TOWARDS THE TRUTH

By

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Foreword

In the 1940's the students of the University of Ceylon in Colombo arranged for a three-days debate between representatives of two great religions: Buddhism and Christianity. Their choice was the Rev. Clifford Wilson, M.A., the Vicar of Christ Church, Galle Face, Colombo, and Bhikku Dhammapāla, a Buddhist monk from the Netherlands, a convert from Catholicism.

The three days of the debate were fixed with a week's interval, and the order of the speakers was decided by lot. It was thus that Rev. Wilson opened the debate, which on the first day would be limited to statements by the two opponents on each ones own religion. This order would be reversed the following week, when each speaker would have the opportunity to raise questions about the statements made earlier. The respective answers would be given again seven days later, when once more the order of speaking would be reversed.

Enthusiasm was great, and although some "home" truths were exchanged, there was never any acrimony, while it was said after- wards, that a good time was had by all. But when a wish was expressed to have the debate published, this was made impossible as the text of the three papers read by Rev. Clifford Wilson were not made available.

Now, after almost 40 years those students have grown up and old; but many still remember. And so it was suggested to publish the text of Bhikkhu Dhammapāla's addresses independently, especially as from those texts it was quite clear the way Christianity was presented, and the way Buddhism was objected to.

The whereabouts of Rev. Wilson are not known to me. Bhikkhu Dhammapāla is no more.
But the debate continues.
Henri van Zeyst

Outlines of Buddhism

Notes of the first address by Bhikkhu Dhammapāla

The most astounding statement ever made by a religious teacher, and the most comprehensive statement of his teaching at the same time, was made by Gotama the Buddha, when he said: "Whether a Tathāgata arises in this world or not, still all component things are transient, dissatisfactory and soulless."

Not only are here summed up what we call the three characteristic marks of which we shall speak in turn, but also is indicated a basic difference which makes Buddhism stand, all by itself, opposed to all other religions, namely a teaching independent of its teacher: "Whether a Tathāgata arises or not ..." the three characteristics remain the same. This places Buddhism and the approach to Buddhism on a level which otherwise seems reserved for experimental science. Here we have a religion which is not based on faith, not on authority, not on dogma, not on revelation, but on facts, the brutal facts of naked truth, as we see them in our daily lives. We are not asked to believe them, but we are asked to open our eyes and see them, because they are "visible to anyone who is intelligent" (*paccattaṁ veditabbo viññūhi*).

In this religion then we are not requested to accept on the authority of somebody else something which we cannot substantiate for ourselves. In other words: Buddhism is a religion without faith. This does not mean that a Buddhist accepts as real only that which he can grasp with his two hands. We accept many things without personal experience. That we do on trust. Though it may be possible, it is not always practicable to try and experience every- thing for ourselves. Our schoolboys would not mind if their course of study of geography included a trip round the world, especially under the free education scheme; but it is not practicable, though of course every one of those schoolboys, later on if he happens to have too much money and not enough work,

can embark upon the experiment and convince himself of the roundness of the world. This example shows the difference between trust and faith. Both lack the basis of personal experience, but trust is only a temporary reliance on the authority of somebody else out of expedience, together with the knowledge however that it can be experienced, though not just now.

Faith, on the other hand, is the acceptance of the authority of somebody else, of something which cannot be known. Faith indeed precludes reason, for it is the acceptance of the unknowable. If reason could approve of it, it would cease to be faith. Hence faith is the acceptance of something which reason cannot approve of. And it is that kind of faith which is entirely absent from and strongly condemned by the teaching of the Buddha.

But a certain amount of confidence will help the beginner till he can find his own way. That confidence, moreover, is not so much a trust in a teacher, but a trust in one's own common sense. For, where faith has mystery and revelation as its objects, there confidence is required only with regard to the common facts of daily life.

Daily life is a problem, is a struggle. And all religions and philosophical systems, as well as all scientific and strategic exploits have ultimately but this single aim: to solve the problem of the struggle for life.

Buddhism is one of those systems; but Buddhism refuses to shift the problem to a plane where its pretended solution cannot be contradicted, because there it is beyond investigation and experience.

Buddhism does not become supernatural in solving the problems of nature, but it shows in the experiences of daily life, the struggle, its cause and its solution.

Is life a struggle? Some self-contented people might ask: If life is not a struggle, why then is life a constant striving for greater security, for power, for possessions, for enjoyment? The very fact of man's striving for greater happiness proves the unsatisfactory condition of life. Always people want more than enough. If man's needs, even his most extravagant wants, are fulfilled with enough, why then does he want more than enough? That which cannot satisfy the need of the moment after enough has been obtained, may satisfy in future a need which is still unborn. It is therefore this sense of security which constantly upsets the balance.

To obtain security, man strives for economic independence, which is necessarily accompanied by exploitation, for independence of self will produce dependence of others. And thus the striving for happiness produces disharmony. This is meant when in Buddhism it is said that all component things are sorrow-fraught (*sabbe saṅkhārā dukkhā*). The universality of this disharmony lies in the fleeting and hence unstable nature of all things, which cannot offer security unless constantly grasped at anew. For, possessions do not give that absolute security, because they are perishable. Thus it is owing to the impermanent nature of all things that man is forced to continue in his search for security. Conflict therefore is not inherent in transiency, for sorrow itself is transient too. But the passing of things which offer protection to 'self' causes the disharmony. Conflict arises only when there is self-frustration. As long then as striving involves an action towards greater self-security, disappointment is bound to follow. It is this striving which causes the struggle for life; it is this disappointment which constitutes the problem of life, which is conflict.

Now what is the solution Buddhism has to offer? To live in the world, but not of the world, is an excellent piece of advice. But few only can see any practical way thereto. Merely to tell a man who has craving for worldly things, to be detached therefrom, is as futile as telling a starving man not to be hungry. Buddhism does not offer a remedy for removing the symptoms of the disease, but it cures the disease itself by removing its cause.

What is the cause of this disharmony, of this striving which upsets the balance? It is the isolated position taken in by the 'self'. And it is this isolated position which is attacked and denied in the teaching of the Buddha. The Buddha never denied the existence of individuals, but he viewed individuality as a single, and hence incomplete, aspect of the whole process of life. When this aspect is lifted out of its environment, its intrinsic nature of an interrelated process is necessarily disturbed. And that disharmony is conflict (*dukkha*). It is therefore not so much the transiency of all things which causes sorrow, but the isolated aspect of transiency. For, only in isolation of 'self' the impermanent is felt as a loss, while in the understanding of the process of life as a whole, transiency is merely a change. It is thus egoism which makes one suffer; and that is caused by one's ignorance.

Naturally, therefore, understanding is shown as the supreme cure of all ill. It is in ignorance that we crave for the possession of things which have no intrinsic value. It is in ignorance that we act against our own nature. It is in ignorance that we prolong the process and thereby intensify the conflict. For it is in ignorance that the 'I'- concept is formed; and then it is maintained in craving.

The concept of a 'self' as an individual entity, as a spiritual substance, as a permanent soul, is the great delusion, which forms the basis of all conflict, of all opposition, of all sorrow. It is the individuality of the process of action, which is mistaken for the individuality of an actor. "Action there is, but no actor of the deed" (*kamma atthi kammiko no vijjati*).

