

Some Observations on the Notion of *Tathāgatarbha*

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In this short article, I will endeavour to discuss some aspects of *tathāgatarbha* in their general philosophical rather than specifically buddhological perspective.

David Ruegg writes in his recent book: “Now, in the entire spectrum of their applications, the terms *tathāgatarbha*, *cig c(h)ar ba* and *rim gyis pa* do not appear to define a single, constant and unitary core-notion or essence. Rather, they correspond to contextually varying values grouped round these terms or topoi. In the case of *tathāgatarbha*, this may well have to do with the fact that it is not a referring term for any entity (*bhāva*), but a metatheoretical expression or counter”.¹ Taking this passage as a point of departure or, more precisely, a pretext for my *metaphilosophical* commentary, I will start with this question: what does ‘metatheoretical’ mean or may mean, in this particular context, in contradistinction from, say, ‘theoretical’?

First, as a hermeneutist, Ruegg sees that it is *their*, i.e., those Buddhist Masters’, use of *tathāgatarbha* that he calls metatheoretical, which suggests, among other things, that his approach is *emic* here, or more emic than etic. Second, as a historian of Buddhist philosophy, he regards the philosophical context of the use of the term *tathāgatarbha* as a context which ‘dehistorized’ its own history (as well as ‘depsychologized’ its own psychology, etc.).² And third, as a philosopher, he sees in those Masters Philosophers who were used to distinguish between the theory of *tathāgatarbha*, as it had been presented in the *Mahāparinirvānasūtra* and the metatheoretical implications, consequences and, most importantly, applications of the central terms of this theory.

Now, returning to the question asked above, I would, though no more than tentatively, suggest that the notion and term ‘theoretical’ here could be understood as related or reduced to a set of postulated *objects of thinking* or postula-

¹ D. Seyfort Ruegg, *Buddha-nature, Mind and the Problem of Gradualism in a Comparative Perspective*, London, 1989, 5.

² I find a remark to this effect (*ibid.*) particularly significant, because it is impossible, absolutely impossible to see Buddhist philosophy as a reflection of, letting aside reflexion on, any *human* relations of whatever kind.

tions concerning these objects (such, for instance, as ‘suffering’ (*duḥkha*), dharma and ‘interdependent co-origination’ (*pratītyasamutpāda*), or ‘the Four Noble Truths’, ‘emptiness of all dharmas’ (*sarvadharmasūnyatā*), etc.), whereas the notion and term ‘metatheoretical’ would be understood as that which is related to a certain *direction of (theoretical) thinking* and which marks this direction in a given context as well as marking the context itself (i.e., a text or a group of texts). At the same time, a metatheoretical notion can be regarded as a point of view (or aspect) from which, or in the sense of which, some other texts or groups of texts could be interpreted. (These two cases of the application of the metatheoretical [I am sure that there can be more than two], I would for convention’s sake call ‘intensive’ and ‘extensive’.) So, to give a very trivial example, when we read in the *Vajracchedikā* that, in (the sense of) *prajñāpāramitā* there is no such *dharma* as *samyaksambuddha*, or in the *Hṛdayasūtra* that in (the sense of) *sūnyatā* there is neither knowledge (*vidyā*) nor nescience (*avidyā*), we are inclined to see, contextually, *prajñāpāramitā* and *sūnyatā* as metatheoretical and *dharma* and *avidyā* as theoretical notions here. (This, of course, will not preclude the latter figure as the former and vice versa in some other contexts—both notions are typical shifters.)

It is ‘in the sense of’ that really matters *in* and, more importantly, *as* one’s metatheoretical position. One’s *metaphilosophical* task here—my own, in this particular case—would, then, consist in attempting to understand the ‘sense’ in which the Mahāyāna Masters employed the ‘meta-terms’ and ‘meta-notions’, from the point of view and in terms of notions of our own philosophical apperception. And it is the latter that we have to explore in the first place.

