

**The Way of the Translators:
Three Recent Translations of Śāntideva's
*Bodhicaryāvatāra***

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It is possible that translation is like the flight of the bumblebee: unlikely in principle but a fact nonetheless. (Hensey, 1982).¹

1.0. Introductory.

As in other bodies of literature, a few Buddhist works have gained special favor among modern scholars and readers. Some have achieved the exalted status of membership in the modern canon of Buddhist texts. Śāntideva's *Bodhicaryāvatāra* can claim to be among these select few.² Without question it is the most translated among Indian Buddhist works of the *śāstra* genre. Although it is difficult to keep up to date with, or keep an accurate census of, the many modern language renderings of classical Buddhist texts that appear in contemporary libraries and bookstores, I would venture to say that the *Bodhicaryāvatāra* most likely now occupies the third position among the most frequently translated Indian Buddhist texts, after the

¹All references within the main body of the text and in the notes are to the last name of the author or translator as listed in the Bibliography at the end of this review; the date of publication is added only when necessary to distinguish two works by the same author or authors. Abbreviations are noted on their first occurrence and are also listed at the end of the article.

²The common title, *Bodhicaryāvatāra*, is abbreviated as Bca. in the footnotes and in textual references in the main body of the paper, and in the comments that follow some of the entries in the Bibliography. The alternative title *Bodhisattvacaryāvatāra* is not used in this essay, essentially in order to avoid the entering into a discussion of its sources.

Dhammapada and the "Heart Sutra."³

It held a privileged position in Tibetan territory, where it seems to have been translated at least twice.⁴ The *Bodhicaryāvatāra* most likely was greatly esteemed in the Indian subcontinent, and perhaps for a short time among the élites of Buddhist Indonesia.⁵ In other parts of Asia it failed to make much of an impression. It was clumsily translated into Chinese only once and it was virtually unknown in East Asia until Western Buddhist Studies brought the text to the attention of scholars in China and Japan.⁶ A good portion of the text is preserved in fragmentary manuscripts from Dunhuang in a Tibetan translation that differs significantly from both the Tanjur version and the extant Nepalese Sanskrit version).⁷

³In the case of the latter, it is hard to tell what should count as a separate or distinct translation—furthermore, its Indian origin has been called into question (see Nattier, 1992). I will not attempt a comparison with Buddhist texts composed or preserved in Chinese or Tibetan, or works in Japanese, several of which also have sometimes a semi-canonical status. They include the Lotus Sutra, the Platform Sutra, the *Shōbōgenzō*, and the *Bodhipathapradīpa*.

⁴This is counting the two extant and clearly distinct versions: the Tanjur (or "canonical") version and the Dunhuang version. But the canonical version was most likely revised extensively from an earlier prototype of the 9th century. This version is listed in the Bibliography under the name of Sarvajñadeva as main translator. The Dunhuang version has been studied extensively by Saitō.

⁵This statement is, of course, primarily impressionistic. There is no basis for a stronger statement, like that of Wallace and Wallace (p. 7) claiming that the Bca. "has been the most widely read, cited, and practiced text in the whole of the Indo-Tibetan Buddhist tradition." The suggested connection with Indonesia is only based on the existence of two compendia or abridgements of Bca. by Atīśa's teacher Dharmakīrti (Eimer, 1981), who was known by the name of his land of origin, Gser-gling-pa, that is, Suvarṇadvīpa (Chattopadhyaya & Lama Chimpa).

⁶The Chinese text has never been translated into a Western language. It was "translated" once into Japanese in the style of paraphrase known as *kokuyaku* (Byōdō, 1931).

⁷The Dunhuang text, moreover, is attributed to a different author by the name of Akṣayamati. It is preserved in four manuscripts: Stein 628, 629, 630, and Pelliot 729. Henceforth references and allusions to "the Tibetan" or

But among contemporary believers in the West and among scholars in contemporary Japan, Europe, and North America, the *Bodhicaryāvatāra* continues to hold a special fascination.⁸ It has seen a number of translations, mostly from the Sanskrit, but some from the Tibetan text in the Tanjur.⁹ We have three translations into French. It has been available, until recently, in two complete and one partial English renditions (not counting assorted fragments in anthologies). It has been translated into several other European languages: Danish, Dutch, German, and Spanish and Japanese—and into a number of modern Asian languages: Chinese, Hindi, Japanese, and Newari. It is also available in one partial translation into Italian.

Three English renditions have appeared in the last two

"Tib." will be to the Tanjur version of Bca., unless it is specified otherwise. This version is among the earliest texts translated into Tibetan (ca. first half of the 9th century C.E.). The translators were Sarvajñadeva and Dpal-brtsegs—it is No. 5272 (vol. 99, pp. 243-262) in the Peking edition (Ōtani Reprint). It was revised by three scholars generally dated in the 9th century (Dharmaśrībhadrā, Rin-chen-bzang-po, and Śākya-blo-gros), but was then revised much later by scholars dated in the early and late 11th century (Sumatikīrti and Blo-ldan-shes-rab—1059-1109 C.E.). The Mongolian versions, including the late translation of Chos-kyi 'od-zer also have some interesting variants (see Poppe, 1954, Ruegg, 1967, Lokesh Chandra, 1976, and Rachewiltz, 1996).

⁸An exploration of the reasons for this fascination would yield interesting insights into the Orientalist frame of mind. One of our graduate students at the University of Michigan, Mr. Kaoru Ohnishi, is at present engaged in such an investigation. I myself am of two views. As a hold-out in the "canon wars," I would argue that the work is a classic and deserves the attention it has received; but as a child of post-modernity, I also recognize that much of the attraction is the result of a mirror effect that seems to allow the Western scholar and practitioner to recognize in Bca. a Western ascetic subconscious. This mirror allows us the fantasy of a "spirituality" with all the glory, but none of the gore, of classical ascetic traditions. Needless to say, the Bca. satisfies neither the requirement of a pure spirituality nor the expectation of tame asceticism.

⁹Full references for all of the translations mentioned in the following paragraphs will be found in the Bibliography.

years, bringing the number of complete English translations to five. First, a version from the Sanskrit by Crosby and Skilton was published by Oxford University Press in 1996 (abbreviated CS).¹⁰ This was followed in 1997 by a translation from the canonical Tibetan version by Wulstan Fletcher, of the Padmakara Translation Group (abbreviated PG).¹¹ Soon thereafter, we saw the publication of still another English rendering, this time by Vesna A. Wallace and B. Alan Wallace, based on the edited Sanskrit versions, with copious extracts translated from the canonical Tibetan version (abbreviated WW). These three most recent English translations bring the total of contemporary translations to at least twenty-seven.¹²

1.1. Indian Document or World Classic?

Although the translation of Buddhist śāstras presents special problems, the difficulties, methods, and assumptions we

¹⁰When the abbreviations used for the new Bca. translations are used to mean the book or the work, the abbreviation is construed as the singular (e.g., CS = Crosby and Skilton's translation). When the abbreviation stands for the translators, it is construed as a plural (e.g., CS = Crosby and Skilton).

¹¹In a self-effacing gesture, the book is published as the work of the Padmakara Translation Group, but the introduction strongly suggests to me that the translation is primarily the work of Fletcher. Nevertheless, in deference to their wish, I refer to this version as "the Padmakara translation."

¹²My count is based on the translations I have been able to examine, or for which I have found reliable references. I am not always comfortable listing as more or less independent translations some of these texts, even some of the ones I have examined. I also have little confidence in my list of the translations into contemporary Indian languages. Pezzali, for instance, lists others, but her references are at times obscure, and often unreliable. I have also not attempted to count fragmentary or partial translations in anthologies (some of which are slightly edited excerpts from the complete translations—see, e.g., Conze, Nyanaponika). A good example of an anthologized excerpt, translated with care, is Winternitz, 1930. In all, I have been able to obtain and examine 19 complete or close to complete translations into modern languages (counting LVP's efforts as only one translation), another 8 have not been accessible to me. Versions in modern languages that are known to me are listed in the Bibliography. Those I have been able to examine are listed under "Modern Translations Examined by the Reviewer" the others under "Modern Translations Not Examined by the Reviewer."

find in translations of Buddhist scholastic treatises have much in common with those encountered in any other body of translated literature. This is especially true of a text like the *Bodhicaryāvatāra*, which combines elements of several genres in a manner that must be characterized as unique in Indian literature.¹³ Furthermore, śāstras are sometimes read as if they had some sort of universal or timeless appeal, yet they are also assumed to be highly technical, if not scientific treatises. Modern interpreters seldom acknowledge the tension between these two characterizations.

Yet, the relative popularity of the *Bodhicaryāvatāra* in the West may be due to the fact that it has come to be considered primarily as a timeless expression of universal human longings. Since the days of Auguste Barth (1893), it has been considered as equal to the greatest works of Christian "spirituality," and therefore (as if one proposition followed necessarily from the other) as a work of universal value and appeal.

The translation by Crosby and Skilton (CS) is part of a collection called "World's Classics." Steinkellner, in the Introduction to his German translation (1981, p. 7) speaks of the "religious inspiration," wisdom, and literary beauty that in combination make the *Bodhicaryāvatāra* "a document of world literature." With such expectations, the translator's task becomes much more difficult than it would be if the work were assumed to be a technical text, or a culture-bound literary production.¹⁴

Since its modern re-discovery at the end of the nineteenth

¹³This does not imply necessarily the originality of a single author. I am not sure we can confidently eliminate the possibility that Bca. is a composite text formed by agglutination. The existence of the Dunhuang recension at the very least suggests this alternative hypothesis.

¹⁴One could argue that shastric texts are so bound to their cultural context or to the scholastic jargon of their creators as to be untranslatable, or as to render their translation a pointless effort (Griffiths). I think this is an extreme position, but nevertheless an exaggeration that captures in a few words the difficulties encountered by the translator of such works.

century, the *Bodhicaryāvatāra* has been regarded as an expression of the universal longings presumed to underlie "mysticism" or "spirituality" (La Vallée Poussin & Thomas, 1925, Pezzali, 1968, etc.). It has often been held as an ideal, if not an accurate account of Indian Mahāyāna practice (see, e.g., La Vallée Poussin, 1910 & 1925). And it is sometimes regarded as a practical manual, or even a "meditation manual"¹⁵—which would entail still another shift in the goals and expectations of audience and translator. Still other scholars and believers see the work as primarily philosophical (Ruegg, 1981, also 1995), although classical literature as well as modern use confirms its importance as a ritual and devotional text. Less common are appreciations of the *Bodhicaryāvatāra* as a document of Buddhist monasticism (Ishida, 1988, 1993a, 1993b). Also, for all our expressed admiration for the poetical beauty of Bca., we do not have to date any detailed explorations of the literary characteristics and merits of the work.¹⁶

Allusions and references to Śāntideva and his *Bodhicaryāvatāra* are legion, yet surprisingly, until recently it had not been the object of any major published monograph—although one must mention a number of Ph.D. dissertations in America and Japan (e.g., Sweet, 1976), and a fascinating paper on the psychology of meditation published in a major journal of clinical psychology (Sweet & Johnson, 1990).¹⁷ In spite of this

¹⁵Respectively, Kajihara (1991), and Paul Williams in his *General Introduction to CS* (p. xxvi). But the notion that Bca. is a manual comes from the title (*avatāra* understood as "practical introduction"?) and is already found in LVP and Brt. Kajihara suggests that the Bca. was a "ritual" manual of sorts. I think neither characterization is acceptable for the whole book—not even for Chapters III-V, and VIII, which admittedly contain much practical advice or instruction.

¹⁶For one way of looking at Bca. as rhetoric, see Gómez, 1994. Also of interest is the remark of Frauwallner (1956, p. 254) that Śāntideva is more important as poet than as philosopher.

¹⁷I had not received my copy of the only published monograph (Williams, 1998) at the time the typescript of this review was sent to the editors. Hedinger, 1984, is a respectable study of certain themes in Śāntideva's

dearth of critical studies, the *Bodhicaryāvatāra* is often read in the original in university graduate courses and in translated excerpts in undergraduate courses. It is also the object of study in many Western Buddhist centers, and not too long ago was the object of a commentary—published in English—by H. H. the Dalai Lama (who is extremely fond of this text).¹⁸

The *Bodhicaryāvatāra* is therefore a work of many meanings, amenable to a wide variety of readings. If that makes it into a “classic,” then a true classic it is. The point is not whether it is “a true classic” or not, or whether or not there are true classics. Rather, the point is that such a protean work deserves and requires many translations—and that comparing translations becomes all the more complicated, since the value of a translation is linked to its intended use and audience.

One should also note that a translation, if well done, can serve as a kind of critical study, a commentary of sorts. In that sense the recent spate of English translations not only increases the number of English renderings twofold, it also adds something to our scholarship on Śāntideva and the *Bodhicaryāvatāra*. To boot, one of these translations (CS) adds a study of some size if one combines the preface, the main introduction, all the separate chapter introductions and the notes.

The value of a translation is not determined exclusively by a “goodness of fit” between audience and translated text, or between preferred interpretation and preferred renditions. The

other work, the *Śikṣāsamuccaya*.

¹⁸ *A flash of lightning in the dark of night* (1994). This is a commentary of selected stanzas from all ten chapters. There is, however a more detailed commentary to the ninth chapter also by H. H. the Dalai Lama, published as *Transcendent Wisdom, A commentary on the ninth chapter of Shantideva's Guide to the bodhisattva way of life* (1988). I should note also that my undergraduate students are very fond of the first of these two commentaries by H. H. the Dalai Lama—an important observation in light of my own judgement regarding the source for the Bca. excerpts used in that commentary: namely, the Padmakara version.

value of translations is also measured in terms of grammatical and idiomatic constraints, by rhetorical and cultural parameters, and by the limitations of cultural context and language usage. Furthermore, translations are not only commentaries and useful tools for the scholar who is struggling with a text, they are also meant to do something else: somehow make the text accessible in a different idiom—and make it accessible especially to those unfamiliar with the source language and culture. One must therefore ask, not only if a new translation offers new insights or an interesting new perspective, but also the degree to which it is able to stand alone as a work of literature (in this case presumably religious literature) accessible to a moderately educated reader in the target language (in this case contemporary standard English). One must also judge the degree to which this accessibility is balanced by signals (conventions and turns of language) reminding readers in the target-language that the text is the work of (a different) culture or of a human being who did not always think the way the readers think (or believe they do).