Here we are touching on two very important aspects of the teaching of the Buddha: The teaching of soullessness, (*anatta*) and the doctrine of action (*kamma*), on which two fundamentals are based the whole system of ethics and the teaching of rebirth.

What is conventionally called the mind is nothing but mental activity, i.e. sensations, perceptions, differentiations, and ideas. Apart from these mental factors there is no mental entity, as there is no river apart from the flowing water. The continuity of action deceives many into the belief in an underlying substance, called soul. It is, of course, impossible for a Buddhist to prove the non-existence of a delusion.—The only thing we can do is to challenge all proofs advanced in favour of the soul-idea.

Buddhism admits only the knowledge of phenomena which constantly change; and it denies the necessity of a substance underlying those phenomenal changes. Whatever there may appear as identical in this process of change, is always identified with action. Without action the 'I' cannot be conceived even, and there is nothing else which deserves the designation 'I'. In the same way as the matter of the body is reduced to relative qualities without substantiality: extension, cohesion, caloricity, oscillation—so the mind is even less substantial as a process of thought, constantly arising and ceasing with every new precept and concept. With all this change and nothing but change, it is impossible to admit anything of a permanent nature, for an actor without action is as unthinkable as a father without a child, as a flame without burning. It is the productive action which constitutes the actor, and apart from that action there is none. It is the continuity of the process of action which brings about in many the delusion of an entity.

If the soul is believed to be a substratum which remains the same, while it supports changing phenomena which cannot exist in themselves, it may be asked, what is it then that changes? If the soul itself is subject to change, it cannot be distinguished from phenomena, and its existence becomes entirely superfluous.

Thus the Buddhist doctrine of soullessness denies the existence of an individual entity, but does not reject individuality of action.

There may be many individual processes, as so many rivers, which can be distinguished from each other, though within themselves they contain nothing of a permanent nature. The phenomena are constantly changing expressions of activities, which spring up as reactions to an ever-changing environment. It is thus only in the frame-work of the environment that individual action can be understood.

This individual action within the framework of social environment is called karma. This shows at once the double aspect of action. As individual action karma is volitional (*cetanā*); but it does not arise spontaneously, for its arising is dependent on tendencies of character which are formed and influenced by physical, educational, social and economic conditions. Thus it is at the same time action and reaction. As reaction it is a product of the past to which all actions of the past have contributed their share. Such is the nature of a process: it is active in the a present, but its activity is dependent on past conditions. This does not make of karma an inexorable deity of destiny. For, as past conditions influence present action, so present action can modify tendencies, inherited from the past.

In all there are sixteen kinds of karma, which support, modify, or even destroy existing tendencies. Some actions are immediately effective, others become like stored-up energy, to be released when the occasion demands, while others again remain entirely inoperative, owing to lack of opportunity. And all this may be for better or for worse.

Thus the law of karma is not a strict law of cause and effect, but rather of conditionality. Influenced by tendencies from the past actions are forces which try to reproduce themselves. Without this reproductive tendency there would be no purposeful action at all. Actions which are volitional, i.e. karmic actions, are performed for the sake of the result (*vipāka*). Naturally, therefore, the result will be of the same kind as the action, which produced it. This fact of reproductivity, which is nothing but the process of rebirth, is the inherent quality of all volitional action, and does not require a

soul for its continuous process. For, this reproduction is not a giving birth to offspring, but a process of becoming. The act does not remain together with its effect, but it has become the reaction. Hence, the reborn effect is not the same and not another (*na ca so, na ca aññ*o.) For, it is not the individual who has gone over into the new life, neither is the effect entirely different and independent from its originating action. In a process there is no individuality as an entity (*na ca so*), but the continuity of becoming cannot be ascribed to anybody else either (*na ca aññ*o).

Rebirth, therefore, is not of persons, but of actions, which will reproduce themselves according to their own nature. Thus, a good action (*kusala kamma*) will produce a good effect (*kusala vip*ā*ka*), if the circumstances offer the opportunity. Environmental influences account certainly for many of the differences which we observe in individuals. Not only racial and climatic conditions mark their presence at birth and before, but also the economic conditions, later on further influenced by education. It could easily be demonstrated that the height and weight of those born in poverty is less than of those who are socially more comfortable, which is obviously due to pre-natal malnutrition.

There are other differences between individuals which are accounted for by the so-called laws of heredity; facial features, deformities, and even illnesses, are handed down from generation to generation. And this is as far as science can go, viz. to explain the situation in terms of general laws.

But all this explaining leads us rather away from the real facts. Let us concentrate on some particular differences which we can see repeated after a certain interval and from that a law is drawn up with classified results in ratio of (say) three to one. And the thing has been scientifically explained. But do we know why it happened? Has our explanation increased our understanding or has it merely framed the problem confronting us?

Even if one would be prepared to accept that artisticity as well as lunacy may be inherited, because are imbedded in the 48 chromosomes which are contained in the germ-cell—even if the determination of sex at the moment of conception is explained by the information that the union of a sperm having a Y-chromosome with an ovum will produce a male-child, while an X-chromosome would have produced a girl—this does not at all explain how, and still less why, the Y got in before the X, or vice versa. The question which science does not explain is: why should the tail of the sperm vibrate so as to conduct it to the ovum along the genital tract? Why should the sperm ultimately pierce the ovum at all? The "how" we know but what about the "why"?

Science explains the effects, but can say nothing about the cause. That part is left to philosophy, religion and speculation.

Speculation is a gamble; it is not rational to the end, and hence it accepts chance. But chance can neither be accepted, nor rejected. It is outside the scope of experiment, and can therefore neither be proved, nor disproved. Thus speculation does not solve the problem by recurring to chance.

If then chance is not admitted, a cause must be shown. And here again the philosophy of Buddhism and the dogmas of religion part. For religion believes in an external cause, called God. But that is a statement which cannot be proved logically and scientifically.

As Buddhists and rationalists we not only remain unconvinced by such great statements, but find it most incomprehensible that such a perfect creator, who is said to have omnipotence as his tool and love as his motive, that he should produce such miserable effects, defective even to the low standard of a human viewpoint. A perfect watch-maker, but his clocks do not go!

Rejecting then, of necessity, an external cause, yet admitting the need of some cause, we must therefore accept an internal cause. That means, things act each in its own particular way because that way of acting makes it that particular thing. If it would act differently, it would not be that any more. If stones could fly, they would not be stones. A stone falls because its internal

composition makes it heavier than air, and not because some external cause like an omnipotent creator throws it down.

Applying all this to the fact of birth, or rather conception, the explanation of the physical contact between two individuals appears simple enough. But why should there have been any contact, if not for a particular tendency in these two to contact one another rather than seeking contact elsewhere?

So the differences in individuals, which cannot all be explained by environment, and heredity, find their reason of existence in them- selves. But can a thing be its own cause? Certainly not! The cause must exist before the effect, logically. Therefore, as the differences appear to have been traced by scientists up to the very doorstep of conception, we must place the cause—and that is here the internal cause—before conception. Thus, a being must exist even before it is born, before it has been conceived which shows the logical necessity of a previous life the rational proof of the doctrine and the fact of rebirth.

But as long as we try to understand rebirth as the passing of something into something else, we are thinking of the Hindu theory of the transmigration of a soul. Buddhism, however, is the doctrine of soullessness. And even its teaching of rebirth does not admit of the passing on an individual. It is the rebirth of actions with all tendencies of reproduction.

