

## KATHĀVATTHU AND VIJÑĀNAKĀYA

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The *Kathāvatthu* and the *Vijñānakāya* share two topics of discussion: the existence of the *pudgala* and the existence of past and future. Both texts agree in rejecting the existence of the *pudgala*, using to some extent the same arguments. They disagree where the existence of past and future is concerned: they do not exist according to the *Kathāvatthu*, according to the *Vijñānakāya* they do exist. The latter text ascribes the mistaken idea that past and future do exist to someone called Maudgalyāyana.

It seems at first sight plausible to identify this Maudgalyāyana with the presumed promulgator of the *Kathāvatthu*, described as Moggaliputta Tissa by the Pāli sources. According to these same sources, Moggaliputta played a leading role in the Council of Pāṭaliputra, where the Vibhajyavādins — read Theravādins — expelled certain heretics. If we assume that these heretics included the Sarvāstivādins, we get the following picture: The *Kathāvatthu*, or at least the portion that contains the two topics of discussion mentioned above, was composed soon after the Council of Pāṭaliputra in order to refute the expelled heretics; the *Vijñānakāya* was composed subsequently to answer the arguments of Moggaliputta, i.e., of the *Kathāvatthu*<sup>1</sup>.

However, this picture is hard to reconcile with the wording of our two texts. Consider first the existence of past and future as discussed in the *Vijñānakāya*. This text presents a number of arguments which differ but little from each other. They all centre around one fundamental assumption, viz., that in one single person (*pudgala*) two mental events cannot simultaneously take place. For example, when an object is observed which is itself of a mental nature, e.g., desire, the mental event which is the object of perception and the one that is its subject cannot simultaneously exist. In this situation one is forced to admit that something non-present exists, or else that no such vision is possible, which is against the scriptures.

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<sup>1</sup> This view was held, e.g., by E. Frauwallner (1952: 667).

These arguments make sense, and there is no reason to doubt that they played a key role among the Sarvāstivādins from an early date onward. Yet the *Kathāvatthu* ignores them completely. There is even reason to think that it did not know them. In the sections I.6.23 f. this text argues that if all conditions for perception — i.e., in the case of vision, the eye, visible objects, eye-consciousness, light and attention — exist in the past, perception of past objects with a past sense-organ should take place, which is absurd. A similar argument applies to the perception of future objects with a future sense-organ. In the course of this discussion it becomes clear that only perception of present objects with a present sense-organ is acceptable to the *Kathāvatthu* and to its opponent. This is explicitly stated to be true also of the perception of *dhammas* by the mind (*mana*): only present *dhammas* are cognized by the present mind.

But this shows that the author of this part of the *Kathāvatthu* did not know the line of reasoning which we find in the *Vijñānakāya*. The traditional account, according to which the author of the *Kathāvatthu* himself confronted the heretics and investigated their doctrines, seems difficult to maintain in the face of so much ignorance.

Let us now consider the discussion regarding the existence of the *pudgala* in our two texts. The *Vijñānakāya* rejects the *pudgala* in its second Skandhaka; the discussion consists of the following clearly distinguishable parts:

- (i) One and the same *pudgala* cannot at one time be one thing, say an inhabitant of hell, and at another time something different, say an animal; this argument is repeated with many variations (II. I. 1-4<sup>2</sup>; p. 537a l. 27 - p. 542b l. 5).
- (ii) The acceptance of a *pudgala* entails certain unacceptable views (II. I. 5-6; p. 542b l. 6 - p. 543c l. 1).
- (iii) The object of benevolence (*maitrī*) is not the *pudgala* (II. II. 1-4; p. 543c l. 2 - p. 545b l. 12).
- (iv) The *pudgala* is neither *saṃskṛta* nor *asaṃskṛta*, and as a result it cannot exist (II. II. 5; p. 545b l. 13-19).
- (v) No *pudgala* is observed (II. III. 1-4; p. 545b l. 20 f.)<sup>3</sup>.

The most interesting among these parts, for our present purposes, is (iii), which deals with the object of benevolence. In this part, and only here, the Śūnyavādin (the name which is here reserved for the denier of

<sup>2</sup> I use the divisions introduced by La Vallée Poussin (1925) in his translation.

