



VII. Buddha and the Mythopoetic Tradition (1967)

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Bard College, Spring 1967

The mythical mind of man presents to us so much of the dream-like mind of man for when we dream we do not control our thoughts. They come to us quite arbitrarily being governed only by one single law of association which is always very hard to control. If one looks at the power that ancient myth once held over the mind of man one begins to wonder how mankind was ever able to break away from it, in the same way that one wonders, after awakening from a dream, how it is possible to break away from the world of images that only moments before had seemed so real. And the funny thing about all of this is that if one looks upon the most complete body of mythical speculation that the world has ever witnessed, namely, the myths of India, we see that they should have felt compelled to invent a symbol for this whole state of affairs. This symbol is embodied in the high God Vishnu who is said to come to the earth again and again in the form of different incarnations when the world is in need of him. The Hindus call him the god of dreams for his basic function is to sleep and eternally dream up new worlds which follow upon an endless cycle of birth and dissolution.¹ So now we must ask ourselves how this spell, and it must have been a tremendous spell, could ever have been broken?

Many circumstances contributed to this. It would often come about that different myths would conflict with one another and the result would be tribal or caste wars. In between ages of peace and relative calm there would be periods of fighting and great conflict. But of even greater importance is the fact that to be able to break a myth means first to have known and to have analyzed what lay at the source of this tremendous power, to have developed what I call the metaphysical capacity to think about and analyze the world and ourselves. It has taken us a long time to develop this capacity and in a way I am sorry for having to put it quite in this way, because one can easily get the impression that I am speaking about the phenomenon of evolution and I am not an evolutionist and do not want to be mistaken for one.

When I speak about the beginning of the power of thought and analysis in man I am thinking about the only phenomena I have been able to find in all of world history that I can properly call a development and that is the constant growth of man's world consciousness and his man consciousness. I have not said self consciousness because we are all too self conscious in this

¹ In the later Hindu pantheon of the gods Vishnu is also worshiped as the God of love who incarnates himself in the form of a man or animal in order to help mankind especially in times of strife or natural disaster. See for instance Abbe J.A. Dubois, Hindu Kanners, Customs and Ceremonies, Oxford University Press, 1928.

age although we take a great deal of pride in our so called individuality. No, psychologically I am not interested in any of that. I see now only one phenomena and that is the steady and slow growth of what man can and should be and I am speaking about man in general and not as an individual. It is true that every individual must go through a process of development but behind this human development there must be a concept of man and it is this that interests me.

Against this picture of ever growing order and the creation of an orderly world there stands in contrast the mythical world which was so disorderly that one could almost treat their personages as actors and exchange one for another. All of the gods could incarnate themselves as animals, plants, stones, or any object in the universe and man too would go through various incarnations where no clear distinction could be made as to where one phenomena ended and another began.² There was no world picture then for the world was not organized in that sense. Yet despite this lack of order one can see a kind of strange consistency in the spectacle of endless reincarnations and the question once again presents itself how man was able to break away from this, especially since it presents us with such strange results.

Recently an English astronomer, one of the leading scientists of our time, advanced a very interesting theory about our universe. It is a hypothesis, not a truth, about the possible origin and development of the universe, and it says that the universe has been for billions and billions of years exhibiting the phenomena of periodicity. During some of these periods it expands and it happens to be such a period that we are living in. Those galaxies that are on the periphery are receding at an astronomical speed and this continues until finally, they begin to slow again, and then contract, and for billions and billions of years the universe shrinks inwards into a compact mass of matter of enormous density and energy. Finally there is a great explosion and release of energy and it begins to expand again.³

² It has been estimated that there are approximately thirty million deities in the Hindu pantheon which range in importance from the Trimurti (literally "three shapes") i.e. Brahma (God of creation), Vishnu (God of dreams and love), and Shiva (God of death) to lesser deities (household gods, angels, gods which are specific to indigenous rural areas and peoples). "To the Hindu mind there was no real gap between animals and men; animals as well as men had souls, and souls were perpetually passing from men into animals, and back again; all these species were woven into one infinite web of Karma and reincarnation". [Quoted in Will Durant, The Story of Civilization, "Our Oriental Heritage", Simon and Schuster, New York, 1935, p.509. From Sir Charles, Eliot, Hinduism and Buddhism, 3v., London, 1921. -*Written in pen in Manuscript. -ed.*]

³ The hypothesis of an expanding universe was originally put forth by Hubble and his colleagues to explain what is called the red shift (the displacement of spectral lines in the direction of decreasing wavelengths obtained from stars on the outer periphery of our universe), however the above reference might possibly be to the English philosopher-physicist Eddington who developed a consistent expansion-contraction theory on the basis of Einstein's 1916 theory of general relativity. According to this view the above phenomena (known technically as gravitational collapse) is a consequence of the fact that the interaction of gravitational as opposed to nuclear forces produces a situation in which extremely high densities of matter are forced into an increasingly smaller and smaller area until finally an explosion (which is responsible for the initial expansion) takes place in which the matter created is propelled outward at an enormous velocity.

It is strange that we should find this strictly scientific hypothesis being advanced today in all seriousness, especially since it was once formulated by an ancient Indian mythical speculator many centuries ago in quite a different way. He said that the universe is breathing...it expands, and then it contracts and that is its law.⁴ Now this is rather odd, isn't it? Could it be that somewhere deep in the human mind where these speculations originate there are patterns from which they emerge? That is subconsciously, so to speak, there might be a collective unconscious which mirrors a single possibility as to the origin and development of the universe.⁵ A possibility that is now at least scientifically proved or half proved...we don't know!

