

The Two, the Four, the Three Truths
Extracts from the *Vibhāṣā* and the *Kośa* by Saṃghabhadra

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A.

Introduction

The problem of the two truths,

1. the truth of *saṃvṛti* or relative truth (truth of appearance),
2. the truth of *paramārtha* or absolute truth,

is of great importance in the Great Vehicle, in the Vedānta, in Indian speculation in general, and, one might say, in universal philosophy.

Here we are studying one of the secondary aspects of this problem by examining a few of the sources of the Foundational Vehicle **in Sanskrit**:¹ (1) the discussions of the *Vibhāṣā*, (2) Vasubandhu's definition, (3) Saṃghabhadra's commentaries that, as often happens, clarify somewhat (4) the theses of the Sthavira Śrīlāta. We also indicate the (5) texts relative to "the three truths of the Brahmins."

AA.

The words *saṃvṛti*, *saṃvṛtijñānam*, *saṃmuti*, *saṃmutiñānam*, *paramattha*, etc.

The word *saṃvṛti*, "to cover, to hide," is in fact explained in the Madhyamaka sources as a synonym for ignorance, delusion, mistake (*avidyā*, *moha*, *viparyāsa*): "We call it *saṃvṛti* because it covers and hides the correct consciousness, hiding the true nature of entities, causing the false to appear."²

The Pāli is *saṃmuti*—sometimes replaced by *saṃmati*—which is explained by the root *man* (a labialized to *u*). The Pāli Text Dictionary indeed translates: "consent, opinion, general consent"; *saṃmutisacca* is "conventional truth."

The "death" of a tree is *saṃmutimarāṇa*, "what is commonly called *death*," for the tree does not have a "vitality faculty" and is not a "living being" (*Visuddhimagga*, 229); kings are *saṃmutidevas*, "gods in the general way of thinking": they do not have any divine nature although they are venerated as gods.

The section of the Abhidharma consisting of the thirty-third *sūtra* of the *Dīgha* (iii, 226) enumerates four cognitions (*jñāna*):

1. *dhamme ñāṇam*,
2. *anvaye ñāṇam*,
3. *paricchede ñāṇam*,
4. *saṃmutiñāṇam*.

¹ For the schools of the Great Vehicle, see the notes and bibliographies of *Siddhi*, 547ff. – Add *Bodhisattvabhūmi*, 292 (*Satyaprajñaptivyavasthāna*): *avitathārthena tāvad ekam satyam na dvitīyam asti | dvididhaṃ satyaṃ saṃvṛtisatyaṃ paramārthasatyaṃ ca | ... ṣaḍvidhaṃ satyaṃ satyasatyaṃ mṛṣāsatyaṃ pariññeyasatyaṃ ...*

In regard to Harivarman (chap. 14, 141, 152, 190, 192), Étienne Lamotte is preparing an analysis of the *Tattvasiddhi*, which will be very useful.

We do not have any gloss on the thesis of the Yogācāras that there are three modes of existence, *paramārtha*, *saṃvṛti* and *dravyasat* (*Kośavyākhyā*, 524, 24).

² *Bodhicaryāvatāra*, comm. of ix, 2; read *ānṛtaprakāśanāt*.

The first two are the first two of the ten cognitions of the Abhidharma, *Kośa*, vii, F 12: the cognition of the four truths relative to the realm of desire (*dharmajñāna*; cognition of the factors) and the two higher realms (*anvayañāna*; subsequent cognition); the third is perhaps the ninth Sanskrit cognition, “cognition of exhaustion” (*kṣaye jñānam*); the last is the third Sanskrit cognition, “conventional cognition” (*saṃvṛtījñāna*). In the *Kośa* it is not always an ordinary mundane cognition but rather an imperfect and inexact cognition. Example: the “perfected beings” (*arhat*) cognize unsatisfactoriness by means of a pure cognition; coming out of the meditation where they have made contact with the truth, they think: “Unsatisfactoriness is known by me”: this thought is an impure cognition, a *saṃvṛtījñāna*, since it assumes a self (*Kośa*, vii, F 4–5, opinion of the Andhakas, p. 5, n.1).

The *Pāli Text Dictionary* notes *Milinda*, 160: *saṃmuti mahārāja esā: ahan ti mamāti, na paramattho eso*: “It is a mere commonly received opinion, O king, that ‘This is I,’ or ‘This is mine,’ it is not a transcendental truth.”

The most interesting Pāli texts are *Kathāvatthu*, v, 6 and the commentary on i, 1, where it is asserted that the “person” is not truly, really established (*saccikatṭhaparamatṭhena*).³ <161>

B. *Vibhāṣā 77, p. 399, col. 2, l. 10. – p. 400, col. 3, l. 12*

BA. *One truth*⁴

If there are four truths, why did the Blessed One say that there is one truth? Actually the stanza says:

One truth and not two. People, perplexed thereupon, each speak of different truths for themselves. I say that they are not mendicants.⁵

³ *Suttanipāta*, 648, 897, 904, 911. – The commentary of 897 in *Bodhisattvabhūmi*, 38; *Manorathapūraṇī*, I, 95; transl. of *Kathāvatthu*, 63, 180, 371; Ledi Sadaw, “Some points in Buddhist Doctrine,” *JPTS*, 1914, 129; Oltramare, *Théosophie Bouddhique*, 300; La Vallée Poussin, *JA*, 1903, ii. 262.

Visuddhimagga, 555, 20: “Since an enjoyer does not exist, to whom will the effect [of the action] belong? The mere production of the effect [in the series] justifies the conventional (*saṃmuti*) notion of enjoyer in the same way that the appearance of fruit [on the tree] gives rise to the expression (*saṃmuti*): It bears fruit.” – P. 433 at bottom: 497.

Samyutta, I, 135.

⁴ **LS**: All subheadings have been added to LVP’s text.

⁵ *Suttanipāta*, 884:

*ekaṃ hi saccaṃ na dutīyam atthi
yasmīn pajā no vivade pajānaṃ |
nānā te saccāni sayamaṃ thunanti
tasmā na ekaṃ samaṇā vadanti ||*

Samghabhadra, *below*, p. 667, col. 1, l. 27, has a different version.

The meaning is that there is just one truth. Not being sure, the heterodox, each for themselves say that there are several [truths]. The Buddha says that, in the Dharma,⁶ these people do not obtain the fruit of the path of the mendicant,⁷ for this fruit rests on the single truth. [P. 399, col. 2, l. 16.]

1. According to Pārśva,⁸ the expression “one truth” means that the four truths are each single. There is only one truth of unsatisfactoriness (*duḥkhasatya*); there is not a second [truth of] unsatisfactoriness (*duḥkha*); only one truth of the origin (*samudayasatya*), one truth of cessation (*nirodhasatya*), one truth of the path (*mārgasatya*), not a second [truth of the] origin (*samudaya*), a second [truth of] cessation (*nirodha*), a second truth of the path (*maggasatya*). Consequently, to say “one truth” does not contradict saying “four” [truths].

2. Furthermore, the expression “one truth” means: “one truth of cessation” (*nirodhasatya*), <162> for the Buddha wants to condemn the other [theories of] liberation (*vimukti*). Actually, the heterodox teach four liberations:⁹ (i) non-corporeal¹⁰ liberation that is the “perception-sphere of infinite space” (*ākāśānantyāyatana*); (ii) liberation of the infinite mind (*anantamanovimukti*) that is the “perception-sphere of infinite consciousness” (*vijñānānantyāyatana*); (iii) liberation of “the accumulation of the pure”¹¹ that is the “perception-sphere of nothingness” (*ākīṃcanyāyatana*); (iv) the liberation of “the *stūpa* of the world”¹² that is the “perception-sphere of neither ideation nor non-ideation” (*naivasamjñānāsamjñāyatana*). The Buddha says that this is not the true liberation (*vimukti*), the true deliverance (*niḥsaraṇa*), but rather it is existence in the realm of immateriality (*ārūpyabhava*). The true liberation is just the single truth of cessation (*nirodhasatya*), the absolute¹³ *nirvāṇa*. [P. 399, col. 2, l. 20.]

3. Furthermore, the expression “one truth” means “one truth of the path” (*mārgasatya*), for the Blessed One wants to condemn the other truths of the path. The heterodox actually teach many truths of the path. They think that the path is: (i) to starve oneself; (ii) to sleep in ashes; (iii) to follow the sun (*sūryānuvartana*);¹⁴ (iv) to drink the wind, to drink water, to eat fruits,

According to the *Mahāniddeśa*, the single truth is Nibbāna or the Magga; according to the *Visuddhimagga*, 497, it is the *paramatthasacca*, namely Nibbāna and the Magga.

⁶ In the Buddhist religion.

⁷ The path of the mendicant = *śrāmaṇya*.

⁸ Here and below, it is hard to see where the citation from Pārśva stops.