1.2. From “Old” to “New” Translations

When a work has been translated many times before, one must also ask if new translations advance our knowledge of the text, use language that is more accessible to contemporary readers than the one found in the older versions, or improve on the accuracy and elegance of the translations. Of course, ideally we would want new translations to accomplish all four of these goals, but we should be more than pleased if some progress is made in any of these fronts.

At the outset I will say that the new translations under review do make some progress (each in different proportions and in their particular style). The next, middle part of this review will make specific judgements, exemplifying some problems and specific areas and degrees of progress. Given the intended purposes of this journal, in the final section of the review I will allow myself to speak more generally on the craft

and science of the translator. I will then discuss the areas that are still in need of improvement in the available translations of the *Bodhicaryāvatāra*, and will present some recommendations for those readers interested in knowing which of these translations might be more useful.

But, in order to describe progress, one must first consider a rapid survey of the major earlier translations. The first Western rendition was an incomplete French translation by Louis de La Vallée Poussin of Chapters I, II, III, IV, and X (1892), followed a few years later by Chapter V (1896). The same translator then started anew beginning with Chapter I, retranslating the text systematically, but this time excluding chapter X (1905-1906). This version (henceforth LVP) was published independently as an offprint in 1907 (still minus Chapter X). This renditions are overall reliable, but the second set of translations (the one consulted by most readers) tends to read like a gloss, sometimes sliding into commentary form (this was less true of the earlier fragmentary drafts).

Soon thereafter (1909), Barnett published a partial English version, that excluded most of Chapter IX, and passages considered redundant ("prolix") by the translator (abbreviated Brt.).¹⁹ Barnett recognized his debt to La Vallée Poussin's 1907 rendition; but for the most part he improved on the French. Barnett's is an excellent, unappreciated, rendition. Unfortunately it is clouded by an occasional Christian theological twist in word choice and by archaic or quaint English. The introduction to the translation is dated and is often misleading. Still I would argue this version remains to date the best English rendition in terms of accuracy, clarity, and elegance.

Barnett's was followed by Finot's French rendering

¹⁹ Brt. in fact omits several key stanzas (e.g., VIII.107). I do not believe it is proper for a translator to make this sort of decision for the reader. I feel the same way regarding LVP's decision to omit Chapter X, without omitting other passages that have been questioned by the tradition. More on this below.

(1920), which also made good use of La Vallée Poussin's insights, but superseded its predecessor in elegance and accessibility. Finot's translation was followed by a rendition that remains, to this day, the best understanding of the Sanskrit version of Bca. in a modern Language, the German version of Schmidt (1923—abbreviated Schm.). This is a work that must be consulted by anyone attempting to understand Śāntideva's deceptively simple language.

After these four pioneering works, many translations from the Sanskrit have been by necessity derivative—sometimes in the best sense of the term. Some translations, however, in attempting fresh renderings have not benefited from the experience and spadework of the pioneer translators.²⁰

Tucci's Italian (1925) is derivative—he recognizes his debt to La Vallée Poussin, Finot, and Schmidt but seems not have consulted Barnett. Tucci's renderings, however, make some advances by breaking here and there a particularly knotty crux. A long hiatus separates this work from another respectable translation: the Japanese version of Kanakura Enshō (1958). Kanakura clearly owes much to the French translations, but tends to miss many subtleties that had been grasped by previous translators.

Nevertheless, Kanakura's rendering is superior to the English version of Matics (1971), which is unfortunately a good example of why it is sometimes better to write a derivative translation than to attempt an original (Matics was reviewed by Gómez, 1974). Except for the occasional useful footnote or reference, Matics's version is extremely problematic and misleading. Also of very limited use is a more recent English version by Sharma (1990). The English prose of both the Matics and Sharma translations is often hard to follow.

The second German rendition, by Steinkellner (1981—

²⁰In fact, as I will argue presently, attempts to avoid the shortcomings of derivative translation by ignoring earlier translations often result in the recurrence of translation errors.

abbreviated Stn.), owes much to Schmidt, sometimes following the early rendering verbatim. Yet, although this is obviously a derivative product, it has been done with extreme care, and a solid command of Sanskrit and of the cultural and doctrinal contexts of the original. This is a model of how one can use previous translations to avoid repeating mistakes or wasting the hard work of one's predecessors. Steinkellner's translation also contains what is by far the most reliable and accessible rendition of Chapter IX, often improving on Schmidt in this section of the work.

Neither WW nor CS have superseded the French or the German renditions in terms of accuracy. These translations, especially CS, sometimes tend to translate Sanskrit as code, missing idioms that Barnett had translated correctly and clearly. CS sometimes feels stilted; WW is generally more accessible and transparent. My guess (and a guess it must be) is that WW put the Tibetan version to good use by reading it not like a crib for the Sanskrit but as model of possible solutions to problems in the Sanskrit. This produced, I surmise, the smoother translation. Both WW and CS have come a long way from the Matics rendering, and add materials omitted in Barnett.

Modern interpreters have also used the Tibetan version as an alternative route to understanding the text. The first such attempt appears to be that of Kawaguchi. I have never seen Kawaguchi's work, and hence must rely on Kanakura's all too brief remark that Kawaguchi's Japanese rendering is "not infrequently" hard to follow (Kanakura, 1958, p. 245). Much the same can be said of Batchelor's rendering from the Tibetan (abbreviated Batch.), which is an example of reading Tibetan as code—a practice that leads to inaccurate and awkward translations. As in the case of Matics, at times Batchelor's English is not readily intelligible. There is no doubt in my mind that PG and WW have superseded Batchelor. Additionally, as will be noted below in a detailed analysis of selected stanzas, PG is in general the best of the three new

translations, and can be used confidently in spite of the fact that it is based on the Tibetan and not the Sanskrit text.

2.0. Three Translations and the Craft of Translation.

On the surface, many of the problems with modern renderings of Indian texts from either Indian or Tibetan versions may be described as a failure to understand the source language as a natural language (reading Sanskrit as a “scientific” code, or even worse, trying to read Tibetan as Sanskrit, or Sanskrit through Tibetan, often without a good command of the presumed underlying Sanskrit). This is one way of explaining the problem, excessive use of wooden, pseudo-technical English jargon (“Buddhist Hybrid English”—Griffiths).

Overall, the new English translations (in contrast to Matics or Batch.) have outgrown these problems (with notable, but infrequent, exceptions in CS, some of which are examined below). But, at a deeper theoretical level, these efforts may reflect two problems that will be highlighted below: a theoretical belief in the literal and the true, an inability to separate the peculiarities of the Sanskrit idiom from the peculiarities of Buddhist jargon, and a difficulty crossing over from a technical understanding of the text to a viable translation. In the following pages I will attempt to formulate such judgements with regard to the three “new” English renderings of the *Bodhicaryāvatāra*.

Naturally, the consideration of any particular work of translation is an occasion for possible reflection on the art of translating and its many rewards and frustrations. To translate, as already noted, is to interpret, or, better yet, to give public shape in the target language to the world of words, ideas, events, and objects that one has understood in a text in the source language. The end product is sometimes the only evidence we have of our own understanding of the original, and it embodies both the joys of understanding and the pain of knowing that one has not understood.

2.1. Three Translations.

The three books under review embody these joys and frustrations. To be fair to the translators one must remember that the source text is a difficult combination of literary forms—code of conduct, poetry, idealized ritual, philosophical argument, to name the most obvious. It is also a work (in spite of what these translators seems to believe) whose audience is no more. As far as we can tell, the work was written in a setting that is no more.²¹

In the case of a work like the *Bodhicaryāvatāra*, the task of the translator is complicated by problems of both “lower” and “higher” text criticism.²² It is a disjointed text, and we have no way of knowing for certain how much of that fragmentation is due to historical accident. Much that is characteristic of the *Bodhicaryāvatāra*’s genre does not meet our expectations of unity, development, and cohesion. The text is allusive, relying on echoes and indirect references; it abounds in literary conceits that may strike the modern reader as mixed metaphors or obscure puns that combine imagery and scholastic jargon.

Perhaps more than in other genres, here the translator’s success cannot be measured except by counting near misses and occasional bull’s-eyes. And even then there is much room for disagreement among intelligent people regarding what is a near miss and what is completely off center. There is also some room for variant approaches to the historical audience and the present audience. This does not mean however that there are

²¹Translators and scholars ceaselessly repeat as incontrovertible fact the authorship of Śāntideva and his affiliation with Nālandā, and assume that every single word they read in Bca. somehow represents Śāntideva. All of this is open to question (see, for instance, Saitō’s discussion of the Dunhuang text—Saitō, 1986a, 1986b, 1993, 1994). What is more, we should ask ourselves what it is that we really know about life in Nālandā in the 7th century—assuming that we can place the author of Bca. in that location at that time, and, furthermore, exactly what do our claims about authorship mean?

²²Whoever invented this distinction never understood how inseparable the two are, and how difficult and sophisticated lower criticism can be.

no constraints on translation, or that an argument cannot be made to prefer one translation over another. As I expect to show in the following pages, the fact that intelligent people disagree is also not a good reason for ignoring the contributions of past translators and commentators.

2.2. A Close Look at Three Translations

In the restricted space of a review it is not possible to discuss these three translations line by line, or do justice to the complexities of the craft of translations generally. I can only hope to clarify some of the pitfalls specific to the translation of Buddhist Sanskrit texts, exploring some of the strategies for solving these problems. Furthermore, I can only look at and see the end product, whereas a discussion of the process is essential to understand why I may agree or disagree with the translators. Translators, reviewer, and readers are therefore at a disadvantage, because in this review we can only guess at what the underlying processes may have been.

One way to look at the problems of translation is to conceptualize them as technical problems. My analysis will begin with such an approach. This perspective has two advantages and one great disadvantage. On the one hand, it gives us a more or less common language of rational discourse (and disagreement), namely, grammar and lexicography. On the other hand, it creates the false impression that grammar is language, and leads to the bad habit of grammatical carbon copies that turn out to be perhaps grammatical, but definitively unidiomatic in the target language.

On the one hand, the assumption of a technique allows for an easy pedagogical transmission of certain tools of translation. On the other hand, it creates the false impression that the memorization of certain rules will guarantee understanding of the language (this is part of the myth of Sanskrit as a scientific code).

In the following paragraphs, I will begin with a sampling of problems that appear on the surface to be only technical

(grammatical or lexicographic), yet under closer examination reveal themselves to be problems of context and idiom. Given the limitations of space imposed by the review genre (and the natural limits of my readers' patience), I will make a detailed analysis of only a few stanzas. But I trust these will be enough to show how complex the relations between grammatical signs and idiomatic meaning are, how different they are in Sanskrit and in English, and how problematic are the contexts we are trying to transfer across language and culture when we attempt to translate a text like the *Bodhicaryāvatāra*.

2.2.1. Mechanical Translation. The problems involved in turning a mechanical (so-called "literal") translation into an idiomatic translation can be illustrated by the following stanza. This is a passage that is grammatically so simple that it could be used as an exercise in a first semester of Sanskrit. Naturally, this only means that the passage is deceptively simple, and hence it reminds us that grammar is only the very first of many keys needed to enter the Kafkaesque palace of textual interpretation. The passage in question is Chapter VI, stanza 3, part of a long passage explaining the ravages of hatred (the opposite of the virtue exalted in Chapter VI: patient acceptance or *kṣānti*):

VI.3. *manah śamaṃ na grhṇāti na prīti-sukhaṃ aśnute |*
na nidrāṃ na dhṛtiṃ yāti dveṣa-śakye hṛdi sthite ||

This can be rendered *mechanically* as:

VI.3. The mind does not hold calm, does not obtain joy-happiness, does not [attain] sleep, does not gain stability/security, if the dart/thorn of hatred has settled in the heart.

This stanza illustrates plainly the problems faced by the hypothesis of the literal translation. First, a mechanical translation often slides into unintelligibility. Second, even the "literal" translation is a compromise in many ways. Consider, for instance, the verbs translated as "gain," "obtain," and "attain," "gain" and "is." On the basis of a rigid etymological analysis, they could be rendered, respectively, as "grasp,"

“enjoy” (or “consume”), “go to,” “go to” (a single verb in the original must be translated twice in English), and “stands, stays, remains.” So much for elementary Sanskrit and literal translations.

Here the three translations under review struggle to find a simple idiomatic rendering—one that will retain the simplicity of the original, yet work as intelligible English. The result is mixed: sometimes very successful, sometimes disappointing. Transformed into idiomatic English, this passage appears in CS as a straightforward statement:

VI.3. One's mind finds no peace, neither enjoys pleasure or delight, nor goes to sleep, nor feels secure while the dart of hatred is stuck in the heart.

Compare this with WW:²³

VI.3. The mind does not find peace, nor does it enjoy pleasure and joy, nor does it find sleep or fortitude when the thorn of hatred dwells in the heart.

The solutions “finds” and “does not find” are certainly more elegant than the “does not grasp” and “hold” of the mechanical translation. The English phrases “finds no peace” (CS) and “does not find peace” (WW) come close to what the Sanskrit seems to convey (namely, “never manages to get a firm hold on peace”), yet are also idiomatic in English. These are successful transformations of the Sanskrit. The same can be said of “enjoy,” which actually represents a good compromise for Sanskrit *aśnute*, because it means “get,” “reach,” “gain possession,” “possess,” but also is historically the same root as *aśnāti* (“to consume, to eat”).²⁴ In fact, the rendering “enjoy” is attested (or “proposed”) in the dictionaries (BR, MW) for both

²³ Notice, parenthetically, that Tib. differs from Skt., yet WW offer no rendition of the Tib. of this passage.

²⁴ This is not only an argument from etymology. The association of eating with enjoying is, if I may say so, natural. We see it also in the family of roots represented by the two doublets of *bhaj-* and *bhuj-*. And one could make a psychoanalytic argument as well.

aśnute and *aśnāti*.²⁵ Parenthetically, WW's "enjoy... joy" is an example of a different sort of problem: renderings that may sound awkward in the target language simply due to cacophony. This is often unavoidable.

The solutions in CS and WW for the next verb are not as successful. The verb literally means "to go," but is here essentially an auxiliary of sorts (what some would call a modal, others a dummy or empty verb): it indicates movement towards, approach, but the exact meaning of this movement is supplied by the object of the verb not by the verb itself. To render it as "goes to sleep" (CS) is not only unnecessarily literal, it gives the wrong impression to the English reader (simply ask yourself what it would mean to say "my mind went to sleep"—it is either something one would never say or something meant ironically or as an infelicitous metaphor). "Find sleep" (WW) is also a bit unidiomatic, but at least not misleading.