It is again on this doctrine of a soulless rebirth, i.e. a rebirth not of persons but of actions, that is based this Buddhist concept of morality. Where only actions produce their natural effects, and where there is no actor to reap the fruits of his own labour, there the motives of morality become entirely selfless. Actions performed for the sake of obtaining merit or bliss are based on selfishness. Actions performed because they are commanded are based on selfishness. Neither of them are acts of true morality. But a Buddhist practises,

without being commanded to so, acts of morality which his reason tells him are necessary for peaceful living in society. He practises them without reference to himself, only knowing that a good act will produce a good effect, without worrying where that may be, and who may reap the fruit thereof. Hence he knows of no prayer or sacrifice, of no appeasement or repentance. A good act means for him a skillful act (*kusala kamma*) because of its desirable effect. That means to be good for goodness' sake. Hie code of morality is based on nature, on the needs and rights and duties of living in society.

Very consistently in this philosophic outlook on life, the highest bliss of Nirvāṇa it not considered as a reward for good life. A good life may find a remuneration in one of the heavens, which, however, are impermanent, just as any other form of life. The bliss of Nirvāṇa, however, may be attained in this life itself in a human form, for it is the realisation of the delusion of the isolated self-idea. When thus all conceit and self-delusion have vanished, then the basis of all conflict has been removed and the problem of the struggle for life has been resolved. And that indeed is bliss supreme.

The Inconsistence of Christianity

Bhikkhu Dhammapāla's second address in the debate

It was certainly a great surprise to most of us, when last time we were told that one "can be a Christian, even if one never has heard of the ten commandments or of the Sermon of the Mount". The only possible explanation I can think of, is that anyone who leads a naturally good life is by nature a Christian. It is strange that we Buddhists make the same claim, that anyone who abstains from doing evil, who does the right thing, and purifies his mind, is a follower of the Buddha. Except for the two personalities of the Founders we have here at least something in common to start with. But now the difficulty arises, when one has to fill in his census-paper. Is a person who lives a good moral life according to the so-called natural law as well as according to the Roman-Dutch law, without worrying in the least about religious dogmas or philosophic viewpoints, is such a person, who is as good and faithful as a dog, is he a Christian or a Buddhist? It is clear, that one requires more than morality to call oneself either Christian or Buddhist? One must have conviction. And to have conviction one must know at least something: at least one must know the object of one's faith, the purpose of one's morality. And therefore my reverend opponent rightly pointed out, that it was a principle in Christianity "to attempt to give an answer to the problems of life. Whence? Whither? Why?"

It is a pity that these particular questions fit so ill in the frame- work of the Christian religion, as it was expounded to us. For it was made abundantly clear to us, that Christianity is a religion of faith. "Christianity is not a philosophy" it was said, "but a religion for which no scientific proof can be given".

Not so long ego in this same hall we heard the Rector of a leading Catholic College in Colombo say that he could prove the existence of God "logically and scientifically". But when he tried to do so, his logic did not prove to be as sound as his mathematics.

My present reverend opponent in this debate is wiser and admits that "he cannot give a scientific proof for the truth of the religion of Christianity."

Thus we are told here as it were in one breath: You *must* put the question Why? (It is a principle of Christianity) ... but don't expect to get an answer. It is difficult to quarrel with one who not only refuses to give a fight, but who is even prepared "to gamble his life without proof, because he believes in the truth of Christianity." But I am facing here more than a believer in Christianity. He is a lover of Christ, a passionate lover indeed, an "all-outer" as he calls it. He might have said of himself what Saint Paul said: "For me to live is Christ, and to, die is gain."[1]. And who will not respect such sacred feelings? With his passionate love his claims on behalf of Christ, were impressive and eloquent. He claimed Sri Lanka, India, England, even Holland! Next time he will be crying for the moon!

But to settle those claims one has to provide some evidence. My reverend opponent, however, has chosen the wisest part, He has followed the advice of saint Paul to the Ephesians[2]: "Take the shield, of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked." For in his faith he is unassailable, but also unapproachable. His fortress of faith is a strictly private one. No one else can be admitted, because its fortifications are his personal feelings. Everyone is free to think what he likes; and as long as that thinking remains confined to one's private life, no one has a right to object. But when those feelings and thoughts take the shape of missionary activity, intended for the conversion of the infidels, I think the heathens of the University of Ceylon will insist on being offered something more substantial than the inner feelings of somebody else.

1 Philipp: I, 21
2 VI, 16.

And I think it is their perfect right to ask for convincing proof, for guarantee, before they too gamble away their young lives and intellects, which form the hope for the emancipation of this country. The scribes and Pharisees too felt that as their right, "and they said: Master, we would see a sign from thee. But Jesus answered and said unto them: An evil and adulterous generation seeketh after a sign; and there shall no sign be given to it, but the sign of Jonah the prophet. For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the whale so shall the Son of man be three days and three nights in the bowels of the earth"[3].

Here then is a sign given to us, the only sign whereby we may test the veracity of the teaching of Christ. And the test falls miserably, because however much we may try to stretch our imagination, the time which lapsed between the burial of Jesus on Friday evening and his supposed resurrection on Sunday early morning, is not more than two nights and one day. And thus this prophecy "the only sign" which has been given to us, has clearly not been fulfilled. If then such solemn words of Jesus himself do not bear the seal of truth, on what else can we rely? Can we still further quote the Gospel and base our faith on it? Or was it a mistake of Saint Matthew that he did not hear properly when it was said? Or was it the translator's fault? Whatever may be said to us, the practical question arises as far as revelation is concerned: What is it that we are going to accept? The Bible? Which version? Rome or Canterbury? And are we going to take that as a whole in toto, or are we going to

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[3]Matthew: XII, 38-40.

make a selection? If the Bible is the inspired word of God, i.e. of an infallible God, it must and should mean just what it says. If one part be allegorical, may not other parts be considered so? Are we free to decide for ourselves which is the word of God most convenient to us? As Bernard Shaw puts it in his Saint Joan:

joan: I hear voices telling me what to do. They come from God.
robert: They come from your imagination.
joan: Of course. That is how the messages of God come to us.

Religious inspiration is not essentially different from the inspiration of an artist or an inventor. And we may say with Lin Yutang:

"Everything that we think God has in mind necessarily proceeds from our own mind; it is what we imagine to be in God's mind."

Christianity, like several other religions, has deified its teacher; and Saint Paul was the founder of that cult. But did not Jesus claim for himself divine sonship?

Our position should be made very clear here. One may and must have a very high esteem for the person of Jesus, a personality of such outstanding virtues as are rarely met with in this world. One should also have a very high esteem for his noble doctrine. But one should not put words in his holy mouth. He never intended to say nor explain his words to suit us. His teaching is extremely simple; and that is its beauty and attraction; yet it fails to be original and typical. Jesus did not mean to be original; he did not come to abolish the law of Moses, and so he borrows a whole ready-made theology, the monotheism of the Hebrews. His was a moral code without rituals. He worked for the spiritual upliftment of his people, and without being a philosopher, he loved the depressed classes. Just as Mahātma Gandhi has done all that and remained an orthodox Hindu, so Jesus remained an orthodox Jew till the end, his last meal being the ritualistic Pass-over.

