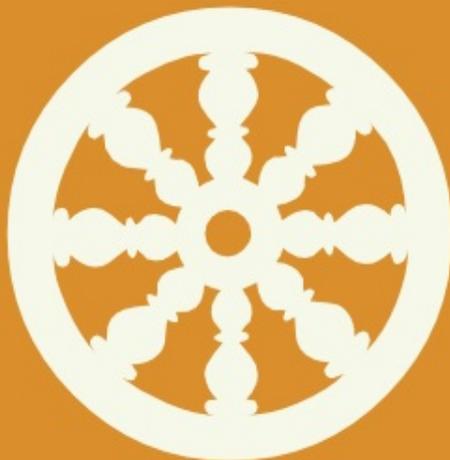


Wheel Publication No. 128/129

Aspects of Buddhist Social Philosophy

Two Essays

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First Impression: 1969

Second Impression: 1984

BPS Online Edition © (2008)

Digital Transcription Source: BPS Transcription Project

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A Recent Criticism of Buddhism



Professor Toynbee “in his recent work, *An Historian’s Approach to Religion*, makes certain criticisms of Buddhism on the basis of what he believes to be the account given of the life and teaching of the Buddha in the Hīnayāna ^[1] scriptures. It is proposed in this article to examine these criticisms in the light of the relevant material in the Pali Canon, which the Hīnayāna School holds in high regard as its main source of knowledge and inspiration with regard to the Buddha and his doctrine.

Toynbee’s criticisms may be listed briefly as follows. He asserts that (a) there is a basic inconsistency between the life and teaching of the Buddha and that (b) it would seem that his life has at least more value than his teaching since (i) the account given of human nature in his teaching is wanting, (ii) the goal it sets forth would appear to be intrinsically unattainable and that (iii) even if it were attainable it would not seem desirable.

Let us examine the grounds on which these criticisms are made and see whether they are justified in the light of the account given of the life and teaching of the Buddha in the Pali Canon.

Toynbee says that “the Buddha was an illogical evangelist” (p. 77) and speaks of his “sublime inconsistency” (p. 64) or “sublimely illogical practice” (p. 73). Now, what is the nature of his inconsistency? There seem to be three respects in which a religious teacher may be held to be inconsistent. His life may be inconsistent in the sense that his response or pattern of behaviour in some situations may be radically different from that of other situations which are essentially like them. His teaching may be inconsistent in that there are at least two propositions in it, one of which or what it entails contradicts the other or what the other entails. Lastly, while his life may be perfectly consistent and his teaching a coherent whole when taken independently of each other, his life may not be compatible with his teaching and vice versa. When Toynbee speaks of the inconsistency of the Buddha he seems to have this last sense in mind.

Strictly speaking there is nothing “illogical” in this kind of inconsistency since such a state of affairs is quite conceivable and perhaps not uncommon, since it is not everyone who for better or for worse practises what he preaches. Consider, for instance, the case of a person who says quite sincerely that it is bad to smoke but continues to smoke or says that it is good to have a regular medical check-up but does not himself do so. In both cases we find a

person asserting that a certain proposition p is true and behaving as if he does not believe p or finds it difficult to live up to the demands that p makes on him. In such situations, however valid the grounds for asserting the truth of p may be, his behaviour seems to undermine or impugn it, since not only do his actions not seem to follow on the track of his beliefs but appear to go contrary to them. I suppose this is part of what Toynbee intends to convey by calling this relationship between teaching and practice “illogical.” But perhaps he means more. Consider the case of the person who says that he has given up smoking but continues to smoke. Such a state of affairs is also quite conceivable and therefore cannot strictly be called “illogical,” but his behaviour shows that his statement is false. In the previous case the statement “it is bad to smoke” could still be true even if he smoked, but the statement “I have given up smoking” cannot possibly be true in the light of his behaviour since his behaviour is directly relevant to the truth or falsity of his statement.

Consider Toynbee’s own statement of the case he makes: “The Hīnayāna scriptures purport to be recording the Buddha’s practice as well as his preaching; and if their record is true, we are bound to conclude from it that the Buddha was not preaching what he was practising. In preaching, if he did preach this, that man’s paramount aim ought to be self-extinction, he was recommending to others a course of action which he had rejected for himself when the Tempter, after his attainment of Enlightenment, had

suggested to him that he should make his exit into Nirvāna without delay. In choosing, instead, deliberately to postpone his own release from Suffering in order to work for the release of his fellow sentient beings, the Buddha was declaring, in a positive act, that for himself, he believed that “to suffer in the cause of Love was a better course than to release himself from Suffering through Self-extinction.” (p. 292). In other words, if Buddha taught the proposition that “man’s paramount aim ought to be self-extinction’, (*p*), then in not extinguishing himself when he gained this knowledge he was acting as if he did not believe in *p* as far as he was concerned. Toynbee puts this argument in a slightly different form elsewhere. He says that if the attainment of Nirvāna involves the suppression of both good and bad desires, then after attainment there should be no motive or desire on his part to preach. If he does preach out of love or pity, this would be incompatible with his teaching about Nirvāna since there would be at least some desires (love, pity) which have not been suppressed and continue to influence his behaviour. Either his claim about the nature of Nirvāna as a state in which all desires (good and bad) are suppressed is false or his behaviour is not compatible with his teaching. So “if this impartial suppression of all desires, good and bad alike, was thus a logical consequence of the Hīnayāna Buddhist doctrine, the Buddha himself was guilty of a sublime inconsistency” (p. 64). In short, if the Buddha’s teaching about the nature of Nirvāna and the means of achieving, it is true then his

practice is not only quite incompatible with it but seems to show that this teaching was false.

It is worth pointing out that although Toynbee sees an incompatibility between the teaching and practice of the Buddha, one of the points often stressed in the Pali Canon is that the Buddha “preached what he practised and practised what he preached” (*yathāvādī tathākārī yathākārī tathāvādī*; It 122). Let us start at a point where Toynbee and the Pali Canon seem to agree, namely, that what the Buddha suffered during the forty-five years of his ministry was inspired by his love for mankind. As Toynbee puts it, “Even if he did recommend in his teaching a self-centred pursuit of self-extinction, he was tacitly countermanding his words by his acts of self-devoting love” (p. 292). The Pali Canon makes frequent reference to the love and compassion of the Buddha. One of his lay disciples, Jīvaka, says on one occasion, “I have heard it said that God is loving (*Brahmā mettāvihārī*), but I have seen with my own eyes how full of love the Blessed One is (*Bhagavā mettāvihārī*; M I 369).” Where the Buddha converts the robber Aṅgulimāla at the risk of his life, his kindness is referred to (*Buddho ca kāruṇiko*; M II 100), and it is often mentioned that the Buddha preaches not through desire for gain or glory but out of compassion and benevolence (*anukampako Bhagavā hitesī anukampaṃ upādāya dhammaṃ desesi*; M II 238).

If the Buddha practised Love, did he also not preach it? The injunctions to practise love and compassion towards our fellow beings are much more numerous in the Pali Canon

than the references to his own example. The Buddha tells his followers, “Just as a mother loves her only child even more than her life, extend a boundless love towards all creatures.” (Sn 149). The importance that he attaches to the cultivation of love for our fellow beings above all else is seen from the following statement that he makes: “None of the good works employed to acquire religious merit, O monks, are worth a fraction of the value of loving-kindness (*mettā*; It 19–21).” Then there is the well-known saying to his disciples, “Even if ruffians were to seize you and cut you limb from limb with a double-handed saw, you would not have carried out my bidding if you felt the slightest anger towards them.” (M I 129, 186)

It would appear therefore that not only did the Buddha practise love but he preached it, and viewed in this manner, there does not seem to be any inconsistency between what he practised and what he taught. But Toynebee is now likely to raise the question as to how his teaching about self-sacrificing love would be compatible with the proposition, “If he did preach this, that man’s paramount aim ought to be self-extinction” (p. 292). If love and pity along with selfish desires were to be extinguished in Nirvāna, how can they continue to influence a person after his attainment of Nirvāna? If the latter is true, the teaching about Nirvāna would be false.

In spite of Toynebee’s use of the epithet “self-extinction” to denote the ideal set-up in Buddhism, it seems to be fairly clear from his references to the concept of Nirvāna (pp. 62,

63) that he quite rightly does not subscribe to the annihilationist view of Nirvāna, which has been discarded by scholars on the ground that it does not take account of the positive description of Nirvāna in the Pali canon as also Buddha's own categorical denial that Nirvāna was annihilation. But Toynebee does not seem to take account of all the implications of this view. Just as much as it is man's duty to attain "self-extinction" it is equally a duty of his to attain ultimate reality, for "self-extinction" and "ultimate Reality" are paradoxically synonymous. The Buddha's view seems to have been that the categories of logic do not apply to Nirvāna (*atakkāvacara*). As such Nirvāna cannot strictly be described by positive or negative epithets. Positive epithets suggest empirical reality and negative ones annihilation, both of which are misleading. Nirvāna is a transcendent reality beyond space (*na katthaci kuhiñci*), beyond time since "the distinctions of past, present and future do not apply to it," and beyond causation (*na paṭiccasamuppannaṃ*). The passage from our finite self-centred existence to Nirvāna is pictured as one from bondage to freedom (*vimutti*) and power (*vasī*), from imperfection to perfection (*parisuddhi*, *paramakusala*), from unhappiness to perfect happiness (*parama-sukha*), from ignorance to knowledge (*vijjā*, *aññā*), from finite consciousness to transcendent infinite consciousness (*ananta-viññāṇa*), from the impermanent to the permanent (*nicca*), from the unstable to the stable (*dhuvva*), from fear and anxiety to perfect security (*abhaya*), from the evanescent to the ineffable (*amosadhamma*), from a

state of mental illness to a state of perfect mental health, [2] from darkness to light (*āloka*) etc.

