

Eli Franco

The Religious Background of Buddhist Logic



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Reading through the reports of previous years a certain pattern seems to repeat itself. "Yes, I did a great deal of work. No, I did not finish my project." In this respect, I am afraid, I am no exception, although perhaps not for the usual reasons. When I came to the Kolleg, the first draft of my monograph on Dharmakīrti's *Pramānavārttika (PV)* (*pramānasiddhi*-chapter, verses 1-132) was already finished. However, instead of finalizing the manuscript quickly and moving on to the next project (a study of the Jain philosopher Prabhacandra, planned as a contribution to the *Encyclopedia of Indian Philosophies*), I decided to expand the structure of the book by including an annotated translation of the most relevant passages in the *Pramānavārttikālahkāra* of Prajñākaragupta (approximately end of 8th c.), by far the most superior, the most detailed, and the most difficult commentary on the *PV*, and, from the traditional point of view (both Indian and Tibetan), the most authoritative. Unfortunately, Prajñākaragupta's commentary has come down to us only in a single, rather faulty Sanskrit manuscript (discovered in Tibet and published by the great explorer Rahula Sātikrityāyana, to whom we owe almost all existing Sanskrit manuscripts on Buddhist logic and epistemology). Fortu-

nately, we possess a canonical Tibetan translation of the same, which, although far from being perfect, is on the whole reliable. With the help of this Tibetan translation I was able to conjecture numerous amendments to the Sanskrit text (5-10 new readings per page) and identify some lacunae as well in this hardly studied commentary.

Furthermore, Prajnâkaragupta's commentary contains frequently implicit references to the earlier and earliest known commentary by Devendrabuddhi. Therefore, any serious study of Prajnâkaragupta has to entail, at least on a limited scale, a study of Devendrabuddhi. I have undertaken a comparative and contrasting study of the relevant portions of the two texts on the basis of two Tibetan recensions (the Peking and Derge xylographs) of Devendrabuddhi's commentary, the Sanskrit original of which has not been discovered so far, except for a few fragments. One of the most important general results of this study is that Devendrabuddhi could not have been a personal disciple of Dharmakirti, as is claimed by the Tibetan tradition and uncritically accepted by modern scholars, because he too often misunderstands and misinterprets him.

The planned monograph is intended as a contribution to the study of the religious background of Buddhist logic and epistemology, a hitherto almost completely neglected subject, which has been attracting increasing attention in the last five years or so, especially in Japan and in the Netherlands. More specifically, it concentrates on proofs of rebirth.

The Buddhist philosophers had to prove rebirth in both directions, into the past and into the future. On the one hand, the Buddha's authority was derived from his infinite compassion towards all living beings. Such a tremendous amount of compassion could not possibly have been accumulated during a single life time. Thus, infinite compassion as a necessary condition for religious authority presupposes among other things an infinite number of past lives. On the other hand, rebirth had to be proved for the future as well, for otherwise the exertions towards the Buddhist ideals and goals would be pointless.

Rebirth in the future was somewhat problematic within the conceptual framework of Buddhist logic, because it allowed inferences from effect to cause, but not vice versa. The inference from cause to effect was considered unsafe, and therefore not valid, because there is always the possibility that something intervenes in the causal process and prevents the cause from producing its effect. Thus, even if one can infer from this life as an effect its cause, the previous life, one cannot infer from this life as a cause its effect, the future life. The strategy adopted by Dharmakirti to overcome this difficulty was to take recourse to another type of inference where the probans and the probandum have the same nature (the stock example for this kind of inference is: This is a tree because it is a *šimsapa*

[*śāpā* being a kind of tree]). Applied to the problem of future causality, this kind of somewhat tautological inference reads: A certain causal complex produces its effect because all the causal factors are complete and nothing can interfere in the process. The inference becomes plausible by establishing a causal nexus between cognitions and rejecting any possible dependence (in the strong sense that when the one does not exist the other does not exist) of the mind on other factors like the body, senses, breath, etc. In the final analysis, this proof of rebirth amounts to establishing (or to the attempt to establish) the absolute autonomy of the mind.

This is just one of the main topics discussed by Dharmakīrti and his commentators. To be able to fully grasp their intention and importance one has to go back to earlier scholastic writings of various Buddhist schools, a work which is slowed down immensely by the lack of reliable translations, in-depth studies and exhaustive indices for most of this mass of literature in various languages.

Besides advancing considerably in my work on Prajñākaragupta and Devendrabuddhi, I finalized two papers on Buddhist logic and epistemology, both to be published in Vienna this year. Quite unexpectedly, from among a number of book reviews, a lengthy review article of the *Sāṃkhya*-Volume in the *Encyclopedia of Indian Philosophies* provoked an enraged reaction and rejoinder, upon which I had the pleasure to further substantiate my original claims and to write a detailed rejoinder to the rejoinder. The end to this affair is still open. — Because of the almost chronically difficult staff situation at the *Institut für Indische Philologie und Kunstgeschichte* I volunteered to conduct a seminar on classical *Sāṃkhya* philosophy for advanced students of the institute during the *Wintersemester*.

Working at the Kolleg was a pure pleasure. The friendly and efficient library staff has managed to get hold of some of the most obscure Indian publications, which I never expected to find in Germany, let alone in Berlin. (The Staatsbibliothek collection of pre-2nd World War Indological publications is probably the best on the continent.) The committed administrative and technical staff (Herr Prasser, Frau Golf, Frau Sanders and Herr Riedel) simply went out of its way to help us in all dealings and troubles with the "real world". The "restaurant", of course, is a delight, and for me at least the real center of the Kolleg. A minor word of criticism on the secretarial services which in my opinion are too narrowly defined as "Schreibkraft". For those of us who use word-processors it meant no secretarial services at all.

The written purpose of the Kolleg is to form a "community of scientists". Absurd as it may seem, it seems to me that this year this purpose

was actually fulfilled. The fellows with whom I had friendly and congenial contact are simply too many to be enumerated here separately; let me just mention my erudite Fach-Fellow Wilhelm Halbfass, and my multi-talented fellow-Fellow Hans Peter Duerr. In long conversations with Shenyi Luo I have learnt a great deal about Sanskrit-Buddhist manuscripts in the Library of Minorities in Beijing — at the present not accessible, but with a change in the political situation they could lead to sensational discoveries in the field of Mahâyâna Buddhism. The participation and work in the "Arbeitskreise" *Philosophie* and *Anthropologie-Geschichte* opened new perspectives and created an atmosphere of true interdisciplinary understanding.