The ancient Indian speculators then, invented as their symbol the God Vishnu who is an eternal dreamer and in him we find a complete formula as to what the mythical mind is doing. They themselves became those eternal dreamers who dreamt up one world after another and the greatest change that has ever occurred in the mind of man occurred when man abandoned mythical thinking. Buddha called this state of affairs enlightenment and it is almost as if in the process of this awakening man finally comes to himself.

I have now only to make one more decisive distinction. Up until about six hundred B.C. myths shall always be the product of some collective consciousness, i.e., they are the product of whole peoples and societies in conversation with one another and the mythical images spring from their conversation like the endless speculation of a dreaming crowd. Then suddenly individual persons begin to appear who not only challenge this collective consciousness but even begin to break it down. Metaphorically speaking it is almost as if the human mind had been in a deep sleep; had been buried in the earth and was dreaming there, and then suddenly it began to push its way toward the surface like a plant out into the open sky and sunlight. This is the first instance of human enlightenment that we are able to witness and it is of the utmost historical importance. (This was a period of great crisis).^{*} We seem today to be approaching exactly such a period, namely, the end of the logical era where we somehow have to try to transcend the logical mentality with which we have been living. Our crisis today is as big as theirs and their crisis was tremendous. It produced during one historical epoch Buddha in India, Lao Tze in China, and Zarathustra in Persia not to speak of Confucius (although he is not relevant to our immediate purposes).

⁴ The myth of eternal creation is given in the Hindu Puranas (literally old stories) in which each cycle of expansion and contraction forms what is called a year of Brahma the cycle itself being divided into Kalpas which are further subdivided into a thousand mahayugas (of approximately four billion years each). No attempt is made to explain how the universe began. There is no creation in the sense of genesis. On the contrary "the destruction of the whole world is as certain as the death of a mouse, and to the philosopher not more important. There is no final purpose towards which the whole of creation moves; there is no progress; there is only endless repetition". See for instance Abbe J.A. Dubois, Hindu Manners, Customs and Ceremonies, Oxford, 1928, and Sir M. Monier-Williams, Indian Wisdom, London, 1893, quoted in Durant, Our Oriental Heritage, p. 513.

⁵ This speculation is the starting point of Jung's archetypal theory of the collective unconscious as well as Cassirer's Philosophy Of Symbolic Forms which attempts to elaborate the basic categories out of which all symbolic constructions can be derived.

All of these men have one thing in common and that is they are checkers of dreams, that is they analyze these dreams and try to replace them with reality. Buddha in India and Heraclitus in Greece both refuse to dream and both attack their fellow man because all that they have in common is their own dreams and for this reason they cannot create a true understanding amongst themselves. Only by using reason is it possible to agree or disagree and in myth nothing like that was possible. You did not disagree; rather, you agreed and you could not say no because there wasn't any no possible. It is almost as if man up to that time could only say yes and that the idea of a negation should be impossible for him.⁶ And the fact that these men, quite in opposition to the collective consciousness of their times, set themselves against the myths, and that the great body of their propositions were eventually taken over by the masses of people is almost magic.

As we look at these men we see that they never had intended to create or found a world religion. Buddha was not a religious man and he did not speak in religious terms. Neither was Lao Tze or Zarathustra, as a matter of fact, Zarathustra was very careful about making religious statements or statements about God. These ancient sages did not promise much. They did not promise eternity or what we today would call salvation. They promised only enlightenment and enlightenment is not salvation. They believed that they were living in an age when people were suddenly gaining courage and did not need salvation any more. Thus today we shall not talk about Buddhism as such, but rather about the Buddha.

As a religion Buddhism has been accepted by millions of people and it is one of the most successful of world religions. I might even say that in our age of so called ecumenism when all of the religions of the world shall someday sit around a table and ask each other to unite and adjust to one another, that they shall find out in the process that if you want to sit in judgment of a religion then you judge it by the content of humanness that is in it. And as they sit around this conference table one by one they will be asked to give account of themselves and someone will raise the bitter question as to how many innocent people were murdered and tortured for their various gods? "Oh please, you members of this united nations of metaphysical thinkers, give an account of what you have done", and then, one by one they will almost all fall down, for it will turn out that they are all very guilty indeed. And the only religion that will be able to say that it

⁶ This fact has been given a very cogent explanation by Cassirer who writes "mythical thinking does not know (that) relation which we call a relation of logical subsumption, the relation of an individual to its species or genus, but always forms a material relation of action and thus--since in mythical thinking only like can act on like--a relation of material equivalence." In other words, since in mythical thinking only relations of material equivalence are possible negations (in the above sense) can never be exercised since to negate an assertion simply means that one is denying any equivalency relation between the elements of the assertion (logical space of the proposition) and the corresponding elements of reality (logical space of the world.) [See Ernst Cassirer, *Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*, 3v., 1964 Yale University Press, New Haven and London, Volume One, "Mythical Thought", Ch 2, p.65. -*Written in pen in Manuscript. -ed.*]

never encouraged a crusade or sent out missionaries to force others to accept its way of life will be the Buddhists.⁷

