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LAMOTTE AND THE CONCEPT OF ANUPALABDHI*

Ernst Steinkellner, Vienna

In his clarification of Étienne Lamotte's position on the issues of the doctrine of non-self, and in answer to Staal's opposition to an earlier remark in the same spirit,¹ J.W. de Jong not only reconsiders Lamotte's words in the introduction to the extensive chapter on *sūnyatā* in the fourth volume of his *Traité*² but also refers to other statements of Lamotte's that would corroborate an assessment that he "categorically rejects all attempts at discovering in Buddhism the belief in a Vedantic *Ātman*".³

Lamotte's view is particularly clear when he points out that the *argumentum ex silentio* employed in Frauwallner's formula "Ihm selbst lag es zwar fern, damit das Vorhandensein einer Seele überhaupt zu leugnen" ("To be sure, it was far from his intention to deny the existence of the soul altogether.")⁴ has not much weight in view of the dialogues which come to conclusions such as ... *ditth'eva dhamme saccato thetato tathāgato anupalabbhiyamāno*⁵ (SN III 112, IV 384).

The opposition between these two alternative interpretational tendencies is again exemplified by Lamotte with reference to Oldenberg's and de La Vallée Poussin's translations:⁶ the first affirms a transcendent Tathāgata-Ātman when he says that the Tathāgata is "in Truth and Essence for you not to be apprehended", the latter denies the Tathāgata who "is not perceived, ascertained as true, real".⁷

While these two translations of the word *anupalabbhiyamāno* differ only in respect of the emphasis put on its meaning by the interpretation, Lamotte went beyond these vague interpretations, which do not specifically express themselves with regard to the semantic field of the verb itself.

* I would like to thank Lambert Schmithausen and Tilmann Vetter for their careful interest in this paper and for many helpful suggestions.

1 J.W. de Jong, "Lamotte and the Doctrine of Non-Self", *Cahiers d'Extrême-Asie* 3, 1987, 151-153.

2 *Le Traité de la Grande Vertue de Sagesse IV*, Louvain 1976, 2004-2005.

3 J.W. de Jong, "Review of Lamotte 1976", in: *T'oung Pao* 44, 1978, (168-173) 168.

4 Quoted from *Die Philosophie des Buddhismus*, Berlin 1956, 63, in *Traité IV*, 2004.

5 The word seems to be transmitted in this problematic form.

6 *ibid.*, 2004.

7 Cf. also K. Bhattacharya, *l'Ātman-Brahman dans le Bouddhisme ancien*, Paris 1973, 67, note 3.

De Jong points to note 1 in *Traité* 2146, where Lamotte says that he keeps to translating *nopalabhyate* by “does not exist” and refers to Miss J.B. Horner explaining “*anupalabbhamāne*, either: not to be known, or, not-existing”. This also means, of course, that Lamotte agreed with de La Vallée Poussin’s view of the passage quoted above.

It was a great moment in my life when during a meeting of the Kommission für Buddhistische Studien of the Academy in Göttingen in 1975, Professor Lamotte asked me what I thought about the translation of *anupalabdhi* as “non-existence” and of *nopalabhyate* as “does not exist”. At the time I thought that within an earlier canonical or dogmatic context there was no answer to this, certainly not one that was generally applicable, and that later, at least with the *pramāṇa*-tradition, this meaning was not possible.

De Jong’s bringing up the issue again made me consider Lamotte’s words once more and I now think that an improved picture of the semantic possibilities of the word *nopalabhyate/anupalabdhi* has emerged. And I also think that the bluntly antagonistic interpretations of the *anātman* statements in early Buddhism cannot be based on the passages that contain the word *anupalabbhiyamāno. anātmavāda* interpretations that take this term as a point of departure are bound to end in extreme positions, as long as the meaning of the term *na upalabh-* and the development of its usage are not sufficiently clarified.⁸

