Philosophy, Philosophers, and Buddhist Scholastic Texts (Śāstra)*

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Abstract: Vasubandhu would surely have been thrilled to learn that centuries after the composition of his work, philosophers would choose to spend their time reading and thinking about his words, ideas, and arguments. He might well have been intrigued by the following questions: In what form, with what supporting material, and to what end could his *Viṃśikāvṛtti* [Twenty Verses and Exposition] become a part of the curriculum in Euro-American-style philosophy departments today, if at all? This essay addresses these questions by stepping back from Vasubandhu and his text to consider the broader project of whether, and if so how, to bring Buddhist philosophers and philosophical texts from classical India into our contemporary philosophy curriculum. It addresses this question by evaluating the various ways Buddhist philosophy has been understood in modern scholarship, and by comparing modern philosophers' methods with those of traditional Buddhist scholastic texts.

Keywords: Buddhist Studies, Buddhist Philosophy, Six Systems, Vasubandhu, Viṃśikā, Buddhist Epistemology

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Introduction: Vasubandhu's Smile

Vasubandhu (ca. fourth/fifth century CE) would surely have been thrilled to learn that roughly 1600 years after the composition of his *Viṃśikāvṛtti*, a dozen or so professional philosophers would choose to spend their time reading and thinking about his words, ideas, and arguments.[1] I imagine he would have been surprised (and pleased) to learn that even this modest work of his became a source for lines of argument that were targeted by critics, both Buddhist and non-Buddhist, and developed by a range of supporters in a dizzying array of historical contexts.[2] And I imagine he would have been intrigued by questions that continue to guide our engagement with his text: In what form, with what supporting material, and to what end could Vasubandhu's *Viṃśikāvṛtti* become a part of the curriculum in Euro-American style philosophy departments today, if at all? In this essay, I step back from Vasubandhu and the *Viṃśikāvṛtti* to share my perspective on the broader project of whether, and if so how, to bring Buddhist philosophers and philosophical texts into our philosophy curriculum.

I have divided my remarks into three parts: I begin by stipulating what I mean by "Buddhist Philosophy" and share a controversial thought on the state of the field. In Part 2, I take up some common framing narratives that I believe are holding the Buddhist philosophy project back and suggest some ways of breaking through them. It is worth noting that my comments in Parts

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[1]   Vasbandhu has been dated as early as 400–480 and now ca. 350–430. For this latter date, see Deleanu, *The Chapter on the Mundane Path*. For background on Vasubandhu, see Gold, "Vasubandhu" and *idem*, *Paving the Great Way*. For recent editions of the *Viṃśikāvṛtti* see Balcerowicz and Nowakowska, "Wasubandhu"; and Silk, *Materials Toward the Study of Vasubandhu's Viṃśikā (I)*, which also contains an introduction and helpful set of notes. For background on Vasubandhu's historical context in the Abhidharma text-tradition see Willemin, Dessein, and Cox, *Sarvāstivāda Buddhist Scholasticism*. For background on the Yogācāra text tradition see Buescher, *The Inception of Yogācāra-Vijñānavāda*; and Schmithausen, *The Genesis of Yogācāra-Vijñānavāda*, who critically engages Buescher's work. For a general introduction see Williams, *Mahayana Buddhism*.

[2]   For some of Vasubandhu's critics see, for example, Uddyotakara in Kapstein, *Reason's Traces*, chapter 14; and Śaṅkara in Darling, *An Evaluation of The Vedāntic Critique of Buddhism*. To appreciate the "dizzying array of historical contexts," see the range of entries in Powers, *The Yogacara School of Buddhism*.

1 and 2 are based on the history of Buddhist philosophy in India and do not always apply to Buddhist philosophy in other parts of the world. I conclude with some thoughts about what lies ahead for those of us committed to the Buddhist philosophy project.[3]

Part 1. What is "Buddhist Philosophy"?

When we use the phrase "Buddhist Philosophy," the term "Philosophy" is best taken to be the name of an academic discipline and not an intellectual practice or way of life.[4] If Buddhist philosophy is to be recognized as a subfield in Philosophy it must work within existing conventions, even as it seeks to change them. For what it is worth, I cannot think of many, if any, of those whom we should consider to be Buddhist philosophers in pre-modern India who would oppose this idea or not be fully capable of and interested in participating in the contemporary discipline. In what other academic department would Vasbandhu, Dignāga (ca. 480–540), Dharmakīrti (ca. mid-sixth/mid-seventh century), Śāntakrakṣita (ca. 725–788), Śubhagupta (ca. 720–780), or Jñānaśrīmitra (ca. 980–1040) choose to work and have their arguments discussed and debated?[5]

There are of course Buddhist intellectuals who would choose not to

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[3]   I have chosen not to include the Pāli tradition and the work of brilliant Buddhist intellectual Buddhaghosa (ca. 370–450) because his work seems to have been completely ignored by the broader Indian tradition. For more on Buddhaghosa see Heim, *The Forerunner of All Things* and *idem*, *Voices of the Buddha*.

[4]   Many take Hadot and Davidson, *Philosophy as a Way of Life* to be helpful for understanding Buddhist Philosophy, even though I do not. For discussions of Hadot and Buddhism, see the essays in Fiordalis, *Buddhist Spiritual Practices*; and Eltschinger, "Pierre Hadot et les 'exercices spirituels'."

[5]   For Dignāga, see Hattori, *Dignāga, on Perception*; and Taber, *A Hindu Critique of Buddhist Epistemology*; Dharmakīrti, see Dunne, "Foundations of Dharmakīrti's Philosophy"; and Kellner, McAllister, Lasic, and McClintock, eds., *Reverberations of Dharmakīrti's Philosophy*, and the references contained therein; Śubhagupta, see Saccone, *On the Nature of Things*; Śāntarakṣita (and Kamalaśīla), see McClintock, *Omniscience and the Rhetoric of Reason*; Ratié, *Une Critique bouddhique du Soi selon la Mīmāṃsā*, and Eltschinger, "Śāntarakṣita"; Jñānaśrīmitra, see Kellner, *Jñānaśrīmitra's Anupalabdhirahasya and Sarvaśabdābhavacarcā*; and McCrea and Patil, "Traditionalism and Innovation."

participate in the discipline of Philosophy,[6] for example, the Buddhist poet
Aśvaghoṣa (fl. 100),[7] writer Āryaśūra (ca. early fourth century), and perhaps
even the Buddhist thinker Śāntideva (ca. seventh/eighth century).[8] To this

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[6] A variety of Buddhist intellectuals, including those I refer to below, made arguments.
Simply making or containing an argument, however, is insufficient for being a philosopher or
philosophical text. Rather, it is extensive and sustained engagement with and evaluation of
arguments that is most relevant.

