

THE DOCTRINE OF "SKILL IN MEANS"

IN

EARLY BUDDHISM

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By

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ABBREVIATIONS

(Details of publications referred to here can be found in the Bibliography.)

- APP. Aṣṭasāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā, ed. Mitra and trans. Conze
- Dh.(R) Dhammapada, trans. Radhakrishnan
- DN. Dīgha Nikāya, ed. Kashyap and trans. T. W. & C. A.F. Rhys Davids
- Jā. Jātaka, ed. Fausboll and trans. "various hands" under the editorship of Cowell
- PTS Dict. Pali Text Society's Pāli-English Dictionary by Rhys Davids and Stede
- Sn.(C) Sutta-Nipāta, trans. Chalmers
- Sn.(F) Sutta-Nipāta, trans. Fausboll
- Sn.(H) Sutta-Nipāta, trans. Hare
- SP.(K) Saddharmapundarīka, trans. Kern
- SP.(V) Saddharmapundarīka, ed. Vaidya
- T. Taishō
- Vkn.(I) Vimalakīrti Nirdeśa, trans Idzumi
- Vkn.(L) Vimalakīrti Nirdeśa, trans. Lamotte

INTRODUCTION

Anyone studying Mahāyāna Buddhism quickly finds that 'upāya kauśalya' is a consistently important term. It may be translated as 'skill' or 'deftness' (kauśalya) in the use of 'means' or 'devices' (upāya). Among the various suggested English equivalents, the most common are 'skilful means' and 'skill in means'; the latter, which is used by Conze for example, is the more accurate and will generally be used in this paper. 'Skill in means' refers most frequently to the ability to teach, lead and save creatures -- "upāyakauśalya pour autrui, pour faire mûrir les êtres".¹ It belongs to the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas and plays a vital role in Mahāyāna Buddhist soteriology.

In the present work an attempt is made to sort out some of the more interesting aspects of the doctrine in early Buddhist literature. This will involve searching for the origin and development of the expression, the meanings which it has in specific texts, and the way it is used in doctrinal disputes and dialogue within Buddhism.

By 'early' Buddhist literature we shall mean that which belongs to the period up to about 100 A. D. This includes the first stages of the Mahāyāna, and a great deal of activity among the so-called 'Hīnayānists'. The former will be studied through a few of the important (and translated) Mahāyāna Sūtras; the

¹
Vkn.(L), p.117, n.68.

latter will be studied through a selection of texts from the Pāli Canon. The Pāli Canon is interesting in its own right as revealing certain peculiarities of the Theravāda tradition; it is also important, however, as the most complete and accessible 'Hīnayāna' canon, through which can often be seen accounts which were common to all sects. We have certainly not assumed the temporal priority of the Pāli Canon as a whole over the Mahāyāna literature, but the greater antiquity² of many parts of it is considered undisputed. By structuring the paper with the Pāli literature preceding the Mahāyāna literature we are not implying that the latter 'developed out of' the former; by and large, however, the Mahāyāna texts are later and have often been written in evident awareness of the 'Hīnayāna' Nikāyas or Āgamas. This 'evident awareness' is the main thread which connects the last two chapters with the first chapter.

The selection of the Mahāyāna texts to be studied in this essay was easy since there are a very limited number which are both 'early' by popular consensus and available in translation. In the case of the Pāli literature, we were faced with a large body of material and yet were convinced of the desirability of examining any particular work chosen in

2

Pande, having considered the evidence, says that "The major portion of the Nikāyas, thus, appears to have certainly existed in the 4th cent. B. C." Studies in the Origins of Buddhism, p.15.

reasonable depth; this meant that only a very small sample of the available literature could be dealt with. The choice of the Sutta-Nipāta, Dhammapada, the entire Dīgha Nikāya and the Jātaka was rather arbitrary -- the sole criterion was that each be an important work.

To streamline the presentation in the body of the essay, we have decided to give here a brief summary of the chronological data relevant to each major work.

The Sutta Nipāta is often thought to represent one of the oldest strata in the Pāli Canon.³ A more detailed analysis reveals that at the very least the Atthakavagga and the Parāyana-⁴
vagga have much solid evidence in favour of their great age. Pande suspects that Sutta 20 (the Nāvā Sutta) may also be⁵ early. Our account of the Sutta-Nipāta depends largely upon these definitely old sections.

The Dhammapada is more difficult to date since it is chiefly an anthology which draws from other parts of the Pāli

³ See Fausboll's comment, quoted below, p.12, and Chalmer's discussion in his Introduction to Sn.(C).

⁴ See ibid., and Pande, Studies in the Origins of Buddhism, pp.51-65. Pande says that the Parāyanasutta of the Parāyana-
vagga may be a later addition, but gives no evidence to support this belief. (ibid., pp.60,65).

⁵ Ibid., p.65.

6
 Canon. The individual verses may be very old, but the collection in its present form need not be (although it probably would have no trouble qualifying as "early" by our standards).⁷ In any case, it must be admitted that this text was chosen out of curiosity, for it has been extremely popular in Western presentations of Buddhism and is also of great importance to the Theravāda.⁸

The Dīgha Nikāya corresponds to the Dīrghāgama extant in the Chinese. According to Pande, "all the suttas of the Pāli Dīgha can be evidenced in the Āgamas".⁹ This means that this material is probably at least as old as the third century B.C., during which era the major break-up of the sects with their various canons occurred. Within the Dīgha, the first two books, and particularly the first one, are held to represent

6
 Warder, Indian Buddhism, pp. 204, 279; Winternitz, A History of Indian Literature, Vol. II, 81, 83-84.

7
 See Pande, Studies in the Origins of Buddhism, pp. 7-8. There existed a Dharmapada among other early sects corresponding to the Pāli Dhammapada. These are not identical in form but are similar.

8
 Winternitz says: "In Ceylon the book has been used for centuries down to our own times by the novices as a text-book which they must have studied before they can receive the higher orders (upasampadā). For this reason there is not a monk in Ceylon who cannot recite his Dhammapada from beginning to end from memory." A History of Indian Literature, Vol. II, 81.

9
Studies in the Origins of Buddhism, p. 78.

the oldest strata, while book three contains much that is later.¹⁰ Our presentation is based chiefly upon books one and two.

The composition and development of the Pāli Jātakas straddles a very great length of time. It is probable that many of the tales are pre-Buddhist, reaching back before 500 B.C.; on the other hand, there is much material which definitely reflects conditions several centuries A. D. Some of the chronological problems connected with this literature are discussed in the section on the Jātakas in Chapter I.

The Aṣṭasāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā Sūtra ("The Perfection of Wisdom in Eight Thousand Lines") belongs to the Prajñāpāramitā literature, which is generally considered to be among the earliest produced by the Mahāyāna.¹¹ The Aṣṭasāhasrikā itself,¹² moreover, is thought to be one of the oldest of this group.¹³ Conze considers it to contain material from different strata, reaching from perhaps the first century B. C. to 150 A. D.

¹⁰
Winternitz, A History of Indian Literature, Vol. II, 35.

¹¹
Ibid., II, 34.

¹²
See ibid., pp. 314, 316, as well as Conze's "The Development of Prajñāpāramitā Thought" in Thirty Years of Buddhist Studies, pp. 123-147.

¹³
See the previous article and "The Composition of the Aṣṭasāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā", also in Thirty Years of Buddhist Studies (pp. 168-184).

Etienne Lamotte feels that the Vimalakīrti Nirdeśa ("The Teaching of Vimalakīrti") "se range parmi les plus anciens Mahāyāna sūtra"¹⁴. Although he is wary of giving an actual date for its composition, he refers with apparent approval to the view of some authors that the earliest Mahāyāna texts fall between 100 or 200 B. C. and 100 A. D.¹⁵ There seem to have been several versions of the Vimalakīrti in existence, the later ones having expanded and elaborated upon the earlier ones. We have tried to use the earliest available version.

With regard to the Saddharmapundarīka Sūtra ("The Lotus of the True Doctrine"), Winternitz says: "we shall most probably be right in placing the nucleus of the work as far back as the first century A.D."¹⁶ On the basis of Kern's discussion of the time-stratification of the Lotus,¹⁷ it can confidently be asserted that practically our entire description of 'skill in means' in this Sūtra is grounded upon this early "nucleus".

A word should now be said about the plan of attack adopted in dealing with the problem of skill in means in a particular text. The scheme found to be the most desirable

¹⁴
Ykn.(L), pp.40,77.

¹⁵
Ibid., p.77.

¹⁶
A History of Indian Literature, Vol.II,304.

¹⁷
See his Introduction to SP.(K), especially, p.xxi.

involves organizing both research and presentation fairly tightly around the actual occurrences of the relevant technical terms.¹⁸ This approach can be restrictive and uninteresting if relied upon exclusively, but we have tried to make the facts relating to the occurrence of these terms the starting point rather than the sum-total of the discussions. The comments made on the topic of skill in means by most authors suffer from a failure to look at the way the expression was used.

A major deviation from the method just outlined has been necessary during Chapter I (up to the Jātakas). It was found, to our surprise, that the term 'skill in means' is scarcely ever met with in the Pāli Canon. This being the case, we have chosen to examine data relevant to the concept of 'skillful teaching and leading', since this lies at the heart of the most common usage of 'skill in means' in Mahāyāna Buddhism.¹⁹ It is thereby possible to show how the 'Hīnayāna' literature prepared the ground for the later doctrine in some respects, while militating against the growth of the doctrine in other respects.

18

These terms are upāya kauśalya (Pāli upāya kosalla), the adjectival form upāya kuśala (Pāli upāya kusala), and upāya by itself where this has a technical meaning.

19

A search among the Pāli texts for traces of the different meaning of the expression discovered in the Astasaṃskṛitā would be interesting, but it would be very difficult and certainly out of the question for this essay. Most authors do not even acknowledge the existence of this particular meaning.

Lastly, it should be mentioned that although the placing of the Pāli literature first indicates its chronological priority, all other ordering of texts is for convenience of presentation, and has no other significance.

I

'SKILL IN MEANS' IN PĀLI TEXTS

The Idea of 'Teaching' in the Pāli Canon

The Pāli Canon is often portrayed as propounding a religious system grounded in a spirit of self-reliance. Such a characterization would need to be qualified, but there are several points which can be made in its favour. One might mention, for example, the view taken of the law of karma (Pāli kamma). Action and retribution are seen as belonging to the doer of the act: in the final analysis, each creature is responsible for his own destiny. In this spirit it is said that, "By oneself, indeed, is evil done; by oneself is one injured. By oneself is evil left undone; by oneself is one purified. Purity and impurity belong to oneself. No one purifies another."¹ Clearly, there are held to be definite limitations to the ability of one man to help another.

Coupled with this, is the insistence that the kind of 'action' which is really liberating is internal. To be sure, external circumstances are related to inner states and may help or harm the aspirant (and hence the proper environment should be fostered through rules of discipline and so on); all such

¹ attanā va kataṃ pāpam attanā saṅkilissati etc. Dh.(R), p.114.

externals, however, are meaningless if the inner state is not in fact changed. The nature of inner activity varies with such factors as temperament and stages of progress, but whether it is the faith (saddhā or pasāda) of the layman circumambulating a shrine or the powerful event of knowledge and sight which accompanies the attainment of Arahatsip, it is this internal experience which counts. Such experiences can be, in part, evoked by a reliable teacher, but they cannot be transferred. The truths which are soteriologically essential must be made part of personal experience before they can be liberating, and hence they cannot simply be 'told' and 'understood' after the manner of everyday dialogue. As A. K. Warder says with regard to the Four Noble Truths:

This 'science' of Buddhism begins with the knowledge of unhappiness and leads via self-possession and concentration to enlightenment. But enlightenment also is 'discovery', or at least 'understanding in their true nature', of the truths. The difference evidently is that when one has the Buddha or his doctrine as teacher one begins by being informed of the truths as something to be known. Whether one immediately understands them fully depends on one's individual experience. The way is intended to prepare the trainee for this full understanding, which may come only long afterwards, after much exercise in detachment and self-possession, much meditation and exercise of the understanding faculty. What was first picked up as a piece of information will not be fully understood until the trainee sees its truth himself, through his own experience. 2

It is seen once again, therefore, that there are striking limitations to the capacity of any one man to help another.

And yet the person who asks resignedly: "what then can

one man do for another?" and who decides to keep his knowledge to himself, is roundly condemned in the Dīgha Nikāya as holding a "wicked view".³ For, in short, it is believed that despite the difficulties involved, it is possible for people to help one another. One way such assistance can be given is through the simple preaching or relating of the various 'standard' truths and exhortations.⁴ Another way is that of person-to-person teaching. Now of course such teaching may involve the standard formulations, but it also goes beyond them: it requires the teacher's tailoring of his words and method of presentation to suit the occasion. He must take into account the capacities of the hearer and deftly lead him through the requisite experiences towards the final goal. In general, it is precisely such limits and restrictions as have been mentioned above which make this 'deftness' or 'skill' necessary.

³ pāpakam ditthigatam. DN.I, 224 and passim in the Lohicca Sutta. Note that for the Dīgha Nikāya we have used Kashyap's Devanāgarī edition but have adhered to the pagination of the Pāli Text Society's edition since Kashyap includes this. All English quotations from the Dīgha are, unless otherwise indicated, from Dialogues of the Buddha, Parts I-III, (which again includes this pagination), translated by the Rhys Davids. Specific reference is made to the latter only when it is a matter of the translator's comments.

⁴ Such as, e.g., found in the list or mātrka at DN.II, 120 (see Warder's comments in Indian Buddhism, pp.10-11, 81-83). Such groups as the Four Noble Truths would also fall into the category of 'standard' truths.

This type of skilful teaching will be of central concern in the present chapter (up to the Jātakas, where a different approach will be necessary) because it parallels in important respects that ability which many Mahāyāna Sūtras indicate by the term 'skill in means' (upāya kauśalya). It will be found that the texts lay a varying amount of stress on the importance of the skilful teacher. Sometimes there is more insistence upon the 'standard formulations'; sometimes there is such a high degree of self-reliance and independence advocated that there appears to be little scope for the talents of the teacher. Occasionally, interesting combinations of these elements occur. In what follows, it will be of interest to note the extent to which this kind of skilfulness is recognized, and how it is characterized.

Sutta-Nipāta

Fausboll, in the Introduction to his translation of the Sutta-Nipāta, says:

In the contents of the Suttanipāta we have, I think, an important contribution to the right understanding of Primitive Buddhism, for we see here a picture not of life in monasteries, but of the life of hermits in its first stage. 5

The picture suggested here, of wandering 'hermits' devoted to forest-life, is accurate of much of the Sutta-Nipāta; it is most strikingly displayed in the famous Khaggavisāṇa Sutta where it is repeatedly urged that one "wander alone like a rhinoceros".

5
Sn.(F), p.xii.

Such verses as the following are typical of this Sutta and indeed of the whole text:

2. In him who has intercourse (with others) affections arise, (and then) the pain which follows affection; considering the misery that originates in affection let one wander alone like a rhinoceros. (35)

3. He who has compassion on his friends and confidential (companions) loses (his own) advantage, having a fettered mind; seeing this danger in friendship let one wander alone like a rhinoceros. (36) 6

In this hermit-like atmosphere we might wonder what place discussion, teaching and other social activities would be allotted. 'Discussion' in the general sense would almost certainly be rejected, the Atthakavagga in particular looking upon all debate as fruitless contention arising from passion and attachment. We find such verses as these:

1. Abiding by their own views, some (people), having got into conflict, assert themselves to be the (only) expert (saying), '(He) who understands this, he knows the Dhamma; he who reviles this, he is not perfect.' (878)

2. So having got into contest they dispute: 'The opponent (is) a fool, and ignorant (person)', so they say. Which one of these these, pray, is the true doctrine (vāda)? for all these assert themselves (to be the only) expert (879) 7

12. He is full of his own overbearing (philosophical) view [ditthi], mad with pride, thinking himself perfect, he is in his own opinion anointed with the spirit (of genius), for his (philosophical) view is quite complete. (889) 8

For the true sage there is no room for discussion: he is

6
Sn.(F), p.6.

7
Sn.(F), pp.167,168.

8
Sn.(F), p.169.

self-reliant:

1. The opinions that have arisen amongst people, all these the wise man does not embrace; he is independent. Should he who is not pleased with what has been seen and heard resort to dependency? (?) (897) 9

8. But he who is independent undergoes censure amongst the Dhammas; with what (name) and how should one name him who is independent? For by him there is nothing grasped or rejected, he has in this world shaken off every (philosophical) view. (787) 10

In the midst of such self-reliance we might expect that 'teaching' or 'leading' in any significant sense would also be questioned. Indeed, we find it said that, "The harshness of the (philosophical) views I have overcome, I have acquired self-command, I have attained to the way (leading to perfection), I am in possession of knowledge, and not to be led by others; so speaking, let one wander alone like a rhinoceros."¹¹ Obviously, however, it would be impossible for one to learn the Dhamma at all (and thus become truly independent) unless one heard it from someone, hence it is admitted that one should, at least at the beginning of his career, "cultivate (the society of) a friend who is learned and keeps the Dhamma, who is magnanimous and wise: knowing the meaning (of things and) subduing

⁹
Sn.(F), p.171.

¹⁰
Sn.(F), p.150.

¹¹
Sn.(F), p.8.

his doubts." ¹² It is clear that there is room for some sort of teaching, and it remains only for us to determine how important skilful teaching is considered to be.

The most relevant section of the Sutta-Nipāta for answering this general question is the Nāvā Sutta of the Cūlavagga. This Sutta is sufficiently brief and sufficiently important to be given in full:

1. A man should worship him from whom he learns the Dhamma as the gods (worship) Indra; the learned man being worshipped and pleased with him, makes the (highest) Dhamma manifest. (315)
2. Having heard and considered the Dhamma that is in accordance with the (highest) Dhamma, becomes learned, expert, and skilful, strenuously associating with such a (learned teacher). (316)
3. He who serves a low (teacher), a fool who has not understood the meaning, and who is envious, goes to death, not having overcome doubt, and not having understood the Dhamma. (317)
4. As a man, after descending into a river, a turbid water with a rapid current, is borne along following the current, -- how will he be able to put others across? (318)
5. Even so how will a man, not having understood the Dhamma, and not attending to the explanation of the learned and not knowing it himself, not having overcome doubt, be able to make others understand it? (319)
6. As one, having gone on board a strong ship, provided with oars and rudder, carries across in it many others, knowing the way to do it, and being expert and thoughtful
7. So also he who is accomplished, of a cultivated mind, learned, intrepid, makes others endowed with attention and assiduity understand it, knowing (it himself). 321
8. Therefore indeed one should cultivate (the society of) a good man, who is intelligent and learned; he who leads a regular life, having understood what is good and penetrated the Dhamma, will obtain happiness. (322) 13

This Sutta is important as containing, among other

¹²
Sn.(F), p.9.

¹³
Sn.(F), pp.52-53.

things, the sought-for phrase "skilled in means." That which Fausboll translates (in the sixth verse) as "knowing the way to do it, and being expert" is "¹⁴upāyaññū kusalo". It must be admitted that this is not, strictly speaking, a genuine occurrence of "skilled in means" (Pāli upāya kusala), but rather "knowing the means" (upāyaññū; Skt. upāyajña) and "skilled" (kusalo) and hence the phrase "skilled and knowing the means" or, as Hare translates it, "¹⁵skilful knower of the means". The expression, nevertheless, is sufficiently remarkable considering the context.¹⁶

The main points which may be gathered from this Sutta concerning the teaching relationship are:

(1) A man must himself have understood the Dhamma before he can successfully teach it to others. It is not certain what is meant here by 'understanding the Dhamma'. The main terms used to describe the teacher are vedagu, bhāvitatto, bahussuto, avedhadhammo, medhāvinan meaning respectively "one who has attained to highest knowledge", "self composed", "very learned", "unshakeable" and "wise".¹⁷ It may perhaps be assumed

¹⁴
Sn.(C), p.76.

¹⁵
Sn.(H), p.47.

¹⁶
The image of the enlightened leader who ferries beings across to the 'other shore' with his great skill in means fits very well with the Bodhisattva ideal of the Mahāyāna.

¹⁷
PTs Dict.

that such a leader was supposed to have attained the goal of Arahatship and Nibbāna; it is possible, however, that this degree of attainment was not a requirement. The general idea being conveyed here is of course sensible and rather obvious, viz. that a man must have first-hand knowledge of the place toward which he is leading others. It will be interesting, however, to observe the degree to which this is insisted upon in other texts.

(2) One who has understood the Dhamma not only can be but will be skilful in leading others to this understanding. This is not made explicit in the Sutta; all we mean to suggest is that the understanding would seem to include the ability to be a skilful teacher. This is related to the first point, for it will be seen that whether or not understanding includes this kind of skilfulness depends largely on what is meant by 'under-¹⁸standing'.

(3) The third point which may be gathered from this passage is like the previous two in that it appears obvious and trivial here but becomes of considerable importance in the later Mahāyānic scheme of the skill in means of the teacher. It is suggested that no teacher can be effective with a pupil of wrong disposition or low capacity. ("So also he . . . makes others endowed with attention and assiduity understand it" -- verse 7.) This sets a restriction upon the power of the teacher which is

essentially maintained throughout the literature we shall examine.¹⁹

Having dealt with this Sutta, which illumines the attitude toward the relationship between teacher and student of the Dhamma, there remains but one topic to be dealt with. This concerns the stance taken toward Gotama the teacher by his followers. The most interesting passages in this connection are found in the Pārāyanavagga, chiefly in the Pārāyana Sutta.

The brahmin Bāvāri sends his sixteen disciples to ask questions of Gotama. Their humble approach sounds strange after the spirit of self-reliance encountered previously. Upasīva says, "Alone, O Sakka, and without assistance I shall not be able to cross the great stream."²⁰ Jatukannin says, "tell the Dhamma to me who has (only) little understanding, O thou of great understanding [bhūripaṇṇa], so that I may ascertain how to leave in this world of birth and decay."²¹ Dhotaka's supplication is even more interesting:

In thy compassion [karuṇā] teach me, Brahm,
Dharma's aloof state I would know,
So, trusting naught [asito], I here may fare,
Unclouded as the spacious sky. 22

19

Teachers, it will be seen, can purify and exalt the inclinations of their hearers (in fact this is one of the main functions of their skill in means) but there is always an element of the pupil's character which is dictated by his own karma and is not under control of the teacher. See below, pp.33-34.

20

Sn.(F), p.197.

21

Sn.(C), p.260; Sn.(F), p.204. (quoted from Fausboll, with Pāli from Chalmers).

22

Sn.(C), p.250; Sn.(H), p.153 (quoted from Hare, with Pāli from Chalmers).

Here it is suggested that Gotama's compassion (karuṇā) is the motive for his teaching; furthermore, the goal of the aspirant is seen to be precisely the opposite of the dependence he now acknowledges, i.e. he wishes to be independent (asita). Both of these elements will become significant later in this study of skill in means. Most interesting of all, however, is the Pārāyana Sutta where the brahmin Piṅgiya's praises of Gotama are set forth:

9. 'Well! I will praise the beautiful voice of (Buddha), who is without stain and folly, and who has left behind arrogance and hypocrisy. (1131)

10. 'The darkness-dispelling Buddha, the all-seeing, who thoroughly understands the world, has overcome all existences, is free from passion, has left behind all pain, is rightly called (Buddha), he O Brāhmaṇa, has come to me. (1132)

.....

13. 'There is only one abiding dispelling darkness, that is the high-born, the luminous, Gotama of great understanding, Gotama of great wisdom. (1135)

14. 'Who taught me the Dhamma, the instantaneous, the immediate, the destruction of desire, freedom from distress, whose likeness is nowhere.' (1136)

.....

17. Piṅgiya: 'I do not stay away from him even for a moment, O Brāhmaṇa, night and day; worshipping I spend the night . . .

20. 'Belief and joy, mind and thought incline me towards the doctrine of Gotama; whichever way the very wise man goes, the very same I am inclined to. (?) (1142)

21. 'Therefore, as I am worn out and feeble, my body does not go there, but in my thoughts I always go there, for my mind, O Brāhmaṇa, is joined to him. (1143)

22. 'Lying in the mud (of lusts) wriggling, I jumped from island to island; then I saw the perfectly Enlightened, who has crossed the stream, and is free from passion.' (1144)

23. Bhagavat: 'As Vakkali was delivered by faith, (as well as) Bhadrāvudha and Āḷavi-Gotama, so thou shalt let faith deliver thee, and thou shalt go, O Piṅgiya, to the further shore of the realm of death.' (1145)

24. Piṅgiya: 'I am highly pleased at hearing Muni's words; Sambuddha has removed the veil, he is free from harshness, and wise. (1146)

25. 'Having penetrated (all things) concerning the gods, he knows every thing of every description; the Master will put and end to all questions of the doubtful that (will) admit (him). (1147)
 26. 'To the insuperable, the unchangeable (Nibbāna), whose likeness is nowhere, I shall certainly go . . . 23

Piṅgiya's dependence upon Gotama is obvious from the above verses and requires no further proof. The terms in which this is expressed, however, i.e. the epithets applied to Gotama, reveal a pattern which will be of considerable importance later. Gotama's titles may be divided into two groups: those referring to his own perfected development, and those referring to his role as a skilled teacher. Among the former group are found "all seeing" (samantacakkhu), "of great understanding" (bhūripaṇṇa), "of great wisdom" (bhūrimedhasa), "perfectly Enlightened" (sambuddha),²⁴ "he knows everything of every description" (sabbam vedī parovaram).²⁵ Among the latter are found "Master" (Satthā), "darkness-dispelling" (tamonuda); he has "removed the veil" (vivatacchada), he will "put an end to all questions of the doubtful". It is possible that this two-fold pattern is here merely the spontaneous praise of the man Gotama who happens to have such qualities; in the Dīgha Nikāya (especially in the Mahāpadaṇa Sutta) this becomes

²³ Sn.(F), pp.210-213.

²⁴ Lit., "he knows everything high and low". PTS. Dict.

²⁵ Usually translated as "Teacher".

26

a formal scheme applying to all Buddhas. This is an indication, then, of a possible historical development of the concept of the skilful teaching of the Buddhas.

Dhammapada

There is relatively little to be said with regard to the Dhammapada. Since the text is not cast in dialogue form there is no opportunity to see Gotama in action as a teacher, and since very little space is devoted to describing him it is difficult to tell what view was taken of his skilfulness. The text seems to be largely a collection of aphorisms which attempt to give the fundamentals of the Buddhist path and some advice on how to act with regard to them.

Much of this advice, as in the Sutta-Nipāta, is concerned with showing the value of remaining aloof from society. A

26

Some scholars feel that the Sutta-Nipāta, representing an early stage of Buddhism, uses the term buddha as a "title open to all bhikkhus of highest 'comprehension' or 'enlightenment'" -- Sn.(C), p.xix. See also Dialogues of the Buddha, II,2; III,6.

27

Warder refers to it as an "anthology" of verses, most of which are drawn from the Sutta-Piṭaka. Indian Buddhism, pp.204,279.