* * *

It seems that theories of negative cognition and non-existence were developed only later in what can be called the “post-systematical period” in various Indian philosophical systems.⁹ In the Buddhist epistemological tradition initiated by Dignāga we find a great leap with regard to the conceptual possibilities of the term *anupalabdhi* between Īśvarasena (ca. 580-640 A.D.) and his pupil Dharmakīrti (ca. 600-660 A.D.). While *anupalabdhi* for Īśvarasena is still “nothing but absence of perception”

8 The various proposals by, e.g., Msgr. Lamotte, Miss Horner, or the CPD to translate words of the *na upalabh*-family not only in their cognition-related aspect but also, or even only as in the CPD, in their existence-related aspect, are proposals of interpretation only, and can hardly be based on convincing evidence from observation of usage.

9 For a short survey cf. note V,4 to my translation of the *Hetubindu* (Wien 1967); cf. also Brahmananda Gupta, “Story of the Evolution of the Concept of Negation”, in: *WZKS* 12-13, 1968, 115-118; Chhote Lal Tripathi, “The Problem of ‘Negation’”, in: *Indian Philosophy, East and West* 27, 1977, 345-355.

(*upalabdhyabhāvamātra*, *darśanābhāvamātra*)¹⁰, Dharmakīrti¹¹ propounded a complex theory of negative cognition. For our purpose it is sufficient to recall here that Dharmakīrti widened the conceptual frame and distinguished – with a view to their epistemological value – between two basic kinds of non-perception (*anupalabdhi*) that can be made use of in different ways for statements on the existence and non-existence of something:

The two kinds of non-perception are an unqualified general non-perception as a “non-perception of something imperceptible (*adrśya*)” and a qualified non-perception as a “non-perception of something perceptible (*drśya*)”. The former results in “negation of cognition, word and activity with reference to existence”¹², while the latter results in “certain cognition of non-existence”¹³. And while the latter includes of course the result of the former, it is important for the present issue to stress that a “non-perception of something imperceptible” cannot produce a certain cognition of its non-existence¹⁴.

The fact that before Dharmakīrti the problems of negative cognition had not been thoroughly analyzed and solved in the way roughly sketched above¹⁵ also means that there was no such clear and decisive notion of the possible meanings of the term *anupalabdhi* and of the possibilities of negative cognition among the Buddhist users of the term before Dharmakīrti.¹⁶

Now if, with Dharmakīrti, the unqualified general non-perception of an imperceptible entity allows the inference of at least the negation of positive statements on its existence (*sadvyavahārapratishedha*), we may assume that this minimal conceptual content must have been considered as covered by the term *anupalabdhi* before Dharmakīrti’s theorem too, even if not yet supported by a systematical definition. Whether this may

10 Cf. HBT 174,9f.; PVSVT 62,13.

11 A thorough study of Dharmakīrti’s development of the theory of non-perception, in nature and logical usage, is still an urgent desideratum. Cf. HB digression § c. and PVI in II, 11,12ff. for some materials.

12 Cf. *sajjñānaśabdavyavahārapratishedha*- PVSV 4,8.

13 Cf. *asanniścayaphalāpi sā* PVSV 101, 17.

14 *na tu vyatikradarśanādāv upayujyate samśayāt*. PVSV 5,5 (cf. HB II, 157f., note ** on “hypothetical negation”).

15 Īśvarasena’s theory of *anupalabdhi* (cf. my ‘Bemerkungen zu Īśvarasena’s Lehre vom Grund’, WZKS 10, 1966, 73-85) is an undisputable *terminus post quem* for this more differentiated concept of *anupalabdhi*.

16 For a rough survey of the usage in the Brahmanical traditions before Dharmakīrti cf. below p. 402f.

also be assumed of the inclusion of the concept of a resulting veritable “cognition of non-existence” by the term *anupalabdhi* before Dharmakīrti is more doubtful. But only on such an assumption would we be able to say that *nopalabhyate* means not only “is not known” but also i m p l i e s the meaning “does not exist”.