<sup>3</sup> It is not exactly clear where the discussion of the *pudgala* ends. Certainly the last part of the second chapter (the *Pudgalaskandha*) belongs really to the third one; see La Vallée Poussin, 1925: 376 n. 1.

the *pudgala*) is attacked by the Pudgalavādin; this is then followed by an answer to this attack. One has in this case the impression that the author of the *Vijñānakāya* had before him a text of the Pudgalavādins in which they claimed that benevolence requires a *pudgala* as object, since it could not possibly be directed toward the five *skandhas*. The Śūnyavādin replies by describing the mechanism of knowledge and the like, which leaves no place for a being (*sattva*) as object of benevolence. Also part (v) is of interest. The extensive discussion of the process of knowledge and of what is known seems meant to answer the claim that the *pudgala* can be perceived.

It seems safe here to conclude that the author of the *Vijñānakāya* made an effort to answer concrete 'proofs' of the existence of a *pudgala*, and responded, in all probability, directly to a text of the Pudgalavādins. At the same time it is clear that the two parts (iii) and (v) are primarily 'defensive' and are by themselves far weaker arguments against the existence of a *pudgala* than the remaining parts (i), (ii) and (iv).

The *Kathāvatthu* contains sections that correspond to parts (i), (ii) and (iv) of the *Vijñānakāya*<sup>4</sup>, but none corresponding to (iii) and (v)<sup>5</sup>. It is true that it contains much else pertaining to the question of the existence of the *pudgala*, but much of this makes the impression of being exercises in logic, which indeed they may have been<sup>6</sup>. The conclusion must be that the *Kathāvatthu* could afford to ignore the arguments of the Pudgalavādins and concentrate on its own refutation of the latter's point of view. This in its turn seems to show that the confrontation between *Kathāvatthu* and Pudgalavādins was less direct. Again we are led to believe that the author of the *Kathāvatthu* had never himself confronted the opponents he criticizes.

The evidence we have considered so far seems to agree with Bechert's convincing analysis (1961) of the Pali passages that describe the Council of Pāṭaliputra, where Moggaliputta supposedly played a major role. The Council, we learn from this analysis, was not concerned with doctrinal differences among the Buddhists; those who were expelled were rather monks who did not live in accordance with the rules of Vinaya. The *Kathāvatthu* — or its oldest parts — may have been

<sup>4</sup> Vv part (i): Kv 1.1.155, 158-170, 180-182, 219-224.

Vv part (ii): Kv 1.1.212.

Vv part (iv): Kv 1.1.225-227.

<sup>5</sup> Kv 1.1.199 answers briefly the view that the Buddha sees the *puggala*.

<sup>6</sup> See Watanabe, 1983: 154 f., who refers to A. K. Warder's article "The earliest Indian logic" (*Proceedings of the 25th International Congress of Orientalists*, 1963, vol. 4, pp. 56-68).

composed when, after this purification of the sangha of the Asokārāma in Pāṭaliputra, the remaining community of monks of this monastery decided to write down its positions regarding the points of dispute that existed between the nikāyas. No direct confrontation with the upholders of the alternative doctrines, nor indeed any profound knowledge of these doctrines is now to be assumed on the part of the author or authors of the original *Kathāvatthu*.

But if the *Kathāvatthu* was indeed a local product of the Asokārāma in Pāṭaliputra, which does not presuppose more than superficial contact with, or even knowledge of the opposed doctrines, it is less than self-evident that the *Vijñānakāya* should react to it. We have seen, on the contrary, that where the existence of the *pudgala* is concerned, the *Vijñānakāya* appears to react to a text, or to arguments, of the Pudgalavādins. What is more, one gains the impression that the *Kathāvatthu* borrowed some of the arguments of the *Vijñānakāya*, leaving out others.

With regard to the discussion of the existence of past and future the situation is slightly more complicated. If it is true that the *Vijñānakāya* presents the original arguments of the Sarvāstivādins, and I see no reason to doubt this, it is hard to see why it should react to a sectarian work like the *Kathāvatthu* which had completely missed the point of these arguments.

Few certain conclusions can be drawn from the above observations. The exact relationship between *Kathāvatthu* and *Vijñānakāya* remains obscure. But one thing seems certain: these portions of the *Kathāvatthu* were not written in direct exchange of views with the opponents. Rather than representing a direct confrontation of different views, these portions of the *Kathāvatthu* attack alternative points of view without heeding, or even knowing, the arguments that support them.

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