The last verb can also serve as a modal or empty verb: the subject remains in a position or continues in an action that is only revealed by context or by another verb form. Here we are told that a dart or thorn "is," "remains," and will not leave the heart. "Stuck in the heart" seems like an acceptable, if unpoetical rendering; but "dwells in the heart" is not so successful, for it fails to convey the fact that the thorn or dart is painful and hard to remove (compare: "my grief is like a dart dwelling in my heart" with "my grief is like a dart piercing my heart").

Subtleties of this sort, the commentaries seldom solve for us. Prajñākaramita's *Pañjikā* (abbreviated Pk.), for instance, only offers a few platitudes. Commentaries have usually very little to say on such subtleties precisely because such passages appear on

²⁵The aside "proposed" is meant to remind the reader that dictionaries are compressed and indexed compilations of translation. They give us a range of meanings in the target language, from which we are to make a reasonable choice for our own renditions. The testimony of dictionaries is therefore somewhere between the raw data of usage and the uncertain art of translation.

the surface to be so easy, and because they are subtleties that become apparent mostly when one attempts to cross over language barriers. Tibetan translations are not always helpful, as they tend to engage in one of the problematic habits outlined before (assuming that there is something sacred and code-like in the Sanskrit language). Nevertheless, they often offer subtle hints about the way the Sanskrit was interpreted by ancient translators and editors. Consider Tib. for VI.3:

VI.3. *zbe sdang zug rngu'i sems 'chang na || yid ni zhi ba
nyams mi myong || dga' dang bde ba 'ang mi 'thob la
|| gnyid mi 'ong zhing brtan med 'gyur ||*

This can be rendered as follows:

VI.3. As long as one clings to a mind tormented by hatred, the mind will not experience tranquil thoughts. One will not enjoy pleasure or happiness, nor be able to sleep, and will become insecure.

PG is, technically speaking, not accurate, yet it captures much of the spirit of the original in simple, readable English:²⁶

VI.3. Those tormented by the pain of anger
Will never know tranquility of mind—
Strangers they will be to every pleasure;
Sleep departs them, they can never rest.

Although PG in general translates very freely, the above rendering reflects Tib., which in this case helps us understand that the Sanskrit metaphor of the “dart” is meant to indicate that hatred is a torment and something that is difficult to dislodge. Tibetan also suggests that the peace in question is here “peace of mind,” and hence, that we may not need to transfer the metonymical subject “mind.” Thus PG suggests to

²⁶ Coincidentally, here and in many other passages, PG is successful not only as a rendering of Tib., but as a free and graceful rendering of the Sanskrit. Attempts to translate as English blank verse, however, sometimes produce expressions that may not be so felicitous—for instance the phrase “sleep departs them” above.

me that although the Sanskrit subject is the mind, the referent is the whole person. Lastly, Tib. suggests, I believe correctly, that Skt. *dhṛti* is thematically closely related to *nidrā*, and should not be taken to mean fortitude—it must mean rest and contentment.

This simple passage is not exactly a crux, but a quick look at the “old” Western translations, shows major disagreements, and considerable stumbling over the simple but ambiguous verbs. Yet the best among them (Brt., LVP, Schm., Stn.) agree that *prīti-sukha* cannot be translated as “joy and happiness” (or the corresponding variants in CS and WW), but should be understood instead as “the pleasure of joyful feelings”—technically: it is a dependent compound (*tatpuruṣa*), not a copulative compound (*dvandva*).²⁷ The compound therefore means the happiness that accompanies or follows feelings of love (liking something or someone), in contrast to the pain that accompanies hatred (loathing something or someone).

In light of all of the above, I would prefer to translate as follows:

- VI.3. As long as the thorn of hatred is lodged in the heart, the mind will find no peace, it will not know the pleasure of joyful feelings, it will never find rest or contentment.

The above passage begins to suggest some major principles. First, the need to understand the mechanics of language has as much to do with understanding the nuances and semantic functions of words, as it has to do with

²⁷ This makes sense intuitively, but is further corroborated by the use of *apṛītiduḥkha* in V.78—which I take to be the antecedent or allusion behind VI.3. In turn, VI.3 “foreshadows” VI.76 and 95, where Śāntideva puns on this compound and on the ambiguities of *prīti*, which can mean everything from the joy of mental calm, to liking, pleasure, enthusiasm, delight, friendliness, conciliation, and love. In other words, the problems involved in translating this word in the present context are further complicated by the fact that Śāntideva does not use it only in its technical, Buddhist, sense. For instance, at VIII.173 *ātma-prīti* must mean “love of oneself.”

understanding morphology. Second, even if one could conceive of the source language as a learned, scientific language of the literate (which still does not imply that it is an unnatural language), a mechanical translation does not produce a readable or understandable translation in the target language. And, third, the need to work out “literal meanings” is a preliminary to reconstructing concrete circumstances (linguistic and material) not a final stage of fixing “true equivalents.”

2.2.2. Basic Problems of Syntax. In many cases, however, annotation and difficult puns are not the only problems confronted by the translator. The translator’s own “intuition” or “learned habits” may stand in the way of understanding and interpretation. Among English speaking scholars an “intuitive grasp” is likely to be mistaken, because English and Sanskrit have radically different syntactical rules. But, syntactical turns and usage can be obscured also by an excessive focus on morphology and etymological lexicography, which are habits learned in the first years of rote-memory Sanskrit drilling.

Take for instance VIII.88-89. The first of these two stanzas is in fact straightforward and has been rendered accurately in several of the older translations. Consider for instance, Stn., who here, by the way, improves somewhat on Schm.:

VIII.88. Das Glück der Zufriedenheit, das der
genießt, der nach eigenem Wunsche
wandert und wohnt und an keinen
gebunden ist, ist selbst für Indra [den
König der Götter] schwer zu erlangen.

svacchanda-cārya-nīlayaḥ pratibaddho na kasyacit |
yat saṁtoṣa-sukhaṁ buñkte tad indrasyaṅpi durlabham ||

This I translate mechanically from the Sanskrit to assist readers unfamiliar with German:

VIII.88. Even Indra finds it hard to (cannot) attain
this joy of contentment that is savored by
he who wanders and finds shelter at will

and is not bound to anyone.

The temptation for the English speaker here is to invert the position of the relative and correlative clauses, producing an intuitive (and mistaken) rendering: "bound to none, one enjoys that happiness... which even for a king is hard to find" (CS). But the text is actually saying: "even Indra cannot obtain the happiness, which the person bound to none, enjoys."²⁸

Of course, German has certain advantages over English in translating Sanskrit; the relative clause is clearly marked in German, making its inversion more natural, or at least tolerable (Stn.)—Schm. translates accurately, but changes the order of the clauses for clarity's sake. But it is not only a matter of German vs. English: Brt. also mapped out the Sanskrit elegantly and accurately (albeit quaintly) on to his English rendering. On the other hand, LVP and Finot were less successful here. Tucci demonstrates his independence here by reading correctly: "Quella beatitudine fatta.... questa dallo stesso Indra...."²⁹

Among the new English translations, WW also misses the proper relative and correlative. CS and WW also choose not to read *indra* as the name of the god.³⁰ WW reads more naturally than CS, but is still inaccurate:

VIII.88. Living as one wishes, homeless, and not
tied down by anyone, one savors the joy of

²⁸ Parenthetically, "etymology" aside, *durlabha* can also mean "impossible to obtain"—no need to translate *dur-* mechanically if the context justifies another interpretation.

²⁹ Notice that Tucci's literate Italian also has clear markers for the relative and correlative clauses. Additionally, languages with clear gender and number agreements have a certain advantage over English—or, at least, make it easier on the translator.

³⁰ WW and CS choice of "king" for *indra* is not supported by either the Tibetan or the Chinese translations. CS do tell us in a note (p. 176) that they are using the word "king" to translate "*indra*, which is also the name given to the chief of all the gods...." But the comparison between human and heavenly pleasures, and the advantages of being human over being a god are common tropes—in this case confirmed by Pk.

contentment, which is difficult even for a king to find.

In the end, here too PG offers the most eloquent translation (from Tibetan). The translators take certain liberties that make a judgement regarding accuracy a bit more difficult, but their rendering conveys the situational meaning effectively. Thus PG reads:

VIII.88. To have such liberty unmarred by craving,
And loosed from every bond and tie—
A life of such contentment and such bliss,
The gods like Indra would be pressed to find!

Notice the original treatment of the first line in WW and PG.³¹ This contrasts sharply with CS's slightly off-center rendering: "[o]ne's conduct and dwelling are one's own choice." The reading of the compound as a copulative sentence ("are one's own choice") is not only a mistake in grammar, it could have been easily avoided with a quick consultation of, say, Brt.—to say nothing of the French and German versions—or by carefully reading down the columns in BR or MW (under *svacchanda*).

The rendering "conduct" is not felicitous in this context. CS must analyzed the compound as *svacchanda-cārya-nilaya* (as in Stn.). But the pairing of *cārya* (wandering) with *nilaya* (settling down), would suggest the interpretation adopted in Stn., Schm., etc.: that the compound refers to the freedom of the homeless wandering ascetic and the hermit, who wander and choose dwellings freely.

However, the compound can be scanned differently: *svacchanda-cārī-anilaya* (that is, *svacchandacārī* + *anilaya*). This is one of the readings adopted by Pk., and is followed in LVP, Brt., Schm., Kanakura, and WW—e.g., Brt.: "who wanders

³¹Also elegantly done in WW's rendering of Tib.: "Living freely, without attachment,..."

homeless at his own free will."³²

In the end I would settle for a compromise that focuses on the situational meaning, sacrificing some of the grace of Śāntideva's proleptic construction (which placed the most important player, the ascetic, before the less important figure, Indra):

VIII.88. Even Indra cannot enjoy the happiness of perfect satisfaction savored by those who wander free and homeless, tied to nothing and no one.

The stanza immediately following (VIII.89) is grammatically and technically more complicated. In this case I first offer an analytical (mechanical and wooden) rendering to highlight the stanza's structure:

VIII.89. When one has stilled distracting-thoughts by bringing to mind the advantages of solitude in [all their] aspects, beginning thus [= as was done in the above passages], one should then cultivate the thought of awakening.

evam-ādibhir ākārair viveka-guṇa-bhāvanāt |

upaśānta-vitarkaḥ saṁ bodhicittam tu bhāvayet ||

This is one case where we can learn much from Pk., because it offers a detailed gloss:

"Thus," means "as stated above." With the word "beginning" are implied other similar aspects of this practice. "By bringing to mind the advantages of solitude"—both physical and mental solitude. For, one becomes a person whose distracting discursive thought (unreal conceptualization) is stilled by repeatedly bringing before the mind's attention this solitude, which is the cause of total happiness and [spiritual] success. The

³²Tucci: "abituato ad andare dove più gli aggrada." is based on a second interpretation suggested in Pk.: *svacchandacārya-nīlaya*, understanding *nīlaya* as *nīlīna*: "inclined to, used to." This seems to me a bit forced.

person who has attained this state [of freedom from distraction] should then cultivate the thought of awakening. The word “then” is meant to indicate the distinguishing characteristic [of this thought:] namely, that the thought of awakening that is cultivated once the mind is thus purified reaches a level superior [to the previous meditation].

Of course, this still does not tell us how we are to produce a reasonable English rendering, although a gloss of this sort is a first step in the process of transformation and metaphrasing. Before one attempts an English rendering, several unanswered questions must be addressed. First, what are the *viveka-guṇa* objectively and contextually, and what is the reader being told to do with them? Second, the same question, *mutatis mutandis*, with reference to *vitarka*. Third, what is the order of events described or prescribed in this passage?

With regard to the word *viveka*, we should note that its broad semantic field does not allow for a satisfactory “equivalent.” The problem is not only that English does not have a single equivalent (a language seldom has simple equivalents for words in another language), but that the family of possible equivalents diverges considerably in denotation, connotation, valuation, and register. This can be easily demonstrated by simply listing the renderings found in the available translations of Bca. (premodern Chinese and Tibetan, and modern), and some of the entries in MW and PTSD. These renderings cluster into two groups that seem to have as their common theme “division” and “separation.” I use these two categories as an axis to separate the list into two groups:

true knowledge, correct judgement, understanding
 close examination, investigation
 discernment, distinction
division ||
|| separation

withdrawal, isolation
solitude, seclusion (being sequestered), loneliness.

English "solitude" simply does not overlap with investigation and knowledge. Furthermore, in normal English usage solitude generally has positive associations, whereas withdrawal has generally negative associations. Additionally, *viveka* also implies a withdrawal into calm, a serene detachment that extends somewhat beyond similar connotations in English "solitude."³³ The word *viveka* is therefore an excellent example of the semantic phenomenon of convergence and divergence—a fine example showing why one cannot work on the assumption that there are "equivalent" terms, much less the perfect or correct equivalent.

In the *Bodhicaryāvatāra*, the "understanding" pole of the semantic field appears perhaps in X.43 & 52.³⁴ The "solitude" and "seclusion" end of the spectrum is found in II.3 and in VIII.2, 85 & 89. In the Eighth Chapter, however, *viveka* (Tib. *dben-pa*) is used also in a specifically Buddhist technical sense to mean withdrawal of the person from the secular world into an eremitical setting (*kāya-viveka*) and withdrawal of attention from distracting thoughts and passions (*citta-viveka*).³⁵

A long passage covering approximately the first half of Chapter VIII (stanzas 4-88) is an exhortation to practice this sort of *viveka*. It is a description of the virtues (advantages) of a life of solitude and the meditation practices that reduce attachment and hankering after the objects of sensual pleasure

³³ Some traces of a similar association occur in technical uses of "recollection" in the literature on monasticism. In Spanish the association is stronger in the terms *recogimiento*, *recogido* and *recolecto* (all etymologically related), which refer to *withdrawal* from the world into *sequestered* or *isolated* quarters in order to *withdraw* the senses and the mind and *recollect* (concentrate) them in the contemplation of God.

³⁴ I bracket the question of the authorship of this chapter.

³⁵ This is the technical sense that approaches the Spanish semantic cluster mentioned in the note above. On this use of the Sanskrit term, see Pk. to VIII.2, and references in PTSD under *viveka*.

(including the so-called meditation “on the corpse” or “in the charnel ground”). The passage is at the same time a description of such practices and a panegyric of, and an exhortation to, the life of the hermit or wandering ascetic. Stanza VIII.89 refers back to this long passage that has described the virtues of solitude—that is, the advantages, merits and positive qualities of solitude and detachment in the specific setting of an eremitical life.