At the very least that is the praise that we must give to them. How the other religions of the world have conducted themselves in this matter is another question. They are all big civilizers and the essential question of the humanist as to how many innocent human beings must die for the glory of their beliefs leaves them all silent. Didn't the Christians in the sixteenth century murder Jews and put heretics to death at the stake simply because they had a different kind of belief? And what about Cardinal Spellman today? Do you really believe that we Americans are fighting God's war in Vietnam? We may be fighting a necessary war, I am not debating that, but to claim that we are fighting God's war is something that a Buddhist would never do. For heaven's sake leave God out of this question, it is a human question, and to say that only God can give us an answer to this question is a dirty lie because it attempts to use God as an argument and God can never be used as an argument for the draft. If there are any arguments at all then they are human arguments, and if we believe in the draft then we must give reasons for that belief, and we must allow others to disagree with those reasons, and then we shall somehow through the democratic process decide upon the question. But certainly there is no God leading us, indeed he might be insulted if he were to hear this. I think that I should be insulted if I were a God, which fortunately I am not.

The astonishing thing then, about the so-called higher religions is that they were originally put forward not by religious, but by philosophical men, and we are presented with the spectacle of whole societies that capitulate and begin to accept the personal consciousness of one man, and I do not say individual, but rather man. Each of them set before themselves the task of ridding their respective societies of every trace of collective consciousness and of the entire tradition of produced dreams and myths and they came to be accepted to such a large degree that Friedrich Nietzsche was to make the observation that only thoughts which come on the wings of doves can change the world. The thoughts that we shall consider now are thoughts which came on the wings of doves; silently, from man to man, and with the awakening of the human capacity to reason that this entails men discovered that they were not only dreamers, but that they could control their dreams and discover the grains of truth that were in them. That they could get hold of their dreams, because they wanted to get hold of their life, and with the acceptance of the powers of persuasion and argument, the metaphysical stature of man would then be increased.

There is a story about the Buddha who is reproached by one of his followers because he refuses to answer one of the great metaphysical questions of the human mind: namely, the question as to whether or not the universe is finite or infinite and whether or not the saints died as we do and are reborn again, or do not die and are not reborn? Buddha refuses to answer this question for the simple reason that it does not have an answer but to explain the reasons for this would require a lifetime and in the end the only result would be that he would have

⁷ This is also stated by Jaspers. "Despite all the terrible things that have happened in Asia as everywhere else, an aura of gentleness lies over the peoples that have been touched by Buddhism. Buddhism is the one world religion that has known no violence, no persecution of heretics, no inquisitions, no witch trials, no crusades." See Karl Jaspers, The Great Philosophers, Harcourt, Brace & World Inc., New York, 1962, volume I, p. 49.

squandered both his own life and the life of his disciple."We live", he says, "in a burning house, and I want to run out, but first you want me to tell you who it was that set the fire and in the meantime we are burning."⁸

He developed this tough rejection of any kind of senseless metaphysical speculation, because he had been raised in the tradition of Indian myths and he hated them. We today in the west have forgotten the distinction between the teachings of Buddha and those who came after him. Buddhism is not the same as Hinduism and in the beginning they were bitter enemies. When Buddha refused to accept the existence of the untouchables as a caste he attacked the very foundation of Hindu society, and the fact that he was able to gain a foothold in India at all shows that a real revolution was taking place. He excluded no one from his monasteries; he took untouchables, he took women, and there was no distinction made between men or between sexes. Everyone had the possibility of becoming a Buddha and this concept instigated a great revolution, not fought by weapons, but rather by the permanent retirement of more and more people from society. One could either live in a monastery to concentrate upon one deliverance and freedom, or one could return to his village to live a life of service and meditation. To Buddha it made no difference so long as one realized that a life of obligation in the village would place

⁸ "Like the other teachers of his time, Buddha taught through conversations, lectures, and parables. Since it never occurred to him any more than to Socrates or Christ, to put his doctrine into writing, he summarized it in sutras (threads) designed to prompt the memory" (See Durant, p.428). The most complete edition available in English of Buddha's extant sutras (including the vast oral tradition which developed after his death) is Max Muller's multi-volumed Sacred Books Of The Buddhists which includes Rhys Davids' now famous translations of Buddha's dialogues and sermons. Philosophers who posed such questions regarding infinity and the like are often referred to by Buddha as eel-wrigglers (literally hair splitters), because of their penchant for making the finest logical distinctions over questions that amounted to nothing. Belonging to one of the dozens of sects that emerged out of later Hinduism (from which interestingly enough Buddha was to draw many of his disciples) the sutras give abundant examples of such confrontations as mentioned above. Buddha usually dealt with such propositions in either one of two ways. In the first case he would employ the famous reductio ad-absurdum (literally reducing the proposition to its inherent absurdity by a fitting analogy) or he would use what came to be called the four cornered negation (denying that any determinate answer could be given to any conceivable form of the proposition hence inferring that the proposition itself was unanswerable although not necessarily meaningless). In his introduction to the Mahali Sutta from which the above example was taken, Davids lists the following questions which are unanswerable in Buddha's sense. (i) Whether the world was eternal or not? (ii) Whether the world was infinite or not? (iii) Whether the soul is the same as the body, or distinct from it? (iv) Whether a man who has attained to the truth exists, or not, and in any way after death? Buddha calls such questions "the jungle, the desert, the puppet-show, the writhing, the entanglement, of speculation" and at several points suggests that even the gods themselves, if they existed, could not answer them. (Durant, p. 431). See Dialogues Of The Buddha, translated from the Pali by T.W.Rhys Davids, Luzac & Company, LTD., London, 1956 in Sacred Books Of The Buddhists, translated by various oriental scholars and edited by F. Max Muller, volume II, Part I, Luzac & Company, LTD., London, 1956, p. 186. For an excellent summary of Buddha's method of reasoning, see Ninian Smart, Doctrine And Argument in Indian Philosophy, Muirhead Library of Philosophy, George Allen and Unwin, LTD., London, 1964, pgs 47-50. -written in blue ink in manuscript -ed.]

obstacles in the way of one's liberation, but still these obstacles could be overcome and there was no exclusivity implied in the commitment he asked of men.