In his work for the masses he came in conflict with the priests who are always and in all religions (in Buddhism too) arrogant and ambitious, anxious to preserve their authority. Thus he was drawn now and then in some more abstract controversy, on which occasions he usually kept his ground by some vague assertion, sometimes only saving himself from serious hurt by a speedy withdrawal and hiding[4].

It is exactly with those few deeper assertions that he leaves his audience in a wavering disposition as regards the most essential points, e.g. his own divinity. When being pressed to declare himself unambiguously, he will avoid trouble by a quotation from the Psalms. On a certain occasion[5] Jesus called God his Father, thus indirectly attributing to himself divine nature. At least that is how he was understood by the people present. They took offence and wanted to stone him for blasphemy, for making himself equal to God. Now if it had been really in the mind of Jesus that he was the Son of God, and thus divine in the literal sense, why then does he plead here "not guilty", exculpating himself with a quotation from the Psalms that all men are gods, and that therefore in the allegorical sense it is no blasphemy to call oneself son of God? Here, Jesus corrects those who understood him literally by quoting an allegorical saying from the Old Testament. In plain words his excuse would sound: "If the Psalmist[6] calls all righteous men Children of God, where is the blasphemy, if I also call myself a son of God?" Thus Jesus did not claim a higher and more privileged affiliation than that common to all faithful.

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[4]John: VIII, 59; X, 39.
[5]John: X, 34-36.
[6]81:6.

Even when he declares himself “Lord of the Sabbath”[7], he does not claim any extraordinary jurisdiction, for he gives the reason, because “the Sabbath was made for man, and hot man for the Sabbath”, according to which argument every son of man is lord of the Sabbath.

“Jesus did not call himself the Son of God except in an allegorical way, in which it could be said of all men”[8]. There are texts in which he declares his union with the Father, but there are also texts in which he admits his inferiority, which difficulty is cleared out of the way in Theology, as voiced by my reverend opponent, when he spoke of Christ as having two wills and two natures, divine and human, but yet only one person. How is that possible? “If ye have faith, nothing shall be impossible unto you.”[9]. But where is the authority who can tell us after so many centuries what was in the mind of Jesus when he uttered those ambiguous statements, if he uttered them at all? For, even when Peter confessed his faith in Jesus saying, “Thou art the Christ”, he charged them that they should tell no man of him.[10].

If with all our modern means of telecommunication as telephone, telegraph, wireless, television, photography, printing, etc., yet we cannot arrive at the rock-bottom-truth underlying some of the recent historical facts, which happened in the last war, how can we expect to find the absolute truth in records based on frail human memory, communicated orally by many links in a long chain of narrators? If we do not expect to be told the full truth in our daily papers, but make suspiciously at least 50% allowance for propaganda—whether the source be friend or enemy—if we cannot expect the full historical truth even in our great Sri Lanka Chronicle, the Mahāvaṁsa, why then claim such a thing for Biblical history, which yet is the basis of Christian Religions? It is history seen through the eyes of tradition, history, written not always as it was but as it should have been.

[7] Mark: II, 28.
[8] Dr. Glover: Conflict of Religions, p. 131.
[9] Matth: XVII, 20.
[10] Mark: VIII, 30.

Having thus seen the internal difficulties and divergencies in this divine self-disclosure or revelation, we may finally settle the matter by excluding a priori the very possibility of God communicating with man. Even if there existed a supreme deity, it would be impossible for him to come in relationship with others. For by entering into relation (and revelation, creation, salvation, sanctification are all so many modes of relation), he would lose his absoluteness and thus would cease to be God. For absoluteness is not a quality of that supreme Being, called God, but it is God himself. It is his very essence. If he is not absolute, he is not God. Well, absolute and relative are two terms in direct opposition, excluding one another. Science, e.g. teaches us that we cannot talk about absolute motion, because motion includes a change of place in relation to something else, supposed to be at rest. Owing to relative positions there is no question of absolute rest or motion. Similarly, our knowledge of God through his self-revelation would have brought him in relation to us. If this part is admitted, then at the same time his absoluteness is denied. He who has spoken cannot be God. If there is a God, he cannot be known; if he is known, he cannot be God.

Also, the fact of creation constitutes a relationship which did not exist before. A father as such is not older than his child, because before the child's birth he was not its father. Similarly before the creation, God, if he existed, was not a creator; thus he became one when creating. But this involves a change and relation, which are incompatible with the idea of God. Hence, if there has been some sort of revelation to man, it cannot have been divine; and if revelation is not divine it has lost its intrinsic value.

Having set aside the claim of divinity for the historical person of Jesus, having refuted the possibility of divine revelation, we still have to deal with the prime cause of all, God himself. In this connection I am afraid that Saint Paul would not agree with my reverend opponent. And I must say: so much the worse for Saint Paul or, while my reverend opponent here maintains that no proof can be given for the existence of God (with which I fully agree), yet

Saint Paul in his letter to the Romans informs us that the unknown God can be proved from the known things in this world: “For the invisible things of him are clearly seen from the creation of the world, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead”[11]).

It is a physical argument, most welcome to our scientific age. And those who want a proof are not slow in using this argument by pointing to the marvelous order and purpose in nature. This is called the teleological proof or the argument from order or purpose. One need not go very far, one need not even leave this hall, to find out that not everything in this world is perfect and in order. Placed in the balance of an unprejudiced mind, one will find more disorder than order. If then one would postulate a supreme being to explain the existence of order, who else is to be made responsible for the disorder? For, as we were told last time, “Christianity is not dualism”. “He who made man made also the cobra and gave it the will to kill and the venom to do it with”, said the black girl in her search of God. He who made the milk in our mother’s breasts, made also the poison of the snake. He who makes the sun rise and set in time, is the same who scorches the earth, who makes the crops fail and people starve. He who gives life and health and beauty, gives also death and disease and corruption. He sends the cyclone, earthquakes, volcanic eruption, storm and pestilence. He who made the eye made also blindness. He who causes love to grow, has sown also the seeds of hate: “Think not that I am come to send peace on earth”, said Jesus[12]. “I came not to send peace, but the sword. For I am come to set a man at variance against his father, and the daughter against her mother ... and a man’s foes shall be then of his own household.”

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[11] Rom: I, 20.
[12] Matth; X, 34-36.

As regards purposeful striving, the instinct of animals is marvelous indeed. Take, e.g. the paralysing instinct of wasps, (a species known as Hymenoptera). Their larvae are in need of fresh meat which they cannot obtain for themselves, and which even the parent- wasp might not always be able to procure in due time. Thus that wasp lays its eggs in spiders, beetles, or caterpillars, which continue to live, though paralysed by a sting of the wasp in the nerve-centre. As they live for a certain number of days unable to move, the larva finds there a constant supply of fresh meat. How beautiful, how purposeful ... and how cruel! If this procedure was really thought out by an intellect, then it betrays itself in a refined cruelty, which it is difficult to imagine or to believe in. Whatever that creative power be, most of us prefer to ascribe it to chance, or to creative evolution, or to natural sympathy. Or even to purely mechanical action of hormones, rather than to intelligence. For, if intellectual guidance is claimed on behalf of a supreme deity, then it is he who has deliberately chosen this ghastly method of evolution and struggle for life. Let evolution still be a mystery, it is useless trying to solve it by posing another mystery, that of God.

