

Chapter 1

The Doctrinal Study of Doctrine



1.0 Prolegomena

It seems obvious that religious doctrine is both worth studying in its own right and very important to religion. Both claims have been axiomatic for most scholars thinking and writing about religion in the academies of the west for the past century or so; as a result many properly doctrinal studies of doctrine were produced, studies concerned with the history and meaning of particular instances of doctrinal thought and expression considered as phenomena of intrinsic interest. But such studies are no longer in the ascendant. They have been called into question in theory, even if not yet abandoned in practice, by the view that instances of doctrinal thought and expression should be treated only in terms of their relations to the nondoctrinal phenomena that constitute the setting in which they occur. So analyses of doctrinal phenomena in terms of their institutional location, their social setting, their deployment as instruments of oppression, and their political uses (among many other things) increase, while doctrinal studies of doctrine correspondingly decrease.

There are still historians doing good doctrinal studies of doctrine.¹ But such studies are fewer than they were. And although there are some encouraging signs of a recent growth of interest in the theory of doctrine among some Christian

theologians (for instance in George Lindbeck's work and the extensive response it has prompted,² as well as among those with purer theoretical interests, such as William A. Christian, Sr.³), on the whole it still seems true to say that doctrinal studies of doctrine have lost the privileged place they once held in the academic study of religion. In addition, as is entirely to be expected, interest in matters doctrinal among historians of religion and practitioners of religious studies is, as far as I can tell, close to zero.

I offer here, by way of corrective, a theory of doctrine intended to make possible the properly doctrinal study of doctrine. The theory is a formal and systematic one: it picks out a discursive practice and its artifacts, provides an outline of questions of concern to those engaged in this practice, and discusses the properties of the artifacts produced by the practice. I shall state the theory in formal and abstract terms, very largely without supportive examples. But I hope and intend, nonetheless, that it will be consonant with (though not adequate to) the ways in which Christians have used the term 'doctrine' (*didachē*, *didaskalia*, *doctrina*, and so forth). I want to avoid both descriptive and explanatory reductionism, the former at all costs and the latter unless there are pressing theoretical reasons to adopt it. One of the more striking aspects of current theories of doctrine is a tendency toward a too-rapid explanatory reduction and a concomitant weakening of the theory as a heuristically valuable tool.

The theory will act in this book as a heuristic device. I shall be studying a particular complex of Buddhist doctrines, and the theory offered here will guide my work, providing me with questions I want to ask and have answered. Its utility must in the end be judged by its results, and since it is a theory intended primarily as a first step in grounding and making possible the constructive and critical study of doctrine considered as such, and not in terms of other phenomena, to criticize it by saying that it pays insufficient attention to nondoctrinal phenomena will be to miss its point.

The enterprise sketched by the theory may reasonably be called formalist in the sense that it is concerned almost exclusively with conceptual relations among ordered sets of sentences, and is therefore concerned as little as possible with the nonformal

conditions of production of those sentences. It manipulates concepts, patterns of argument, and structures of systems, without paying attention to the material (social, political, institutional, financial) conditions of production of those sentences. In this it does not assume, as do some kinds of legal formalism debated by jurists during the past thirty years or so, that there is a “deductive or quasi-deductive method capable of giving determinate solutions to particular . . . problems”⁴ once the proper rules have been stated; this I take to be a thesis much stronger than any needed for the doctrinal study of doctrine as I understand it.⁵ The formalism in play here, then, goes only so far as to require the possibility of studying doctrine formalistically and to suggest that there may be some benefits in so doing; it does not assume that formalism will provide a method by which all properly doctrinal problems can be resolved, much less that there are no doctrinally illuminating connections between doctrinal and nondoctrinal phenomena.

The enterprise is also objectivist in the pejorative sense given to that term by Pierre Bourdieu,⁶ and about this I have no apologies to make. The doctrinal study of doctrine as I understand it does privilege, by paying exclusive attention to, a synchronic study of logic, relations, and constructed linguistic items as objects in their own right, without adverting much to their history, their practical uses, or their nondoctrinal functions. Bourdieu, of course, judges this strategy to be undesirable and indefensible, but I do not find his fulminations against it at all convincing, for reasons that will become apparent.

I claim also that attention to the formal properties of doctrinal systems—to the argument-patterns evident in them, to the rules that govern their construction and development, to both what is taken to be good evidence for the claims made by them and what actually is so—is essential even to nondoctrinal histories and explanations of doctrine. Without such attention, understanding of the discursive practices that produce doctrine will languish; without it we will have, as Ronald Dworkin has put it in arguing against social-theoretic jurisprudence as the dominant model for understanding law, theories that “grow steadily more programmatic and less substantive, more radical

in theory and less critical in practice.”⁷ Dworkin claims, rightly, that to give an account of law exclusively in terms of its social functions, its economic effects, or its “ideological force and witness,”⁸ necessarily misses its distinctive properties as a discursive practice. To explain law as an instrument of oppression used by one race against another, one class against another, or one sex against the other, may very well say true and interesting things about it, but can say nothing about law in itself. Such explanations assimilate law to all those other phenomena with such oppressive functions, and they are legion. If, then, we want to be anything more than programmatic and totalizing in our analysis of distinctive discursive practices such as the legal or the doctrinal, we must pay attention to the formal properties that individuate them; we must not obscure their distinctiveness by appealing only to incidental instrumental properties they share with many other phenomena. Northrop Frye, with his customary elegance, long ago made a similar point about the study of literature.⁹