There are two possible interpretations for the first line of VIII.89, and there is no way to tell which one is the correct reading, in part because the passage, and the tradition, probably mean both. This line tells the readers what they should have done with VIII.4-88: apply those teaching so as to gain the advantages of solitude and detachment, or reflect on the merits of solitude and detachment in order to overcome the distraction and hesitation that keeps us from cultivating and developing our determination to seek supreme awakening (*bodhicitta*, implying both the determination to seek awakening and various degrees of awakening, culminating in full awakening).

The second alternative is followed by PG, WW and most of the older translations (Kanakura is the exception). Among the new translations only CS seems to adopt the first interpretation: “By developing the virtues of solitude in such forms as these” (CS). Unfortunately this is at best awkward (I am not sure most English speakers would readily understand this phrase), but it is also possibly misleading, since one is not “developing,” but “making present in the mind” or “considering” (two very common meanings of the causative forms of *bhū-*), or, perhaps, “internalizing and practicing.”³⁶

One strong argument could be adduced in favor of understanding *bhāvana* (in *viveka-guṇa-bhāvanāt*) as a sort of

³⁶Non technical, as well as alternative technical uses of the causative forms of *bhū-* are well attested—see BR and MW. Unfortunately our Buddhist tools focus only on a specific technical use, so that it is difficult to tell to what extent we encounter non-technical uses in Buddhist literature.

formal meditation: this chapter is about meditation as the groundwork for insight or wisdom (*prajñā*) as it is presented in the next chapter. One would therefore expect the author to talk about the practice, the actual cultivation of these states of mind. However, one can conceive of this cultivation in a variety of ways, and I would be inclined to take the passage under consideration as an example of cultivation as "consideration," that is, as mental review.³⁷ Furthermore, the tone of VIII.4-88, especially with respect to the eremitical life, suggests to me that this is something to be contemplated or reviewed in the mind, not necessarily something that can be practiced fully in its ideal (or idealizes?) forms.

Hence, I find that WW and PG are more readable and accurate than CS: "After meditating on the advantages of solitude in this and other ways" (WW), and "Reflecting in such ways as these upon the excellence of solitude" (PG) [in contrast to CS: "By developing the virtues of solitude in such forms as these"].

Such reflections, we are told, lead to the stilling of *vitarka*—Tib. *rnam (par) rtog*. But what is this *vitarka*? The Pk. to Bca. VIII.2 has told us that it is the cause of mental distraction (or dispersion)—*cittavikṣepabhetu*. The word *vitarka* is one term that needs annotation, because its technical use is far from clear—it appears to be an act of attention or mental focusing directed at an object that is unreal or that is distorted by passion (e.g., the beauty of an object of desire), and thus *vitarka* shares part of the semantic fields of *saṃkalpa* and *vikalpa* (Pk. glosses *vitarka* as *asan-manasikāro*).³⁸ We can then surmise that *vitarka* is a precondition for, or the proximate cause of, distraction.

³⁷We bring many preconceptions to our understanding of Buddhist meditation. I would argue that in theory and practice "Buddhist meditation" covers the full range from repetition and recitation, through mental consideration and review, and all the way to silent or contentless meditation.

³⁸See also the entries for *vitakka* and *kāma-vitakka* in PTSD.

PG and WW offer an instructive range of imaginative options: “mental wandering” (PG, VIII.2), “discursiveness” (PG, VIII.89), “discursive thoughts” (WW, VIII.2 & 89, Skt.), and “ideation” (WW, VIII.89, Tib). Most of the older translations, including Schm. and Kanakura (similarly CS at VIII.2) are less careful and translate “distraction,” possibly following LVP. From the point of view of the target language, there is no reason for not using “distraction” metonymically to mean “distracting thoughts” (thoughts that lead the mind away from its intended object or goal).³⁹ However, since this is a technical term, I rather retain some of its technical nuances in the English rendering, opting for a compromise similar to the one adopted by CS at VIII.89 (“distracted thoughts”); but this seems to me still too much a reference to the effect, not the cause. I prefer “distracting thoughts” (Stn.’s “distracting deliberations”: “zerstreuenden Überlegungen”).⁴⁰

With this preliminary survey of some of the stanza’s component parts, we are ready to consider the hierarchy or temporal sequence of the events of reference. Is one to cultivate the thought of awakening (*bodhicitta*) after distracting thoughts have been eliminated completed, or as one continues to eliminate them? The present participle in *upasānta-vitarkaḥ san* serves a grammatical, almost pleonastic, function. It indicates that the person will continue (present participle) in a completed state or state attained (past passive participle), and hence continues to have the necessary preconditions for the cultivation of the *bodhicitta*. One may gloss this as follows (following Pk.’s gloss): “when he has stilled distracting thoughts, then in that condition, he....” (or more “literally”:

³⁹I take *vitarka* to be, as suggested in BR and MW, part of the process of fantasy and will. I prefer to think of it as the ideational component (as in WW’s rendering) of fantasies, of desire and animosity, not the mental movement or discourse of fantasy. But this preference is only based on the problematic distinction between *vitarka* and *vicāra*—see discussion in PTSD.

⁴⁰Tucci takes even greater liberties: VIII.2, “distrazione,” against VIII.89, “dubbi.”

"while he is in the state of having completely stilled").⁴¹ This gloss is still stilted and artificial; one could rephrase: "once one has stilled distracting thoughts, one should then cultivate ." The fact that everything down to "stilled distracting thoughts" is one unit, and that it contrasts (Skt. *tu*) with the final phrase is crucial; yet it is not clearly brought out in any of the newer translations. In some cases (CS and WW) the translator seems aware of this, but the final rendition is muddled by the attempt to use the stilted -ing form for the ablative or for the present participle.⁴²

PG also fails to account for the contrast between the two parts of the stanza and uses an ambiguous -ing clause in a translation that is otherwise satisfactory:

VIII.89 Reflecting in such ways as these,
 Upon the excellence of solitude,
 Pacify completely all discursiveness
 And cultivate the mind of bodhichitta.⁴³

Granted that "discursiveness" and "the mind of bodhichitta" are a bit awkward, this is still an improvement on many of the older translations. WW uses the awkward English construction "having" plus participle presumably as an analytical rendering of the possessive compound: "having one's discursive thoughts calmed, one should cultivate the Spirit of Awakening." CS appear to have overlooked the fact that the compound *upaśāntavitarkaḥ* has to be possessive, which makes

⁴¹ The notions of calming, suppressing, stopping, and eliminating which in English form discrete semantic fields, tend to converge in Skt. notions of "calming, allaying, etc." The translator is therefore also faced with the difficult decision of choosing between English fields, and every choice will sacrifice some dimension of Skt.

⁴² Also commonly abused by Sanskrit students and scholars in the translation of gerunds, this "solution" is only a way to defer difficult decisions of metaphrasing.

⁴³ PG translates the first verb correctly as an injunction (imperative or optative)—Tib. *zhi ba dang... bsgom bar bya*. In Sanskrit too the mood, tense and aspect of a finite verb can be extended backwards to present participles in the clause.

their use of the -ing form even more awkward: “distracted thoughts being calmed.” Nevertheless, CS highlights the contrast between the two parts of the sentence by stating “one should now cultivate.”

The *grammar* of this passage is best glossed, awkwardly, but accurately, as “One should still distracting thoughts by considering the above, and similar, circumstances—which show the advantages of detachment. Then, when one is a person in whom such thoughts have been extinguished [when one has extinguished them, and they are completely extinguished], one should (can / may) cultivate the thought of awakening with the meditations that follow: namely,....” This combines a draft grammatical (analytical) translation and a gloss of the underlying situational meaning. This draft can be transformed into more natural English as:

VIII.89 One should still distracting thoughts by reflecting, in this and other ways, on the advantages of solitude and detachment. With distracting thoughts stilled, one should then cultivate the thought of awakening:

VIII.90 One should first cultivate intently the identity of self and others....

It is, of course, impossible to translate to anyone’s satisfaction the term *bodhicitta*. I prefer the simple rendering “thought of awakening,” leaving it to context to clarify its many nuances. A full discussion of my argument for this choice would take too much space. Suffice it to say that when we come to terms such as these, there is even more room for honest, intelligent disagreement.

2.2.3. Word Choice and Lexicon. As the above discussion suggests, the perusal of almost any translation of a Sanskrit text betrays the weaknesses in common assumptions regarding the nature of Sanskrit and Buddhist discourse, and by extension the weaknesses in our teaching of Sanskrit—especially Buddhist

Sanskrit. It reveals the problematic models created by the notion of literal and scientific equivalents. The translator often assumes that Sanskrit is a code, a scientific or mathematical code, not a language.⁴⁴ The sort of difficult choice faced by the receptor, interpreter, and translator of any living language are often overlooked or ignored, or the choice is reduced to a choice between equivalents. This I call "the curse of the Mahāvvyutpatti fallacy": if you know the equivalent, you understand the concept.

Problems of understanding and word choice are indeed often problems of simple lexicography. However, lexicography is seldom simple. Some of the most common problems in the translation of Buddhist texts in Sanskrit texts may be attributed to two unspoken lexicographic assumptions. First is the privileging of philosophy and doctrine: the assumption that Buddhist usage can always be clarified by reference to simple tables of doctrinal truth and classification. Second is the privileging of etymology: the assumption that "the root" gives a "primary" and preponderant meaning accessible to the translator whenever the latter is in doubt as to what a word might mean. These two assumptions can only be countered by familiarity with the literature (including non-Buddhist texts, of course), and by frequent consultation of a variety of lexicons—classical Sanskrit dictionaries as well as PTSD and EdgD.⁴⁵

⁴⁴I will not enter into the question of what sort of language Sanskrit is supposed to be. As a literate, and to a certain degree artificial, language it presents special problems. But, modeled on a living language, and written by persons influenced by their own living languages, Sanskrit requires strategies very similar to those used when interpreting other literate languages. I would also argue that the peculiarities of the source language do not exempt the translator from the necessity of thinking of the target language as a natural and living language. In other words, even if Sanskrit were some sort of code, its translation into English would require an analytical transformation of the code into natural language.

⁴⁵As a rule of thumb, I give my students the following golden rules about the Sanskrit dictionary (most of these rules also apply to dictionaries generally). (1) A dictionary is not an exhaustive list of equivalent synonyms. It

Additionally, one can learn much by reading old translations patiently and critically.⁴⁶

Cases in which doctrinal readings can be misleading have been discussed above. I would now like to consider one case in which some assumptions about etymology may have played a major role. In Bca. VII.3, the reader is given a list of common proximate causes of sloth, lassitude, apathy, or moral indolence.⁴⁷ The list includes one word that has presented problems to some translators: *apāśraya*.

I translate the passage as follows (italics indicating the portion of the English text representing the aforementioned Sanskrit word):

VII.3 Sloth is motivated by an apathy towards the misery of transmigration that is sustained by inactivity, by the pleasures of comfort, and by a strong

is a partial list of possible transformations—a list that is neither exhaustive nor hierarchical. (2) It was compiled by human beings—bear in mind at one and the same time that they were smart and fallible. Try to be in doubt most of the time. (3) Always consult dictionaries in related languages or glossaries of specialized usage (especially Pāli and Buddhist Sanskrit, and concordances). (4a) Be prepared for those times when the dictionary is of no help, (4b) but don't put too much faith on "the root" or etymology as a way to supplement the dictionary. (5) And, more relevant to the issue discussed above: When in doubt prefer the nontechnical over the technical equivalent.

⁴⁶I say "patiently," but I should also say "humbly." I suspect one reason why Brt. is not appreciated (and hence, why we refuse to learn from his translation) is the assumption that because his views on Buddhist doctrine seem to us today so biased and quaint, then his understanding of Sanskrit must have been equally "mistaken." A patient reading of his work would prove us wrong.

⁴⁷The Skt. term, *ālasya*, is taken to be the defining antonym of *vīrya*, another difficult term, which is variously translated. I do not believe there is a single correct translation for either one of these terms. For *vīrya*, I prefer "vigor" (British "vigour" in CS), "zeal" (in WW), "fortitude," or "perseverance" (PG's "heroic perseverance" may be overdoing it)—any one of these seem to me preferable to the common rendering "energy," (or Stn. Stärke) which seems to me too neutral, if not weak, to qualify as one of the perfect virtues of the bodhisattva.

attachment to sleep and idleness.

A number of words and phrases in this passage could be translated differently, but there is no significant disagreement among translators regarding the general tenor of the stanza. The word *apāśraya*, however, seems to have caused much unnecessary confusion. Tucci and CS follow what in my view is a false etymology—e.g., CS, “the longing to lean [on others]” (I add the brackets to isolate and mark the words added by CS and Tucci). The assumption is that the root (*śri-*) means “to lean on,” in the sense of “seeking support” (Matics even opts for “protection” or “refuge”). But “leaning” can mean many things. A quick consultation of MW shows that Skt. *apāśraya* means “the upper portion of a bed or couch on which the head rests,” and *apaśraya* means “bolster” (which actually represents in English a semantic range similar to that of *apa-[ā]-śraya*). Similar meanings will be found in PTSD (e.g., *apassaya*, “bed bolster, mattress,” *apassayika*, “reclining”). These meanings perhaps do not sound as doctrinally correct or profound as “depending on others,” but they fit the context well.

As is often the case, LVP and Brt. had it right a long time ago: “le désir de l’oreiller,” and “eagerness for repose.” The text should probably be interpreted as a common Sanskrit trope (enumeration): craving for sleeping, lounging, reclining...” or, “attachment to bed and cushion.”

Of the new translations, PG is acceptable, but a bit off center and not as elegant as elsewhere: “repose” (essentially the same as Schm./Stn.: “Halt”). On the other hand, WW is as close to perfect as it gets: “lounging around.” This translates correctly and also conveys imagery that is essential both for the trope in the stanza and for the role of this stanza in the general argument of the chapter.

In essence, my argument is that context must take precedence over etymology. But one must also keep in mind that the analysis of roots in terms of “basic meanings” is not the same thing as etymology or semantics. In the above case the

lexicons give us the clues we need to understand the word.⁴⁸ However, sometimes word choice has to be determined contextually, and neither etymology nor lexicon solves the problem. Consider for instance the mixed metaphor in the following stanza:

VII.4 Pursued by hunters—the afflictions—you have walked into their snare—rebirth.