So we can now see more clearly that what Buddha ultimately proposed was a way of life. Today that way of life has become embellished. In Tibet for instance, the embellishments have gone very far and Buddhism has been fused with every kind of mysticism and ritual the mind can imagine.⁹ Buddha is no longer listened to any more. He only would have laughed at those who believe that they could become a Buddha simply by smearing their faces with ashes or starving themselves and having their heads shorn. "No", he would have said, "you are not a Buddha but only a charlatan and you would do better to forget about all of that and concentrate upon your deliverance."

A complete break with the mythical world! What made it possible? How are we to explain this spectacle of the mythical world being broken into pieces? Perhaps the answer lies in the fact that if you really want to observe the world and what goes on in the world you really need to be at a certain distance from it. The distance I am speaking of is tremendous. It means that you must make a very sharp distinction between humanity, man, and nature and it means something else as well. Because in the world of the Hindus every phenomenon had been transformed into every other phenomenon; man, God, and nature were interchangeable, and so from man and nature the world of the gods must be separated as well. One no longer could encounter in the world a God any time that he wished; no Krishna could ever appear to you in one of his various incarnations and no Vishnu would come to you when you were frightened to listen to your prayers. Because as far as Buddha was concerned these gods when they came into the world came not as deliverers but as demons and these demons ultimately possessed you and were the cause of your fright. And in a way this became a little embarrassing for Buddha because he did not recognize a single demonic force operating in the world. Not a single one and he replaces the concept of salvation with the concept of Buddhahood which is merely a concept and not a god or demon. It can neither harm another human being nor do him any good but is something that the individual person can acquire only for himself.

At the end of the day when he finishes his meditation he will be able to rise and say that now all of the gods will see that he has become a Buddha, that he has become an enlightened one, that he can run through the palaces of the gods without fear and that he can place himself above the gods in order to put them in their place. Buddha smashed all of the Indian gods and he smashed them in the most literal way in order to propose a way of life that was based upon the recognition of suffering and the power to overcome suffering. Everything in life amounts to suffering and more suffering and he puts this forward as an objective argument which is irrefutable because it is something any human being can see with his own eyes.

⁹ Buddha originally elaborated a pluralistic philosophy (especially in its epistemological aspects) that has a great deal in common with the classical empiricism of Locke and Hume. The transformation of this as Buddhism spread from India to China and the rest of Asia into an idealistic philosophy and finally into a full blown catholicism replete with saints and heaven is described by T.R.V. Iviurti, The Central Philosophy Of Buddhism, George Allen And Unwin, London, 1960.

The question then, is how is one to get rid of this suffering which implies that first we must understand the reasons for suffering in order to be able to obtain the methods of thought necessary to rid ourselves of it. So Buddha now asks "what causes this ever increasing suffering in the world", and he answers, "we cause it". We cause it by our blind wishes and passions, and by that he does not mean all passions for he himself is a very passionate man, but he is passionate for the truth. Rather most of our passions are blind. We are like blind animals running through the world and by our running we increase our suffering more and more. Thus the first step in the abolition of this suffering is that we must get a hold of ourselves.¹⁰ How are we to do that? Buddha coins for us a logical term to describe our predicament which he calls selfhood and he sets against this another term which he calls Buddhahood.

Now when anyone tells us that we must abolish selfhood we Europeans understand him to mean by that the abolition of all our joys and our individuality. We do not like that thought because we love so much to be selves. But Buddha is not speaking about our concept of self. He has a very different concept in mind, a concept that is expressed by the Indian word atman which, according to the Hindus, is destined to be sucked back into Brahman because Brahman is the soul of the world and the atman is only the dream of that soul. And now we see something of the revolutionist coming in, because it is with the atman that Buddha identifies selfhood and it is selfhood with which he identifies suffering and finally it is with Brahman that he identifies the