In *Mahāyāna* we are familiar with the conception of the Buddha as embodying infinite wisdom (*mahāprajñā*) and infinite love (*mahākaruṇā*) but this conception seems to have its roots in the Pali canon where Nirvāna is depicted not only as a state of perfect knowledge (*vijjā, aññā, jñāna*) but as a state in which the “boundless states” (*appamaññā*) of love (*mettā*), pity (*karuṇā*), sympathetic joy (*muditā*) and equanimity (*upekkhā*) find their fulfilment (M I 297). Nirvāna is frequently defined as a state in which craving (*lobha*), hatred (*dosa*) and delusion (*moha*) are completely extinguished, but with the elimination of hatred, for instance, perfect love (*mettā*) takes its place. One who has attained Nirvāna is therefore endowed with the finest qualities of compassion, utterly refined and removed from the slightest tinge of selfishness. With the total elimination of the finite self-centred qualities of craving, hate and delusion, the transcendent mind, shining with its natural lustre (*pabhassaraṃ cittaṃ*) is wholly filled with perfect renunciation and charity (*alobha, arāga, cāga*), loving-kindness (*mettā*) and perfect wisdom (*amoha, paññā*). So with the eradication of the selfish desires love and pity find their perfect expression.

In other words, far from it being inconsistent for one who has attained Nirvāna to minister and preach unto others out of pity and compassion, it would be quite natural for him to do so. He does this not out of earthly considerations of gain

or glory or out of a sense of duty, for, as one who has attained the highest, he is described as one who is “free from debt” (*anaṇa*) and as one who has “discharged one’s obligations” (*katakaṇṭhīya*) but because it would be just what such a person would quite naturally do by virtue of his attainment.

The role of love and compassion before and after the attainment of the ideal is not infrequently referred to in the texts. A person, for instance, who attains final salvation after the cultivation of these qualities of love, compassion and meditation is described as “one who is cleansed with an internal bathing” (*ayaṃ vuccati bhikkhave bhikkhu sināto antarena sinānena*; M I 39)” and it is urged that this bathing is to be done not in the river but “in the waters of love and compassion for one’s fellow beings” (*idheva sināhi brāhmaṇa sabbabhūtesu karohi khemataṃ*; M I 39). Consider again the following passage:

“In whatever monk who was covetous, covetousness is got rid of, who was malevolent, malevolence of mind is got rid of, ... wrath ... grudging ... hypocrisy ... spite ... jealousy ... stinginess ... treachery ... craftiness ..., who was of evil desires, evil desire is got rid of, who was of wrong view, wrong view is got rid of. He beholds himself purified of all these evil unskilled states, he beholds himself freed (*vimuttaṃ attānaṃ samanupassati*). When he beholds himself freed, delight is born; rapture is born from delight; when he is in rapture, the body is tranquil; when the

body is tranquil, he experiences joy; being joyful the mind is concentrated. He dwells, suffusing one direction with a mind of loving-kindness (*mettāsaḥagatena cetasā*), likewise the third, likewise the fourth; just so above, below, across; he dwells having suffused the whole world everywhere, in every way with a mind of friendliness that is far-reaching, wide-spread, immeasurable, without enmity, without malevolence. He abides ... with a mind of pity (*karuṇā*), ... with a mind of sympathetic joy (*muditā*) ... , with a mind of equanimity (*upekkhā*) ... without enmity, without malevolence. It is as if there were a lovely lotus-pond with clear water, sweet water, cool water, limpid, with beautiful banks; and a man were to come along from the east, west, north or south, overcome and overpowered by the heat, exhausted, parched and thirsty and on coming to that lotus-pond might quench his thirst with water and quench his feverish heat. Even so ... one who has come into this *Dhamma* and discipline taught by the Buddha, having thus developed loving-kindness, pity, sympathetic joy and equanimity attains inward calm." [3] (M I 283)

That love and pity cease or ought to cease with the attainment of Nirvāna is a basic misconception due to misunderstanding the nature of this ideal. It is quite expressly stated that the saint who has attained perfection

(*sampannakusalaṃ paramakusalaṃ uttamapattipattaṃ samaṇaṃ ayojjhaṃ*; M II 29) is endowed among other things with “right thoughts (*sammā-saṅkappa*) which do not require to be further disciplined” and these right thoughts include *ahiṃsā* (*avihiṃsā-saṅkappa*) which is a positive concept in Jainism and Buddhism.

That a person on attaining perfection, whether he be the Buddha or one of his disciples, ought to pass away immediately into Nirvāna without being a light unto the world by his example and teaching is an idea which is quite alien even to Hīnayāna ways of thinking. The Buddha exhorted his disciples who were Arahats to go and preach unto the world for the good and happiness of mankind (Vin I 21). Perhaps Toynbee was misled by the significance to be attached to the first “temptation” of the Buddha. According to the explanation in the Pali scriptures themselves, the Buddha’s compassion is in no way compromised by his attainment of Nirvāna. He hesitates for a moment wondering as to whether he should preach, not because of any lessening or lack of love on his part for his fellow beings nor because he thought that Nirvāna “was a prize to be clutched” (p. 293) but because he wonders whether the world, immersed in and getting satisfaction from, its petty self-centred desires, hates and its cherished erroneous beliefs would hearken unto a teaching which involves a total abnegation of all this. His thoughts on this occasion as recorded in the scriptures are as follows: “Should I teach what I have found with difficulty? This Dhamma is not

readily comprehensible to those given to craving and hate. It goes against the current, is subtle, profound, and difficult of comprehension and as such those who are slaves to their desires and are enveloped in darkness, would fail to see its truths." (M I 168) It is only after he looks into the hearts and minds of men and sees that there are among them those who would understand that he decides to preach.

Love and compassion as ideals exemplified in the lives of Buddha and his disciples, far from being incompatible with the teaching of the Buddha, have a central place in Buddhism both as a means to the attainment of Nirvāna and in a refined and transcendent form comprising the goal itself. Nirvāna was only the extinction of the fires of greed, hate and delusion in the infinite waters of transcendent and unconditioned love and wisdom. When the Buddha or one of his disciples attained this transcendent state, he came back to make use of his psycho-physical personality to serve others until it passed away. The theory that it would be an act of selfishness to seek to share one's spiritual gains with another is unequivocally condemned by the Buddha in a sermon on the ethics of teaching. The Brahmin, Lohicca, holds the view, "If a religious person acquired some spiritual state, then he should tell no one else about it. For what can one man do for another? To tell others would be like the man, who having broken through an old bond, should entangle himself in a new one. Like that is this desire to preach to others; it is a form of selfishness. For what can man do for another?" (D I 224 ff) The Buddha dismisses this

as a false and evil view (*pāpakaṃ diṭṭhigataṃ*) and among the reasons given for doing so is that such a person would be one who is lacking in love and sympathy for the welfare of others.

II

If the Buddha's life has value, as Toynbee grants, it would be difficult to see how his teaching, of which his life was an expression, lacks value. Here again Toynbee seems to entertain this view owing to a misunderstanding of Buddhist teaching. Let us consider his criticisms in detail. Toynbee says that the Hīnayāna account of human nature is defective: "If a twentieth century inquirer, brought up in the Christian tradition, found oneself called upon to answer these questions as best as he could, no doubt he would be likely to declare in favour of Christianity and the Mahāyāna as against the Hīnayāna. On the question of fact, he would find the Hīnayāna's diagnosis superficial in its failure to distinguish between self-devoting and self-centred desires. He would find that a superficial diagnosis had led to a wrong valuation and a wrong prescription" (p. 291). Earlier in his work Toynbee seems to concede the distinction between good and bad desires, but both are to be suppressed for the attainment of Nirvāna: "If the Buddha

was right as surely he was, in holding that absolute detachment can be achieved only through the extinction of all desire whatsoever, then the Hīnayāna must require not only the suppression of desires that are ordinarily regarded as being selfish, such as those of personal pleasure, prosperity, and power for oneself, but also the suppression of desires that are ordinarily regarded as being altruistic, such as love and pity for one's fellow sentient beings" (p. 64).

