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Buddhist Philosophy and Its European Parallels

THE SEARCH for philosophical parallels is fraught with pitfalls. Some parallels are fruitful and significant, others incidental and fortuitous. I now propose to discuss the European parallels to Buddhist thought in two articles, of which the first is devoted to the true, and the second to the spurious, parallels.

As for my interpretation of the basic principles of Buddhism, I have recently given it in some detail in *Buddhist Thought in India*.¹ Since my views differ to some extent from those of my predecessors, I will briefly sum them up so that the reader can see what kind of "Buddhism" I compare with European philosophy.

The basic teaching of the Buddha can be expressed in one sentence: The conditioned world as it appears to us is fundamentally and irreparably undesirable, and salvation can be found only through escape to the Unconditioned, also called "*Nirvāṇa*." Everything else is elaboration.

All conditioned things are marred by having three "marks," i.e., by being impermanent, "ill," and "alien to our true self."² Much thought has gone into determining the full meaning of those marks. "Ill," for instance, comprises not only pain and suffering, but also the unease which is nowadays known as "existential anxiety,"³ and the mark of "not-self" has given rise to interminable discussions.⁴ Human beings fret against a world which is impermanent, ill, and not-self and are not content to live in it, because they believe that in the core of their own being they are eternal, at ease, and in full control of everything.⁵ This alienation of our empirical personality from our true being (i.e., from the "Tathāgata" within us⁶) is brought about by "craving."⁷

¹ *Buddhist Thought in India* (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1962). Hereafter *BTbl*.

² *BTbl*, pp. 34-43.

³ To be discussed in Section 2b of the second article, "Spurious Parallels to Buddhist Philosophy," to be published in the next issue of this Journal.

⁴ About its relation to Hume's denial of a "self," see Section 3 of the second article.

⁵ *BTbl*, pp. 43-46.

⁶ It is "A central peace, subsisting at the heart/Of endless agitation" (W. Wordsworth). See below, p. 18.

⁷ See below, p. 19.

If we want to return to our original state of purity, we must first regenerate ourselves by developing five cardinal virtues,⁸ of which wisdom is the last and most important. After these virtues have sufficiently matured, we can slowly attempt a break-through to the Unconditioned,⁹ which, through the three doors of deliverance, i.e., Emptiness, the Signless, and the Wishless,¹⁰ leads to *Nirvāṇa*,¹¹ which is a state in which the self has become extinct, in which none of this world is any longer extant, and which therefore transcends all words and concepts.¹²

This is all quite simple to understand, though at times hard to believe. It is very much complicated, however, by being combined with an ontological theory of "*Dharma*" which requires a tremendous intellectual effort.¹³ This theory distinguishes three levels of reality: (1) the one and single *Dharma*, which is the ultimate and unconditioned reality of *Nirvāṇa*; (2) a multiplicity of *dharmas*, or momentary and impersonal events, which, though illusory compared with the one single *Dharma*,¹⁴ are more real than the things around us; and (3) the things of the common-sense world, which are mere verbal constructions, in that they are combinations of *dharmas* held together by words.¹⁵ The Buddhist "*dharma*-theory" is unique, and has no exact equivalent anywhere else.¹⁶

So much for the tenets of what I call "archaic" Buddhism. They were probably formulated by the time of Aśoka.^{16a} Two centuries later the further elaboration of these ideas led to two distinct schools, i.e., the "scholastic Hinayāna" and the "Mahāyāna," which, contrary to what is often said, did not significantly conflict in their doctrines but merely diverged in their range of interest. The "scholastic Hinayāna" concentrated on the conditioned *dharmas*, systematized their classification, defined more precisely their particular attributes and general marks, and worked out the relations pertaining among them.¹⁸ The creative contributions of the Mahāyāna, on the other hand, almost exclusively concern the Unconditioned. In particular, the notion of "Emptiness," which in "archaic" Buddhism had been one of the avenues to

⁸ *BThI*, pp. 47–55.

⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 56–58.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 59–69.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 69–79.

¹² The teachings of European mystics correspond to this doctrine in its general tone (see below, pp. 17–18), but only Schopenhauer matches it in many particulars (see below, pp. 18–20).

¹³ *BThI*, pp. 92–106.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 223–225 (see below, p. 22).

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 97n.

¹⁶ See Section 2a of the second article.

^{16a} 274–236 B.C.

¹⁷ *BThI*, pp. 119–191.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 148–158.

Nirvāṇa, was now immensely enriched.¹⁹ It was also buttressed by a searching analysis of the traditional concept of the "own-being" of *dharmas*²⁰ and by a type of logic which in Europe we would call "dialectical."²¹ Equally applied to conditioned and unconditioned *dharmas*, "emptiness" led to their identification. The result is a "monistic" ontology which shows many analogies to European metaphysical systems of the same type,²² while the descriptions of the bafflement experienced by the intellect when confronted with this one and unique Absolute resemble the position of the Greek skeptics in many ways.²³

Of special interest for the theme of these articles is the chapter on "Tacit Assumptions,"²⁴ in which I compare Buddhist with contemporary mentality, and try to establish that

Buddhist thinkers made a number of tacit assumptions which are explicitly rejected by modern European philosophers. The first, common to nearly all Indian, as distinct from European, "scientific," thought treats the experiences of Yoga as the chief raw material for philosophical reflection. Secondly, all "perennial"²⁵ (as against "modern") philosophers, agree on the hierarchical structure of the universe, as shown in (a) the distinction of a "triple world" and (b) of degrees of "reality," and (c) in the establishment of a hierarchy of insights dependent on spiritual maturity. Thirdly, all religious (as against a-religious) philosophies (a) use "numinous" as distinct from "profane" terms, and (b) treat revelation as the ultimate source of all valid knowledge.²⁶

This is not how everyone sees it, and the doubting reader must be referred to the arguments of my book.