* * *

At this point we may consider the possibility that, notwithstanding the fact that no elaborate theory of non-perception was propounded before Dharmakīrti, another Buddhist tradition different from the epistemological school may have developed a different theory or may have used the term *anupalabdhi* etc. differently. As far as I can see we can exclude this possibility.

This can be supported, e.g., by textual instances from the Yogācāra tradition, which can also contribute to further clarification of the semantic history of the term.¹⁷

arthānupalambha, the non-perception of something, in the DhDhVV¹⁸ 48,22 would i m p l y non-existence of something (*artha*), because in the following sentence this non-existence (*arthābhāva*) is used as the condition for the non-perception of *vijñaptimātra*, which again i m p l i e s its non-existence. But the fact that after the statement of an *arthānupalambha* an *arthābhāva* is said to be relied upon, does not mean that *arthānupalambha* m e a n s *arthābhāva*. It only means that the latter follows from the former, that it is implied by it. Here – and this may be the case in the canonical instances too – the implication is not expressed, nor are the conditions of the *arthānupalambha* expressed with which the *arthābhāva* necessarily follows.

Another, more elaborate expression of the way how the notion of non-existence is related to that of non-perception can be found in the Kāśyapaparivarta § 102.¹⁹ “Mind, Kāśyapa, when being searched for, is not found (*na labhyate*). What is not found, that is not perceived

17 I am obliged to L. Schmithausen for this reference (letter of January 17, 1989).

18 The Dharmadharmatāvibhaṅga and the Dharmadharmatāvibhaṅga-Vṛtti. Ed. Jōshō Nozawa, in: *Studies in Indology and Buddhology. Presented in Honour of Professor Susumu Yamaguchi on the Occasion of his Sixtieth Birthday*, Kyoto 1955, 9-49. Cf. also *Madhyāntavibhāgabhāṣya* (ed. G. Nagao, Tokyo 1964) 20,3f. on I.6.

19 Ed. von Staël-Holstein, Shanghai 1926, 149 and quoted in the *Śikṣāsamuccaya* (ed. C. Bendall, St.-Petersbourg 1902) 234, 15-18. Cf. F. Weller, *Zum Kāśyapaparivarta*, Heft 2, Berlin 1965, 121f.

(*nopalabhyate*). What is not perceived, that is not past, not future, not present. What is not past, not future, not present, that is beyond the three times. What is beyond the three times, that is neither existent nor non-existent (*tan naivāsti na nāsti*). ...”

Here there is no question of the non-perception of mind being the same as its non-existence. For it is based on its unavailability which – here again – remains unclear as to whether it is due to its non-existence or to its imperceptibility. But the important thing is, that its non-perception serves as a reason for rejecting it as an object for an affirmation of its existence as well as of its non-existence.

A passage in Buddhaghosa’s *Visuddhimagga* (XVI. 507,27ff.)²⁰ also shows that the word is not used to indicate non-existence directly, but only by way of implication: “If (it be said): ‘There is no Nirvāṇa because, like a hare’s horn, it is not to be perceived (*anupalabbhanīyato*)’, (we answer:) no, because it is to be perceived by a (certain) means. ... Therefore it should not be said [by ordinary people] that there is no Nirvāṇa because it is not to be perceived (*anupalabbhanīyato natthī ti na vattabbam*). For it should not be said [by trained persons] that this does not exist, which simple and ordinary people do not perceive (*na hi yam bālaputhajjanā na upalabhanti, tam natthī ti vattabbam*).”

Clearly “not to be perceived” does not mean “not to exist” here, but is only given as the reason for the latter concept.