To put this in another way: I am centrally concerned in this work with the doctrinal study of doctrine, with the analysis of doctrine-expressing sentences considered as expressive of doctrine, not as epiphenomena of social settings or institutional arrangements of any kind. I shall, in the body of this study, attempt to analyze, understand, and assess the buddhalogical doctrines evident in some Buddhist discursive practices entirely in doctrinal terms: as substantive claims and injunctions governing the intellectual lives of the virtuosos who engaged in such practices, and in what these claims and injunctions state or imply about the ontology, metaphysics, anthropology, and soteriology of those who assert them. In imitation of Michael Frede’s approach to the study of ancient philosophy, my explanations and analyses of these claims and injunctions will themselves be doctrinal in the sense that I shall adopt as a procedural principle the rule of not appealing to social or institutional facts except where doctrinal explanations and analyses fail.¹⁰

The following assumptions and stipulations will govern what is to come. First, I assume that doctrines are artifacts located in communities, and that religious doctrines are possessed

and used by religious communities. Second, I stipulate that, while a religious community's doctrines may be expressed in many ways (sententially, liturgically, architecturally, iconographically, and so on), I shall be concerned here only with the sentential expression of doctrine, and, to delimit the investigation still further, only with collections of such sentential expressions in written texts. Third, I assume (and shall show in the case of Indian Buddhism) that religious communities typically have virtuoso intellectuals among their members, and that one of the functions of such intellectuals is to engage in discursive practices that express, organize, and defend the community's doctrines. These discursive practices issue in the production of the texts that are the primary objects of a properly doctrinal analysis of doctrine.

Religious communities usually have few virtuoso intellectuals among their members. This means that only a small minority of religious people engage in the discursive practices that produce doctrine. Rather more, perhaps, know something of the doctrinal discourse of their community; and still more have their doxastic practices, affective states, and religious lives formed by that discourse. The relations between the doctrines of a community's virtuoso members and what the nonvirtuoso members of that community believe, say, and do are complex, and I shall not be much interested in them in this study. I shall, nonetheless, speak of doctrines as belonging to religious communities without intending any particular view as to the relations between the discursive practices of that community's virtuoso intellectual representatives and the broader religious life of the community. So, speaking of 'the community's doctrines' and the like will often be a kind of shorthand for 'sentences of the relevant kind found in the textual artifacts produced by the community's virtuoso intellectuals'; and 'community' will often mean simply a community of virtuoso intellectuals whose existence is evidenced, for the purposes of this study, solely by its texts.

It follows from all this that what I offer here is not a complete theory of doctrine (I doubt the existence of any such, and certainly the desirability of seeking it), but a doctrinal theory of doctrine.

1.1 Primary Doctrines

William Christian calls a religious community's primary doctrines those sentences it uses to describe the setting of human life and to recommend as desirable or attribute value to certain patterns of conducting that life.¹¹ Sentences of the first kind will typically be declarative, attributing to some existent or existents some property or properties (for example, the claim *Buddha is omniscient*). Sentences of the second kind will typically be injunctions or recommendations, framed in the optative or imperative moods (for example, *one should give to monks or do not take sentient life*). But not all sentences of these kinds set forth in the authoritative texts of religious communities express doctrines for them. Suppose we call a sentence whose status as expressive of doctrine for some community is unclear a 'doctrine-candidate' for that community. In order for it to be proper to classify some doctrine-candidate as expressive of doctrine for some community, I suggest that it should possess the following properties:

1. Being taken by its community to possess to a greater degree than any of its known competitors whatever property or properties the community thinks of as making doctrine-candidates acceptable in their spheres of relevance—or, if the property controlling acceptability does not, for some community, admit of degrees (as may be the case for truth), then the doctrine-candidate must have it in the eyes of the community, and its known competitors must lack it.
2. Being taken by its community to be of significance for its religious life.
3. Being taken by its community to be binding upon its members.

Each of these properties is indexed to a community's perceptions of its artifacts. These conditions are therefore properties of communities; they may also be properties of sentences, but they need not be.

I take each of these properties to be necessary in order that a particular doctrine-candidate may properly be acknowledged to express doctrine for some community. But I do not take them to be jointly sufficient. That is, there will be doctrine-candidates that meet all these requirements for some community and yet do not express doctrine for it. It is not possible, I think, to specify a set of necessary and sufficient conditions in this connection. This is because each religious community will have criteria peculiar to itself that control which sentences can be said to express its doctrines, and no theory of doctrine applicable across several different communities can or should take account of all these. So it is important to remember that a doctrine-candidate may meet all these conditions for some community and yet not express doctrine for it.