The first metaphilosophical observation concerning *tathāgatagarbha* would be that there can be no *what* with respect to this notion. The notion of ‘being’ (*bhāva*) is used mainly not as ‘state of being’, but as ‘entity’ which the *tathāgatagarbha* is not. So one may say that when it is, it is not an entity. At the same time, it should be noted that *bhāva* is not *classificatory* in the Buddhist vocabulary. That is, there is no class of objects that could be classified into ‘being’ and ‘non-being’ (*bhāva* and *abhāva*) and, therefore, one cannot deduce ‘non-being’ from ‘being’ by way of mere negation. (Likewise, and using an *etic* approach here, it can be said that there can be no object of thinking, say, such as ‘all’ or ‘the whole’, that could be classified into *saṃsāra* and *nirvāṇa* as its taxons, for they do not belong to the same taxonomic whole.)³ And denying the being of

³ This, in its turn, *can* imply a very interesting *philosophical* (and not metaphilosophical) question, to wit, whether or not ‘all’ or ‘the whole’ here is tautological with “such an object (*ālambana*) as ‘all dharmas’”? See Ruegg’s “The *Gotra*, *Ekayāna* and *Tathāgatagarbha*: Theories of the *Prajñāpāramitā* According to Dharmamitra and Abhayākara Gupta”, in L. Lancaster, ed., *Prajñāpāramitā and Related Systems*, Berkeley, 1977, 294.

something does not entail the asserting of its non-being.⁴ But, again, from the point of view of Buddhist philosophy proper, i.e., Abhidharma, each and every ‘non-being’ (but not necessarily ‘being’!) has ‘sense’ only in the sense that ‘there is no such *dharmā* as ...’, and in no other sense. Or, in other words, each and every object can be classified in terms of *dharmas* either negatively or positively which, however, is not to say that *dharmas* can, themselves, be predicated by ‘being’. For, indeed, predicating the *dharmas* as ‘being’ would be tantamount to denying the postulate of *nairātmya*. And here we have to address ourselves to ‘being’ as a metaphilosophical term and to the possibility of applying the notion of ‘ontology’ in an interpretation of the contexts of *tathāgatagarbha*.

The second observation is, thus, on ontology. In its classical and, later, theological use, it serves as a term denoting the concept that attributes ‘being’ to *that which has already been postulated as the (highest) reality*—God, Form, Idea, Absolute, etc. Although, of course, speaking historico-philosophically, the concept has, not infrequently, been extrapolated to things, ideas and circumstances (such as matter, consciousness, mind, language, etc.) whose ‘being’ is established *a priori* or, being taken for granted, remains implicit in a philosophical context. So, for instance, one may say that, in L. Wittgenstein’s *Tractatus*, language is an ontological entity, or that in some phonological theories a phoneme is endowed with some ontological value. However, this is so only provided that what can be, for convention’s sake, called the ‘European philosophical tradition’ has included the concept of ontology in its composition. On the Indian side, one may see, for example, in the *sat* of the Vaishnava triad, *cit-sat-ānanda* (‘thought-being-bliss’) an approximation to this concept, but only if one sees it from a metaphilosophical position. And it is this position that allows us to see in the *sat*, ‘reality’ in relation to which *bhāva*, ‘being’, would be seen as something definitely non-ontological, not possessing its own being when related to that which is ‘being par excellence’ i.e., *sat*. This is why in some not only Buddhist but non-Buddhist contexts too *bhū* and *bhāva* are ‘become’ and ‘becoming’, and not ‘be’ and ‘being’. Let us take, in contrast to the Buddhist non-ontologism, such an all too well trodden passage:

“There is no becoming (*bhāva*) of non-being (*asat*), nor is there non-becoming (*abhāva*) of being (*sat*): the border-line (*anta*) between the two is seen by those who see the truth (*tattva*).”⁵

⁴ Or more precisely speaking, ‘being’ and ‘non-being’ *do not necessarily exist together*. See in the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā*, particularly ch.1. Although theoretically, we can infer *bhāva* of that of which *abhāva* is asserted, in the Buddhist contexts both figure as mere *contingencies*.

⁵ *Bhagavadgītā*, 2, 24, 16:

nāsato vidyate bhāvo nābhāvo vidyate sataḥ ||
ubhayor api dr̥ṣṭō ’ntas tv ’anayos tattvadarśibhiḥ ||.

The translation, literal as it may be, does not gain in precision as regards the philosophical relation between *sat* and *bhāva*, for the intentionality of the passage is about the philosophical relation between *sat* and *asat*.⁶ At the same time, the *content* of the passage is unambiguously about *bhāva* (or *abhāva*) which is negated in respect of *sat* (or *asat*), and not the other way round. In other words, the relation between *sat* and *bhāva* undoubtedly lies in the realm of semantics here, and not in philosophy, and could reveal itself as philosophy only in a metaphilosophical observation. For, indeed, *bhāva* here is ‘coming into being’ rather than ‘being’, and *abhāva* ‘going out of being’ rather than ‘non-being’. The word ‘becoming’ (or ‘become’) might have gradually re-assumed its primary etymological meaning in the process of the philosophical critique of the ontological postulate of *brahman* (or *ātman*) or some other ontological postulates.⁷