Although the analysis, classification and valuation of desires in Buddhism would not be the same as what Toynbee adopts, it would be quite incorrect to say that Buddhism fails to distinguish between self-devoting and self-centred desires. According to Buddhism, the springs of action are six-fold, comprising the three immoral bases of action (*akusala-mūla*), namely craving (*lobha, rāga*), hate (*dosa*) erroneous beliefs (*moha*) and the three moral bases of action (*kusala-mūla*) consisting of their opposites, selflessness (*alobha, cāga*), love (*adosa, mettā*) and wisdom (*amoha, paññā*). One of the terms generally translated as desire (*taṇhā*) literally means "thirst" (Skr. *tr̥ṣṇā*) and there are said to be three thirsts: the thirst for sensuous pleasures (*kāmatāṇhā*), the thirst for selfish pursuits (*bhavataṇhā*) and the thirst for destruction (*vibhavataṇhā*). Of these the thirst for sensuous gratification (*kāmatāṇhā, kāmarāga*) and the thirst for selfish pursuits (*bhavataṇhā*) such as the desire for self-preservation, self-continuity (personal immortality), self-assertion (power), self-display, self-respect etc. arise from the basis

(lit. root, *mūla*) of craving (*rāga*, i.e. *kāmarāga*, *bhavarāga*). The thirst for destruction (*vibhavataṇhā*) springs from (the root of) hate. These are the three forms of thirsts or desires, which continually seek and find temporary satisfaction (*tatratatrābhinandinī*) though ever remaining unsatisfied and provide the fuel for the process called the individual. The distinction made between these unwholesome desires (*taṇhā*) based on craving and hate, and righteous aspirations (*sammā-saṅkappa*) based on selflessness and love is so marked that the term “thirst” is not used to denote the latter. What springs from selflessness and love are not “thirsts” unlike the products of craving and hate. Love (*mettā*) is as such not termed a desire since a desire in the above sense of a “thirst” (*taṇhā*) is basically self-centred and its role would be to build the house that is the individual from birth to birth. Selflessness (*alobha*, *cāga*) and love (*mettā*) as the opposites of craving and hate, when they occur in their purest form, do not have these characteristics and are hence not considered desires in the sense of “thirsts.” In fact, by not doing so, Buddhism recognises the wide gulf that exists between the two. Desires are narrow and selfish (*pamāṇakataṃ*), while selflessness and love are boundless (*appamāṇā*; M I 297). And what the Buddha recommends is the complete elimination and eradication of the former until the mind is entirely suffused by the latter in their most refined state. The distinction and opposition between the two as motives of action is often mentioned. For instance, it is said that one’s speech may be opportune

or inopportune, true or false, gentle or harsh, useful or futile and inspired by love (*mettacitta*) or influenced by hate (*dosantarā*; M I 26).” The narrow desires are in fact to be eliminated by the development of the latter, their opposites. It is said that “by cultivating love (*mettaṃ bhāvayato*), ill-will (*byāpāda*) subsides.” (M I 424)

The criticism is sometimes made that although the cultivation of selflessness and love may be recommended as a means to an end, namely, in order to expel craving and hatred, they too have to be given up in order to attain the state of perfect detachment which is Nirvāna. There are passages in the canon which *prima facie* appear to favour such a theory. It is said, for instance, that the mind’s emancipation through love (*mettācetovimutti*) is conditioned (*abhisaṅkhata*) and as such, impermanent and liable to cease, and realising this, he attains the supreme secure state of Nirvāna (M I 351). To cite another instance, it is recommended that one should work for the cessation of evil habits (*akusalānaṃ sīlānaṃ nirodhāya paṭipanno*) as also for the cessation of good habits (*kusalānaṃ sīlānaṃ nirodhāya paṭipanno*) or for the cessation of good aspirations (*kusalānaṃ saṅkappānaṃ nirodhāya paṭipanno*; M II 26).” It is perhaps passages of this sort, which if not carefully examined in their respective contexts, are likely to lead one to the conclusion that the Buddha recommends the suppression of both good and evil and that both are almost valued alike.

But if these very same passages are carefully studied in their contexts and on the general background of canonical

thought, they would acquire quite a different meaning and significance. Let us take the passage that we have just referred to. Here the question is asked: “How should one conduct oneself in order to eliminate evil habits?” (MII 26). The answer given is that we should exercise our will (*chandam janeti*) or master-desire as Toynbee would have it (see below) and by a process of self-analysis and effort on our part, strive (a) to eliminate evil states that have arisen, (b) to be on our guard against the arising of evil states not arisen, (c) to make arise good states not arisen and (d) to preserve (*thitiyā*), to not allow to fall into desuetude (*asammosāya*), to further develop (*bhiiyobhāvāya*), to bring to maturity (*vepullāya*), to cultivate (*bhāvanāya*) and perfect (*pāripūriyā*) good states that have arisen. Evil, in other words, is to be eradicated and prevented from influencing us and part of the means for doing so is to cultivate the good. Now, in this same passage when we come to the question, “How is one to conduct oneself in order to eliminate good habits?” the answer given is precisely the same as the above, comprising (a), (b), (c) and (d). Indeed it would look paradoxical as to how one can eliminate good habits (*kusalānaṃ sīlānaṃ nirodhāya paṭipanno*) were not the crucial distinction drawn in this passage between “conditioned virtue” (*sīlamayo*) and perfected “natural virtue” (*silavā*). It is said that the perfect saint who has attained final salvation (*cetovimuttiṃ paññāvimuttiṃ yathābhūtaṃ pajānāti*) is “naturally virtuous and not virtuous through conditioning” (*sīlavā hoti no ca sīlamayo*).

With regard to the elimination of the good aspirations, we find the same paradoxical statement that this is to be done by eliminating evil states of mind and cultivating the good states of mind to perfection and here again the saint “who has attained the highest perfection (*sampanna-kusalo*), the highest good (*parama-kusalo*) and the highest attainment (*uttama-pattipatto*)” is said to be, among other things, “endowed with righteous aspirations which do not need further refinement or disciplining (*asekhena sammā-saṅkappena samannāgato*).” This conception of the Arahāt is surely far removed from that of a person who has attained a state of cold quietist indifferentism prior to extinction.

The distinction made in the Pali Canon is that of the conditioned (*saṅkhata*) goodness of those whose self-centred desires (i.e. the threefold thirsts) are not completely eradicated and the pure goodness of the perfect ones or the Arahats in whom these thirsts or desires have been completely extinguished. The conditioned goodness requires further disciplining (Pali *sekha*; Sk. *śaikṣya* from the root *śikṣ*, to discipline, train) while the perfect goodness (*parama-kusala*) of the saint does not require such disciplining or further refinement (*asekha*). The latter is naturally virtuous (*sīlavā*) while the virtue of those who have not as yet attained perfection is artificial and conditioned (*sīlamayo*). This is no denial of the importance of selflessness and love, the cultivation of which is necessary though not sufficient for the extinction of the self-centred desires but a recognition of the extent to which these same

self-centred desires may condition and dominate much of our so-called acts of selflessness and love, so that it is only on attaining the detachment (*virāga*) of Nirvāna that our love and pity could be entirely disinterested. What passes for love and pity is influenced consciously or unconsciously by our desire for gain or glory in earth or heaven and other such self-centred considerations such as fear of man or God. Disinterested love and pity can arise only when the mind at all its levels is totally purged of all such self-centred desires and considerations.

III

Now, this goal, says Toynbee, “looks intrinsically unattainable.” “Absolute detachment looks as if it might be intrinsically unattainable, because it is hard to see how the intensely arduous spiritual effort to detach oneself from all other desires can be achieved without attaching oneself to the single master-desire of extinguishing every desire save this. Is the extinction of the desire to desire nothing but the extinction of desire a psychological possibility?” (p. 64). To say that absolute detachment is intrinsically unattainable would of course imply that the claims made by the Buddha and some of his disciples to have attained such a state are in fact mistaken or false, but it is not primarily by an

examination of these claims that Toynbee makes this assertion. Instead, he (i) asserts that the giving up of desires entails the presence of a single master-desire intent on eliminating all desires save this and (ii) questions the psychological possibility of extinguishing this master desire.

That the giving up of desires is to be accomplished by attaching oneself to a master-desire is precisely what Buddhism states: “Desires are to be given up depending on desire” (*taṇhaṃ nissāya taṇhaṃ pahātabbaṃ*; A II 146). This master-desire is more usually designated by the term “will” (*chanda*, sometimes translated as “desire,” see *Kindred Sayings* V 239; also p. 243 fn.) and is defined as “the will to prevent the arising of evil states of mind not arisen, the will to keep out evil states of mind which have arisen, the will to make arise good states of mind which have not arisen and the will to preserve, develop, refine and perfect good states of mind which have arisen.” (S V 268). In short, it is the will or desire to do away with the unwholesome desires (‘thirsts,’ *taṇhā*) and to refine the wholesome states of mind to perfection by completely eliminating the impact of the former on the latter until these good states of mind (selflessness, love, wisdom) cease to be in the least affected by erroneous beliefs. This is the role of the master-desire which in a wider sense comprises the acts of will (*chanda*), the physical and mental energy (*virīya*), the thoughts (*citta*) and the mental investigations and analyses (*vīmaṃsā*) directed towards the above end. So, on this count, the Buddhism of the Pali canon would have no quarrel with

Toynbee's assertion that a master desire would be necessary to give up every desire save this.