[7] Aśvaghoṣa's work is full of interesting arguments against a range of Brahmanical views
having do with caste and ritual violence (these broadly socio-political and "ethical" issues will
be discussed below) as well as arguments against Sāṃkya (Buddhism's predominant opponent
at the time, it seems) and, to a lesser extent, early Vaiśeṣika. While I think Śāntideva would
be interested in Philosophy, I do not think he is primarily a philosopher. For Aśvaghoṣa's sec-
tarian affiliation (which seems to be very close to that of Vasubandhu), see Yamabe, "On the
School Affiliation of Aśvaghoṣa." For his discussion of Sāṃkhya, see Johnston, *Aśvaghoṣa's
Buddhacarita*; Ramakrishna Rao, "The *Buddhacarita* and the Sāṃkhya of Arāḍa Kālāma";
Kent, "Early Sāṃkhya in the *Buddhacarita*"; and Eltschinger, "Aśvaghoṣa: The Dawn of Indian
Buddhist Philosophy." For his discussion of Vaiśeṣika, see Bronkhorst, "Aśvaghoṣa and Vaiśeṣika."
It is worth noting that in Sarvāstivāda texts debates with non-Buddhists are relatively rare.
In contrast, non-Buddhists figure prominently in Mūlasarvāstivāda texts. See, for example,
Eltschinger, "Aśvaghoṣa and His Canonical Sources," where he discusses a famous passage in
the *Mūlasarvāstivādavinaya* where the future Buddha descends to earth from the Tuṣita heavens
to defeat six rival philosophers (*tārkika*), six rival traditionalists (*ānuśrāvika*), and six rival
enlightenment seekers (*samāpattṛ*) before entering Nirvāṇa himself. That Aśvaghoṣa too saw
the refutation of rivals as important to the historical Buddha and his mission is evident in *Bud-
dhacarita* 27.30–32 in Johnston, *Aśvaghoṣa's Buddhacarita*, where he writes, "by refuting the
other systems and by argument he caused men to understand the meaning which is hard to
grasp. By teaching everything is impermanent and without self and by denying the presence
of the slightest happiness in the spheres of existence, he raised aloft the banner of his fame
and overturned the lofty pillars of pride." In his *Buddhacarita* [Life of the Buddha] and *Saun-
darananda* [Gorgeous Nanda], it is clear that Aśvaghoṣa thinks that rival views of the path
must be subject to rational criticism (*yukti*) so that the Buddhist path can be demonstrated as
being the only viable one. In both of these texts, Aśvaghoṣa uses the term "critical inquirer"
(*parīkṣaka*) to refer to both the Buddha and his rivals. These critical inquirers are dedicated
to inquiring into the nature of reality, defending their own views, and engaging in a form of
religious practice that is consistent with it. It would be wrong to not see them as philosophers.
Through their voices, Aśvaghoṣa introduces many lines of argument that are developed in the
following centuries such as—and this is but one example—the argument that property-posses-
sors (*guṇin)* are ontologically distinct from their properties (*guṇa*). Nevertheless, I do not think
Aśvaghoṣa would choose to be in a philosophy department, unlike the author(s) of the founda-
tional texts of the Abhidharma text-traditions that preceded him, such as the *Jñānaprasthāna*
and its "commentary," the *Mahāvibhāṣā,* which Āśvaghoṣa is said to have studied and copied.

group we might add the composite authors of influential Buddhist texts such as sūtras, including those that belong to the so-called "perfection of wisdom" (Skt. *Prajñāpāramitā*) tradition.[9] There are others like Nāgārjuna (ca. second century), Candrakīrti (ca. 600–660), Kamalaśīla (ca. 740–795), and Ratnākaraśānti (ca. 970–1030) who wrote works of philosophy as well as works that are not.[10] This is not to say that philosophical work could not or should not be done with the work of any of these thinkers or their texts, or that neither are of philosophical significance. My point is simply that not every text of philosophical

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For more on early Abhidharma see Willemin, Dessein, and Cox, *Sarvāstivāda Buddhist Scholasticism*, which is also referred to above.

[8]   It is obvious that Śāntideva made arguments and, in some cases, pursued them in detail, especially in his *Bodhicaryāvatāra* [On the Road to Awakening] (shortened as *BCA*) in Steinkellner, "Śāntideva's Bodhicaryāvatāra." The sections of greatest interest to philosophers are *BCA* 6.22–32; *BCA* 8.89–8.103; and *BCA* 9. Despite these sections, I do not think the *BCA* reveals Śāntideva to be a philosopher or the *BCA* to be a philosophical text, though excellent philosophical work can be (and has been) done with it. See, for example, the analysis in Harrison, *Setting out on the Great Way*. For a translation of this text see Steinkellner, "Śāntideva's Bodhicaryāvatāra." For background on Śāntideva see Goodman, trans., *The Training Anthology of Śāntideva* and the essays in Gold and Duckworth, eds., *Readings of Śāntideva's Guide to Practice*. For an accessible translation of Śāntideva's Training Anthology (*Śīkṣāsamuccaya*), see Goodman, trans., *The Training Anthology of Śāntideva*. For a translation of how a traditional Sanskrit commentator engaged with Śāntideva's work see Goodman and Shultz, "Prajñākaramati on Śāntideva's Case Against Anger."

[9]   See, for example, Conze, *Prajñāpāramitā Literature*; Hikata, *Suvikrantāvikrāmi-paripṛcchā-prajñāpāramitā-sūtra*; and Karashima, "Who Composed the Mahāyāna Scriptures?" For philosophical content in sūtra literature see, for example, Wynne, "Miraculous Transformation and Personal Identity."

[10]   As an example of Nāgārjuna's philosophical work, see his *Vigrahavyāvartinī* in Bhattacharya, Johnson, Kunst, eds. and trans., *The Dialectical Method of Nagarjuna*. For Nāgārjuna's non-philosophical work, which is also of philosophical interest, see his *Ratnāvalī* in Dunne and McClintock, trans., *The Precious Garland*. For more on Nāgārjuna see Tuck, *Comparative Philosophy and the Philosophy of Scholarship*; Siderits and Katsura, trans., *Nagarjuna's Middle Way*; and Westerhoff, trans., *The Dispeller of Disputes*. For the range of Candrakīrti's work see Vose, *Resurrecting Candrakirti*; MacDonald, *In Clear Words*; and Eltschinger and Lang, "Āryadeva." For Kamalaśīla, compare his *Tattvasaṃgrahapañjikā* in Jha, trans., *The Tattvasaṃgraha of Śāntarakṣita* with his *Bhāvanākrama* in Adams, "Meditation and the Concept of Insight"; and see Eltschinger, "Aśvaghoṣa and His Canonical Sources." For Ratnākaraśānti's philosohical work, see his *Prajñāpāramitopadeśa* as discussed in Tomlinson, "Buddhahood and Philosophy of Mind." For his non-philosophical work see his *Chandoratnākara* and *Vidagdhavismāpana* in Hahn, *Ratnākaraśānti's Chandoratnākara*, vol. 34.

interest needs to be a work of philosophy.[11] While a professional philosopher might make such texts a part of their curriculum in Philosophy, they need not be works of philosophy as such. We are lucky that Buddhists did much more than philosophy.[12]

Some might take my proposal that the term "Philosophy" in "Buddhist Philosophy" name an academic discipline to be too restrictive, since it privileges the present work done in Euro-American style Philosophy Departments, and ways of reading, arguing, and writing that are characteristic of the discipline today.[13] Forcing Buddhist texts from classical India into such a framework is historically irresponsible and likely to distort the views and projects of their authors, they may argue. I will speak to the charge of being "historically irresponsible" a bit later. To the charge of distorting their views, my response is simply that this has to be assessed on a case by case basis. I can think of contemporary work in Philosophy that distorts the views of Buddhist intellectuals and, fortunately, work that does not. Regardless, I think it is far better to understand and assess the arguments in these texts alongside those of Aristotle, Aquinas, Descartes, Hume, Kant, Frege, or Quine than not. To *not* treat the work of these Buddhists as a part of Philosophy is to risk distorting it.[14]

If "Philosophy" names an academic discipline, what about the adjective "Buddhist"? I don't have much at stake in what this term should mean, at least in this context. Just like the terms "Ancient" and "Early Modern," the term "Buddhist" can simply label a subfield of Philosophy. It picks out philosophical work done with or in texts that associate themselves with Buddhism by endorsing, in one way or the other, what the authors of such texts take to be

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[11]   This is how I understand the work of Aśvaghoṣa and Śāntarakṣita, for example.

[12]   My favorite contemporary example is the philosopher Michael Dummett, who famously wrote on the history of Tarot. See Dummett, *The Game of Tarot*.

[13]   See Dotson, "How is this Paper Philosophy?" for a series of arguments and observations about the contemporary discipline and how it ought to change.