The cornerstone of my interpretation of Buddhism is the conviction, shared by nearly everyone, that it is essentially a doctrine of salvation, and that all its philosophical statements are subordinate to its soteriological purpose. This implies, not only that many philosophical problems are dismissed as idle speculations,²⁷ but that each and every proposition must be considered in reference to its spiritual²⁸ intention and as a formulation of meditational experiences acquired in the course of the process of winning salvation. While I cannot imagine any scholar wishing to challenge this methodological postulate, I am aware that, next to D. T. Suzuki, I am almost alone in having applied it consistently.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 242–249.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 239–241 (see Section 1 of the second article).

²¹ *BThI*, pp. 261–264; also below, pp. 22–23.

²² See below, pp. 20–22.

²³ See below, pp. 15–17.

²⁴ *BThI*, pp. 17–30.

²⁵ For a definition, see below, pp. 12–13.

²⁶ *BThI*, p. 17.

²⁷ Sections 1 and 3 of the second article.

²⁸ For a definition, see below, p. 14, note 35.

Finally, any interpretation of Buddhism which goes beyond the indiscriminate accumulation of quotations and attempts actually to understand Buddhist thought involves an element of choice, in that one has to decide which one among the numerous presentations of the Buddha's doctrine should be regarded as the most authentic. Bu-ston favors the Buddhism of the Pāla period, Frauwallner the Yogācārins, Oldenberg the Pāli Canon (minus the Abhidhamma), Stcherbatsky the scholastic Hīnayāna and the later logicians, D. T. Suzuki the early Mahāyāna and Zen, some Chinese schools the *Saddharmaṣaṇḍarīka*, and so on. With Professor Murti, I regard the Mādhyamikas as representing the central tradition of Buddhism, and believe that with them Buddhist theorizing reached its full maturity. This preference colors much of what I have to say.

What, then, is the relation of these Buddhist teachings to European philosophy? From the outset, I must admit that I do not believe in a clear-cut distinction between "Eastern" and "Western" mentality. Until about 1450, as branches of the same "perennial philosophy,"²⁹ Indian and European philosophers disagreed less among themselves than with many of the later developments of European philosophy. The "perennial philosophy" is in this context defined as a doctrine which holds (1) that as far as worth-while knowledge is concerned not all men are equal, but that there is a hierarchy of persons, some of whom, through what they are, can know much more than others; (2) that there is a hierarchy also of the levels of reality, some of which are more "real," because more exalted than others; and (3) that the wise men of old have found a "wisdom" which is true, although it has no "empirical" basis in observations which can be made by everyone and everybody; and that in fact there is a rare and unordinary faculty in some of us by which we can attain direct contact with actual reality—through the *prajñā* (*pāramitā*) of the Buddhists, the *logos* of Parmenides,³⁰ the *sophia* of Aristotle³¹ and others, Spinoza's *amor dei intellectualis*, Hegel's *Vernunft*, and so on; and (4) that true teaching is based on an authority which legitimizes itself by the exemplary life and charismatic quality of its exponents.

²⁹ This term was originally invented by Catholics to describe the philosophy of St. Thomas and Aristotle. It was then taken over by Aldous Huxley and others, and my definition is akin to that of Ananda Coomaraswamy. A. Huxley in his famous book of 1946 envisaged only the mystical school, whereas here I include the intellectual and speculative trends, i.e., Plato and Aristotle as well as the German idealists. The only people before 1450 who are excluded are those who, like the Lokāyatikas in India, were deliberately antiritual, but not necessarily the Epicureans who were anticlerical but no foes of a tranquil and serene life.

³⁰ Being for him is "one" *kata ton logon* (when seen by reason), "many" *kata ten aisthēsin* (when seen by perception). Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, I.986^b33–34.

³¹ In his *Metaphysics*, Aristotle has taken great pains to describe the subjective counterpart of "being as being," e.g., in Book I.981^b–983^a.

Within the perennial philosophy Indian thought is marked off by two special features: (1) the reliance on *yoga* as providing the basic raw material of worth-while experience,³² and (2) the implicit belief in *karma* and rebirth. *Yoga*, of course, has its counterpart in the West in the spiritual and ecstatic practices of contemplatives, and belief in reincarnation is nearly world-wide,³³ though rare among philosophers accorded academic recognition.

Then, after 1450, the East fell asleep and lived on its inherited capital, until in the end innate lethargy and aggression from the outside brought it to its present impasse. In the West, a large number of philosophers discarded the basic presuppositions of the "perennial philosophy," and developed by contrast what for want of a better term we may call a "sciential"³⁴ philosophy. That has the following features: (1) Natural science, particularly that dealing with inorganic matter, has a cognitive value, tells us about the actual structure of the universe, and provides the other branches of knowledge with an ideal standard in that they are the more "scientific" the more they are capable of mathematical formulation and the more they rely on repeatable and publicly verified observations. (2) Man is the highest of beings known to science, and his power and convenience should be promoted at all costs. (3) Spiritual and magical forces cannot influence events, and life after death may be disregarded, because unproven by scientific methods. (4) In consequence, "life" means "man's" life in this world, and the task is to ameliorate this life by a social "technique" in harmony with the "welfare" or "will" of "the people." Buddhists must view all these tenets with the utmost distaste.