There is also an important terminological ambiguity here concerning the word 'doctrine.' This word has been used by Christian thinkers to refer both to collections of sentences and to what is expressed by those sentences. This is not usually confusing, but in this context it may be since doctrines can be expressed otherwise than sententially, and the customary extension of the term to cover both the instrument of expression and what is expressed tends not to occur when the instrument is something other than a sentence. I shall usually restrict my usage of the term to refer to what is expressed by some artifact, and shall refer to these artifacts as 'doctrine-expressing Xs'—usually sentences. But the demands of euphonious English will sometimes lead me to give the term its customary extension.

I turn now to a closer examination of the first property that doctrine-candidates must possess in order properly to be regarded as expressive of doctrine for some community. This property has to do with the acceptability of a sentence for some community in comparison with the acceptability of other sentences of which the community is aware as competitors to it. To be expressive of doctrine for the community, the doctrine-candidate must be more acceptable to it than all known competitors. If the community's criterion for acceptability in some sphere of relevance does not allow degrees—if, that is, all doctrine-candidates are thought either to have it or to lack it—then this

definition should be modified to say that, for such a community and such a sphere of relevance, all doctrine-candidates must possess the acceptability-creating property and all known competitors must lack it. More briefly, the point of this condition is to ensure that a doctrine-candidate has more acceptability for some community than all its competitors known to that community in some sphere of relevance. Only then is it possible to judge it to express doctrine for that community.

Some observations on what it is for one sentence to compete with another will be of use here. I shall take it that some sentence—call it S—is a competitor to a doctrine-expressing sentence—call it D—of some community if that community takes assent to S to be incompatible with assent to D. Again, incompatibility as here used is a property of communities (or, more properly, of their attitudes toward assenting to sentences), not primarily of the sentences themselves. Incompatibility, in this sense, may take the strong form of apparent outright contradiction. Consider the sentence *Jesus Christ is God's only-begotten son*, affirmed as expressive of doctrine by some Christian communities, and the Islamic doctrine-expressing sentence *God does not beget*. If, as the surface grammar of these sentences suggests, each is intended as an attribution of some property to God (in the first case, that of having begotten just one son; in the second, that of having begotten nothing), then it is clear that God cannot possess both properties, and that the competition between these two sentences may be taken by their communities to be intense—so intense, perhaps, that it may be thought impossible to hold to both and preserve sanity.

It may of course be that the surface grammar of these sentences is deceptive, and that when they are set in a broader context it will turn out that the competition between them is less intense than it seems, or even that it is nonexistent. Perhaps one community (or both) has a theory about the referential capacities of language that makes such competition impossible; or there may be some theory about what it means to predicate properties of God that makes competition among such predications impossible. But, absent such theories, the strong competition suggested by the surface grammar of these sentences may

sometimes occur (and was taken to occur by some Muslim and Christian communities).

Competition may be less intense than outright contradiction. A community may, for example, take some sentence to be a competitor to one of its doctrine-expressing sentences because of a perceived lack of consonance between the two. Such might be the case, for example, for those Christians who would take the sentence *scripture alone is sufficient for salvation* to express doctrine, and those who would so take the sentence *the body and blood of Christ received at the Eucharist is the primary means of sanctification for Christians*. These two sentences are not obviously contradictory, but neither are they obviously consonant, and it is perfectly comprehensible that some community for which the former is a doctrine-expressing sentence might take the latter to be a competitor just because of such a lack of consonance. And there may also be other modalities of competition that, like this perceived lack of consonance, fall short of perceived contradiction in intensity.

This condition has been stated in an entirely formal way: the property that makes sentences acceptable to some community in the spheres of relevance covered by its doctrine-expressing sentences might theoretically be anything at all. This formal way of putting things seems to me preferable to that used by William Christian, who specifies acceptability-creating properties in terms of truth for sentences describing the setting of human life, or rightness, for sentences attributing value to some pattern of human conduct.¹² While it is true that these are very likely to be found as acceptability-creating properties among religious communities, there seems no reason to suppose them the only ones, nor to suppose that truth need be the acceptability-creating property always linked to sentences describing the setting of human life, nor rightness that always linked to sentences attributing value to some pattern of human conduct. One might imagine, for example, some religious community for which the only acceptability-creating property is neither truth nor rightness but salvific efficacy, or one for which it is *being seventeen syllables long*. For these reasons it seems preferable to keep the definition at the formal level.

In looking at the textual artifacts produced by virtuoso intellectuals it will usually be abundantly clear which sentences fulfill this first condition: they will be those sentences for the acceptability of which the text(s) in question argue. They will be the discursive practice's tenets, what a Buddhist theorist would call its *siddhāntas* and what a Christian theorist would call its doctrines. But some texts will do no more than state or list the relevant sentences, without arguing for them or against their competitors, as in a Christian catechesis or a Buddhist *māṭṛka*. In such cases the student will have little idea of what the acceptability-creating properties are, or what competitors the community was aware of when it set them forth. In other cases—say, a Christian conciliar document or a Buddhist *śāstra*—arguments are offered, competitors are canvassed, and acceptability-creating criteria are manifest. In either case, it will be the texts' tenets that meet this first criterion.

