

THE PENDULUM OF THOUGHT



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The Pendulum of Thought—Or the Uniqueness of Buddhism

By Bhikkhu Dhammapala (Henry van Zeyst)

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Preface

The following pages contain the text of two lectures given by the Ven. Bhikkhu Dhammapala at the invitation of the Buddhist Brotherhood of the University of Ceylon. The talks aroused very keen interest in the large audience that listened to them and it was felt that their publication in some permanent form would make them available to a wider public and give greater scope for study by seekers after Truth.

The Ven. Bhikkhu Dhammapala has made a rapid but thorough survey of the different systems of Philosophy which have gained currency in the West from the time of the Greeks up to the twentieth century and he shows in the case of each its fundamental weaknesses. Throughout the ages the *pendulum of thought* has swung from Idealism to Materialism, now this way now that, but nowhere has it found its stable equilibrium. It is Buddhism alone, with its twin doctrines of *anatta*, no-Soul, and *kamma*, action, that can solve the problems which have baffled philosophers from the beginning of the world.

The Ven. Bhikkhu's obviously intimate knowledge of Western Philosophy, combined with his profound study of the Buddha's teachings, makes him pre-eminently fitted for the task he has undertaken. He has demonstrated the uniqueness of Buddhism as contrasted with other systems of thought and his comparative study should prove of very great assistance in a proper understanding of the questions involved.

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G.P. Malalasekera
The University of Ceylon, 15th December, 1943

The Pendulum of Thought

It has become a custom for modern authors on Buddhism to indicate points of contact between the different schools of philosophic thought of East and West—not, it is said, to seek the patronage of the West for the teachings of Buddhism, but to derive some intellectual pleasure from drawing comparisons between different systems of thought. It may be tempting, but it is dangerous.

In our appreciation of Buddhism we might easily read a Buddhist thought in an isolated statement, while wishful thinking might give an interpretation, originally not intended by the author.

And even if there are some real points of contact, the indication of these alone might give sufficient reason to less educated intellects to take in wholesale whatever those authors have produced, and proclaim that as Buddhism.

Where many Orientals then sing the praises of the West and imitate their vices more than their virtues, it would be good, perhaps, if a Westerner shows some of their deficiencies thus indirectly proving the superiority of the Philosophy of Buddhism.

Philosophy is said to be an attempt to explain the ultimate nature and causes of the phenomena of the universe. In doing so the different Schools or systems of thought fall at once apart in two main divisions.

During many centuries these two divisions have been given

different names, but the fight has been always over the same prize: "What is the ultimate reality?" Many say that the ultimate reality is one; they believe in a permanent unity behind all the variety and change of the world. They are the Monists, Theists, Animists, Eternalists, Traditionalists, Fideists, Dogmatists, Ontologists, Realists, Idealists, Energists. All these different schools, though distinct between themselves, and opposed even in many points, have yet this in common that they accept an ultimate reality as an entity in the metaphysical sense whether that be called substance, or soul, or God, or Force, or categorical necessity, or whatever name still might be invented.

They may be said to follow a subjective method, moulding reality on conception, and hence mostly a method of conjecture.

Others say—perhaps not explicitly, but it can be derived from their doctrines—that the ultimate reality is plural. They follow an objective method, moulding conceptions on observations and generally deny a unity behind or within nature's plurality. They are the later on "das Ding an sich", they postulated a principle of existence. Here, therefore, lies the initial error, that they took for granted an invariable existence lying beneath these varieties.

It pleads for his mathematical mind that Pythagoras did not postulate for this invariable constant any further qualities except those proper to the number One.

Bernard Shaw remarks that God is equal to the number -1 (minus one) because God was before the beginning.

The Buddha too made reference to the number one: "*eka nāma kin? sabbe satta aharatthitika*"—"What is one? All beings are sustained by nutriment."

This is no juggling with numbers, but a statement of the first importance showing that all existence is dependent on conditions, that nothing is self-sustained, therefore that nothing is permanent, but merely a process of nutrition in the case of food, a process of combustion in the case of volition, a process of grasping in the case of consciousness,

It is the actuality of the process which was entirely overlooked in the Greek Philosophy up to now.

Heracleitus

Then, however, appears Heracleitus in Ephesus, who with his denial of validity to all conceptions not originally due to sensation, is more actual and concrete than anyone before him.

He found the meaning of the universe in the actual process of experience, in the flow of time and change in which we are all immersed. “*Panta rhei: everything flows*”. Others had sought the real nature of things as an entity, as a noun, but he found it as a verb, a process of actuality. In this point he stands indeed amazingly near the Buddha who at the very same time was preaching his doctrine of actuality in the North of India. Yet he remains amazingly far away from the Buddha’s logical conclusion, that if all is a flux, there cannot be a permanent ego-entity. For Heracleitus remains an idealist when explaining the perpetual delusion in the mind of man as a lack of the Divine Soul within him. Thus the constant flux of all things, the impermanence of all things is not seen, as in Buddhism, as a result of their composed nature (*sabbe saṅkhāra anicca*), but as an inherent longing to some ulterior end, to attain supreme harmony with the eternal Being.

Parmenides

The earliest champion for the opposite camp we meet in Parmenides, who also lived at the same time. He held a duality of thought, one originating from reason, the other from sense. Thus it happens, according to him, that reason proclaims the absolute Truth, while the senses give rise only to opinions; thus rational thought is opposed to and frequently conflicting with sensible thought; whence it follows that delusion is caused by the imperfection of sense. It was only by means of his dualistic philosophy, by relying upon ineradicable convictions, innate ideas of necessary truths, that he saved himself from Scepticism, whereto the deceitful nature of opinion in the senses would inevitably have led him.

In this Parmenides is the prototype of all those modern compromisers who turn away from the logical conclusions made evident by Science, and turn to Faith; who are Materialists by conviction and yet are Idealists by choice. But when, as in Buddhism, reason is considered as one of the senses, the distinction between truth and opinion disappears and speculation becomes an absurdity in the face of the actual process of life. And thus the fight goes on. “To the extreme idealist the universe is entirely inside himself. To the extreme objectivist or materialist the individual is entirely outside the universe—In reality we are entirely inside the universe, not static but dynamic.”¹ We form part and

¹The Changing Pattern: H. Levy.

parcel of the process, as a wave in the ocean is no individual entity, but in its arising and passing away is dependent on other conditions and has no existence except in the process of rising and falling. It is not a wave which rises, because outside the rising and fall there is no wave; it is the rising which makes the wave, and with the ceasing of the process the wave also ceases.

Eternalism and Annihilationism

This difference, which we notice here for the first time in Greek Philosophy, is found also nearer the home of Buddhism at the same period, if not much earlier. We hear of Eternalism and of Annihilationism.

Eternalism (*sassata-dit̥ṭhi*) believes in the eternity of self as a logical deduction from their misconception, the wrong view of individuality (*sakkāya-dit̥ṭhi*). They regarded bodily shape, sensation, perception, mental differentiations, consciousness as the self, or the self as having those qualities, or being in those qualities, or those qualities being in the self, making in all twenty different speculations, which, however, agree in this point that the whole of the experimental world, material or mental, external or internal, is dependent on the self. Thus by eternalizing that self, the world also becomes eternal. And that is our modern Idealism.

For those idealists, says Dr. Paul Dahlke, “actuality is obliged to adjust itself and form itself after the concept”.

Eternalism was professed by the Vajjiputtakas and the Sammitiyas, who branched off from the orthodox Theravāda already in the 4th century B.C., *i.e.* hardly 100 years after the passing away of the Master. They are the Puggalavādins or Attavādins, the believers in the existence of a personal entity, or immortal soul, or perduring vital principle, in other words, the Animists.

Opposing them, but by doing so falling into the other extreme, are the Annihilationists. They too believed in self, but that self would not survive its present life, but be annihilated at death (*uccheda-dit̥hi*). The annihilationistic view is stated² to consider matter, or sensation, or perception, or mental formations, or consciousness as self, which therefore ceases and perishes with them.

The ages which follow left their impressions on the way of thinking. Greece had developed politically into a democracy, but the only democratic characteristic was the absence of an absolute monarch. The “*demos*” was highly aristocratic and numbered just a few hundred free citizens lording it over an enslaved population of many thousands who had no share in public affairs. Socrates, Plato and Aristotle in their philosophy show the traces thereof.

²At̥hasālini, III, 2, 1.

Socrates

Without building up a real system, Socrates was above all a critic who with analysing and criticizing proved his aristocratic, or as we would better understand nowadays, his capitalistic thought. Induction and definition are said to originate from Socrates. He certainly forced others to think and that is very much indeed. But thinking in the correct way is of the highest importance. Now both induction and definition are pure logic. Logic may be useful, but the light derived therefrom cannot exceed its source, human reason; and that is a very poor source which the Lord Buddha compares with a glow-worm: “A glow-worm shines as long as the sun has not risen. But its light is quenched, it glows no longer, when the sun has risen. So long as the Fully-Awakened Ones do not arise, the Logicians (*takkika*) have no light, nor have their followers; with their wrong views they cannot become free from woe”.³

Logic is absolutely necessary in those cases where experiment cannot be applied. Experiment can only show the facts, but cannot go beyond. Experiment shows reaction, but not the action.