"Sciential" philosophy is an ideology which corresponds to a technological civilization. It arises in its purity only to the extent that its social substratum has freed itself from all pre-industrial influences, and in the end it must lead to the elimination of even the last traces of what could properly be called

³² "Notre philosophie est née de la curiosité et du besoin de savoir, d'expliquer le monde d'une façon cohérente. En Inde la philosophie est l'interprétation rationnelle de l'expérience mystique." So Constantin Regamey, on page 251 of what is one of the most notable contributions so far made to comparative philosophy, i.e., "Tendances et méthodes de la philosophie indienne comparées à celles de la philosophie occidentale," *Revue de Théologie et de Philosophie*, IV (1951), 245-262. Regamey also shows how this difference in the *point de départ* leads to a radical divergence in the criteria of absolute truth.

³³ Joseph Head and S. L. Cranson, eds., *Reincarnation: An East-West Anthology* (New York: The Julian Press, Inc., 1961).

³⁴ The opponents of the perennial philosophy prefer to describe themselves as "scientific." There can be nothing more unscientific, however, than the drawing of extravagant and presumptuous conclusions about the mind, soul, and spirit of man, and about his destiny and the purpose of his life, from a few observations about the expansion of gases, the distribution of moths, and the reflections of the celestial bodies in little pieces of glass. If I were reduced to that part of myself which can be seen in bits of glass, I would certainly feel that most of my being was omitted. Why should this not be true also of other things apart from my own dear self?

"philosophy" in the original sense of "love of wisdom." For centuries it existed only blended with elements from the traditional "perennial" philosophy. As philosophies, both the "perennial" and the "sciential" systems possess some degree of intellectuality, and up to a point they both use reasoning. But, considered in their purity, as ideal types, they differ in that the first is motivated by man's spiritual³⁵ needs, and aims at his salvation from the world and its ways, whereas the second is motivated by his utilitarian needs, aims at his conquest of the world, and is therefore greatly concerned with the natural and social sciences. Between the two extremes there are, of course, numerous intermediary stages. They depend to some extent on the quality of the spirituality behind them, which is very high, say, in Buddhism, slightly lower in Plato and Aristotle, and still quite marked in such men as Spinoza, Leibniz, Berkeley, Kant, Goethe, Hegel, and Bergson. The general trend, however, has been a continuous loss of spiritual substance between 1450 and 1960, based on an increasing forgetfulness of age-old traditions, an increasing unawareness of spiritual practices, and an increasing indifference to the spiritual life by the classes which dominate society.

Leaving aside the relative merits of the "perennial" and the "sciential" approaches to philosophy, all I want to establish at present is their mutual incompatibility, which is borne out by their mutual hostility. Our "sciential" philosophers are well aware of this. We need only peruse the writings of empiricists, logical positivists, and linguistic analysts, and it will become obvious that the animosity displayed toward a philosopher is almost a measure of his spirituality.³⁶ And, in a way, the moderns are quite right. For "perennial" and "sciential" philosophies represent two qualitatively different kinds of thinking which have almost nothing in common, except perhaps for a certain degree of respect for rationality. Our contemporaries continually assure us that the spiritual philosophers of the past are not "philosophers" at all, but dreamers, mystics, poets, and so on. All we can conclude from this is that the word "philosophy" is being used in two quite disparate senses: (1) as the pursuit of "wisdom," and (2) as a "rigorous" academic exercise without

³⁵ I have defined the word "spiritual" in my *Buddhism* (3rd ed., Oxford: Bruno Cassirer, 1957) on page 11. The quintessence of the spiritual life, shorn of its usual accretions, was admirably formulated by Petrus Damiani in the eleventh century in two exceedingly fine poems which have recently been reprinted in F. J. E. Raby, ed., *The Oxford Book of Medieval Latin Verse* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1959), pp. 185-189. The second has also been translated into English in Frederick Brittain, ed., *The Penguin Book of Latin Verse* (Harmondsworth, England: Penguin Books, Ltd., 1962), pp. 176-180.

³⁶ To mention just two easily accessible sources: In Bertrand Russell's *A History of Western Philosophy* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1945) this attitude is expressed with some urbanity, and in J. O. Urmson, ed., *The Concise Encyclopedia of Western Philosophy* (London: Hutchinson, 1960) with blunt rudeness (e.g., the article on Schopenhauer is sheer personal abuse).

much ostensible purpose. The "wisdom" meant here is compounded of knowledge and a "good life," and to it apply the words of *Proverbs*: "Blessed is the man who has found wisdom. Her ways are good ways, and all her paths are peaceful. She is a tree of life to all that lay hold upon her."³⁷ It is not easy to see how such words could be used of "philosophy" in the second sense.

Having stated the general principles on which the comparison of Buddhism and European thought must be based, I now speak of the only three currents of European philosophy which can significantly be compared with Buddhism, i.e., (1) the Greek Sceptics, (2) the wisdom-seeking mystics, and (3) the monists and dialecticians.

