

EDWARD HAMLIN

DISCOURSE IN THE LAṆKĀVATĀRA-SŪTRA

In the study of Mahāyāna Buddhism one finds again and again that certain philosophical contradictions, rather than undermining religious thought, actually serve to stimulate it, propelling it to greater heights of inventiveness and insight. Among these productive contradictions we can certainly count the problem of *language*. It is easily stated: What is the status of words which insist that all words are essentially empty of meaning? How can a philosophical system which makes full and rich use of its conceptual language contend at the same time that language is not a means of access to religious truth? From the Buddha's refusal to answer metaphysical questions to the linguistic conundrums of Zen *kōans*, the Buddhist tradition has demonstrated an ongoing concern with the problem of expressing – or prompting – the 'enlightenment' experience with words. With the rise of the Mahāyāna shortly before the time of Christ, the language question took on a singular importance: the distinctive literature of the Mahāyāna thinkers displayed a new willingness to penetrate the potentially labyrinthine depths of the Buddha's basic teachings, inaugurating a scholasticism which sought to formulate coherent theoretical accounts of the Buddhist experience. The appearance of sophisticated and dialectical works such as the *Vimalakīrti-nirdeśa-sūtra* signalled a new current in Buddhist thought, one which led inevitably to a critical reflection on the nature of language itself, on its forms and limits, its strategies, and its power to transform direct experiencing. With this new reflection, moreover, came a revolution of rhetoric: language was recast as a valuable instrument of skillful means (*upāya*), a religious modality of the highest importance.

This essay is meant to explore a few of the ways in which a particular Mahāyāna text, the *Laṅkāvatāra-sūtra* (ca. 300 AD¹), pursued the new critique of language – and more particularly, how it sought to use language as a special means of sharpening and opening intuitive experience. For two quite separate reasons, what follows is intended as a phenomenological study. First, it attempts to show that the writers of the *Laṅkāvatāra* meant to make a point about how language interacts with perception and pre-conscious

experiencing — and thus undertook something akin to what we understand as a phenomenological investigation, or an inquiry which seeks to formulate a precise description of the experiential process. And second, this essay itself is meant to be a reflection on the process of interpreting a Buddhist text, on the interaction of language and direct experiencing in the activity of reading. I hope to demonstrate that the writers of the *Laṅkāvatāra* employed unique linguistic *strategies* in their attempt to present their views of the world and of Buddhism, strategies which directly condition our reading of what they have written. I have tried, therefore, to maintain a reflective point of reference throughout the essay, one which keeps a sort of phenomenological logbook of the reading process. For only by maintaining a degree of lucidity with regard to the methods we employ in reading Buddhist texts can we hope to appreciate what it is they express of Buddhist life. Both philosophical traditions, Buddhist and Western, have come to understand that theoretical constructs cannot simply “contain” experience; and accordingly, each in its own way has tried to uncover the nature of the reciprocal *interaction* of thinking and experiencing in the conduct of sentient life. It is at this level that the present study intends to address the *Laṅkāvatāra*.

The *Laṅkāvatāra-sūtra*, though it has played a pivotal role in the Mahāyāna tradition,² continues to baffle and frustrate its readers by confronting them with a philosophical discourse which is at once disjointed, contradictory, and highly digressive. The usual response to the inherent difficulties of the text has been to assert that its composition was haphazard and unsystematic; following the lead of D. T. Suzuki, many in the West have believed the sūtra to be little more than a conglomeration of free-floating Mahāyāna ideas, pulled together loosely under a single title and a crude narrative structure. Typical of this response is Suzuki’s dismissal of the “108 questions/108 *pādas*” section, in which the Buddha “answers” the bodhisattva Mahāmāti’s questions and declaims a series of metaphysical verses:

Whatever we may say about them, one thing sure is that these questions and answers are incoherently strung together, and we fail to find any logical interpretation to the whole body of the *gāthās* making up the first part of the *Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra* . . . the 108 clauses (*pādas*) preached by the Buddhas of the past are a string of negations, negating any notion that happened to come into the mind at the moment, apparently with no system, with no special philosophy in them. These negations are another example of the irrationality of the *Laṅkāvatāra*.

Suzuki sifts briefly through the content of the questions and *pādas*, trying to relate their subject-matter to the rest of the text. Failing this, he dismisses the section as anomalous and unworthy of serious consideration.

The number of terms . . . does not matter very much. What does matter is the subject-matter and the ultimate significance of the negations. Are all these negations from the point of view of absolute *Śūnyatā* philosophy? . . . Are they all important notions for the emancipation of sentient beings? Are they subjects to be treated in the body of the *Laṅkāvatāra*? If so, how is it that the eight *Vijñānas*, which occupy a position of chief interest in the sūtra, are not at all mentioned here? In short, the presence of these so-called 108 questions (*praśna*) forming the first section of the *Laṅkāvatāra* proper, can safely be cut off as not essentially belonging to the teachings.

(SLVS, p. 41)

Despite such a summary dismissal of the portions of the text he finds incoherent, Suzuki is interested enough in the issue of its composition to offer a number of tentative hypotheses regarding its origin. He wonders if perhaps the *Laṅkāvatāra* is merely a collection of shorter, independent sūtras compiled as a sourcebook or anthology. He argues, through a survey of extant versions of the sūtra, that certain sections of the text (for example, the Rāvaṇa and meat-eating chapters) are later accretions added by the Chinese and Tibetan translators. And finally, he suggests that the current versions are merely abridgements of a larger, more comprehensive edition now lost. This last theory gives him a possible explanation for the apparent incoherence of the 108 questions/108 *pādas* section:

. . . it is probable that the *Laṅkāvatāra* which we have at present . . . is an abridgement of a larger and fuller text, that is, selections made from it by a Mahāyāna scholar who took them down in his notebook for his own use; and that in the larger text not only the 108 questions (*praśna*) but the 108 clauses (*pāda*) are systematically answered and explained. In any event, something more than the present text of the *Laṅkāvatāra* is needed to understand it thoroughly and harmoniously.

(SLVS, p. 42)

Whatever the plausibility of Suzuki's hypotheses from a strictly historical standpoint, it is clear that they represent an attempt to explain the difficulties of the text *externally* rather than *internally*. Under the sway of his massive *Studies in the Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra* (1930) this external interpretation has long held court among Western critics, apparently discouraging scholars from attempting a more modern reading of the work.³ It is time for us to try again to approach its very real difficulties and problems, giving due attention to

the *internal* semantics of the text. Since Suzuki's time much has developed in the way of hermeneutic theory; for all his prodigious energy, that scholar of Zen had at his disposal only a modest arsenal of critical tools and techniques. The *Laṅkāvatāra* is a philosophical, discursive text which makes extremely scant mention of meditation and other practice-oriented topics; therefore we must analyze it philosophically – *textually* – in order to begin to make sense of it. The hermeneutic of this essay will focus particularly on the *linguistic strategies* of the *Laṅkāvatāra*: besides addressing the overt content of the discourse it presents we will look carefully at its *method*, at its philosophical style, and ultimately, at its implicit assumptions about the uses of language. As even a cursory reading of Buddhist writers like Nāgārjuna and Aśaṅga will readily remind us, we must not err on the side of ascribing too little rhetorical sophistication to writers in the Mahāyāna tradition; with their dramatic, argumentative, and paradoxical moods the Mahāyāna texts confront the reader with a wide spectrum of formidable challenges and puzzles. The *Laṅkāvatāra-sūtra* is no exception. If we are to read it meaningfully, we must regard it not only as a collection of Mahāyāna theories, as Suzuki did, but as a unique linguistic *production*, with all the subtleties and rhetorical nuances entailed by that word.

1. VISUAL LANGUAGE AND MĀYĀ

The *Laṅkāvatāra-sūtra* opens with a spectacle, a play of illusions which serves to introduce one of the central themes of the text: the doctrine of *māyā*, the dream-like quality of the phenomenal word. Asked by Rāvaṇa, the ten-headed king of the Rākṣasas, to expound the Dharma, the Buddha responds with what seems to be a miraculous manipulation of reality:

Thereupon the Blessed One created jewel-adorned mountains and other objects magnificently embellished with jewels in an immense number. On the summit of each mountain the Buddha himself was visible, and Rāvaṇa, the Yakṣa, also was found standing there. Thus the entire assembly was seen on each mountain peak . . . here too was the king of the Rākṣasas and with him the residents of Laṅkā, and the Laṅkā created by the Buddha rivalling (the real one). Other things were there too, (like) the Aśoka (garden) with its shining woods, and on each mountain peak Mahāmāti was making a request of the Buddha. . . .

(LVS, p. 8)

Each of the newly-created Buddhas, like the original one, lectures on the teachings in a magnificent voice “varied in hundreds of thousands of ways”.

But then, to consummate the spectacle, the Buddha and his entourage disappear into thin air, leaving Rāvaṇa completely alone. Bewildered, Rāvaṇa tries out several explanations for what he has witnessed: "Is it a dream then? or a vision? or is it a castle conjured up by the Gandharvas?" (LVS, p. 8) Dissatisfied with these more traditional rationalizations, Rāvaṇa realizes that what he has witnessed is a demonstration of *māyā*, the illusory nature of phenomenal reality. Anticipating the seminal argument of the sūtra, he concludes that "this is the nature as such (*dharmatā*) of all things, which belong to the realm of Mind . . . there is neither the seer nor the seen, neither the speaker nor the spoken . . ." (LVS, p. 9). Even the Buddha and the Dharma spring from the empty play of the mind: having once disappeared into nothingness, the Buddha now speaks directly to the newly-enlightened Rāvaṇa:

Rāvaṇa . . . found himself abiding in the Buddha-knowledge when a voice was heard from the sky, saying, 'It is to be known by oneself.'
 'Well done, well done, Lord of Laṅkā! Well done indeed, Lord of Laṅkā, once again. The Yogīn is to discipline himself as you do. The Tathāgatas and all things are to be viewed as you view them' (LVS, p. 10)

Significantly, Rāvaṇa wishes to see the invisible speaker, the Buddha, with his own eyes — thus further extending the play of illusion and reality. In imploring the Buddha to reappear, Rāvaṇa expresses a quite understandable need to see an exemplar of the teachings before him, whether that exemplar be mere *māyā* or not.

I wish to see the Blessed One again, who has all the disciplinary practices at his command, who has turned away from the practices of the heretics . . . may I thus see again, by means of his miraculous powers, the Compassionate One in whom the fuel of passion and discrimination is exhausted, who is surrounded by sons of the Buddha . . . and seeing him may I attain what I have not yet attained, (retain) what I have already gained . . . (LVS, p. 11)

This is a traditional setpiece: the revelation of a divine or at least suprahuman being to human eyes. Arjuna tells Kṛṣṇa, for example, that "I have heard thy words of truth, but my soul is yearning to see: to see thy form as God of this all . . ." ⁴ Similarly, Rāvaṇa asks the Buddha to undo the spectacular disappearance in order to deepen his own enlightenment. The Buddha, seeing that Rāvaṇa is on the verge of a profound insight, fulfills his request; but he does so by reinstating the first illusion — the panorama of Buddhas

spread across the mountains — *not* by reappearing in his ordinary and singular form:

At that moment, the Blessed One, seeing that the Lord of Laṅkā was receptive to the insight that states of existence have no origin (Skt. *anutpattikadharmakṣānti*, Tib. *ma-skyes pa'i-chos-la-bzod-pa*), showed his glorious compassion for the ten-headed one by making himself visible once more on the mountain peak studded with many jewels . . . the ten-headed king of Laṅkā saw the splendor again as seen before on the mountain peak(s) . . . and he saw himself on each mountain peak, together with Mahāmātī, in front of the Tathāgata (LVS, p. 12)

This last vision has many consequences, for it foreshadows several key philosophical points. Why does the Buddha reinstate the first illusion rather than restoring himself in a “normal” and unitary form? And what is the significance of the fact that Rāvaṇa sees *himself* on each mountain peak?

The sūtra will argue at some length that there is an important distinction between absolute knowledge (Skt. *prajñā*, Tib. *ṣes-rab*) and relative knowledge (Skt. *vikalpa*, Tib. *rnam-par rtog-pa*). *Prajñā* will emerge as the sort of knowledge which grasps the “true” nature of phenomenal reality — its nature as *māyā*. Relative knowledge, or *vikalpa*, will prove to be a knowledge of “discriminated forms” — a knowledge which breaks up the world into a web of objects, each with its own individual existence or non-existence. In general, relative knowledge serves as a trap, mooring us in the delusion that “things” have unique existences and natures of their own; absolute knowledge is what springs us from the trap, liberating us from the error of believing in “things” as such. But where does the Dharma, the Buddha’s teaching, fit into this scheme? Where indeed does the Buddha himself belong? In keeping with its renunciation of the logical games of *vikalpa*, the *Laṅkāvatāra* must argue that *all* concepts, even the Buddha’s concepts, are fundamentally empty, as are physical forms. Words and things are both merely manifestations of *māyā*. But this presents a clear pedagogical problem for the sūtra: are the Buddha’s discourses worthless? Is there any point in discussing Buddhist ideas at all? How can one follow the Buddha’s way if both the Buddha and the way are empty?