The next condition to be fulfilled so that some doctrine-candidate might be thought of as a doctrine-expressing sentence for some religious community is that it must be regarded by that community as being significant for its religious life. This condition is intended to rule out the possibility of judging some doctrine-candidates thought of by all members of some religious community as true (or as more acceptable than all known competitors in some sphere of relevance) to be expressive of doctrine for it when they are of no significance for or relevance to the religious life of that community. For example, the substantive claim that *the United States began active hostilities against Iraq in January 1991* would presumably be acknowledged as true by most members of most religious communities. Yet few would wish to regard it as expressive of doctrine for them—except, perhaps, for those with idiosyncratic eschatological views about the significance of events in the Middle East.

Finally, in order for a doctrine-candidate properly to be regarded as a doctrine-expressing sentence for some religious community, it must not only be thought of as acceptable to and significant for the religious life of that community (conditions one and two), but also as in some way authoritative for or bind-

ing upon it (condition three). This, I suspect, will be the most difficult condition for which to provide anything close to precise specification. It can be cashed out in institutional terms for those communities that have centralized and hierarchical institutional structures: here, 'being binding' might mean that if public assent to some doctrine is refused membership in the community is relinquished. But not all communities possess such structures, so I suggest, schematically, that a sentence should be thought binding upon a community if that community feels obligated (1) to teach it to its members; (2) to defend it against perceived competitors; (3) to explain why it is to be preferred to those competitors. The first of these is catechesis; the second is negative apologetics; and the third is positive apologetics, categories I have discussed in more detail elsewhere.¹³ All these motivations will often be present in the discursive practices that produce doctrine-expressing sentences, and there might be added to them a fourth: system-building, which is the attempt by the community to integrate a particular doctrine-expressing sentence into a coherently ordered system of such.

Finally, any particular doctrine-expressing sentence will always be embedded in cognitive and epistemic systems that extend far beyond its own range of relevance; this has been effectively argued by Roberto Unger in the sphere of jurisprudence. It will, that is, have extensive entailments and truth-conditions that may not have been articulated by the community for which it is a doctrine. So, for example, the sentence expressive of doctrine for some Buddhist communities, *everyone should practice mindfulness ceaselessly*, has among its truth-conditions an entire and complex metaphysic that includes both an ontology and a systematic and imaginative axiology. Even if no one in this community has ever articulated some aspects of this ontology and axiology, all of it should still be said to be part of the community's doctrine. For whenever a community formulates and uses a primary doctrine, it also commits itself by necessity to all its truth-conditions and entailments as doctrinal (assuming, of course, that the sentences expressing these truth-conditions and entailments meet the conditions stated above). I am not suggesting, though, that it will ever be possible to elucidate

all these truth-conditions, for they are infinitely many for any given case.

1.2 *Secondary Doctrines*

Secondary doctrines are also sentences expressive of doctrine for some community, but the object of these sentences is neither the setting nor the conduct of human life, but rather other doctrine-expressing sentences of that community. Such doctrines are generally intended to state rules governing how the community's primary doctrines are to be ordered, derived, recognized, interpreted, and used. A category such as this has long been used by theorists working on legal doctrine;¹⁴ William Christian was the first to make systematic use of it in the analysis of religious doctrine.¹⁵ Not all religious communities will possess such secondary doctrines since not all will have felt the need for them; but all communities with a long history of doctrinal reflection prompted by internal crises, divisions, or disagreements, or by contact with alien communities will have secondary doctrines of these kinds.

1.2.1 *Rules of Recognition and Patterns of Derivation*

These secondary doctrines are formulated by religious communities to provide the community with criteria for use in answering questions of this form: Is this doctrine-candidate expressive of doctrine for the community? Such questions will often be answered in terms of the origins of the doctrine-candidate. For example, a Buddhist community might have a rule of recognition of the following form: *a doctrine-candidate is expressive of doctrine for this community if and only if it was uttered by Buddha*. This is a strong rule of recognition, one that specifies both necessary and sufficient conditions. (It is not, I think, a rule of recognition espoused by any actual Buddhist community.) Others may be weaker, specifying only necessary or only sufficient conditions. And, of course, a community's rules of recognition need have nothing to do with the origins of a doctrine-candidate; they might instead refer to some property of the

doctrine-candidate that is neutral as to its origin—perhaps *being in the śikharī meter in Sanskrit* or *being shorter than the Gettysburg Address* or the like. But I suspect that most rules of recognition operative in religious communities (as also in law-governed ones) will have to do with the origins of doctrine-candidates, so I now offer a schematic outline of what seem to me the main options here.

A rule of recognition will often say that to be expressive of doctrine for the community a doctrine-candidate must have its origin in some authoritative text or collection of such; perhaps by being contained in it, entailed by what is contained in it, consonant with what is contained in it, or the like. To put this another way: rules of recognition will often be couched in terms of allowed patterns of derivation from an authoritative source. These need to be looked at more closely, beginning with authoritative texts.