(1) The European system nearest to the Mādhyamikas is that of the Greek Sceptics. In my *Buddhism*,^{37a} I have shown their close similarity, both in intention and structure. They also agree in that the history of skepticism exhibits the same tendency to deviate into a purely theoretical intellectualism which has continually threatened the integrity of Buddhist thought. Greek Scepticism went through four stages, which R. G. Bury³⁸ has called the practical, the critical, the dialectical, and the empirical. The parallel with Buddhism is closest in the first stage, i.e., with Pyrrho (360–275 B.C.). In the last, with Sextus Empiricus (A.D. 160–210), it is barely perceptible. Indeed, taking the later developments as his norm, Bury can affirm that Pyrrho "was probably not at all a full-blown Sceptic, but rather a moralist of an austere and ascetic type who cultivated insensibility to externals and superiority to environment."³⁹ It was only in the New Academy, with Arcesilas (315–241 B.C.), that Scepticism "ceased to be purely practical and became mainly theoretical."⁴⁰ "Thus, while Pyrrho had renounced and Timon flouted the Dogmatists, Arcesilas started the practice of refuting them scientifically and systematically, and earned thereby the abuse of Timon for his lapse from pure Pyrrhonism."⁴¹ In fact, when we read Sextus Empiricus, we find that, although some of the original message has remained intact,⁴² it has been overlaid by a vast technical apparatus accumulated over five centuries and by numerous concessions to common sense. The bulk of Sextus' work is parasitical on the dogmatic philosophers, and seems to be motivated more by disputatiousness and

³⁷ Cf. III:13–18.

^{37a} *Op. cit.*, pp. 140–142.

³⁸ R. G. Bury, trans., *Sextus Empiricus*, 4 vols. Vol. I, *Outlines of Pyrrhonism* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1933), p. xxx.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. xxx; Cf. also p. xxxi.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. xxxii.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. xxxiii.

⁴² E.g., in what the *skeptikē agōgē* ("sceptical procedure") (Book I. Chap. 4) has to say about *ataraxia* (= *śamatha*) as the end of life (I. 25–30), or about the *svabhāva* (*physis* or *peritōn exōthen hypokeimenōn*) (I. 15, 22, 93, 163), the relativity of everything (I. 135), or on non-assertion (I. 192–193), non-determination (I. 197), and non-apprehension (I. 200).

the desire to score debating points than by a positive interest in mental repose. In many ways his attitude resembles that of the later Buddhist logicians.

At the time of Cicero, halfway between Pyrrho and Sextus Empiricus, this loss of spiritual earnestness had not gone quite so far. Some of the statements which Cicero makes in his *Academica*,⁴³ on behalf of or in response to the Skeptics, are indeed strikingly similar to the teachings of the Mādhyamikas and other later Buddhists.

The Skeptics were people who "sanctioned nothing as proved" (*qui nihil probarent*⁴⁴). "All those things you talk about are hidden, closely concealed (*occultata*) and enfolded in thick clouds of darkness, so that no human intellect has sufficiently powerful sight to be able to penetrate to heaven and get inside the earth."⁴⁵ Though "it is possibly the case that when exposed and uncovered they change their character" (*quia possit fieri ut patefacta et detecta mutantur*).⁴⁶ The Skeptics "have a habit of concealing (*occulandi*) their opinion, and do not usually disclose it to any one except those that had lived with them right up to old age."⁴⁷ And the opponent says, "What pray are those holy secrets (*mysteria*) of yours, or why should your school conceal (*celatis*) its doctrine as something disgraceful?"⁴⁸

"It is the wise man (*sapiens*) that we are investigating,"⁴⁹ and it is on him that "all this enquiry turns."⁵⁰ He "avoids being taken in and sees to it that he is not deceived."⁵¹ They hold that "nothing can be perceived,"⁵² or grasped (*comprehendi, anupalabdhi*),⁵³ and the "wise man will restrain all acts of assent" (*adsensus, abhiniveśa*).⁵⁴ There is also a reference to the "perversity" (*pravitas*) of seeing the non-real as real,⁵⁵ and to arguments against the senses, which are said to be "full of darkness,"⁵⁶ and against "everything that is approved in common experience" (*consuetudo = samvrti*).⁵⁷ And, as

⁴³ Cicero, *De Natura Deorum; Academica*, H. Rackham, ed. and trans. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1961).

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 488–489; *Academica*, II (Lucullus). vi.17.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 624–625; *Academica*, II (Lucullus). xxxix.122.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 462–463; *Academica*, fragment No. 21.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 542–543; *Academica*, II (Lucullus). xviii.60.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 550–551; *Academica*, II (Lucullus). xx.66.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 614–615; *Academica*, II (Lucullus). xxxvi.115.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 550–551; *Academica*, II (Lucullus). xx.66.