¹⁰ The statement that all of life is permeated with pain and suffering as well as the means to overcome this suffering is given by Buddha in what has been called his favorite sutra, the Four Noble Truths. In certain essential respects the view put forth here has a great many affinities to the philosophy later preached in the west by Pascal who also believed that a man could learn more from an hour's pain than from all of the philosophers that have ever lived. In very brief summary the four noble truths state the following doctrine. 'A man's lot in this life is characterized by suffering (Sanskrit: duhkha; Pali: dukkha). The texts make it clear that suffering is linked to ignorance. Indeed, in (Buddha's) view, suffering and ignorance are invariably associated. The one is never found without the other. Most poignant and consequential among the aspects of ignorance, says (Buddha), is man's failure to comprehend the basic truth about the phenomenal universe; no phenomenon is permanent-nothing abides. Ignorant of that truth, his proclivities (habitual thirst-trsna, tanha-for objects and experiences) nurtured accordingly, a man lives out of harmony with himself, his fellows, his world. He suffers....(the destruction of which, duhkhanirodha, by the eightfold path) involves the eradication of ignorance through the acquisition of wisdom (sambodhi)-knowledge, conceived classically in India not merely as intellection but as operational and effective knowledge." See Guy Richard Welbon, The Buddhist Nirvana And Its Western Interpreters, The University Of Chicago Press, Chicago and London, 1968, (preface,vii). It has been pointed out by many scholars that Buddha's statement of the problem (what is suffering) as well as his answer and solution (suffering is blind desire and ignorance whose cure is knowledge) has a great deal in common with the method that a physician uses to diagnose and cure a disease (a further confirmation of the degree to which Buddha had removed himself from the mythopoetic consciousness of his time). Ninian Smart for instance in his Doctrine and Argument In Indian Philosophy (p.33) writes "it is interesting that the way the Four Noble Truths are expressed corresponds to traditional Indian medical practice. The disease is diagnosed (it is suffering); its cause is outlined (it is craving); and it is asked whether the cause can be removed and a cure effected. The answer being in the affirmative, a course of treatment is prescribed. The medical flavor of the Buddha's teaching seems to indicate an attempt to apply protoscience to religious problems. It also is a sign of the pragmatism enshrined in much Buddhist thinking."

image of selfhood. That is, the whole of suffering is symbolized in the image of Brahman (to the Hindus the ultimate God) and with this he relegates the entire concept of a world soul to the status of superstition. How fortunate for him that the Hindus were more tolerant than the Christians turned out to be centuries later when a similar situation arose, because if he had been in Christian surroundings he would have found himself at the stake for the views he put forth. He analyzes the concept of self almost in the manner of a modern psychologist and it took a very long time until finally, in the eighteenth century, David Hume appeared, and to the question "what is the self" he put forth the answer: "a series of disconnected impressions".

That is exactly what Buddha said. The self is not a one (i.e., a unit, or monism of sensory data) but rather a series of discontinuous psychic states.¹¹ This self which I claim to possess is not an I. It is rather like a kind of spreading monster that spreads to everything, that desires everything, that covers everything, and that wants everything. And it is precisely this self which you must diminish and ultimately smash if you are to become a Buddha, if you are to become an enlightened one. I am stressing the words enlightened one. They mean a man who has composed himself in accord with a certain way of life until finally in the end everything that he thinks and does is an expression of the thoughts that he lives. They are put into existence by him and his thoughts and deeds have become one. All of the men whom we mentioned before were like that. Their thoughts and deeds were one and Buddha expresses this in the form of a parable as the difference that exists between a man who speculates about the behavior of others and writes down his thoughts but does not live by them, and someone whose

¹¹ I hope that we shall no longer hear of the alleged pan- psychism contained in Buddha's philosophy of mind, something that is part of the abundant popular mythology that surrounds his thinking, and for which he himself would have had the utmost contempt. For the simple fact is that Buddha's analysis of consciousness (which is the epistemological precondition for any derivation of the self from either concepts on the one hand or sensations on the other) accords in almost every respect with the analysis given by Hume in the Treatise Of Human Nature (see for instance Part IV, Sec VI), indeed, Buddha anticipates Hume in nearly every major conclusion. In the BRAHMA-GALA SUTTA Buddha observes that there are some "recluses or Brahmins addicted to logic and reasoning (who) give utterances beaten out by argumentation and based on sophistry (who say) This which is called eye and ear and nose and tongue and body is a self which is impermanent, unstable, not eternal, subject to change. But this which is called heart, or mind, or consciousness is a self which is permanent, steadfast, eternal, and knows no change, and it will remain for ever and ever." (see Dialogues Of The Buddha, Part I, p. 36). And as if to further drain the notion of any inherent meaning he says in a later sutra that the personality (which is merely the image of the self) is nothing but a curse to which can be traced the root of the very disease that he has devoted his life to cure. (see Buddha's Teachings, "Being The Sutta-Nipata or Discourse Collection", volume thirty-seven of the Harvard Oriental Series, Harvard University Press, Cambridge Massachusetts, 1932, p. 129). In general this conclusion is also upheld by Ninian Smart (Doctrine and Argument in Indian Philosophy, pgs 38 and 44) as well as T.R.V. Murti (The Central Philosophy of Buddhism, the first three chapters) in which Buddha's original system as well as those that came after is given an exhaustive analysis. The self (as well as the epistemology upon which it is based) can be dispensed with. "All that is required for release is the individual's capacity for release" and consciousness is simply a series of discrete physical reactions (one often runs across the term sense fields in the critical literature) that can never be reduced to some unifying conceptual scheme and that belongs to no one.

understanding of the right path is reflected in his actions as well. The former he likens to a herdsman who has absconded with another man's cow, and he means by this that to rob another man of his thoughts, to endlessly speculate about something that is not one's own, is to engage in an activity that is irreal. There can be no reality to it and he draws our attention to this because he has something which he wishes to do for us, and what he wishes to do is to point the way to something he calls nirvana. Now what is this nirvana, really? Is it hereafter? Is it eternal bliss? What is Buddha saying to us?

There he sits -smiling- in all of his status as one who has reached nirvana. It is an unforgettable smile, the greatest smile that I have ever seen. It is the smile of achievement, nothing more. He has achieved enlightenment. He has become a Buddha. He no longer believes in rebirth. He is sure of only one thing, and that is that he shall never come back, he shall no longer return into samsara, into the circle of life, he shall be a Buddha forever and he offers this to us as a possibility (to be achieved by each of us in our own lives).