28

Dayal speaks of a "tendency toward spiritual selfishness" and says: "The Dhammapada exalts self-control, meditation, and absence of hatred, but it also exhibits an attitude of contempt for the common people and remoteness from their interests." The Bodhisattva Doctrine of Buddhist Sanskrit Literature, p.3. There is, to be sure, a total lack of 'missionary zeal' in this text; nevertheless, it may be misleading to speak of self-reliance born of a certain view of the law of karma as 'selfishness'.

typical verse urges: "Let one sit alone, sleep alone, act alone without being indolent, subdue his self by means of his self alone: he would find delight in the extinction of desires."²⁹ As in the Sutta-Nipāta, the only exception to the rule is in the case of a wise friend.³⁰ There is little question but that this attitude is linked with a belief in karma as individualistic and inexorable,³¹ the latter being a constant theme herein. It is obvious that this sets rigorous limits on the amount of assistance one man can render another; this is most clear in verse 165, already quoted: "By oneself, indeed, is evil done; by oneself is one injured. By oneself is evil left undone; by oneself is one purified. Purity and impurity belong to oneself. No one purifies another."³² Another verse emphasizing this 'anti-social' stance says: "Let no one neglect his own task [attha] for the sake of another's, however great; let him, after he has

²⁹ 29

Dh.(R), v.305.

³⁰

"Therefore, even as the moon follows the path of the constellations one should follow the wise [dhīraṃ], the intelligent [paññaṃ], the learned [bhāṇaṃ], the much enduring, the dutiful, the noble: such a good and wise man (one should follow)." Dh.(R), v.208.

³¹

E.g., vv. 66-69, 71, 119-127, 137-140, 220, 247, 248, 311, 312, 314.

³²

Dh.(R), p.114.

discerned his own task, devote himself to his task."³³ Occasionally we find passages which actually appear to represent reactions against 'dependence' tendencies within Buddhism, perhaps of the kind noted previously in the Pārāyana Sutta. For example: "You³⁴ yourself must strive. The Blessed Ones are (only) preachers." The term translated as "preachers", akkhātāro, means "one who relates, a speaker, preacher, story-teller"³⁵; the term satthā ("teacher, master")³⁶ which was used of Gotama in the Pārāyana Sutta is not found at all in the Dhammapada. Indeed, there is little expression here of the idea of the 'teacher' who takes into account the dispositions of his hearers and deftly leads them.

One must be careful, however, not to over-emphasize the individualism of the Dhammapada. In fact, it is probable that most of the verses are essentially concerned with making the same point made in the Nāvā Sutta, namely that while one should indeed teach, it is imperative that he first understand the Dhamma himself. Hence it is said: "Let each man first

³³ Dh.(R), v.166. Attha is an early term for the Goal of the Buddhist training, i.e. Nibbāna. See Pande, Studies in the Origins of Buddhism, pp.36, 454.

³⁴ tumhe hi kiccā ātappam, akkhātāro tathāgatā. Dh.(R), v.276.

³⁵ PTS Dict.

³⁶ Ibid.

establish himself in what is proper, then let him teach others. (If he do this) the wise man will not suffer." "If a man shapes his life as he directs others, then, subduing himself well, he might indeed subdue (others), since the self is indeed difficult to subdue."³⁷

There is also some recognition that one of the main functions of a Buddha is his teaching of the Dhamma ("Blessed is the birth of the awakened; blessed is the teaching of the true law")³⁸ but there is no mention of the skilfulness such teaching might require.

In general, it is found that the emphasis in the Dhammapada is on the Dhamma and on the 'standard truths' contained therein rather than on the teacher whose job it is to communicate these truths.

Dīgha Nikāya

The following examination of the Dīgha Nikāya will prove fruitful, hence it is desirable to organize our approach somewhat more completely than previously. The material will be presented as follows: first, several comments relevant to the teaching process in general, i.e. to relationships involving teachers other than Buddhas, will be dealt with; next, passages

³⁷ Dh.(R), vv.158, 159.

³⁸ sukho buddhānam uppādo, sukhā saddhammadesanā. Dh.(R), v.194.

dealing specifically with Gotama's skilful teaching will be quoted and analyzed; thirdly, it will be seen how qualities attributed to him were considered as not peculiarly his but as applicable in fact to all Buddhas; finally, it will be shown how, in the concept of the dhammatā, these qualities were further seen as constituting part of the very essence of Buddha-hood, and part of 'the way things are'. These last three topics may well represent progressive stages in the development of the doctrine of the skilfulness of the Buddhas and as such will be particularly interesting. The theme of 'dependence and independence' will be seen to fall into place as one among many important elements connected with the doctrine of skilful teaching.

39

The Lohicca Sutta concerns itself with Gotama's opinions regarding the "three sorts of teachers (satthā) who are worthy of blame", the discussion being provoked by the Brahman Lohicca's question "for what can one man do for another?" The three types of teachers may be briefly described thus:

The first is he "who has not himself attained to that aim of Samanaship (sāmaññattho) for the sake of which he left his home". His hearers pay him no heed and go their own way without having attained anything.

The second case is that of the teacher who again has not attained his own goal but whose hearers nevertheless take

heed and "become steadfast in heart by their understanding what is said"; they also go their own way apart from their teacher.

The third teacher has attained his goal but his hearers, because of his ineffectiveness as a teacher, go their own way without having accomplished anything.

Now in each of these cases the teacher is considered worthy of rebuke, each discussion ending with the comment "for what, then, can one man do for another?" The following points are therefore clear. In the first instance the teacher is to be blamed for his hearer's failure; he has no right even to attempt instructing others while he has not yet attained his own goal. In the second case the hearers deserve the credit for their success rather than the teacher: the latter is "like a man who, neglecting his own field, should take thought to weed out his neighbour's field." In the third instance the interesting possibility is suggested that a man may have accomplished his own task and yet be a failure as a teacher. It is made clear that the hearers' lack of success is not entirely their own fault: as in the previous two cases the teacher is worthy of blame, being "like a man who, having broken through an old bond, should entangle himself in a new one".

Now of the various 'aims' of Samānaship, one would think that Arahātship and Nibbāna would be that most relevant to this discourse; indeed, attha was definitely used in this sense.

Hence it is tempting to make the general conclusions that

(1) a man cannot be a good teacher of the Dhamma until he has attained Arahatship; (2) self-effort is extremely important, some men being able to make progress even without a proper teacher; (3) Arahatship does not necessarily entail the ability to teach others. In light of what we have seen in the Sutta-Nipāṭa and the Dhammapada, the only one of these statements which is surprising is the last one: this does not seem typical of the attitude encountered previously nor indeed of the Dīgha.⁴¹ It seems probable that at the time of the composition of this Sutta there was no formal theory on the subject. Many reasons could be given, using certain schemes, for the failure of an Arahats⁴² to teach successfully, at least as compared with the Buddhas, but the relation between 'Arahats' and 'Buddhas' is by no means

⁴¹

See, for example, the Pāsādikā-Suttanta: "Yet senior bhikkhus of mine are there, Cunda, who are disciples, wise and well trained, ready and learned, who have won the peace of the Arahant, who are able to propagate the good Norm, who when others start opposed doctrine, easy to confute by the truth, will be able in confuting it to teach the Norm and its saving grace." DN.III,125. This passage is typical of the attitude generally encountered in that, while it does not explicitly say that Arahatship is a sufficient condition for the teaching ability, it seems to assume it.

⁴²

E.g., the Buddhas, but not the Arahats, have the ten balas; also, it seems that Arahats did not necessarily even have to acquire all the abhiññās, at least one of which (knowledge of the thoughts of others -- cetopariyañāṇa) would be of considerable importance to the teaching process. See DB.I,92,n.1.

clear for most of the Dīgha.

There is but one further passage of interest on the subject of the requirements of 'teaching' in general. In the Mahā Paṇinibbāna Suttanta Gotama says to Māra:

"I shall not pass away, O Evil One! until not only the brethren and sisters of the Order, but also the lay-disciples of either sex shall have become true hearers, wise and well-trained, ready and learned, carrying the doctrinal books in their memory, masters of the lesser corollaries that follow from the larger doctrine, correct in life, walking according to the precepts -- until they, having thus themselves learned the doctrine, shall be able to tell others of it, preach it, make it known, establish it, open it, minutely explain it and make it clear -- until they, when others start vain doctrine easy to be refuted by the truth, shall be able in refuting it to spread the wonder-working truth abroad! I shall not die until this pure religion of mine shall have become successful, prosperous, wide-spread, and popular in all its full extent -- until, in a word, it shall have been well proclaimed among men!" 43

It is said that all the hearers (sāvakas), even the lay-disciples, are expected to be capable of this skilful teaching of the Dhamma. It is clear that these hearers were not Arahats so it may be that the 'missionary zeal' noticeable in the above passage was connected with a lowering of the requirements for a teacher of the Dhamma. At any rate the tone here is remarkably different from that of, for example, the Dhammapada. 44

It would now be interesting to consider the teaching of the Buddhas. At one point in the Dīgha, Sakka, the king of

43
DN.II,113.

44
See, for example, DN.II,251-251; DN.III,125.

the gods, says of Gotama:

"Now what think ye, my lords gods Three-and-Thirty? Inasmuch as the Exalted One has so wrought for the good of the many, for the happiness of the many, for the advantage, the good, happiness of gods and men, out of compassion for the world -- a teacher [satthā] of this kind, of this character, we find not, whether we survey the past or whether we survey the present -- save only the Exalted One. 45

In order to see what qualities of Gotama provoke such praise, a passage describing his mode of speech may be examined:

In season he speaks, in accordance with the facts, words full of meaning, on religion, on the discipline of the Order. He speaks, and at the right time, words worthy to be laid up in one's heart, fitly illustrated, clearly divided, to the point. 46

It is insisted here that the Buddha speaks what is true (bhūta) and what is useful or salutary (atthasaṃhitā).⁴⁷ The attempt⁴⁸ to hold on to these two factors simultaneously seems to be

45
DN.II,222.

46
'... kālavādī bhūtavādī atthavādī dhammavādī vinayavādī nidhānavatīm vācam bhāsītā kālena sāpadesaṃ pariyantavatīm atthasaṃhitā' ti. DN.I,4-5.

47
The PTS Dict. gives "connected with good, bringing good, profitable, useful, salutary" for atthasaṃhita and "one who speaks good, i.e. whose words are doing good or who speaks only useful speech . . ." for atthavādin. It would seem that attha should be taken as "profit" or "gain" rather than as "meaning".

48
Kālavāda is also important but for our purposes may be seen as constitutive of atthasaṃhita for, as we shall see, his words cannot be completely useful unless they are spoken at the right time.

49

constant in the Pāli Canon; this will later develop into one of the central problems connected with the doctrine of the skill in means of a teacher.⁵⁰

Now it is clear that before Gotama's speech can be truly effective (before it can be atthasamhita) he must be able to adjust his manner of discourse to fit the temperament of the individual with whom he is talking.⁵¹ This involves a clear perception of the different capacities of men. It is interesting in this connection to note the following passage which occurs near the beginning of the Dīgha Nikāya:

'How wonderful a thing it is, brethren, and how strange that the Blessed One, he who knows and sees, the Arahāt, the Buddha Supreme, should so clearly have perceived how various are the inclinations of men! 52

This quotation is important, for the ability of the Buddha to perceive the various dispositions (Skt. adhimukti) of beings becomes essential to the doctrine of skill in means as found in the Saddharmapundarikā and the Vimalakīrti Nirdeśa. It is unclear whether or not the present passage hints at an ability

49

See Jayatilleke's discussion of Majjhima Nikāya I, 395. Early Buddhist Theory of Knowledge, pp.351-352.

50

See below, pp.131-136.

51

It will be seen that a three-fold adjustment is necessary, viz. adjustment of the method of teaching, adjustment of the doctrine, and adjustment of the teacher himself (i.e. his appearance).

52

DN.I,2.

on the part of Gotama to actually discern the dispositions (Pāli adhimutti) of creatures. Such a discernment is of course accredited to him throughout the Dīgha as a natural ability (as can be seen from practically every dialogue); what we are questioning is the ascription of a supernatural (or 'paranormal') ability such as was certainly ascribed to him in later passages. 53 All that the above passage says is that the 'many-dispositionedness' (nānādhimuttikatā) of beings is known by the Blessed One. In the context it seems likely that this merely means that he realizes and takes into account the variety of inclinations among creatures, not that he can paranormally 'read' these inclinations. 54 At any rate, it is clear that in parts of the Dīgha it is assumed that the Buddhas have powers which are, for our purposes, essentially identical with this one, and it is further clear that these are connected with their ability to teach beings. 55

53

One of the ten balas or powers ascribed to Buddhas is "'the ability to comprehend the predilections of beings' (sattānāṃ nānādhimuttikatam yathābhūtam pajānāti, M.I,70)". Jayatilleke, Early Buddhist Theory of Knowledge, p.406.

54

One is tempted to suggest that passages such as the present one may have been the basis for later theories involving the paranormal abilities. Jayatilleke, however, says that: "Despite the apparent progress from three to six and six to ten, it is difficult to say that there is genuine change in the conception of the intellectual powers of the Buddha. The seven powers [which include the present one] added to the list of three are commonly attributed to the Buddha throughout the Nikāyas and it is difficult to say that the transition from three to ten represents a change in stratum." Ibid., p.470.

55

See below, p.55; these are, of course, powers above and beyond the six Abhiññās.

Further enlightenment on the Buddha's teaching methods may be gained from a passage which occasionally occurs after the main discourse, showing Gotama bringing things to a successful conclusion. In this case it is the brahmin Pokkharasādi who is the hearer:.

Then to him thus seated the Blessed One discoursed in due order; that is to say, he spoke to him of generosity, of right conduct, of heaven, of the danger, the vanity, and the defilement of lusts, of the advantages of renunciation. And when the Blessed One saw that Pokkharasādi, the Brahman, had become prepared, softened, unprejudiced, upraised and believing in heart, then he proclaimed the doctrine that Buddhas alone have won; that is to say, the doctrine of sorrow, of its origin, of its cessation, and of the Path. And just as a clean cloth from which all stain has been washed away will readily take the dye, just even did Pokkharasādi, the Brahman, obtain, even while sitting there, the pure and spotless Eye for the Truth, and he knew: 'Whatsoever has a beginning in that is inherent also the necessity of dissolution.' 56

Here we see many of the characteristics of Gotama's teaching thus far noted put into action. The speech is obviously atthasaṃhita ("useful", "edifying") since it results in Pokkharasādi's attainment of the understanding of impermanence. Note, however, that this usefulness or effectiveness can be seen as of two types: (1) The discourse on giving (dāna), morality (sīla) and so on is effective in preparing, softening and unprejudicing him; (2) the discourse on the peculiarly Buddhist truths (dukkha etc.) is effective in causing the arising of the 'dhamma-eye' (dhamma-cakkhu -- translated by Rhys Davids as "Eye for the Truth"). This can be analyzed by utilizing the concept of 'inclination'

(adhimutti) which, though it is not explicitly mentioned here, is clearly involved. Thus the initial truths⁵⁷ are given so as to accomodate the hearer's low disposition⁵⁸ and to subsequently raise and purify this disposition, inclining him from some things (e.g. lusts) and toward other things (e.g. renunciation). When his disposition has been purified, "just as a clean cloth from which all stain has been washed away", the Buddha (who is kālavādin) perceives that the time is ripe and reveals the truths of dukkha, its origin, its cessation and of the Path. They result in insight, experience, and personal verification.

All of this has been brought about by the great skilfulness of Gotama; nevertheless, it should not be forgotten that there is a restriction upon this skilfulness imposed by the fact that, by the law of karma, an individual's present disposition is the result of his former actions. Since these former actions are not under the teacher's control it may happen that the hearer is hopelessly intractable. This is by no means considered a merely 'theoretical' restriction: in the present instance Pokkharasādi attains insight but in the Sāmañña-Phala Sutta the infamous king Ajātasattu fails to attain this same insight

57

The whole speech is considered as truthful, for the Buddha is bhūtavādin; the initial advice may not be peculiarly Buddhist but it involves no falsehood (i.e. lusts really are defiling, etc.).

58

Of which the Sanskrit is hīnādhimukti, a very important term in the Saddharmapundarīka.

because of a previous evil deed.

We have said that the result of the present discourse is insight and verification. This is clearly relevant to the theme of 'dependence and independence'. It is evident that during the conversation the hearer is dependent upon the Buddha; it is equally evident that he wins independence as he verifies the truth of impermanence for himself. This is shown strikingly by the words which immediately follow the last passage quoted:

And then the Brahman Pokkarasādi, as one who had seen the Truth, had mastered it, understood it, dived deep down into it, who had passed beyond doubt and put away perplexity and gained full confidence, who had become dependent on no other man for his knowledge of the teaching of the Master [aparappaccayo satthu-sāsane], addressed the Blessed One . . . 60

This confirms what has been noted previously, namely that dependence upon the teacher is supposed to result in true independence. On this subject Rahula says: "It is always a question of knowing and seeing, and not that of believing. The teaching of the Buddha is qualified as ehi-passika, inviting you to 'come and see', but not to come and believe." ⁶¹ One could accuse Rahula of oversimplification, since, as was seen in the Pārāyana Sutta, faith

59

"This king, brethren, was deeply affected, he was touched in heart. If, brethren, the king had not put his father to death, that righteous man, and righteous king, then would the clear and spotless eye for the truth [dhamma-cakkhū] have arisen in him, even as he sat there." DN.I,86.

60

DN.I,110.

61

What the Buddha Taught, p.9.

can be an important tool in the attempt to gain freedom; nevertheless, even Piṅgiya can scarcely be said to have remained in a state of 'blind faith'. He describes Gotama as the "darkness-dispelling Buddha" who "has removed the veil" so that he can see for himself. Even faith, then, leads the hearer to the experience of personal verification. This point is of very great importance, for it sets a goal and a limit to the skill in means of a teacher. The hearer may be deftly led by many devices but when he sees it as it is (yathābhūtam) he not only does not need to be led, he cannot be led.

Since it is easy to over-simplify the situation, this problem should be scrutinized a bit more closely. The last passage from the Dīgha continues as follows:

'Most excellent, oh Gotama (are the words of thy mouth), most excellent! Just as if a man were to set up that which has been thrown down, or were to reveal that which has been hidden away, or were to point out the right road to him who has gone astray, or were to bring a light into the darkness so that those who had eyes could see external forms, -- just even so, Lord, has the truth been made known to me, in many a figure, by the venerable Gotama. And I, oh Gotama, with my sons, and my wife, and my people, and my companions, betake myself to the venerable Gotama as my guide, to the truth, and to the Order. May the

'As Vakkali was delivered by faith (as well as) Bhadrāvudha and Āḷavi-Gotama, so thou shalt let faith deliver thee, and thou shalt go, O Piṅgiya, to the further shore of the realm of death.'

Yathā ahu Vakkali muttasaddho
Bhadrāvudho Āḷavi-Gotama ca,
evam eva tvam pi pamuḍcassu saddham
gamissasi tvaṃ, Piṅgiya maccudheyypāraṃ

Sn.(C), p.272; Sn.(F), p.213. The English is Fausboll's, the Pāli is from Chalmers.

venerable Gotama accept me as a disciple, as one who, from this day forth, as long as life endures, has taken him as his guide. 63

The first part of this passage is easily understandable and merely reinforces our contention that the hearer was dependent upon Gotama's great skilfulness during the discourse. It is more difficult, however, to comprehend the subsequent sentences which proclaim Pokkharasādi as taking Gotama "as his guide" (or "refuge"--sarana). If he is now independent, what need has he for a refuge? Two points should be made to clarify this issue. First, the passage just quoted is an extremely common 'stock finish' occurring, for example, in the Sutta-Nipāta as well as in the present text. It usually signifies merely that a man wishes to become a lay-disciple (upāsaka) and it ends accordingly with the declaration of 'taking refuge' in Gotama, the Dhamma, and the Saṅgha. It has no particular connection with the previous discourse and in fact usually occurs without it. Secondly, the arising of the dhamma-cakkhu marks only the first step along

63
DN.I,110.

64
See Dialogues of the Buddha II,144, n.1.

65
E.g., Sn.(F), pp.79,80,94.

66
E.g., in the Sāmañña-Phala Sutta and the Kassapa-Sihanāda Sutta. In the Kuṭadanta Sutta the two passages occur but in the opposite order.

the path to Arahatsip. When one attains to this, he knows this particular aspect of reality (impermanence) as it really is, and he has no need to depend upon anyone, including the Buddha, for this knowledge. But he still has a long way to go before reaching the summum bonum and during this time he may require assistance, i.e. he may need to be led by Gotama or by another qualified teacher. Finally, however, when he destroys the āsavas, he is free and knows he is free:

He knows as they really are: "These are the Deadly Floods" [ime āsava ti yathābhūtaṃ pajānāti]. He knows as it really is: "This is the origin of the Deadly Floods". He knows as it really is: "This is the cessation of the Deadly Floods." He knows as it really is: "This is the Path that leads to the cessation of the Deadly Floods." To him, thus knowing, thus seeing [evam jānato evaṃ passato], the heart is set free from the Deadly Taint of Lusts, is set free from the Deadly Taint of Becomings, is set free from the Deadly Taint of Ignorance. In him, thus set free, there arises the knowledge of his emancipation [vimutta-smiṃ vimuttamiti ñānaṃ hoti] and he knows: "Rebirth has been destroyed. The higher life has been fulfilled. What has to be done has been accomplished. After this present life there will be no beyond!" 68

At this point there is no question of his being led by anyone; Arahatsip is therefore the goal and the limit of the skill in means of a teacher in the Pāli Canon.

See Dialogues of the Buddha I, 95, n.1. This event is to be distinguished from becoming an upāsaka, which latter does not necessarily entail 'entering the path' at all. See ibid., I, 190-192.

DN.I, 84.

The fact that it is the goal and the fact that it is the limit must be seen as two different facts; Arahatsip

It was mentioned earlier that Gotama's skilfulness could be seen in the manner of adjustment of his teaching to the inclinations of his hearers, and it was further noted that this adjustment could be seen as of three types: adjustment of method, adjustment of doctrine, adjustment of the teacher's own appearance. Most easy to understand and to illustrate is the first kind of adjustment. Numerous dialogues furnish ample evidence of the Buddha's talent for shifting from one mode of expression to another in accordance with his hearer's disposition. One might refer, for example, to the Ambattha Sutta.⁷⁰ Here the young brahmin Ambattha is seen as extremely proud of his birth and breeding, so much so that he refuses to sit down and hold conversation with Gotama, whom he considers of inferior caste. The latter proceeds to tell a story revealing Ambattha's own lineage. The results of this are so devastating for Ambattha, his reputation being crushed in the presence of his friends, that Gotama tells a second story which has the effect of restoring some measure of his self-respect. Having thus tamed the brahmin's disposition he engages him in dialogue. Many further examples of such adjustment of method might be given; we shall choose rather to quote

does not merely represent the point after which leading is not needed, it represents also the point after which leading is not possible, for the Arahant is not only free but also independent.

Rhys Davids' very apt comments on the subject:

When speaking on sacrifice to a sacrificial priest, on union with God to an adherent of the current theology, on Brahman claims to superior social rank to a proud Brahman, on mystic insight to a man who trusts in it, on the soul to one who believes in the soul theory, the method followed is always the same. Gotama puts himself as far as possible in the mental position of the questioner. He attacks none of his cherished convictions. He accepts as the starting-point of his own exposition the desirability of the act or condition prized by his opponent. . . . He even adopts the very phraseology of his questioner. And then, partly by putting a new and (from the Buddhist point of view) a higher meaning into the words; partly by an appeal to such ethical conceptions as are common ground between them; he gradually leads his opponent up to his conclusion. This is, of course, always Arahatsip. . . .

There is both courtesy and dignity in the method employed. But no little dialectical skill, and an easy mastery of the ethical points involved, are required to bring about the result.

.

However this may be, the method followed in all these dialogues has one disadvantage. In accepting the position of the adversary, and adopting his language, the authors compel us, in order to follow what they give us as Gotama's view, to read a good deal between the lines. The argumentum ad hominem can never be the same as a statement of opinion given without reference to any particular person. 71

What Rhys Davids calls the argumentum ad hominem is precisely that adjustment of 'method' to the adhimutti of the individual which we have mentioned. Rhys Davids finds it a "disadvantage" that this very flexible method makes it hard for us to determine what Gotama's real opinions were on various subjects. (e.g. asceticism). This difficulty is very real but is comparatively minor as long as the discourse follows a fairly stable pattern, reaching a consummation with the preaching of

the goal of Arahatsip. The problem becomes very serious, however, where no such consummation is seen to take place, i.e. where the discourse is found to end without mention of the highest, most important items. Here, not only the 'means' of teaching but even the 'end' of teaching seems flexible, unstable. In this case it would seem not to be a matter of different means at all but simply of different doctrines. We have, consequently, labelled this 'adjustment of doctrine'. Examples of this kind of radical adjustment in the Dīgha are rare: the Tevijja Sutta is the most striking. Rhys Davids perceptively remarks of the Tevijja:

This is the only Suttanta, among the thirteen translated in this volume, in which the discourse does not lead up to Arahatsip. It leads up only to the so-called Brahma Vihāras -- the supreme conditions -- four states of mind held to result, after death, in a rebirth, in the heavenly worlds of Brahmā. Why is it -- the Buddhist ideal being Arahatsip, which leads to no rebirth at all -- that this lower ideal is suddenly introduced? 72

This question may be answered quite simply by applying the terms already discussed. That is, the brahmins being taught did not develop the proper disposition to enable them to derive benefit from the 'higher' truths, hence there was no point in revealing them. After practising the Brahma Vihāras they would eventually (either in the present life or in a future existence) be in a position to comprehend the essence of the Dhamma, and some teacher, perceiving that the time was ripe, would communicate it. This explanation really says that there is no 'adjustment of doctrine'

ultimately, but that the seeming variety of doctrines is really just an extension of 'adjustment of method' aimed at bringing everyone finally to a comprehension of the one Dhamma. Hence, for example, even if the Buddha appears to preach a different and lower doctrine to laymen than to monks, this is merely a temporary measure directed towards bringing these same laymen to the point where, finally, they will be able to understand the doctrine they are now denied.⁷³ However this may be, this type of adjustment is sufficiently different from the usual 'adjustment of method', and opens the door to so many new possibilities, that we prefer to retain a separate label for it. For, once the precedent has been set, this 'adjustment of doctrine', whether final or temporary, allows one to maintain that in any given discourse of the Buddha the doctrine which he expounds, even at the conclusion of his speech, may not contain his highest truths. What, then, is to stop someone from claiming that none of the doctrines found in the Sūtras, including those involving Arahats⁷³hip, are the Buddha's final teachings? Perhaps they are all

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"Evidently, then, the teaching should not be indiscriminate but should be restricted to what the person spoken to could be expected to understand. Hence the stress on virtue and heaven when addressing laymen, even Buddhist laymen, despite the fact that all this is still a matter of involvement in the world, in transmigration, is only relatively good, as contrasted with evil and purgatory, is far from the supreme good of non-attachment and nirvāṇa. At best, the practice of this relative good was a preparation which brought the understanding of the supreme good nearer, so that a virtuous layman might eventually be ready to benefit from hearing the whole of the doctrine." Warder, Indian Buddhism, p.194.

simply 'lower' truths (analagous to dāna, sīla, sagga, etc.) designed by the Buddha in his great skilfulness to purify the capacities so that eventually the 'higher' or ultimate truths may be revealed. This is, in fact, precisely what the Saddharma-puṇḍarīka claims and it uses the concept of the Buddha's 'skill in means' to justify the claim. This is why we have insisted on pointing out this 'adjustment of doctrine' as a separate type.