The provisional solution suggested in the opening allegory of the sūtra is this: while words and concepts are empty by comparison with the absolute knowledge of *prajñā*, there are grades of soteriological value within the general framework of relativity. To wit: some concepts are useful in bringing about enlightenment, and some are not. Though truth is not to be found in

words alone, words can help push direct experiencing deeper and deeper until *prajñā* takes hold. This doctrine, which will emerge in greater detail as the work proceeds, is latent in the imagery of the opening scene: the Buddha *speaks* to Rāvaṇa from *empty space*, graphically linking the phenomenon of language (as speaking) with that of emptiness (as space).⁵ When the Buddha then appears again at Rāvaṇa's imploring, the text informs us that he does so because he senses that his appearance – though *māyā* – will push Rāvaṇa to a yet deeper intuitive level. In order for this to work properly, he must arrange to appear in such a way that the emptiness of his image is unmistakable. Rather than reappearing as a conventional man, the Buddha reappears as spectacle, reduplicated endlessly atop the mountain peaks ringing Laṅkā. The very power of this extended illusion, as the text tells us, demonstrates to Rāvaṇa the truth of emptiness.

Hand in hand with this foreshadowing of the doctrine of emptiness is a suggestion of the doctrine of egolessness (Skt. *anātman*, Tib. *bdag-med-pa*). Not only the Buddha, but Rāvaṇa too appears on the mountain peaks: Rāvaṇa witnesses his own *māyā*-nature as an integral part of the magical demonstration. If Rāvaṇa appears on fifty mountain peaks, who can say which, if any, of the appearances is “real?” Much of the philosophical discussion of the sūtra is underpinned by the necessity of recognizing that the self is *māyā* – for only by doing so is the practitioner finally capable of breaking his attachment to *things*. This twofold suspension of self and object is suggested, in fact, after the first illusion mysteriously vanishes: Rāvaṇa wonders to himself, “How is this? What does this mean? And by whom was it heard? What was it that was seen? And by whom was it seen? Where is the city? And where is the Buddha?” (LVS, p. 13). If the seen implies the seer, and the seen disappears, what can we say about the original reality of the seer? If the heard implies the hearer, and the heard disappears, what becomes of the hearer? This dual emptying of everyday reality-concepts will occupy a good part of the text. The opening allegory only hints at it, clothing the central philosophical problem in theatrical imagery.

The initial spectacle of the *Laṅkāvatāra* culminates in an even more precipitate demonstration of *māyā*.

Then the Blessed One, beholding again this great assembly with his wisdom eye, which is not the human eye, laughed loudly and most vigorously like the lion-king. Emitting rays of light from the tuft of hair between the eyebrows, from the ribs, from the loins, from the *śrivatsa* on the breast, and from every pore of the skin – emitting rays of light

which shone flaming like the fire occurring at the end of a *kalpa*, like a luminous rainbow, like the rising sun, blazing brilliantly, gloriously . . . — the one who sat on the peak resembling Mount Sumeru laughed the loudest laugh. (LVS, p. 13)

This visionary climax serves a particular verbal purpose: it causes Mahāmāti, a bodhisattva, to ask the Buddha for an explanation of his behavior. Until this point the emphasis of the scene has been on *visual* semantics, with the issue of verbal language waiting in the wings. After the creation of the first vision, Rāvaṇa reflects that “those who see things such as were seen before, do not see the Buddha; (even) when discrimination is not activated one does not see the Buddha; the Buddha, being fully enlightened, is seen where the world itself is not evolved.” (LVS, p. 9) Moments later, when the Buddha has dissolved the first illusion and addresses him from empty space, he tells Rāvaṇa to “reflect on the signification of this as you did when seeing the Tathāgata before; for this indeed is seeing the Tathāgata.” (LVS, p. 11) But now, after the Buddha’s enigmatic laugh, Mahāmāti confronts the Buddha, wanting an explanation. This confrontation sets in gear the philosophical dialogue which will dominate the remainder of the sūtra. The Buddha applauds Mahāmāti’s inquiry, and proceeds to offer to answer any questions he might have. The magical laugh — a special sort of verbal utterance, a special creation of *māyā* — thus serves as a transition from the almost purely visual level of *māyā*, as manifested in the succession of illusions, to the verbal or linguistic level of *māyā*, the level of words and their meanings. Mahāmāti decides to confront the Buddha explicitly because he realizes that “beings to be born in the future would be confused because of their delight in the verbal teaching (*deśanāpāṭha*), because of clinging to the letter as (much as) the spirit (*artha*) . . .” (LVS, p. 14). The instances of visual *māyā* served to enlighten the ten-headed demon king Rāvaṇa by demonstrating the emptiness of phenomenal appearance; now the Buddha sets out to enlighten Mahāmāti and his troupe of bodhisattvas by using words — philosophical discourse — to lead to the *same* intuition of emptiness. Any phenomenon of *māyā* can seemingly be manipulated by the Buddha to achieve the same result: its self-revelation as emptiness. But certain sorts of practitioners require special efforts; it is the Buddha’s skillful means (*upāya*) that dictate the form his teaching will take. The mode for the rest of the text is discursive, since the Buddha’s intention is to lead his auditors through language toward an experience of enlightenment. In showing the flaws of everyday logic, laying out an alternative conceptual scheme, and then

emptying his own logical paradigm, the Buddha hopes to usher his interlocutors toward a more direct encounter with reality as it is, or *suchness* (Skt. *tathatā*, Tib. *yañ-dag-pa*) — an encounter which, as we will see, reaches beyond the relative knowledge of logical *vikalpa* and engages the absolute knowledge of *prajñā*.

2. COUNTERFEIT AND REAL: THE ONTOLOGY OF THE WORLD

The opening allegory of the *Laṅkāvatāra* suggests a threefold ontological distinction. We may think of the experienced world as either: (a) Real; (b) Unreal; or (c) Realistic but empty. Though much of the early language of the text would seem to favor the second interpretation, later passages overtly contradict such a reading. The Buddha repeatedly cautions his listeners against simple nihilism — the mistake of believing that the phenomenal world is mere fantasy, an absolute unreality, a shadow play. The various Chinese versions of the sūtra in particular stress the importance of not being seduced by the conception of *māyā* elaborated in the Hindu tradition. Indian classical literature is full of whimsical stories which could lead to what the Buddha considers to be a “nihilistic” view of *māyā*; in the *Purāṇas*, for example, we find the following story about Nārada:

... the sage Nārada bathed in a pool and came up a woman; she married, had children, and lived to see them all slain, and when she threw herself upon their funeral pyre she emerged from the pool as Nārada⁶

Though this sort of story is at least outwardly reminiscent of the Buddha’s multiple changes of state at the beginning of the *Laṅkāvatāra*, the Buddha carefully stresses the proper *understanding* of such phenomena: they do not indicate the absolute nothingness of things, but only the delusion which results from the operation of the human mind. It is the mind itself — in *vikalpa* — which mistakenly divides a phenomenal flux into a web of discrete objects; contradictions and paradoxes like that of Nārada arise as a second-order result of the mind’s primary falsification, the discrimination of an objective world. Instead of the oblivion of a pure void, the Buddha would have his listeners understand that “an objective world, like a vision, is a manifestation of Mind itself.” “Mind” thus becomes the real core of ontological analysis, as we will see; the *Laṅkāvatāra* argues that it is impossible to understand the nature of physical or “phenomenal” reality

without first understanding the operation of the mind — chiefly, its discriminative conatus. Here epistemology must precede ontology.

In asserting the primacy of consciousness the writers of the sūtra set themselves apart from several of the pre-Mahāyāna schools which had attempted to reason out the nature of phenomenal objects and events without recourse to an in-depth analysis of consciousness (though they sometimes undertook such an analysis independently of the problem of ontology). The Sautrāntikas, for example, had erected an elaborate ontology around a theory of *events*, arguing that an event persists for only an instant, perishing as soon as it acquires its being. Its destruction is spontaneous, requiring no outside or psychological cause. By contrast, the Sarvāstivādins had believed events to consist of four distinct steps, origination, subsistence, decay, and destruction. Each step required a separate and distinct motive principle, a unique cause. Thus, an event was a complex of causal influences, arising in composite fashion from the web of dependent co-origination (*pratītya-samutpāda*). Both lines of thought represent attempts to think about phenomenal reality in a rather objectivist manner — a manner which de-emphasizes the role of mind in bringing about the succession of events and things.⁷

Between a simple nihilism and an objectivist materialism, then, the *Laṅkāvatāra* presents a doctrine which attempts to link the ontological status of the panorama of *māyā* to the operation of the mind. In essence, the text's project is to explain how the mind *generates* the world of phenomena — not how that world sustains itself. But though it is a highly psychological text, preoccupied with the analysis of cognition and perception, it is far from the sort of psychologism which denies ontological independence to the world. The analysis of cognition will in fact ultimately serve to guarantee the "reality" of the phenomenal flux — though, as will become apparent, this "reality" is of a radical sort indeed. The key to understanding the text's radical concept of reality lies in its analysis of *māyā*, an analysis which makes extensive use of the simile of *dreams* or *counterfeits*. The symbolism of dream is in some ways the root of the sūtra's entire analytic.

What is the nature of a dream? We have suggested that the *Laṅkāvatāra* opts for the thesis that a dream — like phenomenal reality — is an instance of *realistic but empty* experiencing. *Realistic*, because its components possess a certain verisimilitude, an appearance of genuineness, presenting themselves as independent objects in an external world. And *empty*, because there "are"

no such objects and no such world; *individuation is an illusion*. The fact that things seem to rise up, sustain themselves, and pass away is a deception — a trick which in fact constitutes the mind's normal procedure.

... all *dharma*s are like *māyā* because they are unreal, like a lightning flash which is seen as quickly disappearing. Mahāmāti, just as fools speak of the appearance and disappearance of the lightning flash, so also are all beings understood as having the marks of generality and self-being — (in both cases) this is because of clinging to the marks of form. (LVS, p. 95)

By employing a familiar example — an example reminiscent of the Sautrāntika theory of events — the Buddha is able to add a new facet to the usual conception of *māyā*. Phenomenal components (Skt. *dharma*, Tib. *chos*) do not appear as individuals by virtue of their own nature, but because of the mind's incessant attachment to the "marks" of form (Skt. *lakṣaṇa*, Tib. *mtshan*). By the same token, they do not appear as members of a class (i.e., in their "generality") until we divide them up and subsume them under categories. If their individuality and generality are functions of our cognitive process, then they cannot truly come into being and pass away; even their mutability must arise from the discrimination of the mind. It is mind, not things, which causes the apparent rise and fall of phenomena. The *Laṅkāvatāra* thus reduces the question of the spontaneity of things to a question about *mind*, not one about *things* per se. The elements of a dream do not come and go of their own accord, whatever the appearances to the contrary; they come and go because we make them do so. It is no more than a convention of speech (*vāgvikalpa*) to speak of "things" as "real". The whole idea of an individual thing is rooted in the relative knowledge of *vikalpa*; "reality", whatever it is, is something quite apart from the net of objects, relations, and events of which we speak in everyday parlance.

The language of dream and illusion in the sūtra sometimes gives way to a different, though fundamentally closely related, simile: that of the shadow or counterfeit. Like the dream language, this second simile cuts phenomena off from any domain of "essence" or individuated being.

Lord of Laṅkā, the appearance of beings is perceived like that of figures painted on the wall; they have no sensibility. Lord of Laṅkā, all that alights in the world possesses *karma* and *kriyā*; (but) because of the nonbeing of all *dharma*s, no one hears (phenomena), nor is heard. Lord of Laṅkā, all that alights in the world is like a magically created image . . . those who see otherwise walk in discrimination; because of the discrimination of self-being, they cling to dualism. It is like seeing one's shadow reflected in the mirror,

or one's shadow on the water, or in the moonlight, or seeing one's shadow in the house, or hearing an echo in the valley.

(LVS, p. 20)⁸

None of the types of images here enumerated has an external object of essence; they are patterns without an "original". Here we have a play on the idea of the counterfeit: the shadow thrown by the (empty) image, the shadow of the (empty) shadow, and so on, *ad infinitum*. The perceived "reality" of physical beings becomes mere illusion; their being is reduced to the being of the counterfeit, a being of falsity and deceit. (Plato works with a somewhat similar motif in *Republic* 509c–517c: he sketches a mythical cave in which prisoners, bound in a fixed position, see only the shadows thrown by artifacts paraded in front of a strong light behind them, which they cannot see. Socrates concludes that "such men would hold that the truth is nothing other than the shadows of artificial things" (515c) – and in fact relegates the counterfeit to the lowest reaches of the "divided line" which represents the progression of modes of knowledge and being. The difference, of course, is this: while the *Laṅkāvatāra* would well agree with Socrates' critique of any knowledge which is based on the apprehension of counterfeits, it would resist the general upward movement along the divided line toward the ultimate reality of the "forms" – the originals of which objects themselves are but crude images. Whereas the divided line implies a clear, upward progression toward greater and greater ontological clarity and concreteness, the *Laṅkāvatāra* disallows any such movement by emptying the very concept of *being*. The image on the wall is no less "real" than the object which throws it, since the object itself is not strictly real; by the same token, no "form" can stand prior, as an absolute, to the phenomenal image.)