Logic on the other hand is like pure mathematics; it remains dead, if not applied, it solves the problem on paper, but not in actuality. Hence it is not sufficient for a proposition to be logically sound and correct, it must be at the same time in accord with

³Udāna, VI, 10.

actuality. “To be human is of greater consideration than to be logical”.⁴

Logical mathematics laid down formulas to explain the behaviour not only of atoms individually, but of great masses also; and to make those formulas applicable in all circumstances, a first demand came for a space-time continuum of four dimensions. This did not prove enough, yet, so that some for a full representation of the interaction of two electrons require as many as seven dimensions. Others go much further still.

About this Prof. H. Levy remarks in “The Universe of Science”: “It is not, however, the two electrons that require seven dimensions, but the mathematicians!” Logic is based on definitions, but definitions stifle our thoughts and kill them, because they deprive them of living actuality. Life is not an argument, it is actual.

It is logic which makes Western Philosophy sterile; it is preoccupied with methods how to obtain knowledge, even the possibility of knowledge will be discussed, but in doing so one forgets to deal with the knowledge of life itself. The inductive method suffers from the same disease, or rather it is past disease, it is dead. To Socrates is usually given: the doubtful honour of having invented the inductive method, but in the Kathāvattu⁵ we meet with the heretical doctrine of the Pubbaseliyas and the Aparaseliyas, who held that in generalizing one can attend to all things at once and quoted in their favour the saying: “all things are impermanent” (*sabbe saṅkhāra anicca*). This, however, is no generalization, no induction, no inference from particular instances. If it is said that “all component things are transient”, this is not a conclusion drawn from isolated facts that this and that and everything known to us is transient. It is not an induction from individual experience, because we have not experienced all things. “Impermanent” is a conclusion deducted from “*saṅkhāra*”, because impermanence follows from the intrinsic nature of *saṅkhāra*, i.e.

⁴Lin Yutang: My Country and My People.

⁵XVI. 4.

composed, dependent on conditions. Therefore, the inference about the impermanence of all things is not drawn from observed phenomena, but deduced from the nature of “*saṅkhāra*” thus: All that is composed, can be decomposed. Well, “*saṅkhāra*” means composed things, made by conditions, formations. Therefore, all *saṅkhāra* can be decomposed. What can be decomposed, however, is impermanent. Therefore “*sabbe saṅkhāra anicca*”

The classification of things into genus, species, sub-species, etc., forms still the foundation of our so-called scientific thinking, but it will be good to remember that genus and species can never be found in the individual object. They are mere creations of the mind and that only at the sacrifice of the truth. For a genus can only be thought of by eliminating all individual characteristics. Thus a definition is formed from the proximate genus together with the specific difference. An animal therefore is a corporal substance with sentient organs. This is the essence of an animal, not, however, to be obtained by distillation like concentrated beef-extract, but by purely logical abstraction. Though all individuals of a certain species will come under the definition thereof, not one individual can even be imagined without hundreds of peculiarities not covered by the definition, owing to its abstract nature. To build up a system of thought like this might be an interesting speculation, but it is not actual.

Plato

Plato, who developed Socrates' philosophy, certainly corrected this point by introducing ethical principles; thus his philosophy is largely religious, but remains idealistic, when he asserts that only eternal, unchanging principles are real, thus making God the measure of all things. By being dragged down from heaven, the Supreme Being ceases to be the Absolute and becomes merely relative, for his laws, his justice, his knowledge of human affairs are all relative, which cannot find a place in the Absolute One. Thus either God is and cannot be known by us, cannot reveal himself to us—or if he has revealed and created, he cannot be absolute, cannot be God. Plato is a Monist finding the One in the many, making universals exist *per se* as entities. And as such he stands condemned. For if essentials are eternal, unchanging and real, how then can there be dependent on them the imperfections and changes in concrete individuals?

Aristotle

Aristotle also saw the necessity of an Ethical Philosophy, yet sharply separated it from his Metaphysics. He is the first in the West (born 384 B.C.) to use the terms “form” for individuality and “matter” for the particular thing made real by the form; thus form gives being to the possibility of matter. The distinction between *nāma* and *rūpa* is purely Buddhistic and was taught by the Buddha almost 200 years earlier. It is not a far-fetched suggestion to see here some connection, if we remember that about 530 B.C. the Persian Empire extended from the valley of the Nile and from Macedonia to Babylon, and the army of Xerxes, defeated at Marathon (490 B.C.), included Indian soldiers. Pythagoras had visited Egypt about 500 B.C. which had adopted the doctrine of rebirth from India.

But then Aristotle is inconsistent. If matter is always informed, form could not have independent existence, and here he too becomes an idealist by believing in the existence of human reason or soul before the birth of the body.

In Buddhism, moreover, the distinction between “*nāma*” and “*rūpa*” is only made in reference to living, *i.e.* conscious, beings. Buddhism is pure psychology and is quite unconcerned with matter alone. Yet, in further refutation of Aristotle it must be said that matter as potential existence, *i.e.* without form, *materia prima*, is a subjective fiction. Also his distinction between substance and accident, which was retained by Immanuel Kant as noumenon and phenomenon, and is still endorsed by the Roman Catholic

Church in explaining the mystery of the Holy Eucharist, where the appearances of bread and wine are said to be present, but not the substances thereof, having been replaced by the body and blood of Christ—this distinction then between substance and accident ought to lead us to pure nothing at the termination of such a removal of all accidents. And indeed in Buddhism we learn:

No doer of the deeds is found
 No one who ever reaps their fruits:
 Empty phenomena roll on,
 Dependent on conditions all.⁶

Thus the progress made by the Athenian school of Philosophy is of a very doubtful nature when we realize that definitions are mere phantoms, abstractions are delusive, and distinctions between potential and actual are a juggle and a fancy. If modern Idealists are still operating with these concepts, it shows on the one hand the great influence of those Greek thinkers of the 5th and 4th century before Christ, and at the same time how little the West has proceeded since. There have been great reactions, however, but even in the reactions of Materialism there is so much of Idealism that it becomes sometimes difficult to classify. As a matter of fact, at this very moment, while condemning definitions and abstractions, we are trying to do the same, when placing different schools of thought in one category. It shows how little “actual” we are in the pure Buddhist sense while occupying ourselves with speculation (*miccha-ditṭhi*).

A materialistic reaction was not long in making itself felt. Having produced the same crop of idealistic speculation too long, the soil of the mind had become exhausted.

The Stoics at a first glance might be supposed to be consistent in their Materialism when all reality is explained to consist in bodies. Even God and human souls, virtues and emotions were

⁶Visuddhi Magga XIX.

seen as bodies. Yet the distinctive feature of Materialism is wanting here—the purely material nature of matter. Instead of being thoroughly consistent by rejecting both God and soul, they made God identical with the world, he becomes “the fiery reason of the world”, while matter is not merely influenced but thoroughly pervaded by soul. Thus their system is truly Pantheistic and is dominated by teleology, purposiveness.

To see order, purpose, aim, in life tends to mechanization. Order and purpose are mere ideas in which the subject frames the outside world. In originating life an individual had no definite purpose, it was a mistake which should not be repeated. Thus to discuss life as a useful or a useless means is vain speculation, for it is merely an effect which we have to put up with and make the best of.

Epikuros

The mechanical world-view was brought forward by Epikuros: everything is governed by an eternal order which regulates the interchange of origination and destruction. This teaching stands self-convicted, for there is more disorder than order in nature. Natural laws are simply would-be abstractions, distilled from experiments. Thus a natural law cannot go beyond experience; and any new experience may upset the law.

Determination in advance will only be accurate, if the same phenomenon would recur under exactly identical circumstances. This never happens in the ultimate sense. Laws of nature have no meaning unless in nature, *i.e.* in actuality. In abstraction they have no existence, but in actuality they are actuality themselves. Now it is the very nature of a process that it is not constant. If it were constant, it could not be brought to a stop; it would have stopped already. Order, or natural law, being born from observation, remains dependent on observation. More accurate observation may make the law more precise or supplant it by another law, which again will rest on observation and experience.

With this the Greek Philosophy has come to a conclusion. Epicurean softness paved the way to sensuality, indifference, scepticism. Greek civilisation was fast falling to decay.

A New Academy was more keen on beauty of expression than on depth of thought, till in the Alexandrian School reason once more submitted itself to faith and thus lost its independence of thought. It was in Alexandria that the Neo-Platonists struggled

with the Christian Fathers. It was admitted by all then that if human knowledge is a delusion, truth must be sought for in some higher sphere; where the senses deceive, where reason fails, there faith alone can solve the problem. Thus Philosophy is reduced to Theology with the immediate result that the sunlight of knowledge grows dim again in the night of superstition. For more than 1.000 years to come there is movement in everything except ideas. Thought becomes more and more stereotyped in dogma. Philosophy is no longer the free woman, the queen of sciences but the bonds-woman, the slave-girl of faith, "*ancilla theologiae*".

In the period of transition unbelief and superstition would go hand in hand; there would be many who denied the gods with Epikuros, and yet prayed and sacrificed before every shrine.

"L'histoire se re'pete"

As we shall see later on, thought has emancipated itself once more. Again the thinkers divided themselves into the two great camps of Idealism and Materialism. And again in an over-civilized world unbelief weds superstition. In a maternity-home a doctor will be a thorough materialist, but when he comes to church he will bend his knee as a token of the submission of his intellect and he will listen with faith and devotion to the Gospel which tells him that Christ was born from a virgin.

When a man denies to be the father of his wife's child, he will divorce her and brand her as an adulteress. But when Joseph found his spouse to be with a child not his, Mary was declared a Saint, the spouse of the Holy Ghost, the Mother of God.