The disagreement would be with the next step of Toynbee, namely, his statement that it would be psychologically impossible to extinguish this master-desire. If by "the desire to desire nothing but the extinction of desire" Toynbee means "the master-desire", the objection would be "Is the extinction of the master-desire a psychological possibility?" But why is this psychologically impossible? Apart from the mere suggestion, Toynbee does not seem to make it at all clear as to why this is so. He does not provide any empirical grounds or logical reasons for holding that this would be psychologically impossible. Would he say that from what we know of the psychology of man it would by no means be likely for one to have a desire to do away with desires or to extinguish a desire to do away with desires? Now, Buddhism would grant that in desiring to do away with desires one would be going against the natural current (*paṭisotagāmi*) of the mind which continually seeks the gratification of its self-centred desires without ever finding satisfaction. But Buddhism would not grant that this is psychologically impossible and would point at least to the example of the Buddha and some of his disciples. It would be psychologically difficult particularly for those whose self-centred desires are strong but by no means psychologically impossible even for them.

On the other hand, is Toynbee's objection to the possibility of desiring the extinction of the master-desire primarily a

logical one? Is he saying that just as much as we need have a master-desire to extinguish desire, it would seem necessary to have a super-master-desire to extinguish the master-desire and that this would lead to an infinite regress? And is he also suggesting that the master-desire like the first-order desires cannot achieve permanent satisfaction? If the objection is in this form, it has already been raised and met in the Pali canon itself. A Brahmin asks Ānanda how desire can be fully extinguished since the extinction of desire by desire would be an unending process.

“What is it, Master Ānanda, for which the holy life is lived under Gotama, the recluse’?

‘For the sake of abandoning desire (*chanda*), Brahmin, the holy life is lived under the Exalted One.”

‘But is there any way, is there any practice, Master Ānanda, for the abandoning of desire?’

‘There is a way, Brahmin, there is a practice for abandoning desire.”

‘Pray, Master Ānanda, what is that way and that practice?’

‘Herein, Brahmin, a monk cultivates the basis of psychic power of which the features are desire (*chanda*) ... energy (*virīya*) ... thought (*citta*) ... investigation (*vīmaṃsā*) together with the co-factors of concentration and struggle. This, Brahmin, is the way, this is the practice for the abandoning of

desire.”

‘If that be so, Master Ānanda, it were a task without end not one with an end. That he should get rid of desire by means of desire is an impossible thing.’

‘Then, Brahmin, I will just question you on this matter. Do you answer as you think fit.’

‘Now, what do you think, Brahmin? Was there not previously a desire in you (urging you) thus: “I will go to the park?” When you got to the park was not that particular desire abated?’

‘Yes, indeed it was, Master.’

‘Was there not previous energy (*virīya*) in you (urging you) thus: “I will go to the park” ... thought (*citta*) in you ... deliberations (*vīmaṃsā*) in you ... When you got there did not energy ... thought ... deliberations subside?’

‘Yes indeed, Master.’

‘Very well, then, Brahmin. That monk who is an Arahat ... who is released by perfect insight,—that desire which he had previously to attain Arahatship, now that Arahatship is won, that desire is abated ...’”
(*Kindred Sayings* V 243–5)

The argument is that logically the master-desire is not on the same footing as the first-order desires, for, unlike these self-centred desires which continually seek gratification

without being permanently satisfied, the master-desire would achieve final satisfaction and be extinguished with the eradication of the self-centred desires.

IV

The next criticism is posed in the form of the question as to whether the pursuit of absolute detachment, if feasible, is also good: “They sought to detach themselves from every form of mundane society and beyond that from the lust of mundane life itself; and the very sincerity and resoluteness with which these Hīnayāna Buddhist philosophers pursued their spiritual quest raise two questions: Is absolute detachment an attainable objective? And supposing it to be attainable, is the pursuit of it a good activity?” (pp. 63, 64). Perhaps this criticism, which was based on the misconception that Love and Pity were extinguished in Nirvāna along with the self-centred desires, is already met in so far as we have pointed out that these good states of mind, far from being effaced in Nirvāna are refined and perfected so that they are no longer dependent on the egoistic base of the self-centred desires.

Yet the objection may be raised in another form. It may be asked how Love and Pity can be cultivated in the abstract by cutting oneself away from the life of society for the sake

of one's own salvation. Is this not a radically egoistic pursuit in itself? Is not the ethic of Hīnayāna Buddhism rooted in the idea of achieving one's own salvation with no concern for others and even one may say at the expense of others who have to provide with their toil and sweat the basic necessities of life without which even their selfish ascetic existence would not even be possible?

This picture does not do justice to the Buddhist conception of the religious life. The Buddha does not say that the contemplative life (*vita contemplativa*) lived apart from the active life of society, was essential even to seek the goal of Nirvāna in this life itself, although there is no doubt that the contemplative life was recommended in view of the better opportunities that it provides the individual. The life of the Buddhist contemplative, i.e. the monk, is not the same as that of the ascetic who retires from the world. He dwells aloof from society but nevertheless in society giving moral guidance and spiritual instruction to laymen. This work of his for society is considered as valuable as the production of mundane goods and services on the part of the other members of the society. Although he seeks to achieve the final goal by his own individual effort yet the means of achieving it as well as the goal itself is stamped with selflessness. If he achieves his goal he continues to be of the greatest service to others because of his spiritual knowledge and attainments with no expectation whatsoever of earthly or heavenly reward.

Can such a life be called egoistic? Although the term

“egoist” strictly refers to an individual who seeks his own welfare, we normally use the term to denote one who seeks primarily his personal material welfare even at the expense of others. But would a person who seeks primarily his own spiritual welfare at the expense of his material welfare or even his life, and seeks it partly by his selfless service in the present and in order to be of the greatest service to others in the future, rightly be called an egoist? In so far as he seeks primarily his own spiritual welfare until he reaches the goal he may be called an enlightened egoist. But in so far as he does this by cultivating a selfless love for his fellow beings, culminating in a state of perfect selfless love, which enables him to live the rest of his life solely in the service of others, it would at the same time be the life of an enlightened altruist. Buddhism holds to the principle that one cannot save another without first saving oneself. The Buddha tells Cunda, “It is not possible for one who is stuck in the mud to help another out but it is possible for one who is not stuck in the mud to help another who is stuck in the mud. It is not possible that a man who has not saved himself can save another but it is possible for a man who has saved himself to save another.” (M I 46)

Toynbee says that “the Mahāyāna Buddhist’s verdict on the Hīnayāna philosopher can be summed up in an inversion of the Scribes’ and Pharisees’ jibe at Christ on the Cross: “He saved himself; others he cannot save” (p. 65). The Hīnayāna philosopher’s reply would be: “He saved himself so that others he can save.” The Buddha first trained his disciples to

be Arahats and then sent them into the world to work and preach for the good and happiness of mankind. It would seem odd to call these Arahats, (who like Puṇṇa went among unknown peoples ready to meet the worst persecution and even death with hearts of love), egoists. The ethical ideal recommended in the Pali canon, as representative of the Hīnayāna viewpoint, is that of enlightened egoism-cum-altruism, the one being dependent on the other. The Buddha says, “Monks, there are these four persons in the world. What four? He who is neither bent on his own welfare nor on the welfare of others; he who is bent on the welfare of others but not his own; he who is bent on his own welfare but not of others; and he who is bent on the welfare both of himself as well as of others. He who is bent on the welfare of oneself as well as of others is of these four persons the chief and best, topmost, highest and supreme.” (A II 95). According to this valuation the best of all people is he who works for his own good as well as for the good of others, there being no conflict between the two ends when the good happen to be moral and spiritual.

Some Aspects of the Bhagavad Gīta and Buddhist Ethics

Comparing the ethical teachings of the Bhagavad-Gīta (= Gīta) with Buddhism, Rādhakrishnan in his *Indian Philosophy* (pp. 526–27) makes the following observations: “Both protest against the absolute authority of the *Vedas* and attempt to relax the rigours of caste by basing it on a less untenable foundation. Both are manifestations of the same spiritual upheaval which shook the ritualistic religion though the Gīta was the more conservative, and therefore a less thorough-going protest ... In the descriptions of the ideal man the Gīta and Buddhism agree. As a philosophy and religion the Gīta is more complete than Buddhism which emphasises overmuch the negative side. The Gīta adopts the ethical principles of Buddhism while it, by implication, condemns the negative metaphysics of Buddhism as the root of all unbelief and error.”

The impression that this passage leaves in the mind of the reader is that the Gīta, though less critical of the *Vedic* tradition than Buddhism, nevertheless adopts, on the whole, the ethical principles of Buddhism and gives them a less extremist interpretation on the background of a more satisfying positive metaphysics. Now, whatever the

difference of opinions that scholars have about the origin of the Gīta, they seem generally to agree that the work in its present form is eclectic in character and contains in it many strands of Hindu thought somewhat loosely knit together. As such it is not surprising that the *jñānamārga* (way of intuitive knowledge) of the *Upaniṣads* should be well represented. Now, it is from these passages (i.e. II.55–72; IV.16–25; V.18–28; XII.13–16) that Rādhakrishnan quotes in support of his statement that “in the descriptions of the ideal man the Gīta and Buddhism agree.” But this agreement in the content of these passages which idealise the *muni* or the “contemplative seer” (II.56; V.28; XII.19) is understandable for there is much in common between the way of salvation in Buddhism and the *jñānamārga* of the *Upaniṣads*, and to this extent, the ideal man and the ideal life pictured in each is very much similar. It may also be granted that the Gīta references to this life have a more Buddhist tone than the *Upaniṣads* in that phrases and concepts more typically Buddhist than Hindu such as *rāga-dveṣa* (II.64), *maitri* (XII.13), *kāruṇya* (XII.13) and *Nirvāṇa* (II.72) occur among them, betraying possible Buddhist influence on the Gīta.