[14]   Resistance to this idea is often driven by an understanding of what Buddhist intellectuals in pre-modern India must have been like, how they understood their work in relation to Buddhism, and their own personal practice. Unfortunately, there is very little historical information about this. In most cases, all we have are their texts (or reports which post-date their work by centuries), which tell us precious little of relevance to these questions. What we need to ask ourselves is why we think we have answers to these questions at all.

the teachings of the Buddha.[15] With historical texts, this association is usually readily apparent in a *maṅgala*-verse, a poetic stanza that introduces most every Sanskrit text.[16] Interestingly, the *Viṃśikāvṛtti* has no such verse, though some of Vasbandhu's other works do.[17]

Why is it worth discussing how we should understand the term "Buddhist Philosophy?" It is worth discussing since far too many of us who are interested in Buddhist Philosophy fail to appreciate why it has not yet become a part of the discipline of Philosophy. A focus on Philosophy as an academic discipline provides a helpful place to start. What is slowing down the inclusion of Buddhist Philosophy in Philosophy is not, primarily, a lack of interest or prejudice on the part of professional philosophers, despite claims to the contrary.[18] Rather, it is the simple fact that the majority of those who work with Indian and Buddhist philosophical texts are not yet good enough philosophers, and could not be hired and tenured in top-ranked Philosophy Departments in North America. To an important degree, one of the pre-conditions for including Buddhist Philosophy in Philosophy is only slowly being met. There are, of course, many other problems as well: there are very few adequate translations of Buddhist philosophical texts, little explanatory material suitable for those who have not formally studied the primary languages, and even fewer high-quality peer-reviewed articles in philosophy to support either. To these problems we

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[15]   While it is often relatively straightforward to label a text or author as "Buddhist," the issue becomes more interesting when we turn to doctrines, arguments, poems, or practices. My own view is that to correctly identify some *x* as "Buddhist" we need to show that it was or should be understood as being part of the Buddhist path to Nirvāṇa in one meaningful way or the other. It is Nirvāṇa that, in a sense, makes a sentence a Buddhist sentence. A seemingly generic practice in pre-modern India of giving alms to wandering mendicants, for example, is "Buddhist" when it was or should be understood by the giver, recipient, observer, or analyst as being part of the Buddhist path. For an excellent discussion of Nirvāṇa see Collins, *Nirvana and Other Buddhist Felicities.*

[16]   For a discussion of such verses see Slaje, ed., *Śāstrārambha.*

[17]   Regardless, it is clear from the first few lines of almost all of his work that his texts are taken by him to be "Buddhist," as I am using the term.

[18]   For a discussion of all of this, see Garfield and Van Norden, "If Philosophy Won't Diversify," and the comments it has generated. For comments, see Leiter, "Anglophone Departments" and links provided in Van Norden, "The Multicultural Philosophy Manifesto"; Park, *Africa, Asia, and the History of Philosophy*; and Leiter, "Ignorance of Philosophy, Identity Politics, and the Cosmopolitan Ideal."

should add the deeply Euro-centric focus of our curriculum and the still shocking level of ignorance about so-called "non-Western" philosophy that often supports it.[19] It is, in addition, important to keep institutional considerations in mind, especially as the humanities contract. Many of those who are deeply committed to adding new texts and thinkers to our curriculum in Philosophy are forced to ask, at the expense of what should we include specifically Buddhist Philosophy?

I do not find any of this demoralizing, since it points us to exactly what we need to do and the work we need to support. Those of us who are in a position to do so need to train a new generation of *philosophers* who (1) are able to really read primary texts or even translations (and not just pretend to read them); (2) are able to think deeply with and about the issues that actually concerned Indian Buddhist philosophers (and not just about the issues that we wished they cared about), and (3) have the philosophical skills to engage, philosophically, with Indian texts and the ideas and arguments they contain, whether as historians of Indian or Buddhist Philosophy or as people interested in Epistemology, Metaphysics, Philosophy of Language, Philosophy of Mind, etc. None of this is possible without extensive training in the discipline of Philosophy. To make this training possible we need accurate and useable translations of entire texts, accessible explanatory material, and high-quality philosophical engagement with both. We need to focus our resources and effort on making this possible, even as we create new opportunities for our colleagues to familiarize themselves with Buddhist texts and seek philanthropy to support the creation of new tenure-track lines in Buddhist Philosophy (and Sanskrit

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[19]   Much of this is readily apparent in the online comments to Garfield and Van Norden in the *NYT* and Leiter, which I referred to above. Richard Rorty's views too still echo in many quarters of the academy. See, for example the review by Rorty, "Interpreting Across Boundaries," 333: "What we in the West call 'philosophy' became what it is by successively distinguishing itself, self-consciously and insistently, from theology, natural science, and literature. The sequence of intellectual history was very different in the various parts of Asia, so we may well wonder (…) whether applying the term 'philosophy' to Asian books is more than an empty gesture, a stilted compliment that creates more awkwardness than collegiality." And Rorty, "Philosophy as a Kind of Writing," 143: "All that 'philosophy,' as a name for a sector of culture, means is 'talk about Plato, Augustine, Descartes, Kant, Hegel, Frege, Russell … and that lot.' Philosophy is best seen as a kind of writing. It is delimited, as is any literary genre, not by form or matter, but by tradition…".

Philosophy more broadly) in Philosophy departments.

There is much standing in the way of all of this. The Buddhist Philosophy project will be more successful (and successful faster) once some deeply entrenched narratives about how to approach Buddhist philosophical texts are set aside, undermined, or at the very least questioned. And it is to three (plus one) of these narratives that I now turn.

Part 2. Frames

Frame 1: Six Systems

The first and most easily set aside framing narrative is that of the so-called "six systems" of orthodox Indian philosophy—the three pairs (1) Sāṃkhya-Yoga; (2) Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika; and (3) Mīmāṃsā-Vedānta.[20] These six are usually supplemented by the so-called heterodox systems of Buddhism, Jainism, and Physicalism (Cārvāka/Lokāyatā).[21] This framework is most often presented as historically grounded, and a useful way of making sense of the long and otherwise dizzying history of philosophy in India.[22] However, the framework is neither historically grounded nor conceptually useful. In fact, it distorts our understanding of Indian philosophy and, in my view, is an entirely inappropriate (if not irresponsible) way to approach its history and that of Buddhist philosophy more specifically.[23]

Even though the history of the six systems framework has not been fully worked out, it is clear that no one in classical or even early pre-modern India

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[20] A simple internet search for "six systems of Indian (or Hindu) philosophy" reveals just how widespread and entrenched this framing narrative is.

[21] See, for example, Part 3 of Hiriyanna's helpful *Outlines of Indian Philosophy*, which he titles, "The Age of the Systems." See page 183 for a discussion of the three pairs referred to above. There are dozens of other examples, both earlier and later.

[22] For an introduction to this history, see Dasgupta, *History of Indian Philosophy,* and the useful podcast series, Adamson and Ganeri, "Classical Indian Philosophy."

[23] There are two relevant issues. The first is the historicity and conceptual utility of a distinction between "orthodox" and "heterodox." The second is the historicity and conceptual utility of identifying "orthodox" with the six systems. Neither distinction is historically grounded or, in my view, of value for thinking about the history of philosophy in India. For some of my reasons for thinking so, see the relevant sections of this lecture and notes.

thought about the history of philosophy in India in such terms or of the six systems as "orthodox." It is worth noting—and this is but one example—that the brilliant seventh-century Mīmāṃsā philosopher, Kumārilabhaṭṭa, took Sāṃkya and Yoga to be heterodox.[24] The tenth-century philosophical polymath, Vācaspatimiśra, wrote commentarial texts on five of the six "orthodox" systems, which might suggest to some that the six orthodox systems have an historical basis. The fact that one of the systems is missing is, of course, significant, as is the fact that Vācaspatimiśra does not pair them with each other or contrast them as a group with those that are supposedly "heterodox." It is likely that the now familiar doxographic sense of "heterodox" became historically salient only after Buddhist philosophy was no longer a live option in India, that is, after the thirteenth century.[25] It is of no value as a way of understanding the history of philosophy in India before this time.

An early, if not the first, explicit reference to more than one of the three systems paired together can be found in Madhusūdana Sarasvatī's sixteenth-century *Prasthānabheda*, which is actually an excerpt from his commentary on the seventh verse of his famous hymn, the *Śivamahimnaḥastotra*. In this text, Madhusūdana enumerates eighteen broadly Brahmanical or "orthodox" textual traditions to demonstrate the superiority of non-dual Vedānta.[26] As a part of his discussion, he explains that Vaiśeṣika, which is not included in the text he is

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[24] As noted in Kataoka, "Kumārila's Notion of Pauruṣeyavacana," 47, Kumārila addresses the issue of non-Vedic views, including Sāṃkhya and Yoga, and concludes that they are all authoritative (*sarveṣāṃ prāmāṇyam*, *Tantravārttika ad* 1.3.2, Subbāśāstrī, *Mīmāmsādarśana*, 168.20) since the non-Vedic elements in even Buddhist texts are of some instrumental value for followers of Veda. In contrast, Kumārila is much less tolerant when it comes to the acceptance of other religious *practices*. For an excellent discussion of this, see Freschi and Katoaka, "Jayanta on the Validity of Sacred Texts," which I also refer to below.

[25] For an interesting take on the end of Buddhism in India, see Verardi, *Hardships and Downfall of Buddhism in India*.