⁹ The same four liberations in *Vibhāṣā*, 8, p. 39, col. 2.

¹⁰ *ou chen kiai t'ouo, akāyikī?*

¹¹ ?? *tsing tsiu; śuci, viśuddha, śubha, prasāda, vyavadāna, etc.; rāsi, etc.*

¹² *loka* translates *che* or *che-kien* (*Vibhāṣā*, 39); *stūpa* is transcribed: *su-tu-pa*. – This way of designating the *bhavāgra* is not usual.

¹³ *kieou-king, niṣṭhāgata, samāpta*.

¹⁴ Compare *Kathāvatthu*, comm. p. 5, *ādiccam anuparivattanti*; *Mahāniddeśa*, 89, *suriyavattika*, people who take the vow (*vrata*) of the sun.

to eat vegetables; (v) nudity;¹⁵ (vi) to sleep on thorns; (vii) not to lie down; (viii) to clothe oneself in rags; (ix) to take drugs and not to eat. The Buddha says that this is not the real path; these are bad paths, counterfeit paths, deceptive paths. The good persons (*satpuruṣa*)¹⁶ do not practice them; it is bad people who stray in them. The true pure path is the single truth of the path (*mārgasatya*), the eightfold noble path, right view, etc.

4. Furthermore, the expression “one truth” means “one truth of cessation” (*nirodhasatya*) <163>, the complete abandonment of all the kinds unsatisfactoriness of cyclic existence.

5. Furthermore, the expression “one truth” means “one truth of the path” (*mārgasatya*), that which cuts the cause of all cyclic existence. [P. 399, col. 3, l. 8.]

BB.

Two truths in relation to the four truths

According to other *sūtras*, there are two truths, the relative truth (*saṃvṛtisatya*) and the absolute truth (*paramārthasatya*).

What are these two truths?¹⁷

1. According to one opinion. – Of the four truths, the first two (unsatisfactoriness and the origin of unsatisfactoriness) are relative truth (*saṃvṛtisatya*), for all things that are mundane entities (or entities of the relative), immediately perceived in the world: man, woman, going, abiding, pitcher, clothing, etc., are included in the first two truths.¹⁸ The last two truths (cessation and path) are absolute truth (*paramārthasatya*), for supramundane (*lokottara*) reality (*tattva*) and the supramundane qualities (*guṇa*) are included in these two truths. [P. 399, col. 3, l. 13.]

2. According to another opinion. – The first three truths are relative truth. There are mundane entities in the first two, as we have seen. As for the truth of cessation (*nirodhasatya*),¹⁹ the Buddha said that it was like a city, like a palace, like the other shore. Since such mundane designations refer to the truth of cessation, it follows that the truth of cessation, too, is called *relative truth* (*saṃvṛtisatya*). Only the truth of the path (*mārgasatya*) is absolute truth (*paramārthasatya*) for mundane designations are not found in it.

3. According to another opinion. – The four truths are included in the relative truth. For the first three, as above: because mundane entities are found in them. However, the truth of the path (*mārgasatya*) also involves mundane entities, for the Buddha <164> taught the truth of the path by using the names of mendicants and of brahmins. – Only the principle:²⁰ “All entities are empty and without self” is absolute truth (*paramārthasatya*), for, in emptiness and the nonself, all the mundane entities (or entities of the relative) have their designation cut off. [P. 399, col. 3, l. 22.]

¹⁵ *lou-hing*, pink-shape, the Nirgrantha.

¹⁶ *Kośa*, vi, F 217–218.

¹⁷ A translation of this passage, up to 400, col. 1, l. 3, in *Siddhi* by Hsüan-tsang, 552.

¹⁸ The first two truths are the totality of impure entities (*sāsrava*) considered as unsatisfactoriness or the cause of unsatisfactoriness.

¹⁹ *nirodhasatya* = *nirvāṇa*.

²⁰ *li*.

4. According to P'ing-kia.²¹ – The four truths are relative (*saṃvṛti*) and absolute (*paramārtha*).

- i. In the truth of unsatisfactoriness there is relative truth, as explained above. But²² in the truth of unsatisfactoriness there is [also] absolute truth, namely, the unsatisfactory–impermanent–empty–nonself principle (*duḥkha, anitya, śūnya, anātman*).
- ii. In the truth of the origin [there is] also [absolute truth, namely,] the cause–origin–successive-causation–condition principle (*hetu, samudaya, prabhava, pratyaya*).
- ii. In the truth of cessation there is relative truth, for the Buddha said that it is like a garden, a forest, the other shore; but there is also absolute truth, namely, the cessation–peaceful–excellent–escape principle (*nirodha, śānta, praṇīta, niḥsaraṇa*).
- iv. In the truth of the path there is relative truth, for the Buddha said that it is like a raft (*kola*),²³ a rocky mountain, a pier head (*sopāna*), a dike (*setu*), a flower, water; but there is also absolute truth, namely, the path–correct-method–route-of-obtaining–conducive-to-definitive-exit principle (*mārga, nyāya, pratipad, niryāṇa*). <165>

Since the four truths are relative truth and absolute truth, it follows that relative and absolute together comprise the eighteen elements (*dhātu*), the twelve sense-spheres (*āyatana*), the five aggregates (*skandha*). Space and “cessation not due to deliberation” (*apratisaṃkhyanirodha*) are also included in the two truths. [P. 400, col. 1, l. 3]

[The *Vibhāṣā* is unaware of a fifth opinion: that the third truth (*nirodha, nirvāṇa*) alone is absolute. – Harivarman, *Tattvasiddhi*, chap. 192 (who concludes that the path is the seeing of the third truth alone); *Madhyamakāvātāra*, transl. p. 70 (*Muséon*, 190), where it is also a question of truths distinct from the four, cf. *Daśabhūmi*, p. 42; *Bodhicaryāvatārapañjikā*, ix, 2, p. 362; below, F 170.

²¹ *Mélanges* (1936–37), 156.

²² Ping-kia considers the sixteen “aspects” explained in *Kośa*, vii, F 30–39 as absolute truth.

The Bahuśrutīyas (Vasumitra, *Masuda*, p. 35): “Five teachings of the Buddha are supramundane: impermanent, unsatisfactory, empty, nonself, peaceful.” These are the four aspects of the truth of unsatisfactoriness, and one aspect of the truth of cessation. – Compare the four *dharmoddānas*, e.g., *Bodhisattvabhūmi*, 277, and *Sūtrālaṅkāra*, xviii, 80–81: “The *saṃskāras* are impermanent, unsatisfactory, nonself; *nirvāṇa* is peaceful.” [Cf. *Sūtrālaṅkāra* and *Kośa*, viii, F 184: theory of the three concentrations (*samādhi*); Asaṅga gives the classification of the four *dharmoddānas* as belonging to the *bodhisattvas*.]

Vasumitra, *Mahāsāṃghikas*, thesis 3; Sarvāstivādins, thesis 47. E. Johnston, *Acts of the Buddha*, p. xxxiii, relationship between Aśvaghōṣa and the Bahuśrutīyas.

²³ See *Kośa*, i, F 13; viii, F 186 and Add. – “The *dharma* (which is only a raft) should be abandoned”; according to *Sūtrālaṅkāra*, *dharma* here means the teaching, the *sūtras*, etc.: *arthajñāḥ sarvadharmāṇāṃ sūtrādīnāṃ kolopamataṃ jānāti*.

A problem related to that examined here (Are the truths absolute truth?) is that of whether the speech of the Buddha is completely supramundane (or leading to “deliverance”), see Masuda, *Treatise on the Sects*, 13, 19, 35, 52.]

BBA.

Does the relative exist from the point of view of the absolute?

[If one states:] – Does the *saṃvṛti* nature of the relative (*saṃvṛti*) exist or not exist from the point of view of the absolute (*paramārtha*)?²⁴ – Both hypotheses are unacceptable, in fact, if it does exist, there is only one truth, namely, the absolute truth; if it does not exist, there is only one truth, namely, the absolute truth.

Answer. – The *saṃvṛti* nature of the relative exists from the point of view of the absolute. In the opposite hypothesis, the statement of the Blessed One: “There are two truths,” would not be true. Now, this statement <166> is true; therefore the *saṃvṛti* nature of the relative does exist from the point of view of the absolute.

[Question.] – But is then there only one truth, the absolute truth?

Answer. – In truth, there is only one truth, the absolute truth.

[Question.] – Then why establish two truths?