Why is it that even now you do not realize that you have fallen into the jaws of death?

kleśa-vāgurik(a)-āghrātaḥ praviṣṭo janma-vāgurām |

kim adyāpi na jānāsi mṛtyor vadanam āgataḥ ||

Are *vāgurika* hunters or fishermen? Bca. translators are divided almost evenly between rendering the word as “fishermen” and translating it with “hunters.” The word, related to *vāgura*, “net” or “snare,” means simply (as explained in Pk.: *matsyādivadhikā jālikā*) one who kills animals or fish by trapping them with a net (perhaps PG’s: “trapper” is an attempt to catch the ambiguity, but the English word, whatever its etymology, means a kind of hunter).

The word *āghrāta*, which seems to be etymologically related to *ghrā-*, “to smell,” could mean “smelled out,” “scented out” (WW: “scented out by the hunters”); but, Minayeff has the reading *āghāta*. And, as already noted in BR (and partly supported by Pk.), *āghrāta* may have a different (perhaps Middle Indic) etymology (from *ākrānta*), and could mean “assailed,” “pursued,” “rounded up.”⁴⁹ I am not too sure I can imagine the afflictions (*kleśa*—PG: “defiled emotion”) smelling

⁴⁸ Furthermore, a root is not a monad: the semantic range of a Sanskrit (like an English, Latin, or German) root is strongly affected by preverbal particles.

⁴⁹ BR’s analysis and exemplification (under *āghrāta*), and their discussion under *ākrānta*, are reproduced in abbreviated form in MW. See also both sources under *āghāta*. Schm. Chooses the scent metaphor: “Von den Jägern aufgespürt”—Stm. does practically the same, but follows his penchant for more complex syntax: “Von ... den Jägern...bist du aufgespürt worden.” See also the footnote to this passage in Schm., where he justifies his choices.

us out, but I can imagine myself pursued by these afflicting and afflicted thoughts and emotions. I imagine them more like Indian hunters or fishermen beating, respectively, bushes or water, forcing us into their snares. I also hesitate, because in Bca. VI.89 the afflictions are fishermen (in the latter passage CS, I believe correctly, prefers “anglers,” since, in that case they use hooks). However, in the end, I conclude that “hunters” is the better choice because most contemporary readers do not think of fishing as an active and patently hostile pursuit, which is an important component of the image in this passage.

2.2.4. When Jargon is the Idiomatic Choice. In the above examples one gets glimpses of an unspoken cultural and situational background situated beyond grammar and etymology. How much of this background will be conveyed to the reader and in what way are perhaps the most difficult decisions facing the translator.

Religious and scholastic discourse is especially problematic because discourse is multilayered, and the referents of many passages are not concrete events, persons, or objects (like fishermen angling for fish with hook and bait). In doctrinal or philosophical passages often the situational background is and intertextual relationship, or other philosophical arguments and polemics (as is the case when one substitutes general vague notions of self with a technical notion of a the stream of phenomena serving as the substratum for the vague notions of self). The background may sometimes be a terminological relationship—sets of scholastic shorthands and dogmatic lists. Often the doctrinal presuppositions are such that a single line will encapsulate centuries of debate and scholastic tradition. This makes for terse prose with rich meanings in the original; but it does not help us much to celebrate its richness or to assume that because it is rich it is profound or relevant. It remains for the translator to convey at least part of the richness, and perhaps some of the depth and relevance—and, if at all possible, retain some of the terseness. Furthermore, if the

passage is open to being interpreted as sophistical, fallacious, or obscure, the translator must provide the reader with some hints of these possible readings. But, if the reader of the translation is to make such judgements, the translation must reveal at least the most important layers of doctrinal and polemic discourse. This is not easy to do—in the end perhaps it is impossible to do.

In this genre of literature sometimes a jargony or periphrastic translation is the best choice; and sometimes notes and headings are necessary. This is the case in passages that express philosophical argument. This sort of passage occurs in Bca., especially in Chapters VI and VIII, but above all in Chapter IX.

The problem with these passages in the Bca. is that they are, for the most part, summaries of very specific scholastic polemics. Many of the arguments are barely intelligible if one does not understand the viewpoint of the real or imagined opponents against whom the passage is directed. This means that, for instance, a critique of “the self” may be directed at a notion of the self that is not very relevant to us today (whichever notion of self we prefer from among the scores that circulate among amateur and professional philosophers in our culture)—or at the very least, that we cannot know whether it is relevant until we have understood the opponents point of view.

Various solutions are possible. LVP opts for wordy paraphrases with a generous use of brackets; Stn. uses headings and short notes very effectively. WW and PG have opted for a minimum of everything, sacrificing historical accuracy in the interest of making these passages (including Chapter IX) as accessible as the rest of the text.

I understand the last of these solutions. And I find it difficult to object to it after spending so much ink arguing for accessibility. But I am not sure that Chapter IX can be made easy—it is difficult, it was written by a scholastic for other scholastics. Among the new translations CS is the most

conscientious about the scholastic background, but in what appears to be an effort to make the arguments universal or relevant, the translators often miss the exact purport of the polemic.

Let us examine briefly one passage from Chapter IX—stanzas 68-71.⁵⁰ It is one of the arguments against “the” notion (actually, against “one” notion) of self.

I will focus mostly on CS to discuss this passage, because among the newer translations it is the translation that makes the best effort at following the technical terminology faithfully and unraveling the various voices in the passage. PG is particularly and surprisingly weak in most of this Chapter. WW is often more idiomatic than CS, but it is less reliable in its identification of the opposing voices in the arguments.

CS renders the first part of the passage as follows:

IX.68. That which is not conscious is not ‘I’ because it lacks consciousness like an object such as a cloth. If it is a conscious thing because it possesses consciousness it follows that when it stops being conscious of something it perishes.

IX.69. If the Self is in fact unchanged, what is achieved by its having consciousness? It is agreed that the nature of something that is unconscious and does not partake in any activity in this way is the same as space.

The reader is left wondering why the passage changes “I” to “Self” midstream, or why “self” is capitalized. One is misled into thinking that “I” and “Self” mean the same thing, and that they mean what the average reader means by these words (one assumes the passage is “about the self generally”). The reader is likely to be led to these conclusions, because the reader has not

⁵⁰Following, for convenience’s sake, the numbering in CS, PG, & WW. Because some interpolations and truncated stanzas intervene, the numbering of these stanzas vary according to the translator’s choice of edition. Others number the stanzas 69-72.

be cued in to the fact that this is a critique of Nyāya views of the self, and because the deceptive simplicity of the first argument does not give any hint that it is only a critique of a specific (and to us rather foreign) notion of self.

If we add a few essentials to this passage, we can transform it into a more cogent argument (perhaps no easier, though). First, we need a heading: "Against the Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika Notion of the 'I.'" Next we need either an introductory paragraph (my preference, as in Stn.), or a note indicating that the following two stanzas criticize the idea that the "I" can be a non-conscious, unchanging soul, and still be somehow associated with cognition (or consciousness). Lastly, we need a few additions to signal *within the translated text* itself the specific context and presumed audience behind the argument. This can be done along the following lines:

IX.68. Now, an unconscious [self, such as the pure "soul" you posit,] cannot be an "I," because it is unconscious like a rag or some other [insentient object]. If on the other hand [you propose] that [this soul] cognizes because of its close connection to consciousness, [then] it would follow that when it is not cognizing it is dead.⁵¹

acetanaś ca naivaham acaitanyāt paṭādivat |

atha jñāś cetanāyogād ajñō naṣṭaḥ prasajyate ||

IX.69. If on the other hand the self is something that does not change at all, then what can consciousness do for it? [If it were as you propose,] then one could likewise think that empty space, which is unconscious and inactive, has what it takes to be a self.

athāvikṛta evātmā caitanyenāśya kiṃ kṛtam |

ajñāśya niṣkriyasyaivam ākāśasyātmataḥ matā ||

The break between the above two stanzas and the next

⁵¹This obscure, and in my view sophistical, argument, presupposes a continuous association of soul and cognition during a lifetime.

two, is not marked in any clear way in any of the new translations. The next two stanzas address a different issue, and should be marked accordingly to signal to the reader a new argument, although it is still part of the critique of Nyāya.⁵²

The stanzas can be translated as follows:

IX.70. If [you argue that] without a self the connection between action and its fruits would not be possible, then who possesses the fruit if [the doer] dies after he carries out the action?

na karma-phala-saṃbandho yuktas ced ātmanā vinā |

karma kṛtvā vimaṣṭe hi phalaṃ kasya bhaviṣyati ||

IX.71. Moreover, we both agree that action and fruit have separate locations,⁵³ and you think that the self is inactive. Is this polemic then not pointless?

dvayor apy āvayoḥ siddhe bhinn[a]-ād bhāre kriyā-phale |

nirvyāpāras ca tat[r]a ātm[ā] ity atra vādo vṛthā nanu ||

This is a more or less smooth reading. One could also fill out the translation with a modicum of scholastic bracketed readings. For instance:

IX.70. If [the opponent argues that] without a self the connection between action and its fruits would not be possible, [we say this is not the case] because who would possess [then] the fruit if [the doer] dies after he has carried out the action?

⁵² Parenthetically, this raises another important issue: what are the arguments for or against the introduction of paragraph breaks and headings in translating Bca. As it is probably already clear to the reader, I favor the use of both devices as a way to avoid inserting too much interpretive material in brackets.

⁵³ The point of 71 is this: if the opponent agrees that when the actor dies the fruit is not enjoyed by the person that performed it (the person the actor was when he or she was alive), then there is agreement between the author and the opponent that the actor as doer and the actor as enjoyer are in two different places—therefore doing and enjoying occur in different realms, and (the Buddhist would add by a sleigh of hand) in different persons. The stanza also implies that a self that is non-active is tantamount to a self that is non-existent—hence, opponent and Buddhist “agree” on this point as well.

In this passage only some of the older translations—Stn., Schm., and LVP (in descending order)—can be of help for the reader. Among the newer translations, again, PG and WW are closer to acceptable renderings if one focuses only on accessibility. But sometimes they are also more accurate. Consider for instance the renderings of IX.70cd (above: “then who possesses the fruit if [the doer] dies after he carries out the action?”). CS: “for ‘if the agent of the action has perished who experiences the consequence?’” The renderings “for,” “agent of the action,” and “experiences,” and the use of the quotation marks are not justified by the Sanskrit, and to boot result in a clumsy English phrase. (Why the single quotes? “Has perished”? When?). PG: “If when the deed is done, the doer is no more, Who is there to reap the karmic fruit?” WW, not as successful as PG, but still clear: “for if the agent of an action has perished, who will have the result?”

CS also assume that the author has not already presented a counterargument in IX.70, and thus adds at the beginning of 71: “[our response is:].” CS also takes “and you think that the self is inactive” (*nirvyāpāraś ca tatr[a] ātm[ā] ity*) as the author’s position. The commentary does not support this interpretation. PG also makes the same mistakes in breaking up the passage. But they are in good company—LVP made the same mistake with 70 (but not with 71).

2.2.5. Context and the Unexpected. Sometimes the problem is not so much in the specificity of the contexts of discourse, but in a novel (to us) way of thinking or speaking. Then our translations might slip because we read our expectations into the text—a mistake that is often reinforced by grammar that is not readily transparent in the original. For instance, in VI. 114cd and 115ab the confusion is both grammar (the antecedent is not clear) and conceptual (a novel idea is offered, perhaps taking the modern reader by surprise).

The core passage—or rather, the apparent crux—can be rendered as follows:

VI.114. The greatness of an intention does not come from the intention itself, but rather from its fruits. Therefore, the greatness of sentient beings is the same [as that of a buddha], and they [= the sentient beings] are the same as the [Buddha].

*āśayasya ca māhātmyam na svataḥ kiṃ tu kāryataḥ |
samaṃ ca tena māhātmyam sattvānāṃ tena te samāḥ ||*

The key to the stanza is to be found in the preceding and the following stanzas (VI.113 & 115). Consider first the stanza that follows the above passage in Bca.:

VI.115 The greatness of sentient beings is nothing but that the persons whose intentions are benevolent deserve to be revered [because of that benevolence]; the greatness of buddhas is nothing but the merit [one will gain] from devout trust in those buddhas.

*maitry-āśayaś ca yat pūjyaḥ sattva-māhātmyam eva tat |
buddha-prasādād yat puṇyam buddha-māhātmyam eva
tat ||*

In other words, sentient beings derive their value from the fact that those who deserve our honor deserve it because of their love for sentient beings, and buddhas derive their greatness from the fact that the faith sentient beings place in them generates merit in those sentient beings. In my view, the argument is sophisticated, subtle, and beautiful—albeit not quite syllogistic, and initially seemingly counterintuitive.

Both CS and PG translate accurately and transfer into their translation more of the suggested paradox than I have done above: “It is greatness on the part of beings that someone with a kindly disposition is honourable” (CS), “Offerings made to one who loves / Reveals the eminence of living beings” (PG). WW obscures the logic of the paradox and offers a weak “friendly disposition” for the bodhisattva’s great benevolence: “A friendly disposition, which is honorable, is the very

greatness of sentient beings.”

The logic of the paradox is clarified further by the first (VI.113) of the three stanzas (113,114,115):

VI.113. If one can attain the attributes of a buddha equally through sentient beings and through the conquerors, then what [sort of] distinction keeps people from rendering unto sentient beings the same veneration they show to the conquerors?

*sattvebhyaś ca jinebhyaś ca buddha-dharm(a)-āgame same |
jineṣu gauravaṃ yadvaṃ na sattveṣu iti kaḥ kramaḥ ||*

Here WW offers us the most elegant (albeit rather free) rendering:

VI.113. As the attainment of the Buddha's qualities is equally due to sentient beings and to the Jinas, how is it that I do not respect sentient being as I do the Jinas?

WW take some liberties that I would be reluctant to take. But I see that as a matter of personal preference, and still regard their translation of this stanza as an excellent translation.

PG and CS, on the other hand, stumble. For instance, CS takes *āgama* (here: “attaining”) as a technical term meaning “transmission,” and interprets *krama* as “logic” (the term I translated freely as “distinction,” and which means “ranking,” “precedence,” “relative position”—French translations “différence,” Schm. “Unterschied,” Stm. “die Abstufung”). The latter term is translated in PG as “tradition” (Tib. *tsbul*). These choices blur the rest of the stanza.

Having said all of this, one must add that most of the old translations understood the passage correctly. Except for some rough edges in LVP, the old renderings were also clear and accessible.