An archaeologist will write a documented essay on pre-historic times and the formation of this earth in the solar system during the millions of years before life became possible on this globe, and on Sunday he will close his office and take rest to honour the day of the Lord on which seventh day the Lord himself rested after the laborious task of having created the whole universe in six days.

A modern Buddhist, boasting of his education and enlighten-

ment, will reject all *Jātaka*-stories in a spirit of puritanism, but at the same time defile himself by the non-observance of the five precepts; he will neglect to take his refuge in the teaching of the Buddha, but try instead to bribe the gods with a pilgrimage to Kataragama. What the West wants is that which the East has, which the East can give and must give. But instead of giving to the West a practical philosophy an actual religion—for that is Buddhism—we take from the West a mechanized Materialism or a sophisticated Idealism. We are like the prodigal son of the Gospel,⁷ who after having squandered his paternal inheritance by living with harlots, had to fill his belly with the husks that the swine did eat. Likewise, many of our so-called Buddhists squander the national inheritance of the Truth for the sake of living with the harlot of Western civilization, trying to satisfy their intellectual hunger with literature which is meant for the swine.

And meanwhile the spouse who was theirs by right of birth, goes childless and dressed in rags. Incredulity and superstition further and excite each other. But when a rigorously scientific system, resting upon solid principles, on well considered grounds excludes faith from science, it will most certainly, and even more entirely, exclude all vague superstitions.

Such a system we have in Buddhism. Not that Buddhism is a science to be taught from a chair in a university, not a philosophic system to be discussed, but it is a science of life to be lived, a philosophy of actuality to be practised. As such it has the power to transform our lives. But unless we here are prepared to bring about that reform, it is useless planning to bring to the West what the West wants. First we must understand our own wealth and from that supply our own wants.

From this point of view comparison is good and useful, for it will give us the right appreciation of our beautiful religion, which is like unto a treasure from which the owner can bring forth

⁷Luke XV. 11–32.

things new and old, and it will make us cautious in borrowing from others indiscriminately things glittering, but useless, if not positively harmful.

Monotheism

Thus we have come then to a long period where thought remained stagnant, because dogma suppressed free thinking as the greatest crime with supreme penalties. Is it accidental that the greatest suppression was found where Monotheism was most powerful?

The Greeks had their many Olympian gods, but those gods were rather human. They were a jovial, loving, lying, quarrelling company. Because their gods were so human, the Greeks were not divine. The wars they fought were for supremacy over land or sea, but there was not a grain of fanaticism in them. If strategy divided them now and then, the Olympic games united them. The Hindus too had their wars, but never for religious motives.

As soon, however, as we turn to nations who had adopted a Monotheistic religion, the picture is quite the reverse. The Hebrews were never long without war, and all those wars were not theirs, but Jehovah's. It was his command that the seven tribes residing in Palestine at the time that the Hebrews were oppressed in Egypt had to be extirpated with their wives and children and even their cattle. Though Christ preached love, he also said "Think not that I am come to send peace on earth; I came not to send peace, but a sword. For I am come to set a man at variance against his father, and the daughter against her mother, and the daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law. And a man's foes shall be they of his own household⁸".

⁸Mt. X, 34-36.

The spirit of fanaticism prevailing in Islam needs but to be mentioned by name. War against non-Muslims was a Holy War and conversions were made at the point of the sword. Monotheism was supreme for many centuries and all fresh ideas were forcibly suppressed.

“When in the south of France Waldo taught a return to the simplicity of Jesus in faith and life, Innocent III preached a crusade against the Waldenses, Waldo’s followers, and permitted them to be suppressed with fire, sword, rape and the most abominable cruelties. When again St. Francis of Assisi (1181–1226) taught the imitation of Christ and a life of poverty and service, his followers, the Franciscans, were persecuted, scourged, imprisoned and dispersed. In 1318 four of them were burned alive at Marseilles. On the other hand the fiercely orthodox order of the Dominicans was strongly supported by Innocent III, who with its assistance set up an organisation, the Inquisition, for the hunting of heresy, and the affliction of free thought⁹”.

The whole mediaeval spirit, the attitude of those truly dark Middle Ages can be summed up in St. Anselm’s motto: “*Credo ut intelligam*, I believe so that I may understand.”

Monotheism is compared to a mighty lake, which gathers the floods of science together, until they suddenly begin to break through the dam.¹⁰

⁹H.G. Wells: Short History of the World p. 192.

¹⁰F.A. Large, History of Materialism.

Materialism

It was the development of natural science which forced a breach. Copernicus, Galileo, Kepler, Empiricism in general, substituted observation and experiment for the ancient speculation. Phenomena of nature were measured and their systematic connection shown.

Philosophy was not slow in following up in the attack through the breach made by Mathematics. But it was a daring exploit. The freedom of natural reason was challenged; Galileo was compelled to disavow his former opinions, because his telescope contradicted the Bible; and because Giordano Bruno in the 16th century dared to draw some inferences from the Copernican theory contrary to the Scholastic Philosophy of the Church based on Aristotle, he was excommunicated and handed over to the secular authorities with a recommendation of a “punishment as merciful as possible and without effusion of blood”, the atrocious formula for burning alive. He perished the victim of theological stupidity and self-applauding intolerance, the martyr for freedom of thought. But from the ashes of his pyre arose the phoenix of new thought, freed from dogma and superstition.

As it was to be expected, the upsurge of science left its impressions also on the new mode of thinking. It was a definite blow to Monotheism and Idealism. A materialistic reaction had to follow; and though the idea of God was still preserved as the Infinite Intelligence, he was no longer the creator of the universe, but he *is* the universe, as the cause is and lives in the effect. This

is a definite Pantheistic idea, the unity of units, which we find also in Hinduism, where all is said to be an emanation of Brahma in whom all will finally be re-absorbed.

The beginning of the 17th century is marked by a spirit of searching which means doubting. The lead was given by physical science, but once the doors were opened for doubt, nothing was thought too sacred for investigation. Philosophy, having been enslaved for so many centuries, naturally breaks loose in exaggeration in the opposite direction. Materialism is the keynote of thought.

Francis Bacon

Francis Bacon (1561–1626) should be named more for his method than for constructive thinking. His method was experimental and though this method cannot bring us further than facts and particular cases, generalizing which is deviation from actuality—yet he has done much to free the human mind from preconceptions. Observation is excellent, for without this one is merely speculating; observation must be the basis of scientific thinking, for in abstraction therefrom one loses sight of the objects. By not seeing the trees one gets lost in the wood. That is the result of abstraction.

Yet Bacon has views which any Buddhist could endorse. It is our action which attributes plans and purposes to nature; our own peculiarities provide the interpretation of difference and resemblance, or, as the Buddha would say, of likes and dislikes. All those individual idols or phantoms must be dethroned before unbiased observation can lead to the discovery of the truth.

Being himself still on the threshold of Materialism, it is not surprising to find even in his thinking much compromising. Had his moral character been purer and firmer, he might have been more consistent also in his teaching.

Descartes

Although then Materialism received its first impulse from Bacon's method, yet it was really due to Descartes that Materialism became Mechanism, when all the physical and psychical phenomena were regarded as mechanical products. Descartes (1596–1650), is great because he maintained that everything that can be doubted must be doubted. That he did not fall into absolute scepticism is only due to the fact that he did not press on till the very end. He found that there is only one proposition which no man can doubt, and that is that he himself exists; for even to doubt one's own existence one must exist. Thus his famous "*Cogito, ergo sum*"—"I think, therefore I am", becomes the foundation of his whole philosophy. It requires no proof, it is self-evident. But then if this basis is rotten, the superstructure must fall. And fall it does, because the foundation is none. From the fact of thinking, the fact of consciousness to the fact of an I-existence is an unpardonable *faux-pas* in a philosopher. The conclusion from "I think" to "I, am" does not go further than from "six" to "half a dozen"; for, when saying "I think", it is already implicitly stated that "I am", namely: I am thinking. What had to be proved, and what has not been proved, and what never will be proved, is that it is the "I" which thinks. If the fact that I think gives the proof that I am, then it ought to follow that if I do not think, I am not. And even if consciousness would lead to the acknowledgement of an *ego* entity, what can be the ground of certitude respecting things which are not me?

Here only Buddhism can give what the world wants: no I—*anatta*. No I who thinks, but only thought; no doer, but only action (*kamma*). Can this be proved? One cannot show the darkness with a light, one cannot analyse a flame, one cannot isolate a wave. But if the so-called “I” is not an entity, but a process of action, how then can this process be proved? Here we can fall back on Empiricism. Action can be known from reaction; contact can be known from feeling, but not the “I”. When feeling becomes an I-experience, it is craving which results in suffering. And suffering is all that is self. When contact and feeling therefore are a mere process they cannot proceed further, if they are not moved on by self. As the philosophy of Descartes is based on the “I” so Buddhism is based on “non-I” (*anatta*)

A process can only be known in acting, and action is known from reaction, Reaction as well as action are impermanent and thus in the whole process there is no place for an entity, for an I.

There is no need to investigate Descartes’ God-idea because that too is based on his I-concept. “To deny God’s existence would be self-contradictory”, he said; and with this we can fully agree. Denying the self, we must also deny God; where there are only relations, there is no place for the Absolute.