Suppose we understand 'text' broadly to mean any articulated system of communicative signs. The category would then include written artifacts (books and the like), oral artifacts (speeches, sermons, discourses), ritual acts (liturgical celebrations), icons (visual images of all kinds), musical performances (sacred sound), and no doubt much else.

Every religious community necessarily possesses especially authoritative texts, texts that carry and communicate to the community's members in special ways whatever it is that the community takes to be of religious value. Some of these texts will contain natural-language sentences (as, for example, do sacred books of all kinds and almost all liturgical acts; many musical performances; and some buildings and other three-dimensional artifacts); but some will not (as, for example, most icons and some musical performances). But all authoritative texts can, I suggest, become sources of doctrine for religious communities, and can therefore be appealed to in the construction of rules of recognition.

I do not intend to be very specific as to the types of authority that texts may possess. A broad spectrum of positions is possible, and much will depend upon the institutional structure of a particular community. At one extreme, perhaps, are those

texts explicitly regarded by some community as possessing supreme religious authority: they may, for instance, be thought of by the community as the sole source of its doctrines. Some Christians think in this way (or say they do) about the written text of the Bible. Even more extreme would be a community that regarded some text not only as the sole source of its doctrines, but also as coextensive with those doctrines; from such a position it will usually follow that the community's doctrines are doctrines for it just because of their presence in such an authoritative text, and not because of any other property they might possess. It is difficult to think of an instance of such an extreme position being held. Not even conservative Islamic views on the nature and authority of the Qur'ān come close.

Paralleling this broad range of positions on a text's authoritativeness is an equally broad range of patterns by which doctrine-expressing sentences may be derived from authoritative texts. Suppose we consider first texts that contain natural-language sentences, such as the Bible or the ritual performance of baptism. First, there is derivation by simple identity. That is, a sentence found in the authoritative text may be simply appropriated by the community as expressive of doctrine for it. This pattern is evident for a good many Christian communities in the case of many sentences found in the Bible, as well as for those uttered during the baptismal liturgy: they are to be taken as expressive of doctrine for the community, and their status as such is traceable to their occurrence in the authoritative text.

Second, some sentences may become expressive of doctrine for some community in virtue of their entailment by sentences found in an authoritative text. Some Christians might want to make the (implausible) claim, for example, that the doctrine-expressing sentence *the Son and the Father are consubstantial* is derived by entailment from sentences found in the biblical text—such, for example, as “I and the Father are one” (John x.30), or “Before Abraham was, I am” (John viii.58). Others have made the claim (more plausibly) that doctrine-expressing sentences about the subjection of infants to the world, the flesh, and the devil because of original sin are entailed by sentences uttered in the authoritative texts of the baptismal liturgy.

Third, and perhaps most common, the doctrine-expressing sentences of a community may be related to those of its authoritative texts that contain sentences neither by simple identity nor by entailment, but by consonance. That is, it may often be taken by a community to be a necessary condition for some doctrine-candidate to become a doctrine-expressing sentence that it be consonant with what the community takes its authoritative texts to say. Consider, for example, the importance of narratives, stories told in authoritative texts, for many communities. A strong case can be made for the claim that narrative—whether written in the biblical text or reenacted by the community in the text of a liturgical act—is the single most important source of Christian doctrine-expressing sentences: that Christian doctrine is largely the result of the community's meditation upon its foundational narrative.¹⁶ If this or something like it is the case, then the community's doctrine-expressing sentences will naturally have to be consonant with this narrative: they must appear to the community to give expression to the narrative's structure and implications, to make explicit in a faithful manner what the story implies. Alister McGrath puts this well: "Doctrinal formulations are the result of the early church's correct perception that the mere reiteration of the scriptural narrative was not enough; it was necessary to interact with other modes of discourse."¹⁷ It may then be asked by the community whether, for example, some doctrine-expressing sentence is consonant with or legitimately generated by the narrative that it purports to explain.

Rules of recognition can be formulated in terms of all these patterns of derivation. One example will suffice, based on the pattern of derivation by entailment: a community may have a rule of recognition of the form *a doctrine-candidate is expressive of doctrine for this community if the community takes it to be entailed by what the community takes its authoritative texts to say*. Notice that this rule of recognition, like the properties of primary doctrines discussed above, is indexed to the community's perceptions of the entailments of its authoritative texts; this must be the point of first refuge in a descriptive analysis of a community's rules of recognition. Variants of the rule of

recognition cited above in terms of identity or consonance can easily be formulated.¹⁸

Religious communities also possess authoritative texts that contain no sentences—some buildings and other three-dimensional objects; music; and some kinds of ritual. Ritual observances that do as a whole contain sentences may also have sentence-free parts. Consider, for example, the complex of gestures used by Christian priests during the consecration of the elements at a celebration of the Eucharist. Such wordless authoritative texts may also act as sources of doctrine-expressing sentences, though when they do the process of derivation will typically be harder to trace than in the case of derivation from some sentence-possessing authoritative text.