Does this then mean that it is right for us to die, forever? It means something like that. Because nirvana, which is always explained as nothingness or emptiness, is not really any of those things. Nirvana is something else.

Nirvana is mindfulness.

He wants to teach us a life that is mindful and he means by that not only learning or the possession of understanding, but also the capacity to be able to mind good things. You are mindful, not only your own life, but the life of your children, the life of your ancestors, the life of everything alive. We have lost the meaning of this word in our language, because we have confused it with an object (from which we obtain the inference that where there can be no object only a void remains).¹² So Buddha preaches only mindfulness as a state to be achieved by all who truly want it and who wish to proceed along the path that he shows.

In this sense he is like a guide for us, someone who has scaled the mountain path before us and who assures us as to where we may place our feet, because he has passed this way already and knows that indeed this is the way to go. It is the same way he proceeded and the

¹² The meaning of nirvana is one of the most difficult questions in all of Buddhist scholarship and one that Buddha himself is by no means clear on. Usually it is taken to mean the extinction of selfish desire (which seems to be implied in the last of the Four Noble Truths) however Durant (p. 435) gives at least four other possible meanings and notes that "the term has often a terrestrial sense, for the Arhat, (saint), is repeatedly described as achieving it in this life, by acquiring its seven constituent parts: self-possession, investigation into truth, energy, calm, joy, concentration, and magnanimity." In his Doctrine and Argument in Indian Philosophy Smart distinguishes between two possible states of nirvana which he designates as "nirvana with and without substrate"(p. 34), the "former (which leads on death to the attainment of transcendent nirvana) involves gaining peace and insight, in which not only craving is destroyed, but the truth of Buddha's teaching is seen existentially to be true", while the latter, in the sense of the saint, refers to a terrestrial state to be achieved in this life. Clearly the identification of nirvana with mindfulness has a great deal in common with the second, as represented by the Arhat or saint, which implies not only conceptual knowledge (i.e., insight into the fundamental essence, impermanence, of the phenomenal universe), or peace, as represented by the cessation of desire, but also virtue in its terrestrial sense of a mind and body that are in accord (a mind that is both filled with goodness and can mind goodness).

way he taught all of his disciples to proceed, to achieve more and more mindfulness, because in a way the mind is everything to him. What does that mean, the mind is everything? The mind for him is composed of two powers; the power of understanding, or intellectual power, and the power of minding in the sense of a purified will. In order to make your will free, to be able to exercise it freely, you must first purify it and free it from the commands of the self. You must put your will to the task of something which is reachable only under the conditions of a permanent effort and you must learn to master your wants, which are in fact infinite.

So we are left then with nirvana, mindfulness, a state which he tells us may last only for a moment, and which is the cause of the smile we see upon his face. And we ourselves can reach that, we can become a Buddha, and so the question then presents itself as to what it means to become a Buddha. He starts with the self, which is described as a kind of monster, and he ends with Buddhahood which he describes as something we would almost call today a person, and I would almost replace the term Buddhahood with manhood although in a sense much different from the way in which we usually speak of a man. Manhood, in the sense Buddha came to understand it, means the transformation of an individual (a prince who left his family and broke with all of the past) from a self that acts blindly to an enlightened one, to a man. So I propose to replace the word Buddha with the word man, and say that Buddha became a man in the sense that any human being can become a man because one isn't born a man and neither is one born human. One can become human and only through a tremendous effort. Yet it is here that we see the birth of what later came to be mistakenly called humanism, (which does not mean what the later so called humanists took it to mean) but rather is a permanent effort with many means to transform oneself from an animal into a man. There are other men besides Buddha who live in this time period and who are humanists in this sense. They all suppose that man is not born a human being, that he is too much of an animal, or better yet, that he isn't really much of an animal either. Rather he is more like a monster, not an animal, and so Buddha as well as Lao Tze and Zarathustra, all show the way for the development of man from an isolated self into a human being.

Buddhahood then, is the overcoming of the self that possesses us and keeps us bound to the fetters of samsara. Much later the half Buddhistic Zen Buddhists will once again ask the question "what is Buddhahood"? It should have been clear to them if they studied Buddha's teachings carefully but they mixed him up with Lao Tze and turned his beliefs into mystic beliefs. Buddha was not a mystic and does not present us with a mystic performance. We do not enter into eternal bliss, there is no such promise. If anyone ever suggested this to him Buddha always answered that he could know nothing of such an eternal bliss, because he is a man and he knows that a man can never know about anything eternal, and that anyone who claims to know such a thing is already on his way to becoming a charlatan.

This explains the strange fact that what is called sin in Christianity is called ignorance in Buddhism. The only sin Buddha recognized was ignorance and by ignorance he means much more than not knowing enough. This anyone can repair by studying books, however for the kind of ignorance Buddha has in mind there are no books that can help you no matter how much you learn. To be in ignorance means to have lived in an erroneous way and that means being ignorant of what man can do. He asks us to look at this phenomenon called suffering and then

see for ourselves whether or not he was right when he said that all of life was suffering. He wishes to persuade and convince us through reason, to sharpen and clear the mind not only the logical part but also the part Pascal called the heart, to learn to use that instrument in loving care for everything that is suffering. He is almost a rationalist in that sense, and when he tells us that he wishes us to become mindful it is this conception of mind that he is speaking of. There is no mysticism here, this is not the nothingness or the emptiness that crept into Buddhism later. Perhaps it crept in from the influence of other asiatic religions and philosophies, from a misunderstanding of Lao Tze, because Lao Tze speaks about emptying one's mind, but he means by this only that we should make our minds more perceptive. He means by emptiness receptiveness. We could of course speculate about emptiness forever. Even God has been called emptiness, but Buddha would have dismissed such speculations as being unanswerable. Unanswerable questions are good only when they sharpen your mind to enable you to put forth answerable questions.¹³