It remains only to determine whether or not the Dīgha contains instances of the 'adjustment of the appearance of the teacher'. No doubt some such adjustment could be made naturally (i.e. Gotama could to some degree change his 'image' to suit his hearer); what would be interesting to find, however, would be a paranormal ability such as becomes of great importance to the Mahāyānic conception of 'skill in means' as found, for example, in the Vimalakīrti Nirdeśa. There is one such case found in the Mahā Parinibbāna Suttanta, as follows:

'Now I call to mind, Ānanda, how when I used to enter into an assembly of many hundred nobles, before I had seated myself there, or talked to them or started a conversation with them, I used to become in colour like unto their colour, and in voice like unto their voice. Then with religious discourse I used to instruct and incite, and quicken them, and fill them with gladness. But they knew me not when I spoke and would say: -- "Who may this be who thus speaks? a man or a god?" Then having instructed, incited, quickened, and gladdened them with religious discourse, I would vanish away. But they knew me not even when I vanished away: and would say: -- "Who may this be who has thus vanished away? a man or a god?"

[And in the same words the Exalted One spoke of how he had been used to enter into assemblies of each of the other four orders of monks, and of how he had not been able to leave in any way but by the power of his own wish.]

of the eight kinds, and of how he had not been made known to them either in speaking or in vanishing away.] 74 (Rhys Davids' brackets)

S. Dutt speaks of this power of manifestation as being an ability of a "yogin", and he connects it with Gotama's experiments with asceticism prior to his enlightenment.⁷⁵ It seems unnecessary to seek for such an explanation; it is probably explicable as the fruit of the power of Iddhi available to all⁷⁶ aspirants to Arahatsip.

The next step is to see how the qualities of skillfulness attributed to Gotama were attributed to 'Buddhas' in general. It is possible that this represents a historical development-- attributes of the man Gotama being universalized and formalized

74

DN.II,109. The seven other kinds of assemblies are "brahmins; householders and wanderers, and of the angel hosts of the Guardian Kings, of the Great Thirty-Three, of the Māras, and of the Brahmās." (See the passage just preceding the one quoted.)

75

The Buddha and Five After Centuries, pp.37-38.

76

"He enjoys the wondrous gift [iddhi] in its various modes -- being one he becomes many, or having become many becomes one again; he becomes visible or invisible . . . he reaches in the body even up to the heaven of Brahmā.

Just, O king, as a clever potter or his apprentice could make, could succeed in getting out of properly prepared clay any shape of vessel he wanted to have -- or an ivory carver out of ivory, or a goldsmith out of gold." DN.I,78. This occurs not only in the Sāmañña-Phala Sutta but also in succeeding Dialogues.

increasingly as an elaborate Buddhology evolved.

The view develops that there have been several Buddhas (seven, including Gotama, according to the Mahāpadāna) and these are seen as having almost exactly parallel careers; hence it becomes possible to define what "Buddhahood" entails. Thus far it has been seen how important is Gotama's role as a teacher (satthā) and how explicitly is recognized his talent for leading men, taming and purifying their dispositions so that they can penetrate the Dhamma. A common recurring passage, which speaks about 'Buddha' and 'Tathāgata' as a type of being rather than as a particular individual, shows how this role was accepted as part of the formal definition of a 'Buddha':

'Suppose, O king, there appears in the world one who has won the truth, an Arahāt, a fully awakened one, abounding in wisdom and goodness, happy, who knows all worlds, unsurpassed as a guide to mortals willing to be led, a teacher for gods and men, a Blessed One, a Buddha. He, by himself, thoroughly knows and sees, as it were, face to face this universe, -- including the worlds above of the gods, the Brahmas, and the Māras, and the world below with its recluses and Brahmans, its princes and peoples, -- and having known it, he makes his knowledge known to others. The truth, lovely in its origin, lovely in its progress, lovely in its consummation, doth he proclaim, both in the spirit and in the letter, the higher life doth he make known, in all its fulness and in all its purity. 78

Thus S. Dutt says: "So it is that the humanity of the Lord, known in all accounts of him in tradition, is consistently subdued in the legends to the colours of Buddhahood. It is the implicit, but prevailing tendency of the legends." The Buddha and Five After Centuries, p.87.

idha, mahārāja, tathāgato loke uppajjati araham,
sammāsambuddho, vijjācaraṇasampanno, sugato, lokavidu, anuttaro,

This quotation may be rather neatly divided into two parts, which we have indicated by underlining. Those sections which are unemphasized refer to the qualities of the Tathagatas' own attainments; those emphasized refer to the fact that they share these attainments with others by assuming the role of teacher (satthā). Their deftness in leading ignorant and intractable men along the path is suggested chiefly by the term purisadammasārathi. Rhys Davids translates it as "a guide to mortals willing to be led" but the implications of the expression are captured better by the phrases: "a man-trainer", "a coachman of the driving animal called man",⁷⁹ "the trainer of the human steer".⁸⁰ It is evident, then, that this skilful leading and teaching is recognized as an important element of 'Buddhahood'.

This process of formalization and solidification is carried further through the concept of the dhammatā. Both S. Dutt and T.W. Rhys Davids look upon this doctrine as an historical development by means of which characteristics of the person and career of Gotama became universalized and hypostasized as part

purisadammasārathi, satthā devamanussānaṃ, buddho bhagavā. so imaṃ lokaṃ sadevakaṃ samārakaṃ sabrahmekakaṃ sassamanabrāhmaṇiṃ paṇḍitaṃ sadevamanussaṃ sayāṃ abhiññā sacchikatvā pavēdeti. so dhammaṃ deseti adikalyāṇaṃ majjhakalyāṇaṃ pariyosānakalyāṇaṃ sāthaṃ sabyañjanaṃ, kevalaparipunnāṃ parisuddhaṃ brahmacariyaṃ pakāseti. DN.I,62.

79

PTS Dict. under sārathi.

80

PTS Dict. under damma.

81

of the very "nature of things". Dutt's comments regarding the dharmatā are worth noting:

The theory of Dharmatā is of the Theravāda school, representing the earliest attempt to re-orient the legends to the changed Buddha-concept. Appearing for the first time in the Mahāpadāna Suttanta, it is taken up in the Mahāyāna development of Buddhism and enlarged upon (vide Laṅkāvatāra Sutra). The theory draws upon the old legends, in which a human Satthā is posited, to build up the frame-work for a Buddha, superhuman and immutable.

The inner logic of the theory is that since the Buddha, re-conceived as an 'eternal Being', is not bound by time, the manner of his earthly manifestation must also be timeless: it must be a pattern, not a career. Every incident of this pattern must partake of the quality of eternity, not fleeting and fugitive but capable of recurrence and renewal. What, therefore, the legends relate of the Lord's life and career from his birth at Lumbinī to his death at Kusinārā is not personal history at all: these events grew not out of an individual life, but only followed an eternal order of phenomena in the spiritual world. 82

For the present purposes, only that part of the "Sublime Story"

dealing with the Buddha Vipassī's decision to teach the Dhamma

83

is relevant.

Vipassī first gains his 'enlightenment', which in this

81

Rhys Davids says of the Mahāpadāna Suttanta:

"We have legends of six forerunners of the historical Buddha, each constructed with wearisome iteration, in imitation of the then accepted beliefs as to the life of Gotama. So exactly do these six legends follow one pattern that it has been possible, without the omission of any detail, to arrange them in parallel columns.

"The main motive of this parallelism is revealed in the constantly repeated refrain *Ayam ettha dhammatā*: 'That, in such a case, is the rule,' the Norm, the natural order of things, according to the reign of law in the moral and physical world." Dialogues of the Buddha II, 1.

82

The Buddha and Five After Centuries, pp. 224-225.

83

The pattern which Vipassī's career displays is assumed to hold for all the succeeding Buddhas, including Gotama.

case is seen as coming about with the destruction of the āsavas.

He then reflects upon how difficult the Dhamma is to penetrate, particularly for "a race devoting itself to the things to which

it clings."⁸⁵ There follows a period during which he almost decides not to try to teach, feeling that the task would be fruitless. One of the "Great Brahmās", however, tries to persuade him to make the effort, urging that, "There are beings whose eyes are hardly dimmed by dust, they are perishing from not hearing the Truth [dhamma]; they will come to be knowers of the

Truth."⁸⁶ After the third such entreaty the following important events occur:

'Then, brethren, when Vipassī the Exalted One, Arahant, Buddha Supreme, became aware of the entreaty of the Brahmā, because of his pitifulness towards all beings, he looked down over the world with a Buddha's Eye. And so looking, brethren, he saw beings whose eyes were nearly free from dust, and beings whose eyes were much dimmed with dust, beings sharp of sense and blunted in sense, beings of good and of evil disposition, beings docile and indocile, some among them discerning the danger in rebirth and in other worlds, and the danger in wrong doing. As in a pond of blue, or red, or white lotuses, some lotus-plants born in the water grow up in the water, do not emerge from the water, but thrive sunken beneath; and other lotus-plants, born in the water and grown up in the water, reach to the level; while other

84

DN.II,35. See Rhys Davids' comment in Dialogues of the Buddha II,28,n.2.

85

DN.II,36.

86

DN.II,37.

lotus-plants born in the water and grown up in the water, stand thrusting themselves above the water, undrenched by it. . . 87

Vipassī then decides to teach the Dhamma.

One of the main things to be noted about this passage is that Vipassī's decision to teach is grounded upon his compassion (karuṇā).⁸⁸ S. Dutt tends to see this compassion as a cultic invention belonging to the Satthā-Sammāsambuddha aspect

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atha kho, bhikkhave, vipassī bhagavā araham sammāsambuddho brahmano ca ajjhesanaṃ viditvā sattesu ca kārūṇātataṃ paticca buddhacakkhunā lokam volokesi. adrsā kho, bhikkhave, vipassī bhagavā araham sammāsambuddho buddhacakkhunā lokam volokento satte apparajakkhe mahārajakke tikkhindriye mudindriye svākāre dvākāre suvinṇāpaye duvinṇāpaye appekacce paralōka-vajjabhayadassāvino viharante, appekacce na paralōkavajjabhaya dassavino viharante. etc. DN.II,38.

88

Warder says: "Then the Buddha, on account of his compassion for beings, (a significant motif), surveys the world with his Buddha's insight and sees the varying qualities and faculties of beings, some of whom may be able to understand the doctrine." (Indian Buddhism, p.50) This comment is made of Majjhima Nikāya I,168ff. but describes equally well the present discourse. Warder again picks up the theme of compassion a few pages later, saying: "However, the element of compassion must not be overlooked, Though [sic] not dominant it would seem to be essential. It is presented as the motive for all the Buddha's teaching and organizing, it inspires the moral teaching although the latter is also intellectually grounded: compassion and concern for the welfare of all living beings is frequently spoken of". (ibid., pp.63-64.) Besides the present passage, he is no doubt thinking of such utterances as "Inasmuch as the Exalted One has so wrought for the good of the many . . . out of compassion [anukampa] for the world -- a teacher [satthā] of this kind, of this character, we find not . . ." DN.II,222. The present examination of the Mahāpadāna shows, of course, that this scheme is not peculiar to Gotama but is part of the dhammatā and therefore applies to all Buddhas.

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as opposed to the Buddha aspect of the Lord. It may, however, be questioned whether this division between Buddha and Sammāsambuddha is developed to any extent in the Dīgha; and it is doubtful that the concept of karuṇā is an artificial addition. The ascription of karuṇā to the Buddha is quite consistent with his image as presented throughout the Dīgha and is explicitly given as a motive for his teaching in the very ancient Pārāyanavagga of the Sutta-Nipāta.

89

E.g.: "When the Lord is described as Satthā in the legends, it hits off an aspect of his personality -- the Sammāsambuddha, as distinguished from the Buddha aspect, -- and though his teaching function may be ultimately derived from the human tradition of him that remained in the inseparable background of the legends, the cult conceived this function to be the expression of his Karuṇā (compassion for mankind) attribute." The Buddha and Five After Centuries, p.84.

90

Specifically, we would question Dutt's account of the Buddha's decision to teach (ibid., pp.204-205) on two points. (His account is supposed to apply to the Mahāpadāna as well as to the Lalitavistara and the Mahāvagga.) First, the present text says that he looked down upon the world with his Buddha-eye because of his compassion (and this is substantiated by Warder's description above n.88). This casts doubt on Dutt's comment that, "Karuṇā, we have to take note, comes not with but after the Buddhahood, not evolved from the Lord's inner nature, but coming to him in response to the experience of his 'Buddha-eye'" (ibid., pp.204-205). Secondly, it is worth noting that Vipassī is called sammāsambuddha immediately after his 'enlightenment' and before his decision to teach. (DN.II,35). This weakens Dutt's argument that the legend "marks the attribution by Buddhist faith of an additional characteristic, viz., Karuṇā, to the Enlightened, rounding off the concept of his personality, -- a Buddha who is also a Sammāsambuddha" (ibid., p.204). Our second point is also made by Rhys Davids -- Dialogues of the Buddha II,2.

91

See above, pp.18-19.

Another item worth mentioning is that the Buddha's decision to teach rests also upon his ability to discern the capacities of men. We have already discussed this element of Gotama's teaching and it will be seen that it is fundamental to "skill in means" in both the Lotus and the Vimalakīrti.

Vipassī then teaches two men whom he perceives "are learned, open-minded and wise, and for long have had but little dust in their eyes".⁹² He delivers to them the discourse beginning with dāna and sīla and ending with their attainment of insight through the arising of the dhmma-cakkhu. They then praise his great skill in teaching in a stereotyped passage already referred to.⁹³ They are ordained and, with further guidance from him, soon accomplish the destruction of the āsavas. Vipassī repeats the procedure with a group of eighty-four thousand and continues from there, sending forth hordes of bhikkhus to spread the Dhamma. In this manner the Sangha and, in effect, the Dhamma are established in the world.

What is important here is that this scheme, whereby the Buddhas -- motivated by their compassion and aided by their discernment of the capacities of beings -- skilfully teach the Dhamma to the world, is established as part of the dhmmatā, part of the "way things are". It will be found that the

⁹²
DN.II,40.

⁹³
See above, p p.35-36.

Saddharmapundarika repeats the above episode, with several important innovations, and that it uses the term "skill in means" (upāya kauśalya) to refer to that deftness which is left unnamed in the Dīgha.⁹⁴

The Jātakas

Thus far, this paper has been concerned with the concept of skilful teaching. This has been done in anticipation of the concept of 'skill in means' found in Mahāyāna literature and in the absence of the actual term upāya kauśalya, which latter is apparently very seldom encountered in the Pāli Canon. When one turns, however, to that mass of Pāli material commonly called the Jātakas the situation is quite different. Here one finds a minimum of explicit doctrine, particularly in the actual birth stories (the 'Tales of the Past'), and hence little can be gathered with regard to the theme of skilful teaching; at the same time, the term itself is met with fairly frequently.⁹⁵

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The term upāya kosallaṃ occurs only once in the Dīgha as far as we are aware. This occurrence, at DN.III,220, is insignificant for our purposes since it sheds no light on the accepted meaning of the term and does not tell us whether or not it was considered important.

95

By 'the term' we mean upāya kosalla and the corresponding adjective upāya kusala. These have been found to occur approximately 33 times in Fausboll's edition of the Jātakas. The term upāya occurs on its own with very great frequency but it is unclear whether this is significant or not. This would have to be determined through a comparison with other contemporaneous Indian literature.

Before examining the particulars of the situation, something should be said about the rather complicated chronological problems connected with the Jātakas.

What is often called 'the Jātaka' is actually a commentary -- the Jātakatthavannanā ("elucidation of the meaning of the Jātakas")⁹⁶ -- which is based upon a collection no longer extant.⁹⁷ Of the present conglomeration only the verses or gāthās are now accepted as canonical and it is possible that⁹⁸ even many of these were not originally part of the canon. In general, it may be said that the gāthās are the earliest element of 'the Jātakas' insofar as their present form is concerned, for while the accompanying prose narratives may in essence be just as ancient, their form was less stable and hence was more subject to development and alteration. As Winternitz says:

Nevertheless we may certainly say that, on the whole, the Gāthās have a stronger claim to be regarded as canonical than have the prose portions of the Jātakas. At all events the prose was more exposed to changes. In many cases it is nothing but the miserable performance of a very late period. It contains allusions to Ceylon, and not infrequently it is at absolute variance with the Gāthās. Moreover, the language of the Gāthās is more archaic than that of the prose. ⁹⁹

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Winternitz, A History of Indian Literature, Vol. II, 116. This is what comprises Fausboll's Pāli edition. The English translation called The Jātaka, done under the editorship of E. B. Cowell, is the same except that it excludes the Veyyākaraṇa.

97

For a description of it, see ibid., II, 115-116.

98

See ibid., II, 117-119.

99

Ibid., II, 119.

Since, therefore, much of what one sees in the Jātakas bears the stamp of lateness, the question naturally arises whether this literature should even be included in the present discussion of 'early' Buddhist texts. We have decided to include it, for it is found that even in its present confused state it can be made to shed some light on the development of the concept of skill in means; at the very least, it raises some vital questions about this development.

Some facts of interest relating to the context of the term's occurrence will now be mentioned .

(1) Skill in means is virtually always accredited to the Buddha or the Bodhisatta in the Tales of the Present, but in the Tales of the Past there is no such preference and it is used to describe any crafty creature. ¹⁰⁰

(2) There is, in general, no connection between skill in means and virtue. ¹⁰¹ The ten pāramis are often mentioned but are not associated with skill in means.

100

Specifically, the term is used 12 times in connection with the Bodhisatta and 9 times in connection with divers other beings in the Tales of the Past. This is perfectly natural in view of the fact that the Bodhisatta is generally the most crafty being in the story.

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For example: "Men surely are cruelly mined and versed in expedients [upāya kusala] . . . " Jā.V,357. "This teacher is fertile in resource [upāyakusalo]; 'tis a wonderful plan to kill the king." Jā.VI,424. (Note that the quotations from the Jātakas are from the English translation edited by Cowell but that the pagination of Fausboll's Pāli edition is followed. The English version includes this pagination in brackets.)

(3) Upāya kosalla has the general meaning of 'skill in devices' or 'resourcefulness'; it may be used for any kind of resourcefulness and has no technical meaning, much less a Buddhistic technical meaning. Of particular interest and importance is the fact that there is no connection seen between this resourcefulness and the teaching, leading and saving of beings.
102

(4) The term occurs in close association with 'wisdom' (paññā) altogether at least fifteen times, i.e. about half the time. Within the Tales of the Present, moreover, skill in means is associated with the 'perfection of wisdom' (paññapārami) about half of the time.

One is now faced with the task of making sense out of this collection of facts. It may first be noted that of the Mahāyāna literature to be examined, the Aṣṭasāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā Sūtra comes closer to the Jātakas in its use of skill in means than do any of the other texts. Although the Aṣṭasāhasrikā gives the term a very subtle and distinctive set of

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Although this is clear in virtually every instance, Jātaka 402 might be cited as particularly striking. In the Tale of the Past the Bodhisatta is praised as a wonderful teacher and preacher and is also described as skilled in means, and yet there is no connection seen between these two facts. His skill in means is tied in with his wisdom and reasoning powers but not with his teaching ability.

There is a sole exception to this rule, and that is in the Tale of the Present for Jātaka 478. Here the 'teaching' meaning is explicitly mentioned and several excellent examples of this type of skill in means are referred to. Oddly, however, the Tales of the Present which contain these examples do not themselves mention the term 'skill in means' at all, nor does the Tale of the Past for Jātaka 478 which is supposedly being introduced.

implications which are lacking in the Jātakas, the use of skill in means in contexts other than the teaching and leading of creatures, and the connection of it with wisdom and especially the perfection of wisdom, are curiously similar elements. This might lead one to posit some sort of historical relationship between the Jātakas and the early Prajñāpāramitā literature. Before much is made of this line, however, it would be well to ascertain something of the chronology of the occurrences of skill in means in the Jātakas -- whether they belong to the most ancient strata or the latest strata or somewhere in between.

It should be remarked at the outset that there is nothing the slightest bit artificial about the presence of 'skill in means' in the stories themselves (the Tales of the Past). The Bodhisatta is very frequently identified with the clever and wise hero popular in folk-tales and is accordingly described continually as pandito and paññavā.¹⁰³ Surely it is only natural that certain expressions referring to the deftness and resourcefulness of such a hero would develop and recur. In this vein Winternitz, having described one of the tales, remarks:

This anecdote belongs to a class of narratives, which are just as popular in the narrative literature of all peoples, as those of foolish tricks, namely the narratives of ultra cleverness or skill, which finds expression in clever answers,

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Indeed, the PTS Dictionary defines 'Jātaka' as ". . . the story of a previous birth of the Buddha as a wise man of old".

especially answers to riddles, or in the skilful accomplishment of difficult tasks, or in wise judgments or in the accomplishment of wonderful works of art. We find numerous narratives of this kind in the Jātaka book, and many of them belong to universal literature. 104

So much, then, for 'skill in means' in the Tales of the Past. As for the quite numerous occurrences of the expression in the Tales of the Present, one could simply say that the resourcefulness of the Bodhisatta as portrayed in the Tale of the Past was recognized and a suitable introduction was given stressing this same quality. This naturally led to an emphasis on the most appropriate perfection (pārami), namely the perfection of wisdom.

What all of this amounts to is that upāya kosalla may well have belonged to many of the Jātaka tales in their most ancient forms, several centuries before Christ. If this were accepted, the next step would be to suggest that the concept of skill in means found in Mahāyāna may have originated in the Jātaka tradition -- not necessarily in the Pāli Jātaka tradition but at least in this general body of literature which was fertilized and exploited by all streams of Buddhism. There are, however, problems with the above argument.

There are several facts which, when taken together, suggest that contrary to what has been implied thus far the expression 'skill in means' is not native to the Pāli Jātakas in their earliest form.

First, of the thirty-three occasions where the term is used, not one is in the gāthās. This does not merely mean that none of these occurrences is in canonical text, it probably also means that the expression was originally lacking from the tales. For, as has already been mentioned: while the prose narratives may in many cases be essentially as old as the verse portions, the latter are generally older in their present form. It is likely, therefore, that upāya kosalla became included in the stories as time went on.

This hypothesis is strengthened when comparisons are made between the version of a tale encountered in the Jātaka-tthavannanā and a version of the same tale encountered elsewhere. Jātaka 1 in the Pāli collection, for example, is found in Dīgha Nikāya II, 342-346. The version in the Dīgha is shorter and is not identified as a Jātaka (a birth-story of the Buddha), but is in most respects quite close to the other. In the Dīgha, the first caravan leader is described as "silly" (bāla) and the second leader is described as "wise" (pandita); in the Jātaka-tthavannanā these terms are kept but two other ones are also found -- anupāyakusala and upāya kosalla -- referring respectively to the first and second caravan leaders. ¹⁰⁵ It is difficult to avoid the feeling that this is one of the several

This is not easy to guess from the English translation, which uses the expressions "lacking resource" and "ready wit".
Jā.I, 98, 102.

respects in which the latter account represents a later elaboration of an early tale.

Again, this issue might be investigated by comparing the Pāli Jātaka collection with the collection found in the Mahāvastu. Although we cannot claim to have conducted a rigorous examination of the Mahāvastu, a cursory inspection did not turn up any cases of upāya kauśalya at all. Since it is most surprising to find the concept of skill in means flourishing in Pāli literature while it is unheard of in the supposedly proto-Mahāyānist Mahāsamghika literature, it seems likely that the Pāli Jātaka tradition was left open to oral recitation and gradual modification after the Mahāvastu had already been set down in a relatively stable form. An interesting case of the same tale occurring in both traditions would be that of Jātaka 20 in the Jātakatthavannanā, which is represented by the story on pages 28-29 in Volume III of Jones' translation of the Mahāvastu.¹⁰⁶ In neither instance does the sought-for expression occur in the Tale of the Past, but the Tale of the Present in the Pāli version concludes that the Bodhisatta was "fertile in resource"¹⁰⁷ (upāya kusala). whereas the Mahāvastu does not mention this. It appears as if both the Tales of the Past and the Tales of the Present in the Jātakatthavannanā use the term

¹⁰⁶ For the Sanskrit, see Le Mahāvastu, ed. E. Senart, III, 29-30.

¹⁰⁷ Jā.I, 172.

where it is not absolutely necessary and where it may well have been absent from the earliest accounts.

In assessing these new facts, one tempting move would be to ascribe the origins of the concept of skill in means to that body of literature which is definitely known to have considered it of central importance at an early date, namely early Mahāyāna, and to explain all subsequent usages of the expression within Buddhism, as for example, in the Pāli Jātakas, as due to such Mahāyāna influence. Such a view would receive support from the points of similarity noted above between the use of 'skill in means' in the Aṣṭasāhasrikā and in the Pāli Jātakas, for the former is put among the most ancient of Mahāyāna texts. Could it not be the case that this emerging Prajñāpāramitā literature was largely responsible for the situation in the Jātakas? This suggestion cannot be dismissed out of hand but it probably involves great oversimplification. It will have been noticed from the account given earlier regarding the Jātakatṭhavaṇṇanā that in most respects the use of 'skill in means' therein is not in fact even particularly Buddhistic. The strong connection of skill in means with the Bodhisattvas (and Buddhas), the integration of the concept into a scheme of morality, and the development of various specific technical meanings for it within Buddhist doctrine are features of the idea of upāya kauśalya in all the Mahāyāna literature to be examined, and yet all are lacking in the Jātakatṭhavaṇṇanā. This makes it extremely difficult to argue for direct Mahāyāna influence.

In reality the situation is probably much more complex than the above proposed solution recognizes. Of all the classes of Buddhist literature, the Jāṭaka is probably one of the most open to interaction and exchange among the various sects and one of the least bound within any particular doctrinal position. Hence it is next to impossible to sort out the various streams of influence at work. All that can be said in light of the preceding discussion is that while the Jāṭaka tradition remains one of the most logical birth-places for the concept of skill in means the actual evidence for this is very scant.

II

'SKILL IN MEANS' IN TWO EARLY MAHĀYĀNA TEXTS

Aṣṭasāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā

The Aṣṭasāhasrikā belongs to the group of Mahāyāna texts known as the Prajñāpāramitā literature. It is generally believed to be the oldest and most 'basic' text of the collection, forming the essential foundation for later extensions and contractions¹ into Sūtras of various sizes.