But if we analyse deeper, where is that order? Is it in nature, or is it not rather in the human mind, which turns and twists so long, till one actually sees rules in the stars, order in the universe and the hare in the moon? To see mathematics in the phenomenal world is to read the book beginning at the last page. Would it not be truer to admit that mathematics are built up by the human intellect and imposed upon an imaginary outside world which is not truly distinct from the microcosm which we are? “We have found”, said Eddington, “a strange footprint on the shores of the unknown. We have devised profound theories to account for its origin. At last we have succeeded in reconstructing the creature that made the footprint. And lo! It is our own.” The laws of

nature are not rules laid down by some Chief Justice to be obeyed by organic and inorganic matter, but human calculations made from experiments and observations, which calculations can be upset by any new experiment contradicting them, as they have been upset already so many times.

The universe is not made, but is still making itself, and that without any order or disorder, which are purely mental conceptions, and not signs of the guidance of a divine intellect. When saying that the existence of God could not be proved, my reverend opponent contradicted Saint Paul. And Saint Paul, trying to prove the supernatural from nature, contradicts himself, for his argument holds no water. Where facts can be explained quite naturally, there is no need to introduce supernatural imaginations.

In the idea of God can be distinguished inner and outer components. The outer components are the powers acting upon man, the inorganic elements of sun, moon, seasons and other phenomena and disturbances in nature; the organic influences from disease-causing microbes, from strength-giving plants, from harmful wild animals, from helpful domesticated animals, the human influences from the community or society which is always partly friendly and partly hostile.

All of these act upon man's body and upon his way of thinking, and they constitute the material from which he individual is building his God. To that material he individual himself contributes the form, which is the outcome of his mental process, though even this is ultimately conditioned by external influences as summed up earlier. This form in which he moulds his God, is the inner component in the idea of God, for that part is personal action upon the raw material of "Divinity" even in the outer forces of nature.

One of the main causes of man first submitting to, and later actually taking active part in the making of God, is the ascription of personality to natural sources, which of course includes the ascription of intellect, to which man feels himself compelled when contemplating purpose in nature. But in that he merely reflects his own tendency to planning, striving and craving on the

basis of self, of his own personality. Merely because one imagines to see results in nature, somewhat similar to the results of one's own purposeful striving, one is not justified to project one's own ideas into the working of nature and ascribe purpose to what is only adaptation, an inevitable product of the struggle for existence.

After all this it must seem rather superfluous to speak of the Holy Trinity, after having denied both revelation and the idea of God. But there are some points of interest which I would like to mention. "The mystery of the Trinity was revealed," we were told, by my reverend Opponent "because man could never have conceived it." But I would like to point out that the idea of a trinity requires no revelation whatsoever, as it is in the progressive order of every process: arising, continuation, and cessation; or birth, life and death. Thus we find in Hinduism for the arising phase Brahma the creator, for continuation Vishnu the preserver, and for cessation Shiva the destroyer. The idea of destruction does not necessarily imply some evil influence; it is the completion of the process. Thus death may be the beginning of eternal life. And so we find in Christianity the Father who creates, the Son who preserves or restores the original order by his redemption, and the Holy Ghost who completes the process by sanctification. That the Holy Ghost is the personal love between the Father and his Son is a sublime conception of the consummation and the materialisation of the love of any two beings in their offspring. That too is a trinity!

Another kind of trinity we meet with in the Vedas is Varuna the lord of the moral law, Agni the lord of the ritual order, and Indra the lord and controller of the cosmic law. And this wonderfully coincides with the trinity of some Central Australian tribes, where the "All Father", (Mungangua) is represented as a guardian of morality, while Daramulun, who is watching the youths from the sky, punishes the breach of his moral and ritual ordinances, and Baime completes the process of retribution after death with the reward of eternal happiness or a punishment of everlasting fire. These instances, which could easily be multiplied, will suffice to

show how without revelation the trinity-idea has grown and developed naturally in such distant countries as Palestine, India and Australia.

Finally there are three things which are so closely connected that we have to speak of them at the same time: soul, sin and salvation. I do not think that my reverend opponent has used in his address the word "soul", but he spoke of an "indestructible life-principle". And that makes it much clearer to all of us, for it is exactly that permanent entity which we reject in the Buddhist teaching of soullessness (*anatta*). The soul then is said to be the "principle of life", i.e. the "essence and the totality of the functions of a living being" (Aristotle). That means that if an axe would be a living being, its essence would be to cut, and that faculty would be its soul. But as it happens that an axe has no life, it can cut without a soul. A man is not such a simple affair, because he is alive and therefore he has a soul which is his indestructible life-principle. The essence of man is his rationality, and therefore he has a rational soul, except of course if he falls in love, for then he ceases to be rational and he loses his soul together with his heart.

All this is quite clear and does not offer any difficulty. But the real problem begins with my dog who, when I come home, gives full evidence of being alive. He must have therefore a life-principle, which most probably is situated in his tail, as that is the organ with which he laughs.

The difference between a rational soul and an animal soul according to the theologians is that the rational soul is spiritual, indestructible and hence eternal, while the animal soul is material and will dissolve into nothing at the moment of death. According to the same theologians there are also material souls in plants, which therefore contain the essence of vegetable life; something like Marmite, I suppose. But I leave those alone, for the moment, not to make matters unnecessarily complicated. Objects, like tables

and chairs, have no soul at all; they have only a substance underlying all their changing phenomena. This is how Aristotelian and Christian philosophy consider the matter. I give it merely for general information, for otherwise many would not have the faintest idea of what we are talking about.

Now I would appreciate it very much, if next week, when we meet again, we would get a solution to the following dilemma:

1. If the "soul" is separate from the phenomena, and the phenomena can change without changing the soul, it is clear that those phenomena can function independently and do not require the existence of a soul or a substance.
2. If the "soul" is not separate from the phenomena, and if therefore together with the changing phenomena the soul also changes, then there is no distinction between them, and the soul itself is like a phenomenon and not a permanent indestructible entity. In this case too the phenomena do not require the existence of a soul, for it would be like a co-existent phenomenon without interdependence.

Moreover, if the phenomena in inorganic matter can change without a soul, as e.g. the colour of paint, the sweetness of milk, and if the vitality of animals is none the less, though their life principle is not permanent and indestructible, why should similar change in man require a spiritual soul, though his intellectual faculties are not of a different kind, even if they are more perfect? I have not the time at my disposal to prove to you that experiences are always particular and that even so-called immaterial concept have been derived from material experience. For that I have to refer you to my radio-lecture on soullessness, which was printed in "Broadcasts on Buddhism".

Our rational faculty is as material as the animal instinct. The main difference is that our logic goes often wrong where their instinct is always right.

Now that soul is supposed to be the doer of good and evil so much so that the body is merely its instrument. Virtue and sin are so much connected with the Christian soul-idea, that Christianity even claims monopoly-rights over certain virtues. Thus we hear of Christian charity, which however is found nowhere more than in Atheistic Communism. Isn't the Church of England called the Conservative Party of Prayer? And doesn't the Conservative Party stand for Capitalism and imperialism? Wasn't Christ described to us last time, by my reverend opponent, as a totalitarian dictator? If that is so, weren't the Jews quite right in trying him as a war-criminal?

With regard to sin we heard also the following statements: "Sin is a tendency to deviate from a course leading to well-being. Man is born with a tendency to leave the straight road, and by his own merit man is not able to overcome this tendency to evil. Therefore God evolved the plan of redemption."