¹³ The merging of the concept of nirvana with nothingness (at least for the Asian mind) almost certainly can be traced to the transformation that took place in Buddhism as it merged with the philosophies indigenous to China, Japan, Tibet, etc. However as Guy Richard Welbon points out in his very excellent The Buddhist Nirvana And Its Western Interpreters, the earliest scientific and philosophic studies of Buddhism did not begin in- the west until the nineteenth century, and it is to Schopenhauer and the unique position that Buddhism occupies in his philosophy, that the most elaborate and consistent identification of nirvana and nothingness can be found. That this identification has persisted and continues to persist up to this very day is in no small part due to the impact that Schopenhauer's philosophy has had upon those western philosophers and theologians interested in Asian thought. In Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung Schopenhauer takes as his point of departure Kant's conception of the ideality of space and time as well as his conception of phenomenon (as manifested by the thing in itself which according to Kant we can never know). Schopenhauer immediately begins to dispute this and claims that phenomenon, far from being the lifeless concatenation of properties made available to our experience through our intuitions, also exhibit a more basic aspect symbolized by the will in man, especially the will-to-live. Suffering then, according to this view, is simply the Buddhistic transitoriness of all of the life processes (i.e., the inevitability of death) which circumvents and frustrates the will-to-live (longing for eternity) manifested in men's infinite wants and desires. "If we want to know what human beings, morally considered, are worth as a whole and in general, let us consider their fate as a whole and in general. This fate is want, wretchedness misery, lamentation, and death." According to Schopenhauer however, this fact is no cause for needless sorrow, but rather the height of eternal justice (i.e., the justice which rules the world as distinct from temporal justice which resides in the state and hence is limited as to its influence). The average (uncultured) individual whose reason is guided by the principium individuationis makes distinctions and judgements not on the basis of their true (eternal) worth but rather on the basis of their temporal worth hence he continues to look for final justice in institutions or in history and does not know that suffering and joy (justice and injustice) are but two aspects of the same phenomenon (namely the will). Evil then, is the necessary consequence of man's blindness to the real nature of the will (continual death and rebirth) where justice (the eternal meeting out of punishment, i.e., suffering, and reward, virtue) is accorded to each individual in measure to his understanding of the nature of the will and its law. Virtue (the recognition of myself as will which constitutes the prerequisite for an understanding of its operation in all of the life processes) is attained not by the average person (who is condemned by Schopenhauer to the realm of maya or illusion) but rather by the ascetic who renounces suffering and evil (through the renunciation of the fact of birth which in reality becomes the highest evil since only through birth can the life processes and hence the cycle of creation and dissolution come into

So in the end this tough man became a symbol of mildness and he created what became a religion of mildness, almost too mild, when we look at the Buddhists today. They have not gone on crusades, they have not tortured people, and we may ask ourselves what kind of religion is that? It is the most humanistic religion that has ever been created and in that sense Buddha has been called the light of Asia. He wants us to achieve enlightenment, he truly wants us to judge the ideas he proposes, we can accept them or reject them, but he never forces them on us. In this sense he is a humanist philosopher. This man, who has such a toughness about him, gives us only one mild teaching after another, because he wants us to get a hold of life so deeply that in a way he shall always remain a riddle for us.

Buddhism has become a world religion. But it has become a religion in a very funny way, namely, they have made Buddha into a God; or more correctly, they have made thousands of Buddhas' into gods, and they have created a heaven of which Buddha never spoke.¹⁴ These are the embellishments, the things that have overgrown it, and with them have grown back the myths as if a clearing, once made by human hands, is suddenly overgrown by the surrounding jungle. Such are the leftovers, the weak possessions of contemporary Buddhism. We can clear them out again, but on the other hand there is a religion, a real religion contained in the teachings of Buddha. I don't know if it has ever been put forward in quite this way, but once we have made a clear distinction between nature and man, that is once we have gained our freedom, we must still distinguish nature and man from divinity or God. This is done in a very philosophic way, but although Buddha tells us that he knows nothing about God, or gods, as

existence) thus breaking the chain (samsara) of death and rebirth. However in order for this to be accomplished the original goal (telos) of the will must be renounced which was embodied in the will-to-live, something that the ascetic reverses in himself, and hence sees as the final aim of all of the life processes in the universe. That is we are dealing here with a phenomenon, the will, which recognizes as its highest goal of perfection its own extinction. The result of this is a state of nothingness (according to Schopenhauer the nirvana of the Buddhists) in which all of nature is pacified and redeemed. See The World as Will and Representation, volume I, pgs. 353-412.