Spinoza

Spinoza (1632–1677) put his philosophy in a geometrical form. He must have realized the futility of Descartes' I-affirmation, and thus he makes his doubt penetrate deeper still, and questions: "Why should there be anything at all?" The answer he gives is certain surprising: "Because it is inconceivable that there should be nothing", which can only mean that things are only because they are conceived, or to put it in Cartesian language: "I am because I think". Still more surprising is his further conclusion, that, if there is anything there must be everything, and this infinite, everlasting universe is God. This marks him definitely as a Materialist and Pantheist. The Buddhist answer supplied to his question: "Why should there be anything at all?" would be: Nothing *is*, but all becomes, not in striving for a goal, but in grasping to be, which is ever-delusive.

The system of his philosophy and through that the order of the universe are developed from eight definitions and seven axioms, some of which we can fully endorse though perhaps not in the meaning intended by him. The first definition: "By a thing which is its own cause I understand a thing the essence of which involves existence". Exactly the opposite is true, for that which is its own cause cannot be essentially existent, but must be in a state of development, must be essentially becoming, a process, as a flame can only be its own cause of keeping aflame by the process of burning. If there could be a being (say God) whose essence would be existence (and that is the scholastic description

of God) then that being could not be its own cause but would be a contradiction in itself. Only where there is a process of becoming, this becoming can become the cause of further becoming.

The fourth definition, however, can be fully accepted: “By attribute I understand that which the mind perceives as constituting the very essence of substance”. Indeed, the phenomena are the essence of all, and there is no need for any substance besides. But this is not the meaning intended by Spinoza, for he defines substance as that which exists in itself, which is sufficiently contradicted above.

Spinoza’s third axiom deserves a little attention: “From a given determinate cause the effect necessarily follows; and, *vice versa*, if no determinate cause be given, no effect can follow”. We can agree with the latter section: without sufficient cause no effect. But the first part that every cause must necessarily produce its effect is contradicted by the Buddha’s teaching of “*kamma*”. If all action must produce its effect, an escape from this Samsāra would be impossible, but exactly because the effects of action can be impeded by stronger action and thus become “*ahosi*”, ineffective, an escape from Samsāra is possible. Spinoza’s axiom is contradicted by nature itself, where many seeds are produced, but very few grow up again.

Having scattered the basis of investigation, the “I” of Descartes and Spinoza, no basis for certitude seems to be left and Philosophy indeed was threatened with Absolute Scepticism, the natural consequence of Materialism.

Hobbes

While Descartes in France and Spinoza in Holland followed up the lines indicated by Bacon, it was especially Thomas Hobbes who gave the great push to Materialism in England, readily followed up by Locke and Hume. Hobbes (1588–1679) made the discovery that sensations do not correspond with external qualities, that colour and shape are not qualities of the object, that sound and noise do not belong to the bell or to the air, but are only inferences from motion. All beings then are modes of motions. So far all right; but then this movement is said to be of masses or particles and of minds. And here we disagree: motion, but nothing that moves; even quantity is a quality, not a quality resting on a substance, but a mode of motion, *i.e.* a process in itself. By calling consciousness a motion in certain parts of an organic body, thought a motion in the head, the feeling of pleasure a motion of the heart, is confusing the action and its instrument. Action may be dependent on the instrument, but that does not make the action materialize.

Locke

Hobbes paved thus the way to the Sensationalism of John Locke (1632–1704). Locke, leaving aside the mechanical world-conception, was none the less a thorough Empiricist: “All our knowledge originates in experience” is the chief motto of his philosophy, not merely assumed, but supported with many arguments and proofs.

Innate ideas he rejects on the ground that moral principles are not equally admitted by all, but only as a result of teaching. Yet according to him it is “a certain and evident truth that there is an eternal, most powerful and most knowing being, which whether anyone will please to call God it matters not”. For him morality is constituted by the will of God, and not following from the nature of things. But his own assumption that effects must resemble their causes condemns his God-theory, for then the cause of material effects must be material, the cause of imperfect things must be imperfection, the cause of myself cannot have been another non-self. The Buddhist answer to this problem is not a rigid law of causality, but the law of Dependent Origination, of conditional arising: dependent on feeling arises craving. This is not causation, because not all feeling results in craving; it is conditionality, because without feeling no craving can arise. A seed is not the cause of the plant, and yet the plant could not have become without the seed.

The puzzling problem of both Hobbes and Locke, *viz.* that “awareness exists” (a distinct improvement of Descartes’: “*I am*

aware”) is solved with the Buddha’s: “awareness arises”: “*iti vinnanam, iti vinnanassa samudayo, iti vinnanassa atthagamo*¹¹”. “This is consciousness, the arising of consciousness, the disappearance of consciousness”. In other words: awareness exists not; it becomes, as a process; it ceases, as a process. The dogmatic prepossessions of Locke, his theism and acceptance of Christianity on the evidence of prophecy and miracles show no advance on mediaeval logic.

¹¹Satipaṭṭhana Sutta.

Hume

David Hume (1711–1776) is a critic of Berkeley. Yet we shall speak of him first because he stands in his philosophy nearer to Locke.

He is considered by many as the greatest of all British Philosophers. He is keenest in his polemic against the doctrine of personal identity, of the unity of consciousness and the simplicity and immateriality of the soul. “I never can catch *myself* at any time without a perception, and never can observe anything but the perception. When my perceptions are removed for any time, as by sound sleep, so long am I insensible of *myself*, and may truly be said not to exist.”

There is another point which deserves Hume the sympathy of Buddhists, namely his theory of causation.

When speaking of Locke we remarked already that Buddhism does not teach causality, but conditionality. Hume points out that all our experience of causation is simply that of a constant succession. We do not perceive that phenomena *necessarily* succeed one another. Hume maintains that only the succession of impressions is perceptible, never their alleged necessity. This is true to a certain degree. The cause contains the seed of the effect. The seed does not grow up necessarily, but if it grows up, it is more than a mere succession, for the very reason that it was already present in the cause. All this is expressed in the Pāli word for Dependent Origination: *Patīccasamuppāda*. The arising (*uppada*) of an effect is dependent on conditions (*paticca*) but simultaneously (*sam*). “The sprout”, says Dr. Paul Dahlke,

“is not the pure succession of the seed; the leaf is not the pure succession of the sprout, and so on; but each phase here is the simultaneousness succession of the other. The seed is not other than the sprout, it is also not the same, but it becomes the sprout; the latter is its simultaneousness-succession¹²”.

According to the permanent law of impermanence, even a system of thought is subject to development. Now this development can take different directions. Thus while Locke’s Sensationalism prepared on the one hand the road for Hume’s materialism, on the other hand a desire for compromising it with the idea of God developed in the Idealism of Berkeley.

¹²Buddhism & The Mental Life of Mankind, p. 166.

Berkeley

Though we have classed Plato and Descartes as Idealists, this does not mean that Berkeley's Philosophy is a mere repetition of theirs. Originally Idealism began with the analysis of knowledge, and accepted without further proof or even investigation the existence of the subject as an entity: consciousness meant self-consciousness.

Materialism then got the upper hand owing to the growth of science. When after a very long period Idealism shows signs of life again, it is influenced and modulated by Materialism: Idealism comes to mean a spiritual view, not of "self", but of the universe.

George Berkeley (1685–1753) was a Bishop for the last twenty years of his life, yet all his works but one were written before that time.

He united in his mind childlike piety and acute analysis. Holbach, when speaking of Berkeley, pointed out that the irrefutability of his system only extends so far as it denies the existence of a physical world different from our ideas. But the conclusion that there is a spiritual, incorporeal, and active substance which is the cause of our ideas, is as full of flat and palpable absurdities as any metaphysical system whatever. To regard the whole world as an idea is not the same as the Buddha's teaching that all things are mind-made. For, as it is explained in the Commentary to the Dhammapada, not matter (*rūpa*) is mind-made, but the feelings or sensations (*vedanā*) resulting from physical contact, the perceptions and differentiations (*saññā, sankhāra*) resulting

from mental contact are mind-made. Thus mind-made is not the world, but our opinion about the world. The phenomenal world is not merely a product of our conception, neither is our mind an adequate picture of actual things, but knowledge is the result of contact of external influences and internal tendencies. This contact is actual, *i.e.* neither objective nor subjective; it is actual like "*kamma*".

It is certainly true that all facts of experience can be described and explained without the assumption of a substratum or a nature by itself; but this does not mean that matter does not exist. It may be that sensations are not copies of objects existing wholly outside; but this does not reduce the object to a mere idea. Things do certainly not exist as mind perceives them, for the same objects are differently perceived by different minds; but one cannot conclude from that, that things have no existence independent of minds. Berkeley held that primary qualities as well as the secondary qualities are attributable to the perceiving subject. In this, of course, he differs greatly from Buddhism, where the primary qualities, extension, cohesion, calorificity, vibration, are not qualities existing only in the mind, not even, as Locke maintains, modifications of matter, but are matter itself: there is no matter apart from those primary elements. That those primary qualities are not mental can be proved scientifically even, because they can be communicated also to inorganic bodies.

If a kettle of cold water is left on the fire, and on returning after a sufficient interval of time is found boiling, then it is clear that the energy set free by the combustion in the fire has been turned into energy which made the water boil. The presence or absence of a thinking mind during the process of boiling does not affect the energy. But if fire, water, kettle are only phenomena existing in the mind, then also the boiling takes place only in the mind. Yet material processes go on according to their nature and not according to the nature of consciousness or mind. As a matter of fact, most accidents occur through absent-mindedness.