The ultimate conclusion of the *Laṅkāvatāra*'s deconstruction of *māyā* seems inevitable: "Things are not as they are seen, nor are they otherwise". A dream is neither real (in that it reflects no external world of individuated objects) nor non-real (in that we have a concrete experience of it as we dream). Suzuki, in his translation of the sūtra, employs the term "unreal"; but perhaps a better coinage would be the modern term, *irreal* – better only in the sense that it might avoid the error of nihilism, an error which the text adamantly cautions us against. The English language lacks a precise word to describe that peculiarly intermediate state of being which our text ascribes to *māyā*. Since it makes constant mention of concepts such as *tathatā* and *dharmatā* we are compelled to leave the door open to a further permutation

of its basic ontological scheme, one which will perhaps supersede even the intermediate ontology articulated to this point. Early in the work the Buddha lectures that the bodhisattva attains enlightenment when he vaults over discrimination and achieves a state of “imagelessness” (LVS, p. 38) — at which point he grasps things “as they are”, free of egotistical distortions. But how can the sūtra speak of “things as they are” after so radically undermining the notion of thinghood? In order to answer this question we will have to examine carefully the model of consciousness presented by the *Laṅkāvatāra* Buddha. Our guiding question must now be: how does the illusion of *māyā* come about?

3. THE VIJÑĀNAS

The fundamental component of the *Laṅkāvatāra*'s model of the mind is the *vijñāna*. The mind is described as an interlocking complex of *vijñānas*, the net function of which is to produce the phenomenon of *māyā*. Since the *vijñāna* is so pivotal to the meaning of the text, it will help if we pause for a moment to investigate the term itself more thoroughly.

The verbal stem of the Sanskrit word *vijñāna* is $\sqrt{jiñā}$ -, which means to discern, to distinguish, to know, to understand.⁹ The preverb, *vi*-, expresses a variety of operations, including division, distinction, distribution, arrangement, ordering, opposition, and deliberation. Interestingly, it is possible that *vi*- devolves etymologically from *dvi* “two” — a derivation which adds several more senses to the preverb, among them: asunder, apart, to and fro, in different directions, about, away, away from, off, and without. The usual meaning of the word *vijñāna* is “the act of distinguishing or discerning, understanding, comprehending, recognizing, intelligence, knowledge”¹⁰ — a meaning which certainly includes all of the senses recognized in the *Laṅkāvatāra*. But as we shall also see, the *Laṅkāvatāra*'s specialized, philosophical usage of the term brings forward the connotations of the preverb more forcefully, in particular its emphasis on division. The *vijñāna* will emerge as a faculty which *divides up* the world, yielding a knowledge which rests on the discrimination of opposites from one another. The result of the *vijñānas*' activity is a fragmented worldview, one which artificially posits individuated objects where there are only temporary, ephemeral *dharmas*. This sense is carried through effectively in the Tibetan rendering of *vijñāna*: the Tibetan *rnam-par šes-pa* literally means “piece- or part-wise

knowing". As indicated by the Tibetan terminology, the term *vijñāna* can have both a restrictive and a global connotation: restrictively, a *vijñāna* is a component or "faculty" of the mind which is linked to a particular type of "knowing" – sight, for example; globally, *vijñāna* serves to represent the composite activities of the separate *vijñānas*, in much the same way that we might refer to *Sensation* as a generic term for the *senses*.

The sūtra recognizes eight separate, though integrated, *vijñānas*. They are: eye-*vijñāna*, ear-*vijñāna*, nose-*vijñāna*, tongue-*vijñāna*, body-*vijñāna*, *mano-vijñāna*, *manas*, and *ālayavijñāna*. The first five, of course, parallel what we would call the five senses: sight, sound, smell, taste, and touch. They are active faculties, helping to generate our "discrimination knowledge" of the world. But in order to do so, they require the agency of the sixth, *manovijñāna* (Tib. *yid-kyi-rnam-par-ṣes-pa*):

Along with this system of five *vijñānas*, there is what is known as the *manovijñāna*, whereby the objective world is distinguished and individual appearances are distinctly determined, and in this the physical body has its genesis. (LVS, p. 40)

While the five primary sense-*vijñānas* apprehend the sense-field "like a mirror reflecting objects," the sixth *vijñāna*, *manovijñāna*, is what delimits the boundaries of each object and thus sets the stage for the appearance of a world. Simply: "the function of the *manovijñāna* is to recognize . . ." (LVS, p. 43). It is impossible to separate the operation of the "perceiving" *vijñānas* from that of this crucial sixth.

Mahāmāti, between the two, the perceiving *vijñāna* and the object-discriminating *vijñāna*, there is no difference; they are mutually conditioning. In this way, Mahāmāti, the perceiving *vijñāna* works through the transformation of unthinkable remembered impressions, while the object-discriminating *vijñāna* functions through the mind's discrimination of an objective world and through impressions accumulated by erroneous reasoning since beginningless time. (LVS, p. 34)

We will have more to say about the role of "impressions" (*vāsanā*) shortly; the important thing at this point is the interlock of the perception and discrimination functions – or in the terminology of the model, the linkage of the five sense-*vijñānas* with the *manovijñāna*. The above passage argues, in essence, that they never operate singly: whenever a perception arises in one of the sense-*vijñānas*, it is discriminated by the *manovijñāna*. Likewise, the *manovijñāna* cannot operate without the underlying activity of the perceptual centers. There is no such thing as "pure sense"; nor is there such

a thing as “intuition of pure form”. We see objects, not a formless blur; by the same token, the forms we think of all have an imagic content. It is in this sense that the sense-faculties are engaged in a *constructive* process in tandem with *manovijñāna*: consciousness as presented here is a perpetual synthesis, a recompounding of *dharmas* which maintains the illusion of a steady horizon of objects. But how does the “world” as such emerge from the spectrum of discriminated objects? How does the mind grasp an overarching unity behind individual appearances, such that it perceives itself to be “in space”, “in time”, and “in a world?”

The problem of constructing a world rests on the two *vijñānas* we have not yet discussed: *manas* and *ālayavijñāna*. Taken hermeneutically, these two terms dwell at a higher structural level than do the six other *vijñānas* — in fact, they are not properly *vijñānas* at all, but instead serve special integrative and directive functions which organize the discriminated data provided by the sense-*vijñānas*. One can think of them as the supportive network of the *vijñāna* system, its “administration”.

In early Buddhism, *manas* forms one strand of the *vedanākkhandā* (Pali), the “aggregate of sensation”, which in turn forms but one part of the fivefold scheme of the *skandhas*. But *manas* acquires a somewhat different set of connotations in the Mahāyāna, an additional texture which anticipates the *Laṅkāvatāra*’s rather unique understanding of *māyā*. The sūtra tells us that “*manas* is evolved along with the idea of an ego and its possessions, to which it clings and upon which it reflects” (LVS, p. 109). Whereas *manovijñāna* divides the world into a web of objects, *manas* polarizes this world around a falsely-discriminated ego or self. *Manas* develops attachments and aversions to the “things” which *manovijñāna* isolates. In this sense *manas* contributes substantially to the establishment of the “worldhood” of the world: it furnishes *perspective*, the absolute focus of an ego from which the “world” recedes as horizon. Secondly, it works out a web of relations between objects upon which it bases its valuation of them; hence it feeds directly into the activity of discursive thought and rationality. In short, *manas* is the active center of ego-reifying activity, a process which works directly through the perceptual and cognitive discrimination of the *world* as such. *Manas* will presently lead us to the concept of *vikalpa*, or “discriminating knowledge”. But first let us look at the last of the eight *vijñānas*, the *ālayavijñāna*.

In order to grasp the full richness of meaning conveyed by the term *ālayavijñāna*, we must examine not only the term itself but also its synonym

within the text: *citta*. The word *ālaya*- is a combination of the prefix *ā-* and the root $\sqrt{\text{ā}}$: to come close to, to settle down upon, to stoop, to crouch. *Ālaya* becomes, by extension, house, dwelling, receptacle, asylum. The word *himālaya*, for example, means “abode of snow”. In the philosophical context of the sūtra, then, we might assume that *ālaya-vijñāna* indicates the “abode of discrimination”; and in one sense this would be correct. But this reading would not suffice to make it the powerful concept that it was for the *Laṅkāvatāra* and for later Mahāyāna. We have yet to link it with its synonym, *citta*.

Citta generally derives from $\sqrt{\text{cit-}}$, “to think”; but in the *Laṅkāvatāra* it is also explicitly related to $\sqrt{\text{ci-}}$, “to pile up”, “to arrange in order” (LVS, p. xxi). This aspect extends the meaning of *ālayavijñāna*: not only is the *ālaya/citta* the “abode” of discrimination; it is also the *storehouse* of discriminated forms. Here accumulate the many discriminations generated by the seven lower *vijñānas*. Once present in the *ālaya*, these discriminations impel the *vijñānas* forward as “unconscious impressions” (Skt. *vāsanā*, Tib. *bag-chags*), perpetuating the vicious circle of *samsāric* mind. In this manner *ālayavijñāna* provides the second requisite condition for the experience of the world as such, in its “worldhood”: *phenomenal continuity*, the association of present (discriminated) perceptions with those of the past. To grasp the horizon of *dharma*s as constitutive of a “world” as such, we must: (a) implicitly assume a perspective or a vantage-point toward them; and (b) implicitly treat them as homogeneous, temporally continuous existents. The first is carried out by *manas*; the second by the *ālayavijñāna*, through its maintenance of a stock of *vāsanā*. Together with the basic, object-discrimination activity of *manovijñāna*, these two higher-level functions lock the unenlightened mind in its state of delusion and perpetuate the pageant of *māyā*. Their activities dominate the unenlightened mind, constituting its sole function (the Tibetan translation of *ālayavijñāna* punctuates the point: *kun-gži rnam-par šes-pa* literally means “the ground-of-all *vijñāna*”). For this very reason, *manovijñāna* and *ālayavijñāna* play absolutely essential roles in the enlightenment process: they are the pivots upon which spiritual progress or regress turns.

The *ālayavijñāna* is certainly one of the most difficult concepts in the *Laṅkāvatāra* — and also one of the most controversial. Historically, its close cognates and relatives include the *tathāgatagarbha* popularized by the Ch’an writers and the *dharmadhātu* of the mainstream Yogācārins. Perhaps because

of its inherent difficulty, the *ālaya* is often described through similes and metaphors. The most common of these – and one which would become seminal for Mahāyāna – is the simile of the mind-ocean:

Like waves which rise on the ocean stirred by the wind, dancing and without interruption, the *ālaya*-ocean is, in a similar manner, constantly stirred by the winds of objectivity, and so is seen dancing about with the various *viññāna*-waves As the waves in their variety are stirred in the ocean, so in the *ālaya* is produced the variety of what is known as the *viññānas*. (LVS, p. 42)

Or similarly,

As the waves are seen on the ocean, or (images) in a mirror or a dream, so the *citta* is reflected in its own fields. (LVS, p. 43)

The *ālayaviññāna*, so it would seem, is the medium through which the various *viññānas* operate; it is a substrate of some kind. But is it a substance? If so, how can it stand above *māyā*? Isn't *substantia* merely an illusion of the *manoviññāna* itself?

The ontological status of the *ālayaviññāna* presents a knotty problem not only for the present text, but for later Mahāyāna works as well. The crux of this problem is the attempt to cast the *ālaya* as two things in one: while it normally serves as the storehouse of discriminated forms and (somehow) the “medium” of the *viññānas*, it is also the essentially formless *tathāgatagarbha* (Tib. *de-bžin gšegs-pai sññ-po*) or “womb of Buddha (hood)”. This dual role allows the *ālaya*, in tandem with the *manoviññāna*, to act as a soteriological pivot, a point marking the transformation from the unenlightened to the enlightened state of being. As a transitional agent, its ontological status is cast into doubt: is the *ālaya* “formal” as the storehouse of the *viññānas*, or “formless” as the womb of enlightenment? Moreover, is it the “whole” uniting the activities of the “partwise” *viññānas*, or is it without individual being in the “emptiness” of the absolute?