Answer. – If two truths are established, it is due to the difference in point of view,²⁵ not due to the entity itself.²⁶ There is only one truth, the absolute truth (*paramārthasatya*), in respect to the entity; but in respect to the difference in point of view, two kinds [of truth or of *paramārtha*] are established. The point of view according to which the relative truth is established is not the point of view according to which the absolute truth is established, and vice versa. [P. 400, col. 1, l. 17]

Comparison. A sensation is four kinds of conditions (*pratyayatā*); the point of view according to which it is defined as “causal condition” (*hetupratyaya*) is not the point of view according to which it is defined as “condition as the equivalent and immediate antecedent” (*samanantarapratyaya*), as “cognitive object condition” (*ālambanapratyaya*), as “dominant condition” (*adhipatipratyaya*), and vice versa. Likewise, it is six kinds of causes: the point of view according to which it is defined as “associated cause” (*saṃprayuktaka hetu*) is not the point of view according to which it is defined as “efficient cause” (*kāraṇahetu*). – It is the

²⁴ Something like *saṃvṛteḥ saṃvṛtītā*; the genitive is signaled by *tchong*, “in the midst of.” The meaning is simply: “Does the relative truth (*saṃvṛti*) exist in absolute truth?” – *paramārthatas*: the suffix *tas* is translated by *kou*.

In the Vedānta, Śaṅkara answers: No. The world, the relative (*saṃvṛti*) does not exist in absolute truth. The truth of the relative (e.g., the law of *karma*...) is true as long as deceit lasts; it is deceitful and provisional. Rāmānuja and the semi-monists answer: Yes. – The Mahāyāna scholars are divided. It seems that for the Madhyamaka the relative (*saṃvṛti*) does not really exist; that for the Vijñānavādins it exists or does not exist according to whether one follows Dharmapāla or Sthiramāti. But this problem demands a careful examination.

²⁵ *tch’a-pie yuen*; *viśeṣa-pratyaya*. – See below, F 180.

²⁶ *che-che* (40 and 11, 6 and 7), a real entity (*dravya*), *Kośa*, ii, 869 [??; *LS*: This page reference does not exist, maybe LVP means: i, 8–9].

same for the two truths: they are established due to the difference in point of view, not due to the entity. [P. 400, col. 1, l. 24]

BBB.

Do the relative and the absolute each refer to an unmixed entity?

Do the relative and the absolute each refer to an unmixed²⁷ entity²⁸? – Yes. How is that? – The Bhadanta Vasumitra says: “The name that designates²⁹ is relative; the factor (*dharmā*) that is designated is absolute”; and again: “That which is said in accordance with <167> the world³⁰ is called *relative*; that which is said in accordance with the noble persons (*ārya*) is called *absolute*.” The Bhadanta says: “To speak about a living being (*sattva*), a pitcher, clothing and other things—expressions (*vyavahāra*)³¹ produced by a non-erroneous mind—is relative truth; to speak about causality (*pratyayatā*), production due to conditions and other principles (*li*)—expressions produced by a non-erroneous mind—is absolute truth.” The Bhadanta Dharadatta³² says: “Name, in its nature (*nāmasvabhāva*), is relative, it is a part of the truths of unsatisfactoriness and of the origin. The object-referent (*artha*), in its nature, is absolute; it is a part of the first two truths, the other two truths and two unconditioned entities (*asaṃskṛta*).” [P. 400, col. 2, l. 4]

BC.

Three truths of the Parivrājakas Brāhmaṇas

The *sūtra* says:³³ The Parivrājakas³⁴ Brāhmaṇas have a threefold “truth of the brahmins” (*brāhmaṇasatya*). – What are these three? – (1) There are some Parivrājakas Brāhmaṇas that say: “Beings, all of them, should not be harmed.”³⁵ What they are saying thus is true, not false: this is what is called the *first truth of the brahmins*. (2) There are also some that say: “I am not that; that is not me.”³⁶ What they are saying thus is true, not false: <168> this is what is called the *second truth of the brahmins*. (3) There are also some that say: “Everything that

²⁷ *samsṛṣṭa, saṃkīrṇa*.

²⁸ *ou*, 93 and 5.

²⁹ *neng hien, souo hien; dyotayati, jñāpayati, prakāśayati*.

³⁰ *lokānurodhena*.

³¹ *yen chouo*.

³² Or Dharanadin (?), see *Kośa*, Index, F 118, and Akanuma who also is indicated in *Vibhāṣā*, 496, 2.

³³ For the paragraphs that follow and the corresponding paragraphs of Saṃghabhadra, below, p. 558, col. 3, compare *Aṅguttara*, II, 176 and a Sanskrit fragment from *Idikutśari* published by Pischel, Academy of Berlin, May 5, 1904.

³⁴ **MW**: Wandering religious mendicant.

³⁵ In the Pāli source, the *sūtra* is addressed to the Parivrājakas: “O Parivrājakas, the brahmin says...” There is: *idha paribbājakā brāhmaṇo evam āha: sabbe pāṇā avijjā* (should be corrected to: *avadhyā avajjhā*, or perhaps *avijjhā*) *ti, iti vadaṃ brāhmaṇo saccam āha no muṣā*. – But the fragment from *Idikutśari* has: “[The... brahmins] say: ...”

³⁶ *brāhmaṇo evam āha: nāhaṃ kva cana kassa ci kiñ canaṃ tasmim na ca mama kva cana kattha ci kiñ canaṃ n’attīti*. – *Idikutśari: evam āhur na mama kva cana kaś cana kiñ canaṃ asti*.

ngo fei pei souo yeou; pei fei ngo souo yeou; see p. ... [LS: page no. missing in LVP.]

is subject to production is subject to destruction.” What they are saying thus is true, not false: this is what is called the *third truth of the brahmins*. [P. 400, col. 2, l. 12.]

What is meant by “brahmins”? What is meant by “truth”?

The intention is to speak, under the name of “brahmins,” about heterodox mendicants (*parivrājaka tīrthika*). In what they say, the three aforementioned [doctrines] are “truth”; all the rest is false.

(1) “Beings, all of them, should not be harmed,” i.e., should not be killed. (2) “I am not that, that is not me,” i.e.: I do not depend³⁷ on that, that does not depend on me. (3) “Everything that is subject to production is subject to destruction,” i.e.: everything that arises ceases. [P. 400, col. 2, l. 18.]

According to another opinion, the intention is to speak, under the name of “brahmins,” about “residents in the Buddhist religion” (*buddhadharmastha*). – The aforementioned threefold doctrine is called *truth*: it is to oppose the heterodox that the Buddha spoke this *sūtra*. – Actually, (1) there are some heterodox who say: “I am a true brahmin,” and who, nevertheless, kill cows and sheep in sacrifice, round up different kinds of animals and kill them. In opposition to these, the Buddha declares: “They who harm another are not true brahmins; the true brahmins should not harm beings.” – Again, (2) there are some heterodox who say: “I am a true brahmin,” and who, nevertheless, practice chastity (*brahmacarya*) in order to be reborn in the heavens and taste pleasure there. In opposition to these, the Buddha declares: “They who practice chastity with the view of heavenly pleasures are not true brahmins; true brahmins practice chastity without being bound (*pratibaddha*)³⁸ by any <169> intention³⁹ whatsoever.” – Again, (3) there are some heterodox who say: “I am a true brahmin,” and who, nevertheless, accept annihilation or eternity (*uccheda, śāsvata*), abandoning the middle way (*madhyamā pratipad*). In opposition to them, the Buddha declares: “They who accept annihilation or eternity are not true brahmins. True brahmins know that everything that is subject to production is subject to destruction. There is production, thus non-annihilation; there is destruction, thus non-eternity. Neither annihilation nor eternity, this is the middle way.” [P. 400, col. 3, l. 3]

Or else, the intention of this *sūtra* is to say what is preparatory to the three gates of liberation (*vimokṣamukha*). (1) “Beings, all of them, should not be harmed”: this denotes the preparation (*prayoga*) of the gate of liberation of emptiness (*śūnyatāvimokṣamukha*). (2) “I am not that, that is not me”: this denotes the preparation of the gate of wishlessness (*apraṇihitavimokṣamukha*). (3) “Everything that is subject to production is subject to destruction”: this denotes the preparation of the gate of signlessness (*ānimittavimokṣamukha*).

Or else, the intention is to denote the three gates of liberation (*vimokṣamukha*), respectively.

Or else, the intention is to denote the three concentrations (*samādhi*), emptiness (*śūnyatā*), wishlessness (*apraṇihita*), signlessness (*ānimitta*), respectively.

³⁷ *chou* (44 and 18); *vidheya, adhīna*.

³⁸ *hi-chou*.

³⁹ *tche*, 61 and 3.

Or else, the intention is to denote the three elements (*skandha*) of morality, concentration, understanding, respectively; likewise, the three trainings (*śikṣā*), the three cultivations (*sieou*; *bhāvanā*?), the three purities. [P. 400, col. 3, l. 12.]

C. **Samghabhadra, 58, 665, 3 – 668, 1**

CA. **Different opinions on the relation of the four truths to the relative and to the absolute**

Of the four noble truths, how many are relative, how many are absolute?