[26] When used to classify philosophical "schools," the orthodox/heterodox distinction is usually assumed to be trans-temporal, in the sense that it applies to the entirety of the so-called classical period. This assumption, however, is without any historical basis. Recently, it has been argued that the notion of "orthodoxy" (traditions that affirm the Veda) is an early modern development. The idea is that, due to the "threats" posed to Brahmanical culture by Islam and Muslims, the orthodox/proto-Hindu traditions began to see themselves as such and distinguish themselves from heterodox traditions. See, for example, Lorenzen, "Who Invented Hinduism"; Pollock, "Ramayana and Political Imagination in India"; and the response

commenting upon, should be implicitly included as a part of Nyāya, which is mentioned and Vedānta, which is also not included in the original text, should be included, again implicitly, in Mīmāṃsā. Sāṃkhya and Yoga are similarly included, but as parts of Dharmaśāstra. While Madhusūdana clearly sees the six systems as part of an orthodox, broadly "vedic" tradition that the original text he is commenting on did not recognize, he does not separate them out from the other eighteen text traditions as systems of philosophy (Skt. *darśana*).

The first explicit mention of the standard six systems that I have found (though I am sure it is not the first) is in Varadarāja's early seventeenth-century *Girvāṇapadamañjarī*, a text on how to speak Sanskrit.[27] Notable too is

to Pollock by Rao, *Re-figuring the Ramayana as Theology*. In reviving this argument, and in support of this conclusion, Nicholson, *Unifying Hinduism,* cites doxographical passages from Madhusūdana's *Prasthānabheda* but not, interestingly, from his other texts. Nicholson's conclusion is, I think, false. See, for example, Allen, "Review of *Unifying Hinduism*," *idem*, "Dueling Dramas, Dueling Doxographies," and Nair, "'Islam' in Sanskrit Doxography." Briefly, the idea that traditions like Buddhism, Jainism, and Physicalism are non-Vedic (*vedabāhya*) clearly predates Islamic rule in South Asia. As an example, just consider the famous passage in Śaṅkara's *Brahmasūtrabhāṣya* (*BSūBh* 2.1.3, where Buddhists, Jains, and Kāpālikas are also labeled as being *mleccha*s) or Bhaṭṭa Jayanta's *Āgamaḍambara* (*ĀḌ*) in Bhatta, *Much Ado About Religion*, 131, and his discussion in the fourth chapter of his *Nyāyamañjarī* (*NM*) in Freschi and Kataoka, "Jayanta on the Validity of Sacred Texts." What is significant is that the idea of being "non-Vedic" (*vedabhāya*) has nothing to do with Islam or Muslims. To show that non-Vedic/heterodox came to include Muslims and, more significantly, that the notion of Vedic "orthodoxy" was created in response to Islam, much more evidence is needed than Nicholson provides. What counts as "orthodox" and "heterodox" seems to depend on philosophical and theological details that cut across what is ordinarily thought of as orthodox and heterodox. In addition to the Mīmāṃsā philosopher Kumārila who, as I mentioned above, considers Sāṃkhya and Yoga to be heterodox, consider the Nyāya philosopher Bhaṭṭa Jayanta's attitude towards Pāñcarātra and different Śaiva groups, which varies between his *Nyāyamañjarī* and *Āgamaḍambara*. See Freschi and Kataoka, "Jayanta on the Validity of Sacred Texts," referred to above. Interestingly, Madhusūdana himself follows thinkers as diverse as the Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika philosopher Udayana (ca. eleventh century) and the Vedāntin Mādhava/Cannibhaṭṭa (ca. fourteenth century) in including Buddhist, Jain, and Physicalists in their doxographical schemes, not as rivals to "orthodoxy" but as representing views that, like the views of everyone other than themselves, are false or, at best, usefully false. See, for example, the passages from his *Siddhāntabindu* and *Vedāntakalpalaṭīka*, cited in Nair, "'Islam' in Sanskrit Doxography," referred to above.

27   *vaiśeṣikaṃ tarkaḥ sāṃkhyaṃ yogaḥ mīmāṃsā vedānta iti ṣad darśanāṇi. Girvāṇapad-amañjarī* (*GVP*): 2. Earlier in this text, the six are referred to as the *darśanaṣaṭka*. See *GVP*: 2.

Rāmabhadra Dīkṣita's early eighteenth-century *Ṣaḍdarśinīsiddhāntasaṃgraha*, where he mentions the standard "six systems" plus grammar.[28] This latter text, which is only extant in three unedited manuscripts, is a composite work by seven authors, each of whom contributed one section to the anthology at the request of the emperor Shāhaji (ca. 1594–1664).[29] While the standard six systems plus grammar are discussed, it is worth noting that Yoga is discussed only as a subtype of Sāṃkhya.

As far as I can tell, it was Henry Colebrooke's introduction of the six systems in his 1823 lecture to the Royal Asiatic Society of Bengal that was of decisive influence in propagating the myth of the six systems.[30] There is no question that Colebrooke drew upon the *Prasthānabheda* by picking and choosing a doxographical scheme that made sense to him.[31] My guess, however, is that either he, or the traditional scholars with whom he worked, were aware of Varadarāja's *Girvāṇapadamañjarī* and perhaps even Rāmabhdara Dīkṣita's *Ṣaḍdarśinīsiddhāntasaṃgraha*. It is unlikely that Colebrooke "came up with"

Varadarāja (c. 1600–1650), the author of this text, is the same as the author of the famous "middle," "short," and "super-short" versions of Baṭṭoji Dīkṣita's *Siddhāntakaumudi.* See Cardona, *Pāṇini: A Survey of Research*, 287, for this way of characterizing these texts. It is possible, if not likely, that identifying this group of six as the six systems predates Varadarāja and is not his innovation. It is hard to imagine that the *GVP* is the source. A definitive answer will require further research.

[28]   For a discussion of Rāmabhadra's works and an edition of the section on Grammar from his *Ṣaḍdarśinīsiddhāntasaṃgraha* (ṢDSiSaṃ), see Thiruvengathan, *Rāmabhadra Dīkṣita and His Works*.

[29]   In addition to Rāmabhadra, the contributors are Rāmabhadradhvarī, Naraharyadhvārī, Periyappa Śāstrī, Śrīveṅkaṭeśa, Yajñeśvarādhvārī, Śriṇivāsamakhī. See, ṢDSiSaṃ 6–9 in Thiruvengathan, *Rāmabhadra Dīkṣita and His Works*, 140–41, reproduced below:

> *sārvajñanidhinā tena śāśvatīṃ kīrtīm icchatā | sabhālaṃkāratāṃ nītās sādaraṃ prerita buddhāḥ || ṣaḍdarśanīsthasiddhāntān saṅgṛhṇīta yathocitam |sarveṣām upakārāya saralair vacanair iti || Rāmabhadrādhvarivaro Rāmanāthamakhīśvaraḥ | Naraharyadhvarimaṇiḥ Periyappabudhāgraṇīḥ ||*
> *Śriveṅkateśavibudhaḥ śīmān yajñeśvarādhvarī | makhī ca Śrīnivāsāryo mahatām api sammataḥ || śāsanākṣaram ākarṇya Śāharājasya dhīmataḥ | saptaite śastrasiddhāntān saṅgṛhṇanti yathāmati ||*

[30]   Colebrooke, "A Discourse Read," 19–20, reprinted in a collection of his essays edited by E. B. Cowell. See Cowell, *Miscellanous Essays, H.T. Colebrooke.*

[31]   This comment is based on comments by Deussen and Müller. Deussen credits Colebrooke and uses the text for an introduction to Indian philosophy See, Deussen, *Die Philosophie Des Mittelalters*, 44–64. Max Müller also credits Colebrooke, see below.

the six systems framework on the basis of the *Prasthānabheda* alone. Max Müller famously credits Colebrooke with "discovering" the six systems and follows him in discussing them in his 1899 book, *The Six Systems of Indian Philosophy*.[32] He was followed by Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan (1888–1975), the Spalding Professor of Eastern Religions at Oxford University and first President of India, whose second volume in his *History of Indian Philosophy*, published in 1908, has a long section entitled "The Six Brahmanical Systems."[33] The six systems framework was, sadly, here to stay. But why sadly?