That the term *anupalabdhi* is not used in the relevant linguistic context as meaning non-existence can also be seen from its usage in early layers of the Brahmanical scholarly literature. A well-known passage in Patañjali’s *Vyākaraṇamahābhāṣya*²¹ gives a list of six possible reasons for non-perception of otherwise existent things (*satām bhāvānām*). When this list is enlarged in later versions²² by the addition of the reason “subtlety” (*saukṣmya, atisaukṣmya*), we can identify this reason as the condition of general imperceptibility, but here it is evident again, that the things intended are assumed to be existent and only have to be inferred because

20 Ed. C.A.F. Rhys Davids, London ²1975 (Ed. H.C. Warren, Cambridge, Mass., 1950, 431).

21 Ed. Kielhorn 1883, 3rd ed. by K.V. Abhyankar 1965, Vol. II, 197, 8-10. This passage and its context were translated and studied by O. Strauß, “Mahābhāṣya ad Pāṇini 4,1,3 und seine Bedeutung für die Geschichte der indischen Logik,” in: *Festschrift Richard Garbe*, Erlangen 1927, 84-94 (reprint in: *Kleine Schriften*, Wiesbaden 1983, 273-283) and by H. Scharfe, *Die Logik im Mahābhāṣya*. Berlin 1961, 74-77, who interprets this passage as a quotation from an old philosophical treatise, possibly belonging to a Vaiśeṣika tradition.

22 Carakasamhitā, Sūtrasthāna 11,8 and Sāṃkhyakārikā 7 (cf. Strauß, *loc. cit.*, 90, and Scharfe, *loc. cit.*, 74).

of their subtlety.²³ Thus the term non-perception (*anupalabdhi*) is used here as a purely cognitional term only related to those existent things which for various reasons are not perceived.

Moreover, in the Nyāyasūtras the term non-perception can also be found as implying non-existence²⁴, but not as meaning non-existence. And from Pakṣilasvāmin's Nyāyabhāṣya we can see again that the cognition of non-existence is only to be derived from non-perception²⁵. Similarly clear is the usage in the early Mīmāṃsā, where the term *anupalabdhi* is represented by the term *abhāva* ("non-existence") as one of the means of cognition (*pramāṇa*) for a non-existent fact.²⁶

Such examples²⁷ of the usage of the term *anupalabdhi* etc. tend to strengthen two general impressions: that the assumption of non-perception directly meaning non-existence can almost certainly not be supported from instances between the early canonical passages and Dharmakīrti, and that a usage of the term that homogeneously corresponds to tradition and at the same time is based on a sufficiently developed theory of the concept is not extant before Dharmakīrti, even in other areas of the Buddhist and non-Buddhist literary realm.

The hypothesis that Dharmakīrti, in propounding his theory of non-perception, leaves the Buddhist tradition and generally violates its conceptual usage is highly problematic, and his achievement can only be understood on the hypothesis that his theory of *anupalabdhi* is nothing but a more developed and reasoned presentation of the conceptual usage of this term in the tradition he belongs to.

In other words, I assume that if Dharmakīrti holds that from non-perception of something totally imperceptible one cannot infer its

23 Cf. Strauß, *loc.cit.*, 93f.

24 E.g. NSū II.2.18,26,33,35.

25 NBh, ed. Calcutta 1936, 26,2-27,3.

26 E.g. the Vṛttikāra's definition in Śabarāsvāmin's Bhāṣya; cf. E. Frauwallner, *Materialien zur älteren Erkenntnislehre der Karmamīmāṃsā*, Wien 1968, 32,9f.

27 I am aware of the need to study all, or at least more pre-Dharmakīrtian occurrences of the term and even the usage of the positive term *upalabdhi* and its relation to the concept of existence in Buddhist literature before we can hope to gain a complete and more reliable impression of its usage in the post-canonical Buddhist tradition. At this time I am quite unable to undertake an enterprise of this kind and would like to apologize for presenting only these random examples. I do not, however, think, that in the light of these examples and the instances from the wider Indian context the principal point of this paper, the necessarily hypothetical applicability of Dharmakīrti's analysis of non-perception to earlier Buddhist usage, is invalidated by incomplete observation of other occurrences.

non-existence, the earlier usage of the term non-perception cannot have included the concept of non-existence in such a way that we could simply say “not to be known, or not existing”, either.