However, using the term and notion ‘ontological’ here, we have to stress again that in its application to the ancient Indian sources it would have to lose its original contextual philosophical meaning—i.e., of being attributed to something real, absolute in its reality or, by way of extrapolation, to anything—and acquire its metaphilosophical meaning—i.e., of *being per se*, as in *saccidānanda*. In the *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* (VI, 2, 1–2), it is *Being (sat)* primary and beginningless, alone (*ekam*) without another.⁸ But, again, note, it is to *Being* alone that anything else can be ascribed or denied, and not to anything else that *Being* can be ascribed or denied. In the *Brahma-Sūtras* (1, 1, 6–8), the idea of *sat* as Absolute Being figures in the commentary with reference to the *Chāndogya* and as synonymous with Self (*ātman*).⁹ And one cannot, then, ask of our three non-Buddhist contexts ‘what is that Being?’. For the only answer one could get

⁶ Van Buitenen renders the first line as “there is no becoming of what did not already exist, there is no unbecoming of what does exist” (*The Bhagavadgita in the Mahabharata*, Chicago & London, 1981, 75). He characteristically comments on the end of the second line: i.e., the boundary between being and non-being (162).

⁷ That this re-assumption of the primary etymology (being, probably, ‘to grow’, ‘to grow full’, ‘to swell’, ‘to expound’) might have taken place in Pāli, would seem to me a quite convincing conjecture. However tenuous an attempt by Mrs. Rhys Davids to present the two meanings (and two verbal forms) of this word in Pāli as two different philosophical concepts might be, it reflects the most important fact, to wit, that the philosophical work in the early historical Buddhism was with *words* used and usable in the background of *oral* traditions in the first place, and not with the analysis of the concepts. That is why the critique of her opponents, who accuse her of ascription of the concept of *ātman* to the early Buddhists, seems to me entirely beside the point. See C.A.F. Rhys Davids, *To Become or not to Become*, London, 1937; T.R.V. Murti, *The Central Philosophy of Buddhism*, London, 1980, 20–24.

⁸ *The Principal Upanisads*, ed. & tr. by S. Radhakrishnan, London, 1974, 447–449.

⁹ Swami Vireswavananda, ed., *Brahma-Sutras, with Text, Translation, English Rendering and Commentary*, Almora, Advaita Ashrama, 1948, 41–4.

would be ‘*that*’ (*tad*), which neither adds to nor subtracts from the meaning of *sat*, serving as its ‘eternal counter’ in the lapidary contexts of the *Brahma-Sūtras*. *Tad* here is not a metatheoretical term but a purely philosophical one, *one in all of its contexts*. It fixes *sat* as the ultimate reality and, at the same time, the only object of thinking (‘one without another’). The object which is the object of thinking not because of thinking but because of *itself* which is thinking and being together. *Sat*, though universal as Being, remains absolutely concrete as the *object*, and that is why it can, metaphilosophically, be rendered into *English* as a kind of entity. The semantical advantages of employing ‘entity’ as equivalent of *sat* are quite obvious: it is less ‘thingly’ than ‘thing’ and far more concrete than ‘being’, though in some other contexts (particularly Buddhist), it would be very tempting to render ‘being’ (*bhāva*) as entity or substance (*dn̄gos-po*).¹⁰

Now we have to return to *tathāgatagarbha* and Ruegg’s suggestion that it is *not* an entity, bearing in mind, at the same time, that it cannot, doctrinally, be *the* entity in the sense of *sat* (*tad*, etc.). Then the question arises: in respect of what can the *tathāgatagarbha* be used in its specific Buddhological contexts as a metatheoretical term and notion? The answer, then, would be: while the ontological context of *sat* includes (or excludes) all and everything, the sphere of application of *tathāgatagarbha* is, in principle, only the world of sentient beings (*sattva*) and not the world of the things inanimate (*bhājanaloka*).¹¹ However, saying that the *tathāgatagarbha* resides in all sentient beings (*sarvasattva*) is not to say that that is so in the sense of *nirvāṇa*, for the latter is not a metatheoretical notion. It is in the sense of *tathāgatagarbha* that all ‘things’ can be classified into *sattva* and *bhājana* in relation to *nirvāṇa*, given that the last, strictly speaking, is no ‘thing’ and, thereby, as mentioned above, is not subject to any classification. At the same time, while answering the question, in respect of what would the notion of *tathāgatagarbha* be used, we also have to bear in mind that, metaphilosophically, it indeed does not matter now whether the *tathāgatagarbha* does or does not reside in all sentient beings, since the former would determine the context of the latter all the same, either positively or negatively. In stating this I am suspending, but not ignoring, the two contrasting points of view in this regard as well as the third (i.e., that of *mKhas-grub-rje*) that refutes them, for the same reason.