But if sin is an inborn tendency towards the gutter—and God made man thus—and if man is incapable by himself to get up again, how can that ever be an offence? And how can that ever be called justice, if man is pushed from the gutter into the drain—nay, into everlasting hell-fire? But "God does not want man to go to hell". Then who else wants it? Who created man with evil tendencies, and who created hell? Would the whole plan of redemption not have been much simpler, if God, instead of sacrificing his only Son and afterwards cursing the Jews for having done it—if he had created man with a tendency for good?

But God is love; and love is not reasonable.

I know it and admit it: I have lost my faith by reasoning too much; I have not always been as the little child, which alone has the privilege to enter the kingdom of heaven. But then, if God is my creator and he has given me intellect and reason, why should I not be allowed to use them? I used my reason and lost my faith. Who is to blame?

I will conclude with a note of harmony. It was said that "Christianity cannot be dissected to find out its working." And I fully agree there. For if you dissect it, it explodes!

Buddhism Vindicated

Final address in the debate, answering the different objections raised against Buddhism

In this final address I am supposed to confine myself to answering the different objections raised against Buddhism, as explained on the first day. Not many objections have been brought forward, and those few ones are not serious either, so that I shall be able to dispose of them without making full use of the time allotted to me.

It must be abundantly clear to all of you by this time, that the fundamentally different standpoints, taken by my reverend opponent and myself, make it practically impossible to come to an agreement. My reverend opponent therefore deserves all the more praise, that in his spirit of tolerance he has found it possible at least to find a few points of contact and even of similarity. I am by nature much less accommodating, which is probably due to the fact of being born and bred in a land of mud, for which I blame my ancestors and not my "Creator".

In my first talk I have shown the absence of faith as the strength of Buddhism, and the reliance on faith as the weakness of Christianity. But it appears that this requires a little more elucidation. It is not with faith, but with trust and confidence, that a Buddhist takes a refuge in the Buddha, whom he considers as his teacher, and not as a saviour. An act of faith (according to the theological definition) is a supernatural assent, whereby the intellect, moved by the will and under the influence of grace, firmly adheres to the revealed truths on account of the authority of God revealing. Hereby faith is clearly distinct from science, which adheres to natural truth on account of evidence, and does not accept supernatural truth. It is distinct from opinion, which does not give any absolute certainty as faith claims to do. It is not a religious sense either, as some modern Christians accept it, for

that would mean individual interpretation, or rather creation of dogmas as felt by each one for himself, and that would leave out the authority of God altogether. For the same reason faith is not a historical assent which is only supported by human testimony. It is not a beatific vision either, as that is supposed to be an immediate perception of the divine. Though some Protestants hold that faith is a fiducial trust in divine mercy, we have shown in our first talk on the Outlines of Buddhism that this spirit of confidence is far removed from faith, for the object of trust is always based on the possibility of proving with evidence the truth of the statement temporarily accepted for the sake of expedience, while the object of faith must always remain the unknown, and is therefore based on the impossibility of proof. And such faith is always contrary to reason, is always blind faith. Yet it is that kind of faith which my reverend opponent demands from us, before he might attempt to prove the truth of his belief. But those who have faith are not in need of any proof, while those who are convinced by proof can have no faith, for they understand!

Faith is devotion and emotion, and thus it has the same value as appreciation of happiness or beauty, i.e. it is entirely subjective. “The fact that a believer is happier than a sceptic is no more to the point than the fact that a drunken man is happier than a sober one. The happiness of credulity is a cheap and dangerous quality”, says Bernard Shaw.

It is because Buddhism is a philosophy without faith, a philosophy based on actuality, that preoccupation with, the problem and struggle for life becomes necessary. For life is action, actuality, striving, i.e. non-attainment. And non-attainment is unsatisfactory. Sorrow understood as disharmony is not the root of all, but it is the effect of misunderstanding. Whether we like it or not, there it is, and the closing of our eyes does not remove it from our yes.

This universal disharmony, which expresses itself in planning, striving, craving and clinging, is actuality; and as such it forms the foundation of the Buddha's teaching. But that does not make Buddhism pessimistic.

Just as a Christian can rejoice over Christ dying on the cross, because thereby his own redemption was worked out—so a Buddhist sees in the understanding of sorrow the possibility of his release from sorrow. Not sorrow is the goal of Buddhism, but the deliverance from sorrow, "As there is in the mighty ocean but one taste, the taste of salt, thus there is in my teaching but one taste, the taste of deliverance", said the Buddha in the Udana. That certainly does not "smack of the morbid". Buddhism is not a religion of sorrow and sadness, it is not a pessimistic philosophy as Schopenhauer's but it leads to the purest happiness and joy, because it teaches the deliverance from sorrow and its cause: "One thing only do I teach: Woe and how its end to reach".

But in order to be delivered from sorrow we must first understand what sorrow is. But those who refuse to look at sorrow will never be able to understand it. Without understanding it, they thoroughly enjoy it; they simply wallow in it like a pig in the mud. And that constitutes the problem of life. It is that disharmony which gives us the liking for competition, for rivalry, yes, for debating! And who will say that we did not enjoy these three days? But did they solve our problem? We have not even understood our problem, because instead of analysing the cause of our dissatisfaction, we merely try to drown our disappointment in the bliss of ignorance. But to sacrifice truth for the sake of bliss is worse than compromise, which according to someone is a "betrayal of the truth": it is murder, the murder of truth!

For us life means a certain proportion and composition, a blending of opposites. In that compound the constituents naturally strive to preserve their own nature while exploiting the opposite. And that results in disharmony, which is sorrow, conflict, the struggle for life.

A Buddhist does not try to "remove sorrow by renunciation", as it was said last time; we try to remove sorrow by the understanding of its cause. Renunciation, which merely tries to escape from sorrow, is not worthy of the name. But if the nature of the world and of the delusion of self is understood, then renunciation will come spontaneously, not as a sacrifice, but as a relief. For that which we abandon is the burden and the fetter of 'self'. And thus renunciation becomes freedom, relief, deliverance, a foretaste of Nirvāṇa.

Frequently we are told that Buddhism fails to give any account for he origin of life. Is this failure a weakness an incompleteness?— Or is this failure perhaps due to the impossibility to discern a beginning in a process which cannot have an ultimate beginning, because it is always beginning? The nature of a process is a constant change. This is not a change of something which remains the same under changing phenomena and changing circumstances. We disposed of the idea of a 'soul' or substance on a previous occasion, and so there is no need to repeat what we have said then. But still the nature of a process does not seem to have been fully understood yet. A process is not merely a succession of events; and hence we cannot accept the American definition of life, that "life is one damned thing after another." Life is a process of becoming. This excludes both the fact of creation and of spontaneous generation. The concepts of creation and generation are both concentrated on entities, while the concept of a process is based on the universal event of change.

In truth it must be admitted, that nowhere and at no time anyone has observed the beginning of anything. Always and everywhere it is something which is changed into something else. And that change

is so constant that it is impossible to speak of "something" in the ultimate sense. There is always, and only, and nothing, but change. That means that we have not "one thing after another" not even one event after another, but one event developing into another. That we see going forward in what we call the future, and that we have seen taken place in what we call the past.