⁵² *Ibid.*, pp. 550–551, 554–555, 608–609, 489–490, 542–543. They "do not deny that some truth exists, but deny that it can be perceived" (*qui veri esse aliquid non negamus, percipi posse negamus*). II. xxiii.73.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, pp. 620–621; *Academica*, II (Lucullus). xxxviii.119.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 554–555; *Academica*, II (Lucullus). xxi.68.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 566–567; *Academica*, II (Lucullus). xxv.80.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 559; *Academica*, II (Lucullus). xxiii.73.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 562–563; *Academica*, II (Lucullus). xxiv.75.

though he had read the Prajñāpāramitā, an opponent points out that "as for wisdom herself, if she does not know whether she is wisdom or not, how in the first place will she make good her claim to the name of wisdom? Next, how will she venture with confidence to plan or execute any undertaking when there will be nothing certain for her to act upon?"⁵⁸

(2) Secondly, there is a close similarity with those ascetic, other-worldly, and "mystical" thinkers who assigned a decisive importance to "spiritual experience." They are represented by four main trends:

(a) First, there are the Wisdom speculations of the Near East between 200 B.C. and A.D. 300. Their conception of *chochma* and *sophia* is closely analogous to that of *prajñāpāramitā*, and some of the similarities are really quite startling.⁵⁹

(b) Next, the kindred Gnostic and Neo-Platonic modes of thought, especially the later Neo-Platonists, like Proclus and Damascius,⁶⁰ and also their Christian form in Origenes and in Dionysius Areopagita, who in some passages of his *Mystical Theology*⁶¹ gives what may well be called a Christian version of the *Heart Sūtra*.

(c) Thirdly, there are the great mystics of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, such as Meister Eckhart,⁶² Ruysbroeck, and Suso. Their kinship with Buddhism has been noted so often that I can be quite brief. Ruysbroeck says of the "God-seeing man" that "his spirit is undifferentiated and without distinction, and therefore feels nothing without the unity." Among Western contemplatives, *śūnyatā* corresponds to the "desert of the Godhead," to Ruysbroeck's "idle emptiness," to Eckhart's still wilderness where no one is at home, to the "naked orison," the "naked intent stretching unto God," which becomes possible with entire self-surrender, and also to the fathomless abyss of Ruysbroeck and Tauler.⁶³ This "abyss" is wholeheartedly welcomed by those steeped in self-negation and self-naughting, but, later on, less selfless people

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 499; *Academica*, II (Lucullus). viii.24.

⁵⁹ For some details, see my review of H. Ringgren, *Word and Wisdom*, in *Oriental Art*, I, No. 4 (Spring, 1949), 196-197.

⁶⁰ Some useful material has been collected by R. Gnoli in *La Parola del passato*, I (1961), fasc. LXXVII, 153-159. See also J. Rahder's suggestions on *śūnyatā* in *Indogaku Bukkyōgaku Kenkyū* (*Journal of Indian and Buddhist Studies*). IX, No. 2 (1961), 754. On the other hand, I can see no merit in E. Benz's attempt to establish a direct link by claiming that Plotinus' teacher, Ammonios "Sakkas," was either a member of the Indian dynasty of the "Saki," or a "Sakya" (Sakiya, Sakka), i.e., a Buddhist monk. *Orientalia Romana*, I (1958), 18-20 (Istituto Italiano per il Medio ed Estremo Oriente. Serie Orientale Roma, XVII).

⁶¹ I.e., I.2, II.1, III.1, chaps. 4 and 5. The translations are apt to obscure the parallel, which becomes strikingly obvious as soon as the Greek text is consulted.

⁶² Cf. Daisetz T. Suzuki, "Meister Eckhart and Buddhism," in *Mysticism, Christian and Buddhist* (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1957), pp. 7-35.

⁶³ For a good description, see Tauler, "Sermon on St. John the Baptist," in *The Inner Way: 36 Sermons for Festivals*. New translation, edited with Introduction by Arthur Wollaston Hutton

like B. Pascal⁶⁴ and Ch. Baudelaire⁶⁵ felt rather ambivalent when confronted with it, since they were clearly none too enchanted with the implication of being "separated from all created things." The *Theologia Germanica*⁶⁶ (ca. 1425), as is well known, contains many formulations with a distinctly Buddhist flavor. The most striking similarity lies, of course, in the constant emphasis on "I-hood and selfhood," on "I, me, and mine" as the source of all alienation from true reality, and on the need to undo that "blindness and folly."⁶⁷ But this is not all. On re-reading the book I have been astounded to find how close it is in so many ways to Buddhist mentality, in spite of its author's "cautious limitation of his speculations to what is compatible with the Church,"⁶⁸ and some minor concessions to theism, especially in the later parts. Apart from the subject of *satkāyadr̥ṣṭi* this is true of what is said about the Godhead (= *Nirvāṇa*), the "deified man" (= the *bodhisattva*), activated by both "cognition" and a "love" wherein "there neither is nor can remain any I, Me, Mine, Thou, Thine, and the like,"⁶⁹ non-attainment,⁷⁰ the perverted views,⁷¹ self-deception (= *avidyā*),⁷² Suchness,⁷³ faith,⁷⁴ the One,⁷⁵ emptiness,⁷⁶ desire,⁷⁷ and so on—in fact, quite an impressive list.

(d) Toward the end of the seventeenth century, shortly after Galileo, European mysticism of this type lost its intellectual distinction, and faded away into the "Quietism" of Molinos and Mme Guyon. In the aftermath of the French revolution, many of the basic laws of the spiritual life were re-discovered by great poets who were also fine thinkers, such as Blake, Shelley, Wordsworth, and Coleridge in England. Though often vitiated by a fatal rift between theory and practice, their thought offers many parallels to Buddhist thinking. To this generation of rebels against the Goddess of Reason belonged Arthur Schopenhauer, whose thought, partly under Indian influence, exhibits numerous, and almost miraculous, coincidences with the basic tenets of Buddhist philosophy.⁷⁸ The term "parallel" implies that two lines run

(London: Methuen & Co., Ltd., 1901), pp. 97–99. Cf. St. John of the Cross, *Noche Oscura*, Vol. I, Book 2, chap. 17.