But surely the Buddhist ideal is at variance with the *jñānamārga* of the *Upaniṣads*, if we go by the main trend of its thought and its special emphases, which show a persistent and distinct preference for the Personal conception of God as against the Impersonal, for devotion (*bhakti*) as against abstract meditation on the impersonal Absolute, and for the

path of disinterested action based on moral imperatives (*karmayoga* and *svadharmā*) as against the way of contemplative knowledge (*jñānamārga*). It is true that in this respect the Gīta contradicts itself or at least provides only a very loose synthesis of doctrines apparently mutually inconsistent. For instance, although it is essential and generally maintained that the worship of the Personal Lord is better than meditation on the Impersonal Being (XII.I,2) which is unmanifest (*avyaktam*), yet it is expressly mentioned earlier that “men of no understanding think of Me, the Unmanifest (*avyaktam*) as having manifestation (*vyaktim āpannam*) not knowing my higher nature.” (VII.24).

These two conceptions of God show up the inconsistency of the Gīta teaching. On the one hand we are told that the highest intuition of God reveals his Being as Impersonal, and without this intuition salvation is not possible. On the other hand it is said that worship of God as Personal (which necessarily entails an erroneous conception of the divine being according to the former view) is the easier, the more proper and the natural path to salvation, thus implying that entertaining an erroneous conception is not only no bar to salvation but is in fact the better path to it.

The same inconsistency is manifest where the life of the *muni* or sage, who on attaining perfection, is in no need of work that needs to be done (III.17) is represented, on the one hand, to be the ideal while the life of disinterested action is more often held up as the superior, (V.2; VI.2) though both guarantee salvation (V.5).

Yet notwithstanding this divergence of doctrines in the Gīta we should not overlook the fact that the ideal man as portrayed in the main teaching of the Gīta is far removed from the *Upaniṣadic* ideal of the contemplative seer even though an *Upaniṣad* like the *Īśā* is almost an epitome of the religious philosophy of the Gīta while the contemplative seer finds a place, though not an important place, in the total background of Gīta teaching. The Gīta ideal is the man of action, who performs his social duties purely out of a sense of obligation and devotion to God.

In the circumstances it would be unfair both by the Gīta as well as by Buddhism to say that “in the descriptions of the ideal man the Gīta and Buddhism agree” merely on the ground of the similarity between the Buddhist sage and the contemplative seer of the *Upaniṣads* for whom the Gīta finds a not too important place in the scheme of things. If therefore we study the Gīta ideal in relation to the Buddhist, it is at the level of social ethics that we have to make the comparison, no doubt on the general background of the metaphysics of each.

Now, it would seem from the statements of Rādhakrishnan (e.g. the passage quoted above) that even at the level of social ethics there is a similarity rather than a disparity in the ethical attitudes and outlook of the Gīta and Buddhism. I propose to show that this is by no means the case and that in this respect the ethics of the Gīta is to be contrasted rather than compared with the ethics of Buddhism. For this purpose I would like to show that there is a significant

radical disparity between the attitude of the Gīta and that of Buddhism at least on the problem of war and the belief in caste.

But before we go into the details of these problems it is necessary to point out that the fundamental difference between the metaphysical background of the ethical doctrines of the Gīta and of Buddhism is not that the metaphysics of the Gīta is positive and that of Buddhism is negative as Rādhakrishnan has tried to point out, but that the Gīta metaphysics throughout maintains a deterministic view of the universe and of all events in it, while Buddhism on the contrary vehemently upholds freewill though granting the causal relatedness of events. This seems to be the essential difference between the metaphysical standpoints of the Gīta and Buddhism touching ethics.

It would seem that one of the fundamental prerequisites of ethical action is that man should be free to choose between alternative courses of action open to him and should be solely responsible for the decisions he makes. If this is not granted moral injunctions would appear to lose their point. No one would deny that the Gīta contains moral advice, but this advice, it should be noted, is given in a context in which it seems on the whole to be taken for granted that the actions of men are strictly determined by nature (*prakṛti*) which is controlled by the fiat of God. Nothing is more striking than the advice that Arjuna, who has been seeking an answer to the moral question as to whether he should fight or not, gets in the last chapter where he is told that he

has no choice in the matter for “if indulging in self-conceit you think, “I will not fight’, vain is this your resolve. Nature will compel you (*prakṛtis tvāṃ niyokṣyati*; XVIII.59) notwithstanding the statement that “he may ponder over it fully and do as he chooses.” (XVIII.63).

This deterministic role or compelling power of *prakṛti* or Nature over which the individual has no control is one of the basic themes of the Gīta and reference is often made to it. Thus in making a case for the necessity for action (*karma*) one of the arguments employed is that for individuals action is inevitable “for no one can remain even for a moment without doing work; everyone is made to act (*karma kāryate*) helplessly (*avaśāḥ*) by the impulses born of Nature (*prakṛtijaiḥ*; XVIII.5). It would appear that individuals cannot help but act and that their actions are the mere working out of impulses generated by Nature (*prakṛti*) over which they have no control whatsoever—a fact which is clearly indicated by the term “*avaśāḥ*” which implies that the individual “has no power of mind” to offset the force of the impulses which dominate his actions. Later in the same chapter it is argued that this dominant power of nature under whose yoke man can but only humbly submit afflicts even the man of knowledge for “even the man of knowledge (*jñānavān*) acts in accordance with his own nature (*prakṛti*). Beings follow their Nature (*prakṛtiṃ yānti bhūtāni*). What can repression accomplish?” (III.33). Saṃkara here interprets *prakṛti* to mean “the sum total of the good and evil mental dispositions due to past actions manifest in

this life." (*Prakṛti nāma pūrvakṛtadharmādisaṃskāro vartamānajanmādāvabhivyaktaḥ.*) Rādhakrishnan however explains that this verse seems to suggest the omnipotence of nature over the soul and requires us to act according to our nature, the law of our being and adds that "it does not follow that we should indulge in every impulse. It is a call to find out our true being and give expression to it." (*The Bhagavadgita*, p. 146). Yet if we take this verse for what it states in the context of the traditional comment of Saṃkara it is clear that *prakṛti* here does not mean "our true being" as opposed to our false nature, but our being as composed of all the modes which have potencies for both good and evil; and what the verse implies is not that we should not indulge in every impulse but that we cannot help but give vent to our impulses which we are unable to suppress, in that we are under the domination of *prakṛti*.

The relation of this *prakṛti* with the Supreme Being appears to be differently conceived in different contexts. On the one hand the omnipotence of the Supreme Being requires that he should be the ultimate cause and ground for the operations of *prakṛti*. On the other hand since the Supreme Being is transcendent though immanent in every individual it was necessary that his being should be conceived apart from the operations of *prakṛti*. We thus find it stated in one place that the Supreme Being sends forth the multitude of beings fixing the *prakṛti* of each: "I send forth again and again this multitude of beings who are helpless (*avaśaṃ*) under the power of *prakṛti* (*prakṛter vaśāt*) having fixed the

prakṛti of each (*prakṛtiṃ svām avasṭabhya*).” But in another context, *svabhāva* or inherent nature which is the same as *prakṛti* in connotation (see below) is said to operate independently of the Supreme Being: “The Lord does not create for the world agency or acts; nor does he connect acts with their consequences. It is inherent nature which works these out.” (V.14)

Here the word *svabhāva* is used in a context in which *prakṛti* would have fitted equally well. *Svabhāva* or “intrinsic nature” is here regarded as the ultimate agent or cause of all action as well as what brings about the natural consequences of these, very much in the manner in which *prakṛti* was considered to perform this role in similar contexts. (Cp. XVIII.59; III.33.). But the use of the word, *svabhāva*, is much more significant in this context, where *svabhāva* is said to function independently of the Lord, since the word seems in its origin to have reference to a theory which gave a purely mechanistic or deterministic account of the universe without theistic assumptions.

The earliest reference we have is possibly the *Śvetāsvatara Upaniṣad* (I.2), where *svabhāva* along with time (*kāla*), fate (*niyati*), etc. are mentioned as possible alternatives to the theistic explanation of the universe. Again, Jñānavimala, commenting on the *Praśnavyākaraṇa Sūtra* (no. 7), says that “some believe that the universe was produced by *svabhāva* and that everything comes about by *svabhāva* alone.” Then in the *Tarkarahasya-dīpikā*, a commentary on the *Ṣaḍdarśana-samuccaya* (ed. L. Suali, Calcutta 1905, p.13.), we find

Guṇaratna quoting from the upholders of the theory of *svabhāva* a stanza which says, “What makes the sharpness of thorns and the varied nature of beasts and birds? All this comes about by *svabhāva*. There is nothing which acts at will. What is the use of effort?” This shows that the term “*svabhāva*” had reference to a theory which maintained that the universe was strictly determined and that all the processes in it were fully explicable in terms of such determinism and as a result denied freewill and the value of human effort to alter the course of events.