In addition to not being historically grounded, the six systems framework completely distorts what Indian philosophy is and masks the critical role of specifically Buddhist philosophy. The framework distorts what Indian philosophy is by suggesting that the distinction between "orthodox" and "heterodox" is foundational, rather than an early modern development that post-dates the last Buddhist philosophers in India by centuries. Moreover, this distinction tells us nothing about the history of philosophy in classical India, the positions that Sanskrit philosophers defended, the arguments they made, or the criticisms they offered. In fact, text traditions labeled "orthodox" have little more in common with each than they do with those that are "labeled" heterodox. For example, against Mīmāṃsā and Nyāya philosophers, Vaiśeṣika and Buddhist philosophers argued that testimony was not a source of knowledge; against Yogācāra Buddhists and some Vedāntins, Buddhist Atomists and Naiyāyikas argued that there are external objects; against Naiyāyikas, Buddhist Epistemologists and Mīmāṃsakas rejected an independent check thesis in epistemology; and against Mīmāṃsakas, Buddhists and Naiyāyikas argued that scripture was not authorless. There are many other examples as well. As the analysis of even Madhusūdana reveals, early modern Sanskrit intellectuals knew that philosophical views are often radically independent of sectarian affiliation and that they cut across, if not crisscross, a mythical "orthodox/heterodox" divide. The doxographies of thinkers like Madhusūdana actually challenge rather than support the orthodox six systems narrative.

The six systems narrative also deeply distorts the history of specifically Buddhist philosophy in India, since it makes it far too easy to see Buddhist

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[32] See Müller, *The Six Systems of Indian Philosophy*, 79, 83, where he credits Colebrooke and discusses the *Prasthānabheda*.

[33] Radhakrishnan, "Indian Philosophy."

philosophy as somehow different from more "mainstream" Sanskrit text-traditions such as Mīmāṃsā or Nyāya. Nothing could be further from the truth. It is simply impossible to imagine philosophy in India from roughly the second century CE to the thirteenth century CE without Buddhism. Debates between Buddhist, Mīmāṃsā, Nyāya, Vaiśeṣika, and Vaiyākaraṇa philosophers just *is* Indian philosophy during this time period. The label "heterodox" masks the primacy, complexity, and vibrancy of these arguments and minimizes Buddhism's critical (and often innovative) role.

As an example, consider the work of the Buddhist philosopher, Dignāga. The text tradition growing out of Dignāga's work proved to be among the most influential in South Asian intellectual history, in that it prompted a major transformation in the self-conception and organization of Sanskrit philosophy as a whole.[34] Dignāga's principal work, the *Pramāṇasamuccaya* [Compendium on Sources of Knowledge], as its title suggests, organizes philosophical discussion first and foremost in terms of epistemology. In the wake of Dignāga's work, there was a marked "epistemological turn," not simply among Buddhist philosophers but among all Sanskrit philosophers. In the centuries following Dignāga's work, virtually all philosophical questions were reconfigured as epistemological ones. That is, when making any claim at all, it came to be seen as incumbent on a philosopher to situate that claim within a fully developed theory of knowledge. The systematic articulation and interrogation of the underlying presuppositions of all knowledge claims thus became the central preoccupation of most Sanskrit philosophers.

With this preoccupation came a dramatic shift in the discursive practices of Sanskrit philosophy. Beginning with Dignāga, Sanskrit philosophers began to read and criticize the works of their opponents in a far more detailed and systematic way than before, criticizing not only the general positions of their rivals but also very specific textual formulations of those positions. Consequently, the critical exchange between rival philosophical traditions became far more intimate, using a shared conceptual vocabulary to formulate and pursue philosophical questions. In effect, debate over basic epistemological and ontological questions became a single, extended conversation.

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[34]   This section is based on McCrea and Patil, "Traditionalism and Innovation." For bibliographical details and textual citations consult the references therein. For a richer discussion of the intellectual context see Eltschinger, *Buddhist Epistemology as Apologetics.*

Buddhist, Hindu, and Jain philosophers from the sixth century onward wrote for a general "philosophical" audience at least as much as they did for members of their own text traditions. It can be argued that it was Dignāga's work that ushered in a shared Sanskrit philosophical culture that had not existed previously. Sanskrit philosophers of this period held a common understanding of what constituted the standards for rational acceptability and the proper framework through which philosophical claims were to be formulated and defended. They developed an increasingly specific, shared understanding of the precise points of disagreement among their respective positions, and of the systemic consequences that would follow from resolving these disagreements in one way or another. Their disputes were extremely focused, with everyone understanding that these few narrowly defined points of contention were the key to their disagreements.

If we choose to allow the history of philosophy in India to be framed in terms of orthodox and heterodox "systems," most of what is interesting and important about Buddhist philosophy will be lost.

Frame 2: Right View, the Path, and Ethics

It is widely thought that what makes Buddhist philosophy distinct from contemporary Philosophy is that Buddhist philosophers see their work as part of the Buddhist path to Nirvāṇa and, therefore, as being closely (perhaps even intrinsically) connected with questions of how we ought to live. After all, the eight-fold path begins with "right view," and then moves on to "right intention," "right speech," "right conduct," "right livelihood," "right effort," "right mindfulness," and "right concentration." Right view is the purview of philosophy.[35] To do philosophy without keeping the other seven steps in mind is to fail to appreciate what the project of Buddhist philosophy is, or so the claim goes. The right view at issue, of course, is the view that the pronoun "I" does not refer to a persisting entity of any kind. And that the special concern that we ordinarily have for ourselves is based on the false view that this self has a meta-

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[35]   For a very thoughtful and sustained argument in support of this view, see Carpenter, *Indian Buddhist Philosophy*. Also see Garfield, *Engaging Buddhism* and Siderits, *Buddhism as Philosophy*. For a helpful way of understanding the way in which philosophers can reconstruct Buddhist philosophical ethics, see Goodman, *Consequences of Compassion* and Garfield, *Buddhist Ethics*. For a helpful introduction to Buddhist ethical thinking, see Heim, *Buddhist Ethics*.

physical justifier. Buddhist ontology, metaphysics, and philosophy of language and mind is, on this picture, focused on demonstrating that there is no such justifier. It is motivated by the importance of establishing this right view to the path, which is itself assumed to be a path for how we ought to live and, therefore, to Nirvāṇa. I think this is false, and a very misleading way to understand Buddhist philosophy in India.

It is true that most Buddhist philosophical texts associate themselves with Buddhism or the Buddha in one way or the other. This association is usually evident in a *maṅgala*-verse, a poetic stanza that introduces most every Sanskrit text. It is, therefore, difficult to deny that Buddhist philosophy is somehow related to Buddhism. The relevant question is: how? Let us consider two such verses: In opening his *Abhidharmakośa* [Treasury of Metaphysics], Vasubandhu writes:

> After paying respect to the one who taught us the way things really are; who destroyed darkness everywhere; and who rescued this world from the mire of the cycle of birth and death, I offer this teaching, the *Abhidharmakośa*.[36]

In opening his *Pramānasamuccaya*, Dignāga writes:

> With great reverence to the teacher, who exists as a source of knowledge; who seeks the well-being of the world; who is maximally accomplished; and who is our protector, I compose this compendium on the basis of my own thoughts, which are scattered about here and there, in order to establish the sources of knowledge.[37]

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[36] *Abhidharmakośa* 1.1: *yaḥ sarvathāsarvahatāndhakāraḥ saṃsārapaṅkāj jagad ujjahāra / tasmai namaskṛtya yathārthaśāstre śāstraṃ pravakṣyāmy abhidharmakośam //*

[37] *Pramāṇasamuccaya* 1.1: *pramāṇabhūtāya jagaddhitaiṣiṇe praṇamya śāstre sugatāya tāyine / pramāṇasiddhyai svamatāt samuccayaḥ kariṣyate viprasṛtād ihaikataḥ//*. *Pramāṇasamuccayavṛtti* 1.10–13: "With great reverence to the teacher who has such qualities, I will compose this *Compendium of the Sources of Knowledge* by bringing together material from my other works, such as the *Nyāyamukha*, in order to reject the sources of knowledge of my rivals and promote my own, since an awareness of what can be known depends upon the sources of knowledge, and there are many competing claims made about them." (See Hattori, *Dignāga, on Perception*, 23–24, Kellner, "First Logic, then the Buddha?," 148). *evaṃguṇaṃ śāstāraṃ praṇamya pramāṇasiddhyai svaprakaraṇebhyo nyāyamukhādibhya iha samāhṛtya pramāṇasamuccayaḥ kariṣyate parapramāṇapratiṣedhāya svapramāṇaguṇodbhāvanāya ca, yasmāt pramāṇāyattā prameyapratipattir bahavaś cātra vipratipannāḥ.*