Nobody has ever made anything; at the most he has changed something into something else, while it was already changing of its own nature. Our difficulty of understanding this lies in the limitations of our observation. Even the few senses we have, are conditioned by environment. In our anthropocentricity we try to explain our very limited experiences within our limits. If but for a moment we could forget our delusion of isolated individuality, we might get a different view of life as a biological relativity, of mind as a psychical relativity. Within their limits our logic may be logical and our science wisdom, but still only partial and incomplete. Only the understanding of the whole as a whole will show the totality of the process of change without beginning and without end, because it is without entity to which any measurement can be applied.

To see the absolute it must be seen as a whole. And that entirety has neither beginning nor end. Delusions arise and delusions will cease; and that is the cessation of an individual which was self- delusion. That cessation of a deluded 'self' is called Nirvāṇa, while the continuation of the process of change, which might give rise to delusion, to grasping, to selfishness, to isolation—that continuation of the process is called Saṁsāra, which is eternal, not in existence, but in an ever new arising.

When Julian Huxley called the God-idea "an inevitable product of biological evolution", we need not see in that more than a certain complex of phenomena, arising in dependence on conditions. Even if the God-idea arises necessarily (which I certainly do not admit), it still remains an idea, and is far remote from a living God.

In Buddhism we accept a series of conditional effects, called Dependent Origination (*paṭicca samuppāda*). Well, even if such an

origination would be the inevitable result of certain previous actions, acting as conditions, that would not give any absolute or independent state to either cause or effect, as both remain mere aspects of the entire process. And as aspects they are necessarily incomplete. An aspect, therefore, will appear to have a beginning, while a process has no beginning, because it is always beginning.

It was a rather unfortunate choice that made my reverend opponent quote Descartes: “Faith” going for support to “Doubt”. For Descartes’ greatness lies in his position that everything that can be doubted must be doubted. His famous “I think therefore I am” was also the outcome of his doubt. For, Descartes felt the need to doubt, and therefore to prove, his own existence. But to doubt one’s own existence, is a thought of doubt. And one must exist in order to think such a doubt. Hence from the premise “I think” he drew the conclusion “I am”: “Cogito ergo sum”.

But this is an unpardonable faux pas in a philosopher: to beg the question (*petitio principii*). What he doubted, and what he had to prove, therefore, was the fact of his existence, the fact “I am”. And it is exactly that unproven fact, which he assumed in his premise “I think”; for when saying “I think”, it is already implicitly stated that “I am” namely: I am thinking. In the fact of doubting and thinking he has introduced the I-actor and then finds the ‘I’ back in his conclusion. It is begging the question under the influence of wishful thinking. His mistake lies in the introduction of the conclusion into the premise. The given fact was not “I think”, but the fact of thought: “Here is thinking”; and from that premise one can never conclude to “I am”; Moreover, if the fact that I *think* would give the proof that I *am*, then it ought to follow that I do not think, I am not.

Thus we see that Descartes, if he had been a little more logical, would in his doubt not, have given any support to faith, but to the only possible conclusion of the non-existence of an ‘I’, where there is only the act of thinking. And that would have been the Buddha’s teaching of no-self (*anatta*).

“I know that I am here”, my reverend opponent said. It is the very thing we do not know.

We know actions which are reactions, speaking, hearing, standing, sitting; and beyond those actions nothing is known. As I said in my first address: “Without action the ‘I’ cannot be conceived even, and there is nothing else which deserves the designation of ‘I’.”

It is the productive action which constitutes the actor; and apart from that action there is none. An actor without action is as un- thinkable as a flame without burning.

The confusion of intellect and will, of which Buddhism was accused last time, does not exist except in the minds of those who believe in thinking and willing not as actions, but as faculties of a soul. There is no mind apart from a thought as it arises and passes. There is no will apart from the volitional activity arising and passing in dependence on conditions. As we do not postulate a principle of walking in the person who walks, and as that person cannot be separated from his action—for walking makes him a walker—so we need not postulate a principle of thinking apart from the act of thought, or a faculty of will apart from the act of willing, as all these actions cannot be separated from the person who walks, thinks or wills. It is the action which makes the persons, and apart from that there is none.

An action thus arising in dependence on conditions cannot be free. And hence we denied the existence of a free will. We go even further; we deny the existence of any will, because we maintain that will is a volitional activity, which arises when objects are placed before us to choose from. When there is no chance of a choice, there can be no will, either free or otherwise. But will arises conditioned by the attraction or repulsion of objects of choice, conditioned also by dispositions and tendencies made by earlier volitional activity. How can that which arises thus conditioned, be said to be free?

“Free will”, we were told, “is moral choice”. But if there is the possibility of a choice there must be at least two objects to choose from. Both will influence man’s way of thinking. That

which agrees most with his present mood of thought, will exercise a greater attraction, and man will follow the line of the least resistance. This does not mean that this line of conduct is always the easier one from a physical viewpoint. Both Christianity and Hinduism have offered examples of young girls who willingly sacrificed their lives in flames. Christian virgins did so for God and the protection of their purity; Hindu widows did the same to escape the despair of widowhood. But both had a motive which drew them so strongly emotionally, hat for them there was no real choice. Their passionate feelings had settled already the choice for them.

The same thing happens to all of us, whenever we have to choose. Before the choice there is no will at all. Will arises at the moment when an object is placed before the mind to be accepted or rejected. But from the moment of that mental contact, the object is influencing the mind by its very presence. Mental tendencies will be drawn in an affinitive direction, so that when will arises it is not free.

From this it does not follow that Buddhism accepts determinism. Karma means action, but never fate or destiny. To be determined is the contrary to being free. In Buddhism we deny both and are content with contra-dieting the freedom of willing by showing that volitions are conditioned, i.e. influenced, which is not the same as being caused, produced and determined. Volition is based on consciousness which is constantly arising and passing with every new thought. It is this consciousness fettered by craving which is ignorance, but which is the deliverance of Nirvāṇa when freed from this fetter. Real freedom lies not in the will, but in being without will or craving.

In ignorance, however, we always do what we feel to be the best, even if it is a wrong thing. Hence, Buddhism does not believe in sin, but only in unskilful action (*akusala kamma*). A man who murders does not think of offending God, but merely of taking revenge on his enemy. The offence is not against God but against society. And as his unsocial act prevents the harmonious living in society, it is unskilful. At the time of murder the man does not think of

the gallows, which therefore ceases to be a deterrent. He still less thinks of God. The pricks of our conscience, the remorse after committing sin, are no signs of the existence of the authority of a supreme legislator. The so-called dictates of conscience are merely forms of social tradition, and dependent on social conditions, social reforms, heredity, education and environment.

Hence it was rightly remarked that in Buddhism morality is subjective. But far from being an imperfection, this shows the naturalness and common sense of Buddhism. Good and evil do not exist objectively, but the intention makes actions good or bad. And the intention is, of course, entirely subjective. The recognition of the difference between right and wrong is not the same in all nations, and has changed considerably during the ages. It seems indeed that utility has been always the main factor in deciding the standard of good and bad. Life in community as found in our modern civilisation seems to necessitate the limitation of marriage: and the result is that monogamy is a virtue and bigamy a vice, according to Christianity. Matrimony is even raised to the rank of a holy sacrament, and the blessing of God is invoked the priest over the young married couple. But if the marriage with one woman is good and holy, to marry two ought to be better and holier still. What is a crime in our society, is permitted by law in another country. In Tibet with its very scarce food-production, where over-population would mean general starvation, the moral law is adapted to circumstances, and with polyandry one girl is married into a whole family of brothers, who equally share the conjugal rights and joys, while the birth-rate is kept down in the most natural way. Bernard Shaw claims to have had three fathers, and neither intellectually nor physically he appeared to be the worse for it.