As a general category of Buddhist philosophy *sattva*, in the *tathāgatagarbha* contexts, serves on the one hand as almost synonymous with *saṃsāra* (and par-

¹⁰ That is what Ruegg does, and quite conveniently, in his article “On the Dge Lugs pa Theory of the *Tathāgatagarbha*”, in *Pratidānam*, The Hague, 1968, 500–9.

¹¹ There is a superb résumé of the problem in D. Ruegg, *La théorie du tathāgatagarbha et du gotra*, Paris, 1969, 152–3.

ticularly, in opposition to *nirvāṇa*), but on the other, as a concretisation of the latter. That is, as that in which the *tathāgatagarbha* resides, *sattva* constitutes only the ‘living’ or ‘moving’ (*jaṅgama*) part of *saṃsāra* and leaves its ‘static’ (*sthāvara*) or ‘insensible’ part as a kind of ‘un-nirvanizable’ residuum (and as a class to which *nirvāṇa* does not apply—as Ruegg said).¹² Moreover, *sattva*, in the same contexts, is further concretized as or rather reduced to that which in itself seems to be specifically permeated by *tathāgatagarbha*, i.e., the series or continuum of thought, *cittaśaṃtāna*.¹³ Can we speak then of *tathāgatagarbha* in the absence of *śaṃtāna*?¹⁴ Definitely not, for as we cannot speak of the *śūnyatā* in the absence of that of which it is *śūnyatā*, or *ālayavijñāna* in the absence of the six *vijñānas*, so in the contexts of *tathāgatagarbha*, the last is postulated as residing in a *śaṃtāna* and nowhere else.¹⁵

As a philosophical notion, *śaṃtāna* is extremely ambiguous. On the one hand, it is an *individual* stream or continuum of thought. Individual, in the sense of its being *one* for each *sattva*, and not two or more. On the other hand, it presupposes that thoughts exist only in series, and that no two or more thoughts can arise (in the sense of the abhidharmic notion of *cittotpāda*) simultaneously in the same *śaṃtāna*, and that the interval between any two thoughts is, in principle, indeterminable. This aspect of *śaṃtāna* calls irresistibly for a ‘naturalistic’ interpretation.¹⁶ For, indeed, though by any means not an entity in the sense of *sat* or

¹² *ibid.*, 151–2: “tel est le non-*nirvāṇa* absolu (*atyantā-parinirvāṇa*).” I am very much tempted to nickname it, in *tathāgatagarbha* contexts, ‘anti-*nirvāṇa*’ in the sense in which *nirvāṇa* is, in some other contexts, ‘anti-*saṃsāra*’. Speaking metaphilosophically, ‘anti’ here marks the presence in both terms of the same quality but with opposite ‘directions’. So, it could be said that both in *bhājana* and *nirvāṇa*, there is no consciousness or thought (*citta*, *vijñāna*), and that both are systemically related to space. Only in the first case, it is the empirical space or direction (*diś*), while in the second, it is the pure ‘metaphysical’ space (*ākāśa*), itself an *asaṃskṛta dharma*.

¹³ D. Ruegg, *op. cit.*, in note 3, 296.

¹⁴ Strictly buddhistically speaking, of course, we cannot speak of anything in the absence of *śaṃtāna*, but here I am sticking to my metaphilosophical position.

¹⁵ In saying this, I am clearly aware that ‘nowhere else’ is no more than a manner of saying that, as a *soteriological* notion, *tathāgatagarbha* figures in the *soteriological* contexts and nowhere else. When we read in Ruegg’s exhaustive analysis of the *Ratnagotravibhāga* (*La théorie du tathāgatagarbha et du gotra*, 249–53) that all sentient and reincarnated beings (*sattva*, *dehin*) are (or ‘possess’ in Tib. trans.) the *buddhagarbha* (or *tathāgatagarbha*), and that the latter is, like space (*ākāśa*), ubiquitous, all-penetrating, finds itself in all forms (*rūpa*), and is immutable (*avikāra*)—from this it does not follow that our limiting condition (‘nowhere else’) is cancelled. For *sattva* here is a subject of liberation described in its relation to the liberating principle (i.e., *tathāgatagarbha*). This relation can, in its turn, become an object of a metaphysical analysis.