At issue is what the content of such verses reveal about a text and its author. Based on the many densely argued pages that follow, these verses seem to reveal little of philosophical significance—i.e., of significance to the arguments that are actually made in the text and the issues that are discussed. What these verses tell us about what is in Vasubandhu or Dignāga's heart of hearts is anyone's guess. What is debated and discussed in great detail in their texts and those of their successors are basic issues in ontology, metaphysics, language, and mind. To a much lesser extent, if at all, topics in meta-ethics and moral psychology are also touched upon.[38] If these issues have to do with "right view," there is almost nothing devoted to any other part of the path. Moreover, there is almost no discussion or defense of there being a connection between what is discussed in the texts and other stages of the path.[39] And there is equally little discussion of how one ought to live or, for that matter, how anything that is actually discussed is connected to how we ought to live. To frame Buddhist philosophy as being distinct from contemporary philosophy because of its close connection to the path and, therefore, with how one ought to live is without significant textual support. To take it to be so framed is to obscure what the work is most obviously about—i.e., ontology, metaphysics, epistemology, language, and mind. Buddhist philosophers (and Sanskrit philosophers more generally) were simply not interested in large parts of what we call philosophical ethics.[40] Why this is so is a fascinating,

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[38]   For a discussion of action in Vasubandhu's *Abhidharmakośa,* see Meyers, "Freedom and Self-Control." For a discussion of moral psychology in Buddhist philosophy more broadly, see Garfield, *Engaging Buddhism*.

[39]   For a fascinating discussion of this, see Bhāviveka's discussion in Eckel's forthcoming *Bhāviveka and the Boddhisattva Path*.

[40]   For a discussion of this, see Heim, *Buddhist Ethics*, 2:

There is general consensus in the field of Buddhist studies that Buddhist thinkers did not offer systematic ethical theories justifying moral principles in this way, though their texts everywhere explore moral psychology, exhort moral behavior, posit moral rules and norms, and explore virtue and high moral ideals (Dreyfus 1995; Gowens 2013; Edelglass 2013). This is not because Buddhists did not practice systematic philosophy or were not adept at philosophical argumentation at all, for in the areas of metaphysics, logic, and epistemology we find works analogous to Western philosophy. Rather, in the area of morality their concerns were less abstract and more focused on practical aims of moral and religious training and transformation.

It is worth noting that there are very few, if any, examples of Buddhist philosophers who practiced "systematic philosophy" and also wrote on "morality."

deep, and important question which is, unfortunately, beyond the scope of this essay.

How then do Buddhist philosophers explain what they are up to? As an example, consider how two of the last Buddhist philosophers writing in India understood the relationship between philosophy and the path.[41] You will notice that there is nothing in their account (or in any of their work for that matter) about how one ought to live. According to Jñānaśrīmitra and Ratnakīrti, a philosopher should first argue against the views of their opponents and, in doing so, show them that their epistemology fails. She should then argue in support of their own views and, in so doing, demonstrate the success of Buddhist epistemology. The philosopher should then, on the basis of this epistemology, demonstrate that the essence of the Buddha's teaching is correct, namely, that all existing things are momentary. Finally, the philosopher should show that by meditating on momentariness, it is possible to perceive that all things are momentary. This hard-won perception places one, it seems, on the first step of the very, very long ten-stage Boddhisattva path.[42] It is at stage one where philosophy and the work of philosophers like Jñānaśrīmitra and Ratnakīrti comes to an end. Their work in no way should be framed as having to do with progress on the path or how we ought to live.

Frame 3: Schools, Text Traditions, and Commentaries
Another framing narrative that we ought to set aside is that of Buddhist philosophical schools such as Abhidharma (Descriptive Ontology and Metaphysics), Madhyamaka (Middle Way), and Yogācāra (Representation Only). The term "school" suggests an institutional structure for which there is no evidence and implies that its members agreed with one another philosophically to a degree that they did not. Even more problematic is thinking of Buddhist Epistemologists like Dignāga or Dharmakīrti as belonging to a "school," since the term "Buddhist Epistemologist" names a method in which those working within broadly Abhidharma, Madhyamaka, and Yogācāra text-traditions could do philosophy.[43] In this sense, it is like the term "Tantra."

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41 This view is defended in Patil, "Dharmakīrti's White-Lie," and *idem*, *Against a Hindu God*. For more details, refer to the references contained therein.

42 Funayama, "Kamalaśīla's View."

43 For example, Dharmottara and Śubhagupta were atomists; Śāntarakṣita and Kamalaśīla were

Identifying individual philosophers as representing philosophical "schools" is equally unhelpful. Consider Vasubandhu. Vasubandhu's *Abhidharmakośa* is, as he himself says, written from the perspective of the Vaibhāṣika interpretation of the Abhidharma text-tradition. His own commentary on the *Abhidharmakośa* is written from the perspective of the Sautrāntika interpretation of the Abhidharma text-tradition, which is incompatible in important ways with that of the Vaibhāṣika interpretation. Vasubandhu's *Viṃśikāvṛtti* is written from the perspective of the Yogācāra text-tradition and is fundamentally incompatible with both. And yet, Vasbandhu was neither confused nor inconsistent. He is a philosopher who worked in both Abhidharma and Yogācāra traditions of philosophy. To what "school" did he belong? Vasubandhu's philosophical commitments were not to schools but to more subtle lines of argument that, in my view, have to do with the nature of mental content and the relationship between mind and what we take our world to be.

Within a so-called school, there is a great deal of internal variation, debate, and polemic directed against other practitioners of that school, as well as substantive and often dramatic evolution over time. It is misleading to describe authors who belong to a "school" as sharing a single philosophical system. It is more accurate to describe them as belonging to a single "text tradition."[44] A text-tradition is not a school. Rather, the idea of text-tradition recognizes that what unites Buddhist philosophers is often a commitment to a foundational text that they take to be a source of their basic concepts and arguments. Authors within a text-tradition very rarely, if ever, openly contradict an explicit position expressed in their foundational text or by its author. Consider, for example, the Mādhyamaka or "Middle-Way" text-tradition.[45] Without exception, Middle-Way philosophers look back to the foundational texts of Nāgārjuna as the fundamental source of their basic concepts and arguments. This is so even though Middle-Way philosophers disagree amongst themselves about fundamental issues such as whether Buddhist epistemology and its sources of knowledge framework is defensible; whether reasoning

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emptiness theorists; Jñānaśrīmitra and Ratnakīrti were idealists. All six were "Dharmakīrtians" or Buddhist epistemologists.

44   This section is based on McCrea and Patil, "Traditionalism and Innovation."

45   For an overview, see Ruegg, *The Literature of the Madhyamaka School*, which is dated but still useful.

by inference is ampliative; and what exactly philosophy can tell us about the world. What these authors really share, then, is not a philosophical position but a set of building blocks and common textual resources provided by Nāgārjuna which constitute a common intellectual heritage, all of which, however, was subject to critical examination vis-à-vis its meaning and ultimate significance. Their work is thus directed as much toward criticizing rival Buddhist philosophers working within the Middle-Way text-tradition as it is towards non-Buddhists. The foundational texts that form the basis of these traditions are often as much a source of contention as they are of unity.[46] A "text-tradition" model, in my view, provides a better way of thinking about what those who work within these traditions do and do not have in common.

The concept of a text-tradition can be usefully applied not only to Buddhist philosophers but to most historical practitioners of what today is called "Indian philosophy." I would argue that it represents a much better way of thinking about affiliated groups of philosophers than do more widely applied concepts such as philosophical "schools" or "systems." Because Indian philosophers themselves have tended to classify their own works under one or more labels—for example, Nyāya and Mīmāṃsā—modern scholars have often been too quick to assume that all philosophers or texts grouped under a certain label are committed to the same philosophical positions. This in turn has led people to assume that there is a great deal more consistency than careful observation reveals and that there is little or no real innovation to be found in later commentaries and "scholastic" works of these traditions.