Of this body of literature in general, Murti comments:

With the Prajñāpāramitās an entirely new phase of Buddhism begins. A severe type of Absolutism established by the dialectic, by the negation (śūnyatā) of all empirical notions and speculative theories, replaces the pluralism and dogmatism of the earlier Buddhism. The Prajñāpāramitās revolutionised Buddhism, in all aspects of its philosophy and religion, by the basic concept of Śūnyatā.²

This emphasis on 'emptiness' (śūnyatā) as the essential doctrine

1

See Conze, The Prajñāpāramitā Literature, pp.9ff; see also Murti, The Central Philosophy of Buddhism, pp.83-84. This is not to suggest, of course, that the Aṣṭasāhasrikā is itself the work of one author or that it is from one historical period. Conze believes that several different strata may be distinguished. See, e.g., "The Development of Prajñāpāramitā Thought" (Thirty Years of Buddhist Studies, pp.123-147) and "The Composition of the Aṣṭasāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā" (ibid., pp.168-184).

The two primary texts used for this section are Mitra's Sanskrit edition and Conze's translation. Reference is made to Mitra's pagination, which Conze includes in brackets.

2

The Central Philosophy of Buddhism, p.83.

of the Prajñāpāramitā texts is quite often encountered.³ While this doctrine is, to be sure, extremely important to the Aṣṭasāhasrikā, it is interesting to note that this text considers the concept of the 'skill in means' (upāya kausalya) of the Bodhisattva as a more solid criterion than Śūnyavāda for distinguishing its own particular concerns from those of other texts.⁴ This makes it obvious that 'skill in means' is at the heart of the Aṣṭasāhasrikā's concerns. The significance of the term upāya kausalya is further emphasized by the frequency of

³ Hence Suzuki says: "The Prajñāpāramitā is generally regarded as exclusively teaching the philosophy of Emptiness (śūnyatā). Most people, including scholars of Buddhism, subscribe to this view. . ." "The Philosophy and Religion of the Prajñāpāramitā"; On Indian Mahayana Buddhism (Conze, ed.), p.44. Suzuki himself holds that "the teaching of the Prajñāpāramitā consists in defining the essence of Bodhisattvahood [Bodhisattvacaryā] ." This, he feels, can be best understood through the concept of prajñā. Ibid., p.33.

⁴ E.g.: "Furthermore, Mara the Evil One will come to where Bodhisattvas teach, etc. this perfection of wisdom, and he will bring along the very deep Sutras which are associated with the level of Disciples and Pratyekabuddhas. He will advise them that they should 'train in this, write, expound, and repeat this, for from it all-knowledge will be created.' But a Bodhisattva who is skilled in means should not long for those Sutras. For although they teach Emptiness, the Signless and the Wishless, nevertheless they do not announce the skill in means of the Bodhisattvas. A Bodhisattva remains without the higher knowledge of the distinction of the cognition of skill in means if he spurns this deep perfection of wisdom, and seeks instead for skill in means in the Sutras associated with the level of Disciples and Pratyekabuddhas." APP., pp.242-243. See also APP., pp.310-312, 371-379. The above passage speaks, of course, not only of 'emptiness' but also of 'the signless' (ānimitta) and the wishless (apraṇihita). These are the three 'doors to deliverance' (vimokṣa-mukhāni); 'emptiness' occurs most commonly in the Aṣṭasāhasrikā as a member of this group.

its occurrence and by the fact that it is extremely closely associated with the perfection of wisdom. Skill in means is, in fact, absolutely essential to the Bodhisattvacaryā; without it one is bound to fall to the level of the Śrāvaka or the Pratyekabuddha. It is, indeed, found that none of the practices of a Bodhisattva can be fruitful unless he is skilled in means. There is little question, then, of the importance of the term upāya kausalya to the present Sūtra; it is now necessary, however, to establish its meaning.

This brings us immediately into difficult straits. For the comments of most authors regarding the subject of 'skill in means' are most unilluminating when applied to the Aṣṭasāhasrikā. Dayal, for example, says that upāya kausalya "may be

5 It is found about 93 times in Conze's translation, and even more times, of course, in the repetitive Sanskrit.

6 It is virtually always connected with "prajñāpāramitā" in the text and is literally conjoined with this term in over half of its occurrences. Skill in means is variously said to issue from the perfection of wisdom (APP., p.75), to be on an independent and equal footing (see the simile. APP., p.291), and to be identical with it (APP., p.427).

7 See, eg., APP., pp.238,287-291,310-312,356,373,390. For the relation between upāya kausalya and the irreversible (avinivartaniya) Bodhisattva, see APP., pp.379,469-470.

8 E.g., without skill in means (and the perfection of wisdom) one cannot successfully train in the pāramitās (APP., pp. 100-101,172,310,348-350,412-413); without skill in means one cannot conduct a useful 'dedication of merit' (pariṇāmanā) (APP., pp.138-168).

explained as 'skilfulness or wisdom in the choice and adoption of the means or expedients for converting others or helping them'. It is especially related to a bodhisattva's work as a preacher and teacher." He then goes on to give a rather detailed analysis of the factors involved in a Bodhisattva's teaching and preaching, without re-examining his initial assumption that this is in fact what the term signifies. Curiously, while the term invariably has this meaning in the Lotus and usually has it in the Vimalakīrti, it almost never means this in the Aṣṭasāhasrikā.

Suzuki, like Dayal, repeatedly speaks of upāya kauśalya as if it involved only the ability to deftly teach and save

⁹
The Bodhisattva Doctrine in Buddhist Sanskrit Literature, p.248.

¹⁰
The possible exceptions are 3, viz. APP.pp.58, 75, and 483. The first passage is not at all clear with regard to this problem, particularly in the Sanskrit; the second passage seems to imply this meaning of "teaching and preaching" but is also analysable on the basis of the meaning which we shall suggest. The third instance seems quite definitely to be parallel to the usage found in the Vimalakīrti and the Lotus, i.e. it involves the meaning of the term suggested by Dayal. It is found, however, in the "Sadāprarudita" section, which Conze feels to be "later than the remainder of the Aṣṭa, both on external and internal grounds." ("The Composition of the Aṣṭasāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā" in Thirty Years of Buddhist Studies, p.169.)

11
beings.

Conze also quite often seems to be of the opinion that
 12
 this is the sole meaning of the term, but he is obviously
 aware at times of the difficulty involved in making this in-
 13
 terpretation fit with the Aṣṭasāhasrikā, and consequently is

11
 See, e.g., Outlines of Mahayana Buddhism, pp.64, 298-299; The Lankavatara Sutra, pp.xiii, xiv; "The Philosophy and Religion of the Prajñāpāramitā" in On Indian Mahayana Buddhism, pp.74-78.

This characterization of 'skill in means' may be accurate of the Lankāvatāra (see, e.g., pp.69, 104, 128 of that text - though see also p.138), but it is scarcely sufficient with reference to the Prajñāpāramitā. Of course Suzuki is speaking also of the Mahāprajñāpāramitā, but we have reason to believe that even in the larger and later expansions of the Aṣṭasāhasrikā the 'non-teaching' meaning of the term which we shall examine presently was retained as at least one of the connotations. (see below, pp.75-76.)

12
 See, e.g., Buddhism: Its Essence and Development, pp.16-17, 128, 144; A Short History of Buddhism, pp.33-34; Buddhist Thought in India, pp.203, 236, 265; "Mahayana Buddhism" in Thirty Years of Buddhist Studies, pp.72-76.

13
 He says: "This leaves the seventh, and by far the most difficult problem - "skill in means". . . It is well known from the Daśabhūmika that skill in means is a virtue even more exalted than perfect wisdom, and its explanation will therefore be correspondingly even more difficult. Apart from some occasional remarks the Aṣṭa devotes its twentieth chapter to this subject. The three similes of pp.371-375 (= Rgs xx 2-10) are quite easy to follow, but the remainder of the chapter is rather obscure, and Rgs sums it up in two brief verses (xx 1,21) and shows its conviction that the problem should be clarified by metaphor rather than abstract reasoning . . ." "The Development of Prajñāpāramitā Thought" in Thirty Years of Buddhist Studies, p.133.

It seems likely that much of the confusion and difficulty which he encounters here is the result of his beginning with the assumption that 'skill in means' should have something to do with preaching and teaching.

forced to express his views on 'skill in means' in the Prajñāpāramitā literature somewhat differently. These new descriptions which he hesitantly offers are exactly in line with the interpretation which we shall suggest.¹⁴

Now, with a minimum of aid from writers dealing with this subject, we must proceed. To initiate this attempt to come to grips with the problem of 'skill in means' in the Aṣṭasāhasrikā, we may look at a typical parable:

A stupid man would launch into the water, a seafaring vessel which was not caulked or repaired, and had been tried [sic] to moorings for a long time, would overload it with goods, and mount on it. His ship is doomed to collapse before it has conveyed the goods across the water. When his ship has burst asunder, that stupid merchant, who is unskilled in means [anupāyakuśalo], will have lost a huge fortune, a great source of wealth. Just so a Bodhisattva who has all the qualities enumerated above, but who lacks in perfect wisdom and skill in means [sa ca prajñāpāramitayopāyakaualyena (sic) ca virahito bhavati], without having gained the wealth of all-knowledge he is bound to collapse midway, to incur a fall; he has lost a great deal of his own wealth, and he has also lost a great deal of the wealth of others, because he has lost all-knowledge, which is like a huge fortune and a great source of wealth; not to mention his collapse in the middle of the bad road, his fall unto the level of Disciple or Pratyekabuddha. An intelligent merchant, on the other hand would construct a solid ship, would launch it with proper care into the water, load it with goods and distribute them evenly, and with a favourable wind his vessel would gradually sail to the country which is the goal of his voyage. His ship will not collapse in the water, it will go where it is meant to go, and the merchant will win great wealth, in the shape of worldly jewels. Likewise, a Bodhisattva who has faith, and the other qualities enumerated above, and who in addition has been taken hold of by perfect wisdom and does not lack in skill in means [sa ca prajñāpāramitayā parigṛhīta upāyakaualyena cāviraḥito bhavati], it is certain that he will not collapse in the middle of a bad road, that he will not incur a fall, that he will stand in supreme enlightenment. For it is

a fact that if a Bodhisattva has faith, and the other qualities enumerated above, and if, in addition, these dharmas of his have been taken hold of by perfect wisdom, and are not lacking in skill in means, then they will not hasten towards the level of a Disciple or Pratyekabuddha [ete cāsyā dharmāḥ prajñāpāramitayā parigrhītā upāyakaśālyena cāviraḥitā na śrāvakabhūmiṃ na pratyekabuddhabhūmiṃ vā pratipatsyante], but on the contrary these dharmas will face in the direction of all-knowledge, and they will set out for it, and they will conduce to the winning of full enlightenment. 15

This parable is obviously reminiscent of the Jātakas, where the picture of the wise Bodhisattva (pandito, paññavā) who is 'resourceful' or 'skilled in means' (upāya kusalo) and thus carries all of his ventures to a successful conclusion, is commonly met with. 16 The Aṣṭasāhasrikā and the Jātakas agree that (1) the Bodhisatt(v)a, while at times a 'leader' who assists beings in distress, virtually always uses 'skill in means' to bring himself to a certain goal; (2) while instruction or 'teaching' might presumably be one of many valid fields for the exercise of his 'resourcefulness', it is almost never mentioned in this connection; (3) 'skill in means' is a close partner of wisdom (paññā) and of the perfection of wisdom (paññāpāramiṃ).

More specifically, with regard to the first two points, it may be said that the Aṣṭasāhasrikā views 'skill in means' as a tool with which the Bodhisattva brings himself to the goal.

15

APP., pp.288-290.

16

See, e.g., Jātaka No. 463, where the clever Suppāraka (identified as the Bodhisatta) deftly brings himself and his crew through the perilous oceans, wins great treasure, and distributes it to the benefit of all. He is described as pandito and upāyakuśalo and the story is introduced with a Preface praising the perfection of wisdom (paññāpāramiṃ).

(Buddhahood, full-enlightenment, and all-knowledge), so that
 17
 he then may instruct and save beings.

The idea of 'skill in means' as an ability aimed at the self-perfection of the Bodhisattva appears to be a little-explored theme. Lamotte, however, basing himself on the Bodhisattva Bhūmi, recognizes two main roles or functions of upāyakaūśalya, the first of which corresponds generally to this one. He says:

L'upāyakaūśalya remplit un double rôle: il réalise le bien propre du Bodhisattva et le bien d'autrui (svaparārthasādhana). Il y a donc lieu de distinguer, avec la Bodh. bhūmi, p.261-272, un double upāyakaūśalya:

1. Upāyakaūśalya pour soi, visant à l'acquisition des attributs de Buddha (buddhadharmasamudāgama): 1. sollicitude compatissante pour tous les êtres (sarvasattveṣu karuṇāsahagatāpekṣā), 2. connaissance exacte de tous les conditionnés (sarvasaṃskāreṣu yathābhūtaparijñānam), 3. désir de ce savoir par excellence qu'est la suprême et parfaite illumination (anuttarasamvaksambodhiḥ), 4. voyage non-souillé à travers la transmigration (asaṃkliṣṭa saṃsārasaṃsrtiḥ), 5. énergie ardente (uttaptavīryatā).

2. Upāyakaūśalya pour autrui, pour faire mûrir les êtres (sattvapariṇāma), constitué par les quatre moyens de captation énumérés à la note précédente. Par leur emploi, le Bodhisattva: 1. assure un fruit immense aux petites racines de bien des êtres (sattvāṇāṃ paritṭāni kuśalamūlāṇy apramāṇaphalatāyām upanavati), 2. fait acquérir par un petit effort d'immenses racines de bien (alpakṛcchrenāpramāṇāni kuśalamūlāni samāvartayati), 3. écarte les obstacles empêchant les êtres d'accepter la doctrine bouddhique (buddhasāsanapratihatāṇāṃ sattvāṇāṃ pratighātam anavati), 4. fait traverser ceux qui sont encore à mi-chemin (madhyasthān avatārayati), 5. fait mûrir ceux qui ont déjà traversé (avatīrṇān paripācayati), 6. délivre ceux

17

E.g., "When he is thus endowed with the thought of enlightenment and with the desire for enlightenment and with skill in means, then he does not midway realize the reality-limit. Moreover, . . . he should in his mind form the following aspiration: 'For a long time those beings, because they have the notion of existence, course in the apprehension of a basis. After I have won full enlightenment I shall demonstrate dharma to those beings so that they may forsake the erroneous views about a basis'". APP. p.376.

qui sont déjà mûrs (paripakvān vimocayati).¹⁸

When attempting to utilize the above scheme it should be kept in mind that the Bodhisattva Bhūmi is a considerably later Sūtra¹⁹ than the Aṣṭasāhasrikā. Indeed, neither the present text nor the Vimalakīrti nor the Saddharmapundarīka shows any awareness of this rather elaborate and comprehensive classification, each text using the term upāya kauśalya with remarkable internal consistency and with a single basic meaning.²⁰ It is possible that the author of the Bodhisattva Bhūmi drew up his scheme partly as an attempt to tie together the various differing usages of the term in texts preceding his own. At any rate, it is clear that we must be wary of assuming that the Aṣṭasāhasrikā reveals a conscious attempt to deal with only one aspect of 'skill in means'. Furthermore, it will be seen that even Lamotte's outline of the first type or role of upāya kauśalya, which corresponds generally to that found in the Aṣṭasāhasrikā, is actually of little use in helping to delineate the more specific and subtle connotations of the term in this text.

¹⁸
Vkn. (L), pp.116-117, n.68.

¹⁹
Dayal places it in the fourth century A.D. The Bodhisattva Doctrine in Buddhist Sanskrit Literature, p.50.

²⁰
The Aṣṭasāhasrikā refers at one point to a plurality of 'skills in means' ("all the varieties of skill in means" -- sarvopāyakauśalyāni -- APP. p.472). This idea is not, however, developed further in the text.

Let us now turn again to the Sūtra itself and attempt to discover and analyse these "specific and subtle connotations". The first few occurrences of the term in the Aṣṭasāhasrikā are quite illuminating in this respect:

Sariputra: Well do you expound this Subhuti, you whom the Lord has declared to be the foremost of those who dwell in peace . . . In this very perfection of wisdom should one endowed with skill in means exert himself, with the aim of procuring all the dharmas which constitute a Bodhisattva. In just this perfection of wisdom all the dharmas, which constitute a Bodhisattva, and in which he should be trained and exert himself, are indicated in full detail. He who wants to train for full enlightenment should also listen, etc., to this perfection of wisdom. One who is endowed with skill in means should exert himself in just this perfection of wisdom, with the aim of procuring all the dharmas which constitute a Buddha. 21

This passage certainly sounds reminiscent of Lamotte's first type of skill in means, i.e. upāya kauśalya "visant à l'acquisition des attributs de Buddha". It is found, however, that Subhuti, who is in this text the proper expounder of the Prajñāpāramitā, is unimpressed by Śāriputra's suggestions. He replies devastatingly:

I who do not find anything to correspond to the word 'Bodhisattva', or to the words 'perfect wisdom', - which Bodhisattva should I then instruct and admonish in which perfect wisdom? 22

After further elaboration he goes on:

He courses in a sign when he courses in form, etc., or in the sign of form, etc., or in the idea that 'form is a sign', or in the production of form, or in the stopping or destruction of form, or in the idea that 'form is empty', or 'I course', or 'I am a Bodhisattva'. For he actually courses in the idea 'I

21

APP. pp.6-7.

22

APP. p.7.

am a Bodhisattva' as a basis. Or, when it occurs to him 'he who courses thus, courses in perfect wisdom and develops it', -- he courses only in a sign. Such a Bodhisattva should be known as unskilled in means. 23

We might be tempted to conclude from this passage that the Bodhisattva who is skilled in means will be he who has penetrated the truth of the 'signless' (ānimitta) as well, presumably, as the 'empty' (śūnya), and the 'wishless' (apraṇihita). There are many passages, furthermore, which would seem to corroborate this hypothesis. Yet such a conclusion would be quite mistaken. We would, for example, find it impossible to explain the chapter which is explicitly devoted to the subject of skill in means. For in the latter section, it is precisely the man who devotes himself exclusively to the 'three doors of deliverance' who is named unskilled in means; on the other hand, "upheld by skill in means, he increases his pure dharma²⁴s more and more". This seems to go directly counter to what would have been expected after a reading of the passage quoted above. At this point, then, one is apt to be completely confused.

The only way to cast light on the situation is to begin by acknowledging the very strange soteriology of this text, and, more generally, of the Prajñāpāramitā literature as a whole. First of all, these texts recognize that there exists a well-developed system of salutary actions to which the Bodhi-

²³
APP. pp.11-12.

²⁴
APP. p.376.

sattva ought to dedicate himself. These are, for example, the
 turning over of merit,²⁵ the practice of the six perfections,²⁶
 and the vowing to save all beings.²⁷ And there is, of course,
 the positive goal toward which the Bodhisattva progresses,
 namely Buddhahood, all-knowledge (sarvajñajñāna), full enlight-
 enment.²⁸ In general, the Aṣṭasāhasrikā encourages rather than
 rejects the plethora of positive activities associated in most
 Mahāyāna Buddhism with the Bodhisattvacaryā. And yet, it is
 inevitable that one who trains in the three doors to deliverance
 in the extremely radical way advocated by this Sūtra will run
 headlong into difficulties with regard to each of these activities.
 Consider the following typical passage:

The Lord: . . . by means of this great vehicle no one goes
 forth, no one has gone forth, no one will go forth.

25

See, e.g., APP. p.135.

26

See, e.g., APP. p.292. The Prajñāpāramitā texts are
 even referred to as "these Sutras associated with the six
 perfections" (APP., p.225).

27

E.g.: "We will become a shelter for the world, a
 refuge, the place of rest, the final relief, islands, lights,
 and leaders of the world. We will win full enlightenment,
 and become the resort of the world" (APP. p.293).

28

See, e.g., the above note.

Because neither of these dharmas, -- he who would go forth, and that by which he would go forth -- exist, nor can they be got at. Since all dharmas do not exist, what dharma could go forth by what dharma? 29

Subhuti: . . . Thus in each and every way I do not get at any of the dharmas which constitute a Bodhisattva. I do not see that dharma which the word 'bodhisattva' denotes. Perfect wisdom also I neither see nor get at. All-knowledge also I neither see nor get at. Since in each and every way I neither apprehend nor see that dharma, -- what dharma should I instruct and admonish through what dharma in what dharma? 'Buddha', 'Bodhisattva', 'perfect wisdom', all these are mere words. 30

To all appearances, the radically negative ontological viewpoint seems to cut down the entire positive soteriological structure. Herein lies the fundamentally paradoxical nature of the teaching of the Aṣṭasāhasrikā, from which issue numerous individual paradoxes. The Bodhisattva must progress to Buddhahood -- yet there is no Bodhisattva and there is no Buddhahood. He must save all beings -- yet there are no beings to be saved. It is most striking that this Sūtra fully

29

nāpi kaścittena mahāyānena niryyāto nāpi niryyāsyati nāpi niryyāti. tat kasya hetoḥ? yaśca niryyāyāt yena ca niryyāyāt ubhāvetau dharmmau na vidyete nopalabhyete. evam-avidyamāneṣu sarvvadharmmeṣu katamo dharmmaḥ katamena dharmmena niryyāsyati. APP., pp.23-24.

30

evam bhagavan sarvvena sarvvaṃ sarvathā sarvvaṃ bodhisattvadharmmamanupalabhamāno nāhaṃ bhagavan taṃ dharmmaṃ samanupaśyāmi yasyaitannāmadheyam yaduta bodhisattva iti. prajñāpāramitānāpi na samanupaśyāmi nopalebhe sarvvajñātānāpi na samanupaśyāmi nopalebhe. sohaṃ bhagavan sarvvena sarvvaṃ sarvathāsarvvaṃ taṃ dharmmamanupalabhamāno' samanupaśyan katamaṃ dharmmaṃ katamena dharmmena katamasmin dharmme' vavadigyaṃyanuśāsiṣyāmi? buddha iti bhagavannāmadheyamātrametat bodhisattva iti bhagavannāmadheyamātrametat prajñāpāramitā bhagavannāmadheyamātrametat. APP. p.25.

recognizes this difficulty (and, indeed, repeatedly brings it into focus), yet staunchly refuses to offer an intellectual 'solution' to it. Many Bodhisattvas will be thrown into confusion and fear, the text says, upon hearing these paradoxical expositions;³¹ one must be very advanced to hear them without trembling.³² The ideal is obviously to proceed courageously and wisely without choosing either of the apparently conflicting alternatives -- in fact, only one who proceeds thus can advance securely to the winning of full enlightenment. Hence, it is finally misleading to portray this paradoxical stance as a conflict of soteriology and ontology: both the vow to save beings (for example) and the insight into the unreality of beings are soteriologically essential.

Standing outside the actual process of Bodhisattvacaryā, and approaching it in a supposedly objective manner, one can penetrate only very slightly into this doctrine. Yet even from the outside we might at least guess that a Bodhisattva would need all the 'wisdom' and 'resourcefulness' he could muster to engage in this difficult pursuit. It is not unreasonable,

31

See, e.g., APP., pp.5,10.

32

See, e.g., the continuation of Subhūti's reproof of Śāriputra quoted above (p.16). Having put forth one of the paradoxes to Śāriputra he goes on: "A Bodhisattva who does not become afraid when this deep and perfect wisdom is being taught, would be recognized as not lacking in perfect wisdom, as standing at the irreversible stage of a Bodhisattva [sthito' vinivarttanīyāyām bodhisatvabhūmau], standing firmly, in consequence of not taking his stand firmly anywhere." (APP. pp.7-8).

then, that this is in fact the role which resourcefulness (or 'skill in means' -- upāya kauśalya), coupled with perfect wisdom (or the 'perfection of wisdom' -- prajñāpāramitā) plays in the Aṣṭasāhasrikā. It appears, that is to say, that upāya kauśalya denotes in this text the indescribable yet essential ability of the Bodhisattva to be engaged equally in the fulfilment of both sides of this paradoxical teaching.

At this point it would be most interesting to look at a passage wherein Conze discusses some developments which took place in the later and larger Prajñāpāramitā texts. It will be found that his comments largely bear out our interpretation of the meaning of upāya kauśalya.

Finally a substantial section was added to the Large Sūtra which deals almost exclusively with one of the facets of "Skill in means". Why, if everything is one vast emptiness, if there is no person, no object, no thought, no goal, no anything, should one strive for perfect enlightenment through a practice of virtue and a knowledge of dharmas? Hundreds of times Subhūti is made to ask the self-same question, and hundreds of times the Buddha answers it. The problem was obviously felt to be a most intractable one, and in the Śatasāhasrikā 413 leaves are devoted to it. The apparent conflict between the ontology of the Prajñāpāramitā and the practical needs of the struggle for enlightenment presented a serious difficulty because experience shows that the Prajñāpāramitā teachings are liable to degenerate into a complete nihilism as far as the practical side of the spiritual life is concerned. 33

.....

It has thus often been thought that in attempting to safeguard the spiritual intent of all religious striving, the Prajñāpāramitā takes away the motive for doing any striving at all. Apparently it was not easy to prove these nihilistic conclusions to be unjustified. If the paradox could have been

resolved by a few cogent arguments, they would have been given. By lavishing so many words on it, the authors of the Prajñāpāramitā showed by implication that no verbal answer is possible. The living rhythm of the spiritual life, lived from day to day, alone can teach what words fail to convey. 34

Conze's description of the kind of problem which the Large Sūtra relegates to 'skill in means' fits in perfectly with the latter concept as we have found it in the Aṣṭasāhasrikā. Conze speaks of 'one of the facets' of skill in means, thereby leaving room for other roles (and especially the more common Mahāyānic role, which corresponds to Lamotte's second category (above, p.68) -- "Upāyakauśalya pour autrui, pour faire mûrir les êtres"). It may be that the term upāya kauśalya does in fact play such other and varied roles in the larger and, presumably, later Prajñāpāramitā texts; as has already been mentioned, however, the meaning discussed above is virtually the only one found in the Aṣṭasāhasrikā and we have no basis for assuming that its authors were acquainted with any others.

It is quickly found that the text we are considering is, as Conze suggests, very concerned with the possibility of the ontological viewpoint taking away the motive for religious striving. It is said, in fact, that this 'nihilistic' stance makes one a Śrāvaka or a Pratyekabuddha.³⁵ A true Bodhisattva is

34

From "The Development of Prajñāpāramitā Thought" in Thirty Years of Buddhist Studies, pp.139-140.

35

See below, pp.79-80 and passim in Chapter 20 of APP.

36

one who can maintain his activity undaunted, and it is precisely his skill in means which enables him to do this. In order to establish this point more firmly, let us look at a few more passages from the text.

Of all the individual paradoxes that this soteriology embraces, perhaps the most striking, and at the same time among the most crucial, is that involving the saving of beings by the Bodhisattva. This paradox is stated boldly in the Aṣṭasahasrikā in terms such as the following:

The Lord: Here the Bodhisattva, the great being, thinks thus: 'countless beings I should lead to Nirvana and yet there are none who lead to Nirvana, or who should be led to it.' However many beings he may lead to Nirvana, yet there is not any being that has been led to Nirvana, nor that has led others to it. For such is the true nature of dharmas, seeing that their nature is illusory. 37

36

Suzuki expresses this well: "The Bodhisattva lives this mystery, which is regarded in the Prajñāpāramitā as Āścaryam, as marvelous. His eye turns in two opposite directions, inwardly and outwardly; so does his life proceed in two opposite directions of Śūnyatā and in the direction of Sarvasattva (all beings). He does not immerse himself in the ocean of eternal tranquillity; if he does, he is no more a Bodhisattva; he somehow keeps himself on the wavy surface of the ocean, allowing himself to suffer the fate of an aspen leaf on the turbulent waters. (From "The Philosophy and Religion of the Prajñāpāramitā" in On Indian Mahayana Buddhism, pp.95-96.) Suzuki, however, does not refer to this ability of the Bodhisattva as "skill in means": he appears to conceive of the latter as involving only the saving of creatures.