The element of extension (*pathavi*) can be measured not only

mentally but also instrumentally as pressure; cohesion (*āpo*) as chemical affinity; caloricity (*tejo*) as change in temperature; vibration (*vaṃyo*) as transformation of motion. These reactions can be checked automatically, which, however, is not the case with secondary qualities, the derivatives of the primary elements, like colour (*vaṇṇa*), odour (*gandha*), taste (*rasa*) and nutritive essence (*oja*). These are, certainly, subjective operations, yet material in so far as they are conditioned by the primary elements. They are derived from matter and hence material; they are derived by mind and hence mental. Though extension is said to be a primary elementary quality which is independent from mind, this cannot be said of large or small size, of heat or cold, for these are mere degrees dependent on mental appreciation, therefore constructive ideas.

When Berkeley maintained that there is nothing but mind and its content, he was, of course, placed before the problem: where do those objects of consciousness come from and where do they go to after we have ceased to perceive them? All things, he says, subsist in the consciousness of God; and then he turns round the argument and says, that by their subsistence the existence of God is proved. A wonderful speculation indeed and a clear example how faith can twist even reason in a vicious circle.

Kant

Immanuel Kant (1724–1804) followed Berkeley in his limitation of knowledge to knowledge of phenomena which are only our ideas. But with that he found he had not explained the fact of cognition. Up to now explanation had been sought for either objectively in experience, which led to Materialism, or subjectively in reason, which led to Idealism. The true standpoint was approached, when Kant stated that, if cognition is to be explained at all, it must be through conditions which precede cognition, and cannot therefore be detected either in experience or in reason.

Instead of following up the line of thought indicated by himself, namely cognition arising in dependence on conditions, which might have led him to “*sankharapaccaya vinnanam*”: “dependent on formations arises consciousness”—he regarded “pure reason” as the faculty of knowledge without experience. Thus he had to accept innate ideas which he supposed to be “*a priori*” in the sense. Thus knowledge becomes an entity which exists already before it acts, before it knows. These “*a priori*” forms of space and time colour all our impressions, for space is the form of phenomena and time the form of our inner attitude. The sense-impression formed in time and space is further classified in forms of thoughts, also innate, the twelve categories; three for quantity, *viz.* unity, plurality, and totality; three for quality, *viz.* reality or affirmation, negation, and limitation; three for relation, *viz.* substance and phenomenon, cause and effect, action and reception; three

for modality, *viz.* possibility and impossibility, existence and non-existence, necessity and contingency.

Thus far the mind is receptive only and Kant admits as only proof for the existence of these categories the fact that without these pure concepts it would be impossible to know objects in general. Herewith he has condemned his own system. For indeed, objects cannot be known in general, but only in particular. All the twelve categories in which the mind is supposed to pigeon-hole its sensations and impressions are not innate at all, but can by psychoanalysis be seen to develop in the young mind from experience. The great question is then: is intuition possible without experience? The answer must be a categorical No.

Kant, however, maintains that some mathematical principles are ascertained by intuition. For even if one has learned by experience that 5 beans added to 7 beans produces a sum-total of 12, it requires intuition or a synthetic judgement to realize that 7 of any kind added to 5 will produce 12. Thus he maintains that the numerical relations are independent of the nature of the things numbered. That they are not independent is simply shown from the impossibility to add *e.g.* 5 beans to 7 miles. The necessity that $5+7$ should produce 12 is a mere psychological necessity, entirely due to association of ideas.

Sometimes one may attribute necessity to a proposition which was not even true, or one may sometimes declare a thing to be inconceivable which before was held to be true.

How does Buddhism solve this problem? By dismissing both proposer and adversary. The Idealist says $1 + 1 = 2$ as a synthetic judgement or intuition "*a priori*" because the numbers are not dependent on objects. The Materialist says $1 + 1 = 2$ as a judgement from experience "*a posteriori*". A Buddhist says $1 + 1 = 2$ in actuality, for whenever the result proves 2, it is a sign that there has been no addition at all in actuality. If one heap of sand is actually added to another heap of sand, the sum-total will be one heap of sand. This is not merely a childish trick, but it shows at one glance the root difference between Buddhism and

idealistic systems of philosophy: the actuality of Buddhism as opposed to the vain speculation of Idealism.

When refusing to take experience as the source of knowledge, Kant had to invent innate ideas, but this only shifts the problem to a further background; for still the question remains: where do those innate ideas come from? Idealism finally must lead to belief in God. Though Kant was frank enough to admit that the existence of God could not be proved, yet he postulated him as a categorical necessity: Without God, he maintains, the moral law would find no sanction; thus God must exist to make morality possible. It is the same poor argument as the one offered in favour of a substance or noumenon: "*das Ding an sich*" cannot be known, he admits, and yet at the same time he accepts its existence. He proves that the mind from the very nature of its constitution cannot know things *per se*, for the only means of communication with objects are our senses, and they perceive only the phenomena. Have we then any other faculty capable of knowing things *per se*? The answer is decisive: We have *no* such faculty. It is the limitation of the mind, said Kant, which prevents us to see the thing in itself, stripped from all appearances. Thus Kant made the problem where there was none, and he could not solve it.

Analytical judgements being based on experience are actual: "fire burns" is a statement which can only be proved by experiment, and not by logic and hence in a person who sees fire for the first time the sight of fire does not contain the idea of burning. No synthetical judgement will ever associate the two ideas. Synthesis is induction, and this does not give a safe foundation for further understanding. But deduction or analysis offers the basis of experience, though nothing beyond. For actuality, however, no beyond is required; and hence no speculation on the "beyond" will solve the problem of actuality which we are facing here.

In actuality matter and form cannot be separated. There is no "*nāma*" as a reality to be separated from "*rūpa*", as a ready-made *a priori* form in which a formless matter can be cast. Body and all

its material actions are in-formed mind, enfolded consciousness, while the mind is not inhabiting the body, but is the body become conscious. Thus mind and body are no opposites, but merely one process of grasping, considered from different viewpoints, like the burning and the shape of a flame. There is not a flame first which then must take a shape previously designed, before it can begin to burn. Similarly there are no *a priori* concepts cast into different categories before the arising of knowledge.

Kant sincerely repudiated Idealism as well as Materialism, but his Critique was not able to extricate him from the meshes of Idealism in which his subjective *a-priorism* held him tight.

Fichte

Johann Gottlieb Fichte (1762–1814) in logical conclusion from the principles of Kant, his master, came much nearer to actuality when he reduced the ego to an activity and all knowledge to an act. Thus intelligence becomes an action, not something that is active. But this action would not even know itself, unless it were opposed in its action and this is how the ideas of self and non-self, of subject and object occur.

In these few statements one can see at once the lack of logic which can only be explained by the fact that the end to be achieved is presupposed, and, with a view on that, the argument is made to force its way through.

Though knowledge is admitted only as an act, a seemingly unsurpassable obstacle was offered by the act of self-knowledge which seems to include some persistence of a previous self. For, if that self did not persist, how would reflective thought be possible, in which mind seems to bend itself back upon itself as an image reflected in a mirror? This difficulty is not overcome by a mere distinction between self and non-self, for the problem is how can “self” know the “self”.

If “self” is mere activity, as Fichte says, or mere “*kamma*”, as we Buddhists would say, and each action an effect of previous action, then each action will contain in its activity all the previous actions from where it sprang, because it is an expression thereof.

Reflection thus is not a looking back in time, but a mere introspection, an understanding of the act of understanding. It is

clear that for this process no subject is required to look upon itself as an object. If there were a subject like a permanent substance, or soul, or “self”, then verily this introspection would be a problem, and even an impossibility for in reflecting, in bending back upon itself, it would merely show that a change had taken place, that the “self” of now is not the same as the “self” of then. But when understanding is an action and nothing but action, *i.e.* a process, it will understand this process while proceeding, and thus explain itself to itself, not by looking back in time as on an entity, where there is neither time nor entity, but in rolling on, in making itself, also will unmake itself, unroll itself; in understanding everything as a process, understanding cannot exclude itself therefrom and thus in acting understands itself as action.

It is a self-contained process, and only in this sense we can speak, even in Buddhism, of a “self”; but a proceeding self, which constantly makes and unmakes itself, a process of action, *i.e.* *kamma*.

But, now the fact that this I-activity acts, is this not a proof of a non-I existence also? Thus it is in the opinion of Fichte. If this I-process acts, strives to obtain, this is in itself a sign that there is some “non-I” which the “I” strives for. In the impossibility to bring everything into the ego-centre, the “I” feels its limitations and discovers a “non-self”. Thus Fichte.

The fact of “I”-activity is not a proof of the existence of a “non-self”, but only a proof of ignorance. Indeed, according to the Law of Dependent Origination (*paticca-samuppāda*), the formations of *kamma*-activities arise dependent on ignorance: “*avijjā paccaya saṅkhāra*”. For it is sheer ignorance which considers action as a self. It is ignorance which sees permanence where there is only continuity of impermanence—which sees an entity where only processes roll on. All *kamma*-activities, whether good or bad, originate in ignorance, and only when this misconception, distinguishing between self and non-self, has made place for true insight that there is mere action, then this action will no longer be a self-affirmation and thus not act with volition (*cetana*) for

self-preservation or self-propagation, but action without reaction, no more “*kamma*”, no more “*vipāka*”, the attainment of the goal where all further striving becomes impossible.