The semantic history of a word within a conceptual community such as Buddhism may be indeterminable to some extent at certain periods. But when we find a point in the history where a clear determination is possible – as with Dharmakīrti’s theory in this case – we have to fit this clear piece of evidence into the overall development (if we can see one) in such a way that it forms a coherent part of that history. At least as long as no obvious and conclusive counter-arguments are to be found. And, in our case, I cannot see any.

* * *

Now, if a Tathāgata is said to be not perceived (*anupalabbhiyamāno*) in the visible world (*ditthe va dhamme*)²⁸ as true and real (*saccato thetato*) it is crucial to find out whether a denial of any affirmative attribution of existence can be based on the imperceptibility of the Tathāgata as the actual meaning of the phrase *saccato thetato anupalabbhiyamāno*.

For in order to be able to deduce any knowledge from such non-perception within the frame of Dharmakīrti’s point of view, we have to be able to say something about whether the Tathāgata as such was conceived as something perceptible or as imperceptible. If he was something perceptible, not perceiving him would allow us to deduce his spatially and temporally defined non-existence, given the fact that all other causes for his perception are available. Even in this case, however, non-perception would not directly mean non-existence, but would only imply non-existence, because the latter can be inferred from the non-perception as its cognitional reason.

However, as far as I can see there are no texts available that would make this alternative plausible, namely that the Tathāgata is something perceptible. That he was considered as imperceptible, on the other hand, could be assumed to be a necessary implication in texts like the *Aggivacchagottasutta* (MN I.72), where the Buddha says (MN I 487f.) that the Tathāgata can no longer be designated by the five constituents and now “is deep, immeasurable, unfathomable as the great ocean” (*gambhīro*

28 On the expression *ditthe va dhamme* cf. now T. Vetter, *The Ideas and Meditative Practices of Early Buddhism*, Leiden 1988, 9 note 4.

appameyyo duppariyogālho seyyathā pi mahāsāmuddo).²⁹ In this Sutta, notions of existence and non-existence etc., of the Tathāgata after death, are strictly disapproved of as *views* by the Buddha.³⁰

And for him who is compared to the unfathomable ocean when freed from the designations of any of the five constituents (*rūpasāṅkhāvimutto* etc.), it is said that the views “he arises, he does not arise, he both arises and does not arise, he neither arises and does not arise” are not correct.³¹ These views do not apply to him who “is deep, immeasurable, unfathomable” and thus – I would assume – imperceptible.³² And this is also the case with “the great ocean”, a metaphor that is, moreover, not used in India for something non-existent.³³

But an assumption of the Tathāgata’s imperceptibility can also be concluded from one of the Sutta adduced by Lamotte itself, I think, when in the Buddha’s words to Anurādha (SN XLIV.2) the possibilities that the Tathāgata is one of the five constituents (*rūpaṃ tathāgato ti*), and that he is inside the five constituents or outside (*rūpasmiṃ tathāgato ti ... aññatra rūpā tathāgato ti*) are rejected (SN IV 383).

From another occurrence of the phrase *saccato thetato anupalabbhiyamāna/anupalabbhamāna* with regard to the subjects of the Self (*attā*) and of what belongs to the Self (*attaniyam*) in the Alagaddūpamasutta of the Majjhimanikāya we can draw a more decisive conclusion regarding the problem of the assumed imperceptibility of the respective subjects.

29 For this suggestion I am indebted to L. Schmithausen (letter of January 17, 1989). Cf. also Vetter, *loc. cit.*, 57.

30 MN I 485f.: *hoti tathāgato param marañā ti ... na hoti tathāgato param marañā ti ... hoti ca na ca hoti tathāgato param marañā ti ... n’ eva hoti na na hoti tathāgato param marañā ti ... ditthagatam etam ditthagahanam ditthikantāram ditthivisūkam ditthivipphanditam ditthisamyojanam ...*

31 MN I 487f.: *upapajjati na upeti ...*

32 For, what could “not fathomable” mean other than “imperceptible as such”? Naturally, this is where the comparison fails: the ocean, being “unfathomable” is partly perceptible and only with regard to the majority of its parts imperceptible. But these latter parts are the reason for this metaphor’s application. The Tathāgata, of course, would not have any perceptible parts left.