Focusing on "text-traditions" can also help us appreciate that Sanskrit "commentaries" are often creative and innovative philosophical texts in and of themselves. Commentaries on foundational texts are not principally exegetical in our historically inflected sense of the term. Rather, they are creative and consumerist. According to a consumerist model, what it means to properly interpret and understand a foundational text is just to make good use of it: to consume it, if you will, in accordance with one's own interests; as a way of being true to it; and in recognition of its uniquely authoritative status. That a statement in a foundational text has been properly interpreted and correctly understood can only be determined, according to this model, within the con-

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46   Compare, for example, Bhāviveka and Candrakīrti's radically different commentaries on Nāgārjuna in Ames, "Bhāvaviveka's 'Prajñāpradīpa'"; and MacDonald, *In Clear Words*.

text of one's systematic philosophy.[47] If the philosophical view in which that statement is incorporated is true, it was interpreted correctly. Foundational texts cannot be wrong (or at least admitted to be so).

Frame 4: Decolonization

The questions that we have been asking today about whether and how to make Buddhist philosophy a part of Philosophy can themselves be viewed as a part of a broader effort at "decolonizing" our curriculum.[48] We are fortunate to live in a time when our curriculum is being questioned, its Euro-centric focus examined, and its canonical authors, texts, and disciplinary subfields reconsidered.[49] Unlike the first three framing narratives I have discussed, decolonization should not be set aside. Rather, it is a framework that ought to be embraced. Decolonization is much harder than it seems, however, and those of us interested in Buddhist philosophy need to be careful not to move too quickly, if we seek the long term success of the project. Mere inclusion of Buddhists texts in our curriculum is not sufficient for Buddhist philosophy to become a proper part of Philosophy. To paraphrase Charles Mills, you can't just add Buddhist texts or ideas and stir.[50] What is critical is not inclusion as such but inclusion in a way that does justice both to the arguments and specific ways that Buddhists did philosophy in the past and also to the standards of the discipline today. The simplest way to ensure this is to insist that students work with translations of primary texts and not allow them to rely on secondary

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[47]   For a more detailed analysis and defense of what I call the hermeneutics of "principled consumerism," see Patil, "Consuming Scripture," on which this paragraph is based.

[48]   For two examples of work on this topic, see Jansen, *Decolonisation in Universities*, and Mignolo, *The Politics of Decolonial Investigations*, and the references contained therein. Personally, I do not take my own approach to Sanskrit philosophy an example of "decolonization," since I do not think that decolonization is sufficient. What we need to do, in my view, is expand the authors, texts, and modes of reading and writing that we draw upon in doing philosophy in ways that are both historically responsible and philosophically productive. Decolonizing our curriculum is just one part of this broader (and much more difficult) constructive project.

[49]   In the context of Indian philosophy, see Ganeri, "Blueprint for Cosmopolitan Philosophy."

[50]   Mills, "'Ideal Theory' as Ideology," 178: "Moreover, it is another familiar criticism from feminism that the inclusion of women cannot be a merely terminological gender neutrality, just adding and stirring, but requires a rethinking of what, say, equal rights and freedoms will require in the context of female subordination."

material or textbooks, which are better used as supplementary and background material. The challenges of doing philosophy with primary sources is where the pedagogical value of Buddhist philosophy is to be found. Why? It is only by learning from Buddhist philosophers in their own words that we will be able to discover what is distinct and perhaps most valuable about Buddhist philosophy for Philosophy. Such insight is hard won, however, and a rush to incorporate Buddhist philosophy into our curriculum may result in what is most valuable being missed entirely.

Most Sanskrit philosophical texts, for example, including Buddhist texts, are dialogical in the sense that their arguments unfold as they might in a live debate, where dialectical and rhetorical considerations drive the flow of the argument, even when the debate is truth-seeking. Imagine a free flowing debate between two philosophers. In such debates, arguments are usually made in direct response to the claims put forward by each participant, the questions that each asks of the other, and ever shifting burdens of proof. Outlining such a debate, identifying its central arguments and sub-arguments, and assessing its key philosophical moves is not at all easy.[51] In contrast, contemporary philosophy, especially in its written forms, comes to us pre-processed in the form of structured conference presentations and journal articles that follow writing and reading conventions that we have been trained to follow and with which we are relatively familiar. Outlining the arguments of such presentations or articles, although challenging, can be straightforward. Historical texts, however, do not follow our conventions. And given that reading, modes of arguing, and styles of writing are historically sensitive, outlining (and understanding) a Buddhist philosophical text from classical India is not a simple matter, even for a specialist. To do justice to the arguments in such texts requires that well-trained philosophers who are not specialists have access to high quality translations and secondary material, and also that specialists have a level of philosophical training and sophistication equal to that of their colleagues in the departments in which they are being hired. We are lucky that there are already some high quality translations of Sanskrit philosophical texts of which good philosophers, who are not themselves specialists, can make effective use. If

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[51]   For translations of such debates see, for example, Taber, *A Hindu Critique of Buddhist Epistemology*; Watson, *The Self's Awareness of Itself*; and Taber and Kataoka, *Meaning and Non-existence*.

appropriate specialists cannot be found, departmental hiring should wait and the project of decolonization pursued in other ways. This approach may seem conservative to some. However, if what is distinct about Buddhist modes of argument is to be understood and their quality appreciated, waiting may be the quickest way to make lasting progress.

A discussion of the Buddhist philosopher Jñānaśrīmitra's theory of "conditionally adopted positions" might point to just one interesting difference in how Buddhists approached the project of Philosophy and understood the status of philosophical arguments. A conditionally adopted position (*vyavasthā*) is a kind of philosophically sanctioned "white lie"—a statement which is only partially true and is used for only specific and philosophically legitimate purposes.[52] Jñānaśrīmitra explains how conditionally adopted positions work by providing an example: in explaining the theory of karma, one may legitimately say that in the future a *person* will experience the karmic results of actions that (s)he now performs. Yet, this is not really true since there is no "person" that endures through time. The statement is, however, based on a "little bit of the truth" (*tattvaleśam āśritya*), namely, that people generally do construct a mental continuum that they take to be an enduring "self/person." Jñānaśrīmitra explains that it is even legitimate for this partially true statement to be used in contexts where one needs to expose as false the view that **our** current actions do not have karmic consequences (or the view that **we** may experience karmic consequences that are not the results of **our** previous actions). Elsewhere, Jñānaśrīmitra points out that ordinary people could never function without such convenient fictions and that asking them to do so would just leave them mentally exhausted (*mlānamānasa*).

The internal logic of Jñānaśrīmitra's account of conditionally adopted positions suggests that there are stories of analysis, (or rungs on a philosophical stepladder), in addition to a basement of false views. The first level is the one on which Jñānaśrīmitra discovers there to be a conditionally adopted position. In his view, this first level is characterized by Dignāga and Dharmakīrti's statement that perception is free from conceptual construction (*pratyakṣaṃ kalpanāpoḍham*) and has only a real particular as its object. In this numbering scheme, the views that Dignāga and Dharmakīrti themselves argue against—

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[52]   For a more detailed analysis and defense of this reading with citations etc., see Patil, "Consuming Scripture" and *idem*, *Against a Hindu God*, chapter 5, on which this section is based.

for example, non-Buddhist views—are in the "basement," a pseudo-level zero. This is also the "level" on which Jñānaśrīmitra himself seems to place such views. Unlike the philosophical claims made on level one, however, the claims made on level zero are not white lies, but only falsehoods. Level two is the level on which a position is conditionally adopted by Jñānaśrīmitra himself: this is the level of Jñānaśrīmitra's own conditionally adopted two-object model of mental content. On this level, it is clear that perception is not free from conceptual construction, since it can be shown that it has two objects—a grasped object and a determined/conceptualized one. It is, moreover, only from the vantage point of level two that the position adopted on level one can be seen to be just a conditionally adopted one. Level two is also the level that Jñānaśrīmitra relies upon in criticizing his opponent's views—such as the existence of God/Īśvara—and on the basis of which he establishes his own philosophical positions, such as momentariness. The top level is level three, the level from which Jñānaśrīmitra's own conditionally adopted position on level two can be identified as such, and on which no position is itself adopted conditionally. This is the level of Jñānaśrīmitra's view that neither perceptual nor inferential awareness has any content at all.