In such cases it is difficult to see, for example, that there can be a relation of strict entailment between a wordless authoritative text and some doctrine-expressing sentence. For strictly speaking entailments flow only from one verbal formulation to another. But there can certainly be relations of consonance and contiguity between nonverbal authoritative texts and doctrine-expressing sentences. Liturgical acts, as Geoffrey Wainwright puts it, often have doctrinal incidence.¹⁹ Perhaps they always do. But such incidence will often be extraordinarily hard to trace in detail or with precision. What, for example, is one to say about the doctrinal incidence of church architecture or the arrangement of ecclesiastical furniture inside a church building? Such things are certainly authoritative texts for the community whose buildings and furniture they are; this follows from the fact that they are articulated systems of communicative signs. But the exact nature of this doctrinal incidence is difficult to determine.

A sentence-free authoritative text will usually underdetermine the doctrine-expressing sentence or sentences for which it acts as a source. For example, there will usually be many doctrine-expressing sentences that can be seen by the community as consonant with some wordless ritual act, and the choice of which among these is to be adopted will rest upon factors additional to the ritual act in question.

Rules of recognition may, of course, be formulated in terms of authoritative texts that possess no sentences with roughly the same range of possibilities (ruling out entailment) evident in rules appealing to sentence-possessing texts.

Rules of recognition may also be formulated in terms of authoritative experience, for it is possible that a community might judge its doctrine-expressing sentences to be causally related to the occurrence of such experiences (and that they might be so).

Most—perhaps all—religious communities think of certain experiences as having doctrinal incidence. This is most obvious when one considers the techniques aimed at producing valued experiences so commonly developed and preserved by religious communities. The entire tradition of Christian ascetical theology, to take one of the more baroque examples of intellectual theorizing about such techniques, is an example of a practice that orders, relates, describes, and recommends methods designed to be efficacious in producing such authoritative experience. More broadly still, all of a community's ritual practice may be seen as an instrument for producing in its participants some desired and thus authoritative experiences, experiences that are at once cognitive, affective, and conative.

Suppose, then, we consider a religious community's authoritative experiences to be those it collectively values, regards as significant for its religious life, and develops techniques to inculcate and preserve. Naturally, such experiences will be had by individuals (though perhaps most often in a communal setting), and will be related to the doctrine-expressing sentences understood and assented to by those individuals in various and complex ways. Some comments on the nature of these relations are in order here.

Perhaps the most widespread and influential position on this issue in the west since the seventeenth century, among both theologians and historians of religion, has been the view that religiously authoritative experience is always in some sense prior to the formation of doctrine-expressing sentences, and that the central function of the latter is to express (or describe, or symbolize) the former. George Lindbeck has given this position the

clumsy but accurate name “experiential expressivism,”²⁰ and Friedrich Schleiermacher is often taken as a classical and influential exponent of this view. He defines Christian doctrines (*Glaubenssätze*), for example, in the title to the fifteenth paragraph of the *Christliche Glaube*, as “accounts of the Christian religious affections set forth in speech” (*Auffassungen der christlich frommen Gemütszustände in der Rede dargestellt*), and though his position is in the end considerably more nuanced than this bold statement makes it sound, he does, in spite of careful qualifications, appear to give affect logical and temporal priority over doctrine. A case can be made that a similar judgment has informed, often at the axiomatic level, much theorizing in the field ever since.²¹ This position is also often combined with the claim that there are core religious experiences, recognizable as such cross-culturally.²² I shall not discuss this latter claim here since it is tangential to my interests in this study; but it is worth noting that if the observations made in the next several paragraphs are well grounded, then this claim too—at least in its more naive forms—will turn out to be false.

If experiential expressivism were correct, authoritative experience would be the single most important source of a community’s doctrine-expressing sentences. The view, however, always rests upon an attempt to separate the religious individual’s life from her or his theoretical commitments, and to postulate a one-way causal connection between the former and the latter. This is not successfully defensible. Conceptually complex theory-laden claims such as those found in most doctrine-expressing sentences simply do not flow straightforwardly from preconceptual or prelinguistic experience (even if it is allowed that there is any such thing); rather, there is an exceedingly complex symbiotic and reciprocal relationship between religious experience and doctrine-expressing sentences. Each conditions the other, but if there is a dominant direction of influence it is from doctrine to experience and not vice-versa. Assent to a given set of doctrine-expressing sentences (with all that usually accompanies such experience) makes possible the occurrence of certain kinds of experience, and may at times act as both necessary and sufficient condition for the occurrence of some

apparently doctrinally unsullied moment of consciousness, as Wayne Proudfoot puts it.²³

In order that someone can judge some experience to be religiously authoritative, that person must be able to identify the experience under some description that gives it such a status. And the metaphysical commitments and causal claims operative in the category-systems that govern and make possible such descriptive identifications are not given in the experience itself; they are, rather, part of the cognitive equipment of the person doing the judging, and as such are produced by a long process of formation and acculturation.²⁴ Neither the occurrence of religiously authoritative experiences, nor their identification as such by those who have them can be separated from the highly ramified²⁵ and strictly doctrinal claims that are symbiotically intertwined with them. Doctrine-expressing sentences can, therefore, never be said to be straightforwardly derived from pre- or nondoctrinal experience. God cannot address or be heard by the experiencing subject unless that subject already knows how to hear God and how to identify what is heard as God's voice. Schleiermacher should be stood on his head: the engagement of the religious affections is possible only when there already exists an appropriately developed doctrinal context.

