeed seem to be undeniable. They are clear not only from the philosophical analysis of these ancient concepts, carried out by Falk, but

⁴⁷ In the long-debated problem of the origin of the meaning of the word *dharma* in the plural, the widely accepted position that in the canonical texts *dhamme* refers to “empirical things” or “elements of contingency” is the most difficult to explain, more difficult than the precise value that it assumes in Hinayana philosophy. This is because even in the most “realist” Hinayanist system, that of the Sarvāstivāda, *dharma* retains its transcendence. This is because it is the *manifestations* of the *dharmas* which are immanent to contingency, and impermanent; the *dharmas* themselves remain in transcendence and are eternal. The lengths to which the Sarvāstivādins went to explain this eternity of the factors of impermanence can only be explained by the tight association of the ancient concept of *dharma* with the attributes of the Absolute: transcendence and eternity.

⁴⁸ Cf. note 31 above.

⁴⁹ Jennings, *The Vedantic Buddhism of the Buddha* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1948).

⁵⁰ Günther 1949, cf. note 6 above.

⁵¹ Frauwallner 1953, p. 235.

also from certain terminological reminiscences. Nor are the nonstandard texts lacking that prove it. These texts, such as the *Tevijja sutta* of the *Dīghanikāya*, represent deliverance as union with the god Brahmā or designate *nirvāṇa* as *brahmaloka*. Von Glasenapp is right to underline that this is not a question of the Brahman of the Upanishads but of the god Brahmā. The choice of just this god as a patron of *acyuta pada*, however, is surely not fortuitous. And the persistence with which Buddhists used this ambiguous term at a time of open antagonism against the Brahmans could not be explained unless it did not involve a very ancient mythological reminiscence.

On the other hand, von Glasenapp is right to underline that the Buddhists carefully avoid any qualification of *nirvāṇa* by the term *ātman*. Furthermore, *nirvāṇa* is often defined *expressis verbis* as *anattā* or *attavirahita*. Should one therefore conclude that even *nirvāṇa* is without absolute reality? This seems to have been, rather, a terminological battle. If there is a genetic dependence between the notions of *brahman-ātman* and a Buddhist absolute, this does not make it an identity. The Buddhist notion never evolved into a pantheist monism such as would admit of an Absolute, whether personal or impersonal, containing within itself the whole of reality or constituting the source of this reality. It was to set themselves clearly apart from the pantheism of the Upanishads that the Buddhists substituted the term *dharma* for Brahman and carefully avoided using the term *ātman* in the Upanishadic sense. It may be noted that the term *dharma* also has the sense of the Absolute in Brahmanical terminology, as for example in the *Kaṭhaka-upaniṣad*, the *Bhagavadgītā*, or the *Mokṣadharmā*.

Really, I should also examine the one thesis of Schayer's that has been attacked the most by his critics, namely that concerning Buddhist "theism." This problem is however too large to be tackled in an article such as this, intended above all to illuminate methodological matters. Reserving the right to take it up on another occasion, I would just state the following here. First, the criticisms were originally provoked by the clumsy use of the term "theism" both by Schayer and myself. In fact, Schayer never sought to assert that the Buddha was considered in precanonical times to be a personal god, creator, and judge of the world, or even as a Hinduist *īśvara*; and when speaking of theism in the precanonical teaching, he was seeking above all to insist on the religious character of Buddhism, which had its myth and its cult, and was based on faith in the supernatural

authority of its founder.⁵² This problem will have to be pursued at a later time.

The purpose of the current article was to present the methods which permit us to shed new light on the apparently insoluble problem about [the nature of] Buddhism prior to the appearance of written documents. The discussion of these problems is far from being closed. The sorting of the ancient documents in the light of the criteria which we have discussed has hardly begun, and there is an enormous amount to be done in the monographic study of the terms in question. It is possible that in subsequent,

⁵² This assertion provokes marked opposition on behalf of those who espouse that older interpretation of Buddhism according to which it is the only religion in the world based on personal judgment and conviction, and able to dispense with all irrational faith. In his attempt to prove the contrary, Schayer pointed out, among other things, that the first step in the realization of the Buddhist way, the first item of the “eightfold path,” *samyagdr̥ṣṭi*, is an act of faith. Von Glasenapp has no hesitation in attacking Hermann Oldenberg in this connection, describing his translation of this term as “right faith” [*rechter Glaube*] as a lapse. And Mayrhofer writes in this regard, “But does *dr̥ṣṭi* mean ‘faith’ [*Glaube*]? I only know the word as meaning ‘view,’ ‘insight,’ or ‘opinion,’ and etymologically it belongs with the Sanskrit *darś-* and the Greek *dérkesthai*: to ‘see.’ The first item in the eightfold path is therefore ‘right insight’ [*rechte Einsicht*], and this testifies once again to a religion of well-judging reason and conviction, and not to one of faith” (*Einsicht* 1952, p. 106). It is here that the dangers of purely etymological interpretation become evident. From the point of view of etymology, a translation as *Einsicht* [insight] seems to lend itself; but *Anschauung* [view] would also be justified. Is it altogether objective to select from among the three terms proposed by Mayrhofer himself just that one which not only contains the root “to see” but also brings in the nuance of a correct personal recognition of the truth? By contrast, if the term *dr̥ṣṭi* is examined with respect to its use in Buddhism, one is obliged to recognize that it has a neutral value, referring namely to an “opinion,” “a way of seeing,” in short, an *Anschauung* that can be correct or false. Moreover, in Buddhist literature, including the Pali Canon, *dr̥ṣṭi* without the attribute *samyag* designates a “false view.” It is not the fact of having seen, judged, or understood which confers validity on the first item in the eightfold path, but the fact of having accepted a correct opinion, a *samyag-dr̥ṣṭi*. And the only guarantee of this correctness, at this point in the career of a disciple who is incapable of assessing it or judging it, is the authority of the one who reveals it to him. Incidentally, the canonical texts also designate this indispensable act in the embracing of the path of salvation with the term *śraddhā*, meaning “faith” or “trust” as directed to the Tathagata (cf. for example *Dīghanikāya* chapters 2 and 3 and below, or *Majjhimanikāya* chapters 27 and 38 and below). And here again Frauwallner is right to assert, “[The Buddha] does not demonstrate the correctness of a system but awakes the believing trust [*das gläubige Vertrauen*] that the way to which he points is the right one” (Frauwallner 1953, p. 156). Or again: “Right view (*samyagdr̥ṣṭi*; Pali: *sammādiṭṭhi*) therefore corresponds to that believing trust in the proclamation of the Buddha, which is the presupposition for entering on the path of emancipation” (Frauwallner 1953, p. 185).

more profound studies some of Schayer's conclusions may turn out to be erroneous or insufficiently justifiable. But one should not place his theories and discoveries on the same level as the hypotheses of writers such as Jennings or even of H. Günther. These set out from a preconceived idea for which they sought, or sometimes fabricated, confirmation in the documents. Schayer by contrast was led to his conclusions by the critical and thoroughly objective examination of earlier research, by discovering the reasons for earlier errors, and above all by the application of new methods specifically adapted to the problem which he was tackling. Even if the results he obtained are provisional and subject to revision, the methods he proposed are worthy of much more attentive consideration by specialists than they have hitherto received.

(Translated by Michael Pye)