2.2.6. Some Pitfalls of the Idiomatic Translation. Sometimes the unexpected is an apparently technical usage in the midst of a poetical passage. Confronted by this situation,

the translators feel like they have only two choices: jargon or an idiomatic rendering that leaves out some profound or pivotal point of doctrine. Not only the śāstra genre, but many other forms of Buddhist literature present this type of impediment to the ideal of a fully idiomatic translations. Consider for instance the following fragment (first quoted from CS):

VIII.107. Those... to whom the suffering of others is as important as the things they themselves hold dear, plunge down into Avīci hell as geese into a cluster of lotus blossoms.

And, from PG's rendering of Tib.:

VIII.107. Those... whose happiness it is to soothe the pain of others, will venture in the hell of unremitting agony,⁵⁴ as swans sweep down upon a lotus lake.⁵⁵

These renderings seem straightforward enough; and the central figures of speech seem to have travelled well across the

⁵⁴PG's phrase "hell of unremitting agony" is an attempt to translate *mnar-med-pa* by way of an assumed, but opaque folk etymology. WW translate *avīci*, which implies that they made the wiser choice of taking the Tib. phrase as a name (or untranslatable label) corresponding to Skt. *avīci*. CS, with LVP and Schm. also take the word as a name, not so Stn. and Finot. Stn. and Batch. apparently risk translating according to the most likely etymology: "the deepest" or "lowest."

⁵⁵Ultimately, the difference between "geese" (CS) and "swans" (WW) is of minor consequence, but was at one time a favorite pet peeve of Sanskritists. The Skt. word, *hamsa*, has been translated as "swan" since the early days of Western Sanskrit studies, but strictly speaking a *hamsa* is a kind of wild goose, not a swan. This great Western goose debate is reflected in the shift from Schmidt's "swans" to Steinkellner's "geese." Yet, although wild geese in Asia and North America are (at least in my opinion) more imposing and graceful than the domestic variety, the truth is that in English geese represent lack of grace, and that the approximate poetical or situational English equivalent of *hamsa* is "swan." [Tib. *ngang-pa* also refers to the wild goose—PG: "swans," and WW "a swan."] I cannot resist translating "wild geese" (showing both my philological and ornithological biases), but I consider "swan" a perfectly acceptable rendering. Batch., by the way, chooses "wild goose."

language divide. But the omitted portion (*bhāvita-saṃtānāḥ*) is not easily rendered idiomatically, and is often translated as jargon—partly because it is a technical usage and seems to reflect important doctrinal notions. Broadly speaking, and simplifying very complex ideas, it seems like *bhāvita* refers here to the practice of meditation and its higher fruits; *saṃtāna* seems to allude here (as elsewhere) to the notion that that which we call self or person is nothing but a cause-effect chain, a “series” or “continuum” (*saṃtāna*) of momentary psychic and bodily events. This background explains the more technical renderings among *Bodhicaryāvatāra* translations:

CS: Those who have developed the continuum of their mind

WW: whose mind streams are cultivated in meditation⁵⁶

Stn.: deren geistiges Kontinuum voll entwickelt ist

Schm.: die sich die Kontinuität... vorstellen

These I rank in inverse order of success, although I am truly not happy with any of them.

But one could argue that in this stanza the technical jargon serves no purpose (it is only a metrical convenience). But, on what grounds are we to argue in this manner? Yet, on the other hand, if it is in fact meant to be technical, how should it be translated?

The dangers of not taking the technical register seriously become obvious when we examine the following progression:

Finot: Ayant ainsi cultivé leurs pensées

PG: whose minds are practiced in this way

Tucci: Avendo così disciplinato il proprio io

Batch. whose mind is attuned in this way

⁵⁶WW's rendering of Tib., “whose mind stream is accustomed to meditation” seems to me unnatural, if not misleading in English (compare “accustomed to insight” or “accustomed to generosity”). It may be an attempt to render literally *goms gyur pa*, but *goms* is here serving as the passive perfect of *sgom*. These are common variants that may be merely graphic or may reflect differences in transitivity.

LVP: dont l'âme est fortifiée

Matrics: having transformed their mentalities

These are, again, ranked inversely according to my judgement of success.

The phrase is undoubtedly technical in the sense that the passage bridges two types of meditation, making the first type a precondition for the second: the bodhisattva's stream of thoughts now flows naturally or effortlessly as a result of the meditation that preceded (the identification of self and other, *parātmasamatā*), and this effortless flow is possible because the mind (and the whole person) have been nurtured and transformed by this meditation.⁵⁷

The past passive participle *bhāvita* appears to be a perfective in this passage: once the mind, or the person, has been fully cultivated.⁵⁸ Technically this implies that the process of meditation has culminated in an internalization of the object of meditation. However, *bhāvita* is still related semantically to the causative family of *bhāvanā*, and therefore implies first, non-technically, a careful consideration and second, technically, bringing to mind so that the object becomes real (in the mind). One must convey this somehow in the translation; but that does not mean that the translator necessarily must render *saṃtāna* with a cognate etymology (e.g., "continuum") and *bhāvita* with a vague reference to *bhāvanā* as meditational technique. Such "literal" renderings are only deceptively faithful because the resultant English is not intelligible without extensive annotation. I prefer paraphrasing—for instance, "practice meditation on this topic until your whole person is one with the topic," etc. (see the proposed translation below).

But difficulties do not end there. Sanskrit generally,

⁵⁷ The state of a person who possesses *bhāvita-saṃtāna* is explained in Prajñākaramati's *Pañjikā* (henceforth Pk.) as *anābhogapravṛtticittasaṃtati*.

⁵⁸ The broad semantic range of this, and related terms is already suggested in Bca. I.2-3, and the corresponding glosses in Pk.

including poetical Sanskrit, has a penchant for the obscure or convoluted phrase—the metaphoric riddle, we could say. Thus, a close examination reveals a *lectio difficilior* in the possessive compound *paraduhkha-sama-priya*: “they hold what is dear to themselves to be the same as the suffering of others,” or, perhaps more free, “what they hold dear is nothing but the suffering of others.” Read without further comment this seems to say either that they are indifferent to the suffering of others or that they actually enjoy it. Some of the older translators (Finot, Tucci, Brt.) gave up on this and followed Tib.: “they find pleasure in calming the pain of others.”⁵⁹ There is no need to do this. Again, this is a technical allusion to the meditation that preceded this stanza, which leads to the perception of self and other as identical. Schm. and LVP gloss the general sense of the compound; only Kanakura and Stn. among the older translators translate the compound without explaining the paradox. Among the newer translations, CS has the best rendering, combining a grammatical translation with an unobtrusive gloss: “to whom the suffering of others is as important as the things they themselves hold dear.”

As translators we are trapped, however, because the explanation disarms the metaphor, which involves of course a paradox (hence, the apparent *lectio difficilior*): the bodhisattva cherishes the suffering of others. This is a metaphoric way of saying that they regard concern for others in the same way that others see attachment, craving, personal preferences, etc. This intended meaning (*artha*) is explained in Pk.: “even their own pleasure is nothing but suffering for the bodhisattvas in the face of the suffering of others.” The paradox is meant to lead into the image of the bodhisattvas descending into hell found in the

⁵⁹The Tib. rendering, “gzhan gyi sdug bsngal zhi dga’ bas,” unfortunately suggests an awkward *paraduhkha-sama-priya*. A *lectio difficilior* is not proof of the authenticity of a reading, it simply suggests a greater likelihood that the *lectio faciliior* is a misguided attempt to correct the text. In this case, the correction itself is not all that convincing, supporting even more the *lectio difficilior* (which is, by the way, also supported by Pk.).

second line of the stanza. We can gloss the logic of the metaphor as "the pain of hell (the intended referent of *paraduhkha*) is dear to the bodhisattvas, hence they dive into the hells like swans in a lotus pond, looking for that pain in order to take it upon themselves."

Here, as in so many other passages, we can rely on context to convey part of the technical meaning and part of the metaphor, as well as the meaning of the complex possessive compound. Much has to be left behind in crossing over into English; but let us remember that the original Sanskrit also needed annotation to be fully understood by many, if not most readers. I propose a compromise between jargon and idiom, settle for a periphrastic rendering of what is very concise in the original, and accept the sacrifice of terseness and paradox. The compromise would be as follows (leaving in the brackets to signal major paraphrases and glosses):

VIII.107. Those who have practiced in this manner
[this meditation until] their whole person
[comes to] experience [effortlessly the
identity of self and others] gladly seek to
assume the suffering of others. They plunge
into [the depths of] the Avīci hell as wild
geese dive into a cluster of lotus blossoms.

This is a compromise, and cannot convey all of the nuances of the stanza. A short note must explain the transitional role of the stanza (between *parātmasamatā* and *parātmaparivartana*), the allusion to the internalization of the object of meditation, the peculiar use of *saṃtāna*, and the paradoxical implication that the bodhisattva values the suffering of others. This is still better than a jargony rendering or one that speaks of souls and mental discipline.

Often it is not possible to bring out in the translation everything expressed or insinuated in the source text. The danger then is avoiding two extremes: wooden translations (the tendency in group one above) or one that is artificially

idiomatic (and inaccurate) or presents an unsuccessful or misleading figure of speech in the target language (the tendency in group two above).

But, in the śāstra literature jargon and metaphor mix, and then the choice is often between the metaphor and the technical meaning. Consider another deceptively simple stanza (first translated as mechanically as allowed by English syntax):

IV.11. As he is rocked back and forth in transmigration by the force of his transgressions and the force of the thought of awakening, he is delayed in reaching solid ground.

evam āpattibalato bodhicittabalena ca |

dolāyamānaḥ saṃsāre bhūmi-prāptau cirāyate ||

The figure of speech is, from our point of view, partly a pun, partly a comparison with a concrete physical act. Hence our difficulty with it: our English instincts tell us it is a forced or mixed metaphor. In fact the metaphor can also be read in a way that would sound farcical to the Western ear: a bodhisattva pushed back and forth on a swing or in a palanquin, desperately trying to stand on solid ground. The subject, who is clearly the aspiring bodhisattva,⁶⁰ is literally swung back and forth: transgressions to the vows and precepts pull away from the goal, the bodhicitta pushes towards the goal, and the bodhisattva is suspended in midair, unable to step on solid ground. As long as he is, as it were, suspended between both forces, he will not be able to stand on the *solid ground* (*bhūmi*) that is the first *stage* (*bhūmi*) of bodhisattvahood (the pun). The problem is that in English the image of someone swinging back and forth seems to require a concrete situation that seems undignified to most of us (sitting on a swing or in a palanquin, hanging from a rope, suspended at the edge of a precipice, holding on to a tree branch).

⁶⁰The present participle is masculine singular ("he"). There is no reason to translate with the neuter "it" as in CS—it is not clear to me what the antecedent of this "it" would be.

This cultural difference is aggravated by the fact that "the process of transmigration" is represented by the word *samsāra*, which, as metaphors go, is usually associated with images of water (flood, ocean), although the word *samsāra* itself is in shastric literature essentially an abstract technical term. One could, of course choose to translate *dolāyamāna* as "rocked" [by waves] (as I eventually do); but the goal, *bhūmi*, is not dry land, but the surface of the ground or the surface of the floor in a building (*sthala* would be the preferred word for dry-land), and there too we have to change the image suggested by a literal rendering in order to meet our own metaphoric expectations: waves and dry land.

The word *bhūmi* is of course required for doctrinal and not for poetical reasons. The word play is therefore somewhat forced. Schm. hints at the pun with "Ankunft auf Erden," Stn. clarifies, "Ankunft auf den [Bodhisattva-]Erden."⁶¹ But the truth is that "Bodhisattva-Erden" makes no more sense in German than English "bodhisattva grounds." CS venture more, and are the only ones who struggle with the imagery:

IV.11. Swinging back and forth like this in cyclic existence, now under the sway of errors, now under the sway of the awakening mind, it take a long time to gain ground.

CS perhaps realized that the possibility "dry-land" did not fit *bhūmi* well, but I find the compromise, "gain ground" a bit ambiguous (gaining ground, that is advancing in the path—or did they mean "gaining the ground on which to stand"?).

⁶¹ Parenthetically, the translations "ground, earth," etc. for *bhūmi* may be examples of Buddhist Hybrid English (I am not sure "the first bodhisattva ground" makes much sense). The Skt. word means essentially the surface of the earth, any habitable surface, or one on which one can stand, hence it also means the floor of a house or building, hence, "story" (as in British "storey") or "level," and then, metaphorically as in English, "stage" or "ranking." I realize that saying that a bodhisattva progresses through ten levels or stages does not sound very poetical, but going through "ten grounds" is not poetical either.

Nevertheless, I read their rendering as an alternative pun (CS substitute an English pun for a Sanskrit word play that would make little sense in English), and find their willingness to put imagery and elegance above technical jargon refreshing. In spite of my misgivings about “gain ground” in CS, I find the rendering of the other translators inelegant and misleading: “Bodhisattva grounds” (PG & WW).

There is, additionally a pun on *āpatti*, “moral transgression or failure,” which of course also means “a fall.” Hence, the stanza also suggests wavering, stumbling, falling (again *bhūmi* representing firm ground). Parenthetically, this word *āpatti* also seems to create a lot of unnecessary grief among modern translators, some of whom are terrified by the possibility that Indian Buddhists may have had notions of sin and guilt. Although the three new translations are generally more amenable to the notion of sin in Buddhism, their translations of *āpatti* still feels to me to be rather forced—CS’s “errors,” PG’s “faults,” and the weakest of all, WW’s “downfalls.”⁶²

The word and the underlying concepts are difficult and translators cannot be faulted for not knowing what to do with it. I confess to not knowing what to do with it myself. But I think there are certain things you just cannot do with it, and

⁶² Similar issues arise around the words *pāpa* (“sin, evil”) and *doṣa* (“fault, flaw, vice”)—e.g., at Bca. II. 31, 64. I was pleased to see that the new translations did not shy away from using the word “sin” where the context warranted it. I did detect some hesitation, however, in WW in their inconsistent use of “sin” for *pāpa*, which was also at times translated, “vice.” CS, on the other hand, puts to good use the different nuances of “sin” and “evil” in rendering *pāpa*. I find questionable the rendering of *pāpam... prajñāpty-āvadyam* with “what is wrong by convention” in CS: “what is wrong” is weak compared with *āvadya* (“blameworthy”), and “by convention” (pace EdgD) assumes that *prajñāpti* has the epistemological or ontological sense it has in other contexts. The latter term (*prajñāpti*) must refer to the more general meanings (from the causative *prajñāpayati*, *prajñāpayati*) of public declaration or instruction. WW and PG correctly interpret this as a reference to the morality of vows and monastic prohibitions—confirmed by Pk.

one of them is to try to empty the word of any connotations of fault and moral failing, or perhaps (in Śāntideva at least) of guilt and fear. I will grant that in certain circles in North America, and now across the Río Grande, the Atlantic and the Caribbean a moral failing is just an honest mistake, and I will grant that some intelligent people have good arguments for conceiving the psychology of ethics in such terms (although I strongly disagree with these intelligent persons). What seems to me impossible to argue is that Indian Buddhists, especially Śāntideva, shared this perspective. A monk's or a bodhisattva's *āpatti* is a transgression to the rules or precepts solemnly adopted by that person. It is a serious fault, not a simple mistake. Such transgressions have as a consequence the tortures of hell—hardly what one expects as a result of an “error.”⁶³

My preference for the whole passage would be something like this:

IV.11. Rocked back and forth in the flood of transmigration, now under the sway of his transgressions, now moved by the force of his determination to seek awakening, it will be long before he can regain a firm foothold on dry land.