The answers to these questions seem to lie in the doctrine of *upāya*. The language of “form” and “formlessness” is applied to the *ālaya* merely as a device of skillful means:

. . . there are no such varieties of color in the waves (of *citta/ālaya*); it is for the sake of the simpleminded that the *citta* is said to be evolving in terms of form. There is no such evolving in the *citta* itself, which is beyond understanding. Where there is understanding there is also that which understands – just like the waves (LVS, p. 42)

To predicate qualities (“wavelike”, “agitated”, “formless”) of the *ālayavijñāna* is to discriminate it – to describe it only within the falsifying framework of *vikalpa*. Even our philosophical terms are “waves” in the mind; as such, they cannot capture the “reality” which is pointed to by the term “formless”. Only *prajñā*, as we will see, has the ability to grasp the formless – but *prajñā* is beyond ordinary language. To claim that *ālaya/citta* is “beyond understanding” is not to dismiss it as a phantom, but merely to assert that *vikalpa* is not a suitable means of access to its unique mode of reality.

And yet, there can be no doubt that the text ascribes a soteriological primacy to the “formless”. We will see (in Section 5) that the mind’s sudden turn away from the discrimination of form constitutes the decisive first step on the path of enlightenment. When the Buddha asserts the “formlessness” of *citta/ālaya*, a bodhisattva (probably Mahāmāti) is prompted to ask:

The ocean is distinctly seen dancing in a state of wave-ness; how is it that the evolving of the *ālaya* (in terms of form) is not also recognized? (LVS, p. 43)

The Buddha responds by tempering his original simile, insisting that its justification depends on its utility as *upāya*; in doing so he points beyond simile itself:

The *ālaya* is compared to the ocean for the sake of the discriminating intellect of the ignorant; its likeness to waves in motion is drawn out only by way of illustration. (LVS, p. 43)

The implication here is that simile – and in a broader sense, analogy – is not a direct expression of the truth as it is known by a Buddha. Rather it is a tool; its terms do not necessarily bear a linear relation to the true. The Buddha observes:

As it is with a master of painting and his pupils, who arrange colors to produce a picture, so I teach. The picture is not in the colors, nor in the canvas, nor in the palette. A picture is presented in colors in order to make it attractive to all beings. What one teaches, transgresses – for the truth (*tattva*) is beyond words. (LVS, pp. 43–4)

These explanations quite conspicuously leave the ontological status of the *ālaya* rather ambiguous. By using the ocean simile to make a point about *upāya*, the Buddha skirts the issue of the identity of *ālaya* and the *tathāgatagarbha*; all that seems to emerge from the discussion is that the *vijñānas*, the *ālaya*, and the *tathāgatagarbha* share a relation which is similar, but not

identical, to that of ocean and waves. The simile of the ocean is dropped for the present; after a brief interlude the text shifts to a discussion of imagelessness. In radically criticizing analogical techniques the sūtra seems once again to have brought itself up to a pedagogical blind alley: as a linguistic product — itself a prime example of *vikalpa* — it has begun to reveal the limits of its own descriptive project. As we will see, this type of critique actually provides the occasion for an unusual restructuring of its discursive style — and a yet more sophisticated use of *upāyic* language. The sūtra must formulate new linguistic tools before it can readdress the problem of *ālaya*'s ontological status, tools which do not depend upon the dualisms inherent in simple analogical similes. To pursue the ocean simile further, the Buddha warns, would be to risk falling into misleading discriminations.¹¹ Much later he states unequivocally:

The *garbha* of the *tathāgatas* is indeed united with the seven (lower) *viññānas*; when this is clung to there arises duality. But when it is rightly understood, duality ceases.

(LVS, p. 193)

To “rightly understand” this relationship one must “intuitively experience” (p. 192) the *tathāgatagarbha*; it is not a matter for “speculation”. And yet, the sūtra refuses to abandon language as a means of guiding this intuitive experience. What is at issue in the Buddha's discussion of *upāya* is the proper *role* of language — an issue intimately bound up with the entire project of the text. The following section traces the *Laṅkāvatāra*'s exploration of the interplay between language and direct experiencing, as well as its gradual evolution of a set of new linguistic strategies meant to diversify the potentialities of *upāya*.

4. DUALISM AND DECONSTRUCTIVE DISCOURSE

We now have before us an eightfold scheme of the human mind. In reciprocal interaction with the objectifying *manoviññāna* the five “lower” sense-*viññānas* establish for themselves a panorama of discrete and seemingly independent objects. At a higher structural level, *manas* attaches to this panorama through conceptual discourse, polarizing it around a perspectival concept of ego. Finally, *ālayaviññāna* hoards conceptualized object-discriminations in its “storehouse”, building a fund of largely unconscious impressions which provide the illusion of temporal continuity — thus reinforcing the mind's trust

in the reality of objects. The result of this ongoing process is our steadfast belief in an external, independent world in which things come and go according to their independent natures. Phenomenal flux is resolved into an interplay of transcendent forces which govern the appearance of “things” in a “world”. The suffering of *saṃsāra* is the direct consequence of the unenlightened mind’s attachment to this worldview. But what sets the process in motion? Do we *choose* it?

In discussing the origin of the various *vijñāna* processes, the text isolates a number of causal factors:

The reasons accounting for the arising of eye-consciousness are four: what are they? They are: (1) The clinging to an external world, not knowing that it is of mind itself; (2) The attachment to form and unconscious impressions accumulated since beginningless time through false reasoning and erroneous views; (3) The inherent nature of the *vijñāna* itself; (4) The thirst for multiple forms and appearances. By these four factors, Mahāmātī, the waves of the evolving *vijñānas* are stirred on the *ālayavijñāna* so that it resembles the waters of a flood. The same (can be said of the other sense-*vijñānas*) as of the eye-consciousness. (LVS, p. 40)

The *vijñāna* system takes hold of us before we realize what is happening: emerging from the karmic background of our perceptual patterns and our ignorance, it seizes the experiential process before we catch a glimpse of things as they are in their “suchness” (*tathatā*). The key to the *vijñānas*’ hold on us is our blindness to their functioning — which is only their blindness to themselves.

But the *manovijñāna* and the other *vijñānas* have no thought that they are mutually caused, nor that they are devoted to clinging to the discriminated thought of self. Thus the *vijñānas* go on functioning mutually related in the most intimate manner, discriminating a world of representations. (LVS, p. 40)

The system is self-perpetuating; intellectual belief in the reality of an external world of existents is nourished by the continuing sensory discrimination of objects, a process which goes on below the usual level of awareness and thus escapes notice. In order to see things “as they really are”, the practitioner must find a way to undercut this habitual process of discrimination, to get a direct look at the unconscious operations of the *vijñānas*. While other branches of Mahāyāna emphasize meditation as the only efficacious tool for the task, the *Laṅkāvatāra*, as is manifest on virtually every one of its pages, is much more concerned with *intellectual understanding*. Half of the reasons given for the emergence of the *vijñānas* rest on the way in which we

conceptualize consciousness: clinging to the discriminated *thought* of self and world, we carry forward the stored *vāsanā* of our past discriminations to feed the ongoing activity of intellectual discourse. By the same token, intellectual process becomes central to the process of enlightenment itself. Unlike more meditation-oriented tracts, the *Laṅkāvatāra* takes as its project the deconstruction of our everyday conceptual delusions regarding the externality/reality of the world.

Are these two techniques, meditation and discourse, contradictory? Perhaps not. The *Laṅkāvatāra* Buddha speaks often of the need for skillful means (Skt. *upāyakauśalya*, Tib. *thabs mkhas-pa*) in the conduct of the bodhisattva's life – the need to adjust one's approach to the disposition (*āśaya*) and circumstance (*gati*) of the student. We may recall an illustration of this principle from the opening allegory of the text: the Buddha makes full use of the visual magic of *māyā* in order to enlighten the ten-headed Rāvaṇa; but when it come to the more intellectually preoccupied Mahāmāti, he reverts immediately and seamlessly to his philosophical, deconstructive discourse. Moreover, the Buddha frequently responds to Mahāmāti's conceptual doubts by declaring that he teaches certain doctrines only for the sake of the ignorant – since to teach such doctrines is a skillful means of bringing about their enlightenment. For one student of the teachings, skillful means may require a philosophical debate; for another, a slap in the face; for yet another, absolute silence on the part of the teacher. Each strategy represents a potentially effective way of conveying the Dharma; only situational factors determine which a Buddha will employ. Under such a rationale, concepts per se are not useless: while the truth is not to be found within them, properly drawn concepts can *point to* “things as they are” and thus lead a student along the path. More precisely, discourse can serve a vital function in dismantling “wrong views” and cultivating “right understanding”. But in order for it to do so it must never be taken as an end in itself. This is why the Buddha-figure in the present text persistently empties his own logical constructs, just when his interlocutors had begun to place faith in them. In short, discourse becomes skillful means when it doubles back upon itself to destructure its own structures. The main body of the sūtra is comprised of a rigorous “deconstruction” of wrong views, a negative rhetoric which illuminates the essence of *māyā* as well as the self-deluding patterns of *saṃsāric* consciousness. In the course of pursuing its deconstructive method, the text must develop a series of new rhetorical devices which depart sharply from the

usual techniques of philosophical argument; these linguistic *strategies* will begin to emerge as we look more closely at the actual deconstructions it attempts.

We have learned that “it is a result of one’s own clinging (to appearances) that the manifestations of one’s own mind are taken to be realities as such (*dharmatā*)” (LVS, p. 18). This is the principle of *māyā*. But which of the illusions to which we habitually cling are the most forceful in perpetuating *saṃsāra*? The *Laṅkāvatāra* recognizes that certain sorts of clinging are more tenacious and disastrous than others. Each involves a dichotomous view of the world — a view which, in *vikalpa*, defines phenomena through their opposites. Later the deconstructive analysis of dualism would be applied to language itself: the Yogācārin Dignāga was to popularize the concept of *apoha*, which argued that the meaning of a word lies only in the negation of its opposite (thus A is only not-(not-A) — an elephant is only what is not a non-elephant). After Dignāga, Jñānaśrīmitra and his student Ratnakīrti extended the analysis of *apoha* to embrace the *interaction* of language and direct perception, asserting that a positive image is qualified by the discrimination of dissimilar things: upon hearing the word “elephant” we grasp the negation of not-elephant at the same moment in which we picture an elephant — since the former is the proper qualifier of the latter. The full unfolding of the concept of *apoha* in the works of the Buddhist logicians is directly adumbrated by the *Laṅkāvatāra*’s relentless deconstructive analysis of perceptual and linguistic dualism, an analysis which directed its attention to the pre-reflective level of consciousness where perception and language meet.

Early in the *sūtra* the Buddha addresses the problem of *form*. Is form (*rūpa*) merely the opposite of space (*ākāśa*)? The Buddha’s answer is unequivocal:

But, Mahāmati, space is form, and, Mahāmati, as space enters into the being of form, form is space. To establish the relation of supporting and supported, Mahāmati, one must separate the two, space and form. Mahāmati, when the elements begin to evolve (a world) they are distinguishable from one another; they do not abide in space, and yet space is not non-existent in them. (LVS, p. 48)

The problematic of form and space was a seminal one throughout the development of the Mahāyāna movement; to choose but one example, the *Prajñāpāramitāhṛdaya-sūtra* asserts in parallel fashion that “form is emptiness, and the very emptiness is form.” Because space (*ākāśa*) was perceived by the

Mahāyānists to be intimately bound up with the emptiness (*śūnyatā*) of *māyā*, the attainment of a “right view” with regard to form was considered a vital step along the path to enlightenment. The understanding that all forms were intermingled with emptiness was absolutely necessary if one was to loosen the grip of the mind on objectified phenomena. But what does it mean to argue that “form is space” and “space is form”? If we devote a moment to trying to grasp the Buddha’s assertion on the basis of direct perceptual experience, the rest of his deconstructions will fall into place readily.

Let us imagine for a moment that we are given a piece of white paper containing nothing but a small shaded box, which is positioned in its center. For the sake of simplicity, this figure will serve as our “form”. We can say: I see a shaded region bounded by four straight lines, the intersections of which make four right angles. But what do we mean by “bounded by”? We mean that the shaded region is partitioned off, separated out from the *space* of the paper. We can readily invert our description and say: I see an expanse of space which bounds a shaded region. If we push this inversion yet further we might even say: I see a white form interrupted by an emptiness, an absence of whiteness, a “negative” space.