33 The additional argument based on the metaphor I owe to T. Vetter. The usage of the ocean metaphor in our context is clear from the preceding Sutta (SN XLIV.1), where the Therī Khemā asks the king Pasenadi (SN IV 378): “Then have you some accountant, ready-reckoner or calculator, able to reckon the water in the mighty ocean, thus: There are so many gallons of water, so many hundred, so many thousand, so many hundreds of thousands gallons of water?” (translation F.L. Woodward). The nature of the ocean is a case of something unrevealed (*avyākata*), therefore, not of something non-existent.

In MN I 138 the Buddha rejects the view (*ditthitthānam*) that there is a Self (*attā*) which “after death will exist, as permanent, lasting, eternal, unchanging” (*so pecca bhavissāmi nicco dhuvo sassato aviparināmadhammo*) given the fact that the Self and what belongs to the Self are not perceived as true and real (*saccato thetato anupalabbhamāne*).

That these passages of the Alagaddūpamasutta do not imply a denial of the existence of a permanent Self as was concluded by K.R. Norman,³⁴ but merely represent a rejection of a view or opinion of this kind, has been emphasized by Schmithausen in his lectures on Buddhist Philosophy of 1988/89.³⁵ What is of import in our case is that the text does not say – as I.B. Horner has it³⁶ – that the Self and what belongs to the Self “although actually existing, are incomprehensible”, but only that they are not perceived (*anupalabbhamāne*).³⁷

34 “A Note on *attā* in the Alagaddūpama-Sutta”. In: *Studies in Indian Philosophy. A Memorial Volume in Honour of Pandit Sukhlaji Sanghavi*. Ahmedabad 1981, 19-29. This paper is also important for its demonstration of the allusions to Upaniṣadic ideas in this Sutta. Cf. also R.F. Gombrich, “Recovering the Buddha’s Message”. In: *The Buddhist Forum* 1, 1990, [5-20] 14f.

35 I refer to a copy of his manuscript for which I would like to express my gratitude on this occasion. Schmithausen says (V,8): “That the Buddha – or oldest Buddhism – denied the existence of an Ātman is also not necessarily implied in his rejection of the view (*dr̥ṣṭi*), that a permanent, unchanging Self exists. ... for it is surely not the same to reject a matter as such as to reject the holding of a view with regard to this matter.” (my translation). That this passage refers to a view (*ditthi*) was also emphasized by J. Pérez-Remón, *Self and Non-Self in Early Buddhism*, The Hague etc. 1980, 181ff. And when the Buddha concludes his previous rejection of the views with the words: “He (i.e. the well-trained person) who correctly sees (all this) in such a way is not worried about something that does not exist.” (*so evam sananupassanto asati na paritassafīti*. MN I 136,15f.), the attribute *asati* refers to the ideas “mine, I, Self” as identified in the views rejected above with the various constituents or the world. As external or internal elements of this kind they are non-existent. But it cannot be understood as an attribute of the Self, e.g., as such. And this is also the case in the following explanation of these anxieties, when in MN I 137,3f. they are considered as related to “something which does not exist internally” (*ajjhataṃ asati*). This does not, therefore, imply that “the Buddha denied the existence of the permanent individual Self.” (Norman, *loc. cit.*, 28).

36 *The Collection of the Middle Length Sayings* I, London 1976, 177.

37 The translation “although actually existing” for *saccato thetato* would also be incorrect. Cf. Norman’s “really and truly” (*op. cit.*, 21).