⁶⁴ E.g., L. Brunschvicg, ed., *Pensées* (14th ed., Paris: Hachette, 1927), p. 350.

⁶⁵ It is quite interesting to note, when reading *Les Fleurs du Mal*, the varying and conflicting connotations of such key terms as *gouffre*, *abime*, and *vide*.

⁶⁶ New York: Pantheon Books, Inc., 1949. London: Gollancz, 1950. This is the translation of S. Winkworth, revised by W. Trask, on the basis of J. Bernhart's translation into modern German: *Theologia Germanica* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1949).

⁶⁷ Chaps. 1–5, 20, 22, 24, 32, 34, 40, 44, 49, 51.

⁶⁸ Bernhart, *op. cit.*, p. 101.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 191–192, 197.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 167, 180, 183.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 119, 186.

⁷² *Ibid.*, p. 200.

⁷³ Cf. R. Fussell, *The Nature and Purpose of the Ascetic Ideal* (Kandy, Ceylon: Buddhist Publication Society, 1960). H. v. Glasenapp, *Die Philosophie der Inder* (Stuttgart: Alfred Kroener Verlag, 1958), pp. 428–429.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 206, 240.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 207.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 197, 204–206, 218–219.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 144, 219–220.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 115, *liebheit*.

parallel at more than one point, and the degree of affinity existing between Schopenhauer and Buddhism will give us a standard by which to judge other alleged "parallels."

As he himself said, Schopenhauer continued the triple tradition of "quietism, i.e. the giving up of all willing, asceticism, i.e. intentional mortification of one's own will, and mysticism, i.e. consciousness of the identity of one's own inner being with that of all beings, or with the kernel of the world."⁷⁹ He shows that life in the world is meaningless, essentially suffering, and bound to disappoint the hope that our desires might be fulfilled. He attributes this suffering to "the will to live," which is the equivalent of *trṣṇā*, and which "involves us in a delusion." He looks for salvation from this world by way of a "denial of the will to live," which is a "consequence of the dawning of better knowledge,"⁸⁰ and by an asceticism and self-renunciation exemplified in "the lives of saints, penitents, *samanas*, *sannyāsins*, and so on."⁸¹ We may add his atheism, his denial of an immaterial, substantially unchanging, soul, his belief in reincarnation, his stress on compassion as the basis of morality, his indifference to the "achievements" or "rhythm" of human history,⁸² as well as his insight into impermanence⁸³ and into the reasons why *Nirvāṇa* can be described only negatively, and yet it is not nothing.⁸⁴

It is only on two points that he differs from Buddhism.

(A) He fails to appreciate the importance of disciplined meditation. Educated non-Catholic Germans of the nineteenth century were quite unfamiliar with the tradition of spiritual contemplation. On the other hand, for relaxation they habitually visited art galleries and went for walks in the countryside. It is no wonder, therefore, that Schopenhauer sees the foretaste of "the exalted peace" of *Nirvāṇa*, not in trances (*dhyaṇa*), but in "pure esthetic contemplation." Although the contemplation of beauty has some analogy to the conditions prevailing in trance, it is on the whole an undisciplined faculty, and its results are rather fleeting and have little power to transmute the personality. In this respect, the German bourgeois town-dweller was a lesser man than the Indian man in the forest.

(B) Secondly, Schopenhauer teaches that the Will is the Thing-in-itself, whereas in Buddhism "craving" operates within the conditioned and phenomenal world, and the unconditioned noumenon lies in *Nirvāṇa*, which is quite calm as the result of the abolition of craving. Unacquainted with the

⁷⁹ E. F. J. Payne, trans., *The World as Will and Representation* (*WWR*), 2 vols. (Indian Hills, Colorado: The Falcon's Wing Press, 1958), p. 613. Vol. II.

⁸⁰ *WWR*, Vol. II, p. 608.

⁸¹ Quoted in Fussell, *op. cit.*, p. 1. *Samanas* = recluses; *sannyāsins* = ascetics.

⁸² *WWR*, Vol. II, chap. 38.

⁸³ *WWR*, Bk. I, par. 3; Bk. III, par. 33.

⁸⁴ *WWR*, Vol. II, pp. 608, 612.

practice of *yoga*, Schopenhauer did not know that at the bottom of every mind there is a calm quietude which is the prototype of *Nirvāna*. His central metaphysical thesis is, however, incompatible, not only with Buddhism, but also with his own soteriological aspirations. It is, indeed, not only hard to see how any cognitive act can ever reach the Thing-in-itself, but it also remains incomprehensible how thought can ever have the strength to stand up against the Will, and, what is more, how as a part of the purely illusory phenomenal world it can possibly overcome and effectively "deny" it.⁸⁵ This was early recognized by Nietzsche⁸⁶ and J. Bahnsen⁸⁷ (1881), Schopenhauer's immediate successors, and led them, respectively, into nihilism and a pessimism unrelieved by the hope of escape.