The pun, and the stanza, regrettably, cannot stand alone without annotation.

2.2.7. Accessibility versus Accuracy. Another way of looking at the above discussion (2.2.6) is to consider the tension that exists between an analytical understanding and a readable

⁶³ CS use the word “transgression” in their note to Bca. V.104, where they summarize the passage on the *mūlāpatti* from the *Ākāśagarbha-sūtra* (as quoted in *Śikṣāsamuccaya*, Bendall and Rouse, pp. 61-70). That list shows clearly that, theological arguments aside, *āpatti* cannot mean simply “sin” as suggested by EdgD. The PTSD translates “ecclesiastical offence,” which is accurate only if the reader can be reminded that the traditional Buddhist distinction between “natural” and “monastic” law (Bca. II.64, and Pk.) does not apply in this case: one can commit *āpatti* against either or both of these (furthermore, in practice, “natural” moral rules, such as the injunction against murder, are part of monastic law).

translation, or, as some might prefer to express it, the difference between accuracy and accessibility. By focusing too much on making the text intelligible in the target language (and culture) one runs certain risks that increase the more one relies on the untutored intuition brought to the study of Sanskrit by most modern speakers of European languages (and especially speakers of English). Without a systematic and careful check of the source text, one is liable to make mistakes of syntax and agreement that can be easily avoided. Some of these are illustrated by the following comparison of the translations of VI.134.⁶⁴

PG's translation reads:

VI.134. For patience in saṃsāra brings such things
As beauty, health, and good renown.
Its fruit is great longevity,
The vast contentment of a universal king.

This rendering is deceptively smooth and clear, but a close reading shows that it is not wholly clear and may be misleading, if not inaccurate. The original may be rendered mechanically:

VI.134. One who is patient obtains in abundance, as
he wanders about [in transmigration],
beauty, health, joy, long life, [and] the
happiness of a wheel-turning [emperor].
prāsādikatvam ārogyaṃ prāmodyaṃ cirañjīvitam |
cakravartī-sukhaṃ sphītaṃ kṣamī prāpnoti saṃsaran ||

Or, from Tibetan:

VI.134. The person who is patient obtains, even as
he turns [in the cycle of transmigration],
beauty and other good qualities, health,
renown, a long life, and the great bliss of a
wheel turning [emperor].

'khor tse bzod pas mdzes sogs dang || nad med pa dang grags

⁶⁴This stanza actually continues the thought begun in VI.133: "Do you not see that....?" However, to shorten this review, I treat here VI.134 as an independent passage.

pa yis ||
 shin tu yun ring 'tsho ba dang || 'khor los sgyur pa'i bde
 rgyas thob ||

Some of the nuances are preserved in CS, who, as usual, try to follow the Sanskrit syntax, here with much success:

VI.134. Serenity, freedom from disease, joy and long life, the happiness of an emperor, prosperity: these the patient person receives while continuing in cyclic existence.

This rendering makes it clear that all of the good attainments are due to patience, and that the agent is the patient person, not patience itself. The prolepsis places, as in Sanskrit, the central topic first (patience is the obvious theme of this chapter, but its rewards are the new information provided by the stanza). CS also detect correctly the syntactical (and doctrinal) function of *samsaran*: that the patient person receives (actually, "obtains") these things while he or she is still transmigrating. This both limits the sphere of the reward (the *abhyudaya*) and exalts the advantages of patience, indicating that the patient person, even while still in *samsāra*, can have all of these good things.⁶⁵

The translation of WW not only reflects accurately these features of the Sanskrit, it additionally reminds us that the term *prāsādikatva* here does not mean serenity or calm as rendered by the other two new translators, but an aspect of "personality": a physical appearance and a demeanor that is pleasing, one that gains the favor of others. Thus, WW:

VI.134. While transmigrating a patient person attains beauty, health, charisma, long life, and the abundant joy of a Cakravartī.

⁶⁵ Additionally, one should note that *samsāra* is not "cyclic" existence. The term means either wandering about or moving on without interruption, like a river current. The cycle part is not part of the etymology or the denotation of the word, but part of certain interpretations that have been preferred on account of own preconceptions about what "Orientals" should believe.

I don't know about WW's "charisma" (PG's "renown") and CS's "prosperity" (taking *sphīta* as noun?). I also feel that "while transmigrating" suggests in colloquial English a certain casualness that seems to me inappropriate. So, in spite of some success, I still regard CS superior to WW in this passage.

Nevertheless, this is one stanza where most of the earlier Western translators stumbled, and the newer translations show a better grasp of the text. Most of these older translations, like the three new ones would have benefited from a quick check of Schm., who had already solved some of these problems. But even Schm. here failed to bring out clearly the proper position of *samsaran*, which is done successfully in CS.

A translation incorporating all of these insights would read:

VI.134. {Do you not see that} one who is patient
obtains in abundance {even in this world,}
as he wanders about [in transmigration,]
charming beauty, health, joy, long life, and
the happiness of a wheel-turning [emperor].

The portions in curly brackets are from the preceding stanza, VI.133. In a normal translation, in which VI.133 & 134 probably should be written as a single paragraph, if not one sentence, these insertions would not be necessary. I also generally prefer to omit the square brackets that most translators of Sanskrit consider essential.

3.0 Towards a Conclusion

The above remarks, may be taken as technical reflections—exemplification of some of the concrete problems faced by the translators of texts like the *Bodhicaryāvatāra*. However, these reflections and passages also exemplify many of the generalizations that follow in the next few pages: generalizations about the three new translations of the *Bodhicaryāvatāra* and generalizations about the craft of the translator.

Speaking as generally as possible, three points stands out.

First, the process of mechanical analysis, followed by paraphrasing and re-redaction, as well as sidetracks into the field of tools and methods, reveal something about the art of translation: the claims of translation are always problematic, contested, and, perhaps, negotiable. Second, there are nevertheless more or less cogent arguments for or against particular renderings. Third, as a corollary to the first two principles, a productive use of previous translations is absolutely necessary, because translation is, ultimately about a public voice, and hence a collective effort. Fourth, no single translator can solve all the problems: the process is fluid, the outcome a compromise to be judged, to a certain extent, by the goals of the translation.

3.1 In General: The Claims of Translation

Before I conclude with some generalization about the three new translations, I wish to review some of the imperatives of translating and interpreting ancient Buddhist texts that I believe are implicit in the above discussion of technical details. I invite my readers to read my comments with the knowledge that I think such imperatives—like most of the fruits of the craft of the translator—are not only contested and contestable, but also not the product of some necessary or definitive rational deduction.

The “genre” to which one may assign the *Bodhicaryāvatāra* of course presents special problems of interpretation and translation. Beyond the already complex algorithms of grammar, beyond the intricacies of classical discourse, one is faced with the task of translating segments of discourse whose cultural frame is no longer existing. We are talking of translating works that are preserved in a peculiar combination of poetical conventions and technical jargon from a very learned form of Classical Sanskrit (or a Tibetan or Chinese rendering of this subtype of a literary and artificial language), written originally for a small elite group of technical specialists, a privileged social and intellectual class that is no more. I will

try to frame my remarks mostly in the context of translating this specific genre, which may be called "the shastric genre."

And yet, notwithstanding all of these qualifications, there is the expectation that one could (perhaps should) render these texts into some form of the contemporary idiom of the scholar or the translator. There is the expectation that, at least some, if not most, of these texts are worth translating, and amenable to translation. In fact, there is the assumption that these texts contain something meaningful beyond the circumscribed or limited circle of the social and intellectual classes that produced them.

These last remarks capture the gist of the paradox. We feel compelled to assume that there is something in common between the author(s) of the *Bodhicaryāvatāra*, and some, if not all of us, today in the heterogeneous world of English speakers, when English is in fact a common medium for more than one culture. What we have in common, we assume, includes a common world—of solid objects, of mental and affective states, and psychological expectations. And we assume, against the obvious linguistic and cultural and material differences, that language somehow mediated Śāntideva's world in more or less the same way that it mediates ours—and, needless to say, we also assume that we really understand how language does this. These assumptions eventually meet the aporias of translations, yet we cannot exist without such assumptions. Perhaps we could go on with our lives without ever translating Śāntideva, but we cannot live without some degree of confidence in translatability.

These apparently innocent, albeit problematic, assumptions imply others that are far more problematic. Even the most sophisticated philologists at some time has had three dreams: acquiring or restoring a true and perfect "original," rendering this complete, self-contained, and unambiguous "work" into an equally unambiguous, and "accurate," version in the target language, and thereby producing the definitive

faithful translation of the original. These fantasies do not die easily, although they begin to collapse the moment one engages in the task of the translator—even in the most seemingly inane situations like interpreting from one living language to another in a purely practical and colloquial context. In the realm of the colloquial the aporias of translation appear all too obvious as one moves from the use of language to satisfy the most basic practical needs to the use of language in the negotiation, proverb, the metaphor, or the joke.

The fantasy of a complete source and a complete target collapse because any act of translation eventually confronts the complexities of language and culture—of what is language, especially when it is used beyond the simple function of reference across similar cultural contexts. I will not attempt to explore in depth these, more abstract and theoretical issues, which continue to be debated in several forums of the academy.⁶⁶ But the above explorations of the text and its possible translations have already shown that as we read the *Bodhicaryāvatāra* we are in fact reading more than one text.

3.1.1. Fictions and Paradoxes. The task of the translator needs the presumption that there is a clearly circumscribed object “the original” and that there is a clearly circumscribed single goal and target (person, purpose, and thoughts generated in that person’s mind). These assumptions are part of a pervasive system of practices of hermeneutics that may be called “hermeneutical fictions.” These include the fictions of translation and exegesis and consist in the belief that there is an originator of a message, that the message arises in this person’s individual mind, preceded by an intention and followed by a

⁶⁶ The Bibliography lists some useful texts that debate these issues. In general, I prefer works like Torre (1983), Malone (1988), or Nida & Taber, which address practical issues with actual examples of translation problems. Nonetheless, works like Schulte or Schulte & Biguenet can help create a greater awareness of the issues lurking behind the deceptively grammatical issues faced by the translator when engaged in her craft.

complete expression of that intention, that the expression in language of that original idea in fact contains the whole idea, that the idea can be recovered in its entirety or at least in a meaningful whole from that linguistic vehicle or medium, and that this is done in the mind of a receptor, who is able to understand "the thoughts" expressed in the words.

The detailed discussions that form the middle part of this review, presuppose these hermeneutical fictions. We know that we cannot be completely sure as to the authorship of this work, its original constitution, and which parts are due to a single author. We are less sure about the motivations of the presumed author, and much less about his location in time and space (geographical and social). Yet, we read the text as if it were a single voice. We cannot do the same with every text, and as our understanding of the significance of the Dunhuang recension increases, we may not be able to do it that easily with the *Bodhicaryāvatāra*. However, the existence of a *textus receptus*, in Sanskrit and in Tibetan, and the fact that the latter has had and still has recognizable contexts and audiences, allow us to continue to assume certain linguistic and doctrinal constants (the practical correlates of the hermeneutical fictions).

I take these to be necessary fictions. We need to believe in them if we are going to communicate effectively and with ease; yet we must disbelieve them if we intend to be critical about our own communication. Every great communicator, whether he or she is a benevolent advisor or parent or a malevolent demagogue knows that language means many things in many ways at different times or all at the same time, and that our own thoughts are barely formed when we begin to express them. An effective communicator also knows that both transmitter and receptor very seldom understands fully what we believe we are in fact thinking or communicating.

Now if these fictions are necessary, yet untrue, what is left for the translator to do? I trust I have already shown how the texts begins to dissolve in front of us as we translate, and how

we simply must put it back together again by a series of compromises. I take the recognition of the hermeneutical fictions to be primarily an ethical imperative, secondarily a practical model. This awareness has implications for practice insofar as it forces us to reconsider the text in context, and forces us to continue reconsidering the text and its contexts. In theory it is simpler than it seems, in practice it is as convoluted as some of the technical remarks in the main body of this review.

In theory it is a matter of the balance between belief and disbelief, in practice it is the paradoxical work of pretending to be certain while remaining skeptical—which can be summarized in practical terms as follows:

(a) There is no single text—yet, it has to be imagined—whatever I imagine as the single original will become a provisional single original. Our multiple readers, and the translator's notes, introduction and bibliography will insure the provisionality of this unity. Or, even better, whatever my reader reads in my translation is, temporarily the source original, which becomes many as the community of readers receives and rehearses the text. Ethically, however, another, more concrete single text has to be defined explicitly, and must serve as the first court of appeal: e.g., if one is translating the Nepalese recension, one works under the fiction that it is a single text, using its grammatical constraints as a constant check on the new text the translator and the reader are creating.

(b) The text is far from unambiguous—yet the translator is committed to clarity, so, what I produce must seem clear to me and to my readers.⁶⁷

⁶⁷ As I have argued above, sometimes it is necessary and possible to translate obscurity and ambiguity as such, but generally the translator strives to create clarity—perhaps because translating usually needs an initial understanding at the metalinguistic level before it can produce a new surface structure and meaning in the target language. This means, that one is often trapped between the danger of confusing one's limited abilities with obscurity in the original and the danger of attributing more clarity to the original than it

(c) One must engage in conflation, confabulation and imaginary contexts and dialogues—yet conflation must be controlled, questioned, and justified, confabulation must be documented, and the imagined contexts must be shown to be the most likely, probable or plausible.