The same claims should be made in cases in which a religious community's paradigmatic experiences are neither theistic nor dualistic. Even if it should turn out to be the case that there are, as Robert Forman has recently argued,²⁶ "pure consciousness events," states of consciousness without content or phenomenal properties, and even if such (non)-experiences are identified by some religious communities as religiously significant, such an identification can only be made in an already highly ramified doctrinal context.

None of this is to say that religious experiences are doctrinally insignificant. Without them—whether occasional and dramatic or quotidian and unexciting—religious communities could not long endure. And the members of such communities will often appeal to the occurrence of such experiences as evidence for the truth of their doctrine-expressing sentences, and will frame rules of recognition at least partly in terms of them.

1.2.2. *Rules of Interpretation and Combination*

These secondary doctrines, unlike rules of recognition, are used by religious communities to provide guidelines for interpreting and understanding doctrine-expressing sentences already acknowledged as such by application of the proper rules of recognition. They will often be akin to what the academic community would call hermeneutical principles, second-order descriptions of how to deal with first-order artifacts.

The need for such secondary doctrines will arise when the set of sentences that the community agrees, by the application of its rules of recognition, to call doctrine-expressing sentences, yields *prima facie* contradictions or inconsistencies; or when interpretations of this set of doctrine-expressing sentences (or some subset of it) by one group within the community differ in significant measure from those offered by another (or others). One or both scenarios will usually obtain in any community with a long history, or with a complex set of authoritative texts and rules of recognition.

Rules of interpretation will usually be framed by creating a hierarchy within the set of doctrine-expressing sentences, and requiring that those lower down the hierarchical order be interpreted in terms of those higher up. For example, such a rule might say *all doctrine-expressing sentences of this community are to be interpreted so that they are consonant with a particular subset of them*. The rule of interpretation used by some Buddhist communities, that Sūtras whose meaning is definitive (*nītārtha*) are to be used as guides for the interpretation of those whose meaning requires interpretation (*neyārtha*), is of just this kind. Sūtras are, for Buddhists, collections of *buddhavacana*, Buddha's word, and as such are by definition collections of sentences expressive of doctrine for the community. But the assumption that all these sentences are of equal weight leads to problems, since there are many *prima facie* contradictions among them. Hence the specification of some subset of them as more authoritative: the *prima facie* meaning of these is to govern the interpretation given the rest.

The creation of hierarchy, or the establishment of a subset of especially authoritative doctrine-expressing sentences, will be a common feature of rules of interpretation and combination. A good example of this kind of move is the “post-Tridentine baroque concept of dogma”²⁷ developed by Roman Catholic theologians since the First Vatican Council, most especially in response to the modernist controversy at the beginning of this century. It sets apart a subset of the community’s doctrines, calls them dogmas, and gives them a controlling interpretive power over the members of the larger set.²⁸ Therefore rules of interpretation can also be called rules of combination: they specify how doctrine-expressing sentences are to be ordered and related one to another. The goals of such ordering and relation will always include the creation of a coherent system: this is one of the most pressing goals informing doctrinal discourse.

1.3 The Doctrinal Uses of Primary Doctrines

Primary doctrines have many uses for the communities whose doctrines they are. Prominent among these is the demarcation of the community, the marking-out of boundaries to separate those inside from those outside. Significant also is the pedagogical use of doctrines to make nonmembers of the community into members: the conceptual and practical links between doctrine and catechesis in the Christian west go very deep. But I take these uses of doctrine—and many others like them—to be nondoctrinal uses, concerned as they are to have effects upon nondoctrinal states of affairs such as community membership. Therefore, although an understanding of them would be essential to a complete theory of doctrine, and although these are among the most important functions of doctrine (and conceivably, for some communities, the only uses to which doctrines are put), they are only marginally relevant to a strictly doctrinal study of doctrine.

Among the strictly doctrinal uses of doctrine, then, I distinguish first the descriptive use. Many doctrine-expressing sentences appear to make descriptive claims about the setting of

human life and the properties of the existents that constitute that setting.²⁹ If we follow the surface grammar of these sentences it seems perfectly natural to assume that religious communities at least sometimes use their doctrines to describe the world, to describe human persons, and to describe whatever is taken by the community to be of salvific value.