37

Bhagavānāha: iha subhūte bodhisattvasya mahāsatvasyaivambhavati. aprameyā mayā satvāḥ parinirvāpayitavyā iti. asaṅkhyeyā mayā satvāḥ parinirvāpayitavyā iti. na ca te santi yairye parinirvāpayitavyā iti. sa tāmstāvataḥ satvān parinirvāpayati. na ca sa kaścitsatvo yaḥ parinirvṛto yena ca

It is easy to see how one could, upon hearing and accepting such a statement as this, develop a 'nihilistic' attitude which would negate all spiritual endeavour and, specifically, lead one to abandon 'beings' to their own fate. And such an attitude, we might imagine, would be further reinforced by the meditations or concentrations (samādhi) concerning the three doors to deliverance; for surely these would interiorize and give conviction to these beliefs. Even further, would not these concentrations cancel out others which are aimed at the development of social feelings -- for example, the Brahma-vihāras? It is precisely such problems as these to which chapter 20 of this Sūtra, "Discussion of Skill in Means" (UpāyakauśalyamImamsā-parivarrtā), addresses itself. This chapter is extremely difficult in many ways, but it is relatively easy to show that skill in means fulfills the role indicated previously: it signifies the ability of the Bodhisattva to enter into both kinds of concentration, to train in the emptiness of beings while vowing out of compassion to save them. Two quotations should be

parinirvāpito bhavati. tat kasya hetoh? dharmmataiṣā subhūte dharmāṇāṃ māyādharmmatāmupādāya syāt. APP. pp.20-21.

38

One of the most accurate comments on this chapter which we have found is that of Conze, which was partly quoted above (p. 65). The lines which are relevant here are as follows: "This leaves the seventh, and by far the most difficult problem -- "skill in means". How can a Bodhisattva tone down, without at the same time losing, his gnostic insight and his transic exaltation to such an extent that he maintains contact with the world as it falsely appears to be and with the

adequate to make this clear:

The Lord: Just so, Subhuti, with a Bodhisattva who is full of pity and concerned with the welfare of all beings, who dwells in friendliness, compassion, sympathetic joy and evenmindedness, who has been taken hold of by skill in means and perfect wisdom, who has correctly turned over his wholesome roots, employing the kind of transformation which has the Buddha's sanction. Although he enters into the concentrations which are the doors to deliverance, i.e. the concentrations on emptiness, the signless and the wishless -- he nevertheless just does not realize the reality-limit, i.e. neither on the level of a Disciple, nor on that of a Pratyekabuddha. For he has at his disposal very strong and powerful helpers, in perfect wisdom and skill in means. Since he has not abandoned all beings, he is thus able to win full enlightenment, safely and securely. 39

essentially illusory beings whom he is pledged to save?"

There is little to quibble with here but it is sometimes difficult to avoid the feeling that Conze still believes that skill in means must be directly connected with the saving of beings. It must be stressed, therefore, that although Chapter 20 might give this impression, the bulk of occurrences of the term in this Sūtra show that there need be no such connection.

For a description of this same chapter, see also D.T. Suzuki, "The Philosophy and Religion of the Prajñāpāramitā", in On Indian Mahayana Buddhism, pp.82-87.

39

evamukte bhagavānāyusmantam subhūtimetadavocat:
 evameva subhūte bodhisattvo mahāsatvaḥ sarvasatvāhitānukampī
 maitrīvihārī karuṇāvihārī muditāvihārī upekṣāvihārī upāyakaśā-
 lyena prajñāpāramitayā ca parigrhītaḥ kuśalamūlāni samyakbuddhā-
 nujñātayā pariṇāmanayā pariṇāmya kiñcāpi śūnyatāmānimittam-
 apranihitaṇca samādhivimokṣamukhānyavatarati na tveva bhūtakotim
 sākṣātkaroti yaduta srāvakabhūmau vā pratyekbuddhabhūmau vā.
 tat kasya hetoh? tathā hyasya balavattamā drḍhatamāsca pari-
 grāhakā yaduta prajñāpāramitā upāyakaśālyāṇca. tenāsyāpari-
 tyaktāḥ sarvasatvāstenaiṣa pratibalaḥ svastinā kṣemenānuttarāṇ
 samyak sambodhimabhisambodduḥ. APP. p.373.

The 'friendliness, compassion, sympathetic joy and evenmindedness' alluded to here constitute, of course, the Brahma-vihāras.

The Lord: So it is, Subhuti. For the Bodhisattva has not abandoned all beings. He has made the special vows to set free all those beings. If the mind of a Bodhisattva forms the aspiration not to abandon all beings but to set them free, and if in addition he aspires for the concentration on emptiness, the Signless, the Wishless, i.e. for the three doors to deliverance, then that Bodhisattva should be known as one who is endowed with skill in means, and he will not realize the reality-limit midway, before his Buddha-dharmas have become complete. For it is this skill in means which protects him. 40

It may now be understood why skill in means was seen above (p. 62) to be a more solid criterion for distinguishing the Prajñāpāramitā texts than the concept of śūnyatā. For the latter may be characteristic of the training of Śrāvakas and Pratyekabuddhas who by such practices get rid of the āśravas and realize the 'reality-limit' (bhūta-koṭi);⁴¹ such people thereby make an end of 'becoming' and vanish without attaining Buddha-hood and without acting for the welfare of others. Skill in means, on the other hand, includes by implication the training in emptiness, but it includes also the safeguard against the danger of 'nihilism'.

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evamukte bhagavānāyusmantam subhūtimetadavocāt: evametāt subhūte evametāt. . . tathā hi subhūte bodhisattvasya mahāsatvasya sarvasatvā aparityaktāstasyeme evaṃrūpāḥ prapīdhānaviseṣa bhavanti mayāite sarasavāḥ parimocayitavyā iti. yadā bodhisattvo mahāsatva evaṃ cittamabhinirharati sarvasatvā manā' pariyaktāḥ mayāite parimocayitavyā iti. śūnyatāṅca samādhivimokṣamukhamabhinirharati ānimittaṅca samādhivimokṣamukhamabhinirharati. apraṇihitaṅca samādhivimokṣamukhamabhinirharati. tadā upāyakaṣālyasamānvagato bodhisattva mahāsatvo veditavyo nāyamantaro bhūta-koṭim sākṣātkariṣyatyaparipūrṇairbuddhadharmāih. tat kasya hetor? tathā hyasyopāyakaṣālyam rakṣām karoti. APP. p. 375.

41

See, e.g., APP. pp. 371-374.

Before leaving this discussion of Chapter 20, one last comment of Conze's should be examined. Speaking in the general context of the "New Wisdom School" he says:

A Bodhisattva is a being compounded of the two contradictory forces of wisdom and compassion. In his wisdom, he sees no persons; in his compassion he is resolved to save them. His ability to combine these contradictory attitudes is the source of his greatness, and of his ability to save himself and others.⁴²

It is tempting to suggest that this mysterious "ability" of which Conze speaks here, which allows the Bodhisattva to "combine these contradictory attitudes", is, for the Aṣṭasāhasrikā, just that 'skill in means' which we have been examining. And yet there are important reasons why the above scheme should not be accepted as descriptive of this text.⁴³ Most significant, perhaps, is the fact that there is portrayed no conflict between karuṇā and prajñā in the Aṣṭasāhasrikā. There is, to be sure, a 'contradictory' or 'paradoxical' element in the stance of the Bodhisattva, but this is not depicted in terms of karuṇā versus prajñā. Indeed, it would be more in line with this text to say that "in his wisdom he sees no persons, yet in his wisdom he is determined to save them". For the perfection of wisdom, working hand in hand with skill in means and compassion, is what supports the Bodhisattva as he works for the welfare of beings, and hence it protects him from the 'nihilism' which would

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Buddhism: Its Essence and Development, p.130.

⁴³

This implies, of course, no criticism of Conze, since he does not claim this characterization as valid of this particular Sūtra.

44

result if he merely saw no persons. Hence we may have reservations when Suzuki tells us that "this antithesis [of "Prajñā or Sarvajñatā versus Karuṇā or Upāya"] is fundamental in the Prajñāpāramitā and also in all the other teachings of Mahāyāna Buddhism." ⁴⁵ It can be confidently asserted (speaking strictly within the context of the Aṣṭasāhasrikā) that no such antithesis is in fact articulated.

What should be abundantly clear from the above discussion of the 'paradoxical' nature of Bodhisattvahood and the role of skill in means in relation to it, is that the various 'paradoxes', while perhaps finally resolvable at some experiential level (and hence not ultimately paradoxical or contradictory), certainly cannot be resolved by simply choosing one of the two options over the other. To do so, if we may repeat ourselves ad nauseam, would be to show oneself unskilled in means and would involve falling to the level of the Śrāvakas or Pratyekabuddhas.

If one bears this in mind, it will not be difficult to assess the following comment on this Sūtra by A.K. Warder:

That there are no 'beings' is not new and the apparent paradox that a bodhisattva or buddha causes beings to attain extinction whilst no beings become extinct is merely the

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See, e.g., the passage quoted above, p. 79.

45

"The Philosophy and Religion of the Prajñāpāramitā" in On Indian Mahayana Buddhism, p.87.

conjunction of two statements, the first at the 'concealing' everyday level and the second at the 'ultimate' philosophical level (cf. p.150 above). In case there should be any doubt about this the commentators explain statements using these terms. ⁴⁶

⁴⁷

The doctrine of two truths and the doctrine of two types of statement ⁴⁸ (which should be kept distinct) are difficult notions and entail all sorts of problems, but writers on Buddhism are quite consistently enthusiastic about them. ⁴⁹ No attempt will be made here to analyze and describe them-- and yet, inasmuch as they are used by Warder to support an interpretation which opposes our own, one or two comments are in order.

First, we may be excused for being sceptical of Warder's statement that "in case there should be any doubt" about the applicability of this scheme to the Aṣṭasāhasrikā, "the commen-

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Indian Buddhism, p.368.

⁴⁷

I.e. paramārtha-satya and saṃvṛti-satya, usually translated as 'ultimate truth' and 'conventional truth'.

⁴⁸

I.e. nītārtha and neyārtha, those of 'direct' and 'indirect' meaning. They are also called paramārtha and saṃvṛti, but not necessarily in conjunction with satya (truth).

⁴⁹

Dayal, e.g., says: "The Buddhist philosophers, having so vociferously asserted the non-existence of all things, at last manage to "deviate into sense" by the subtle theory of "two kinds of Truth". The Bodhisattva Doctrine in Buddhist Sanskrit Literature, p.247.

tators explain the statements using these terms". This is scarcely a clincher. The commentator to whom he refers to support this, Haribhadra, lived at least six centuries, and probably more, after the composition of the bulk of this Sūtra, and in that interval many Buddhist doctrines were being defined and developed.⁵⁰

Warder apparently views the two distinctions mentioned above as substantially the same, since he uses the expressions interchangeably.⁵¹ He regards the paramārtha or nitārtha type of statement as being in accord with "strict truth", while the saṃvṛti or neyārtha is in "concealing language" or "conventional everyday terms" in accordance with "the popular viewpoint"; it "requires to be restated to relate it to the philosophical standpoint of ultimate truth".⁵² This accords with Murti's opinion that "saṃvṛti satya is Truth so called; truth as con-

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Warder tries to establish the great antiquity of the 'two level of statement' device, concluding on rather scanty evidence that it had likely "been clearly formulated within about a century after the parinirvāṇa". He goes on to say that "To the Buddha the distinction probably seemed so obvious as to be taken for granted". Indian Buddhism, p.151. Since he considers it to be virtually identical with the 'two truth' scheme, he gives the latter an aura of ancientness far greater than is probably warranted. The 'developed' doctrine is not found, for example, in any of the three Mahāyāna texts examined herein.

51

See, e.g., ibid., pp.368,479

52

Ibid., pp.150-151.

53
 ventionally believed in common parlance". It would seem, then, that from the standpoint of the Bodhisattva, whose wisdom is far above that of the ignorant common folk (bāla prthag-jana), 'saṃvṛti' does not refer to 'truth' at all, but to untruth (asatya). And yet it has been seen above that the two sides of the 'apparently paradoxical' stance of the Bodhisattva are insisted upon with equal emphasis in the Aṣṭasāhasrikā and that neither one is preferred to the other. Both are necessary to the winning of Buddhahood. Nowhere is it said that a Bodhisattva is one who realizes that ultimately there are no beings, while simultaneously realizing that his title of saviour is merely a convenient 'popular' way of speaking which is ultimately false and to be transcended. To speak thus, on the contrary, would be to exemplify perfectly the 'solution' of the paradox characteristic of a Śrāvaka or Pratyekabuddha.
 54
 In fact, the only way one could accept Warder's interpretation would be to acknowledge that this Sūtra was interested in amusing, or even in mystifying and confusing, those who heard it rather than edifying them. For why else would it make such a fuss about the difficulty of

53
The Central Philosophy of Buddhism, p.244. Murti is not talking here, however, of the doctrine as found in Hīnayāna canons and commentaries, whereas Warder appears to feel that his comments apply to these, as well as to the later Mahāyāna formulation. There is some reason to be skeptical about Warder's account of the former; see, e.g., Jayatilleke's views in Early Buddhist Theory of Knowledge, pp.361-366.

54
 See the chapter on "Skill in Means" already discussed.

training in the paradoxical course of the Bodhisattva (i.e. why would it make much of skill in means)? All that one would need to know, after all, would be the two-truth distinction. If the decision is made to take the text seriously, as attempting to incite, instruct and enlighten, this would seem to entail the rejection of Warder's suggestions.

There is one last passage in the Aṣṭasāhasrikā which should be discussed. This is the one in the "Sadāprarudita" section, already referred to.⁵⁵ It is worthy of note because it contains the only instance of the term "skill in means" in this text which we feel to be clearly and definitely related to 'the teaching and saving of beings through deftness in devices'. In accordance with this meaning it is found that the concept is put to a certain use, is made to fill a particular role, which may be characterized as the severing of the Apparent from the Real. What this argument involves, quite simply, is the claim that something which appears to be the case is not really the case, but is merely a skilfully manifested guise or show - - a device - - intended to edify the hearer. As such it is good and worthwhile but must eventually be seen for what it is and recognized as not constitutive of the real situation. This function of skill in means will be seen to be of very great importance to the Vimalakīrti Nirdeśa and the Lotus Sūtra. In

the present passage we find a warning to students of the Dharma to be steadfast and to have faith in their teacher, even when he appears (due to his skill in means) not to be practicing what he is preaching:

When you weigh up these advantages, you are bound to treat that monk who preaches Dharma as the Teacher. You should not follow him with motives of worldly gain, but from desire for dharma, out of respect for dharma. You must also see through Mara's deeds. For there is always Mara, the Evil One, who may suggest that your teacher tends, enjoys and honours things that can be seen, heard, smelled, tasted or touched, when in actual fact he does so from skill in means, and has really risen above them. You should therefore not lose confidence in him, but say to yourself: 'I do not know that skill in means as he wisely knows it. He tends, enjoys and honours those dharmas, in order to discipline beings, in order to win wholesome roots for them. For no attachment to objective supports exists in Bodhisattvas.' 56

Before concluding this section, a few specific facts about the context of the occurrence of the term 'skill in means' in this text should be mentioned.

First, this quality is accredited in virtually every instance to Bodhisattvas. It is perhaps not surprising that it is denied to Śrāvakas and Pratyekabuddhas, considering the general aim of the text to exalt the Bodhisattva-yāna, but it is curious that it is not used more liberally in describing the Buddhas. The reason for this, however, is probably to be found by considering the meaning of the term in this Sūtra. For the Buddhas have completed their journey to absolute enlightenment and have no need of any such tool to self-progress. They are the teachers par excellence but, since there is no connection

seen between this and being skilled in means, the latter is not used to describe them.⁵⁷

Secondly, we might point out again the close association of upāya kauśalya with prajñāpāramitā. While this gives skill in means a sense of great importance (for the perfection of wisdom is without doubt the most central concept in the Aṣṭa-sāhasrikā), it also keeps it barren of any particular independence or distinctiveness: one gets the impression, generally, that it is merely an aspect of, or another name for, the perfection of wisdom.

The term occurs several times in connection with the six pāramitās, but not as though it were considered a member or near-member of the group, but rather as an element (along with the perfection of wisdom) essential for their correct execution.

Lastly, it should be noted that there is no strict connection portrayed between skill in means and compassion (karuṇā). These two are occasionally mentioned together, and are clearly seen to be complementary, but they are not bound

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It is interesting to note that while a section of the text is devoted to the subject of the Tathagata's knowledge of the minds and inclinations of beings (APP., pp.256-272) -- which is essential to skilful teaching -- there is no mention made here of skill in means. This contrasts sharply with what is found in, e.g., the Lotus Sūtra.

58

together in any formal scheme. This is interesting inasmuch as some authors lead one to expect that they would be.

59

Vimalakīrti Nirdeśa

The chief sources utilized for this section are the translations by Hokei Idzumi (into English) and Etienne Lamotte (into French). These works are based, in turn, upon a variety of translations of the original Sanskrit text (or texts), the latter being no longer extant. Idzumi has based himself largely upon Kumārajīva's translation, which has been the most popular in China; Lamotte has relied chiefly upon the translations of Dharmatāsīla (into Tibetan) and Hsüan-tsang (into Chinese).

These three versions differ significantly at certain points, and it has therefore been necessary to decide which one ought to be given pre-eminence. We have decided to concentrate, as far as possible, upon Kumārajīva's translation,

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A good example of the informal but intimate association of prajñā, upāya, and karuṇā characteristic of this text is the following: "In consequence of that he despises other Bodhisattvas who dwell in villages, but who are uncontaminated by mental activities associated with Disciples and Pratyekabuddhas, who dwell in the dwelling of wisdom with its many devices, and with its great compassion." (aparissuddhakāya-vānmanahkarmamānta eva samstato'nyānapi bodhisattvān mahāsatvān grāmāntavihārino'saṅkīrṇān śrāvaka-pratyekabuddhapratīsamuktair-manasikāraibḥ prajñopāyamahākaraṇāvihāravihārino'vamamsyate.) APP., p.392. This could be translated more simply as : "... who dwell in the dwelling of wisdom, devices, and great compassion".

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See especially Suzuki: "The Philosophy and Religion of the Prajñāpāramitā", in On Indian Mahayana Buddhism, pp.74ff; Outlines of Mahayana Buddhism, p.298, n.1.

and this will involve relying heavily upon Idzumi. The reason for this is simple: this paper is concerned with the concept of skill in means as it is found in early Buddhist texts. The earlier a translation is, the better it is suited to this purpose. Later translations may reflect, through the medium of the translator himself, a later stage of Buddhism than is actually portrayed in the Sanskrit original; they may even be based upon later Sanskrit 'originals'.⁶⁰ The earliest extant translation of the Vimalakīrti Nirdeśa is that of Chih⁶¹ Ch'ien, accomplished early in the third century A.D.; this work has not, unfortunately, been translated into a modern European language. This leaves Kumārajīva's translation (done in 406 A.D.)⁶² as the earliest feasible version upon which to base the present essay.⁶³

The plan followed herein, therefore, is as follows:

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We have no guarantee, of course, that a translation, simply because it is 'late', is based upon a late 'original'. In the present case, for example, the Hsüan-tsang version is the most elaborate and detailed of the above three and gives the impression of having a later and more developed Sanskrit prototype than the others; while this translation is in fact later than Kumārajīva's, however, it is two centuries earlier than that of the Dharmatāsīla.

61

See Vkn. (L), p.3.

62

See Vkn. (L), p.8.

63

Hsüan-tsang's rendition is placed at 650 A.D. (Vkn. (L), p.11), and Dharmatāsīla's in the early 9th century A.D. (Vkn. (L), p.14).

Idzumi's text will be given most frequently, supported by the Chinese of Kumārajīva (Taishō 475) where necessary. Lamotte's translation will be referred to when the situation seems to warrant it.

Lamotte gives an excellent description of the general mood of the Vimalakīrti:

Le Vimalakīrtinirdeśa est peut-être le joyau de la littérature bouddhique du Grand Véhicule. Frémissant de vie et rempli d'humour, il n'a ni la prolixité des autres Mahā-yānasūtra ni la technicité des Śāstra bouddhiques dont il partage cependant la science et l'information. Loin de se perdre dans le désert des doctrines abstraites et impersonnelles, son auteur réagit à tout coup devant la profondeur de la loi bouddhique à laquelle il n'épargne ni les critiques ni les sarcasmes. C'est un virtuose du paradoxe qui pousse l'indépendance d'esprit jusqu'à l'irrévérence. 64

Considering its relatively early date, the lively audacity of the Vimalakīrti is most striking. We find here neither the defensive attitude of the Aṣṭasāhasrikā nor the wily, conciliatory stance of the Lotus. In its dialogue with other Buddhist groups, it is frank and confident, at the same time managing to avoid giving the impression of haranguing. It is found that in both its straightforward presentation of the Dharma and in its discussions within the Buddhist body, the concept of 'skill in means' plays a central role and is used in a subtle and sophisticated fashion. We might first take note of some of the facts regarding the context of the

occurrence of the term 'skill in means'.

It is noticed that this particular ability is accredited in this text to both Bodhisattvas and Buddhas. This might warn us that we are dealing with a different quality from that encountered in the Aṣṭasāhasrikā. For if it can belong to Buddhas it is obviously not primarily an aid to self-attainment; it must, on the contrary, be an aid to the 'other'-directed aims of the Tathāgatas.⁶⁵ This is exactly what will be found to be the case.

Equally noteworthy is the fact that skill in means is given a very independent status in the Vimalakīrti. It is not continually associated with, or made dependent upon, any other single item, as, for example, the perfection of wisdom. Where it is connected with the latter, it is granted an equal status.⁶⁶ The term⁶⁷ does occur fairly often, however, in close

65

This is not meant to imply that Bodhisattvas do not direct their efforts toward the betterment of others -- if they did not do so they would not be Bodhisattvas -- it is meant to suggest, rather, that only the Buddhas have completed their course (caryā) and can thus, immediately and completely, give themselves to the effective saving of beings.

66

E.g.: "Prajñāpāramitā is the mother of the Bodhisattva; Upāya is the father; all of the leaders of men are born of such . . ." (Vkn.(I), IV,51). See also Vkn.(I) III,238-240. Passages such as this are very significant in light of later Tantric developments -- see, for instance, Bharati's The Tantric Tradition, chapter 8.

67

By "the term" we shall mean both upāya kauśalya and

proximity to the six perfections, and in some cases seems to be very near to admission into this scheme as a pāramitā of full rank.⁶⁸ Let us now turn to a consideration of the central meaning of 'skill in means'

It quickly becomes apparent that this term signifies, in the Vimalakīrti, the ability to deftly lead, teach, and save beings. In his praise of the Bodhimāṇḍa, for example, Vimalakīrti says: "The Necessary Means is the Bodhimāṇḍa [sic]⁶⁹ as it teaches all beings". This is the constant connotation of the term in this text. Since we are, then, dealing with skilful teaching and guiding, we may refer to some

upāya (where the latter is used in the technical sense). The Chinese equivalents for these vary from version to version, showing greater precision and sophistication in later translations. Hence for example, Chih Ch'ien usually has 權 or 善權, only occasionally using 方便. Kumārajīva almost always has 方便 and 善方便. Hsüan-Tsang usually has 方便善巧.

68

See, e.g., Vkn.(I) III,55 and IV,48-49. In the former of these passages skill in means is in fact a pāramitā in the corresponding lines in the versions of Dharmatāsīla and Hsüan-Tsang, where a list of the full 10 perfections is given. (See Vkn.(L), p.99.) Both Chih Ch'ien and Kumārajīva list only 6 perfections here, and elsewhere in all versions there are only these 6 mentioned.

69

Vkn.(I), III,226. 方便是造場教化衆生故。T.475, p.542, c24. See also, e.g., Vkn.(I), III, 64: "... with the Necessary Means he brings all beings to perfection..." (隨其方便則成就衆生。T.475, p.538, b29-c1.)

of the relevant comments made in Chapter 1. It was suggested there (p. 38) that after discernment of the hearers's capacities, the teacher might use a three-fold adjustment in order to adapt to them, viz. adjustment of the method of teaching, of the doctrine taught, and of the teacher himself. The Vimalakīrti takes for granted the ability of the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas⁷⁰ to penetrate the capacities or inclinations of beings, and it is made quite clear that this ability is essential to those⁷¹ who would be skilled in means. It is further said that⁷² Śrāvakas or 'Hīnayānists' do not have this talent and hence⁷³ should not attempt to set forth the Dharma. The subsequent

70

"These Bodhisattvas . . . were acquainted with the capacity of all beings; . . . they were acquainted with all the places occupied by all beings and their mental dispositions. . ." (Vkn.(I), III,55,56) "Capacity" and "mental disposition" probably stand for indriya and āśaya respectively: see Vkn.(L), pp.99,100.

71

See below, pp.99, 109-110.

72

小乘 ('small vehicle') for the Sanskrit 'Śrāvaka-yāna'; it is not, that is to say, apparent that the term 'Hīnayāna' is actually found in the original Sanskrit.

73

Vimalakīrti says: "How can they be taught and led by the doctrine of the Hinayana? I know that the Hinayana knowledge is, like the blind, limited, superficial, and can not discern different capacities of all things," Pūrṇa adds that "Since that time, I am convinced that no Śrāvakas, being incapable of understanding of others' faculties, ought to preach the law." Vkn.(I), III,147. 如何以小乘法而教導之。我觀小乘智慧微淺猶如盲人。

three-fold adjustment is also found herein, though, of course, this division is not explicitly made. Of the three aspects, that which is probably most consciously and frequently associated with the term 'skill in means' is the adjustment of the teacher or leader himself. The Bodhisattvas, particularly, are often said to manifest themselves in countless forms and guises for the sake of beings.⁷⁴ The nature of each of these three adjustments should become apparent as we proceed. Having established the general meaning of the term, we should now examine some of the specific functions of skill in means in the teaching of the Vimalakīrti.

The two particular roles which will be examined may be classes under the general heading of what was referred to earlier as the scheme of 'the Apparent and the Real'.⁷⁵ In each instance, the purpose of the argument is to show that what is really the case is very different indeed from what appears to most people to be the case. The first example involves a

不能分別一切衆生根之利鈍。；我念聲聞不見人根不應說法T.475, p.541, a3-5,10-11.

74

For example: "Practice the mercy of the Necessary Means as he manifests himself in all things." Vkn.(I), III, 343. 行方便慈一切示現故。 T.475, p.547, b28-29.