Two key operations are at work here, each corresponding to one of the higher *viññānas*. The core of both the straightforward description and its inversion is the concept of a “boundary.” Our perception of the form as a form hinges on the mind’s ability to discriminate one area of the sense field from another by recognizing a limit or boundary condition. This ability, according to the *Laṅkāvatāra*, is the province of the *manovijñāna*, the directive faculty which organizes sensory data into a panorama of discrete objects. But a second operation complements that of drawing boundaries. When we “flipped” our original description to yield an “inverse” description we invoked the *perspectival* function which the sūtra ascribes to *manas*. In inverting the first description we shift our frame of reference, our gestalt, bringing forward the normally hidden mirror-image of what we perceive to be a discrete object. The boundary lines of the form, as determined by *manovijñāna*, serve as pivots for this shift of perspective: if we treat them as “belonging to” the contained region, we come up with our original characterization, which focuses on the positivity of the shaded region; if, on the other hand, we treat them as “belonging to” the white expanse, we invert our characterization and treat the page itself as a positivity (at which point the shaded region becomes “emptiness”). In essence, both descriptions are valid

accounts of experience; but convention usually dictates one over the other, suppressing the other so that we can understand objects as discrete existents. To draw out an inversion of the usual perspective is not to claim that convention is useless; quite the contrary. How could we ever pick up and use a hammer if we could not grasp it as an existent, distinct from the “emptiness” of the surrounding workbench? The discriminations of *māyā* do allow us to move through the ordinary world: the problem is that they deplete the richness of “things as they are”, polarizing our experiencing around conventionalized concepts. By unpacking the implicit discriminations latent in such dualisms as space/form, the text hopes to restore this experiential richness and recover an experiencing which is not restricted by the boundary-locking of *manovijñāna* and the perspectivization of *manas*.

A second dualism tackled by the text is that of *time*. Ordinarily we think of time as a progressive line; but the *Laṅkāvatāra* asserts that

... that which is spoken of as “earlier” belongs to discrimination; as “earlier” is thus a discriminated (concept), so also are the ideas of “not-yet” and “now”. (LVS, p. 19)

Here again we have a germinal Mahāyāna problematic. The Chinese *Chao-lun* of Seng-chao, for example, takes it up in relation to the problem of change: if a man goes on a journey and then returns to his village, is he the same man who left the village “in the past”? In a manner reminiscent of Taoism, Nāgārjuna, and Heraclitus, Seng-chao elegantly argues that the everyday conception of time is rooted in the illusion that things have an enduring self-nature (*svabhāva*), an idea which Buddhist logic adamantly denies. Only if we posit the belief that the man who returns is the man who left, can we begin to believe in linear time – since we may then readily conceptualize a unitary object moving along a fixed time-line. If we deny self-nature, time becomes a relative construct, a discrimination arising from concepts.

As for the *Laṅkāvatāra*'s analysis of time, we can most clearly understand the meaning of past, present, and future by relating them to the space/form problem: just as neither space nor form intrinsically supports its complement, so also neither past, present, nor future intrinsically support the others. It is once again a matter of perspective. In one context (of *manas*), the assassination of President Kennedy is a “past” event; but “at one time” it was a “future” event, just as “at one time” it was a “present” event. Similarly, it can again become a “future” event for us if we read an account of the assassin's actions prior to the shooting – and so on. If we conveniently and

conventionally think of the assassination as strictly a thing of the “past”, we blind ourselves to its “futural” dimensions – for example, in the sense that it can be thought of as a “negativity” interrupting the surrounding “positivity” of other events (just as we inverted the positivity/negativity aspect of the space/form relation above). Time is relative to our *manas*-directed conceptual perspective; through *vāsanā* it serves to reinforce *manas*' view of the phenomena of *māyā* as constituting a world of discrete existents polarized around the perspective of self.

A third deconstruction – one which springs naturally from the sūtra's analysis of space – is that of *extension*. Not only form in general, but also *qualities* of form, depend upon an oppositional dichotomy:

Long and short, and so on, exist mutually bound up together; when existence is asserted, there is non-existence, and where non-existence is asserted, there is existence.

(LVS, p. 49)

If we posit the existence of a quality such as “length”, we can do so only in relation to its inverse, “shortness”. Only in the conspicuous absence of one quality does its opposite become manifest. To extend our earlier analysis further, we might also observe that a quality like “length” is of necessity not inherent in the “object”; it is always relevant to a context of other “objects” – a *world* which exhibits independence, continuity, and perspective. Thus the discrimination of a concept such as “length” necessarily requires the interaction of *manovijñāna* (which establishes the independence of objects), *ālayavijñāna* (which establishes continuity through *vāsanā*), and *manas* (which furnishes perspective). A man standing next to a spider is tall; but if he stands next to an elephant he suddenly “becomes” short. When we speak of John as “tall”, we implicitly posit an aggregation of other men in our “past” experience, the vast majority of whom are absent. It is not “John” who is “tall”: “tallness” is an aspect of a moving process of experiencing, a process which is continually challenging the very meaning of “tallness”.

This sort of analysis extends quite readily to the concept of “existence”, as the above passage indicates. Existence can be conceptualized at two levels, one relative and one absolute. At the relative level, the non-existence of something in my experiencing can announce itself so forcefully that it seems like an existent: for example, the absence of someone who has died can be a disconcerting *presence*. But at the absolute level, according to the theory

of *vikalpa*, the distinction between being and nonbeing is merely an empty discrimination, like any other dichotomy. Things neither exist nor non-exist; the error is to discriminate a dichotomy of existence.

(The error of the heretics) is that they do not recognize an objective world to be of mind itself, wrongly discriminated; and, not understanding the nature of the *viññānas*, which are also discriminations of the mind, like simple-minded ones that they are, cherish the dualism of being and nonbeing (LVS, p. 36)

The Buddhist logicians would later enhance this sort of analysis to encompass a general theory of negation which separates negation of the noun (*paryudāsa*) from negation of the verb (*prasajyapratishedha*). The Svāntarika Bhāvaviveka argued that *prasajyapratishedha* — since it cuts to the issue of *svabhāva* and phenomenal genesis — has in essence a higher soteriological value than *paryudāsa*. But such distinctions do not assume much importance in the *Laṅkāvatāra*. Again, the current text simply provides the seeds for what would later emerge in the full flower of Buddhist logical analysis.

The deconstruction of the concept of being or existence invites us to recall the sūtra's use of the dream as an illustration of *māyā*. Is a dream real? The most that we can say, according to the text, is that a dream is *realistic*, in that it *seems* to point to world of real existents. As illusion it is neither real nor non-real, since to call it one or the other would be to dualistically discriminate it. In indicting the “heretics”, the *Laṅkāvatāra* sets itself apart from both the idealism of a system like Vedānta and the materialism of certain of the pre-Mahāyāna Buddhist sects. It most closely approaches (in certain respects) the Mādhyamika, the path which neither asserts nor denies being. For the *Laṅkāvatāra*, the right view of things is a view which *suspends* the question of being — for *prajñā*, not concepts, is the only way of seeing the immediacy of *tathatā*.

We have been progressing slowly toward an inevitable confrontation: the confrontation between the theory of the *viññānas* and the theory of phenomenal emptiness. To put it most simply, what is the status of the mind — the experiencing “subject” — if forms are empty and the world is mere *māyā*? Isn't the mind necessarily empty too, even in its capacity as *tathāgatagarbha*? If so, how can it possibly create the “world” of phenomenal appearance?

This is a difficult question for the sūtra to answer. Before the backdrop of the traditional Buddhist theory of no-self (*anātman*) the *Laṅkāvatāra* has

erected an elaborate conceptual machinery, all of which is meant to account for the arising and maintenance of the phenomenal “world”. Now the text must dovetail its theoretical stance in such a way as to uphold its argument about *māyā* and, at the same time, turn that argument in upon itself by applying the *māyā* theory to the scheme of the *viññānas*. As one might expect, this undertaking finds itself almost continually skirting paradox.

The first step in this project is to extend the deconstructive analysis of dualistic *māyā* to “internal” phenomena: having shown that “external” phenomena like length and time are empty, the text must now turn this demonstration inward, linking *vikalpa*’s discrimination of the outer world to its implicit grasp of consciousness. The demonstration centers on the *ālayaviññāna*:

The self-nature and the characteristic marks of body, property, and abode evolve when the *ālayaviññāna* is conceived by the ignorant as grasping and grasped; when this happens they fall into a dualistic view of existence in which they recognize its rise, abiding, and disappearance, cherishing the idea that all things are born and are subject to discrimination as being and nonbeing. (LVS, p. 56)

The conception of the mind as a “grasping” agent leads, by the implicit logic of dualism, to the reification of a world of objects to be grasped. By tracing back further and further its analysis of externalized *vikalpa*, the sūtra discovers its root in an internalized discrimination: the dualization of the *ālayaviññāna* and its object of consciousness. The panorama of *māyā* — the web of individuated existents — depends ultimately upon a prior, tacit attitude of the mind toward itself. This leads naturally to a decisive deconstruction: the emptying of the subject-object dichotomy. If the inner world is identifiable with the outer world in that both are brought about through the same discriminative process, the illusion of their discrete separability has already begun to erode. S. Dasgupta explains:

It is only due to *māyā* (illusion) that the phenomena appear in their twofold aspects as subject and object. This must always be regarded as an appearance (*samvṛtisatyatā*) whereas in the real aspect we could never say whether they existed (*bhāva*) or did not exist.¹²

Form and space, past and future, short and tall, being and nonbeing, subject and object — each of these dualisms has now been collapsed. And yet, the *viññāna-māyā* theory has hinged its entire analysis upon the reality of the mind as a discriminating mechanism. What it must now do is to attempt a

characterization of mind, using the discriminated concepts of *vikalpa*, which describes the special sort of “reality” that mind has. The sūtra emphasizes that mind cannot be captured by concepts; its challenge now is to frame concepts which *point to* mind, which point beyond simple discrimination toward the mental process itself. The only way to do this is to negate the discriminations which constitute the world we know, and to negate them so thoroughly that we are vaulted beyond discrimination toward a glimpse of the phenomenon of mind in its “suchness” (*tathatā*). At issue here is the possibility of formulating a new and non-dualistic descriptive language which, by collapsing ordinary language, somehow gains access to the principle of things as they are, *dharmatā*. The various deconstructions of common dualistic concepts have prepared the way for a larger deconstruction – an analytic step which raises the discourse of the sūtra to a new linguistic level.

The focus for this grand deconstruction is the *ālayavijñāna*, since the *ālaya* is at once the “storehouse” of dualistically discriminated forms and the “womb” of enlightenment. The *ālaya* serves as a point of juncture between the (relative) phenomenal world and the direct intuition of (absolute) suchness. *Reality*, in fact, in the only sense upheld by the text, is nothing but the watershed linking the phenomenal order with the absolute; we will return to this idea when we discuss emptiness (*śūnyatā*) in following sections. For now we must confine ourselves to the problem of how the *Laṅkāvatāra* can make use of *vikalpa* to point to the “real” nature of mind. In doing so, of course, it necessarily describes something which cannot even be visualized – since any visualization, through the interlock of *manovijñāna* and the sense-*vijñānas*, inevitably involves an implicit discrimination. Such a description may represent the final end to which discourse – in the deconstructive sense – may be usefully put; as a Korean monk commented on this type of Mahāyāna technique, “It is just as though one stops the voices with a voice”.¹³ The way to this final clearing-away of dualisms is the characterization of the mind as a non-causal, non-evolving, markless unreal.

That such a characterization threatens to undo concepts, the *Laṅkāvatāra* is more than willing to admit. Its attempt to characterize the reality of mind through the use of philosophical descriptive machinery is meant as a final assault upon conceptual language, the problem which explodes conceptual thinking with finality. Dasgupta describes this stage of the argument:

All our phenomenal knowledge is without any essence or truth (*niḥsvabhāva*) and is but

a creation of *māyā*, a mirage or a dream. There is nothing which may be called external, but all is the imaginary creation of the mind (*svacitta*), which has been accustomed to create imaginary appearances from beginningless time. This mind by whose movement these creations take place as subject and object has no appearance in itself and is thus without any origination, existence, and extinction . . . and called the *ālayavijñāna*¹⁴

Is there any “thing” that we can name which lacks appearance, origination, existence, and extinction? Experience in the phenomenal world provides no ready example of such a thing, no concrete referent among the nearly infinite variations of *māyā*. By negating concepts which are, to the usual way of thinking, experientially absolute, the sūtra forces its conceptual apparatus to the limit. Although it coins a new term — “suchness” (*tathatā*) — to refer to the mode in which the *ālayavijñāna* dwells, even this term refers to a “reality” only within the provisionality of language. Suchness is no more than a label for that which, in an absolute sense, can never be compassed by words:

. . . the highest reality is an exalted state of bliss . . . discrimination does not express the highest reality . . . words are subject to birth and destruction; they are unsteady, mutually conditioning, and are produced through the law of causation. Again, Mahāmātī, what is mutually conditioned and produced through the law of causation cannot express the highest reality (LVS, p. 77)

Indeed, “words are not the highest reality, nor what is expressed in words” (p. 77). “Suchness” serves as a placeholder, a strictly empty word which clears a niche in the philosophical argument for *prajñā*. We must now examine the text’s exposition of enlightened knowledge, *prajñā*, though this exposition has already revealed its emptiness from the absolute perspective. In keeping with its emphasis on discourse as skillful means, the sūtra will attempt — at the risk of wandering into paradox — a *vikalpa* description of *vikalpa*’s opposite.