According to one opinion, two are relative, [the first two], two are absolute, [the last two].
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According to another opinion, three are relative, [the first two and the fourth], for all the *saṃskāras* (or “conditioned entities”) are by nature false and deceptive.⁴⁰

According to another opinion, the distinction between the two truths concerns the teaching. The teaching⁴¹ that speaks of certain persons (of *pudgala*), of cities, gardens, forests, etc., belongs to the relative;⁴² but as this teaching has as its motive the indication of a true meaning⁴³ and is not caused by the intention to deceive another, it is called *truth*. The teaching that speaks of aggregates (*skandha*), elements (*dhātu*), sense-spheres (*āyatana*), etc., belongs to the absolute. Its aim is to explain the true nature of factors (*dharmā*); it destroys the notions of unity, of everything,⁴⁴ of an individual being (*sattva*); it shows reality (*tattva*):⁴⁵ therefore it is called *truth*. The teaching of the four truths makes people realize reality⁴⁶ therefore it is absolute. [P. 665, col. 3, l. 28.]

CAA. **The opinion of Śrīlāta and its examination by Samghabhadra**

Here the Sthavira (Śrīlāta) says:

⁴⁰ This is the opinion mentioned above, F 165.

etat dhi bhikṣavaḥ paramaṃ satyaṃ yad uta amoṣadharmā nirvāṇam | sarve saṃskārās ca mṛṣā moṣadharmāṇaḥ.

Madhyamakavṛtti, 41, 237; *Madhyamakāvatāra*, 119; *Bodhicaryāvatāra*, 363; *Vyutpatti* 245 (907–8): *mṛṣā moṣadharmāṇaḥ*; *Catuḥśātikā*, 198: *tan mṛṣā moṣadharmakaṃ yad etat saṃskṛtam ity uvāca śāstā* (whence it follows that the eye is empty of the eye). – Stcherbatsky, *Nirvāṇa*, 125. – *Siddhi*, 544. – S. Schayer, *Ausgewählte Kapitel...*, 26. – E.H. Johnston, *Saundara*, xv, 8.

Majjhima, III, 245: *taṃ hi bhikkhu musā yaṃ moṣadhammaṃ, taṃ saccaṃ yaṃ amosadhammaṃ nibbānaṃ... etaṃ hi bhikkhu paramaṃ ariyasaccaṃ yad idaṃ amosadhammaṃ nibbānaṃ.*

⁴¹ To be precise, *yen-kiao*, the verbal teaching, the *āgama* that will last to the decline of the Holy Dharma when realization (*adhigama*, *Kośa*, viii, F 220) will have come to an end.

⁴² This ought to be the meaning, but the syntax is complicated.

⁴³ *che-i* (40 and 11, 123 and 7); *tathya*, *satya*, *artha*.

⁴⁴ *ho* (30 and 3), which could be *piṇḍa*.

⁴⁵ *tchen-li* and *tchen-che-li*, which ought to be synonymous, *tattva*. *Siddhi*, ii, 6a5; ix, 13a4; x, 11a2.

⁴⁶ *ibid*.

Three truths are both relative and absolute. In the truth of unsatisfactoriness (*duḥkasatya*), which is single, the “expression” [or “designation”]⁴⁷ <171> is relative, but the real entity (*bhūta-dravya*) is absolute; likewise, with respect to the truth of the origin (*samudayasatya*) and of the path (*mārgasatya*). In regard to the truth of cessation (*nīrodhasatya*) alone, its intrinsic nature (*t’i; svabhāva*) being inexpressible, similar to the “indeterminates” (*avyākṛta*), it cannot be said that it exists (*bhavati?*). As [Śāriputra] says in the *sūtra*: “Āyusmat Ānanda, the six sense-spheres of contact and their extinction–abandonment–cessation–pacification–passing, is this the same entity, is this a different entity? One cannot reply categorically (*na vyākṛtam*). Do you want me to answer?”⁴⁸

Let us examine this theory⁴⁹ of the Sthavira: it is in contradiction with the definition of the two truths, relative and absolute. What are the characteristics of the two truths?

CAA.1.1. □□□□ *Samghabhadra’s presentation of the relative and absolute truth according to Abhidharmakośa vi, F 4.*

The verse (*kārikā*)⁵⁰ says:

The broken pitcher no longer gives rise to the cognition of the pitcher; the water analyzed by the mind, by removing the heterogeneous, no longer gives rise to the cognition of water: that is what exists from the point of view of the

⁴⁷ *i-kou-ti (ekasmin duḥkhasatye) kia (prajñapti) che (asti) che-sou (saṃvṛti)*. – There is for *kia*, 9 and 9, *prajñapti, upacāra, saṃketa, saṃvṛti*.

Below, there is: *kia che-che* (70 and 5, 149 and 4) *yeou; che-che-yeou = prajñapti*; therefore: “the expression (*prajñapti: kia*) existing as designation (*prajñapti: che-che*)...”

⁴⁸ Compare *Aṅguttara*, II, 161 where Ānanda is replaced by Mahākoṭṭhita. – *Atha kho Mahākoṭṭhita yenāyasmā Śāriputto tenupasamkami... etad avoca: Channaṃ āvuso phassāyatanānaṃ asesavirāganīrodhā atthaññaṃ kiṃ cīti... natthaññaṃ kiṃ cīti... atthi ca natthi caññaṃ kiṃ cīti... Channaṃ āvuso phassāyatanānaṃ asesavirāganīrodhā atthaññaṃ kiṃ cīti iti vadaṃ appapañcaṃ papañceti... channaṃ āvuso phassāyatanānaṃ asesavirāganīrodhā papañcanīrodho papañcavūpasamo ti*. – See below F 176.

⁴⁹ *i-tsong; artha-samaya*.

⁵⁰ Vasubandhu, in *Kośa*, vi. 4, (F 140); *Vyākhyā*, 524. The second line is given in the *Vyākhyā*; the first line can be reconstructed:

[*bhede yadi na tadbuddhir anyāpohe dhiyāpi ca* ||
ghaṭāmbuvad saṃvṛtisat [tad]anyat paramārthasat ||

See G. Tucci, *Pre-Diñnāga Buddhist Texts* (Gaekwad’s Or. Ser. 49), p. xxv (*Nyāyasūtra*, iv, 2, 26, etc.).

relative. That which is different exists from the point of view of the absolute.
[P. 666, col. 1, l. 8]

CAA.1.2.

The relative truth

Things that are a unified complex (*houo-ho*) occur, according to the case, in two categories: (1) those that can be divided <172> into parts by a material instrument; (2) those that can be analyzed by the mind through abstracting or isolating the heterogeneous elements (“the other *dharmas*”).

When [a certain] material unified-complex–assemblage (*houo-ho-tsiu*) is divided into parts, the cognition of the unified complex is no longer produced [in respect to the parts]: this is relative truth. For example, the pitcher: when the pitcher is broken into shards, the cognition of the pitcher no longer occurs.

There are unified-complexes–assemblages that can be divided without the cognition disappearing, for example, water; nevertheless, it can be analyzed and abstracted or isolated by the mind: then the idea disappears. Water is therefore also relative truth. When water is analyzed by abstracting or isolating the color (*rūpa*), etc., the cognition of water in regard to it no longer occurs.

As long as these various things are not divided or analyzed, they are provisionally designated (*prajñapyante*) by mundane ideations–names (*saṃjñā-nāman*). Existing as provisional designations (*prajñaptisat*), they are relative.

And when, we say from the point of view (*li*) of the relative: “The pitcher exists,” that is true and not false: it is, therefore, relative truth, since it is in accordance with the point of view of the relative that we say that the pitcher exists. [P. 666, col. 1, l. 19]

CAA.1.3.

The absolute truth

That which is different is called *absolute truth*. The cognition of the thing does not cease even though the thing has been divided; the thing can be split up, abstracted or isolated, the cognition continues: this is called *absolute truth*, e.g., *rūpa* (color). etc. Things like *rūpa*, etc., can be broken up into parts and progressively crushed and split even down to atoms; they can be split up by the mind by abstracting or isolating the taste (*rasa*), etc.: the cognition of *rūpa*, etc., remains as before. – The same for sensation, etc.: since it is not material and has no parts, it cannot be reduced to atoms; but by means of the mind, one can split up sensation and reduce it to moments (*kṣaṇa*); by means of the mind, one can split it up by abstracting or isolating the heterogeneous, [i.e.,] the *saṃjñā* (ideation) and (other thought-concomitants) [that are always simultaneous with it]: the cognition of sensation remains as before. <173>

Existing absolutely (*tchen-che*; *bhūtatas*, *tattvatas*), these things are called *absolute* because their intrinsic nature (*t’i*; *svabhāva*) is constant. From the point of view of view (*li*) of the absolute (*paramārtha*) to say that *rūpa* exists is true, not false: therefore this is called *absolute truth* (*paramārthasatya*) since it is in accordance with the absolute point of view that we say that *rūpa* exists. [P. 666, col. 1, l. 28]

CAA.1.4.