75

See above, p.86. As in the earlier case, this function is tied to the 'teaching and leading' meaning of 'skill in means'.

Mahāyānist critique of the Hīnayāna or Śrāvaka-yāna. The second involves what appears to be an argument against some sort of Mahāyānist 'pure land' movement.

There are many sides to the Vimalakīrti's debate with the Śrāvakas, some involving the question of conduct and discipline, others centred on more purely doctrinal issues.

Regarding the former, we would seem to be witnessing in part a reaction against 'monkishness': that is, against an over-emphasis on the value of external conditions of renunciation, poverty, celibacy, meditational exercise, and other similar things which were, by and large, restricted to the saṅgha.⁷⁶ The point is not that renunciation, poverty, and so on are not important, but that there is no necessary connection between them and external circumstances. To see the kind of

76

Regarding 'renunciation', see, e.g., Vimalakīrti's conversation with Rahula, Vkn.(I), III,150-151. ("Well, O Rahula, thou shouldst not preach to them the advantages of renunciation. And why? Not to have any advantages or merits -- this is renunciation".)

Regarding 'meditation', see the conversation with Śāriputra, Vkn.(I), III,141-142. ("I remember one day I was quietly seated meditating under a tree in a forest; then Vimalakīrti came to me and said: 'Well O Śāriputra, to sit thus is not necessarily a quiet sitting. To sit quietly means to withdraw both mind and body from the triple world. Not to rise from the meditation of cessation (i.e. absolute tranquillity) and yet to exercise all manners of daily life, -- this is to sit quietly. Following the manner of ordinary people without renouncing the righteous law, -- this is to sit quietly. . .'" (cf. APP., pp.391-394.)

As for 'poverty' and 'celibacy' see the description of Vimalakīrti, below pp.99-100.

dialogue which takes place, we might look at the interesting conversation which takes place between Śāriputra and the devī. After the latter has strewn flowers over the assembly, the following exchange occurs:

Then the heavenly maiden asked Śāriputra: "Why art thou striving to remove the flowers?" He replied: "These flowers are unlawful; therefore I must remove them."

The heavenly maiden said: "Thou shouldst not deem these flowers unlawful. And why? These flowers discriminate not between one thing and another; it is thyself that does cherish the thought of discrimination. So far as the Law of Buddha is concerned, if any mendicant has discrimination in his mind he is said to be unlawful: if there be no discrimination nothing is unlawful. . . 77 (our emphasis)

The interesting thing about this passage is that Śāriputra's refusal to accept the flowers is in accordance with certain Vinaya prohibitions. ⁷⁸ Another passage which involves the Vinaya, and shows the attitude of this text toward it, is that concerning the Śrāvaka Upāli. The following sections will give some idea of its message:

I remember at one time there were two Bhikshus who had committed a breach of discipline . . . I preached to them the law according to the doctrine of discipline. Then Vimalakīrti came to me and said: 'Well, O Upāli, thou shouldst not increase the burden of those poor Bhikshus, rather shouldst thou directly exterminate their pain of contrition instead of disturbing

77

Vkn.(I), III,345. The Chinese corresponding to the two emphasized portions, in the same order as above is: (i) 此輩不如法是以去之。T.475, p.547, c27-28.

(ii) 若於佛法出家有所分別為不如法。若無所分別是則如法。T.475, p.548, a1-2.

78

See Vkn.(L), p.272, n.27.

their minds. And why? The nature of sin is neither within nor in the midst; as it is taught by the Buddha, all beings are unclean when their minds are unclean; all beings are pure when their minds are pure; the mind is neither within nor without nor in the midst, and so all things are as the mind is.

. . . O Upāli, a false idea is uncleanliness, being free from false ideas is pureness; O Upāli, all things are transient; nothing remains unchanged; they are like a phantom or a flash of lightning; nothing waits for another; nothing continues in a stay; all things are illusions; they are as dreams, a mirage, the moon reflected in the water, reflections in a mirror, caused only by false ideas. One who knows this is said to be obedient to discipline, and one who knows this is said to be learned.' 79 (our emphasis)

It is not clear what Śrāvaka group or groups the Vimalakīrti
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has in mind in its criticisms, nor is it easy to say just
81
what the opinion of this text is toward Vinaya in general;

79

Vkn.(I), III,149-150. For the emphasized portion, Kumārajīva has: 其知此者是名舍律其知此者
是名善解。 T.475, p.541, b28-29.

Lamotte, for the same line, gives: "Ceux qui savent cela sont nommés les vrais gardiens de la discipline (vinaya-dhara); ceux qui savent cela sont bien disciplinés (suvinīta)."
Vkn.(L), p.176.

80

Some scholars would doubt that it is the Theravādins, and would suggest instead, perhaps, the Sarvāstivādins and Sautrāntikas. (See, e.g., Conze, Buddhist Thought in India, p.203 and Murti, The Central Philosophy of Buddhism, p.69).

81

It could be argued, of course, that the Vimalakīrti is merely interested in promoting 'true' Vinaya ('true' discipline and 'true' purity), and yet in its devastation of the belief in external criteria for discipline and purity it may in fact destroy the basis for 'Vinaya' in the usual sense (as involving formal verbal expression, observation, and enforcement.)

what is certain, however, is that it connects the Śrāvaka-yāna with a stance of strict adherence to formal Vinaya and connects this attitude, in turn, with rigid dogmatism which fails to penetrate to the essence of the Dharma. In conveying this message, the Vimalakīrti utilizes, as might be expected, the concept of skill in means; for this allows one to argue that what appears to be lawful (as, for example, Śāriputra's rejection of the flowers) is really unlawful, and vice versa.

A good illustration of the way skill in means is used in the attack on this type of 'monkishness' is the presentation of the layman Vimalakīrti himself. He is introduced as follows:

At that time there dwelt, in the great city of Vaiśālī, a wealthy householder named Vimalakīrti. Having done homage to the countless Buddhas of the past . . . walking in the way of wisdom, acquainted with the necessary means, fulfilling the great vows, comprehending the past and future of the intentions of all beings, understanding also their strength and weakness of mind, ever pure and excellent in the way of the Buddha, remaining loyal to the Mahāyāna, . . . residing in Vaiśālī only for the sake of the necessary means for saving creatures, abundantly rich, ever careful of the poor, pure in self-discipline, obedient to all precepts, removing all anger by the practice of patience, removing all sloth by the practice of diligence, removing all distraction of mind by intent meditation, removing all ignorance by fullness of wisdom; though he is but a simple layman, yet observing the pure monastic discipline; though living at home, yet never desirous of anything; though possessing a wife and children, always exercising pure virtues; though surrounded by his family, holding aloof from worldly pleasures; though using the jewelled ornaments of the world, yet adorned with the spiritual splendour; though eating and drinking, yet enjoying the flavour of the rapture of meditation; though frequenting the gambling house, yet leading the gamblers into the right path; . . . manifesting to all the error of passion when in the house of debauchery; persuading all to seek the higher things, when at the shop

of the wine dealer; . . . thus by such countless means Vimalakīrti, the wealthy householder, rendered benefit to all beings. 82
(our emphasis)

Vimalakīrti appears to engage in all the normal practices that might be expected of a wealthy layman, yet in reality he remains ever unblemished, "observing the pure monastic discipline"; his residence in Vaiśālī and all of his actions there are merely skilful devices (方便) to enable him to save beings. In drawing such a picture, the Vimalakīrti Nirdeśa succeeds in championing the cause of the layman and in becoming the layman's text par excellence.

This same scheme is utilized in describing the general conduct of Bodhisattvas; the following verses, it will be noticed, effect an even more radical separation of the Apparent 83
from the Real than the above passage:

17. Ils connaissent les oeuvres de Māra (mārakarman) et se conforment (anuparivartin) aux Māra. Mais c'est parce qu'ils

82

Vkn.(I), III,138-140. The Chinese corresponding to the three emphasized portions in the same order as above is:

(1) 善於智度。通達方便大願成就。明了衆生心之所趣。又能分別諸根利鈍。
T.475, p.539, a11-13. (11) 欲度人故以善方便居毘耶離。T.475, p.539, a15-16. (111) 長者維摩詰。以如是等無量方便饒益衆生。
T.475. p.539, b8-9.

83

Lamotte's translation will be given here, since he has access to the original Sanskrit of this passage through a quotation of the Śikṣāsamuccaya. There are, for our purposes, no significant differences between this version and that of Kuamārajīva -- the choice has been based on the greater smoothness and precision of the former.

ont atteint l'autre rive des moyens salvifiques (upāyavāraṃ gataḥ) qu'ils manifestent de telles oeuvres.

18. . . . Ils se font vieux ou malades et se montrent morts, mais c'est pour faire mûrir les êtres qu'ils jouent avec ces simulations.

30. . . . Ils se livrent aux plaisirs des sens tout comme à l'extase des extatiques; ils font la perte de Māra et ne lui donnent pas prise.

32. . . . Volontairement ils se font courtisanes pour attirer les hommes; mais les ayant séduits par le choc du désir, ils les établissent dans le savoir des Buddha.

33. . . . Continuellement ils se font maîtres de village, chefs de caravane, chapelains, premiers ministres ou ministres, pour faire le bien des êtres.

39. . . . Tous les moyens possibles pour qu'un être aime la loi, ils les mettent tous en oeuvre car ils sont bien exercés en grands moyens salvifiques.

40. . . . Infinis sont leurs exercices; infini aussi est leur domaine. Doués d'un savoir infini, ils délivrent une infinité d'êtres vivants. 84

While this description of the manifestation of the Bodhisattvas is probably intended to shock Śrāvaka standards of proper conduct, there is also a challenge on the doctrinal level, particularly in verse 18. Here it is suggested that the Bodhisattvas may appear as old, sick, or dead, but that this is merely a "simulation" (māyādharmā)⁸⁵ used to bring

84

Vkn.(L), pp.295-296, 298-299. The Sanskrit for verse 39 is as follows:

yena yenaiva cāṅgena satvo dharmarato bhavet,
darśenti hi kriyāḥ sarvā mahopāyāsuśikṣitāḥ. Vkn.(L), p.299.

85

Vkn.(L), p.296, verse 18.

creatures to ripeness or maturity in the Buddhist Way; it is, in other words, an instance of upāya. There is little doubt that this view is put forth in conscious opposition to the belief of certain 'Hīnayāna' schools that the Bodhisattvas and, indeed, even the Buddhas, are really subject to the above disasters.⁸⁶ This raises the question, then, of the function of 'skill in means' in criticizing Śrāvaka doctrine, rather than simply conduct and discipline. In terms of our previously discussed 'three-fold adjustment' we move from a concern chiefly with the adjustment of the teacher ('manifestation' of the Bodhisattva in various guises) to a concern with adjustment of method and doctrine.

The basic thrust of the Vimalakīrti's claim in this area is that certain teachings (especially those valued most by the Śrāvakas), though apparently Śākyamuni Buddha's authoritative and final word on the doctrine, are not really so. It is argued that although they have indeed been preached by the Lord, they have been given with due regard for the circumstances

86

The Theravāda, for example, would hold this to be the case. With regard to the Bodhisattvas, one need only look at a few of the Jātaka tales. With regard to the Buddha (and to the other previous Buddhas as well, even though their lifetimes may have been longer) see, e.g., the Mahāparinibbāna Suttanta. The Mahāsaṅghikas differed radically on the subject of the Lord's supra-mundane (lokottara) nature, but theirs were obviously not representative of Śrāvaka opinions in the eyes of the Vimalakīrti. See, e.g. Vimalakīrti's conversation with the famous Śrāvaka (who is merely a Śrāvaka for this text), Ānanda -- Vkn.(I), III,151-153.

in accordance with his great skill in means, and hence cannot be expected to be applicable at all times or in all places.

Some of the most significant teachings which meet with this kind of 'relativization'⁸⁷ are those mentioned by Vimalakīrti as being among the "severe words" necessary to save creatures in this Saha world, "who are obstinate and difficult to sub-⁸⁸due". The following selection is representative in this respect:

"Beings of this world are very self-willed and difficult to teach. Therefore, Buddha preaches to them in severe words in order to subdue them: the unhappy regions such as hell, the animal world, and the world of hungry spirits are the regions for the ignorant; evil deed is the result of evil deed; evil speech is the result of evil speech, evil thought is the result of evil thought; . . . ignorance is the result of ignorance; so with the initiation into disciplinary life, living disciplinary life, violation of disciplinary life, what ought to be done, what ought not to be done, the obstacles, absence of obstacles, guiltiness, purity or impurity, passion or passionlessness, right or wrong, the created or the uncreated, the world or Nirvāṇa -- with these divers doctrines he subdues the minds of all beings and conquers them; because they are as difficult to subdue as those of monkeys. . . ." 89

It is made quite clear that the above teachings are not found in many other Buddha-ksetras, where instruction takes place

87

We do not mean to imply that the truth-value of these utterances is seen as relative to their circumstances, but simply that their effectiveness is seen to be thus relative. The problem of 'truth and skill in means' will be dealt with later.

88

Vkn.(I), IV, 188-189.

89

Vkn.(I), IV, 188-189.

90

by quite different means. It is also explicitly said that this ability to adapt to the inclinations of the beings of a particular world is none other than 'skill in means'.⁹¹

Now it is not immediately apparent that anything radically different is being said here from that which one might encounter in, for example, the Pāli Canon. For we saw previously that in the Dīgha Nikāya the Buddha was represented as tailoring his teaching to suit his hearers' inclinations. He did not speak discriminately of 'Nirvāṇa', for instance, but preceded such higher truths with discourses on the value of giving (dāna), morality (sīla), heaven (sagga) and so on; if these did not have the desired effect of uplifting the hearer, 'Nirvāṇa' was not mentioned at all. Furthermore, if we may broaden our gaze so as to include the extra-canonical Jātaka material, we find numerous interesting possibilities suggested.

92

One outstanding case, for instance, shows how the Buddha was able to recognize, by means of his special powers, the utter uselessness of the theme of 'impurity' (mentioned in the above list) for one particular man; this then prompted him to take

90

See, e.g., Vkn.(I), IV, 188 and Vkn.(I), IV, 350.

91

Vkn.(I), IV, 352.

92 Jā. I, 182-184.

93
a different tack. Surely, then, the Vimalakīrti is not proposing anything radically new -- at the most, it is merely extending the process observed in the Pāli literature.

It is quite true that the Vimalakīrti's scheme is similar to that found in the Pāli material. At the same time, however, a new and very significant element can be found, namely the concept of the Buddha-field (buddhakṣetra). In the eyes of the Vimalakīrti it is not a simple matter of how and when to communicate to an individual the various elements of the more or less established body of doctrine: much of this supposedly established doctrine is in fact peculiar to the Sāhā-world (the Buddha-field of Śākyamuni). This opens the door to an infinite number of new teachings, which may be as different from those of this world as 'dāna' is from 'Nirvāṇa'.

It should be evident from what has been said that the critique of the Śrāvaka-yāna, which embraces both conduct and doctrine, is radical and makes significant use of the concept of skill in means. It would be interesting to see how the Vimalakīrti utilizes the same concept, in the same general way (as severing the Apparent from the Real), to establish a position seemingly taken in conscious opposition to some form

93

It may be noted that, interestingly enough, another Jātaka cites this one as exemplifying the Buddha's skill in means. (Jā. IV, 224)

of Mahāyānist 'pure land' Buddhism.

It would be dangerous to assume that any one text was the target of this criticism, but we have little choice but to base our surmises regarding the tenets of this hypothetical pure land movement chiefly on the larger Sukhāvatī-vyūha.

This became one of the chief Sūtras in the Amitābha-centred pure land school, and it is generally considered to be older, and hence more suited to our purposes, than its smaller counterpart.⁹⁴

In the larger Sukhāvatī-vyūha, passages such as the following are typical:

And again, O Ānanda, in the ten quarters, and in each of them, in all the Buddha countries equal in number to the sand of the Gaṅgā, the blessed Buddhas equal in number to the sand of the Gaṅgā, glorify the name of the blessed Amitābha, the Tathāgata, they preach his fame, they proclaim his glory, they extol his virtue. And why? Because all beings who hear the name of the blessed Amitābha, and having heard it, raise their thought with joyful longing, even for once only, will not turn away again from the highest perfect knowledge / te sarve'vaivartikatāyām saṁtīyanuttarāyāḥ samyaksaṁbodheḥ / 95

By the very fact that Amitābha's salvational potency is as great as this, it seems to be implied that he is in some sense a greater Buddha than most. In accordance with this,

94

See, e.g., Nariman, Literary History of Sanskrit Buddhism, p.78.

95

The Larger Sukhāvatī-Vyūha, trans. M. Muller, in "Sacred Books of the East", Vol. XLIX, Part II, pp. 44-45. The Sanskrit is from Bon-zō-Wa-Ei-Gappeki-Jōdosanbukyō, p.96.

he receives lavish praise from the other Buddhas, as shown in this passage. In fact, this Sūtra is not at all hesitant in proclaiming the glory of Amitābha at the expense of his fellow Buddhas. It is said that the Dharmākara (Amitābha-to-be) concentrated on making his Buddha-field "eighty-one times more immeasurable, noble and excellent than the perfection of the eighty-one hundred thousand niyutas of kotī's of Buddha countries that had been told him by the Bhagavat Lokeśvararāja, the Tathāgata".⁹⁶ Amitābha's life is said to be immeasurable,⁹⁷ the number of his Bodhisattvas is immeasurable,⁹⁸ and his personal splendour is so great that he illumines even the Buddha-fields of many other Buddhas.⁹⁹ In respect of both his own person and his field, therefore, he shows himself to be the foremost of the Tathāgatas. This kind of exaltation of one particular Buddha would seem to be basic to much if not all 'pure land' Buddhism; for, the whole point of trying to be born in such a land is that it is pure, as opposed to one's own world (for example, the Sahā-world of Śākyamuni) which is more or less impure, and that it is not only more agreeable to live in but also more conducive to spiritual attainment. It is, in short,

⁹⁶
The Larger Sukhāvatī-Vyūha, p.11.

⁹⁷
Ibid., p.32.

⁹⁸
See, e.g., ibid., pp.66-68.

⁹⁹
Ibid., p.28.

a better land and belongs to a Buddha who is in some sense 'better' than one's own.

It is not difficult to see why this kind of exaltation would meet with resistance from some parts of the Buddhist community. It would be opposed by those who were championing a rival 'pure land', by those (probably the majority) who remained loyal to Śākyamuni Buddha and were unwilling to subscribe to the view that he and his land were inferior, and, lastly, by those who were opposed in principle to the elevation of any one Buddha over the others. The Vimalakīrti allies itself with the latter two groups, insisting on the equality of all Tathāgatas and of their worlds, and spending considerable time in a special defense of Śākyamuni and the Sahā-loka.

The essential argument of the Vimalakīrti can be seen in the following passages:

"... Therefore, O Ratnakūṭa, when the Bodhisattva wishes to obtain a pure land, he should purify his mind, and as his mind is purified, purified is his Buddha-land."

At that time Śāriputra, through the power of Buddha thought within himself thus: "If it be true that when the Bodhisattva is pure in mind, then his world is pure, why is this Buddha-land of ours so impure as we see it, which was established by the Buddha out of his pure mind when he was a Bodhisattva?" The Buddha knowing his thought spoke to him and said: "What thinkest thou, O Śāriputra, is it the fault of the sun or the moon that the blind cannot see the brightness thereof?" Śāriputra replied: "Nay, O lord, it is not the fault of the sun or the moon, but it is the fault of the blind." The Buddha continued, "Then, O Śāriputra, it is not the fault of the Tathāgata that beings who, because of their sins, cannot see the pureness of this Buddha-land of ours. Really, O Śāriputra this land of ours is ever pure; but it is thou that

canst not see its purity."

At that time the Buddha touched the earth with his toes, and lo, all the three thousand great Chilocosms were seen adorned with many a hundred-thousand precious jewels, as the Treasure-adorned land of the Treasure-adorned Buddha possessing countless qualities; the entire assembly finding each seated upon a jewelled lotus-flower praised the Buddha saying that such had never before been seen. The Buddha then spoke to Śāriputra and said: "Now hast thou seen this world of ours pure and adorned?" Śāriputra said: "Well, O Blessed One, it is what I have never seen the like before, never even heard of such a wonder as this splendour now unfolded before us." The Buddha spoke to Śāriputra: "This world of ours is ever pure as this; yet to save beings of inferior capacities is this wicked and impure world shown. . . ." 100 (our emphasis)

Here it is claimed that the Saḥā-world is perfectly pure: it is because of the blindness of men that this purity is not usually seen. It is evident, furthermore, that the world does not merely 'appear' as impure in a mechanical sort of way through the veil of ignorance -- it is shown thus through the deliberate action of the Buddha. This means that the seeming impurity of our world is not merely "not the fault of the Tathāgata" but is, on the contrary, a proof of his great wisdom and skilfulness. By this device he saves beings

100

Vkn.(I), III,64,65. The Chinese corresponding to the emphasized portions is: (i) 舍利弗, 我此土國淨而汝不見。T.475, p.538, c12. (ii) 我佛國土常淨。為欲度斯下劣人故。示是穢惡不淨土耳。T.475, p.538, c25-27.

101

of low inclinations (hīnādhimukti).

This basic position is reiterated and elaborated throughout the Vimalakīrti. The defense of Śākyamuni and the Sahā-world receives special emphasis in a section describing the visit of the Bodhisattvas from the Buddha-field Sarva-ghandasugandhā. In this passage, each major point of controversy is dealt with. It is again stated that the Sahā-world is the equal of any Buddha-ksetra -- all worlds are perfectly pure and empty as space -- and yet, due to their great skill in means, the Buddhas manifest their lands differently. Similarly, all Tathāgatas are equal: there is no high or low, lesser or greater. In an extended passage devoted to this topic, the specific respects in which Buddhas are equal are listed; they include not only such fundamental

101

See Vkn.(L), p.324.

102

See, e.g., Vkn.(I), IV,186,351. Cf. Vkn.(L), pp.326,343,344.

103

"The necessary means of all Buddhas are so inconceivable that they manifest in order to save all beings different lands according to the needs of all beings." Vkn.(I), IV, 352. 諸佛方便不可思議。為度眾生故。隨其所應現佛國異。 T.475, p.554, b1-2. Cf. Vkn.(L), p.346.

104

Vkn.(I), IV,351; Vkn.(L), pp.344-345.

things as enlightenment and wisdom, but also such qualities as duration of life, and ability to teach beings. In other words, such distinctions as appear to set Amitābha apart in the larger Sukhāvatī-Vyūha are ruled out.

The next point made in this connection is that the Bodhisattvas of the Sahā-world are at least as worthy, and, it is hinted, perhaps more worthy, than the Bodhisattvas living in the supposedly pure lands. Hence we find the following conversation taking place between the Bodhisattvas from Sarvagandhasugandhā and Vimalakīrti:

Those Bodhisattvas having heard these words praised him saying: "We have never heard the like before; Śākyamuni, the world-honoured one, concealing his infinite power of independence which is never restricted, and manifesting only those things desired by the poor delivers them [from suffering], and also these Bodhisattvas of this world who are never wearied and always ready to condescend to become poor, are born in this land of Buddha cherishing infinite great compassion."

Vimalakīrti said: "It is even as you say that the Bodhisattvas of this world are firm in their great compassion towards all beings; and the happiness which is bestowed on all beings by them throughout their lives, is of greater worth than all the deeds wrought in your land during hundredd of thousands of Kalpas. 105 (Idzumi's brackets)

This passage is very significant in that it gives as the reason for the Bodhisattvas dwelling in the Sahā-world their "infinite great compassion".¹⁰⁶ This foreshadows the words of a later

105

Vkn.(I), IV,189.

106

無量大悲. T.475, p.553, a19. The Sanskrit is probably acintyamahākaruṇā -- see Vkn.(L), p.331.

Sūtra, the Karuṇāpundarīka:

"On account of the vows (pranidhāna-vaśena), bodhisattva take either pure or impure buddhalands.

Bodhisattvas Mahāsattvas take impure buddhalands, because they are provided with great compassion (mahākaruṇā-sam-anvāgatatvāt).

As for myself [Śākyamuni] according to my own pranidhāna, I have appeared in this degraded world of five-fold defilements (pratikaṣṭe pañca-kaṣāye buddhakṣetra upapannaḥ)" (KP 51, 16-52, 5).¹⁰⁷

There is little doubt that this text was indeed reacting against pure land movements and attempting to restore the dignity of

Śākyamuni,¹⁰⁸ and this lends support to our surmise that the Vimalakīrti undertook a similar task at an earlier date.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁷

Yamada ed., Karuṇāpundarīka, I, 77-78.

¹⁰⁸

Yamada says:

The task of the Karuṇāpundarīka is to explain the reason for Śākyamuni's choice of this impure Sahā world and instruction of inferior beings in religion, against the background of well-established Pure Land Buddhist theory It concludes that Śākyamuni Buddha who has chosen the impure Sahā world and the salvation of helpless beings is ultimately motivated by the highest compassion, in contrast to those who have chosen the pure worlds and pure beings. Thus, in the Karuṇāpundarīka, Amitābha Buddha and Aksobhya Buddha, who have enjoyed great popularity from an early period in Mahāyāna Buddhism, as well as many other buddhas in the pure buddhalands, are assigned no more than supporting roles in order to illuminate the unique position of Śākyamuni Buddha.

In this way, the Karuṇāpundarīka succeeded in restoring Śākyamuni Buddha once more as the central object of worship. Ibid., I, 2,3.

¹⁰⁹

It ought to be pointed out that differences are also noticeable between the approaches of these two Sūtras. The Karuṇāpundarīka, judging from Yamada's comments, would seem to hold that the Sahā-world is really more impure than others, and also, possibly, that Śākyamuni Buddha is more compassionate

There is one last element in the stance the Vimalakīrti takes on this subject which must be stressed. It concerns the creatures of the Sāhā-world. Quite simply, what necessitates both the manifestation of this world as impure, and the manifestation of Śākyamuni in his mundane nature, is the low position of these creatures. Their intractability is graphically described in terms such as the following:

Just as severe pain which penetrates even to the bone is to be inflicted upon an elephant or a horse in order to bring it to complete subjection as it is so obstinate and difficult to subdue, even so severe words must be spoken to discipline those beings who are obstinate and difficult to subdue. 113

This is a striking expression of the lowness of creatures, which was paralleled in the Pāli Canon by the title of the Buddhas as 'trainer of the human steer' (purisadammasārathī). The

than other Buddhas. It has been seen that the Vimalakīrti rejects the former view, and, while it admits of varying degrees of compassion among Bodhisattvas, it explicitly states that the Buddhas are equal in this as in countless other respects. See Vkn.(I), IV,351; Vkn.(L), pp.344-345.

110

See above, pp.109-110

111

See, e.g., the concluding section of the discussion of Vimalakīrti with Ānanda, Vkn.(I), III, 152-153. Lamotte's sources are much more explicit: see Vkn.(L), pp.187-188.

112

This is also, of course, what necessitates the peculiarly harsh doctrines to which Śākyamuni must resort: see above, p.103.

113

Vkn.(I), IV,189.