5. EMPTINESS AND THE INVERSION OF LANGUAGE

In turning toward the question of *prajñā*, we move from the sūtra’s description of everyday *saṃsāric* mind to a consideration of “enlightened mind” — that is, to a consideration of the prescriptive aspects of the text. The sūtra has examined at some length the “pathology” of dualistic thinking and perception; now it seeks a constructive response to suffering. Structurally, the scheme of “salvation” laid out in the *Laṅkāvatāra* is much simpler than its analysis of *saṃsāric* mind. But the simplicity is superficial: the difficulty

of the expressly soteriological concepts more than compensates for their brevity. For here the text embarks upon a discrimination of the undiscriminated; here it subverts language in an attempt to make it point to the indescribable. Let us begin with a sketch of the structural scheme of enlightenment presented in the sūtra, and then move directly to an investigation of each of its terms.

The possibility of overcoming the *samsāra* of discriminating mind rests on the way in which we handle the error of believing in the phenomena presented by *māyā*. Normally, of course, the mind takes things to be substantial, fixed in a temporal grid, and relatively permanent. When we look at a mountain, we imagine it to be eternal; we do not readily perceive that even it is slowly decaying. If we reflect scientifically, we may come to understand that mountains, like people, are in flux; but we nevertheless cling almost poetically to the illusion of the eternal. Just as we posit an absolute quality — permanence — of the mountain, so our discriminating mind categorizes and labels all things as though they belonged to a transcendental order. The most critical error we commit is our faith in the individual reality of things, both internal and external; it is this error which sustains the relative knowledge of *vikalpa*. But because the belief in *māyā* is the sine qua non of *vikalpa*, it can also be the beginning of *prajñā*. Here the theory of *vikalpa* receives a crucial inflection: if proper “non-discrimination” of the error is realized, one emerges onto the path of *prajñā*. “Non-discrimination” emerges as an *activity*, the soteriological foil of “discrimination”; it is not merely a passive receptivity, nor some vacancy of perception, but is in fact a process in its own right. With right views the practitioner can turn the phenomenon of *māyā* to advantage, using it as a tool of insight. If he does so, he sets in motion the process of enlightenment, which eventuates in the realization of what the text calls “suchness” or “actuality” (Skt. *tathatā*, Tib. *yañ-dag-pa*):

...this error (*māyā*) is discriminated by the ignorant as consisting of multiplicity; such a confused view is neither a reality nor an unreality. Thus, Mahāmātī, when this error is non-discriminated by the wise it turns into *tathatā* with them. (LVS, p. 94)

The fact that the world presents itself in *māyā* is neither intrinsically positive nor intrinsically negative; its value, like that of all phenomena, depends on the situation and passes away when we cease to discriminate it. When the various phenomena of *māyā* enter the ignorant man’s interpretive faculties they give rise to a manifold of illusions, all based on dualism. But when they

enter the mind of the wise man, they give him the occasion to see *through māyā to tathatā*. Both wise man and ignorant man perceive the phenomenal panorama; but “while the imagination keeps on going with the wise as well as with the ignorant, the latter alone fails to see reality as it is . . .” (LVS, p. 142). The discrimination of the ignorant leads only to further delusion; the active “non-discrimination” of the wise, on the other hand, leads to insight. What matters is the response of the mind; *māyā* itself is neutral.

But what is meant by “non-discrimination,” and in what sense is it active? This concept (a good illustration of what the Buddhist logicians meant by “verb negation” or *prasajyapratishedha*) rests on the middle step of the enlightenment process: a step which the text refers to as the “revulsion” of the mind from everyday dualisms. When we understand the “revulsion” which causes the “non-discrimination” of the wise to grasp *tathatā*, we will be well along the way to understanding what the sūtra means by the term *prajñā*.

“Revulsion” (*parāvṛtti*) derives from *parā-* (meaning beyond, away, etc., as in *parāñc* “turned the other way”) plus $\sqrt{vṛt}$ (“turn around, revolve, circumambulate, etc.”). The full meaning of *parāvṛtti* becomes “turning, rolling, exchange, substitution, end, termination”. The prefix *parā-* simply heightens the directional sense of the verb – hence the reading “revulsion”. (The Tibetan translation, *Ngyur-ba*, carries an extremely broad range of connotations, most of which are connected with the idea of transformation or change). In the sūtra, *parāvṛtti* is the sudden and decisive turn of the practitioner away from discrimination. It lays the groundwork for the active non-discrimination of *prajñā*, the renunciation of insightless *vikalpa*. But how does the turn manifest itself in terms of the eightfold model of consciousness? Is it the *vijñānas* themselves which turn?

Though the *ālayavijñāna* seems in many respects to be the most important of the *vijñānas*, it is the *manovijñāna* which plays the key role in the turn away from discrimination. The *manovijñāna* is the aspect of mind which breaks up the perceptual information of the lower sense-*vijñānas* into a spectrum of discrete objects; it would seem that this object-discrimination, from the standpoint of soteriology, is the wellspring of the entire eightfold system:

According to my teaching, Mahāmati, the surpassing of the discriminating *manovijñāna* is said to be *nirvāṇa* . . . With the *manovijñāna* as cause and supporter, Mahāmati, there arise the seven other *vijñānas*. Again, Mahāmati, the *manovijñāna* is kept functioning as

it discerns a world of objects and becomes attached to it, while with manifold unconscious impressions it nourishes the *ālayavijñāna*. The *manas* is evolved along with a notion of ego and its possessions (LVS, p. 109)

In coordination with the sense-*vijñānas*, then, *manovijñāna* fragments the field of perception into an array of discrete objects, all of which stray eventually to the *ālaya*-storehouse. The Buddha uses the parable of the magician to illustrate the way in which we mistake collocations of *dharma*s for individuated existents:

When the magician uses grass, wood, shrubs, and creepers to exercise his art, all beings and forms take shape; magically-created persons are produced which appear to be endowed with individuality and material body, and they are variously and imaginatively discriminated. While they are thus manifesting themselves, Mahāmati, there is no substantiality in them. Likewise, Mahāmati, as a result of the idea of relativity, the falsifying imagination recognizes a variety of appearances which are distinguished by a discriminating mind. (LVS, p. 51)

Manovijñāna lays the foundation for the illusion of a world by culling discrete objects from the data of the lower *vijñānas*, drawing boundaries between “things” and thus suppressing the direct intuition of phenomenal flux. The first step of the enlightenment process hinges on an uprooting of this habitual activity – the active “non-discrimination” of the error of *māyā*. With this accomplished, the next move is to destroy the discursive concept of self, perpetuated by *manas*:

As long as there is a mind making conscious efforts, there can be no culmination regarding the various vehicles; when a revulsion takes place in the mind, there is neither a vehicle nor one who rides in it. (LVS, p. 116)

The rooting out of *manovijñāna* and *manas*' discursive concept of self constitutes the core of the revulsion, *parāvṛtti*. But *manas*' conceptual faculty is called upon to render yet another discriminative concept: the concept of emptiness (*śūnyatā*). This very special concept serves as a springboard for the realization of *tathatā* through the absolute knowledge of *prajñā*.

The postulation of emptiness – the emptiness of both subject and object – is the mind's final attempt to reduce *māyā* to concepts. Though the sūtra gives due credit to the concept of emptiness, it is careful to collapse even *śūnyatā* in the same way it collapses other discriminations. The postulation of emptiness is certainly an instance of “right views”; but in the end it too is inadequate to the task of describing accurately the vision of *tathatā*. In

this sense, we may regard emptiness as a *leading* concept, a concept which at once points beyond itself and beyond conceptualization *in general*. Asserting that phenomena are empty is a means of “transgressing” *vikalpa*, of employing language – in this case, a special language – to undermine language. As we will see presently, the text’s use of the concept of emptiness is strategic; it is not, as Suzuki seems to have believed, the ultimate ontological statement of the *Laṅkāvatāra*. The introduction of *śūnyatā* marks a transitional level of discourse in the sūtra, one which no longer deals solely in ordinary dualisms but has not yet discovered an appropriate language for the description of *tathatā*. This transition is critical: to fail to follow the text beyond it is to risk misreading its ontological position as one of absolute nihilism – an error which the text itself warns us against.

Nāgārjuna observes that “emptiness (*śūnyatā*), ill conceived, destroys a stupid man, as would a snake when handled improperly, or a spell badly executed”.¹⁵ What role does the postulation of emptiness play in the *Laṅkāvatāra*’s analytic?

We have watched closely as the text has unpacked several everyday concepts: form and space, being and nonbeing, long and short, perceiver and perceived. From this sort of deconstructive maneuver we have followed the emergence of a concept of *māyā* which casts it as realistic but empty experiencing, experiencing which seems to point to an external and independent world of existents but in fact makes this world up through the operation of the eight *vijñānas*. From this standpoint it now devolves that the world is “empty”. It is clear, though, that this emptiness is of a very special sort. It is not emptiness in the sense of nothingness, for that would ignore the fact that the text confirms the reality (in a relative sense) of the phenomenal flux itself; rather, it is emptiness in the sense that *māyā*-phenomena are devoid of self-nature or essence:

... there is no truth, no essence in all phenomena that appear ... as the phenomena have no essence they are neither produced nor destroyed; they really neither come nor go. They are merely the appearance of *māyā* or illusion. The void (*śūnya*) does not mean pure negation, for that is relative to some kind of position. It simply means that none of the appearances have any intrinsic nature of their own ...¹⁶

Emptiness, then, is the emptiness of essence, of self-sustaining individuality. Certain Buddhologists have pointed to the structure of the word *śūnyatā* to highlight this concept analogically: *śūnya* derives from $\sqrt{śū}$, a weak form of \sqrt{svi} “to swell, grow, increase”; this denotation bears both a positive sense,

as in to expand by swelling (in the manner of a womb, for example), and a negative sense, as in to “hollow out”.¹⁷ We might think of a basketball, for example, as “swollen out” (positively) with air, or as “hollowed out” and full of nothing (negatively). In the philosophical frame of the sūtra, phenomena are “swollen out” with the semblance of individual being, and yet are “hollow” in that they lack a self-nature. So their *sūnyatā* is both a positivity (on the plane of *māyā*) and a negativity (on the plane of *tathatā*).

The most important root of this distinction, of course, is the ancient Buddhist theory of dependent co-origination (Skt. *pratītyasamutpāda*, Tib. *rten-ciñ Nbrei-bar Nbyuñ-ba*). According to this doctrine, phenomena originate and sustain one another mutually, without the necessity of an external or a transcendent cause; the phenomenal world emerges from the interplay of phenomenal components, or *dharmas* (Tib. *chos*), not from the operation of a hidden animus of some kind. The *Lañkāvatāra*, as we have already seen, recasts this concept in terms of the process of the mind: one single discrimination gives rise immediately to its opposite, and thence to a whole web of mutually-referent dualisms.

It is the theory of mutual causation which lays the groundwork for the sūtra’s speculations concerning the emptiness of self-nature. If phenomena arise merely as a result of other phenomena, not with the priority of a linear causation but with a non-prior parallel causation, then phenomena possess no necessity, no self-sustaining independent nature. In the *Lañkāvatāra*’s language, they are merely momentary flashes of the mind. We cannot speak of their production or destruction, since only a self-sustaining thing can be produced or destroyed. But here the text runs into a serious obstruction: what can emptiness possibly mean if there is no such thing as a self-existing “fullness” or plenitude? What is the implicit standard of comparison used in formulating an appraisal of the “emptiness” of phenomena?

The answer to this seeming dilemma should be obvious by now: there is no standard of comparison in the absolute sense, there is no “real” referent for the term *sūnyatā*. By postulating the “reality” of emptiness, so the sūtra says, we have slipped quietly back into a dualistic vocabulary. When we read the word *sūnyatā*, we interpret it in relation to its tacit opposite — and thus, set *vikalpa* in motion once again. Like all other concepts, the concept of *sūnyatā* is dichotomous and relative. Yet, emptiness is a conceptual lever which, though dualistic in itself, helps the practitioner to free himself from

dualism. It is an instance of pedagogic *upāya*, a relative concept which nonetheless possesses a clearcut soteriological value.

Emptiness, emptiness indeed! Mahāmati, it is a term whose self-nature is false imagination. Because of one's attachment to false imagination, Mahāmati, we have to talk of emptiness (LVS, p. 65)

The idea of *sūnyatā* serves, by an inversion of linguistic function, as the definitive termination of logical *vikalpa*: having abandoned the being of the phenomenon to emptiness, we are now compelled to abandon even this emptiness as a negative concept. Emptiness is a symbol which *names* a state of affairs that concepts cannot *describe*. It is in this way that emptiness leads the practitioner out of *vikalpa*. Just as Platonic dialectic necessitates the contemplation of phenomenal emptiness en route to the *noesis* of the forms, so the present text insists that emptiness serve as a transition to the intuition of *tathatā*. If we wrongly interpret *sūnyatā* as the truth, we risk falling into the trap which Nāgārjuna so stridently warns us against. What is required is that the practitioner move beyond emptiness — and beyond its transitional language — toward a language of the absolute, of *tathatā*.