Samghabhadrā: the contradiction of Śrīlāta's system with the nature of the two truths

The system taught by the Sthavira is in contradiction with the nature of the two truths established by this [text] and is, consequently, unacceptable.

CAA.1.4.1.

In regard to the “truth of unsatisfactoriness,” the “element of the tangible” and the “element of factors”

He says [above, F 170 bottom]:

In the truth of unsatisfactoriness (*duḥkhasatya*), which is single, the “expression” [or “designation”] is relative (*saṃvṛti*).⁵¹

This expressly goes against reason. – Why? – Taking the aggregates (*skandha*), etc., one can progressively reduce the truth of unsatisfactoriness (*duḥkhasatya*) down into atoms or moments without removing the cognition of unsatisfactoriness (*duḥkha*): each atom [of *rūpa*, matter], each moment [of sensation] is endowed with the nature of unsatisfactoriness. How could one say: “As is the case for the pitcher, water, etc., at the period of time when the thing which is the support [for the expression “unsatisfactoriness”] is not broken or analyzed, the expression (*kia*; *prajñapti*) [of “unsatisfactoriness”], existing as a provisional designation (*che-che-yeou*; *prajñaptisat*), is called *relative truth*?” [P. 666, col. 2, l. 5]

Moreover, it must be the same for the truth of unsatisfactoriness (*duḥkhasatya*) as for the “element of the tangible” (*spraṣṭavyadhātu*) and the “element of factors” (*dharmadhātu*; category of the objects of mental consciousness).

For the Sthavira, the aggregates (*skandha*; “heap”) are merely relative, whereas the real entities (*bhūta-dravya*) that serve as support [for the designation “aggregate”] are absolute. The same for the *āyatana*s (“sense-spheres of consciousness”), whereas the elements (*dhātu*; “family”) alone are absolute. <174>

Now, the two elements, the element of the tangible (*spraṣṭavyadhātu*) and the element of factors (*dharmadhātu*), are they not units established relative to multiplicities? Therefore they must be, like the aggregates (*skandha*), “existing from the point of view of the relative,” whereas the real entities that serve them as support are absolute. Therefore one must accept that the elements (*dhātu*) are of two kinds, relative and absolute. [P. 666, col. 2, l. 9]

The Sthavira will reply that the two elements [of the tangible and of the factors], even if split-up–analyzed, do not lose their nature of “element” (*dhātu*), whereas the aggregates (*skandha*), which are “heaps” (*rāśi*), and the sense-spheres (*āyatana*), which are “gates”

⁵¹ *Duḥkhasatya*, “truth of unsatisfactoriness,” usually does not mean the phrase: “Everything is unsatisfactory, impermanent...,” but rather “everything that is truly unsatisfactory,” namely, all the “conditioned” or “conditioning” entities (*saṃskṛta*, *saṃskāras*) in so far as they are unsatisfactory. – *Samudayasatya*, “truth of the origin of unsatisfactoriness” = all the conditioned-conditioning entities excluding the noble path, for they are the origin of unsatisfactoriness.

(*dvāra*; gates of the consciousness), when they are split-up–analyzed, lose their nature of “heap” and “gate.”⁵²

But, we say, it is the same for the truth of unsatisfactoriness (*duḥkhasatya*) that, even when split-up–analyzed, does not lose its nature. [P. 266, col. 2, l. 12]

CAA.1.4.2. *Śrīlāta’s definition of the two truths & the two elements*

The Sthavira gives his own definition of the two truths:

1. That which exists in many objects (*dravya*) is relative (*saṃvṛti*); [that which exists] in a single object, is absolute (*paramārtha*).
2. Furthermore, when it is divided up, if the thing (*dharma*) in question (*souo-mou*) loses its original name, it is relative (*saṃvṛti*); if it does not lose it, it is absolute (*paramārtha*).

By considering the first part of this definition, the two <175> elements (*dhātu*) of the tangible (*spraṣṭavya*) and of factors (*dharma*) must be “existent as a provisional entity (*saṃvṛti*)” (*kia-yeou*; *prajñaptisat*), for they do not exist merely in a single object (*dravya*). The Sthavira ought therefore to say: “That which exists only in many objects is relative; that which exists in one object is absolute.” In this way, we can say that the two elements (*dhātu*) really exist. But then there is a contradiction with the thesis that the truth of unsatisfactoriness (*duḥkhasatya*) is relative (*saṃvṛti*), for it does not exist just in a multiplicity of objects: it exists in several objects and in each object, like the elements of the tangible and of factors. [P. 666, col. 2, l. 22.]

By considering the second part of the definition, there is also a contradiction with the thesis that the truth of unsatisfactoriness is “existence as a provisional entity” (*saṃvṛti*), for when

⁵² *skandha* is explained as *rāṣi*, “pile,” “heap” (*Kośa*, i, F 35; *Vibhāṣā*, 75, p. 383, col. 3): nevertheless, for the Vaibhāṣika, the atom and the moment are *skandha*.

For the Vaibhāṣika, *skandhas*, *āyatana*s and *dhātus* exist absolutely (*dravyatas*, *bhūtat*as, *paramārthatas*); for Vasubandhu, the *skandhas* have only nominal existence or existence as a provisional designation (*saṃvṛtitas*, *prajñaptitas*); for the Sthavira, only the *dhātus* exist absolutely.

If *skandha* means “heap,” the *skandha* has only nominal existence, like a pile of wheat, like the person (*pudgala*; *Kośa*, i, F 38).

Dhātu means *gotra*, “family,” “lineage,” “mine.” – The eye (*caḥsus*), when qualified as *dhātu* (*caḥsurdhātu*), is considered to be the “mineral, ore” from which arise the later moments of the eye (*Kośa*, I, F 37). – The atom of the eye is evidently an element (*dhātu*).

Āyatana means “gate of entry or of arising (*āyadvāra*) of consciousness,” therefore the eye sense-faculty and the color-object... The atom of the eye is not an *āyatana*, a gate of entry of visual consciousness.

one divides up the existence (or intrinsic nature; *ti*; *svabhāva*) of the truth of unsatisfactoriness (*duḥkhasatya*), it does not lose its name, just like the sense-spheres of the tangible and of factors.

Therefore we hold as established that, in what he has said and written about the two truths, the Sthavira is not coherent (does not consider the first part and the latter part); his students spread what he says afterwards and forget what he first said, [or else,] they consider the first text while the second text is lost.

Using the same line of argument, the views of the Sthavira on the truth of the origin (*samudayasatya*) and on the truth of the path (*mārgasatya*) will be refuted. [P. 666, col. 2, l. 27]

CAA.1.4.3.

In regard to the truth of cessation

The Sthavira said [*above*, 171 top]:

In regard to the truth of cessation (*nirodhasatya*) alone, its intrinsic nature (*t'i*; *svabhāva*) being inexpressible, similar to the “indeterminates” (*avyākṛta*), it cannot be said that it exists.

No! If the truth of cessation is indeterminate, it must be concluded that it does exist from the point of view of the relative (*saṃvṛtisat*). Actually, the indeterminates taught by the Blessed One: “Does the Tathāgata exist or does he not exist after death? Is the life principle [*jīva*] the same thing as the body [*śarīra*]? ...,” all of them are included in the category of conventional existence (*saṃvṛtisat*). – The Tathāgata, being neither identical with the *dharmas*, *rūpa*, etc., nor separate from the *dharmas*, is conventionally existent (*saṃvṛtisat*). If the truth of cessation (*nirodhasatya*) is similar to the Tathāgata, it must be included in the category <176> of conventional existence, like the pitcher, which is neither identical with real entities (*dravya*), *rūpa*, etc., [nor separate from them]. Moreover, it is accepted that “individuals” (*sattva*), who are designations of aggregates (*skandha*), are conventionally existing; thus the Tathāgata is included in the category of conventional existence. In the same way, the truth of cessation (*nirodhasatya*), if it itself also exists, is “indeterminate.”

But it cannot be said that *nirvāṇa* (or the truth of cessation) is conventionally existing (*saṃvṛtisat*). That it is not so, we have explained above.⁵³ Therefore it cannot be said that *nirvāṇa*, like the “indeterminates” (*avyākṛtavastu*), is not “existence as a real entity” (*dravyasat*). One must think that it is included in the absolute truth (*paramārthasatya*). [P. 666, col. 3, l. 8]

⁵³ Page 433, col. 2, l. 17, translated in *Documents d'Abhidharma*, Bulletin 30, p. 71 of the off-print.