114

See above, p.45.

author of the Vimalakīrti obviously realizes that this theme is essential to his argument: only the 'pig-headed', 'mulish' unmanageability of the beings of the Sahā-world can justify the strong measures and radical devices which Śākyamuni is portrayed as using. It will be found that the Lotus Sūtra also has recourse to the concept of the mean aspirations of beings to justify the use of the extraordinary upāya of the Buddhas.

We claimed earlier that the concept of skill in means was a major tool in the above reaction of this Sūtra to 'pure land' pretensions. It should now be clear how this is so, yet something further should be said about the actual occurrence of the relevant terms in the discussion. It has already been
 115
 seen, that the versatile manifestation of the essentially pure Buddha-fields, which is the most important point in the argument, is given as an instance of skill in means. With the consequent defense of the Sahā-world, Śākyamuni is by implication also defended. And yet there are, of course, many respects besides this in which the Buddhas appear to be different, and hence other questions naturally arise: for example, if all Buddhas are to be considered equal in the great duration of their lives, why did Śākyamuni appear to grow old and die? One obvious answer would be that this was a further instance of his great skill in means -- an expedient necessary to dis-

discipline ignorant creatures. This is, in fact, precisely what is said in the Lotus Sūtra, but in the Vimalakīrti the situation is somewhat more complex. In Vimalakīrti's dialogue with Ānanda it is indeed said that Śākyamuni conceals his supra-mundane (lokottara) nature in order to discipline beings and¹¹⁶ awaken them to emancipation, and this plainly points to skill in means, but the term is not actually used here. Interestingly, however, it apparently is used in at least one variation of the text, as is learned from a quotation which Lamotte gives¹¹⁷ from an excerpt cited in the Upadeśa.. In the Hsüan-tsang version, furthermore, it is unambiguously stated that Śākyamuni's¹¹⁸ hiding of his wonderful qualities is a device (upāya). Kumārajīva, while omitting these references, ties in the whole of the 'Sarvagandhasugandhā' section (which contains every major point in the argument) with the happy utterance from the Bodhisattvas of the 'perfumed' land: "Śākyamuni Buddha has here¹¹⁹ well exhibited his necessary means." This neat summation is

116

Vkn.(I), III,152-153; Vkn.(L), pp.187-188.

117

Vkn.(L), p.186-187, n.82.

118

Vkn.(L), pp.331-332. Here, as elsewhere, this version readily speaks of skill in means where it is merely implied in the other versions.

119

Vkn.(I), IV,355. The Chinese reads: 釋迦牟尼
佛。乃能於此善行方便。 T.475, p.554, c25-26.

totally lacking in all other versions, so one is left in doubt as to whether Kumārajīva's Sanskrit 'original' bore these words or whether it was his own rather daring, but very sensible, addition. At any rate, it seems unnecessary to cite further evidence to the effect that 'skill in means' played a vital role in the formation of this sophisticated rebuttal.

It has been seen how this Sūtra uses 'skill in means' in two areas of dialogue within Buddhism. These examples have been chosen to illustrate the usual meaning of the term and to show the importance and force of the role which the concept plays. As for the meaning of the term, by far the most common and probably the only meaning found is that of teaching and leading beings by deftly employing devices adapted to their inclinations. This connotation appears to be a 'given' -- it is not established by argument and seems to require no introduction or clarification. The author seems quite used to the concept and is thus able to wield it with ease and effectiveness. The question that is now bound to arise is: what, then, is the relation between 'skill in means' in the text and 'skill in means' in the Aṣṭasāhasrikā? Since the latter is generally supposed to be the earlier of these texts, but is not thought to be a great deal more ancient, it would be natural to seek for a line of development such that the concept as found in the Vimalakīrti would show strong lines of connection with that found in the Aṣṭasāhasrikā, but also some changes, perhaps even a considerable advance. Unfortunately, on the basis of

these two works alone, it is doubtful whether any such process can be discerned. By and large, it seems that the Aṣṭasāhasrikā uses the term in one sense, and the Vimalakīrti uses it in another. There is only one passage in the latter where skill in means (or, more properly, 'means', since it is upāya which is spoken of) comes close to having the implications it has in the former. This passage¹²⁰ which stresses the interdependence of wisdom (prajñā) and means (upāya), is very reminiscent of Chapter 20 of the Aṣṭasāhasrikā; again, the type of problem discussed is -- how can one train in the three doors to deliverance while still saving beings? It is insisted once more that the Bodhisattva must be able to carry out both of these activities, and it is said that when he can do so he is adept in prajñā and upāya. Thus far, there would seem to be full agreement with the Aṣṭasāhasrikā. And yet, if one analyses the utterances of the Vimalakīrti, it appears that there is a disjunction of prajñā and upāya that is absent in the Aṣṭasāhasrikā: In the latter, these two are seen as so closely related that it would be considered meaningless to speak of one being practiced without the other; the Vimalakīrti, on the other hand, goes out of its way to urge that both must be present, and it is willing to speak of the possibility of their being wisdom devoid of means and means devoid of wisdom. This separation seems

120

Vkn.(I), III,238-239; Vkn.(L), pp.233-235. The discussion is clearer in Lamotte's version.

to correspond to a new distinction in meaning. Specifically, prajñā signifies, in this passage, 'insight' (gained by training in the 'three doors' and so on) while upāya signifies, as elsewhere in the text, the devices whereby beings are saved. Hence skill in means does not refer to the ability of the Bodhisattva to train in both sides of the paradox, it merely refers to the one altruistic side. The two passages compared -- if our analysis is correct -- are not identical, therefore, but contain important differences.

The section of the Vimalakīrti just discussed is the only one which is strongly reminiscent of the Aṣṭasāhasrikā in its treatment of skill in means. Possibly a detailed study of other Prajñāpāramitā literature, and other early Mahāyāna texts in general, would bring to light some stages in the development of the concept; the present study must find its worth in showing that there is at least a gap to be filled and a problem to be solved.

III

'SKILL IN MEANS' IN THE LOTUS SŪTRA AND SEVERAL MISCELLANEOUS TEXTS

The Lotus Sūtra

The Saddharmapundarīka is one of the most important of Mahāyāna Sūtras, whether one judges in terms of historical influence or doctrinal innovation. At the same time, it is a text in which skill in means plays a central role. It would be sensible, therefore, to allot a good deal of space to a discussion of it. On the other hand, this is an essay about skill in means, not about the Lotus Sūtra. Fortunately, it is possible to describe the main functions of the concept briefly, without going into detail about every occurrence. This is what will be attempted here. Following this, some of the problems which arise, and some of the implications of skill in means, will be discussed.

The sources utilized for this section are, almost exclusively, the English translation by Kern and the Sanskrit edition of Vaidya. When translations other than Kern's have been utilized this has been indicated.

It would be interesting to begin by noting some facts¹ about the context of the term's occurrence. It is found that

¹
By 'the term', we shall generally mean 'upāya kauśalya', though occasionally 'upāya' by itself where the latter is used in a specialized sense.

when skill in means is discussed, this is usually the skill in means of the Buddhas. Indeed, almost ninety per cent of the times the term is mentioned it is the Buddhas who are accredited with this ability. The remaining few instances concern the Bodhisattvas.² This is striking inasmuch as the former two texts, particularly the Aṣṭasāhasrikā, place a greater stress on the skill in means of the bodhisattvas than on that of the Buddhas. It will be seen that there are important reasons for this difference.

Next, it is found that the term has a great amount of independence in the Lotus. It is not, for example, one of the pāramitās,³ and it is not habitually conjoined with any one term such as prajñā or karuṇā (though it is connected with the latter in an interesting passage to be examined shortly).

2

A few cases seem to involve Śrāvakas, but a closer look reveals that the apparent Śrāvakas are actually Bodhisattvas who have forgotten their former vows.

3

The one exception to this is in Chapter XXV, at SP.(K), p.419; SP.(V); p.258. Here is an interesting list of seven pāramitās -- the six usual ones mentioned throughout the text, plus 'upāyakaṣaṇḍāpāramitā'. This may represent a transitional stage between the six pāramitās and the later list of ten. At any rate, this chapter is considered a late addition (SP.(K), p.xxi).

There is also a recurring compound linking 'upāya kṣaṇḍā' and 'pāramitā' -- mahopāyakaṣaṇḍājñānadarśanapāramitā -- but 'pāramitā' seems to be used here in a non-technical sense as 'mastery'. (See, e.g. SP.(V), p.21; SP.(K), p.31).

There are two concepts, however, which are associated fairly frequently with skill in means, viz. adhimukti ('inclination', 'aspiration') and sandhā-bhāṣya (translated often as 'mysterious speech'). These will later be discussed in their relation to skill in means.

Having seen a few facts about this term's occurrence, let us consider its explicit meaning. As in the Vimalakīrti Nirdeśa, the constant meaning is the ability to deftly teach, lead, and save beings. It is apparent, in fact, that it is this Sūtra more than any other which has established this as the sole meaning of 'skill in means' and which is responsible for many of its specific implications; when most authors speak of upāya kauśalya they are obviously thinking of it as made famous by the Lotus Sūtra. This is perhaps understandable, given that some of the most important uses to which the concept has ever been put are found here; nevertheless, to assume that this text exemplifies the commonly accepted understanding of skill in means and has merely adopted the general usage of the concept is unwarranted by the evidence and under-rates the originality of the Lotus. Quite simply, it is unclear what the term upāya kauśalya meant before the authors of this text got hold of it, and it is reasonably certain that many of the implications which it has in later literature are due to their innovation.

In initiating the discussion of precisely this originality and innovation, a passage from Chapter II (upāyakaūśalyaparivartah)

will be examined. This particular section deals with a theme already encountered in the discussion of the Dīgha Nikāya -- the Buddha's decision to stay in the world and teach the Dharma. The stance of the Lotus on this, as on many subjects, is deftly taken so as to build upon the undoubtedly well-known account of the story,⁴ and yet to use the very elements essential to this account to establish its own novel message. The relevant passage from the Lotus, although rather long, is here given almost in full:

109. I likewise see the poor wretches, deficient in wisdom and conduct, lapsed into the mundane whirl, retained in dismal places, plunged in affliction incessantly renewed..
110. Fettered as they are by desire like the yak by its tail, continually blinded by sensual pleasure, they do not seek the Buddha, the mighty one; they do not seek the law that leads to the end of pain.
111. Staying in the six states of existence, they are benumbed in their senses, stick unmoved to the low views, and suffer pain on pain. For those I feel a great compassion.
112. On the terrace of enlightenment I have remained three weeks in full, searching and pondering on such a matter, steadily looking up to the tree there (standing).
113. Keeping in view that king of trees with an unwavering gaze I walked round at its foot (thinking): This law is wonderful and lofty, whereas creatures are blind with dulness and ignorance.
114. Then it was that Brahma entreated me, and so did Indra, the four rulers of the cardinal points, Mahesvara, Īsvara, and the hosts of Maruts by thousands of koṭis.
115. All stood with joined hands and respectful, while myself was revolving the matter in my mind (and thought): What shall I do? At the very time that I am uttering syllables, beings are oppressed with evils.

4

This is found not only in the Dīgha Nikāya but in the Majjhima Nikāya as well, and is further corroborated by an account, probably Sarvāstivādin, found in the Chinese Tripitaka. See Warder, Indian Buddhism, pp.8,50.

116. In their ignorance they will not heed the law I announce, and in consequence of it they will incur some penalty. It would be better were I never to speak. May my quiet extinction take place this very day!

117. But on remembering the former Buddhas and their skilfulness upāyakausalāyā, (I thought): Nay, I also will manifest this tripartate Buddha-enlightenment.

118. When I was thus meditating on the law, the other Buddhas in all the directions of space appeared to me in their own body and raised their voice, crying 'Amen.'

119. 'Amen! Solitary, first Leader of the world! now that thou hast come to unsurpassed knowledge, and art meditating on the skilfulness upāyakausalāyā of the leaders of the world, thou repeatest their teaching.'

120. 'We also, being Buddhas, will make clear the highest word, divided into three parts; for men (occasionally) have low inclinations hinādhimuktā, and might perchance from ignorance not believe (us, when we say), Ye shall become Buddhas.'

121. 'Hence we will rouse many Bodhisattvas by the display of skilfulness upāyakausalāyā and the encouraging of the wish of obtaining fruits.'

122. And I was delighted to hear the sweet voice of the leaders of men; in the exultation of my heart I said to the blessed saints, 'The words of the eminent sages are not spoken in vain.'

123. 'I, too, will act according to the indications of the wise leaders of the world; having myself been born in the midst of the degradation of creatures, I have known agitation in this dreadful world.'

124. When I had come to that conviction, O son of Sāri, I instantly went to Benares, where I skilfully upāyena preached the law to the five Solitaries, that law which is the base of final beatitude.

125. From that moment the wheel of my law has been moving, and the name of Nirvāṇa made its appearance in the world, as well as the name of Arhat, of Dharma, and Saṅgha.

126. Many years have I preached and pointed to the stage of Nirvāṇa, the end of wretchedness and mundane existence. Thus I used to speak at all times.

.....

129. Then I conceived the idea that the time had come for me to announce the excellent law and to reveal supreme enlightenment, for which task I had been born in the world. 5

There are many similarities between this account and that of the Mahāpadāna. In both cases, for example, the Buddha almost gives up the idea of teaching but is persuaded by the gods to reconsider. His initial pessimism is caused by a perception of the ignorance and attachment of creatures, which are bound to keep them from penetrating the Dharma. Yet in both stories something happens to change his mind. In the Mahāpadāna, this is his realization of the incredible variety in the inclinations and faculties of beings, so that, while some are indeed steeped in ignorance, the eyes of a few are "hardly dimmed by dust". In the Lotus, the deciding factor is his remembrance of the skilfulness (upāya kauśalya) of former Buddhas. It will be noticed that in the latter version there is actually an even greater stress on the low inclinations of beings: it is this which justifies the use of the very radical devices the Buddha is portrayed as employing. These radical devices are, of course, the three yānas (courses or vehicles). In both accounts, the Buddha, having thus decided to remain and teach, tries out his ability on his first hearers. His skilful presentation makes the Dharma and Saṅgha known in the world. The details of this first act of teaching, however, differ in an extremely significant way. In the Mahāpadāna, the skilfulness of the Buddha (which is not called upāya kauśalya) is found in his choosing disciples with relatively pure dispositions, and his further purifying these dispositions

through the preliminary discourse on dāna, sīla, and so on, so that they may understand the higher truths of dukkha and Nibbāna. He is successful, and they soon destroy the āsavas and personally attain Arahantship and Nibbāna. In the Lotus, on the other hand, the entire discourse, including the doctrines of Arahantship and Nirvāṇa, is preparatory and preliminary. These doctrines are upāya, devices, which help to free beings from attachment so that eventually they will be able to understand the higher, final truth. This final truth is now, in this very Lotus of the True Law, being proclaimed and explicated. It is the gospel, the good news of the Lotus -- "you shall become Buddhas; rejoice!"⁶

It is remarkable how the authors of the Lotus Sūtra thus manage to utilize the idea of the low inclinations of beings and the idea of skilful teaching through preparatory doctrines (now called upāya kauśalya), to relativize those very concepts which are in the Dīgha Nikāya considered final and supreme.

The passage quoted above is revealing in many respects, and illumines the general attitude of the text being discussed. One can see, for example, how anxious it is to weld its message to the existing 'Śrāvaka' literature and to win acceptance among the followers of the alleged Śrāvaka-yāna. In accordance with this, it does not insult the 'course of the Hearers', but merely argues that such a course does not exist. As for those

What is to be

6

bhaviṣyathā buddha janetha harṣam. SP.(K), p.59;
SP.(V), p.43.

who have thought all along that they were Śrāvakas (as, for example, Śāriputra and Ānanda) -- many of them are in fact great Bodhisattvas, acting for the weal of creatures and headed for Buddha-hood, who have simply forgotten their vows. This cautious and amiable attitude of the Lotus, when combined with the genuinely radical gospel which it is proclaiming, makes necessary some clever footwork.

We might next observe that the theme of compassion (karuṇā) occupies the same place in both accounts of the Buddha's decision to teach. It is, therefore, a motive for his teaching in general and, by implication, for his specific employment of skill in means. This connection of karuṇā and upāya kauśalya, however, is rarely made explicit in the Sūtra.

Thirdly, it will be noticed that, as was remarked previously, it is the Buddhas who are accredited with skill in means. In fact, Chapter II not only restricts itself to mentioning the skill in means of Buddhas, but implies that this ability is bound up with the extreme wisdom and enlightenment of the Tathāgatas and hence beyond the range of those merely headed for Buddha-hood, i.e. Bodhisattvas.⁷ This is merely one aspect of the general exaltation of the Buddhas, which occupies much space in the text; the Bodhisattvas occupy a lower position

⁷
See, e.g., SP.(K), pp.31-34.

than in the two Mahāyāna texts examined previously.⁸ Some of the reasons for this tendency will become apparent if the historical situation which greeted the Lotus is kept in mind.. The essential 'gospel' which the Lotus proclaimed was certainly not an axiom of 'Mahāyāna' as that conglomeration of elements then existed. The Aṣṭasāhasrikā, for example, speaks of the Śrāvaka and Pratyekabuddha yānas as inferior courses rather than as non-existent ones. So this new message undoubtedly came as a shock not only to the Śrāvakas (the aspirants in the Hīnayāna groups) but to many 'Bodhisattvas' (aspirants in the Mahāyāna groups) as well; hence it was portrayed as issuing from the great depths of Buddha-knowledge, naturally hidden from the Bodhisattvas.⁹ It need not be concluded, of course, that this exaltation of the Buddhas is therefore merely a polemical tool, for there are many possible religious and doctrinal bases for it. And with specific reference to skill in means, it is probable that a simple yet significant conviction was at work, namely that one who leads others ought to have a first-hand knowledge of the place to which he is leading them

8

Chapters XXIV and XXVI, praising Avalokiteśvara and Samantabhadra, are exceptions to this, but they are believed to be later additions. See SP(K), p.xxi.

9

The exceptions here would be a few of the most advanced Bodhisattvas, such as Mañjuśrī, who have heard this Dharma-paryāya before.

(in this case Buddha-hood). It is clear that the Lotus generally sees the Bodhisattvas as among those who are themselves led by skill in means, rather than as those who thereby lead others.

It would now be desirable to see, in systematic form, a description of each of the major doctrinal points in which skill in means is implicated in the Lotus. These points may be gleaned from six parables, and listed briefly as follows:

(1) There is only one course (yāna). This is the Bodhisattva course. The display of three courses is an instance of the great skill in means of the Buddha, who perceives the different inclinations of beings and adapts his method accordingly. In this way he leads creatures from the triple world, in which they are burning with misery and wrapped in ignorance. Having escaped from it, they can proceed to final enlightenment

10

This belief is suggested by verses such as the following:

But due to the penetration of all dharmas one is called 'perfectly enlightened';
Thenceforth he continually teaches the Dharma to living creatures by hundreds of means. (our trans:)
sarvadharmāḥvabodhāttu samyaksaṃbuddha ucyate;
tenopāyaśatairnityaṃ dharmāṃ deśeti prāṇinām.
SP.(V), 94, v.53.

11

See especially Chapter III and the parable of the burning house.

12

We exclude here the parable of the gem, SP.(K), pp.201ff. Skill in means is mentioned in this context but is not necessary to the argument.

13

by means of the one true course.

(2) Just as the use of different devices is due to the great variety in the inclinations of beings, so the extremely radical devices to which the Buddha must resort are necessary because of the very low inclinations (hīnādhimukti) of beings. In such cases, the required skilfulness is two-fold: first, the speaker and his message must be adapted to the mean circumstances of the hearer; second, the inclinations of the latter must be purified and uplifted so that he is in a position to understand the final truth. In this manner, the Buddha skilfully tends his 'Śrāvakas', waiting for the day when they are ready for the revelation of their true identity as Bodhisattvas. 14

(3) Just as the two 'inferior' courses are actually non-existent, their respective summum bonums -- the Nirvāṇas unaccompanied by full Buddha-hood and all-knowledge -- are unreal. They are like a magic city (ṛddhimayaṁ nagaram) created to give hope and rest to tired travellers. Those who rest in this dwelling are urged by the Buddha to rouse themselves for the rest of the journey to Buddhahood. 15

(4) The state of one who has reached the supposed end

13

The parable of the burning house: SP.(K), pp.72ff.

14

The parable of the prodigal son: SP.(K), pp.99ff.

15

The parable of the guide and the Isle of Jewels: SP.(K), pp.181ff.

of the journey (the unreal Nirvāṇa of the Śrāvakas and Pratyekabuddhas), through the device of the three courses, is like a blind-born man who has had his sight restored: he has been rescued from darkness but must not now presume to know everything. To reach the final stage of all-knowledge will require further devices and further effort.¹⁶

Two more points are made in parable form, but they should be listed separately since they are not part of the above scheme:

(1) The Dharma is One: it is "of one essence" and "has one single taste, i.e. the taste of deliverance, dispassion and cessation, and its final aim is the gnosis of the all-knowing." Creatures, on the other hand, are extremely varied in their inclinations and powers. Only a Tathāgata can perform the cosmic function of uniting the One and the many, and he does this through his skill in means.¹⁷

16

The parable of the blind-born man: SP.(K), pp.129ff. See also, Conze, "The lotus of the Good Law", in Thirty Years of Buddhist Studies, pp.114ff.

17

The parable of the cloud and the plants: SP.(K), pp.119ff. See also Conze, "The Lotus of the Good Law", in Thirty Years of Buddhist Studies, pp.105ff. The phrases quoted above are from the latter translation, pp.106,107.

The theme of the Buddha's voice being useful to each creature according to his own individual make-up is not peculiar to this text: it is found, for example, in the Vimalakīrti-Nirdeśa and in the Mahāvastu. What is distinctive, however, is the connection made between this theme and the gospel of the Lotus that there is only one yāna. Distinctive also, is the way upāya kausālya is fitted into the scheme. Although the term is seldom used in the passage, the few occurrences are decisive in showing its importance: see SP.(K), pp.126,128.

(2) Śākyamuni Buddha did not really die but merely pretended to do so, through his skill in means, in order to discipline beings and bring them to sobriety so that they would apply themselves to obtaining their deliverance. In reality his lifetime is immeasurable and inconceivable.¹⁸

This description should serve to show how important the Lotus considers skill in means to be and how incredibly different the Buddha's message becomes when this factor is accepted and taken into account. As could be guessed, however, there are problems which accompany the employment of this concept, and, while they may not be entirely new to Buddhism, they do become particularly acute in this Sūtra. Any account of skill in means which did not acknowledge them would be superficial in the extreme; they are certainly recognized by the Lotus, and are responsible for some important utterances. A discussion of these implications may be initiated by some remarks which Conze makes under the heading of "Skill in Means":

And yet, if the truth be told, everything we have spoken about so far is not real at all, but is part of the vast phantasmagoria of this world of illusion. In actual reality there are no Buddhas, no Bodhisattvas, no perfections, no stages, and no paradises -- none of all this. All these conceptions have no reference to anything that is actually there, and concern a world of mere fantasy. They are just expedients, concessions to the multitude of the ignorant, provisional constructions of thought, which become superfluous after having served their purpose. . . . Nirvana, as the true Reality, is one single, and it has no second. All multiplicity,

all separation, all duality is a sign of falseness. Everything apart from the One, also called "Emptiness" or "Suchness", is devoid of real existence, and whatever may be said about it is ultimately untrue, false and nugatory; though perhaps permissible if the salvation of beings requires it. The ability to frame salutary statements and to act in conformity with people's needs, springs from a faculty called "skill in means". . . 19

Two interesting questions which this quotation raises are (1) what is the truth-value of expedient statements? (2) are all Mahāyānic conceptions considered to be merely expedients?

Regarding the first question, we are at once confronted with Conze's suggestion that such statements can be false but useful. Certainly he is right in saying that they are useful; in fact, one might say that the whole point of upāya kausālya is to render the Dharma soteriologically useful to beings. The issue of whether or not skill in means can and does give rise to false utterances, however, is more difficult. It will be remembered that in the Dīgha Nikāya the Buddha's speech is described as being both useful (atthasaṃhita) and true (bhūta). 20 This observation is to the point, for it is precisely the Buddha himself who is primarily portrayed in the Lotus Sūtra as speaking forth expediential statements. And the latter text is in complete agreement with the Dīgha in holding that the Buddha speaks only what is both soteriologically useful and true.

19 "Mahāyāna Buddhism" in Thirty Years of Buddhist Studies, pp.72-73. Cf. Conze, A Short History of Buddhism, p.34.

20 See above, p. 29.

It would be interesting to consider for a moment why and how the Lotus makes this claim.

It is immediately apparent that the authors are not unaware of the impression given by the various parables concerning skill in means: they know that deception and falsehood might seem to be involved. In accordance with the recognition of this problem, what they set out to establish is not so much that the expediential statements of the Buddha are true, as that they are not false.²¹ One could give a rather facile explanation of this claim by saying that if the Lotus represented the Buddha as a liar, this would ensure the rejection of its message by the Buddhist community. There are, however, certain religiously and doctrinally respectable reasons for the insistence that expediential statements are not false.

The most common expression for 'false speech' in the Lotus is 'mr̥ṣāvāda'. Just as the English word 'false' is not merely a neutral label which may or may not apply to a certain proposition, but has, on the contrary, in many contexts, implications of 'lying' and 'deception' on the part of the speaker,²² so also has the Sanskrit 'mr̥ṣāvāda' these same implications. But 'deception' is not merely a moral evil (and hence out of the question for a Buddha) but is, in fact, directly contrary

21

See, e.g., SP.(K), pp.75-76, 82, 302, 304, 306, 309.

22

Cf. also the Latin 'falsus' which is originally a past participle of 'fallere', meaning 'to deceive'.

to the notion of Buddhahood. It has been seen how in the Pāli Canon 'Buddha' comes to signify one who (a) is himself enlightened, and (b) spreads his insight abroad by teaching others. In the Lotus, a Buddha is likewise one who reveals the truth which he himself has discovered. Since upāyic statements help him to reveal this truth, and are at times more helpful in this respect than simply 'telling the truth',²³ surely they should not be classed as deception -- mr̥ṣāvāda.

The reaction of the average modern reader to all of this would probably be to say that while it may indeed be misleading to call expediential statements false, they are certainly not 'true' either in the normal sense of the word. Actually, the Lotus agrees with this and, while it is not aware of the developed 'two-truth' scheme of later Mahāyāna, it is definitely feeling its way toward some such doctrine. It recognizes that the kind of 'truth' we normally speak of is the ideal, and that when such truth can be soteriologically useful as well it is to be preferred over expediential statements. The higher type of

23

In the parable of the burning house, the father 'tells the truth' to his sons right at the beginning; they, however, are so ignorant that they do not understand the word 'burning' and hence do not run from the house. In the parable of the prodigal son, it is obvious that 'telling the truth' at the wrong time would be downright harmful to the son. Hence the Buddha, speaking the truth at the right time (kālavādin), tells him of his identity when he has been prepared for the knowledge through expedients.