We have now plotted two of the steps on the path to enlightenment as conceived in the *Laṅkāvatāra*. The process of liberation from *samsāra* begins with the twofold “turn” away from discrimination, a turn which begins to see through the mutual reference of qualitative concepts such as long and short, being and nonbeing, subject and object. This turn results in the second step: the postulation of the “emptiness” of such dualistic concepts when considered in the light of their genesis (*pratītyasamutpāda*). But this postulation of emptiness must dismantle itself, since emptiness itself is revealed to be a dualistic construct. In reflecting back on itself, though, the idea of emptiness finalizes the break with discriminating *vikalpa* — thus clearing the way for *prajñā*, the *intuition* of “suchness”.

We can trace an interesting rhetorical progression underrunning the soteriological sequence described here. The text began with an analysis of the ordinary descriptive language of everyday speech, interrogating the hidden assumptions lurking in terms like “being” and “thing”. This analysis led to an understanding that such terms are descriptive only in the context of *other* such terms (a conclusion the linguist Saussure was to reach much later): they do not refer to an independent world of outer objects, though they pretend to do so. Language — and more broadly, the sort of *linguistic consciousness*

which dualistically categorizes experiencing — thus began to emerge as an activity divorced from “the real” (loosely signified by the term *tathatā*). The problem arose: how can one describe this linguistic consciousness if description itself is fundamentally impossible (because true *reference* is impossible)? How, for example, can one use a word like “emptiness” to describe phenomena when the word itself implicitly posits something beyond phenomena? The sūtra’s answer to this problem lies in its recognition that even a word like *śūnyatā* is only what we have called a *leading* concept, a pointer with no real referent in the domain of *tathatā*. Its value is strictly pedagogical; it deepens insight while remaining, in a real sense, meaningless.

The sūtra is clearly taxing language to the utmost here. Language has become an instrument of insight; by collapsing it tier-by-tier the discourse is able to propel the reader beyond it. But we must be careful to notice the pattern underlying the sūtra’s destruction of language, for it is entirely systematic. We begin with a faith in the possibility of describing the world. This first stage of language, which we might call the *naïve* phase, rests on the individuation of *māyā* into a spectrum of discrete existents. But soon it becomes clear that what we thought was description is actually illusion; we begin to think that concepts are only *analogous* to the world — as in similes — and thus enter the second or *analogical* phase of language. Presently, however, we learn that even this assumption is incorrect; analogies only rest on other dualisms. The world begins to emerge as indescribable, and language enters a third phase, an *hermetic* phase as an internally-referent system of signs completely removed from the real. Slowly we are shifting our emphasis away from a “natural” language toward direct insight of some kind. At this point, language is little more than a source of nominal pointers, words which are stripped so thoroughly of their usual meanings that they verge on non-dualism (and simultaneously, on non-sense). The words — *śūnyatā*, for example — are useful as leading concepts, concepts whose self-reflexivity at once announces their emptiness and points to a reality beyond language altogether. This is language’s fourth or *nominal* phase. Description has been abandoned in favor of the linguistic gesture — a signal directed toward indicating or signifying insight, not containing it conceptually. The nominal phase would seem to represent the final *instrumental* use of language; beyond it lies only the spontaneity of insight, *prajñā*.

But in the *Laṅkāvatārasūtra*, as in many of the Buddhist texts which surround it historically, insight itself puts language to one more task. When

insight has been attained, language can enter a final phase, one of *expression* — a phase in which it is a direct emanation of the enlightened state, a creative medium in the highest sense. Though this mode of language is evinced perhaps most clearly by the responses of Zen practitioners to their masters' *kōans*, the *Laṅkāvatāra* itself records at least one instance of what seems to be a genuinely *expressive* idiom: namely, the sūtra's peculiar description of *tathatā*. We shall see presently that this description is articulated in seemingly blatant contradiction with the theory of *māyā* — a reversal which perhaps expresses the enlightened state. In taking up the problem of suchness, we also may now take up the question of *prajñā*, absolute knowledge. We have seen how words can probe the nature of phenomenal reality; now let us examine the ways in which they can *express* ultimate reality.

6. ENLIGHTENMENT AND EXPRESSION

In considering the nature of *prajñā* and *tathatā*, the two central terms in the prescriptive sections of the sūtra, it is tempting to draw a simple analogical parallel: *prajñā* is to *tathatā* as *vikalpa* is to *māyā*. Or, in cruder terms, the "object" of transcendental knowledge is *suchness* in the same sense that the "object" of dualistic knowledge is the *irreal*. *Tathatā*, or suchness, would thus be what *prajñā* knows; it would be the epistemological object of the enlightened mind.

Though the philosophical structure of the sūtra certainly strongly suggests such a reading, other indications argue that we here face a point of stress in the articulation of concepts, a point at which the systematic nature of the philosophical logic implies a conclusion which is *experientially* unfounded. We have carefully traced the ways in which the author(s) of the *Laṅkāvatāra* quite effectively interrogate and collapse language, all for the purpose of freeing words to point to aspects of direct contemplative experience. The sūtra has continually prodded the precarious border dividing sense from nonsense. But now the text seems to have reached a juncture at which linguistic structure, in the narrow sense, threatens once again to lead insight astray by suggesting clean and persuasive analogical structures which may not, in the end, describe anything at all. This sort of seduction by logical structure is precisely what the text cautions us against: it is a trap of *manas*. Can the text mean to say that *tathatā* is simply the "object" of *prajñā*?

We can best approach this question along the soteriological plane of the

sūtra. If enlightenment is merely a shift from one object-and-faculty to another, what is so unique about it? In fact, the text argues that the transcendental knowledge of *prajñā* is ontologically transformative: to attain transcendental knowledge is to be liberated from *saṃsāra* as a mode of being. To grasp the truth of *tathatā* through a realization of the irreality of *māyā* is to attain *nirvāṇa*, in the quite literal sense of escaping rebirth. Thus transcendental knowledge is a turning point which marks the emergence of a new mode of being, a being which dwells fully within the knowledge of suchness. *Prajñā* is not some static sort of perception, but is actually equivalent to ontological liberation or *mokṣa*:

Surrounded by good friends and the Buddhas, Mahāmati, the (bodhisattvas) are capable of knowing the *citta*, the *manas*, and the *manovijñāna*, which are the discriminating agents of an external world whose self-nature is only of the mind itself; they are capable of crossing the ocean of birth and death, which arises by reason of deed, desire, and ignorance. (LVS, p. 41)

The importance of this point is manifold. Not only does it link the inwound epistemological/psychoprocessual model of the sūtra to concrete Buddhist ontology and soteriology; it also serves, thereby, to reveal *prajñā* and *tathatā* as merged terms. If *knowing* the mind is tantamount to escaping *saṃsāra*, then the special knowing accorded to *prajñā* is a knowing which ontologically transforms experienced reality. In the unenlightened mind, *māyā*'s panorama of existents is more than the mere "object" of *vikalpa*: it is in fact the *creation* of *vikalpa*. Similarly, in the enlightened mind *tathatā* cannot be merely the "object" of *prajñā*. *Prajñā* appears when the mind "dwells in" *tathatā*; *tathatā* is an expression of the mind's mode *as prajñā*. But this is not to claim that the two terms are "mutually caused" — for liberation (*mokṣa*) must free the mind from the pattern of *pratītya-samutpāda*. To define the enlightened mind in terms of mutual causation would be to fall into dualistic discrimination. "*Prajñā*" and "*tathatā*" are simply two ways of referring to a unitary process of transformation. No object-and-faculty dualism can capture their particular identity.

The merger of *prajñā* and *tathatā* is further indicated by a second textual clue: the rebuke of the knower/known dualism. The Buddha stresses this point by insisting that *prajñā* is "unobtainable" — for if the concept of "obtaining" rests tacitly on our trust in a world of discrete existents (which we may succeed or fail in obtaining), the turning-away from this trust must

dissolve the idea of “obtaining” entirely. Enlightenment is not the sort of thing a “knower” could seek and possess:

. . . when we know that there is knowledge gained independent of any supporting object, whatever statements we make about it are no more than thought-constructions. That (transcendental) knowledge is unobtainable is due to the recognition that there is nothing in the world but what is seen of the mind, and that these external objects to which being and nonbeing are predicated are nonexistent. As this (knowledge) is unobtainable, there is no evolving of knower and known, and as thus the triple emancipation is realized, there is unobtainable knowledge (LVS, p. 147)

To conceive *prajñā* as an object which we can obtain is to fall into a delusion, just as it is to conceive it as a faculty of the “knower” which grasps an “external object” “in the world”. *Prajñā* is a type of knowledge which has no supporting object per se; it is beyond the duality of knower and known. Furthermore, any attempt we make to characterize it in a positive sense is merely an instance of discrimination. But having thus re-relativized the philosophical discourse which it undertakes, the sūtra goes on to attempt just such a positive characterization of *prajñā*. Here again we find an attempt to discriminate the undiscriminated, the effort to make language do what it cannot do. But what tools are still available for such a project? Has not nearly every key Buddhist concept been collapsed in upon itself, rendering language empty as a mere trick of *māyā*?

This is indeed the case. But precisely because the text has so fully stripped concepts of their common-sense meanings, showing that they cannot describe reality, it is now free to restructure them in order to maximize their efficacy as phenomenological *pointers*. Surrendering the hope that we can create concepts which *contain* reality, we can give our words a final inversion and let them speak from the direct experiencing of reality as *tathatā* – as “such.” In the sūtra, this strategy works itself out as a sudden inversion of meaning-structure which, not surprisingly, appears as a paradox or an absolute contradiction. The text now resuscitates certain concepts it has already shown to be empty, applying them readily and rather oddly as qualitative signs expressing *prajñā-tathatā*. This is the opposite of a technique which we have seen once before; in fact, we may isolate the two methods as closely related linguistic *strategies*, equally central to the concerns of the text:

(1) The first strategy is to try to point to reality “as it is” by negating experientially absolute concepts such as being, genesis, and destruction. The fact that we can find no experiential referent for something which is described

as being beyond existence, birth, and cessation (as the sūtra describes *māyā* to be) tells us that we have never experienced reality “as it is”, in its suchness. Language allows us, through its internal transformational structure, to posit a theoretical negation of such associated concepts; but it cannot provide us with a direct *experience* of their meanings as negatives. In this sense, language creates a “slot” for an experience which we have not yet had; this, by extension, is the first way in which we may employ language as a *leading* device which challenges and opens up felt meaning. This preliminary step leads to the concept of emptiness, *śūnyatā*, which only serves to unite the set of negatively-posed attributes under a single generic term.

(2) The second linguistic strategy asserts that even the concept of emptiness is void and thus converts our negatively-posed attributes into positive attributes. Having freed descriptive language from its dualistic underpinnings we now employ our terms univalently, dropping their common-sense oppositions as well as the rhetoric of *śūnyatā*. This is equivalent to allowing language to originate with *prajñā-tathatā* rather than with *vikalpa-māyā*. We assert attributive terms as an absolute language, one no longer based on dualism. This set of absolute words evolves from the felt experience of suchness, not from the experience of *māyā*.

The origination of language in the experience of enlightenment constitutes the *expressive* phrase of language alluded to earlier; it is the alternative to the dualistic language of *māyā-vikalpa*, a language which, at its best, can only name reality abstractly — never express it meaningfully. The logical position of the second strategy, in short, is this: because we ground them in the felt experience of reality as it is, we can employ certain terms meaningfully to express the real; but in order to do so we must first free them of their implicit dualistic structure. The univalent assertion of “unborn” can, for example, meaningfully signify (point to) reality, while the dualistic *born/unborn distinction* properly signifies nothing but a transient condition of *māyā*. We move through the stage of emptiness as a way of freeing our descriptive language (and linguistic consciousness) from duality and rendering it univalent. Ordinary words are collapsed into emptiness so that they can be rebuilt on the foundation of the experience of enlightenment. And it is precisely this rebuilding process which yields a language as *expressive* as language can be, in Buddhist terms.

We have glimpsed the possibility of a language which expresses the unitary mode of knowledge-and-being denoted by *prajñā-tathatā*. We have now to

examine the sūtra's attempt at a positive characterization of the enlightened state, one which points to reality "as it is" without recourse to the naively dualistic discourse of *vikalpa*. We will find that this project results in a startling reversal of certain positions maintained earlier in the text — a reversal which indicates not slipshod reasoning but a highly sophisticated sense of rhetoric and *upāya*.

Earlier, the text argued that the way of the bodhisattva is a way of "imagelessness". This condition is said to arise when the illusion of the object-world finally lets go of the mind, when the mind "turns" from *māyā*.