In regard to the statement of Śāriputra

But if that is so, why does Śāriputra not make clear statements [*na spaṣṭaṃ vyākaroṭi*] to Ānanda [about the relationship of cessation (*nirodha*) and the sense-spheres of contact]?⁵⁴

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⁵⁴ See above, F 171 and note. – Ānanda asks whether the cessation (*nirodha*) of the six sense-spheres of contact (i.e., the six sense-faculties) is something other than these six sense-spheres or the same thing... This is the problem of the reality of cessation (*nirodha*) or *nirvāṇa*: if the cessation of the six sense-spheres is the same thing as the six sense-spheres, i.e., is only the six destroyed sense-spheres, the cessation is not a thing in itself; if it is different, it is a thing in itself. Śāriputra refuses to answer. There are two possible interpretations of this silence: (1) there is nothing to reply because there is nothing to be said about what is only a pure absence. Milinda refuses to say if the mangoes that grow in his palace are sweet, because no mango grows in his palace (*Kośa*, ix, F 263). The same for the afterlife of the Tathāgata, because the living Tathāgata is merely a collection of aggregates (*skandha*). This nihilistic interpretation is that of Śrīlāta, of the Sautrāntikas, of Harivarman; (2) one cannot answer anything because *prapañca*—the development of ideas and words, questions such as “Is it the same, is it different?,” notions of object-and-designation—comes to an end when conditioned things come to an end. Cessation (*nirodha*) is *niḥprapañca*, *aprapañca*, without relationship to the ideas and words. Asking about cessation (*nirodha*), in the words of the *sūtra*, *appapañcam papañceti*, Ānanda brings that which is simple and absolute, foreign to any “development” [of ideas and words] down to the level of words, of ideas of identity–difference or existing–non-existing.

prapañca, “expansion, manifestation, diversity, phenomenon, expansion of the universe, visible world” (Monier Williams). For the *Pāli Text Dict.*, it is doubtful whether *papañca* has an analogous meaning, “more likely: obstacle, obsession, hindrance to spiritual progress; *nippapañca*, without obsession” (*S.* iv, 370; *Dh.* 454; *M.* I, 65; *A.* iii, 431, iv, 229, *Miln.* 262). However, *papañceti*, “to talk much.” – *Nettipakarana*, 37.

The *Aṅguttara* uses these words in the sense that they have in the *Madhyamakavṛtti* (Index, 646), e.g., xxii, 15: *prapañcayanti ye buddhaṃ prapañcātītam*: “Imaginings are linked to things (*vastu*), and the Tathāgata is not a thing (*avastuka*): how could there be imaginings about him? Those who imagine the Tathāgata are killed by their imaginings...”; 538, 6, *prapañca* = *nimitta*; the stopping (*upaśama*, *apravṛtti*) of the “marks” (or the “taking of the marks”) is *nirvāṇa*. – Th. Stcherbatsky, *Nirvāṇa*, 240: “*prapañca*, speech (*vāc*), the expression of conceptually differentiated reality in words”; elsewhere, “multiplicity.”

Harivarman, chap. 183, adds an eighth (eight *mahāpuruṣavitarkas*) to the seven qualities of *Aṅguttara*, IV, 228,: the monastic should be *alpecccha*, *saṃtuṣṭa*, *pravivikta*, *ārabdhavīrya*, *upasthitasmṛti*, *samāhīta*, *prajñavant* and *niṣprapañca* (like the Tathāgata in *Dhp.* 254).

That which is called *prapañca* is the theory (*vāda*) of identity and difference. As Ānanda asks Śāriputra: “When the six sense-spheres of contact are abandoned (objects of detachment [*virāga*]), destroyed, is there something else? (*saṅṅāṃ spaṣṭāyatanānāṃ aśeṣavirāganirodhād asty anyat kim cit*)?” And Śāriputra answers: “When the six sense-spheres of contact are abandoned, destroyed, (1) whether there would be then another thing, that has not been stated (*na vyākṛtam*), and yet you want to state [it]?” The same question and answer for the other hypotheses: (2) there is no other thing, (3) there is and there is not, (4) neither there is nor there is not. – Why was this

Does he not state it clearly at the end of the text, when he says [the following]?

Due to the existence of six sense-spheres of contact, there is *prapañca*; when the six sense-spheres are destroyed, there is the breaking of *prapañca*. The Blessed One said that this is *nirvāṇa*.

By that we know that, outside of *saprapañca*, there is, separately, absolute (*niḥprapañca*) cessation. [P. 666, col. 3, l. 13.]

To tell the truth, Ānanda does not ask: “Does the cessation (*nirodha*) of the six sense-spheres exist or not?” and [Śāriputra], as a result, does not reply by existence or non-existence. What Ānanda <178> is asking is whether cessation is the same thing as the six sense-spheres or something else; and so Śāriputra answers that this [cessation] is *niḥprapañca*. If [Śāriputra wanted] to say that cessation, in itself, does not exist absolutely, would he not have answered categorically that it is not something else [than the six sense-spheres]? – Why? – Logically one must express oneself thus on the subject of what does not exist absolutely. There is no absolutely nonexistent *dharma* about which one cannot say categorically that it is different, non-different, different and non-different, neither different nor non-different: one must say categorically that it is non-different.⁵⁵ Śāriputra does not say that [about cessation]. Thus we know that cessation is not absolutely nonexistent. – Now, one cannot say that it is conventionally existing (*saṃvṛtisat*), for, as we have explained above, [designation as conventionally existing] has here no possible support. We conclude that the truth of cessation (*nirodhasatya*) is exclusively absolute truth (*paramārthasatya*), for the sacred teachings know no third [mode of] existence outside of the two truths. [P. 666, col. 3, l. 22]

CAA.1.4.5.

In regard to the response: “No categorical answer is possible”

But if that is so, why this response: “No categorical answer is possible” (*na vyākṛtam*)? Logically, Śāriputra should have only answered that [cessation] is something other [than the six sense-spheres].

The answer *na vyākṛtam* is without blame. It shows only that there is no room to resume the inquiry. In fact, the point that [cessation] is another thing has already been elucidated. There is no place to question this anew. Existence that is separate from the truth of cessation (*nirodhasatya*) has clearly been established by the words:

point not stated? This question bears upon a real self (a real self-*dharma*), whether it is identical or different. This is why it was not answered. The non-existence of self is certain: the word “self” is an expression related to the aggregates (*skandha*). If one answered by existence or non-existence, one would be falling into the views of eternity or annihilation. But when one says “self” as a function of causes–conditions, there is no *prapañca*; [this is as in the *Madhyamaka*, I, 1, where the teaching of production due to causes is called *prapañcoparama*, the stopping of *prapañca*, of the imagining of a self, of an object, etc]. Moreover, when one sees that beings (*pudgala*, *sattva*) are empty, that things (*dharma*) are empty, then there is no more *prapañca*.

⁵⁵ I [LVP] think that my translation is correct.

Due to the existence of six sense-spheres of contact, there is *prapañca*; when the six sense-spheres are destroyed, there is the breaking of *prapañca*. The Blessed One said that this is *nirvāṇa*.

Again, the *sūtra* says that the cessation-element (*nirodhadhātu*) is existent. And due to other [texts], again, there is no place to question anew. [P. 666, col. 3, l. 28.]

Or else, [Śāriputra] wanted to show that Ānanda was wrong to ask; <179> he thus stops the questioning by saying: *na vyākṛtam*. – Actually, if the students take refuge in the Blessed One and apply themselves zealously for a long time to the practice of the religious life (*brahmacharya*), it is absolutely and solely in order to realize–attain (*adhigam*) *nirvāṇa*. It is not suitable now to renew doubt and questioning.

Or else, the fact is that Ānanda is merely speculating (*tarka*): “When the six sense-spheres no longer exist, what is cessation based on? If they exist, any idea of cessation is excluded.” This is why, by means of this conversation, he states this difficulty. Śāriputra then replies: *na vyākṛtam*, because, in *nirvāṇa*, *prapañca* is broken. [P. 667, col. 1, l. 5]

Or else, in whatever way one looks for the possible meaning of the *sūtra*’s words, *na vyākṛtam*, it is impossible to maintain that *nirvāṇa*, being like the indeterminates (*avyākṛtavastu*), does not exist in itself. This is why, in view of their faults, we do not grant our support to the sayings [of the Sthavira]. – He should accept that the pacified *nirvāṇa* is included in the two truths. [P. 667, col. 1, l. 9]

CAB.

Samghabhadra’s opinion of the four truths in relation to the two truths

However, my system teaches that the four truths are absolute (*paramārtha*). [P. 667, col. 1, l. 9]

CB.

The presentation of Samghabhadra’s opinion of the two truths

CBA.

The relation of the relative truth to the absolute truth

The relative truth (*saṃvṛtisatya*) depends on the absolute (*paramārtha*).

The relative (*saṃvṛti*), in itself (*tse t’i*; *svarūpa*), [either] exists or does not exist. If it is said that it exists, truth would be single [since the relative will be absolute (*paramārtha*)]. If it is said that it is non-existent, truth will not be twofold [since the relative truth will be lacking].