If this Fichte’s antithesis of self and non-self is shown as a mere proof of *avijjā*, ignorance, there is no further need to speak of his synthesis of these imagined factors of self and non-self.

Schelling

Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph Schelling (1775–1854) with whom we reach the thinkers who lived during the last 100 years, rejects indeed Fichte's antithesis and tries to reduce both self and non-self to one identity. Thus is repeated what we have seen already several times: successive thinkers sense the difficulty, and the mistake of their teachers is corrected, which ought to bring them nearer and nearer to the truth. But while correcting and improving one point, they make a new blunder elsewhere.

Schelling saw rightly that the antithesis of Fichte's self and non-self is fictitious. But his conclusion is rather surprising. For, rejecting self and non-self, individually and separately, he accepts them as a unity and identity, as a force containing within itself the principle of contradiction. It is this opposition which constitutes life. But then why should that unity of self and non-self be unchangeable? If it is unchangeable how can it contain that principle of contradiction? It is not in the absolute that contradiction can be found, but only in the relative, for contradiction requires two terms which stand in opposite relation to one another. Here Buddhism again gives the only solution possible: if self and non-self are rejected individually and separately, they should equally be rejected as a unity; if still the contradiction between self and non-self obtains this can only be due to misunderstanding, *avijjā*.

Hegel

Georg Hegel (1770–1831), a fellow-student with Schelling, may easily be said to be the most thorough-going Idealist up to now. He admitted the reality of matter, but at the same time postulated that reality to be spiritual.

For, if we start with a proposition: “nothing exists”, then, if that proposition is true, it would exist as such and thus contradict itself by disproving that *nothing* exists. Thus he concludes existence is proved by the impossibility to disprove it.

Like all Idealists before him, Hegel falls over the same problem by substituting “being” for “becoming”. If on the other hand a philosophic system is built up like Buddhism on “*bhava*”, “becoming”, on “*kamma*” action, in other words on process and actuality, then it will be seen at once that the fallacy of a proposition like “nothing exists” is only due to the fact that “nothing” is taken as the subject, as an entity of existence. As soon as there is nothing, it is argued, absolutely nothing, even the idea of nothing cannot persist; If it persists, even if only in imagination, it is no longer nothing. But does that make it a persisting something? The mistake usually made by Idealists lies in the entanglement of the logical and the ontological order. Even if we cannot admit that “nothing”, as an entity, or rather as a non-entity, exists, we can neither admit its logical opponent that anything at all exists, *as an entity*. But if everything is considered as a becoming and passing away of mere processes, then questions about the existence or non-existence of nothing are reduced “*ad absurdum*”. What is

real? Processes are real, not as entities but as mere processes, as a flame is real, not as an isolated entity which can be analysed and composed, but as a process of combustion. Those very processes can only proceed, dependent on other processes-in-decay, as a plant arises dependent on and at the cost of the seed from which it developed. If one, like Hegel, tries to trace movement back to being in its simplest form (and theists will call that God), one must land necessarily in a contradiction; for, if something proceeds from a being, then this being itself has proceeded in so far as it is involved in the process if it is involved in the process it is not a "being", not an entity which persists unchanged (as God is supposed to do), but a process in itself; if on the other hand it is not involved in the process, nothing has proceeded from it.

Hegel's absolute Idealism is undoubtedly a triumph of speculation, but that very triumph is its downfall, because of its lack of actuality.

Schopenhauer

Another philosopher who began to take Kant's Idealism as a starting point and who is many times quoted for his affinity of thought with Buddhism, is Arthur Schopenhauer (1788–1860). Not reason, he said, but will is the most important part of ourselves. Will is the ultimate reality in the universe. It is the struggle for satisfaction, desire unsatisfied, which urges us blindly forward.

It is easy to see here the influence of the Vedanta, the study of which he took up at the suggestion of an Orientalist at the age of 25.

Will then is the source of all our activities and of all our misery as well. Here we see indeed the pessimistic outlook, of which Buddhism is so many times accused, and also the cause thereof, namely will, that in volition, craving. Man is nought except will, his nature consists in the striving of his will, on and on forever. Suffering is inevitable just because of the will-to-live, which is a vain pursuit of happiness. Since the individual will—self-assertion—is the root of evil, the only salvation is by conquering the will-to-live.

Now at this most important point Schopenhauer turns. He does not show how this will-to-live can be conquered. Certainly not by striving which is but new willing. On the contrary, will is said to be the eternal, indestructible part of man. Hence his system is thoroughly pessimistic, not because it takes suffering through craving as its foundation, for that is taught by the Buddha also; but because it cannot lead out of that suffering. When will is

seen as a persistent entity, an escape from suffering is impossible; for willing involves suffering and hence suffering becomes co-eternal with willing. In the Buddha's doctrine too we find willing indicated as the source of sorrow, but here will is not existent as an entity. Will becomes, arises only under certain conditions, and when therefore those conditions are controlled, when contact of the senses and the following sensations are understood merely as such, no likes or dislikes, no will or craving, can arise and the chain of dependent origination is broken. Suffering can come to a stop not by willing, but by non willing; and non-willing can only be achieved by understanding, right understanding (*sammā-diṭṭhi*) of the true nature of things.

Von Hartmann

A modification of Schopenhauer's voluntarism and pessimism is offered by Edward von Hartmann (1842–1906) who adds idea to will and conceives this combined principle as the ground of reality; for will in itself is unconscious. In Buddhist parlance we would say: What is unconscious is *not*, from a psychological view-point; and will is dependent in its arising not on "idea", pure and simple, but on misconception. Not in the unconscious lies the hope of a possible redemption, as von Hartmann would have it, but in the full awareness of the real nature of things as transient, unsatisfactory and void of a self-entity.

Karl Marx

Where the “right wing” successors of Hegel developed a dialectic idealism by supplementing the antithesis of self and non-self with the synthesis thereof in a mutual dependence: the absolute Spirit uniting the Subjective and the Objective—the “left wing” turned the dialectic method in the direction of materialism, of which Karl Marx (1818–1883) has become the best known exponent, owing to its practical application in Socialism and Communism. Marxism gave an economic interpretation to history and the dialectic was expressed in terms of class conflicts, where private (not personal) property, though originally right and rational, is to be overcome and superseded in new process of economic development. Marx’ theory, that the development of society is effected by a material process in which one form of society gives birth to its opposite, contains much truth indeed.

As a matter of fact the antithesis, the conflict, is visible enough even in this lecture. To show the dialectic was the very object of its composition.

The *pendulum of thought* has been swinging throughout the ages from extreme right or Idealism to extreme left or Materialism, and both on their up or downward way have each time come very near, and also passed each time the well balanced centre of Buddhism. The intrinsic impulse, inherent in each, has originated in and developed from its very opposite. It is the lack of historical apprehension which interrupts the thread of progress as a whole. The two extremes can only be explained and understood when

seen as the striving of a pendulum to attain the state of equilibrium. But if by that striving too much of energy is developed, it will merely result in reaction which passes the mark. Whether we have dialectical materialism like Marxism or dialectical idealism like Fichte's and Hegel's, we only have the antithesis of the two extremes.

If the development of society is nothing but a process in which one form of society gives birth to its opposite, then this in turn will have to make place for the previous one in some newer form.

In India of old the Brahmins, the priest caste, ruled the country with their spiritual authority, religious rites and priest-craft, till they had to yield at least in matters non spiritual to the Ksatriyas, the warrior caste. In wars with foreign nations they were subjected, and now they are ruled by the Vaisyas, by a nation of shopkeepers. And it will not take another 25 years before the Sudra caste will overthrow all domination and establish the latest development of Communism.

And will that have solved the problem? If Communism really is what its name indicates, it ought to be the synthesis after the antithesis. If Egoism, however, remains the moral principle, and interest, self interest, the only economy which provides for the good of others, the pendulum has clearly not found its balanced centre yet and is bound by its own weight to swing over again to the extreme right. The French Revolution was necessitated by the extravagant supremacy of the privileged classes, the nobility and the clergy; it resulted in the monarchy being overthrown. But it took only a couple of years to see a son of the revolution reinstitute the monarchy in a form more despotic than ever before: Napoleon Bonaparte.

Communism claims to substitute common interest for self-interest; it is to give the abstract instead of the concrete. After all, even the common interest must always remain the interest of individuals. To see the State as absolute, as a whole in which individuals are means to the end—to subordinate private interests to the good of the whole, is to overlook the fact, as Rousseau

did, that the national or universal will is only the sum-total of individual wills. By abolishing the individual will the national will is also killed, as we see it happening under Nazi or Fascist regimes.

The golden means as always lies between the two extremes. The rule of the individual is nothing but tyranny, dictatorship, which may be good sometimes to get work done efficiently in a short time; but it is unnatural that the overwhelming majority should be ruled by the will of one man. The phenomenon can only be explained by the inborn reluctance of man to get into trouble. Many will rather submit, though half-heartedly, than risk anything as precious as life or liberty. The opposite extreme is if the individual gets lost in the state, and is reduced to a part in a machine, where only the productiveness of the machine as a whole is the ultimate end in view. Though no personal, individual tyrant or dictator is required, the whole machinery as such has taken over that work.

The Perfect state should be based on the principles which obtain in the family. There the primary interest is for the individual, but each individual has to share the burden of the whole. In the family all is for all according to everyone's needs, but yet everyone remains an individual with rights as well as duties. Those rights, however, need never be stressed because there is the real family-spirit, which is entirely dependent on education.