When the mind (*citta*) is bound by an objective world, the intelligence (*jñāna*) is awakened and reasoning takes place; but the highest wisdom (*prajñā*) obtains where there are no images — a higher level of consciousness. (SLVS, p. 160)

This is a reflex, of course, of the sūtra's original descriptions of *māyā*: "It is like seeing one's own shadow reflected in the mirror, or one's own shadow on the water, or in the moonlight . . .". "Is it a dream then? or a vision?" The images of *māyā* are counterfeit, void, hollow; *prajñā* sees through them. But does this imply that the dawn of *prajñā* spells the complete disappearance of figurative appearance? Does the objective world go dark or blank? This question leads us directly to the first of the sūtra's quixotic statements regarding *prajñā*:

If knowledge fails to see that which is existing before it, such is ignorance and not knowledge; this teaching belongs to the logicians. If knowledge fails to see, through various obstructions far and near, its own unique object which does not present itself as such, this is to be called wrong knowledge. (LVS, p. 148)

This is quite a strange comment, given the anti-objectivist tone of the bulk of the text. Hasn't the sūtra almost ruthlessly demonstrated that the world is illusory, that what we call "objects" are merely the products of *manovijñāna*? If so, how can the sūtra employ such objective language?

We must here recall that, while the sūtra assures us that the world is *māyā*, it also adamantly cautions us against nihilism. While one is not to believe that the world exists in the sense of possessing self-nature, one also cannot believe that it non-exists, that it is nothingness. The sudden turn away from *māyā* (*parāvṛtti*) allows one to realize that the world is unreal, not unreal: as a creation of mind it is concrete, but its particulars lack independent being. The above passage, by continuing the renunciation of nihilism and yet reaffirming the psychological model of *māyā*, represents a first step toward a

positive characterization of *prajñā*: the “imagelessness” of the bodhisattva must arise from a realization of what objectivity *is* – that is, an unreal – and not from the simple *annihilation* of objectivity *de facto*. When we take the phenomena of *māyā* to be objective in the sense of self-sustaining, we commit an error; but we likewise err when we take them to be void, mere negativity. The path of insight grasps them as manifestations of mind – and thus, as neither existent nor nonexistent. By extension, an “image”, for the present text, would seem to be something which presents itself as an existent; to recapitulate our earlier terminology, *imaging* is an instance of “realistic” experiencing. *Prajñā* reveals the phenomenon to be neither existent nor nonexistent, but simply unreal. It does not destroy phenomenal objectivity but only demystifies it, freeing the mind from its bondage.

With this restructuring of the concept of “objectivity”, the text begins to reclaim certain key terms as attributive descriptions of *prajñā-tathatā*. More specifically, it starts to articulate a surprisingly concrete vision of reality “as it is” – a vision which contrasts pointedly with the *māyā*-dominated tenor of the earlier epistemology.

This reversal emphasizes the special ability of a Buddha’s non-dualistic language to express the real.

There is an eternally-abiding reality according to the hidden meaning; it is something with neither antecedents nor consequences. The *tathāgata* (Buddha) points out the Dharma without deliberation, without contemplation, by means of words which are original and independent. Because of his right thinking and unerring memory, he neither deliberates nor contemplates . . . and has relinquished the twofold hindrance of passion and knowledge. (LVS, p. 208)

The Buddha’s “original and independent” language is one of *pointing*: it is pure symbolic reference. What the Buddha’s language expresses is the “eternally-abiding reality”. How can we account for this sudden resurgence of objectivist language, this clear departure from the ongoing idealism of the rest of the text? Despite the heavy emphasis on the unreality of *māyā*, the work assumes a philosophical position which stresses not the extirpation of objective consciousness before the void, but the proper interpretation of objective consciousness before the panorama of *māyā*. It is in this sense that the text readily reformulates its objective language and uses it to “point to” the enlightened state.

This line of thought reaches its apogee in one of the most assertive and peculiar passages in the work:

The ancient road of essence, Mahāmati, has been here all the time, like gold, silver, or pearl preserved in the mine, Mahāmati; the abode of Dharma abides forever, whether the *tathāgata* appears in the world or not. As the *tathāgata* eternally abides so does the essence, as such, of all things. reality forever abides, reality keeps its order, like the road in an ancient city . . . what has been realized by myself and by other *tathāgatas* is this essence, the *dharma*-stability (*sthititā*), the *dharma*-regularity (*niyamatā*), the suchness of things (*tathatā*), being as such (*bhūtātā*), and the truth as such (*satyatā*).

(LVS, p. 124)

Where could we hope to find a more realist pronouncement? What a startling claim, coming from a work which so consistently assures us that reality is only illusory *māyā*! But this pointed reversal is in fact largely consonant with the ultimate consequences of the epistemological model which underpins the discourse on *māyā*. Judging from the text's nagging concern with nihilism, it would appear that the author(s) considered themselves quite a bit less "idealist" than some of their contemporaries and forebears. The absolute idealism of the earlier philosophical logic is clearly but a stage in the process of enlightenment, a particular linguistic strategy employed by the Buddha to break through *vikalpa*. The pivotal vision of the text reveals the suchness of reality to be a self-stabilizing, self-regulating flux. It would appear that, for the *Laṅkāvatāra*, enlightenment consists at least partially in the direct intuitive apprehension of the phenomenal process *as* process. The momentary associations of *dharmas* which well up from this process are unreal (essenceless); yet the process itself is not only real — but is the only "real" accessible to human consciousness. Its direct intuition is the constitutive activity of the enlightened mind.

The two critical traditions, Buddhist and Western, have largely glossed the *Laṅkāvatārasūtra* as an idealist text, interpreting it retrospectively from the standpoint of the later Yogācārin movements which it influenced. But upon close scrutiny we have discovered certain anomalies to this reading, nuances of language and rhetorical strategies which fairly strongly suggest a less strictly idealist and a more realist persuasion. There is clear textual evidence to indicate that portions of the work are directed *against* idealism in its extreme forms (e.g., nihilism); moreover, the sūtra carefully works out the exact meaning of *māyā*, only to conclude that, in at least one sense, *māyā* is altogether "real." The reality of *māyā* hinges on its nature as process — as a self-regulating, perpetual rearrangement of *dharmas*, a magic show so seductive that we are led by it to believe falsely in a world of discrete existents. By passing through *śūnyatā* we are able to turn resolutely away from the dualistic

discrimination which nurtures this belief, and to return to the *māyā*-world with an enlightened understanding which grasps it as pure process. Only then are we capable of seeing reality as such: *tathatā*.

7. CONCLUSION: LINGUISTIC UPĀYA

Throughout this essay I have tried to focus attention upon the many subtleties of linguistic strategy which underpin the long discussion of Mahāmāti and the Buddha. These strategies are something other than simple rhetoric; the *Laṅkāvatāra*, in fact, plainly lacks the rhetorical sophistication of works such as the *Vimalakīrtinirdeśa-sūtra* and the *Mūlamādhyamakakārikās*. Instead, they are the tangible evidence of a working conviction that language is instrumental in shaping and maintaining our view of the world — and thus, can also be instrumental in bringing about enlightenment. For the author(s) of the *Laṅkāvatāra*, the process of ontological liberation can be seen as a transformation of linguistic consciousness through several graded phases, culminating eventually in a phase of pure expression. This multiple transformation spurs the progress of insight, providing a catalyst for a metamorphosis of consciousness itself. Language holds an absolutely pivotal place in the sūtra's assay of consciousness; its dualistic nature is the defining characteristic of human cognitive process. As such, it is also the key to realizing *prajñā* and *nirvāna*. As philosophers, the author(s) of the *Laṅkāvatāra* affirmed this fact by placing language — as the root of dualistic awareness — at the center of the *viññāna* system. As pedagogues, they put it into practice by developing certain strategies of discourse intended to usher the reader along the experiential path toward enlightenment. The “irrationalities” with which Suzuki found the text to be riddled, while they are no doubt due in part to the vagaries of translation and revision, are often explicable through a careful consideration of the work's overall symbolic structure — a structure which strategically incorporates both contradiction and paradox as powerful tools of *upāya*, skillful means.

The *Laṅkāvatāra* is a generative text, a text which was to help define key problematics for many later Mahāyāna thinkers. The Ch'an movement pursued the analysis of language to develop entirely new modalities of practice based on *kōan* study; the brothers Asaṅga and Vasubandhu articulated and expanded the doctrine of *māyā* into an intricate analysis of perception and consciousness; the Buddhist logicians focused on the theory of *apoha* and the

dualistic, prereflective discrimination of the conscious mind. Each of these later developments rests tacitly on the *Laṅkāvatāra*'s basic understanding that consciousness is essentially dichotomous and linguistic. The writer(s) of the text insist that language and discourse are merely means to an end. They are not final; they are not capable of containing truth. But through skillful manipulation they *are* capable of *pointing to* the truth – and herein lies their unique religious utility. The key to the linguistic strategy of the *Laṅkāvatāra* is that it formulates a language which challenges the reader to surpass language itself toward the real. In doing so, it poises religious discourse on the precarious but revealing borderline between words and silence.

*University of Chicago,
1536 Stonebridge Trail,
Wheaton, IL 60187, U.S.A.*

NOTES

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The following abbreviations are used through the text:

LVS: *The Lankavatara Sutra: A Mahayana Text* (1932). Translated by Daisetz T. Suzuki. London: Routledge.

SLVS: *Studies in the Lankavatara Sutra* (1930). Daisetz T. Suzuki, London: Routledge.

I have used the former work as a pagination reference, as it is still the most widely disseminated edition of the text. Suzuki largely follows the Nanjio edition of the Sanskrit text; his *An Index to the Lankavatara Sutra* (Kyoto: Sanskrit Buddhist Texts Publishing Society, 1934) furnishes cross-reference tables for the Sanskrit, Chinese, and Tibetan versions. In almost all cases the translations given in the present essay differ from those of Suzuki's work; instances of especially sharp divergence are noted individually.

¹ The dates of the *Laṅkāvatāra* are far from clear. The first recorded Chinese translation, by Dharmarakṣa, dates from roughly 420 AD and is now lost. We have no firm information on the dates of the two Tibetan versions (both ascribed, somewhat uncertainly, to Chos-grub). Some scholars (notably Dasgupta) have reasoned that close similarities between the *LVS* and the *Śraddhotpādaśāstra* place the former at 100 AD or before; but this argument is based strictly on the now questionable attribution to Asvaghōṣa of the *śāstra*. (See Y. Hakeda, *The Awakening of Faith*, Columbia 1967, for a discussion.)

On the whole, we can only assume that the Sanskrit text was composed sometime between the third and fifth centuries AD, judging from its translation history and general style. It is entirely likely that the text went through a succession of revisions before reaching its present form.

² To name but a few of its later routes, the *Laṅkāvatāra* was influential in both of the major Ch'an schools (it is rumored to have been transmitted by Bodhidharma to Hui-k'e), in the composition of the *Śraddhotpādasāstra*, in the Yogācārin doctrines of Asaṅga and Vasubandhu, and in the debates of the later Buddhist logicians (Dharmakīrti, Ratnakīrti, and others).

³ Two early but notable exceptions are: Giuseppe Tucci, *Studio comparativo fra le tre versioni cinesi ed il testo sanscrito del 1° e 2° capitolo del Laṅkāvatāra* (in *Atti della R. Accademia nazionale dei lincei, Memorie della Classe di scienze morali, storiche e filologiche* Roma, 1923) and J. W. Hauer's *Das Laṅkāvatāra-sūtra und das Sāṃkhya* (Stuttgart, W. Kohlhammer 1927).

⁴ *Bhagavad Gita*, (England: Penguin, 1962) transl. Juan Mascaró, p. 89.

⁵ Later (section 4) we will find a strong connection between the Mahāyāna concept of *śūnyatā* and the experience of spatiality.

⁶ Wendy D. O'Flaherty, unpublished manuscript.

⁷ The distinction, of course, is one of emphasis. Buddhism by its very nature recognizes an unseverable link between epistemology and ontology.

⁸ Suzuki misreads *karmakriyārahitaḥ* as "devoid of *karma* and *kriyā*"; but *arahita* signifies "not deprived of, possessed of."

⁹ All etymologies from M. Monier-Williams.

¹⁰ See also the article on *vijñāna* in Edgerton's *Buddhist Hybrid Sanskrit* dictionary.

¹¹ But see *The Awakening of Faith*, *op. cit.*, p. 55 and *passim*, as well as *The Platform Sutra of the Sixth Patriarch* (tr. P. Yampolsky, Columbia 1967) p. 147. The mind-wave simile became a favorite touchstone of the Mahāyāna's particular attitude toward epistemological explanation.

¹² S. Dasgupta, *A History of Indian Philosophy*, vol. I (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1922), p. 146.

¹³ Wōnhyo, quoted in Hakeda, *op. cit.*, p. 33.

¹⁴ Dasgupta, *op. cit.*, p. 146.

¹⁵ Nāgārjuna, *Mādhyamaka-kārikās* XXIV, quoted in Hakeda, *op. cit.*, p. 36.

¹⁶ Dasgupta, *op. cit.*, pp. 140-1.

¹⁷ See *Philosophy East and West* Vol. 20 (1970) p. 269, and Monier-Williams' article under *śū*.

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