¹⁴ "In the centuries preceding and following the birth of Christ, Buddhism split into a northern and a southern movement, Mahayana (the Greater Vehicle in which to cross the waters of samsara to the land of salvation) and Hinayana (the Little Vehicle). Hinayana is purer and closer to the origins; compared to it, Mahayana seems like a fall into the mechanical forms of religion." See Jaspers, p. 46. It is noteworthy that Mahayana has a great deal in common with medieval catholicism although it is a matter of debate as to how literally the people interpret the images (saints and gods) that they pray to. Keyserling for instance, writing during a time (before the first world war) when the great yearning to discover the wisdom of the east was at its highest vogue observed that "Even in Ceylon, where the original teaching exists in all its purity, Buddha is worshiped as God by the people, and he is surrounded by many other mythical creatures--angels, saints, Hindu gods and divinities from the Tamyl Pantheon. Marvelous to relate, however, all these excrescences have failed to divert the significance of the teachings of Buddha...the Church has never attempted to oppose the growth of myths (which) are never taken quite seriously, and no one concerns himself whether one confirms or contradicts another." See Count Hermann Keyserling, The Travel Diary Of A Philosopher, Harcourt, Brace & Company. New York, Volume 1, 1925, pgs. 56, 57.

transcendent entities, he still indicates their possibility.¹⁵ There must be some kind of ultimate reality as a background to what he is doing and he knows this, because otherwise what he is doing would be impossible. Now this notion of an ultimate reality is something that theologians are always talking about, and the more logical they become the less religious they are. Buddha does not deny the possibility of this ultimate reality; he only says that it is unreachable for man. He denies us any understanding of it, because he knows that we cannot conceive of an absolute, of something that is not compound, that has no beginning and has no end. Yet we can at least get some idea of what that reality might be like by conceiving of its absolute negative. It is still not reachable for us, not experienceable, yet we can still get something of an abstract notion of what it may be, and he seems to think that this might be very useful to us. In Lao Tze this is the function of the Tao. It, too, is a transcendent principle, something that transcends reality but still might possibly be an ultimate reality. You can believe in it, or not believe in it, but the possibility cannot be denied. And this means that in so far as man is concerned there does exist a relationship between himself, and an unknown God. It is only the slightest possible relationship, a very human relationship, and yet it exists, not only in our relation to God but in our relation to nature as well.

II

We have seen in this first era of enlightenment the existence Of several men: Buddha in India, Lao Tze in China, Zarathrustra in Persia, the prophets in Israel, and finally the first philosophers in Greece. They all do something to enrich our possible knowledge of man and the world, and they give us an orientation, because at this time everything seems to be lost. For so long the mind of man has been contained in the ethical world, and then, suddenly, he is forced to provide his own direction. So we see created in this age two kinds of speculative metaphysics, and by metaphysics I mean a very simple thing. I mean the recognition of human freedom and the decisions and plans that are put forth upon its basis; the recognition that the world Cannot do this for us and that it is our obligation to be free.

There will be many philosophers who believe that they can take care of this for us. They will build whole systems which are supposed to explain it to us which is the very thing the Buddha did not do. Yet the very moment anyone conceives of a transcendent principle we see the

¹⁵ This raises the much debated question as to whether or not Buddha's skepticism was in fact an actual agnosticism at least insofar as belief in a transcendent reality was concerned. This question becomes all the more important in the light of Buddha's frequent silences when being presented with such questions and in the centuries that followed his death the tendency developed (this is especially important in the so called Madhyamika system which corresponds very closely to western idealism) to interpret this silence as being a negative affirmation of some absolute, transcendent reality, which in time, under the rigid literalness of many monks, became Buddha himself. T.V.R. Murti, in an exhaustive study, reaches the conclusion that "Buddha 's silence cannot be constructed as agnosticism" and produces in the process many quotations and arguments to support this position, a position interestingly enough also upheld by Jaspers. See Murti (p. 47) and Jaspers (p.40).

beginning of a new type of religion which we call transcendent religion. The notion of transcendence appears and then we see systems which originally started as philosophies ending up as religions. This is what happened to Buddha's philosophy. He had not intended to create a religious metaphysics, but since there existed in his system a possible transcendent principle, that already made it religious in the sense of the higher world religions. On the other hand, we have an entirely different phenomenon in Zarathustra.

Zarathrustra is a philosophic speculator as well as a religious speculator. He seemed to want to believe that it was possible to somehow be both. He has a single principle of freedom and one prayer which he says to his God, Ahura-Mazda, who is a God but who is placed so far into transcendence that no one, not even Zarathrustra himself, can really reach him. He only revealed himself once, when he talked to Zarathrustra, and Zarathrustra claims that he has been taught by him. There is a strange absence of rituals and it is a kind of philosophic religion that is being preached. In one of his Prayers Zarathrustra thanks Ahura-Mazda for having brought forth free will in man and the discriminating mind.¹⁶ He has given us everything we need and we shouldn't ask for more.

[tape ends here]

¹⁶ The actual text of the prayer is as follows. "This I ask thee, tell me truly, O Ahura-Mazda: Who determined the paths of suns and stars-who is it by whom the moon waxes and wanes?... Who, from below, sustained the earth and the firmament from falling-who sustained the waters and plants-who yoked swiftness with the winds and the clouds-who, Ahura-Mazda, called forth the Good Mind?" (See Durant, p. 367). It is the consent of the Good Mind that is being referred to above (i.e., a mind that is both discriminating in the sense of being able to separate various classes of phenomena, and which can discriminate in an ethical sense). According to traditional Zoroastrianism it was Ahura-Mazda who gave to Zarathrustra the Avesta (literally Book Of Knowledge And Wisdom) which later scholars and worshipers claimed to be the basis of the Zend Avesta (equivalent to our Bible) in which the sayings and prayers of their religion is compiled.