We cannot be certain whether the author of the Gīta was trying to synthesise *svabhāva-vāda* as well into its general metaphysic. It is also difficult to determine the exact relationship between the workings of *prakṛti* or *svabhāva* and the Supreme Being of the Gīta, since on a monistic or monotheistic interpretation the *prakṛti* or *svabhāva* would be ultimately dependent on Deity, while on a dualistic Sāṅkhya analysis they would be independent (*prakṛtiṃ puruṣaṃ caiva/ viddhyanādyubhāvapi*; XIII.19). And the Gīta does not seem to support wholeheartedly one interpretation, although the emphasis on a Personal God as the highest reality, lends support to the monotheistic rather than the dualistic analysis. But so much seems to be clear, that whatever interpretation we adopt and whatever the import of moral injunctions in the Gīta, the Gīta metaphysic is thoroughly deterministic and as such is opposed to the doctrine of freewill and to the possible value of human effort since human beings are helpless (*avaśāḥ*) in the

predicaments in which they are placed.

It is, therefore, to be expected that in the last chapter, after a long-winded argument, Arjuna should be told that nature (*prakṛti*) over which he has no control “will compel him” to fight. It is also not surprising that one of the arguments employed to urge Arjuna to fight should be that “his enemies are already slain by God before the event,” (*mayi'vai' nihatāḥ pūrvam-eva*; XI.33) or that “he should kill them and not desist since they are already doomed by him” (*mayā hātans tvam jahi mā vyatiṣṭhāḥ*; XI.34) and that he is not ultimately responsible morally for their death since “he is to be only an occasion (or an instrument) for God’s action.” (*nimittamātram bhava*; XI.33) The metaphysical import and ethical significance of this argument has been well expressed in the words of Rādhakrishnan himself where he says that “the writer seems to uphold the doctrine of divine predestination and indicate the utter helplessness and insignificance of the individual and the futility of his will and effort. The decision is made already and Arjuna can do nothing to change it. He is a powerless tool in God’s hands ... Arjuna should feel, “Nothing exists save your will. You alone are the doer and I am only the instrument.” (*The Bhagavadgita*, p. 280, 1.)

Very much on the same lines is another argument as to why Arjuna should fight, namely, that since salvation is predestined and assured for all beings including Arjuna there is no cause for worry and he should carry out his allotted task whatever this may be. “Beings originate in the

unmanifest (*avyakta*), in the middle they are manifest and they would be immersed in the unmanifest in the end. So why worry?" (II.28) Attainment of the state of *avyakta* or the unmanifest, which is the highest state of the absolute (VII.24), is equivalent to salvation, so that what is implied in this verse is that all beings would finally attain salvation in spite of the many vicissitudes they would have to go through in the course of their evolution and this is predetermined or predestined by the fiat of God.

If we compare this deterministic or fatalistic ethic and metaphysics with that of Buddhism, we find that the latter is totally opposed to it. Not only do the Buddhist texts repeatedly uphold the doctrine of freewill and the value of human effort in offsetting the burden of the past and altering the course of the future, but they strongly condemn all types of metaphysical theories which give a deterministic or fatalistic account of the universe.

One such metaphysical theory, which is often singled out for criticism in the Buddhist texts, is that of Makkhali Gosāla and this theory is condemned because of its unmitigated fatalism. Now, in this respect, it would appear that there is much in common between the metaphysics of the Gīta and the philosophy of Makkhali. Makkhali denies the value of personal effort or human endeavour (*natthi attakāre ... natthi purisākāre ... natthi ... purisaparakkamo*; D I 53); so does the Gīta when it says that "mental suppression (of the impulses) can accomplish nothing." (III.33). There is even verbal agreement in the description of the state of man

and the processes of nature. "All beings" (*sabbe sattā, sabbe bhūtā*), according to Makkhali, "are devoid of the power of will" (*avasā*), an epithet frequently used in the Gīta to denote the same (e.g. *sarvaḥ ... avasāḥ*, everyone is devoid of the power of will (III.5), *bhūtagrāmam ... avasāḥ prakṛter vaśāt*, the multitude of beings helpless without the power of will on account of the power of *prakṛti*). Man is thus impotent in the Gīta since he is subject to the power of *prakṛti* or *svabhāva*; in the philosophy of Makkhali all beings are impotent and helpless in that they are "subject to Destiny (*niyati*), Fate (*saṅgati*) and Nature (*bhāva-pariṇatā*; D I 53). As A. L. Basham says, "*Bhava* seems in this context to be synonymous with *svabhāva*, i.e. inherent character or nature. It suggests, below the fundamental category of *niyati*, sets of conditions and characteristics in each entity which, acting as factors subordinate to the great principle, control growth, development and rebirth." (*History and Doctrines of the Ājīvikas*, London, 1950, p. 226) There is yet another significant feature in respect of which the two philosophies seem to agree. Salvation as taught by Makkhali is predestined for each individual "for, just as a ball of thread when thrown would unwind itself to the end, the wise and fools alike will attain salvation after journeying through *saṃsāric* states." (D I 54). This view has been called *saṃsāra-suddhi* (D I 54; cf. M I 81) or salvation through transmigration and has been more explicitly referred to in a stanza in the *Jātakas* where the dependence of salvation on destiny is clearly brought out. "There is no open door to

salvation, Bījaka. Await thy destiny (*niyati*). Joy or sorrow is obtained by destiny. All beings are purified through transmigration (*saṃsāra-suddhi*); so do not make haste (to attain) what is to come." (J-a VI 229).

It would be seen that these sentiments are very similar to what is found in a stanza of the Gīta (II.28) where it is said that "the beings who originate in the unmanifest reality and live in a manifest state in the middle will eventually attain the unmanifest reality. So why worry?" The context of this stanza of the Gīta reveals the import of the argument, namely, that Arjuna should not desist from fighting since his ultimate salvation as well as that of all beings including his enemies is assured. In fairness to the Gīta, however, it must be mentioned that this doctrine of the inevitability of salvation appears to go against the grain of the moral advice of the Gīta (XVIII.64–6), although it is implicit in its deterministic metaphysics.

How strongly these doctrines, which denied freewill and the value of human effort and proclaimed the inevitability of salvation, have been condemned in Buddhism may be seen by the references which Buddha makes to Makkhali and his theories in the Pali texts. In one place the Buddha says that he knows of no other person (than Makkhali) born to the detriment and disadvantage of so many people, comparing him to a fisherman casting his net at the mouth of a river for the destruction of many fish (A I 33). In another passage his doctrines are said to be the worst of all the doctrines of the recluses (A I 286).

There is also the pointed reference to and a criticism of aspects of these doctrines when taken up separately. Very often the denial of free will (*akiriyavāda*) is denounced. It is said that “the view that there is no freewill when as a matter of fact there is free will, is a false view.” (M I 405). The value of personal effort (*attakāro*), no doubt in making the future course of events different from what they would otherwise be, is often stressed and it is maintained that there is such a thing as initiative (*ārabha-dhātu*), enterprise (*nikkama-dhātu*), endeavour (*parakkama-dhātu*), courage (*thāma-dhātu*), perseverance (*thiti-dhātu*) and human instrumentality (*upakkama-dhātu*; A III 337 ff) against the determinists who denied such a factor in human undertakings. The doctrine that salvation would be attained in due course by faring on in saṃsāra or the empirical states of existence is also severely criticized; it is said that “the goal of existence (i.e. salvation) where there is neither birth nor decay cannot be realised by merely faring on (*gamanena*; A II 48).

The main difference between the determinism of Makkhali and that of the Gīta is of course the fact that the latter is theistic. Though the Gīta would grant that all activity is directed by the operations of *prakṛti* over which we have no control, it would, as we have shown above, submit that *prakṛti* would find its ultimate sanction in the Divine Being, though there were passages betraying the dualistic Sāṅkhya analysis that the Divine Essence was quite separate from the workings of *prakṛti*. Saṅkara’s comment that *prakṛti* was the sum total of good and evil mental dispositions of actions

committed in the past (*pūrvakṛta*) is more in accord with the latter view and is an attempt to explain the present and the future in terms of the past activity of the individual. On the other view which appears to be the dominant one, the *prakṛti* of each individual is fixed at creation in accordance with the prescience and providence of the divine will. Now, it is worth noting that Buddhism distinguishes between these two types of determinism though condemning both of them unequivocally. One is the theory that our present actions are fully determined by the actions of the past (*pubbe-kata-hetu*; A I 173–5) and that we are in no sense free to act. The other is that all our actions are fixed in their entirety by the fiat of God (*issaranimmāṇavāda*; A I 173–5); as Rādhakrishnan (op. cit. p. 229) would say, “there is nothing however small or insignificant that has not been ordained or permitted by God even to the fall of a sparrow.” Now, it is significant that both these theories are condemned in the Pali canonical texts (A I 173–175) and with it the framework of Gīta metaphysics which appears to synthesise both these theories.