If a child is made to understand its share in the common responsibility, if it is made to fully realize that the prosperity of all is to its own interest, and, above all, if it is given the opportunity to take the initiative, and to feel its own importance, it must be an abnormally ill-developed child which will not respond properly to those moral and intellectual stimuli.

All this applied to society means nothing else but responsible self-government, of the people, by the people, for the people. And what else is this but the doctrine of self-responsibility, the doctrine of Kamma? If Communism does all this, excellent! But if Communism is the dictatorship of one class, then there is no

essential difference, but only one of degree, from National Socialism.

If State means the “instrument by means of which the ruling class preserves its privileges¹³”, it has no right to exist.

It is by mutual consent that a family is formed, and if children are born they should have the right of self-determination, when they grown up. Here lies the real difficulty, for, if the ruling class does not want to give others the right of self-determination, they simply see to it that those others do not grow up mentally. State-controlled education mostly sees to it that ideas are developed only in a certain direction, in which the spirit of inquiry is killed, thus turning out ideal patriots, fit for any government job, thus ruling the nation by the subjected nation itself. This system of education is prevailing not only in imperialistic countries who call themselves democratic, but also in Fascist and Soviet countries. Education has come to mean the creation of a fixed type of conscience which can never lead to real self-responsibility. To give proper education involves an enormous risk for the state, for the younger generation, after having received that education, might not sympathize with the existing rule.

Thus education must never be one-sided, which is only another word for narrow-minded. As children cannot always be fed, but must learn to eat, so students' education is not merely teaching them, but making them to think. An over-anxious mother will always have weak children, because her great care has warded off all obstacles which might have built up a strong resistance in other environments. It is by falling that a child learns to walk.

Freedom of thought should be encouraged even in view of some probable blunders.

All this seems so quite logical and natural, that one is inclined to ask in surprise: “But why is it not done then?” And there is only one answer to it: Self-interest.

Now again we can return to Buddhism to find a solution there

¹³Aldous Huxley.

in the teaching of Non-self: *anatta*. Whether we seek self in self as Idealism, or self in others as Materialism, it always remains self-seeking. *Anatta* combined with *Kamma* is the only solution of all the problems of the world. It sounds contradictory: self-responsibility without self. But just because there is no self, the deed alone is responsible for the effect. The deed (not the doer) being reborn in the effect bears the whole burden of its action. No blame, no regret, no repentance, no resentment, no revenge, but only growth, *i.e.* education and self-responsibility.

This is the missing link in all philosophic systems from the old Greek down to our latest Bergson, or rather it is this ballast of self which either idealized or materialized constantly disturbs the balance. Turn out this self, and thought will be well-balanced, morality will be natural, and the individual will not longer be tossed to and fro, but find equilibrium in peace of mind and environment.

Comte

Marxism was not the only reactionary outgrowth from Hegel's Absolutism. Contemporary Auguste Comte (1798–1857) favoured also a more social view of life founded on recognition of social laws. The theological stage of science, when events were explained by the working of gods and spirits, had to make room for the metaphysical stage, where personal deities are replaced by forces; finally the positive stage is interested in the conditions under which these forces occur. Materialism is rejected by him, because organic phenomena cannot be explained on a mechanical and chemical basis; and Buddhism is in full agreement. Idealism is also rejected, like in Buddhism, because the existence of a metaphysical entity cannot be known and assumed. Thus Comte falls back on human life as mental with feelings, affections, passions, hence as social. In Buddhist terminology we express this as the knowledge of life and mind not as an entity, but as a process.

Declaring that the object of his philosophy was to reform the whole system of education, Comte deserves all our attention, especially when he warns us that until the Doctrine is completely established, every attempt to change the existing form of government should be carefully avoided. Well, in Buddhism we have the Doctrine completely established, and there is no need to postpone a change in our education, *i.e.* in the formation of character according to Buddhist tenets. For what is the duty of any religion is fulfilled in Buddhism: the intellect is satisfied and the feelings are regulated. Comte's Religion of Humanity was called

by T.H. Huxley “Catholicism without Christianity”—and finally his Positivism changed into romanticism and ritualism, whereby the intellect is regulated and the feelings satisfied.

Stuart Mill

With John Stuart Mill's Empiricism (1806–1873) even the last trace of Idealism seems to have disappeared again for the time being.

No principle prior to experience need be assumed. Or in terms of the *paticca-samuppāda*, every process proceeds in dependence on coexisting conditions. Sensation is dependent in its arising on contact; contact does not exist prior to, but simultaneously arises (*sam-uppada*) and with the ceasing of contact also the sensation ceases.

Yet, though only the series of successive experiences can be known the mind is accepted by Stuart Mill as a permanent possibility of those modifications. Though experience is only the sum of individual impressions, as only individual cases can be observed, yet he maintained that laws of association imply a bond among the parts of the associated series, which leads to the conviction that they are states of an identical ego. According to Buddhism we can explain this fact more rationally thus: impressions can only be observed as individual cases; if association is seen, this can, therefore, not be in the series, but in the mind which misconceives itself as an identical ego to which those individual cases occur as different states in the same person. The validity of induction, *i.e.* argument from particulars to general truths is thus still unproved, as it is based on assumption. His Ethics are based on utilitarianism: good is only what is useful or agreeable, or tends to produce happiness. This has much in common with the Bud-

distinction between “*kusala*” and “*akusala*”, an action being skilful (*kusala kamma*) if it produces a desirable effect (*kusala vipāka*), while sin or immorality is merely unskilfulness, because such an action produces an undesirable effect (*akusala vipāka*) whereby the sanction of the law does not rest in an external judge, but in the productiveness of each action. The difference between the two ethical systems will be understood clearly if it is considered that the good or happiness according to Stuart is the desired end, while according to Buddhism even happiness has to be transcended because it is transient and conditioned; “good” is a means of purification, but not the end in itself. Both “*kusala*” and “*akusala kamma*” are left behind in an Arahant who does not strive any more, because he has attained.

The Philosophy of Evolution, culminating in Hegel’s historical evolution of philosophy, found application also in other fields. The best known are Laplace with his nebular theory and Darwin with his evolution theory of species. As neither, however, endeavoured to show the ultimate origin of the evolution other than in agreement with Christian Theology, they may be great in their respective branches of science, but they cannot be classed as philosophers.

Spencer

Herbert Spencer (1820–1903) too was under the influence of his time when he formulated his system of synthetic philosophy. He has been deservedly attacked for his idea of the Unknowable. He assumes a First Cause as inevitable, though nothing could be known about it. Yet this Unknowable forms the basis of all our knowledge. And his only proof was the contradiction of calling this universe the manifestation of an unknowable Power.

Religion is nothing if not revelation; for which reason it is many times said that Buddhism is no religion. An unknowable God is no God at all, and if he would be known from his manifestations, the Absolute One would have become relative and thus cease to be God.

As, according to Spencer, matter, motion and mind are symbols of the unknowable, their nature is equally inscrutable. Instead of bringing about a unity of composition in his synthetic philosophy, the system, if worthy of that name, leads to pure agnosticism, which term, however, is usually reserved for T.H. Huxley (1825–1895).

But the intellectual interest once being focussed on evolution, philosophic thought still turns round that centre up to this very date.

Haeckel

Ernst Haeckel (1834–1919), a professor of zoology, developed a system of nature-philosophy in which universal evolution seemed to have solved all the great riddles of existence. The crucial point of the origin of evolution is overcome by spontaneous generation so that life is a physico-chemical energy. In so far as Nature takes the place of God, the problem is not really solved, but only shifted to another plane. Spontaneous generation, it is said, has scientifically been proved an impossibility by Louis Pasteur, who sterilized all kinds of foodstuff by heating up to 76°. Yet bacilli are found to keep alive even in steam of 30lb. per square inch and at 120° C. They have been found to retain their vitality after six months in liquid air at -190°C. In the ultimate sense Buddhism does not accept spontaneous generation, but only conditioned; and that conditionality should be taken in the widest sense for the very reason that every thing is considered as a process. Besides external influences which constantly tend to modify a process, it is especially the process itself which contains in its action the sufficient cause to further proceed; a process is by nature self-generating, *i.e.* proceeding.

Ostwald

Together with Haeckel we meet a German professor of physical chemistry, Wilhelm Ostwald (born in 1853), revolting against metaphysical systematisation giving an energetic turn to materialism. But in so far as energy is considered as the universal substance, their Energism is mere Idealism. And with this the *pendulum of thought* is swinging back once more, passing the equilibrium for which all are searching.

It may be useful as a working hypothesis for everyday purposes in physical reactions to assume the constancy of energy; but in the philosophical sense, *i.e.* the ultimate sense, this is a plain contradiction. Energy cannot be constant, for it would cease to be energy. Potential energy has just as much value in actuality as a bottled wave. Being set free it might act again, but is that a proof that the “power to act” was in the latent state? The energy is just as much produced by the conditions which set the energy free. To speak of the constancy of energy, one would, moreover, require a standpoint outside the process from which the proceeding could be measured. But as everything is in the process, such a standpoint cannot be obtained.

Lotze

Hermann Lotze (1817–1881) is again in line with Kant's Idealism, and becomes even more dogmatic and hence theologic, even if he does not call the all-comprehensive Being "God", but symbolizes him in the letter M, where multiplicity is unified.