Notice that my claim here is not that all religious communities use at least some of their doctrine-expressing sentences in this way (although I suspect this to be the case). Whether this is so I take to be an empirical issue rather than a theoretical one that can be decided without paying attention to cases. Neither is my claim even that all doctrine-expressing sentences whose surface grammar might lead one to believe that they are being used descriptively are in fact being so used. Surface grammar can be deceptive, and further investigation of context may very well lead to the conclusion that what looks like a descriptive claim is in fact being used in another way by its community.

My suggestion at this point is only that if some doctrine-expressing sentence's surface grammar does indeed give the impression that it is being used as a description by its community, this possibility should not be ruled out a priori unless there are very good theoretical reasons for doing so. Some theorists think that there are such reasons, and therefore that the surface grammar of such sentences is always deceptive,³⁰ but I see no convincing arguments for this as an a priori judgment, and much interesting a posteriori work can be done if such a judgment is eschewed. Indeed, one of the chief interests that doctrinal studies has lies here: religious communities typically use their doctrines to make complex and interesting claims of metaphysical, ontological, ethical, and epistemological interest. Deciding in advance that no claims of these kinds are what they seem rules out much important work, as well as being at least interpretively reductionist.

The second important function that doctrine-expressing sentences have is that of recommendation. This is simple, obvious, and uncontroversial. I shall dismiss it quickly. Religious communities frequently use their doctrine-expressing sentences to

recommend courses of action or attitudes to their members—and sometimes also to those outside the community. In my analysis of doctrine-expressing sentences I suggested that they will typically either describe or recommend; this second properly doctrinal use of doctrine-expressing sentences will naturally use sentences of the second kind. Religious communities use their doctrine-expressing sentences to commend many things, including ethical behavior, ritual action, doxastic practice, and personal piety. It might be possible to reduce this function of doctrine-expressing sentences to that of description by claiming that all injunctive or commendatory sentences presuppose and are based upon some descriptive sentences. But it seems preferable for heuristic purposes to keep the function of recommending separate from that of describing.

1.4 Applying the Theory

What can be done with a heuristic device such as this? Why would anyone consider it important? I expect the following benefits. First, the theory is intended to identify an intellectual practice at a sufficiently high level of abstraction that it can be used as a tool for directly comparative analysis. The first level of such analysis would be classificatory: the theory could be used to develop schemata of the kinds of secondary doctrines (rules of recognition, interpretation, and combination) that actual religious communities use to recognize, sort, and order their doctrines, as well as of the patterns of argument employed in such activities. Such classificatory schemata could then in turn be used to order religious communities into types according to their doctrinal practices. I would expect such an ordering to correlate with nondoctrinal variables.

The second level of analysis would be substantive, and would have to do with religious communities' primary doctrines. I envisage here the possibility of criticizing such doctrines in two ways. First, they could be criticized in terms of the rules of recognition and interpretation operative within the community; one could ask, for example, whether a given doctrine-expressing

sentence, recognized by the community as authentic, should be so recognized given the rules of recognition stated and used by that same community.

Second, and more controversially, a community's primary doctrines might be criticized in terms of the criteria governing their acceptability in their sphere of relevance for some community. Suppose, for example, that some Buddhist community claims the sentence *abstention from taking sentient life is desirable* to be expressive of doctrine for it because it, more than any of its known competitors in its sphere of relevance, meets the community's acceptability-governing criterion in that sphere—which might here be *being conducive to the attainment of Nirvana*. A critical analysis might want to argue that this is not so (or that it is). Or, imagine a Christian community claiming that the sentence *God the Holy Spirit proceeds from God the Father and God the Son* is expressive of doctrine for it because this claim, more than any of its known competitors in its sphere of relevance, meets the community's acceptability-governing criterion in that sphere—which might here be *being accurately descriptive of the Trinitarian economy*. Again, a critical analysis might want to argue that this is not so (or that it is). In either case, the negative form of such criticism will usually go on by suggesting a new doctrine-candidate that the critic takes to possess more of the acceptability-creating criteria in the proper sphere of relevance than the doctrine-expressing sentence under criticism. This kind of analysis, like that which criticizes a community's primary doctrines in terms of how well they comport with that same community's rules of recognition and interpretation, is intrasystematic: no criteria foreign to the system being analyzed are introduced.

Finally, and most controversially, one might want to claim that the acceptability-governing criteria used by some communities are undesirable, ethically or epistemically. That is, a critical analysis might claim that a particular community's doctrines are authentically doctrinal for it in terms of its own rules of recognition, that the meaning attributed to these sentences by the community is consistent with its own rules of interpretation,

that the sentences do possess the proper acceptability-governing properties in the proper degree—but that no community should have sentences that possess all these properties as doctrines, either because having them will lead to ethically inappropriate behavior, or because it will lead to improper doxastic practice.

This is a truly radical kind of extrasystematic criticism. It introduces normative criteria that are extrinsic to the system being criticized. This does not make it illegitimate; it simply requires a high degree of methodological self-consciousness and ethical sensitivity on the part of the critic.

These are the heuristic benefits of the theory. I intend to attempt all these kinds of analysis in the case of the buddhalogical doctrines that form the subject-matter of this book.