In spite of the deterministic background of the Gīta ethic there is no doubt that there is much in common between the moral injunctions of the Gīta and of Buddhism and this is not surprising considering the eclecticism of the Gīta. But it is equally important to stress the differences especially when these differences are fundamental to the philosophy of each, and reveal mutually opposed ethical attitudes to the problems of life. I propose to illustrate these differences by

taking up the divergent attitudes that Buddhism and the Gīta adopt in respect of the problem of war and caste.

I would hold that the attitude to war in the Gīta is totally opposed to that of Buddhism. Yet, before we could illustrate the differences in the attitudes of each, it would be necessary to clarify the Gīta attitude to the problem of war. I would hold that the Gīta maintains that it is the moral duty of the soldier to fight in the event of any war in which the state is engaged. Rādhakrishnan's interpretation of the Gīta appears to be fundamentally different in that he seems to believe that the Gīta speaks of war only in a metaphorical sense as referring to the moral struggle in man and nature and not to military action. Thus, commenting on the opening verse of the Gīta, Rādhakrishnan (op. cit. p. 79) takes *dharma-kṣetre* to refer to the world instead of taking it as an epithet of *kuru-kṣetre*, the classical home of Vedic dharma. He says, "The world is *dharma-kṣetra*—the battle ground for a moral struggle." Then again, commenting on the phrase *māmānusmara yudhya ca* ("remember me and fight"; VIII.7) he says (op. cit. p. 229): "it is not a fight on the material plane that is intended here for it cannot be done at all times. It is the fight with the powers of darkness that we have to carry on perpetually." This metaphorical interpretation is often reinforced by frequent attempts to give the figurative meaning of otherwise literal statements. Thus Gīta I.14, which states that "Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna blew their celestial conches when stationed in their great chariot yoked to white horses", is to be taken metaphorically for,

says Rādhakrishnan (p.85), “throughout the Hindu and Buddhist literature the chariot stands for the psycho-physical vehicle. The steeds are the senses, the reins their controls, but the charioteer, the guide, is the spirit of real self, *ātman*. Kṛṣṇa, the charioteer, is the spirit in us.”

However ingenious Rādhakrishnan’s attempt may be to give a metaphorical account of the Gīta injunctions to fight, it does not appear to be successful, for the greater majority of the passages containing references to war, far from admitting of metaphorical interpretation, have sense only when taken literally. On the other hand, the few passages which may possibly be interpreted metaphorically are so interpreted only at the cost of obscuring their meaning especially when we consider their contexts. Thus the fact that Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna are stationed in their chariots is mentioned in a general description of the battle field and the events taking place in it. If we interpret “chariot” here to mean the psycho-physical vehicle and Kṛṣṇa as representing the spirit in us, as Rādhakrishnan does, it would be difficult to explain in similar terms the other paraphernalia of war mentioned, as well as the significance of the numerous other personalities besides Kṛṣṇa who are mentioned by name. And again the only passage which Rādhakrishnan adduces as not admitting of a literal explanation (VIII.7) would be given a more natural interpretation if “*sarveṣu kāleṣu*” is taken as qualifying the nearest verb “*anusmara*” rather than “*yudhya*” and the stanza translated, “therefore remember me at all times but fight.”

On the other hand an analysis of the positive injunctions to fight would show that it was at least incumbent on a soldier (*kṣatriya*) to fight in the event of a war in which the state is engaged, for fighting in such a war is always part of his dharma or social duty as being one of the demands made by the state on the soldier. It is said that “having regard to his own duty the *kṣatriya* should not falter, for there exists no greater good for a *kṣatriya* than a war enjoined by duty.” (II.31). It is true that there are injunctions to the effect that the fight should be undertaken with selfless motives in a spirit of self-denial “free from desire and egoism” (III 30; VIII 7) and that fighting regardless of consequences “treating alike pleasure and pain, gain and loss, victory and defeat” brings with it no sin (II.38). Even if we grant that it is psychologically possible to engage in war “free from desire and egoism’, the effect of these passages is more or less nullified by the numerous appeals made to selfish reasons as grounds for fighting. Thus moral grounds appear to be set aside when it is said that the refusal to fight amounts to “unmanliness” (II.3). Failure to answer the call to fight is “ignoble and un-Aryan and causes disgrace on earth” (II.2). Warriors, who desist from fighting “incur ill-fame, and ill-fame is worse than death” (II.34,5). Could anything be sadder, it is asked, than hearing the taunts of his enemies (II.36), e.g. “If you are victorious you enjoy the earth (XI.33) and if slain you go to heaven” (XI.37). Fighting in a war enjoined as duty by the state is an open door to heaven (II.32). The general impression these passages seem

to leave in the mind of the reader is that the Gīta is recommending the soldier to fight at any cost in a war in which the state is engaged. If he fights with selfless motives (and the psychological possibility of this many people would be inclined to doubt), he incurs no sin, whereas if he fights with selfish motives he would still stand to profit either by the gain and honour on earth or by the glory in heaven.

This teaching that the soldier should fight at any cost in such a war is reinforced by the metaphysical arguments in support of war. It is implied that Arjuna should not feel for the death of his enemies among who were his teachers and kinsmen, since “wise men do not grieve for the dead or the living.” (II.11) Now, it is true that according to the best teaching of the *Upaniṣads* and Buddhism, those who have transcended and overcome the world do not entertain thoughts of grief. But to argue that the soldier should likewise “not grieve for the dead” is to commit the fallacy that since the wise do not grieve for the dead, those who do not grieve for the dead are wise. Then there are those arguments which seem to imply that the soldier is in fact not morally responsible for the act of killing either because he is not a moral agent as he is devoid of freewill and is not morally responsible for his actions (as discussed above) or that since God is finally and solely responsible for the death of Arjuna’s enemies in that “his enemies are doomed.” Arjuna is only an instrument in God’s hands (I.33,4). Finally, it is argued on metaphysical grounds that physical killing is

not in reality killing, for the souls of people are eternal (II.12) and indestructible (II 17–25) and “one is not slain when the body is slain” (II.0).

The contrast between the Gīta attitude to war and the Buddhist is brought out in the advice Buddha gave when he was placed in a similar situation to that of Kṛṣṇa on the eve of a battle between his own people, the Sākyas and their blood brothers, the Koliyas. The immediate cause for going to battle was that the Sākya and Koliya tribes were both making claims and demands on the waters of the river Rohiṇī which flowed between their territories. The soldiers or kṣatriyas on each side were assembled (as the Kurūs and Pāṇḍavas had assembled) when the Buddha intervenes and asks them what the war was about. The answer was that it was over water and the Buddha asks them what the water was worth, to which it was replied that it was worth little. It turns out that both sides in their folly were prepared to sacrifice the invaluable lives of their soldiers for the sake of water which was of little worth. And the futility of their war becomes apparent when the Buddha advises them in the words, “Why on account of some water of little worth would you destroy the invaluable lives of these soldiers?” (J-a V 412–4). The merits and demerits of the war as a whole are judged here by its possible consequences, and the suggestion seems to be that the causes for which wars are fought and lost are trivial in comparison with the human sacrifices involved. While the Gīta held that victory brings in its train honour and the gain of a kingdom (XI.33) while

annihilation secures the reward of heaven (X.32), the Buddha (commenting on the war between kings Ajātasattu and Pasenadi) is supposed to have said that “victory arouses enmity and the defeated live in sorrow” (S I 83). Wars result only in further wars, according to Buddhism for “the victor obtains for himself a vanquisher” (S I 85). War, as such, is condemned as an evil since it involves the destruction of invaluable human lives and such evils, we are told, should not be committed even though it be deemed that it is part of one’s duties to one’s king (*rañño rājakaraṇīyaṃ kātum*; M II 188–191). It is therefore not surprising that the life of the soldier was looked down upon in Buddhism and even “trading in the weapons of war” (*sattha-vaṇijjā*) was considered a wrong mode of livelihood (A III 208).

This seems to be the antithesis of the Gīta attitude to war and the fact may be further illustrated if we go into the details. It seems to have been an epic tradition that “the warrior who falls in the battle ground while fighting, attains heaven” (*Mahābhārata, Udyogaparva* 32,65). As such it finds expression in the Bhagavad-Gīta, where it is said that “if slain you shall go to Heaven” (II.37) and “happy are the kṣatriyas for whom such a war comes of its own accord as an open door to heaven” (II.32). Now, this tradition finds mention in the Buddhist texts where a warrior chief (*yodhājīvo gāmaṇi*) tells the Buddha that he has heard from his ancestral teachers in the martial arts that the spirited soldier who fights with zeal and slays his opponents in

battle is rewarded by being born in the company of gods in heaven. The warrior chief wants to know whether this is so and Buddha's reply is that on the contrary he is born in hell for his actions (S IV 308–309).