(C) Furthermore, Buddhism has a distinct affinity with the "monistic" traditions of European thought. The Eleatic emphasis on the One⁸⁸ implied devaluation, depreciation, and at times even rejection of the plural and multiple world. However they may phrase it, all monistic systems are in tune with the feeling which Shelley formulated in the famous verse:

Life, like a dome of many-coloured glass
Stains the white radiance of eternity
Until death tramples it to fragments.⁸⁹

Parmenides (*ca.* 480 B.C., nearly the Buddha's contemporary) and his successors assume a radical difference between appearance and reality, between surface and depth, between what we see (*phainomena*) and what we can only think (*noumena*), between opinion and truth. For Parmenides, opinion (*doxai*) is derived from the senses, which are deceptive and the basis of false information. Truth is derived from the *logos*, which has for its object Being (that which is and has no other attributes but to be). Being is, non-being is not; and that which Is can never not be, either now or later (as in change). Nothing that Is can either arise or perish.⁹⁰

All monistic systems are remarkably uniform, and they are all equally

⁸⁵ For an exceedingly clear and lucid survey of the many inconsistencies in Schopenhauer's philosophy, I must refer to H. M. Wolf, *Arthur Schopenhauer. Hundert Jahre Später* (Bern and Muenchen: Francke Verlag, 1960).

⁸⁶ H. M. Wolf, *op. cit.*, pp. 36, 70, 106-107.

⁸⁷ About his "miserabilism," see E. Conze, "The Objective Validity of the Principle of Contradiction," *Philosophy*, X (1935), 216.

⁸⁸ But the *panta chōrei* of Herakleitos fits none too well, because not everything flows; *Nirvāna*, the most important thing of all, being excepted.

⁸⁹ Good parallels can be found in P. Damiani, "The Glories of Paradise," referred to above, note 35.

⁹⁰ "It never was, and it never will be, since it Is, all of it together, only present in the Now, one and indivisible." (Diels-Kranz, Fr. 8 [Simpl. *Phys.* 145.1.3-6].)

beset by at least four unavoidable difficulties. They must, first of all, try to guard against the misunderstanding that the One might be a datum within the world, or a part of the conglomeration. Both East and West acutely felt the difficulties of finding an adequate verbal expression for the essentially *transcendent* and elusive reality of the One, and both made many attempts to circumvent them by the use of paradoxes, absurdities, contradictions, tautologies, riddles, negations, and other devices. Secondly, the monists must attempt to maintain the *simplicity* of the One by redefining the meaning of predication in regard to it. In this context, scholastic philosophers explained that God *is* each of his predicates, whereas creatures *have* them, and that the predicates of God are not different from one another, since otherwise he would not be simple. "The absolute essence is not in one respect different from what it is in another; what it is, it is in the totality of its being."⁹¹ Everything plural is itself and in addition something else, and only the completely free can be itself pure and simple.

A third problem concerns the relation between the One and *Being*. The old Eleatic school, which flourished between 540 and 300 B.C.,⁹² identifies the two. One must bear in mind, however, that in doing so it uses a special archaic, pre-Aristotelian type of logic⁹³ which, among other things, employs "the principle of unlimited predication." This means that a predicate is either predicated without limitation of the subject or it is not valid at all. This logic only knows statements of the type "All A are all B," which predicate the entire P of the entire S, without any qualification as to time, part, or respect, without any distinction being made between total and partial identity of S and P, or between their partial and total difference. The Eleatics also "assumed that one speaks only in one sense (*monachōs*) of 'one' and 'being.'"⁹⁴ The victory of Aristotelian logic changed all that. Plotinus describes the One expressly as "beyond being"; for Meister Eckhart, who said that "in the Kingdom of Heaven all is in all, all is one, and all is ours," Pure Being, as the most general, becomes the richest of all terms;⁹⁵ and Hegel, again, treats "being" as the initial and minimal definition of the Absolute, which is later

⁹¹ Plotinus, *Enneads*, VI.viii.10.

⁹² Also the Megarics and Antisthenes belonged to it. Pyrrho appears to have started with the Megaric position.

⁹³ S. Ranulf, *Der eleatische Satz vom Widerspruch* (Kopenhagen: Gyldendal, 1924). The archaic character of Parmenides' thinking is also shown in his belief that Being is a mass which, as a well-rounded sphere, fills space. Also the well-known works of Prantl, Apelt, Maier, E. Hoffmann (*Die Sprache und die archaische Logik* [Tubingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1925]), and Cornford are helpful in this connection.

⁹⁴ Aristotle, *Physics*, 185^b33. In many passages (*Metaphysics*, Gamma 2, 4, E 1, Z 1, K 3), Aristotle points out that Being is said *pollachōs* (in many senses).

⁹⁵ See R. Otto, *Mysticism East and West* (London: Macmillan and Company, 1932), pp. 21-26.

enriched by many further "attributes." The *Theologia Germanica*⁹⁶ says that "he who finds satisfaction in God, his satisfaction is the One, and is all in the One. And he to whom the One is not all and all not the One, and to whom something and nothing are not one and the same, cannot find satisfaction in God." The Buddhist non-dual One was in the same way by many devices transferred beyond all logical categories.