(d) One must imagine a single voice or a set of discrete voices—yet I cannot claim to know the mind of the author himself, and I know that even a single author can have more than one mind, and I also know that conflicting voices are seldom discrete.⁶⁸

Moreover we are very eager to talk about the “difficulty” or the “elegance” of a given solution, but difficulties always imply doubts and multiple possibilities. In other words, if the process of translation were a “technique” (it is certainly not “a science”) then it would be perfectly predictable, and therefore would not be difficult or debatable, but it is both difficult and conflictive, which already tells us it is not a simple technique. And yet, there are technical limitations to translations—things that one cannot say, and things that maybe can be said. Translation involves both the desire to have freedom and the desire to constrain freedom. Insofar as it involves freedom it means choice, fear, doubt, and misreading as well as creation and imagination. Insofar as it involves constraint, it is a form of control, and is likely to be resisted by the translator himself or herself—intuition and preference struggling with an imperfect and shifting understanding of the surface structures and meanings of the text.

3.1.2. Uses of a Text. The *Bodhicaryāvatāra* has been the object of number of commentaries in Tibetan, classical and

really has.

⁶⁸ I do not wish to burden the reader with a bibliography on this issue. However, I do include in the bibliography a reference to a paper on the psychoanalytic narrative by Kristeva in which she argues for the necessity of the fiction of intentionality.

contemporary.⁶⁹ Editions and commentaries have appeared in India and Europe. A work that is so popular presents the reviewer with a special challenge. The normal, general constraints and problems of the review (as well as the translation) are magnified a thousandfold by the plurality of uses that a work so widely disseminated acquires by virtue of its multiple audiences and multiple expectations and multiple meanings. By virtue of its many uses and representations, the text also becomes many texts.

These various uses of text and translation fall into four broad categories: philological, doctrinal, historical, and pedagogical. The work, or its various versions, translations, interpretations and incarnations can be used according to different criteria depending on which one of these uses is the goal of a reworking of the text. For a long time philological uses were privileged. Perhaps this should not be; yet, without the philological control we lose all control. I would argue, therefore, that this use is a precondition for other uses. To repeat myself: the model for this particular approach to the text remains Schm., and then later Steinkellner.

Doctrinal uses also tended to dominate the field during an earlier period in the study of Buddhism and are now being displaced by other concerns (especially the historical concern understood broadly). But doctrinal concerns remain outside academia. If one's interest is in understanding the *Bodhicaryāvatāra* in its contexts (not necessarily only its "original" context, but the way in which it has worked in a variety of contexts), then it is important that doctrinal analysis be derived from the philological understanding of the text. And, once more, at the risk of repeating myself too many times Schmidt and Steinkellner remain paramount, with La Vallée

⁶⁹ The bibliography lists some of the many contemporary commentaries—many of which are modeled on traditional Tibetan commentaries. Hayashiyama, Takasaki, et al. list the extant Indian commentaries.

Poussin as a strong third.

If we understand history in the broadest sense, of the word, then a historical study of the text would involve its placement in time and space, and its placement in society. Of course, all translators provide some sort of preface or introduction; but, for the most part those attached to translations of the *Bodhicaryāvatāra* have been too short to provide for the possibility of examining the translators' historical understanding of the text. So far, only CS has made any serious attempt to do this in a manner that is elaborate enough to allow for criticisms, reactions, etc. But much more needs to be done. Serious problems remain, because the location of the *Bodhicaryāvatāra* is so uncertain, and its textual history is barely understood.

The "pedagogical" functions of translations include use in the classroom (presumably to exemplify particular cultural or literary forms) or in some other instructional setting, including the edification of Buddhist practitioners and believers. If the purpose of the education is to open the text to a modern reader, as a first opening to India or classical Mahāyāna Buddhism, then the goal is fulfilled variously by accessibility and clarity, and by a modicum of historical explanation. As I have said before, for this purpose, PG now enters the arena as a strong competitor. Still, the introductory materials in CS are now the most complete in English.

Religious texts (especially though not exclusively religious texts), can also serve, as it were, an end outside of themselves that is somehow different from the social end already mentioned under the historical function. This other end is as part of various "technologies of the self." In this last use, the text justifies, guides, or models particular forms of relating to the presumed object of reference of the text (namely: patterns of religious and ethical behavior, ideals of what one can become). Because these ideals are usually embodied in objects that are revered or worshiped, and because it is commonly

assumed that worship is a matter of "emotion," this approach is sometimes called vaguely the "devotional" use of the text. For this use also, I would recommend PG over the other two translations, with WW as a strong second, and CS as of some help through its many notes and introductory materials.

Needless to say, these distinctions of "function" are merely a matter of convenience. From the point of view of a critical analysis of what goes into the reading and transmission of texts generally, one could argue that a philological translation is a variant of a historical analysis, or that both of these approaches are in fact types of technologies. But I still would argue that the distinction is useful, because it allows us to clarify the different methods, constraints and criteria with a sense of their goal, and separate from the notion of a true text with a single message that must all be true or false, good or bad, etc. Additionally this approach avoids the pitfalls of imagining a single value for literary judgement.

In its present form, specifically in the form it has in the Nepalese Sanskrit recension (sometimes called "vulgate"), the *Bodhicaryāvatāra* is a complex work that resists any simple characterization. It does not fit easily into any Indian pattern or genre, although it has elements of a variety of genres. This is true also from a Western perspective: is this a historical document, a document on monastic demeanor, a philosophical critique, a devotional poem, a ritual manual, or a devotional manual in the spirituality style? It is all and none of these.⁷⁰

One can compare different sections, layers, or aspects of the *Bodhicaryāvatāra* to a variety of texts. It has elements of the Indian "epistle" (seen in the presumably contemporaneous *Śiṣyalekha*, and in older models, such as *Ratnāvalī*). These

⁷⁰At times scholars put too much value in labeling a text's genre. But this is more than a compulsion, since it involves a polemic regarding the function and value of the text. Thus, Kajihara's (1991) unequivocal assertion that the Bca is not a philosophical text is an exaggeration in the direction of truth meant to counter the excessive emphasis on Chapter IX that pervades much of the literature on Bca.

epistles sometimes included nuggets of rituals that correspond in tone and style to various “rituals of the vows,” and “rituals of confession” (some of which are attributed to classical authors, like Āryaśūra). The *Bodhicaryāvatāra* also overlaps with other works devoted to an examination of the bodhisattva path—notably another work also attributed to, the *Subhāṣita-ratna-karaṇḍaka-kathā* (also attributed to Āryaśūra, Zimmermann, 1975).⁷¹ In its expanded discussion of philosophical debates, however, the *Bodhicaryāvatāra* may also be compared to Candrakīrti's *Madhyamakāvatāra*.

The translator is therefore faced with an impossible challenge: to translate effectively several voices and registers in a single work, to preserve the protean or amorphous character of the original while making key decisions to make the text accessible to readers accustomed to other conventions of genre and literary unity. At the same time the translator also has to incorporate or account for the voices of the present—including the voices of other translators. And at the same time he or she must find a way to respond to the various uses of the text.

Furthermore, the *Bodhicaryāvatāra* is not an easy text. At times, sentence structure and vocabulary approach the most basic levels of Sanskrit grammar (see the first passage discussed in the review), but structure and grammar can also be extremely subtle, if not obscure and difficult (see the discussion of Bca. IX.68-71 above). Overall, the *Bodhicaryāvatāra* is not representative of the most difficult passages in śāstric literature, but its apparent accessibility is deceptive for three reasons. First, most of the text is constructed around complex tropes, allusions and literary conceits that can be easily misinterpreted or missed. The text is, in my view, beautiful and poetical. Part of its beauty is in its rhetorical complexity.⁷²

⁷¹ Zimmermann's edition and translation raises important questions regarding the translation of Buddhist texts, specifically regarding the proper and improper use of Tibetan translations of Indian works.

⁷² Perhaps the most complex section, rhetorically speaking, is the

Second, because of its beauty and intense rhetoric the text beckons and invites and deceives us by making us confuse our awe and fascination with understanding. Third the text has been translated, read, and commented so many times that one's understanding is bound to be biased, both by conscious knowledge and by the background narrative we must bring to any understanding of the text.

3.2. Concluding Observations.

The arguments and examples presented in this review, cursory as they are, suggest to me the following. First, translation, like systematic scholarship generally, is a collective, cumulative effort. Second, it does not progress in a straight line—new solutions may be found, but old mistakes may be repeated. Third, in judging progress and value one can think in terms of detail or in terms of wholes. A work as a whole may not represent a significant improvement on past work, yet it may add something of value to our knowledge in its treatment of specific passages. Conversely, a translation may not make major contribution in the resolution of difficult passages, but it may find new ways to present the text as a whole. Fourth, value also depends on context, audience, and purpose.

With these lessons in mind, we can look back at the three new translations and the older translations that preceded them, and make the following generalizations.

We are not at a point in the study of Śāntideva where we can dispense with the older translations. CS, in spite of everything that it offers, has too many problematic points that could have been easily remedied by consulting the older translations. The WW and PG translations are less problematic, but less scholarly. Needless to say, they were not meant to be works for consultation.

I am not a believer in definitive anything, but we do have monuments of scholarship that must be consulted decades after they were produced. I think this is true of some of the older Western translations—especially Schmidt and Barnett for grammar, Steinkellner for philosophical discourse, La Vallée Poussin for a bit of both, Finot for choice of words.

As far as accessibility is concerned, I think the best pedagogical tool is, ironically, in the version that appears otherwise not to have any scholarly pretenses: the Padmakara Translation Group version. This is the one that I would recommend both for classroom use and for use by groups interested in practice and devotion. For teaching students who cannot read Sanskrit, I would recommend PG—or, if the text is to be used in an elementary course, the Dalai Lama's commentary: *A flash of lightning in the dark of night*.⁷³ Although PG is from the Tibetan translation and not from the Sanskrit, it is a great improvement upon Batchelor, and the most readable of the newer translations. In fact, it often illuminates the Sanskrit and Western renderings of the Sanskrit.

One can still learn much from other versions. Although PG is the best rendering in English, the French and German translations have much to teach us. Among the English rendering CS offers a useful and acceptable introduction in the classical style of doctrinal studies of Buddhology. WW rendering, in spite of some problems, offers a good check with the translation of the Tibetan text. In spite of the objections I have raised above, I still think CS and WW are worth consulting. I am not too sure, however, that CS can stand alone—especially in classroom use or for use in discussion groups.

In teaching graduate students or intermediate-advanced Sanskrit students, I would have the students consult CS. The

⁷³ Either PG or *Flash of lightning* may be the best choices for those not concerned with the subtle (albeit crucial) differences between Tibetan readings and possible uses of Bca. in India.

notes in CS are often helpful and trace some allusions not traced elsewhere. But as a translation I would use it with advanced students only by default: regrettably, many graduate students in North America are unfamiliar with other Western languages and unable to consult Schmidt or Steinkellner. The instructor should consult the old translators and make his or her students aware of the contribution of these scholars. They still offer us the best philological versions, and they also give us the best renderings of the philosophical passages.

This means instructors teaching with any one of the newer translations should have on hand at least Steinkellner and Barnett (both of which are still more or less accessible), unless they feel so confident of their Sanskrit skill and training that a quick glance at the Sanskrit version will give them a reliable critical control over any weaknesses in the Tibetan and in Padmakara.

As far as studies are concerned, CS is at this point our only source in English that addresses issues of textual history and literature—unfortunately the translators' remarks are not placed explicitly in any contemporary critical context (e.g., of style, authorship, theory of manuscript interpretation). Pezzali's study may supplement this, but it has many shortcomings (noted already by de Jong). CS does the best job in attempting the difficult and unforgiving task of communicating cultural distance. It is also the only one of the newer versions (and for that matter most of the old) that struggles with the questions of ethics, ritual and ascetic practices—all questions that trouble our Western readers.

However, over all the newer translations are weak in critical distance, and in conveying to the reader the cultural gap that often separate us from the *Bodhicaryāvatāra* and its author(s). They also appear to have failed to benefit from earlier Western translations. I wonder if we do not need to reflect more on a century of Buddhist Studies in the West and on the historical and philological tools that our predecessors left

for us. Of course some of my observations and judgements are bound to be due to personal differences that could be qualified (with equal generosity) as either differences in philosophical outlook or differences of character and personality. Nevertheless, even accounting for such differences, it is fair to say that there is still much room for greater critical dialogue and reflection on the science of reading Buddhist texts and the art of translating them.

3.3. A Parting Thought

My conclusion that the Padmakara Translation Group version (PG) is the most successful of the three new translations is based on the analysis of the translation as I have read it in the privacy of my study. I have no privileged knowledge regarding the way in which the Padmakara Group works. All three translations are collective works in one way or another. It would be good to know if differences in the process account for differences in the outcome. My conclusions makes me ponder some of our assumptions about the institutional and rhetorical trappings of scholarship—about working alone and about the audience we imagine when we translate. Perhaps this tells us something about the limitations of scholarship, but I think it is really telling us something more about the limitations of some scholarly models, especially the Sanskritic model. Here we have an unpretentious translation, one that does not claim to use the Sanskrit literature exhaustively or to even have considered the Sanskrit text of the *Bodhicaryāvatāra*, a translation that offers no accompanying scholarly apparatus... and it appears to be very successful at crossing over into the English idiom. I cannot avoid feeling that this teaches us something about the teaching of Sanskrit and Buddhism, as well as something about the art of translating.

Abbreviations

Batch. = Batchelor, 1979.

Bca. = *Bodhicaryāvatāra*.

BR = Böhtlingk & Roth.

Brt. = Barnett, 1909.

C. E. = the Common Era (of the modern Western calendar).

CS = Crosby & Skilton, 1996.

ed./eds. = editor(s), edition(s).

EdgD = Edgerton, *Dictionary*.

Eng. = English.

MW = Monier-Williams.

PG = Padmakara Translation Group, 1997.

Pk. = Prajñākaramati's Pañjikā, in the ed. of LVP.

PTSD = Rhys Davids & Steed.

repr. = reprint, reprinted.

Skt. = Sanskrit.

Stn. = Steinkellner, 1981.

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National Library in Rome, searches through international booksellers, and walking (pleasurably) the bookstores of Rome and Florence. But I was able to receive a xerography of the copy at the National Library in Turin (Biblioteca Nazionale di Torino), thanks to the kindness of Ramón Prats (Himalayan and Inner Asian Resource Center, Trace Foundation).].

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