Jñānaśrīmitra's theory of conditionally adopted positions further suggests that, for him, the second of the three levels of analysis is the very best a philosopher can do and that the levels below it are just lower order conventions (*adharasaṃvṛtti*) or approximations. This is confirmed by Jñānaśrīmitra himself who clearly believes that the second level of analysis provides the philosophically most rigorous way for us to speak about perception and inference and their contents. Although it is the most philosophically rigorous way for us to understand awareness-events and their contents, it is still a white lie, since such awareness events can be shown to not really have "content" at all. Thus, the best philosophical account that can be given of the contents of such modes of awareness is ultimately still not the case. Relative to level one, it is just a higher order convention (*ttara-saṃvṛtti*).

Jñānaśrīmitra's theory of conditionally adopted positions also suggests what to some may be a shocking historiographical principle: the principle that sometimes it is the future that can best tell us what the past was about. According to Jñānaśrīmitra, his predecessors in the Buddhist epistemological tradition used convenient fictions and partial truths to philosophically educate those who they felt were in error. It is because of their privileged position one

level up the philosophical stepladder that Jñānaśrīmitra seems to think that Dignāga and Dharmakīrti were able to clearly see what was going on below. The situation is no different for Jñānaśrīmitra himself. It is from his privileged philosophical vantage point that he is able to detect and expose Dharmakīrti's white lies and those of his predecessors in the Buddhist epistemological tradition. Jñānaśrīmitra's theory thus suggests that if we are to fully understand the history of Buddhist philosophy in India, it will be necessary to look back on the texts of philosophers such as Dignāga and Dharmakīrti from the vantage point of their successors. Jñānaśrīmitra's own analysis of this history suggests that one way that we can do this successfully is to ask ourselves the same three questions that he asks of his predecessors. As the theory of conditionally adopted positions requires, we should not only ask ourselves what the philosophers we are studying actually said. We must also ask ourselves what they knew but did not say, and what we know that they did not.

The theory of conditionally adopted position is just one of the many interesting and perhaps surprising views found in Buddhist philosophical texts. There are many others, of course, including the elusive view that Buddhist philosophers took towards knowledge; their surprising lack of interest in truth; and their idea that it is easier to defend a "beginninglessness" thesis than it is to defend metaphysical origins. It is what is unfamiliar that is the most interesting but also the most difficult to see. A commitment to decolonization cannot be realized at the expense of the authors, texts, ideas, and arguments in the name of whom decolonization is sought.

Part 3. Ways Forward?

Once we have set aside the framing narratives that are harming the Buddhist philosophy project, we should be in a better position to move the project forward, and in ways that Buddhist philosophers would themselves approve. What follows are three simple suggestions.

First, I think we ought to take a broadly counter-factual approach to the history of Buddhist philosophy in India. After carefully reading a primary text, we ought to ask ourselves what the author of that work would say if they were here today: how would they characterize the philosophical problem or problems that most interest them? How would they explain their most important

arguments? What would they take to be the greatest strengths and weaknesses of those arguments? What distinctions would they say they are relying on? We should then ask ourselves what we would say to them if we were transported back to their intellectual world: what objections would we raise? What distinctions would we make? What would we suggest they read? What questions might they ask us in response? The goal of this exercise is very simple. It is to create a productive dialogue between two philosophers who see each other as epistemic peers. The best way to make the work of Buddhist philosophers a part of Philosophy is to do good philosophy in their company and with their work. To do this, however, we need to focus on single authors, texts, debates, and lines of argument. We need to forget about schools and systems, and we need to teach our students and ourselves to be better readers and philosophers.

As someone who spends most of his time teaching Sanskrit philosophy in a Philosophy Department, it is very clear to me that we are in desperate need of translations of Indian Buddhist texts that are of the same quality as those that exist for Plato, Aristotle, Descartes, or Kant. The challenge is formidable. It is irresponsible to sacrifice accuracy for accessibility or accessibility for accuracy. Yet, texts by the most important Buddhist philosophers are in many cases still being edited and the majority have never been translated before. Complicating this further is the simple fact that translations by themselves are often insufficient, even for relatively simple texts like the *Viṃśikāvṛtti*, let alone for later work like that of Dharmakīrti and his successors, Prajñākaragupta (ca. 750–810) and Yamāri (ca. 1000–1060).[53] In addition to translations, we need supporting secondary material in the form of notes, expository material, commentaries, and articles in good professional journals. Material needs to be in place so that even those philosophers who are not specialists in Buddhist philosophy (and who do not know the primary languages) can teach excellent courses in the subfield. The quality (and future success) of teaching and research in Buddhist philosophy is almost entirely dependent on the quality of these materials. Good material is being published, but slowly. To both speed up the process and improve the quality, further collaboration is necessary. Translations of Buddhist philosophical texts should not be published without being read, commented upon, and their arguments worked over by philosophers and

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[53] For more on Prajñākaragupta see, for example, Moriyama, *Omniscience and Religious Authority* and for Yamāri see Franco, "Yamāri and the Order of Chapters in the *Pramāṇavārttika*."

students who have no background in the texts themselves. It is a mistake to think that those without extensive philosophical training will be able to do this on their own, just as it is a mistake to think that, without much better materials, those with excellent philosophical training will be able to do good philosophy with Buddhist texts on their own. As an example of one such collaboration, although in a slightly different context, consider the collaboration between Ernst Steinkellner of the Austrian Academy of Sciences and the philosophical theologian Perry Schmidt-Leukel on Śāntideva's *Bodhicaryāvatāra*.[54]

Finally, we need to recognize that Buddhist arguments were constantly being updated (and in some cases abandoned) over time. Vasubandhu's *Viṃśikāvṛtti*, rich as it is, begins lines of argument and counter-argument that were developed by his successors and critics, both Buddhist and non-Buddhist, in much greater detail and with ever increasing sophistication and nuance. To appreciate these lines of argument fully, Vasubandhu's *Viṃśikāvṛtti* is insufficient. We need to follow these lines of argument in history through the works of Vasubandhu's successors. It is in the philosophical crucible of centuries of debate between a range of Buddhist and non-Buddhist philosophers that the lasting value of these arguments and the insights encoded within them can be discovered. The work of Dignāga, Uddyotakara (ca. sixth/seventh century), Kumārila, Dharmakīrti, Vācaspatimiśra (ca. ninth/tenth century), Bhaṭṭa Jayanta (ca. ninth century), Śubhagupta, Śāntakrakṣita and Kamalaśīla, Udayana (ca. eleventh century), and Jñānaśrīmitra are just a few places to start.[55]

Conclusion

Buddhist monastic educational institutions in pre-modern India were like modern residential universities: relatively diverse places where people studied a range of subjects and engaged in a variety of work both within the institution and with the lay public.[56] The technical work that Buddhist philosophers did

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[54]   Steinkellner, "Śantideva's Bodhicaryāvatāra."

[55]   For an introduction to the work of Udayana, see Chemparathy, *An Indian Rational Theology*, Laine, "Some Remarks on the Guṇaguṇibhedabhaṅga Chapter," and *idem*, "Udayana's Refutation."

[56]   For a wide range of resources, see Liu, *Ancient India and Ancient China*; Sinha and Pandey, eds.,

was taken to be a part of the overall project of Buddhism and so was supported by kings, queens, lay people, and the monastic community for over a thousand years. It is difficult to know exactly why this was the case but, to some extent, the work of Buddhist philosophers was like the work of basic scientists today who continue to pursue fundamental questions, the answers to which are not often of immediate relevance but, nevertheless, end up being the basis for transformational medical science or technology in the future. The work of Buddhist philosophers was similarly understood. It was the "basic science" through which one could discover the antidote to suffering and, thereby, contribute to the betterment of the world. Philosophy provided a unique way of appreciating and understanding what the Buddha taught by interrogating a range of fundamental questions about ontology, metaphysics, epistemology, language, and mind and subjecting the answers that were offered to critical scrutiny. The Tzu Chi Foundation's ongoing commitment to Buddhism and creating a better world through service is readily evident from the humanitarian work they support. In choosing to support academic work like the lecture for which this paper was written, the Foundation continues to recognize that, like in the past, work done in Philosophy is a critical component of much larger ambitions, even if it is not readily apparent. If Vasubandhu had been here today to listen to our discussion of these issues he would have done so with a smile.

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