It is therefore not surprising that it is Arjuna's attitude, which is condemned in the Gīta that would appear to be similar to the Buddhist. Although *ahiṃsā* or non-violence is mentioned in the Gīta (X 5; XIII 7; XVI 2; XVII 14) as one among a list of virtues, nowhere is the concept woven into the central themes of Gīta philosophy and it is difficult to see how a soldier, whose duty is to fight and kill as many of the enemies as possible, can exercise *ahiṃsā* in these acts. The injunction to fight is therefore a negation of the ideal of *ahiṃsā* and the only representative, if at all, of the philosophy of *ahiṃsā* in the Gīta seems to be Arjuna. Arjuna's indecision and anxiety is not due to any lack of courage on his part but arises out of a moral conflict. On the one hand the love of his enemies for whom he feels compassion (I 28; II 2), a typically Buddhist virtue, makes him desist from the fight but on the other hand he is not sure whether it is not his duty to fight. The Gīta resolves the conflict by dismissing the former and making a case for the latter alternative. As such it would not be fair by Arjuna to call his a "mood of sentimental self-pity" (*The Bhagavadgita* p. 98), for, in a Buddhist context, Arjuna would have resolved the conflict by being a "conscientious objector" or non-resister who considered it his moral duty not to fight, without blindly obeying the dictates of his king or state and

believing them to be part of his moral duties.

Left to his own devices Arjuna seems to favour the Buddhist solution, for he weighs the consequences of the war as a whole and finds them disastrous (I.38–43). He is by no means impelled by cowardice or selfish motives for “he does not long for victory, kingdom or pleasures or even his own life” (I.32). Rādhakrishnan (op. cit. p. 91) accuses Arjuna of “talking in terms of enlightened selfishness” but Arjuna, on the contrary is prepared to offer non-resistance and sacrifice his life for the sake of what he considers at heart to be right without desiring the gains and glories of earth or heaven. “These I would not consent to kill though killed myself even for the “kingdom of the three worlds; how much less for the sake of the earth?” (I.35). “Far better would it be for me if the sons of Dhṛtarāṣṭra, with weapons in hand, should slay me in the battle while I remain unresisting and unarmed” (I.46). To do justice to Arjuna, one must say that except for his indecision and failure to apprehend clearly that it was no moral duty of his to fight and kill fellow human beings, his general attitude is Buddhist to the core. The *Bhagavad-Gīta* in condemning this right along, therefore, takes up a position which is the antithesis of the Buddhist attitude to war.

Rādhakrishnan (*Indian Philosophy*, pp.570–571) sums up the Buddhist and Gīta teachings on caste by saying that “both attempt to relax the rigours of caste by basing it on a less untenable foundation.” He is of course much less explicit when he elaborates on this point for he says that “the Gīta

recognises the caste divisions ... the Gīta broadly distinguishes four fundamental types of individuals answering to the four stages of the upward ascent. Basing caste on qualities the Gīta requires each individual to do duties imposed by his caste ... The confusion of birth and qualities, has led to an undermining of the spiritual foundation of caste." Here again I would hold that the Gīta attitude on caste is the very opposite of that of Buddhism and that while the Gīta in keeping with the Vedic tradition gives religious sanction to caste and attempts to provide an intellectual justification for it, Buddhism denies the validity of such a religious sanction and holds that there is no basis whatsoever for holding to caste distinctions. This would be clear if the specific arguments or assumptions on which caste is upheld in the Gīta were placed side by side with the relevant arguments against caste, as found in Buddhism. It may however be granted that the Gīta agrees with Buddhism in holding that people of all castes may obtain the highest spiritual attainments, but the important difference lies in the fact that while the Gīta upholds caste distinctions on religious and genetic grounds, Buddhism denies the reality and validity of these distinctions on these very grounds.

One of the arguments of Arjuna was that among the undesirable consequences of war was the possible danger of the "intermixture of castes" (*varṇa-saṅkara*). Since the prohibition of intermarriage as between castes was one of the principles of caste theory, it shows that according to the

author of the Gīta the “intermixture of castes” was a disastrous consequence. In Buddhism on the other hand, intermixture of castes considered both as an historical fact and as a possibility, was adduced as an argument against the reality and validity of caste distinctions. It is said that even those who claim caste purity have had mixed ancestors, the implication being that the hereditary distinctions of caste are unreal (D I 92–97). If this is an argument to show the historicity of caste mixture, the biological possibility of the mixture of castes, it may be mentioned, is also brought forward as an argument against the reality of caste distinctions (D II 153–154). Arguing for the unity of mankind as against the distinctions of caste, the Buddha says that there are differences of species and genera among plants and animals “although such distinctions are not found among humans” (*evaṃ n’atthi manussesu liṅgaṃ jātimaṃ puthu*; Sn 118).

Now, the crucial passage in the Gīta, which according to Rādhakrishnan undermines the traditional Hindu basis of caste, is the one which says (to follow Rādhakrishnan’s translation): “The fourfold order was created by Me according to the divisions of quality and work (*cāturvarṇyaṃ mayā sṛṣṭaṃ guṇa-karma-vibhāgaśaḥ*). Commenting on it, Rādhakrishnan (op. cit. pp. 160) says, “the emphasis is on *guṇa* (aptitude) and *karma* (function) and not *jāti* (birth). The *varṇa* or the order to which we belong is independent of sex, birth or breeding. A class determined by temperament and vocation is not a caste determined by birth and

heredity.” If this interpretation is intended for the two lines of the stanza quoted above its absurdity would be apparent if its full implications are worked out. For, if it is correct, what is meant by these two lines is that there are four and only four types of individuals, each with a special aptitude for performing a special type of social duty which is obligatory on his part. Now, the references to the four types, (as is evident from the word *cāturvarṇyam*), is obviously a reference to the four castes, viz. the brahmins, kṣatriyas, vaiśyas and sūdras. But, if as Rādhakrishnan says “the *varṇa* or order to which we belong is independent of birth’, then what is meant is that there may be Brahmins who have the aptitude of śūdras and śūdras who have the aptitude of Brahmins, so that it becomes the duty of these people who have been born in the wrong castes to do the work for which they have a special aptitude. This would cut the ground beneath the concept of *svadharma* in the Gīta.

Now, if the individual types were created in accordance with their *guṇas* or aptitudes and *karmas* or social functions, it is difficult to see why the number of types should be four and not less or more, for, if the types represented the *guṇas*, there would have been three types corresponding to the *guṇas* of *sattva*, *rajas* and *tamas*, while if they represented the *karmas* or social duties, surely many more.

But these two lines could be interpreted without absurdity in the general background of Gīta thought if they are construed as an attempt to give a religious sanction as well as a justification for the hereditary basis of caste. On such an

interpretation it would appear that the fourfold caste structure of society (based on heredity) is fundamental, absolute and divinely ordained as being the creation of God himself, and is not a product of human conventions. The purpose of such a creation would be to ensure the stability and maximum efficiency of society since each caste had a special aptitude for performing the social duties they were expected to perform and it was the specific duty (*svadharma*) of the members of each caste to perform the duties for which they were so created.

This appears to be the more natural interpretation, but if so, it means that the Gīta not only holds that caste is a creation of God but attaches special sanctity to the four castes qua *four*. Now, both claims have been contested in Buddhism. The Brahmin claim was that the Brahmins were created from the mouth of God (*mukhato jātā ... brahmanimmitā*; M II 149), a theory which goes back to the *Puruṣa Sukta* of the Ṛgveda (X.90), which says that the Brahmin was the mouth of God (*brāhmaṇo'sya mukham āsīt*) and that all castes were created out of the Divine Person. This claim to a special association with Divinity was criticised by Buddhism on the grounds that the Brahmins like the people of all the other castes were evidently born of human parents (M II 149). But it is equally important to note that Buddhism held that there was nothing absolute even about the quarterness of castes. The Buddha argues that “among the Yonas and Kāmbojas and others living in the bordering territories there were only two castes (*dveva vaṇṇā*), namely the lords and serfs” (ibid).

In fact it is asserted that caste names have only an occupational significance (Sn 119) and that birth is no index to caste (S I 166) thus denying the hereditary basis of caste altogether, while the theory of caste as promulgated by the Vedic Brahmins is referred to as a false and immoral view (*pāpakaṃ ditṭhigataṃ*; M II 154). It would thus appear that while the Gīta tries to uphold, justify as well as give a religious sanction to the caste theory, Buddhism in countering these very arguments is presenting the opposite view so that it would be neither fair by the Gīta nor by Buddhism to say with Rādhakrishnan that “both attempt to relax the rigours of caste by basing it on less untenable foundations.”

Notes

1. “Hīnayāna” is not a very happy term to denote the Theravāda School of the Southeast Asian countries, partly because it is a term of contempt, but mainly because it tends to presuppose the Mahāyāna metaphysics. I am using it, as no doubt Toynbee does, merely to denote by it the Southern School of Buddhism.
2. A II 143. Here diseases are classified as bodily (*kāyika-roga*) or mental (*cetasika-roga*) and it is said that while we have bodily diseases from time to time, mental illness is almost continual until Arahantship is attained so that only the saint can be said to have a perfectly healthy mind.
3. IX.8. Rādhakrishnan translates *prakṛtiṃ svām avasṭabhya* as “taking hold of nature which is my own.” Even this translation would grant the ultimate power over *prakṛti* to God, but to take *svām* as “each one’s own” is more consistent with the Sanskrit idiom.

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