It must certainly be decided that it is existent. And so the Bhadanta Vasumitra says:

The name (*nāman*) that expresses (or manifests) the object-referent (*artha*) non-erroneously is the relative truth. The object-referent expressed by the name is absolute truth (*paramārthasatya*).

The name is a reality (*bhūtavastu*) as explained above.⁵⁶ [P. 667, col. 1, l. 13]. <180>

⁵⁶ See *Kośa*, ii, F 238.

CBB.

Is the truth single? Why are two truths established?

But then, as we have [just] said, the truth will be single?

Of course! And why? Because nothing that is empty of the absolute (*paramārtha*) can be called *truth*.

But then why establish two truths?

In the absolute (*paramārtha*)—by taking a particular point of view,⁵⁷ and not due to an essential difference—one distinguishes (one establishes) what is called *relative* (*saṃvṛti*). – Why? – The name (*nāman*) is the support of speech,⁵⁸ and speech is developed (*prasarati*) in accordance with the imagination of the world. Due to this fact, we say that the relative is necessarily absolute; but there is the absolute that is not relative, that is to say, all the rest that exists as a real entity (*dravyasat*), except for the “name” [which is absolute and relative]. Of the absolute, i.e., of the “real” (*sadārtha*), from a certain point of view one part is called *relative truth* (*saṃvṛtisatya*), from a another point of view one part is called *absolute truth* (*paramārthasatya*). When there is no distinction (*viśeṣaṇa*), what is grasped with a general characteristic, notions of composite unity,⁵⁹ is what is called *relative truth*; when there is a distinction, that which is grasped with a particular characteristic—either (1) type or (2) individual [entity]—is what is called *absolute truth*.⁶⁰ [P. 667, col. 1, l. 22.]

Take, for example, some impure thing (*sāsrava*): when it is considered as an effect (*phala*), it is “truth of unsatisfactoriness” (*duḥkhasatya*); when it is considered as cause (*hetu*), it is “truth of the origin of unsatisfactoriness” (*samudayasatya*). – A certain entity, thought or “thought-concomitant” (*citta, caitta*), is endowed with a sixfold quality of cause (*kāraṇahetu* [efficient cause], etc.), with a fourfold <181> quality of condition (*hetupratayātā* [causal condition], etc.): but it is not called *simultaneous cause* (*sahabhūhetu*) from the point of view from which it is called *associated cause* (*saṃprayuktakahetu*). [P. 667, col. 1, l. 25]

CBC.

Samghabhadra’s explanation of the Buddha’s statement about one or differing truths

Due to this principle, there is no contradiction in the truths proclaimed by the Great Sage.

As it is said:

⁵⁷ *i sia pie li*: “due to a slightly different principle.”

⁵⁸ *yen i; athāvatthu*.

⁵⁹ *i ho siang li*. – Bukkiō Daijiten, p. 58, col. 3: “The combination of the atoms of the universe is the *i ho siang* of the universe (*lokadhātu*).” – “The combination of the five aggregates (*skandha*) constitutes the person: this is what is called *i ho siang*,” literally, *eka-samasta-lakṣaṇa*.

⁶⁰ (i) An atom of color—a particular inherent characteristic (*svalakṣaṇa*), an individual [entity]—is absolute truth (*paramārthasatya*).

(ii) Color—a type since it embraces an infinite number of individual [entities] but which does not embrace all [individual entities], i.e., specifically [those individual entities of] non-color—is also absolute truth.

There is but one truth, there is no second. The people of superior type do not dispute about this. There are those who speak of divergent truths; they proclaim—declare themselves again and again. Therefore I declare that they are not true mendicants.⁶¹

There are heterodox scholars (*tīrthika*) in the world who study the doctrines (*śāstra*) in depth yet their views do not become settled. Coming to the doctrine of Buddha, they hear that there are two truths and they say: “This also is not certain” and, their perplexity increases. So that they can gain certainty and out of compassion, the Blessed One says: “There is but one truth, ...”

The expression “one truth” indicates the truths proclaimed in the sacred teaching (*āryā deśanā, śāsana*) in a general way. The words: “no second” repeat and confirm that the truth is single.

“People of superior type,”⁶² i.e., Buddhists⁶³ who have already seen the path of the truths.⁶⁴

“About this,” i.e., on the subject of the absolute truth (*paramārthasatya*), i.e., on the subject of the four noble truths (*āryasatya*).

Since there is no doubt about this truth, the text says: “They do not dispute about this.” [P. 667, col. 2, l. 7] <182>

This agrees well, therefore, with what Pārśva says: “Only in the sacred teaching is the noble truth of unsatisfactoriness found and not elsewhere... .”

The Blessed One also says:

There is but one path; the other paths do not bring the attainment of purity.

And also:

[The path] is absolutely single and without division.

To tell the truth, the relative (*saṃvṛti*) rests on the absolute (*paramārtha*). They do not argue any longer about the nature of the relative. Actually, people who have seen the truths do not adhere to the ways of mundane speech (*lokañāpadanirukti*); they know well that all names of this kind, existing in accordance with false common designations, are included in one part

⁶¹ Compare *Suttanipāta*, 884, and the stanza from *Vibhāṣā*, above, F 161. The text does not show a metric form here. There are four lines of eight syllables, putting “As it is said” in the first.

⁶² *cheng-cheng lei: abhijāta-jāti*. – *cheng*, 19 and 10, often corresponds to *abhi*; *cheng-cheng* = *abhyudaya*, *Kośa*, xviii, 9a6.

⁶³ *nei-fa yeou sing*, Buddhists, the *ābhyantaraka*, cf. *Kośa*, ii, F. 119.

⁶⁴ *ti-tsi*, the “tracks” of the truths.

of the appropriative aggregates (*upadāna skandha*).⁶⁵ What subject of dispute would there be in that? [P. 667, col. 2, l. 13]

“There are those who speak of divergent truths: they proclaim–declare themselves again and again.”

“There are those,” this indicates that there are some heterodox (*tīrthika*).

“Who speak” to indicate their wrong speech: the nature of the truths that they advocate is “contrary” (*koai*), and they say falsely: “That which I establish is the truth.”

“Proclaim–declare themselves again and again,” [what they say is assumed by them to be] included in the absolute (*paramārtha*).

“Divergent truths,” this indicates the contrariness to the truth. – The noble truths are not “contrary” [to the truth]: unsatisfactoriness (*duḥkha*) is really impermanent (*anitya*) and not non-impermanent; cessation (*nirodha*) is truly peaceful (*śānta*) and not non-peaceful. – The truths that they establish are in contradiction with this nature. Being opposite to the truth, they are called *divergent truths*. [P. 667, col. 2, l. 19.]

In order to indicate the idea of cause, the text says: “Therefore.” – <183> Only in the religion or doctrine (*dharma*) of the Buddha are the true noble truths (*āryasatya*) found. Because they speak of divergent truths, we know that they are heterodox. Since what they speak is contrary to the noble truths, they are, consequently, not true mendicants (*śramaṇa*) and are included among the heretics.

This is why, at the end, the text again says: “I declare that they are not true mendicants”: what they say diverges from the true noble truths, consequently, they are heterodox, they are not true mendicants. As it says: “O mendicants, all those who abandon the truth of unsatisfactoriness of which I have spoken and establish the truth of unsatisfactoriness differently, they have merely words,” and the rest.

“Proclaim–declare,” this indicates that based on their individual theses, the heterodox proclaim and teach others, by means of false treatises, [that which they claim to be] the increase of “the true meaning.”

“Again and again,” they produce erroneous doctrines frequently and disclose the truths that they accept in various ways. – This shows that the heterodox have not “realized” the absolute (*paramārtha*), for the speeches they give are not definite. – Therefore it is said that they are not true mendicants.

Consequently, in the assemblies the Buddha utters the “lion’s roar” that there are no brahmins or mendicants in the other schools (*luen*). All those who take this name [of “brahmin” or “mendicant”] are empty and do not merit it. [P. 667, col. 3, l. 1.]

Since the relative truth (*saṃvṛtisatya*) is included in the absolute (*paramārtha*), there is no contradiction with the singleness of the truth taught by the Great Master.

⁶⁵ *upādānaskandha*, i.e., all the aggregates (form [*rūpa*], etc) in relation to the graspings (*upādāna*), that is to say, with the “defilements” (*kleśa*) or the “fluxes” (*āsrava*), *Kośa*, i, F 13.