Horner’s interpretation of the word in note 3 was the one adduced by Lamotte in the passage referred to above (p. 399). Miss Horner’s interpretation of the phrase *saccato thetato anupalabbhamāne* is impossible even in the view of her own note on the last term. With her explanation “*anupalabbhamāne*, either: not to be known, or, non-existing” she produces the translation “...although actually existing, are not to be known, are non-existing” which contradicts itself. Beyond that, the word *sacca* not only refers to the notions “real, existent”, but also contains that of “linguistically or

If, now, this text denies the view (*ditthi*) of an existence of a permanent Self under the condition that it is not perceived as true and real, we can understand this – when observing it through Dharmakīrti’s eyes – as implying that the Self is something imperceptible, for the non-perception of something imperceptible would indeed be cause to reject a view which affirms its existence. Thus the very fact that the view of an existent Self is denied in this Sutta makes it plausible that the Self is considered to be not perceived because of its imperceptibility and not because of its non-existence. For were it perceptible, its non-perception would result in a definite cognition of its non-existence at a given time and space, rather than in a negation of the view that affirms its existence.

This is, of course, only a deduction from the systematic possibilities of Dharmakīrti’s theory of non-perception and cannot be considered a contextually appropriate interpretation of the Sutta’s words. But it is also possible to deduce a conception useful for our purposes with regard to the reason for the Self’s not being perceived from the context of the Sutta itself.

The denial of the view that affirms an existent permanent Self follows two hypothetical questions that serve as introductions: “If a Self existed, could there be the opinion ‘I have what belongs to the Self?’” (*attani vā ... sati attaniyam me ti assa*), and: “If what belongs to the Self existed, could there be the opinion ‘I have a Self?’” (*attaniye ... sati attā me ti assa*). The monks agree with both questions and then the Buddha continues: “If a Self and what belongs to the Self are not perceived as true and real, ...”

Thus the formulation “x or y *sati*” are opposed to the formulation “x and y *saccato thetato anupalabbhamāne*”. But this opposition cannot be exploited – as I have explained above³⁸ to prove that *anupalabbhamāne* was to mean nothing but **asati*. What can be

conceptionally determined” (cf. the “true, truth” usages in early Indian and Buddhist literatures).

Dr. Pind, of Copenhagen, on a visit to Vienna on October 19, 1989, made the helpful remark that words such as *saccato thetato* as predicative ablatives in *-to* are usually found with words of cognizing, meaning, considering, explaining etc. (cf. Oskar von Hinüber, *Studien zur Kasussyntax des Pāli, besonders des Vinaya-Pitaka*, München 1968, 220ff.). And this usage is as such an additional, independent argument for understanding *na upalabh-* as being a word with a meaning of a cognitional kind.

38 Cf. p. 404.

understood quite naturally is that the two are “not being perceived as true and real”. And when the Buddha in this Sutta then continues to show that the five constituents cannot be identified with what belongs to oneself (*mama*), with oneself (*aham*) and with one’s Self (*me attā*), he clearly gives an explanation of the formulation *saccato thetato anupalabbhamāne* by stating in exactly what way these crucial items are not perceived among those elements that can be taken as real. Thus, this explanation can be taken as a reason for understanding the *saccato thetato anupalabbhamāne* formulation as meaning that the respective items, namely *mama*, *aham*, *me attā*, are i m p e r c e p t i b l e as true and real.

Thus the passage’s import is: “When they are not perceived as true and real, and as such are imperceptible, the view that they are existent as something permanent is out of the question.”

I would therefore interpret the statement *saccato thetato anupalabbhamāne* as a statement of the condition of imperceptibility for a Self and for what belongs to the Self as a clear reason for the rejection of a view affirming existence. And – again with Dharmakīrti – I would conclude that the text means that – as Dharmakīrti would add – because of a non-perception of a Self and of what belongs to the Self when they are not perceived as true and real, i.e. when they are imperceptible, the view that they exist can definitely be rejected.

The only difference between the canonical phrasing and Dharmakīrti’s possible systematic conception would consist in the following: with Dharmakīrti two terms are to be distinguished here: non-perception as a reason for the denial of the affirmation of existence, and the imperceptible as the hypothetical object of this non-perception. In the canonical passages only the imperceptibility would be expressly stated as the primary condition for the consequent denial, while their non-perception as naturally implied in the expression of imperceptibility was not given separate expression. The latter fact, however, is not peculiar at all, since at that time a systematic theory of non-perception had not yet been developed.