24

statement is indicated through such terms as uttamārtha,
²⁵paramārtha, and ²⁶bhūtārtha. This would seem to correspond more
 closely to the higher 'type of statement', which has its meaning
 drawn out (nītārtha) and explicit, than to the paramārtha-satya
 of the two-truth distinction. Similarly, the neyārtha kind of
 statement, needing to have its meaning drawn out, corresponds
 fairly closely to what is in the Lotus called sandhā-bhāṣya.
 A consideration of this latter concept, which is closely tied
 in this text to upāya kauśalya, will show why the Lotus can
 claim that every word the Buddha speaks is true.

Whatever the best translation of 'sandhā-bhāṣya' may be
 (Kern usually calls it 'mysterious speech'), it clearly signifies,
 in this Sūtra, speech which has two levels, or a double meaning.
 Those beings with high aspirations and good understanding
 catch the higher meaning, while those clogged with ignorance
²⁷may aspire to the lower meaning. This lower meaning is not

24

SP.(K), p.34; SP.(V), p.23

25

SP.(K), p.64 (SP(V), p.46; SP(K), p.128 (SP.(V), p.90).

26

SP.(K), p.189; SP.(V), p.127.

27

The most common example of sandhā-bhāṣya concerns the
 three yānas. Those creatures who are highest in wisdom hear
 themselves being called to Buddha-hood via the Bodhisattva-yāna;
 those with lower understanding, while listening to the same discourse
 hear themselves being called to the Nirvāṇas of the Śrāvakas
 and Pratyekabuddhas via the respective courses. See, e.g. SP.
 (K), pp.39-43, 53, 59.

merely a mistake of the hearer, for if it were it might lead him astray from the truth; it is fashioned by the Buddha so as to lead the aspirant to the point where he can understand the higher meaning, the 'real truth'. It is, in other words, expediential. Both levels of sandhā-bhāṣya, therefore -- the 'paramārtha' level and the 'upāya' level -- are soteriologically positive and have a positive relationship to the revelation of 'the truth'. Furthermore, insofar as any utterance of the Buddha on the subject of the three yānas (previous to the present explicit statement in the Lotus of the True Law) has been an instance of sandhā-bhāṣya, it follows that the higher meaning, the real truth, has always been offered to beings: it is the fault of their own low inclinations that they have been unable to draw out this meaning. Hence the Lotus can and does claim that the Buddha has always told the truth. One could make the counter-claim that he has also always been offering the lower meaning and that this is not 'truth'. This may or may not be the case, for it is unclear whether or not such expediential statements ought to be accepted as 'true in a certain sense'. We have been content to support the Lotus in holding that there are at least 28 good reasons for not wanting to call them false.

28

A word might be added here to emphasize the difference between the two-level distinction which the Lotus accepts and the Mādhyamika two-truth distinction. In the latter, it would appear that "the paramārtha is in fact the unutterable (anabhilāpya), the unthinkable, unteachable etc." (quoted in Murti, The Central Philosophy of Buddhism, p.244). In the Lotus, on the other hand, the paramārtha is utterable, thinkable and teachable: it is, in fact, being taught in this very Dharmaparyāya. Samvṛti-satya,

It is now possible to proceed to the second point of interest which was brought to view by Conze's statements, viz. -- are all Mahāyānic conceptions considered to be merely expedients? (This question, like the former, is of course being considered in the context of the Lotus; an analysis of the Vimalakīrti might yield quite different results.) The first thing to be said is that certain concepts -- that of the Śrāvaka-yāna, for example -- are explicitly called expedients, and that the average reader would take this as an indication that the remaining concepts are not expedients. In short, the obvious meaning of the text is that the Buddhas use various upāya but that many conceptions, such as 'Buddha' itself, are not upāya, or at least not merely upāya.²⁹ They would appear, on the contrary, to refer to actual realities.

At this point it might be objected that the Lotus does not subscribe to a notion of such 'actual realities', since like most Mahāyāna Sūtras it holds "that all phenomena have the nature

furthermore, is absent in the Lotus' scheme; and it corresponds badly with either sandhā-bhāṣya or upāya.

29

This distinction is rather important. One gets the impression, for example, from the parable of the burning house, that the concept of the Bodhisattva-yāna is considered an upāya necessary to attract beings from the ignorance of the triple world, but that it refers, nevertheless, to something real. It is, in fact, sensible that many ideas may be employed in a soteriologically useful way -- as expedients -- without their being 'merely' expedients.

of illusion and dreams, that they are as pithless as the stem of a plantain, and similar to an echo".³⁰ To this, it must be replied that the Lotus seems committed to a doctrine of degrees of reality. If, for example, the Bodhisattva-yāna is unreal, then the Śrāvaka-yāna is even less real. What is important to see, is that the text does not use the notion of upāya for promoting the notion of the general emptiness and unreality of phenomena, as Conze's comments would suggest.

A more serious objection might be raised regarding what we have said above. We have claimed that certain things are 'explicitly' called expedients and that this implies that the remaining things are not expedients; we have spoken of the 'obvious' meaning of the text. But surely this is an extremely naive way of speaking which shows that we have not learned anything about skill in means and sandhā-bhāṣya. If Śāriputra could miss the Buddha's intimations to the effect that he was himself headed for Buddha-hood, might we not at present be missing certain implications of the supposedly obvious and explicit utterances of this Sūtra? Might it not be the case, for example, that "if the truth be told" it would be seen that every one of the conceptions peculiar to the Mahāyānist scheme of salvation -- 'Buddhas', 'Bodhisattvas', 'stages', 'perfections' and so on -- are "just expedients"? A final answer to these questions cannot be given here. It may indeed

be the case that if one had sufficient wisdom he would see this or that in the Lotus Sūtra which he does not at present see. In default of such wisdom, however, it is probably safer to take the text at its 'face' value than to try to guess its hidden meaning. The admittedly 'apparent' meaning of the Lotus, then, is that former utterances of the Buddha have been examples of his skill in means whereas, these devices having served their purpose, the present teaching is 'really true'. Former utterances have been instances of the mysterious speech (sandhā-bhāṣya) of the Lord, but this teaching is explicit in its meaning³¹ and true in the highest sense. Indeed, just as orthodox Muslims regard Muhammad as the 'Seal' of the prophets, so does the Lotus speak of itself as 'the Seal of the Dharma'.³² Again, it says: ". . . For this, Mañjuśrī, is the supreme preaching of the Tathāgatas; this is the last Dharmaparyāya of the Tathāgatas; this is the most profound discourse on the law."³³

This teaching would 'appear', therefore, to be final and

31

See above, pp.134-135.

32

dharmamudrā. See SP.(V), p.64. Kern translates this, we think rightly, as "the closing word of my law". SP.(K), p.91.

33

esā hi mañjuśrīstāthāgatānāṃ paramā dharmadeśanā, ayaṃ paścimāstāthāgatānāṃ dharmaparyāya. sarveśāṃ dharmaparyāyāyāpāmayāṃ dharmaparyāyāḥ sarvagambhīraḥ . . . SP.(K), 276; SP.(V), p.174.

³⁴
explicit. If it is taken thus, one is bound to conclude that those conceptions which it contrasts with expediential conceptions are not themselves "just expedients". With regard to this text, therefore, there is reason to be skeptical of Conze's account of the issue.

However this may be, it remains true that the use of the concepts of skill in means and sandhā-bhāṣya leaves the aspirant in an odd situation. He may accept the 'apparent' message of the new gospel, but if he does so how can he be sure he is not being fooled again? Put in more doctrinally appropriate terms: how can he be sure that he has sufficient purity and wisdom to catch the real and entire significance of what the Buddha is trying to communicate to him? The only possible answer would seem to be that he has the repeated assurance of the Buddha (as recorded in the Lotus) that this is not further skill in means and mysterious speech, but that it is explicit and completely true. To accept this assurance, however, requires faith -- in the Buddha and in the Lotus Sūtra -- and it is no small wonder, therefore, that faith (śraddhā) receives much attention in this text.

³⁴
The Lotus is portrayed as that which finally draws out the meaning of former utterances; it is the uncovering or explanation (vivarana) of the Lord's sandhā-bhāṣya. See, e.g., SP.(K), p.221; SP.(V), p.146.

³⁵
See, e.g., SP.(K), pp.39, 91, 273, 298.

The authors recognize, furthermore, that it is no easy matter for people, particularly the Śrāvakas to whom the message is chiefly addressed, to have faith in what is being said here. Hence the Lotus is characterized as "hard to be received with faith".³⁶ In order properly to appreciate this point it is necessary to bear in mind the religious system which these 'Śrāvakas' espouse. According to this system, the venerable Arhats such as Śāriputra are not merely men who have previously heard something and believed it. They are, on the contrary, men who have personally verified the truths which they proclaim, who have seen as it really is (yathābhūtham) the destruction of the āśravas within them and the cancelling of future rebirths. They are free and they know that they are free. Having attained to this state of independence they do not need to be led, nor can they be led.³⁷ Yet these are the men whom the Lotus portrays as gaining faith in the new message and as admitting that previously they had merely "imagined having attained Nirvāna".³⁸

³⁶ duhśraddadheya. SP.(K), p.70; SP.(V), p.50. See also SP.(K), pp.294-297.

³⁷ See above, pp.34-37. Skill in means is said in the Lotus to have as its aim the freeing of creatures from their various attachments (SP.(K), pp.31,34, 191). Furthermore, it is implied in the parable of the burning house that the Buddha needs these very attachments in order for his upāya to work (i.e. beings are attracted from the pain of the triple world by the promise of delightful rewards: see SP.(K), pp.74,80). But the Arhat is free from attachments; how, then, can he be led by upāya?

³⁸ SP.(K), p.99.

It is easy to see why the Lotus is "hard to be received with faith" by the Śrāvakas.

The text seems to direct one parable especially toward this problem, namely the parable of the blind-born man.³⁹ Here it is suggested that simply because a man has had his sight granted him (as have the Arhats) this does not mean that he can now see and know everything. In reply to this, it could be argued that the Arhat does not claim to see and know everything, but merely those aspects of reality which are essential to complete liberation. At any rate, the Lotus is very aware of the difficulty its gospel will have in being accepted and believed, and it accordingly arms itself against those who would scorn it with warnings of dire karmic retribution.⁴⁰

'Skill in means', as discussed in this scripture, brings one more important problem to the fore. Dayal brings it to light in the following comments:

A bodhisattva can adopt other methods suggested by his upāya-kauśalya. The Sad. Pu. relates some interesting parables, which illustrate this Perfection. It seems that trickery and falsehood are permitted, if the end of converting or helping others is achieved. The pāramitā, as described in the Sad. Pu., comes perilously near the vice of duplicity and insincerity.⁴¹

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See above, pp.129-130.

40

See, e.g., SP(K), pp.92-95.

41

The Bodhisattva Doctrine in Buddhist Sanskrit Literature, p.249.

Now it is necessary to decide whether Dayal is attempting to give the view of the Buddhists themselves here, or whether he is giving his own opinions. The last sentence is presumably his own moralistic gloss; the sentence preceding it, however, is obscure in this regard. If it is his own opinion it is understandable, but if it is supposed to reflect the views of the text he is discussing it is misleading. This should be evident from what has been said above about the truth-value of expediential statements. All of this, however, concerns what is merely a specific instance of a more general problem which Dayal hints at, and it is the latter which is of interest here. Is it the case that immoral means are permitted if the given end is achieved? Put even more broadly: does the doctrine of skill in means entail the belief that 'the end justifies the means'?

In attempting to answer this it is instructive to look at the position taken in the specific case already referred to, that of 'falsehood', since this is illustrative of the stance taken on the wider issue. Just as the Lotus denies that falsehood has actually been used, so the texts refuse to admit that expedients involve immoral actions. Indeed, if immorality were permissible there would be little need for skill in means, for one of the main functions of this ability is to allow the practitioner to save beings without lapsing into immorality. Vimalakīrti, for example, may appear to break the moral rules (śīlas) of a layman, but in reality he is observing the pure

monastic discipline. It is his skill in means which lets him do this; in fact, 'such a severing of the Apparent and the Real has been mentioned as one of the main roles of upāya kauśalya.. Obviously, this doctrine, as seen by the texts examined herein, does not imply that immoral means may be used for the end of saving beings.

A possible rejoinder to what has been said would be that we have actually proven that the end is seen as justifying the means, since what is taking place is that actions and beliefs which promote the attainment of 'the end' come to be considered for that reason good and moral. Hence, it could be claimed, the end 'justifies' or 'makes good' its means. Now it is undoubtedly true that some Mahāyānist groups have been willing to re-think questions of morality and to give more emphasis to actions which have soteriologically useful effects than to certain 'rules of purity' which they consider religiously impotent. This, however, is a perfectly normal instance of what continually happens in religion and in all areas where questions of morality are discussed, i.e. effects are taken into account to help in determining what is and what is not acceptable and moral. This certainly does not imply that one is committed to the bald belief that 'the end justifies the means'.

This concludes our discussion of the Lotus Sūtra. As can be seen, there would be no Lotus Sūtra without 'skill in means'. This concept is the main instrument by which the new gospel is made plausible and is simultaneously part of the

content of the new message. It has strong ties with the conception of the Buddha as a skilful teacher, which is found in the most ancient traditions, and yet it manages to bring about real innovation.⁴² We have tried to sketch the essential scheme into which skill in means is fitted, to indicate the various specific roles it plays, and to suggest some of the problems with which it is bound up.

Miscellaneous Texts

Three Mahāyāna texts will be dealt with here in an extremely brief fashion. They are the Ratnagūṇasaṃcayagāthā, the Rāṣṭrapālāparipṛcchā and the Sukhāvatī-vyūha. The primary reasons for mentioning them are that they all have claims to antiquity, and are all relatively accessible for study. Each Sūtra, however, has special features which merit its inclusion, and it should not be thought that we are simply entertaining the illusion of being completely comprehensive in this presentation of early Mahāyāna works.

The Ratnagūṇasaṃcayagāthā is a collection of verses or gāthās, corresponding fairly closely in subject-matter to the

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Whether one believes that the Lotus Sūtra is really innovative doctrinally or that it is merely, as it claims, drawing out and explaining the doctrine which has been taught all along, it remains true that this scripture has been responsible, historically, for a continuing chain of religious innovation.

much longer Aṣṭasāhasrikā.⁴³ It may, in fact, have originally been the verse portion of the latter (which portion is normally found in Mahāyāna Sūtras intertwined with the prose version).⁴⁴ It wins a place in the present discussion due chiefly to the efforts of Conze, who argues that it contains some of the oldest, or indeed even the "original" Prajñāpāramitā writings.⁴⁵ More specifically, he says: "The first formulation of Prajñāpāramitā doctrine is contained in the first two chapters of the Ratna-guṇasaṃcayagāthā, which may well go back to 100 B.C."⁴⁶ "The second stage of Prajñāpāramitā thought", he claims, "is represented by chapter 3-28 of Egs., and those parts of A [Aṣṭasāhasrikā] which correspond to them."⁴⁷

⁴³

But note that: "The existing text, printed by E. Obermiller, has been rearranged by Haribhadra (c. A.D. 800) so as to make it correspond to the present chapter division of the Aṣṭa. Its value for chronological and historical studies is thereby greatly diminished, and we cannot be certain that Haribhadra did not add, omit, or alter occasional verses." Conze, "The Composition of the Aṣṭasāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā", in Thirty Years of Buddhist Studies, p.169.

⁴⁴

Ibid., p.169.

⁴⁵

See "Recent Progress in Buddhist Studies", in Thirty Years of Buddhist Studies, pp.16-17.

⁴⁶

"The Development of Prajñāpāramitā Thought", in Thirty Years of Buddhist Studies, p. 124.

⁴⁷

Ibid., p.130.

Having already dealt with skill in means in the Aṣṭasāhasrikā, it would seem to be a sensible and intriguing study to compare the state of the concept as found there with its state as found in the supposedly earlier gāthā text. When this is done, the first shocking find is that the actual term upāya kauśalya⁴⁸ does not occur in all 302 verses (as compared with approximately 93 occurrences in Conze's translation of the Aṣṭasāhasrikā, and more in the repetitive Sanskrit). The corresponding adjective upāya kuśala⁴⁹ is met with a single time in a passage not found in the Aṣṭasāhasrikā.⁵⁰ The term upāya occurs six times: very infrequently, in other words, when compared with such terms as prajñā pāramitā and sarvajñatā which literally dot the pages. Upāya is virtually always found in conjunction with the term prajñā and its meaning, so far as is discernible, is the same as in the Aṣṭasāhasrikā.

With regard to the first two chapters, which Conze feels

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It is found, to be sure, in the title given for Chapter 20, upāyakauśalyamīmāṃsāparivarto, but this is almost certainly one among several cases of a chapter title being constructed (presumably by Haribhadra) to match the title of the equivalent chapter in the Aṣṭasāhasrikā. For the term is entirely absent from the remainder of the chapter.

⁴⁹

Prajñā-pāramitā-ratna-guṇa-saṃcaya-gāthā, ed. Obermiller, p.120.

⁵⁰

Ibid., pp.17, 55, 60, 74, 76, 103.

contains the oldest material, there is little to note. The sole relevant expression is upāyaprajñā.⁵¹ Neither the term itself nor the fact that upāya occurs only once in this section is in any way remarkable within the overall context of this work.⁵²

It might be hesitantly concluded that the above findings support Conze's hypothesis of the relative antiquity of the Ratnagūṇasamcayagāthā, and simultaneously indicate a certain stage in the development of a doctrine of skill in means. It appears as if the doctrine became much more popular in the space of time between the initial writing of these gāthās and the completion of the bulk of the Aṣṭasāhasrikā, perhaps from about 100 B.C. to 100 A.D. It is also possible that the term 'upāya', associated closely with prajñā, was used in a technical sense before the expression 'upāya kauśalya'.⁵³ The meaning which the shorter term suggests, however, seems to be the same as that

⁵¹ Ibid., p.17.

⁵² Conze says that, "If we accept verses 16-23, the remainder of the two chapters, with the doubtful exception of tathatā (II v.2), contain no new terms." ("The Development of Prajñāpāramitā Thought", in Thirty Years of Buddhist Studies, p.125.) It could be noted that although upāya is not exactly a "new term", its use in this technical sense seems rather unprecedented.

⁵³ Some authors dismiss any number of oddities in Buddhist Hybrid Sanskrit verse as being due to 'exigencies of meter', and would no doubt urge that it is simply easier to fit 'upāya' into verse than 'upāya kauśalya'. This would be far from convincing, however, since other texts (such as the Lotus) apparently have no trouble incorporating the longer term in verse.

uncovered for upāya kauśalya in the Aṣṭasāhasrikā.

The Rāṣṭrapālāparipṛcchā⁵⁴ was first translated into Chinese in the late sixth century A.D., in contradistinction from the relatively early dates of translation for most of the Mahāyāna texts considered in this essay. A.K.Warder feels, nevertheless, that there is reason to believe that this Sūtra is a very early creation. He says: "There is no external evidence for its great antiquity, but its content would harmonize with its being even earlier than the Ratnakūṭa Sūtra, before the open breach with the 'pupils' (who are not here denounced), in fact a sūtra of the Pūrva Śāila school not remodelled after the breach."⁵⁵ Once again, then, there is a possibility of interesting finds with regard to the early stages of the doctrine of skill in means.

Disappointingly, little of value in this regard can be gathered from the Rāṣṭrapālāparipṛcchā. Although the term upāya kauśalya does not seem to occur at all, upāya is fairly frequent, occurring a dozen times in this short text;⁵⁶ the concept seems to be taken for granted as very important and bears the meaning, where this is clear, which is found in the

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See The Question of Rāṣṭrapāla, trans. Ensink, p.IX.

⁵⁵

Indian Buddhism, p.359. For his remarks on the Ratnakūṭa collection and Sūtra, see ibid., pp.356-359. The Pūrva Śāila is a sect of the Mahāsaṃghika.

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Rāṣṭrapālāparipṛcchā, ed. Finot, pp.4, 5, 7, 20, 27, 30, 51, 52, 54, 55, 57.

Vimalakīrti and the Lotus, i.e. that concerned with the teaching and saving of beings.⁵⁷ Furthermore, although the text explicitly mentions the fact that there are six pāramitās,⁵⁸ and even lists these usual six,⁵⁹ there are three occasions where upāya is listed as a seventh pāramitā.⁶⁰ This, of course, suggests a late rather than an early date, though it may only be a case of late tampering with an early text. At any rate, there are no sure conclusions which can be drawn from this confusing situation with regard to either the date of the Rāṣṭrapālāpariprechā or the development of the doctrine of skill in means.

A few comments are now in order regarding the larger Sukhāvatī-vyūha.⁶¹ Unlike the former two texts this one is unquestionably very important doctrinally and historically, and is undoubtedly quite ancient as well. The only reason it has

⁵⁷ See, e.g., The Question of Rāṣṭrapāla, trans. Ensink, p.50.

⁵⁸ Ibid., p.21.

⁵⁹ Rāṣṭrapālāpariprechā, ed. Finot, p.51.

⁶⁰ See The Question of Rāṣṭrapāla, trans. Ensink, pp.6, 28, 53. Ensink mentions this fact as "remarkable" (ibid., p.6, n.25) but makes no further comment.

⁶¹ This Sūtra is being dealt with rather than its smaller counter-part because it is probably the older of the two. For the records, however: (1) the smaller Sukhāvatī-vyūha does not refer to skill in means, (2) the Amitāyur-dhyāna, another probably later Pure Land Sūtra, seems to mention upāya (see the Amitayur-dhyāna-sūtra, trans. J.Takakusu, in "Sacred Books of the East", Vol. XLIX, PartII, p.169).

not merited a more dignified place in this exposition is that the doctrine of skill in means is entirely absent from it. As far as we have been able to determine, neither the term upāya kauśalya nor even upāya in the technical sense occurs at all. This is rather surprising, and one is immediately set to wondering why it is so.

An answer could be suggested on the basis of certain details given about the creatures living in the "Land of Bliss". It will be remembered that skill in means as a teaching aid is needed particularly when beings have low inclinations; the more wisdom and purity they gain, the more independence they achieve and the less they need to be led. In Sukhāvatī beings are already lifted above the myriad common defilements and evils: hence, perhaps, skill in means, is not necessary. More specifically, in the Lotus, upāya kauśalya is said to be aimed at the freeing of beings from attachment;⁶² in the Land of Bliss they are already free from attachment.⁶³ Again, in both the Lotus and the Vimala-kīrti skill in means aims at bringing beings to the ultimate goal of absolute and perfect enlightenment (anuttarasamyak-sambodhi), i.e. to Buddhahood; in the Land of Bliss they are guaranteed of being bound to one birth at the most before reaching

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See SP.(K), pp.31,34.

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The Larger Sukhāvatī-vyūha, trans. M. Muller, in "Sacred Books of the East", Vol. XLIX, Part II, p.56.

64

this goal. Most revealing of all is the following section of Dharmākara's vow: "O Bhagavat, if in that Buddha country of mine, after I have obtained Bodhi, either teaching or learning should have to be made by any being, and they should not all be in possession of the perfect knowledge, then may I not obtain the highest perfect knowledge?"⁶⁵ The situation seems to be, therefore, that Dharmākara's vow is so tremendously potent that it takes care of the whole soteriological dynamic: once one is born in this land the game has in effect been won.

This being the case, it would follow that skill in means in any of the senses encountered (not merely as connected with saving others) is unnecessary and out of place. And yet, one cannot help thinking that if the relevant terms relating to this doctrine had been in vogue at the time this Sūtra was composed they would have been mentioned, for the lavish descriptions herein manage to include innumerable other technical terms. It is just possible, then, that the larger Sukhāvatī-vyūha is entirely innocent of the doctrine, either because it is a very old text or because it belongs to a quite different tradition from the previous texts examined.

In the final analysis it must be admitted that the reasons

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Ibid., pp.15-16. This excludes, of course, those Bodhisattvas who have taken vows to the contrary.

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Ibid., p.18.

for the omission are still obscure, and it is probably unprofitable to multiply hypotheses without some further evidence of a historical nature.

CONCLUSION

It has been seen that there are plenty of curious and apparently significant data relating to the problem of the historical development of the concept of 'skill in means'; it requires considerable deftness in devices, however, as well as some imagination to fit these into a coherent theory. The definite impression one gets from reading early Mahāyāna Sūtras is that in many cases they were written and transmitted by people who were unaware of each other's efforts. The Aṣṭasāhasrikā and the Saddharmapundarikā, for example, both consider 'upāya kauśalya' to be of great importance; yet in their treatment of the topic, about all they have in common is the term itself. In the Aṣṭasāhasrikā, the ability belongs to the Bodhisattvas and is aimed at helping them to progress to Buddha-hood along the difficult and paradox-ridden Bodhisattva-yāna. It is very closely associated with the Perfection of Wisdom and is not directly related to the saving of beings. In the Lotus Sūtra, skill in means always involves the saving of beings, is almost always a trait of the Buddhas, and is not related particularly to 'wisdom'. Neither text argues for its interpretation but, rather, assumes its own to be the only one and uses it to argue for other ends. In fact, the meaning of 'skill in means' is not itself disputed in any of these Sūtras -- it is taken for granted and exploited in dialogue about other subjects. Furthermore, though the Vimalakīrti Nirdeśa lies in between

the above two works in some aspects of its treatment of 'skill in means', one would have to be very daring to portray it as an actual historical link in a linear 'development'. There is, in short, far too little evidence upon which to construct a theory of the development of the concept in early Mahāyāna.

Again, there is no sure ground on the issue of the 'origin' of the expression 'upāyakaṣālya' as a Buddhist technical term. It would be logical for it to have arisen in the Jātaka tradition as a natural attribute of the wise and resourceful Bodhisatt(v)a. It is further possible that the Prajñāpāramitā literature then adopted it from the Jātakas and proceeded to fit it into its own special soteriology, giving it many new implications. All of this is no more than a guess, however, as should be apparent from what has been said previously. Although it may provide little comfort, one can affirm that the fog which hangs over this issue is merely one area in the larger fog-bank which enshrouds so many questions about the genesis and early development of the Mahāyāna.

What has been clear throughout the study, however, is the central importance that the concept of 'skillful teaching' has in early Buddhism, both in the 'Hīnayāna' and in the Mahāyāna. Moreover, it has been apparent that there is a line of continuity between this concept as found in the Nikāyas or Āgamas and the doctrine of skill in means in the Mahāyāna Sūtras (particularly in the Lotus). Upāya kausālya, therefore, while distinctive of early Mahāyāna Buddhism and active in the

proselytizing and self-justification of that group, is grounded in the earliest Buddhist literature that exists.

This survey has not touched upon the mass of later Mahāyāna works, where skill in means fulfils many new roles. It becomes, for example, the seventh in a scheme of ten pāramitās; again, it has a new life in Tantrism as the male principle corresponding to the female Prajñā. Nor have we touched upon the implications of the doctrine for the spread of Buddhism and the adaptation of the Dharma to different cultures.¹ We have undertaken the present study in the belief that these phenomena will be relatively easy to understand once the gist of the doctrine, as originally conceived and expounded in some of the earliest and most important Buddhist texts, is grasped.

¹ For some interesting comments on this issue, see Conze, "Mahayana Buddhism", in Thirty Years of Buddhist Studies, pp.73ff.

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