CC. **The Buddha's statement about three truths**

That is why [the Blessed One] says to the brahmins that the true brahmin must possess three truths.⁶⁶

1. To say: “Do not <184> kill–harm living beings” is true, not false; this is called the *first truth*.
2. To say: “Everything that arises ceases” is true, not false; this is called the *second truth*.
3. To say: “The self, the “mine”: that which does not exist anywhere and does not belong to anyone whatsoever, is not an entity,” is true, not false; this is called the *third truth*. [P. 667, col. 3, l. 6]

CCA. **The early brahmins' statement about three truths**

Actually, the early brahmins⁶⁷ say that the true practitioner (*yogācāra?*) possesses a threefold truth.

1. To say that “it is religion (*dharma*) to kill animals in sacrifices” is true, not false; that is called the *first truth*.
2. To say that “the action that one carried out (*svakṛta?*) produces an eternal effect” is true, not false; that is called the *second truth*.
3. To say that “their body, etc., is dependent on a sovereign god” is true, not false; that is called the *third truth*.

The early Brahmins teach these three truths; they deceive those who are seeking liberation; to behave according to these principles (?) is empty and fruitless. – The Buddha wants to condemn these three errors respectively. Actually the world, enveloped in blind obscurity, is unable to distinguish within that of which is said that it exists or does not exist; it believes in the traditional Veda of the Brahmins; it says that these three doctrines are true and not false: the practitioners who accept them fall into the bad destinies. Out of pity, the Blessed One cuts these futile speeches and praises the three [doctrines] established by himself by calling them truths. [P. 667, col. 3, l. 15]

CCB. **The aim of studying the three truths of the Buddha**

By studying these three truths, we see that their aim is to produce the path of preparation (*prayogamārga*) for the three *vimokṣamukhas* (“gates of liberation”);⁶⁸ actually, the first, “emptiness” (*śūnyatā*), is aimed at beings (*sattva*); the second, wishlessness (*apraṇihita*), is aimed at production–exhaustion; the third, signlessness (*ānimitta*), is aimed at the absence of signs (*siṅg; nimitta*): place, possession, thing are called the *signs*. <185>

Or else, their aim is to produce the three gates of liberation (*vimokṣamukha*); or to produce the three stages, (1) the preparatory stage (*prayogabhūmi*), (2) the stage of “those in training” (*śaikṣa*), the stage of “those beyond training” (*aśaikṣa*). – According to some, [these three

⁶⁶ Above, F 167.

⁶⁷ In contrast to the early brahmins of the *Suttanipāta*, ii.

⁶⁸ *Kośa*, viii, F 187.

truths] indicate the three *skandhas* [morality, concentration, understanding, *śīla*, *samādhi*, *prajñā*].

ccc. **The three truths of the Buddha and their relationship to the three noble truths and to absolute truth**

These three truths thus fit, each as is appropriate, into the three noble truths. Therefore we know that they are included in the absolute truth (*paramārthasatya*).

ccc.1. **The meaning of “noble truth” and its relation to particular inherent and generic characteristics**

“Noble truths” (or truths of the noble persons) (*āryasatya*): they are said to be noble (*ārya*) in order to distinguish them from the other truths.⁶⁹ The particular inherent characteristic (*svalakṣaṇa*)⁷⁰ of all *dharmas* is not false and is therefore called *truth*. But one does not become a noble person (*ārya*) by understanding that (*śikṣ*). The cognitions that arise by having the particular inherent characteristic as object do not have the power to make one enter the “path of insight” (*darśanamārga*). The persons who have acquired skill (*kauśalya*) in regard to the particular inherent characteristic must understand something else in order to become noble persons. The truths that they must understand are what are called *noble truths* because they are unanimously accepted by the noble persons (*ārya*). What they have to understand are the common characteristics (*sāmānyalakṣaṇa*) of *dharmas*.⁷¹ When one has understood (1) that the “defiled elements” have “unsatisfactory,” etc., (*duḥkha*, *anitya*, etc.) as [common] characteristics; (2) that the productive *dharmas* have “cause,” etc. (*hetu*, etc.) as [common] characteristics; (3) that their peaceful cessation has “cessation,” etc. (*nirodha*) as [common] characteristics; (4) that the method (*upāya*) for their cessation has the “path,” etc., (*mārga*, etc.) as [common] characteristics, one gets to become a noble person. The other [cognitions] do not have this virtue. [P. 667, col. 3, l. 28]

It cannot be said that, because it counteracts (*pratipakṣa*) <186> the five categories [of defilement (*kleśa*)],⁷² the noble truth to study must be of five kinds. Actually, by cultivating the path that has the four truths as object, that which must be cut through cultivation (*bhāvanāheya*) is counteracted by means of a gradual progress. [P. 668, col. 1, l. 1]

ccc.1.1. **What do the four truths consist of?**

In general, what do the four truths consist of?

⁶⁹ *Kośa*, vi, F 123, and the references cited in the notes (especially *Visuddhimagga*, 495 and *Vibhāṣā*, notebook 78).

⁷⁰ Same as previous note.

⁷¹ For the *svalakṣaṇa* and the *sāmānyalakṣaṇamanaskāra*, *Kośa*, ii, F 325, *Vibhāṣā*, 11, p. 53. Seeing the truths is seeing things in their sixteen aspects, four for unsatisfactoriness, which are going to be listed (*Kośa*, vii, F 27–39, *Vibhāṣā*, 29, p. 149, col. 3).

⁷² Five categories: to be expelled by the vision of unsatisfactoriness, of the origin, of *nirvāṇa*, of the path and by cultivation. – According to our text, this cultivation is the “reviewing” of the truths. – *Kośa*, v, F 10.

[They consist of] all the conditioned factors (*dharma*) and the “cessation due to deliberation” (*pratisaṃkhyānirodha*), because these things are object of the defilements (*kleśa*) and of the noble path (*āryamārga*), because they are the various cause and effect of defilement and purification (*saṃkleśa, vyavadāna*).

CCC.1.2.

“Space” and “cessation not due to deliberation” and their relation to truth, noble truths and defilements

As for space (*ākāśa*) and “cessation not due to deliberation” (*apratisaṃkhyānirodha*), being intrinsic natures in themselves (*sasvabhāva*), being the object of right view (*samyagdṛṣṭi*), they are included in the truth; but not being the object of defilements and the noble path, not being cause or effect of defilement and purification, not being things of the domain of pleasure⁷³ or of disgust, it is not by studying them and understanding them that one becomes a noble person: consequently they are not included in the noble truths.⁷⁴

Why do the defilements not arise by taking them as object? Because these two factors (*dharma*) are “pure” (*anāsrava*) and are incapable of “damaging” the impure (*sāsrava*) factors. Craving (*trṣṇā*) has only the impure as object: leniency towards pure factors—being opposite to existence (*bhava*)—is not called *craving* (*trṣṇā*) but rather *inclination for good factors*.⁷⁵

The things that have the nature of favoring the arising of greed (*lobha*) are the cognitive object (*ālambana*) of craving; it follows that, in respect to their cessation and the path of their cessation, there may be <187> the absence of wish, doubt, negation towards them. [But since] space and “cessation not due to deliberation” (*apratisaṃkhyānirodha*) have opposite natures, they are not the domain [or object] of the defilements. [P. 668, col. 1, l. 12]

But do not the Dārṣṭāntikas, etc., produce absence of wish, doubt, negation in regard to these two?⁷⁶

Have we said that the defilements do not arise by aiming at them? [They do,] but to produce ignorance (*ajñāna*), doubt, afflicted views (*dṛṣṭi*) about them does not create an obstacle to the realization of the cessation of unsatisfactoriness, to the realization of the path of this cessation; ignorance, etc., about them is not defiled as is the case for the ignorance, etc., about unsatisfactoriness, etc. Ignorance, doubt, afflicted views in regard to the “path” manifests in the perfected beings (*arhat*): can it be said that there are defiled defilements (*kleśa*) there? Consequently, [the defilements] are not all defiled. This is why it is said that the defilements [do not arise] in regard to these [two].

Some scholars say that space and “cessation not due to deliberation” (*apratisaṃkhyānirodha*) are not being denied, but just their name [is denied], not their existence. These two alone are the object of a good conventional cognition (*saṃvṛtījñāna*) (*Kośa*, vii, F 3). – But why would

⁷³ *hin* (76 and 4): “pleasure,” opposite to “disgust” (*nirveda*), e.g., *Siddhi*, v, 28a.

⁷⁴ *pou yu* (181 and 4) *ts’e-tchong* (*atra*) *cheng ti* (*āryasatya*) *souo-che* (*saṃgrhūta*).

⁷⁵ *kuśaladharmacchanda*, *Kośa*, v, F 36, 39, viii, F 176.

⁷⁶ The Sautrāntikas deny the unconditioned entities (*asaṃskṛta*).

it not be the same for the truth of unsatisfactoriness (*duḥkhasatya*)? Consequently the first opinion⁷⁷ is correct. [P. 668, col. 1, l. 19]

⁷⁷ One has *tao-lou*, which corresponds to *panthan, adhvan, paddhati* (Vyutpatti).