And, fourthly, monists must come to some decision on the *status of appearance*. It may well be that not all of them have, like most Buddhists, regarded appearance as a mere illusion, and it is probably true that "there is never any suggestion in Plotinus that all things except the One are illusions or fleeting appearances."⁹⁷ But this is a distinction without much of a difference, because also in the Plotinian system the sensory and material world has an extremely low degree of reality, and is afflicted by a great loss of the original reality, near its point of extinction. In the same way, in the Hegelian system the natural world is a state of estrangement from the Absolute Spirit. In Eckhart, "all creatures, insofar as they are creatures, as they are in themselves (*quod sunt in et per se*), are not even an illusion, but they are a pure nothing."⁹⁸ And, for Spinoza, "a temporal existence insofar as it is purely temporal is the same as non-existence, and is perishing in proportion to its fragmentariness and exclusiveness; existence in every range insofar as it gains content moves already towards an ideal of perfection which is one with eternity itself."⁹⁹

The background of all "monistic" views¹⁰⁰ is a religious contempt for the world of ordinary experience, for that which is not One or not He who Is. That world is held to be unsatisfactory—partly emotionally as a source of suffering, and partly logically as self-contradictory, and as therefore either simply non-existing¹⁰¹ or unable to abide in the state in which it is. In this way monism is apt to beget the *dialectics* out of itself, as in Zeno, Hegel, and Bradley, to name only a few. In the case of Zeno of Elea (*ca.* 460 B.C.),

⁹⁶ Pp. 204–205. Italics mine.

⁹⁷ A. H. Armstrong, *Plotinus* (London: G. Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1953), p. 41. For the ambiguities in Plotinus' own thought, compare Armstrong p. 21 with p. 29.

⁹⁸ For useful quotations see R. Otto, *op. cit.*, pp. 91–96.

⁹⁹ According to Harold F. Hallett, *Aeternitas* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1930), p. 45.

¹⁰⁰ It may be objected that the comparison of all this with Buddhism applies more to the "monistic" Mahāyāna than to the "pluralistic" Hīnayāna theories. But the difference should not be overstressed. As the Theravāda had a latent idealism and an implicit bias toward a mentalistic interpretation of physical reality (Étienne Lamotte, *L'enseignement de Vimalakīrī*. Bibliothèque du Muséon, Vol. 51 [Louvain: Institut Orientaliste, Université Catholique de Louvain, 1962], pp. 52–60), so it teaches also the one *Dhamma* side by side with the multiple *dhammas* (see Buddhaghosa on *ekam hi saccam, na dutiyam atthi*, in *Visuddhimagga of Buddhaghosācariya*, H. C. Warren, ed; rev. by Dh. Kosambi, Harvard Oriental Series, Vol. 41 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1950), pp. 422, 421.

¹⁰¹ A purely intellectual contradiction reduces thought to nothing. It results in nonsense. He who thinks a contradiction thinks nothing at all.

whom Aristotle called the founder of the dialectics, the "paradoxes" (*aporiai*) he devised aimed at defending by indirect proofs the view of Parmenides, which held local movement to be impossible in the ultimate reality of the true world of being. All Zeno did was to show that, on assuming movement, the consequences which follow are contradictory and untenable,¹⁰² and that, therefore, the information derived from sense-data is patently false, since self-contradictions are the marks of false appearance.

Zeno's dialectics has had many successors. Among them, Bradley seems nearer to the Mādhyamikas than either Hegel or Marx. Both Hegel and Marx make two assumptions which must irritate Buddhists. The first is the insistence on human history,¹⁰³ which Buddhists hold to be utterly pointless. The second is the constant introduction of the tripartite scheme of thesis, antithesis, and synthesis, which postulates a relentless "progress" from one state to the other, culminating in the tyranny of the Prussian state or of the U.S.S.R. On the other hand, Bradley is, next to Schopenhauer, the nearest representative in modern Europe of at least one side of Buddhist thought. Even the procedure of *Appearance and Reality* is the same as that of the *Mādhyamika-kārikā*, in that one currently accepted category after the other is taken up and shown to be self-contradictory and untenable. Nor can I agree with Professor Murti's¹⁰⁴ claim that they differ greatly "in their notion of the Real and its relation to appearance." In fact, they both treat the Real as ineffable, and "at once transcendent and immanent."¹⁰⁵ If Bradley takes care not to exclude entirely the appearance from the Real, and seeks somehow to identify the two,¹⁰⁶ then this is not a "rather inconsistent contention,"¹⁰⁷ but the exact equivalent of the Mādhyamika position ("Form is emptiness," etc.). Both these books are essentially polemical treatises and their message seems to be identical.

¹⁰² Or, in other words, that his Pythagorean opponents cannot assert the reality of movement without coming into conflict with their own premises. These opponents assumed that a line consists of indivisible points in juxtaposition, and the counter-arguments of Hobbes (*Works*, I. 110), Bergson, and Aristotle take no notice of the historical situation. The contradictions involved can be seen succinctly in Hegel, *History of Philosophy*, Haldane, trans., 1892, I. 273-274; cf. *Logic*, I. 191-193, II. 143, sq.; F. Engels, *Herrn Eugen Dührings Umwälzung der Wissenschaft*, 3rd ed. (Stuttgart: J. H. W. Dietz, 1894), 120; E. Conze, *Philosophy* (see note 87), p. 21.

¹⁰³ Hegel said that "comprehended history forms both the memorial and the calvary of the absolute Spirit—that without which it would be Lifeless (!) Solitude." He seems to have a strange view of "life," as composed of a long series of senseless oppressions and massacres perpetrated in the name of some fatuous "ideal" or other.

¹⁰⁴ *The Central Philosophy of Buddhism* (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1955), p. 308.

¹⁰⁵ Murti, *ibid.*, p. 310.

¹⁰⁶ *Appearance and Reality: A Metaphysical Study* (9th impression, corrected, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1930), p. 404.

¹⁰⁷ Murti, *op. cit.*, p. 309.