¹⁶ This is a clear tendency in the modern Buddhist philosophy to represent *śaṃtāna* as a sort of natural process opposed to another, also natural, process of ‘non-sentient beings’. See in W.F. Jayasuriya, *The Psychology and Philosophy of Buddhism: Being an Introduction to the Abhidhamma*, Colombo, Y.M.B.A. Press, 1963, 6, 11–13, 41.

ātman, it figures here as a sort of phenomenon, the ‘empirical’ existence (not being!) to which is always conjoined the totally non-empirical idea of *tathāgatagarbha*. Or, shall we say, it is probably a purely *metatheoretical* (in Ruegg’s sense) notion of *tathāgatagarbha* that makes the notion of *saṃtāna* all the more empirical and inviting a naturalization.¹⁷

One circumstance, however, should not be overlooked in this connexion: *saṃtāna* is not postulated in the Pāli Abhidhamma, nor in the later Abhidharma, not to speak of the specific *tathāgatagarbha* contexts. It invariably remains a kind of ‘background idea’ of a ‘thing as a process’, or rather, when naturalized, of a ‘process as a thing’, but never included in any of the initial postulates. In respect of that which is initially postulated in the Abhidhamma, to wit, the rise of thought (*cittuppāda*), objects (*ārammaṇa*) and *dhammas*—*saṃtāna* emerges as the abstract principle of ascription of all of them to one (*sattva*) and, at the same time as that which ‘keeps them together’, ‘holds them as one’, ‘configurates them’ in a certain way which metaphysically, and not in terms of a psychophysical idea of human perception, would allow one to speak (and think) of it as ‘one’ or ‘another’ (*saṃtānāntara*). Not being one of the primary notions of Buddhist philosophy, it fits in, perfectly, in its ambiguity, with the central Buddhist idea of ‘middleness’ in the sense of ‘neither this nor that’. For, again, taken as a series of arising and disappearing thoughts, it is impermanent (*anitya*), but understood in the sense of ‘one stream and not another’, it is as beginningless as *ātman*, though not sharing with the latter its endlessness. Or, returning to its phenomenal aspect, it can be said that in the *citta-saṃtāna*, stream of thought, understood as a *composit*, it is ‘stream’ or ‘continuum’ that is stressed, and not ‘thought’ (as, probably, *ālaya* is stressed in the *ālayavijñāna*, and not *vijñāna*). Taken in this aspect, *saṃtāna* is a phenomenon in the sense in which *cittotpāda* is not, that is, as *that which can be known*, in principle, of course, directly (as in the transcendental yogic experience) or indirectly (by way of inference). And it can be known not only as ‘one’s own’ or ‘another’, but also in general, as the spatio-temporal configuration of discrete thoughts, or as a ‘force’ or ‘power’ that makes them configure in a certain way and according to a certain pattern, or, at last, as the only *form* (for the lack of a better word) in which two or more thoughts *can be thought of* as existing together.¹⁸

¹⁷ This, however, may lead one to construct an overall *scheme of nature* where the *tathāgatagarbha* figures as the unifying, and in a way also ‘natural’, principle. See in L. Schmithausen, *Buddhism and Nature*, Tokyo, 1991, 22–3.

¹⁸ So, we read in the *Yogācārabhūmi* of Asaṅga (Tibetan translation): “As for ordinary people, even when they contemplate *saṃskāras* ... (as impermanent, etc.), their *citta-santāti* is mixed up with the feeling of self-identity (*asmimāna*), let alone in other states.” See L. Schmithausen, *Ālayavijñāna*, 2 vols., Tokyo, 1987, 447.

As practically all other Buddhist *philosophical* contexts, those of the *tathāgatagarbha* are *multilevelled*. This means that that which determines a context, forms it, so to speak, that it belongs to a level above all other levels in that context, or even, that it cannot be related to any of them systemically. So, speaking of the *tathāgatagarbha* as a metatheoretical notion, it could be said that it is what it is in the sense in which all other elements of its contexts not only are not what they are but are not what they are not, too. For, and this is quite obvious in Ruegg’s *opus magnum*, as a metatheoretical notion, the *tathāgatagarbha* cannot be an element of any other (i.e., determined by another notion) context.¹⁹ That is, in relation to any other element of its contexts, it is absolute, but only relationally, as a *notion*, and not as the absolute related to, say, *cittasamṭāna* as the relative. And if you asked does the *tathāgatagarbha* exist?—the answer would be yes but not as an entity.