I can find no reason why we should not interpret the phrase *saccato thetato anupalabbh(iy)amāna* in the same way, whether the *attā* and *attaniyam* are its subject or the Tathāgata.

Returning to the statement of SN III 112 (also SN IV 384), ... *ditthe va dhamme saccato thetato anupalabbhiyamāno*, we may now understand it as meaning: the Tathāgata is an imperceptible in the visible world (and thus not perceived). Of course, this Sutta to Yamaka seems to be mainly directed against the nihilistic view (*ucchedavāda!*) propounded by Yamaka at the beginning, that one does not exist after death (*na hoti param*

maranā ti. SN III 109, 21f.)³⁹ It therefore concludes with renouncing this idea as a wrong view (*pāpakam ditthigatam* 112,11). And the conclusion primarily intended in this Sutta would thus have to be: since the Tathāgata is imperceptible, it is denied that we can say that the Tathāghata does not exist.⁴⁰ But, although not necessarily demanded in this context, we can, of course, continue to draw also the reverse conclusion that because of his imperceptibility it is also denied that we can say that the Tathāgata exists.

This is less than the straightforward “denial of the existence” which Frauwallner did not think was intended, but it is nevertheless a strong denial, such that it would not lend itself towards being taken as including an affirmation of a transcendent entity following Oldenberg’s interpretation. But it also means that as an imperceptible element a definitive cognition of the Tathāgata’s non-existence is also impossible: That the Tathāgata does not exist cannot be known from his not being perceived in the visible world. Or, in other words, it seems impossible for historical reasons to accept within the Buddhist context the semantic hypothesis that “not to be known” means “not to exist”.

* * *

The theory of non-perception (*anupalabdhi*) as developed by Dharmakīrti at a period of the Buddhist tradition very remote from the canonical expressions has turned out to be a most valuable aid towards a correct assessment of the meaning of these early statements, where the terms used were not yet defined by a systematical network of concepts. That the presystematic usage of the terms in the canon makes good sense in the

39 In other Suttas (e.g. SN XLIV.2) the denial extends to all four possibilities, that he exists, not exists, exists and not exists, neither exists nor not exists. And as Vetter says (*loc. cit.*, 54): “By denying all four possibilities in the case of the continuation of the existence of one who is released one wants to reject every theory as being irrelevant.” (emphasis mine).

40 A positive statement of non-existence would be possible only in cases of perceptibility. In Dharmakīrti’s system, this “negation of cognition etc. with reference to non-existence” is not mentioned as such as something to be inferred from the non-perception of something imperceptible (*adrśya*) because it has no particular and independent systematical value in his epistemological context. It must be seen as being implied by the category of a “negation of cognition etc. with reference to existence” as the result of a non-perception of imperceptibles. For, if with regard to something imperceptible we can only deny a statement with reference to its existence, how much more can we deny a statement with reference to its non-existence.

light of this particular later systematic thought is a clear indication of the uninterrupted flow of a basic Buddhist intellectual attitude, namely the conviction that there are matters with regard to which one should refrain from holding a definite view. It is not until the development of the theory of non-perception by Dharmakīrti that the Buddhist tradition – at least in one of its lines – is provided with systematic reasoning that can explain this basic attitude as being epistemologically valid as well.

With Dharmakīrti's help, our interpretation of the word *anupalabbh(iy)amāna* has thus gained something of the quality of a veritable "*madhyamaka mārga*": On the one hand a definite affirmation of existence is prohibited, on the other, negation is also declared impossible. Can we wish for more and get any further? Or are we deluding ourselves in proposing this "middle answer" as an – also historically – true solution to be preferred to the dead-end extremes our respected predecessors proposed as the unavoidable consequences of the statement of a Tathāgata's non-perception?