Nietzsche

Friedrich Nietzsche (1844–1900) might be mentioned not only for his eccentricity, but especially for the actualization of his thought in our present day dictators. Good and evil are conventional and the “superman” stands above them. There is no doubt about Schopenhauer’s influence on Nietzsche, while Schopenhauer admits his admiration and agreement with Oriental philosophic thought. And thus it is not difficult to recognize in Nietzsche’s superman the “*maha purisa*” who in perfect equanimity rises above likes and dislikes, till as a perfected and enlightened Buddha he stands above “*kusala*” and “*akusala*”. But what a transvaluation of values even to compare the passionless saint with the brutal strength and the militaristic assertions of a dictatorial superman.

Taine and Renouvier

Meanwhile also in France thoughts turned gradually away from materialism, which in the Revolution had brought the nation into too close a contact with realism. Though Comte's Positivism rejected both Materialism and Idealism, we have seen already how he stranded finally in romanticism. Hypolythe Taine (1828–1893) as professor of arts and aesthetics, developed more in a metaphysical line, while Charles Renouvier (1815–1903) regarded himself still more as a direct successor of Kant. We can fully agree with him when he says that the law of relation is the most general, the foundation of knowledge; but from this it does not follow that all knowledge involves an affirmation of will. It is rather the imperfect knowledge or delusion which leads to affirmation of will; while true knowledge or insight into the true nature of things will lead to non-willing.

Bergson

Now that we have thus passed only very superficially through the many ages of human thought, one might easily be overwhelmed at the variety of solutions offered in turn for the one problem of life. One might even think that, having almost touched the truth as expounded in Buddhism so often, surely it has been reserved to our present age to find the true reconciliation between observed facts and logic thinking. It does not seem, however, as if the possibilities of speculation were exhausted. As an example we shall round up with seeing some ideas of Henri Bergson (born in 1859) which make us sometimes feel as if the world has been only on the doorstep of philosophic thought up to now. His system is called Intuitionism and he claims to adopt a midway position between idealism and realism. As this is the very place we claim for the Buddha's Doctrine we cannot round up our general survey without paying some attention to his ideas. As Buddhism is beyond sophistry (*atakkavacara*), Bergson also emphatically refuses to attach importance to intellectual reasoning.

Intellect is useful for practical purposes, but that is not the essential action of the mind; it is one side and is thus "naturally unable to comprehend life". It is the interference of logic which divides and abstracts life, sees life in space. But intuition does not argue, classify, analyse, but comprehends life in its entirety, immediately. Hence moving in time is essential, not in space. We make the mistake to conceive duration in terms of extension, by which we obtain entity in space; but only duration in succession

is real, and that is time. It is on the absoluteness of time that Bergson has built his creative evolution, and it is therefore his time-concept that we should investigate a little closer.

In separating time from space he does not only stand quite apart from other philosophers who attributed only mental values to both, but he will find it also increasingly difficult to reconcile the latest mathematical explanations of the physical world, where exactly time is taken up as, the fourth dimension in the one space-time continuum.

He admits that change is the only reality: "form is only a snapshot view of a transition".

"When the successive images do not differ from each other too much, we consider them all as the waxing and waning of a single mean image—and to this mean we really allude when we speak of the essence of a thing, or of the thing itself".

Change is action and appears in the form of movements. That movement would require space is not essential, for space is not proper to action, or movement, which is the same. Space is only required, if movement is considered as some thing that moves.

When, however, the sole reality is said to be change, space is not longer essential to action, to movement. All this is generally admitted by philosophers, and Bergson does not make an exception. His position, however, becomes different and even unique, as soon as the problem is considered not from the point of view of change as movement, but change as succession, which would necessitate time.

Though Bergson has many thought-provoking ideas and problems, it can easily be foreseen that he will not have many followers in his absolute time solution. If time is defined as duration, and that is necessary if it be absolute, how can it be succession at the same time? Duration of succession seems to involve a contradiction, for duration implies permanence and succession impermanence. This contradiction is only seeming, answers Bergson, because our conception of succession is corrupted by the concept of space. The seeming contradiction of a duration of

succession cannot be solved by logic, by argument, but only by intuition through which all the successive phases are intuited as belonging to the one whole, So that past, present and future melt together in intuitive consciousness.

Based on intuition, he criticizes all doctrines taking their clue from thought, whether that thought be considered material or spiritual. "Intuition is the revelation of immediacy".

But then the difficulty at once presents itself: where does that intuition come from? Intuition springs from the instinct, we are told; and this instinct is not a purely *accidental* evolution, as Neo-Darwinians hold, neither does it proceed solely from an *individual* effort, as Neo-Lamarckians maintain, although accident has a large place in it and individuals collaborate in it. If one tries to understand instinct in terms of intelligence one is bound to fail. Instinct in a concrete form is the relation of the one to the other. Now this relation is lived rather than represented. Thus "intelligence points towards consciousness, and instinct towards unconsciousness". Both involve knowledge, without difference in kind but only in degree: intelligence is knowledge thought, instinct is knowledge acted. Now where does that knowledge which does not think, but acts with greater precision than thought could perceive, where does that instinct come from? Relationship is Bergson's answer, which finds its explanation in what he calls the vital impetus, the impulse of life, the tendency to act. Here Bergson comes to a stop, for this impulse is not further traced: "the visible outlines of bodies are the design of our eventual action on them".

In saying so he merely maintains that forms are visible and that fact is the cause of our sight. But why then should a stone or a tree not see? Not the visible outlines constitute our sight, but it is through our sight that those outlines become visible; and if that sight begins to fail the outlines become invisible.

A stone cannot see because it cannot make those forms visible; in other words, the impulse of life is absent. This impulse or tendency to act is called in Buddhist terminology "*kamma*".

Where Bergson does not or cannot trace his vital impetus, in Buddhism this tendency to act, this vital “*kamma*” is traced to ignorance: “*avijjā paccaya saṅkhāra*”: dependent on ignorance arise *kamma*-formations. This becoming of *kamma* is traced to craving: “*upādāna paccaya bhavo*”: dependent on clinging is becoming of *kamma*-tendencies. This does not point to a first beginning, as if ignorance were the ultimate and primary cause and origin of all things. It is just ignorance which makes us question about the beginning of things. Of processes no beginning can be pointed out because there is mere proceeding which involves change. Beginning can only be thought of in the case of static entities. Ignorance itself, instead of being the first uncaused cause from which all proceeds, is conditioned and a process increasing or decreasing in dependence on the reaction to other impulses. There is no beginning because there *is* nothing; but ignorance arises and in dependence thereon arise the *kammic* tendencies.

Thus we see finally that, like in all the previous philosophic systems, Buddhism can give the proper solution to all the unsolved problems.

It is, moreover, Buddhism alone which can do so, because we can see that the shortcomings of all philosophic systems, from the beginning of Greek thought down to our present time, are all due to one single misunderstanding.

They all are searching for some permanent “self” and many are sincere enough to admit that this cannot be known; but none is clear-sighted enough to conclude that it is non-existent.

If it cannot be known, it will be postulated either in matter or in mind, as *materia prima* or soul, substance, or God, or even so abstract as a categorical necessity or *elan vital*, thus only shifting the problem of causation to a plane where it finds no contradiction because it is beyond investigation and experience.

Here Buddhism alone rightly solves the problem, without remainder being left, in the Doctrine of No-soul: *anatta*. Thus Buddhism stands aloof from Materialism as well as from Idealism.

This is indeed the Religion the world needs, but also the Religion the world does not want.

Whether the world will receive Buddhism is not dependent on the exposition thereof, but on the mental attitude in which Buddhism is being received. Unless Buddhism is seen as an ethical system and practised as such, it may be studied perhaps as a philosophy, but will never exercise its beneficial influence over the world of thought. For he who feels happy in the shining brightness of worldly self-satisfaction will never seek the darkness of non-self. He who seeks, the thrill of being swung up high either to left or to right, will only be too pleased to pass the dead point of emotionless equilibrium. And thus the *pendulum of thought* will swing on for ever more to come, as long as there is craving which renews the impulse to live constantly.

If there is thus little hope for the world as a whole, this should not lead to discouragement. Buddhism was never meant for the masses, but it might well happen that a few, whose eyes are only covered with some dust of selfishness, may see and realize that there is no self, and thus come to the abandonment of all that leads to self, to the freedom of insight in the real nature of things, no longer touched by the world, no longer defiled by the passions, no longer fettered by craving, in the realization of having transcended both sorrow and bliss, in the deliverance of Nibbāna.

About the Author

Henri van Zeyst was born in Utrecht, the Netherlands, in 1905. Educated throughout in Catholic schools and colleges, he spent his final years of studies in philosophy and theology and the first year of his priestly ordination in an Italian monastery near Florence. At the age of 31 he was sent to London to be in charge of a new foundation of his Order, where he was also teaching Dogmatic Theology to the scholastics of Christus Rex Priory in North London. An intensive course of comparative religion brought him in contact with Buddhism. Within a year of his coming to Sri Lanka he was ordained a Buddhist monk there in 1938 under the name of Bhikkhu Dhammapāla. From 1956 to 1968 he worked at the Encyclopaedia of Buddhism at the University of Ceylon in Peradeniya of which he was in the final years of that period the Senior Assistant Editor and Administrative Officer. During the last stages of his life he was residing in a meditation centre at Nilambe, Kandy, giving instructions to those who came to him for guidance on meditation.

He died on September 15th in 1988.