The last remark. My impression is that in relation to *cittasamṭāna* the *tathāgatagarbha* plays a role more or less analogous to *ālayavijñāna*, also a metatheoretical notion. When Schmithausen says that, ‘mind containing all seeds (partly identified with *ālayavijñāna*) ... is something like *vijñānasantāna*’,²⁰ and then makes their relation more succinct saying that, ‘*ālayavijñāna* in the *Yogācārabhūmi* is hardly anything other than seeds hypostasized as accompanying *vijñānasantāna*’²¹—it suggests that the *tathāgatagarbha* and *ālayavijñāna*, as *notions*, are related to *cittasamṭāna* in more or less the same way.²² Stretching this point a little further, they can be regarded as forming the *isomorphic* theoretical contexts. In these contexts *one thing* (‘one thing’ here is no more than a manner of speaking, a way of saying used instead of, say, ‘an object of thinking’) is thought of as *another* (which, even in a manner of speaking cannot be designated as a ‘thing’) from the point of view of the third (a metatheoretical notion, in our case, *tathāgatagarbha* and *ālayavijñāna*). The first is not a phenomenon, it cannot be perceived ‘as it is’, for it ‘is not’, being a mere convention called, say, ‘empirical I’ to which action, speech and thinking are

¹⁹ I am strongly inclined to think, in this connexion, that *nirvāṇa* is not a metatheoretical notion.

²⁰ L. Schmithausen, *op. cit.*, 42.

²¹ *ibid.*, 45. Or, “... the seeds also can be *contained* in the *cittasantāna* ...” (page 111), or even “*ālayavijñāna* may be nothing but the series of *vijñānas* in so far as this series was regarded to contain seeds” (page 179). Also, *ibid.*, 129, 580. At the same time, Schmithausen stresses that “in the *Yogācārabhūmi* ... *citta-santāti* cannot be identified with *ālayavijñāna*” (page 342).

²² I am not considering here some remarkably interesting places where the *tathāgatagarbha* figures as almost identical with *ālayavijñāna*. See D. Ruegg, *La théorie du trathāgatagarbha et du gotra*, 35, 56, 101, n. 5, 160, n. 1, etc.

merely conventionally ascribed by itself or by others. The second is a phenomenon, though not a thing; it takes part in the play of consciousness and is an objectification of the latter as its process ('stream', 'series', 'continuum', etc.); from the point of view of the first that makes distinction between 'perceived' and 'perceiver' (*grāhya/grāhaka*), it is either the 'perceived', or the 'perceiver', while from the point of view of the third, it is the 'perceived-perception-perceiver' in their undistinguishability. But what about the third, the *tathāgatagarbha* itself. Could it be thought as anything other than metatheoretical, in its contexts, and other than antinomial in the tautological series so favoured by Th. Stcherbatsky (like, *tathāgatagarbha* = *tathāgatadhātu* = *dharmadhātu* = *rūpakāya*, etc.)? I think, and it is no more than a metaphilosophical conjecture, that it can be regarded, in relation to *cittasamṭāna*, as that which, though being always present in the continuum of consciousness and, by extrapolation, being *with* every discrete thought of this continuum is, itself, no consciousness. Being, as it were, 'isotopic' with consciousness and cancelling all dualisms and binary oppositions in the latter, it is neither thought, nor the object of thought, let alone the thinker. It neither arises in the *cittasamṭāna* as does the *bodhicitta*, nor can it be objectified as *dharma* (*dharmāmbana*), nor least of all, ontologized as the knower, like *ātman*. In its relation to *cittasamṭāna*, the *tathāgatagarbha* stands—as, probably, *ālayavijñāna* too—as a kind of 'anti-consciousness'. But this, however, is a sheer philosophical metaphor.

I will conclude my observations by saying that, having extracted the *tathāgatagarbha* from its genuine Buddhological contexts, isolated it, following Ruegg, as a metatheoretical notion generating and forming these contexts, and considering it in its metaphilosophical perspective, we may suppose that its negative phenomenological status of 'non-entity' and 'non-subject' is based on the postulate of thought or consciousness (*citta*, *vijñāna*), whereas the positive ontological status of *ātman* (or *sat*) is based on the postulate of absolute knowledge (*jñāna*, *vidyā*). To elucidate the difference between these two postulates would be a task worthy of modern philosophical attempt.