Morality arises when the intelligence develops sufficiently to recognise the social value of certain habits, which then will be considered as moral. Thus not God forms the basis of morality, but life in society. And to be “out of society” is sufficient sanction for this moral law, and has a much greater restricting influence than any threat of hell.

But this change of morality can even be witnessed within the Church, which accepts the Old and New Testament as divinely revealed truth. The case of matrimony is typical. Being questioned whether it is lawful for man to put away his wife, Jesus "saith unto them: Moses because of the hardness of your hearts suffered you to put away your wives; but from the beginning it was not so, and I say unto you: Whosoever shall put away his wife, except it be for fornication, and shall marry another, committeth adultery."[13]. Here we see a law of morality changing four times already. In the beginning no divorce was allowed. Then Moses permitted the same under the force of circumstances. Jesus repealed that permit, but made an allowance in the case of fornication. And nowadays Christian Governments and some Church authorities have once more extended the permit to cases other than fornication, while the divorced parties are free to marry someone else without incurring blame.

This development of morality proves my case that there is no objective basis of morality, but that morality is dependent on changing social conditions. And that makes morality subjective.

But then the objection was raised that if the Norm, the moral law, is subjective and according to each individual, how then can that be a norm to all? Though food gives strength to individuals, and poison harms individuals, they happen to give health and death respectively to everyone, as the individuals have a similar constitution. Likewise the moral norm for one will not differ from the norm of another, as both happen to be members of the same society to which that Norm applies. And if an Eskimo really wants to be a perfect Buddhist, even to the extent of becoming a vegetarian, he can do what my reverend opponent and I myself have done: He can come and live in Sri Lanka.

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[13]Matthew: XIX, 8-9.

That the ethical code, taken as a whole, is more or less stable, is due to the fact that social relations between man and man have not changed essentially. To give a broad and fixed basis to morality we may say that the essence of crime is anti-sociality. With the changing forms of society the root of all evil is selfishness, even if it is self-delusion; for that results in the isolation of individuals, which is anti-social. Self-delusion is ignorance. Ignorance may not be a punishable offence, and hence we do not call it a sin, but it is unwholesome (*akusala*).

It was admitted that Buddhism has a code of morality, but that in this respect it is not better than any other system, as it contains nothing particularly Buddhistic. On the other hand, this Buddhistic morality is far inferior, it his thought, to the ethical system of Christianity, as it has no basis, no reason or motive why one should be moral. The law is there, but as there is no supreme law-giver in Buddhism, there are no sanctions, no confirmation, satisfaction, for validation of that law. Therefore, why should one obey that law?

Moreover, the doctrine of soullessness in rebirth deprives one from all motives to be good, for the reaper of the good effect in a coming life will not know who was the sower in a previous life. The sinner in this life will not be punished himself; but someone else (at least for all practical purposes as there is no self-identity in rebirth) someone else will receive the punishment, which makes the whole system not only unjust, but even irrational.

My answer is that exactly the soulless nature of actions gives them a purity of motive, which cannot be found in any moral code, based on retribution, reward or punishment of a soul. A good action done with expectation of a reward becomes an act of selfishness. An evil action avoided out of fear for punishment remains evil in thought and desire, even if not executed physically. The motive to do good should not be, and in Buddhism is not to obtain something;

for that is craving. The motive for goodness itself: to be good for goodness sake. And if any effect follows or not that is not of interest to a truly virtuous person. A good action will produce a good effect; and even if the sower does not live to see his work ripen and the fruits harvested, he will be content with the knowledge that, as he is reaping now the good effect of deeds done in a life he cannot remember, so the fruits of his present life will be enjoyed by someone else, whoever he happens to be. Does this not encourage people to do evil, as they themselves will not experience the evil effects? In practice it does not; for nobody will inflict suffering on another merely for his own gratification, unless he happens to be a masochist, which places him rather in the class of abnormality and lunacy than that of criminality.

In this connection I would like to raise the counter-question: Should a tendency to evil not be classed as an abnormality, as a mania? We were told that “rebellion against the will of God makes the tendency to evil”. But why should there be rebellion, if there were not a tendency to rebel? And if that tendency is inborn, and forms therefore a part of one‘s nature, how can that constitute an offence?

Thus it would appear that the natural explanation of morality as found in Buddhism is perhaps not so sublime as the supernatural explanation of grace and predilection as found in Christianity. But by throwing man back on his own resources, it gives him the full responsibility for action and reaction, for motive and effect. And that is ultimately the standard of a person’s morality.

Where the roots are so fundamentally different, I wonder whether the similarity of the fruits is not deceptive. A morality based on selflessness, an ethical code in which the only wrong is self-gratification at the cost of others even if only in thought, is bound to produce different fruits from a morality, the only aim of which is the salvation of a soul in order to obtain eternal bliss.

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Nirvāṇa caused the final difficulty, because it does not offer the same positive and individual bliss as may be expected in the Christian heaven. The different outlook on life remains fundamentally different in Buddhism and Christianity even after life. And hence the process of unmaking, or disillusioning, which is the Buddhist idea of salvation, appears to a non-Buddhist as annihilation. Nirvāṇ a is annihilation only in one sense, viz, annihilation of a delusion. Where nothing is, but all becomes as in a process, there unmaking merely means: no more becoming. Only entities can be annihilated, but not a process which is still arising. That process, which in delusions forms the 'I'-concept through a mistaken isolation, can be unmade by ceasing to become. It is that process of ceasing to be deluded, which forms the mental life of the arahant, i.e. of one who reaches salvation, not a salvation of self, but a salvation from self.

Bergson came very near to that, when he wrote in his Creative Evolution[14] of the creative action which unmakes itself, "Everything is obscure in the idea of creation. If we think of things which are created and a thing which creates, as we habitually do, as we cannot help doing ... There are no things, there are only actions".

It is action which is self-creative, and it creates in the measure of its advance. Like a falling stone increases its speed in falling, like an act becomes easier, i.e. finds less obstruction by mere repetition, so action leads to further action. But in that action it unmakes it- self by passing on all its momentum. That is how in rebirth can be found all the characteristics and components of past lives without the transmigration of a soul. The progress of making and unmaking is, therefore, a quite natural process. But if delusion guides this process, it will result in repetition which is rebirth. If insight however guides the process there will be the pure action of unmaking itself, which is the consummation of all action. And that is Nirvāṇa.

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[14] p. 261.

To look forward to an eternity of bliss, to beatific vision, is a self-creative act which therefore continues the delusion. But the understanding of that delusion is the annihilation there. That too is a creative act, for it creates the cessation of the cause of all disharmony; and that is bliss supreme.

If I may take upon myself a part of the Chairman's duty which is to sum up the debate, I would condense my reverend opponent's attitude towards the religion of Christianity in the words of Saint Anselm: "Credo ut intelligam"; I believe so that I may understand. Similarly, I might condense, my own attitude towards the philosophy of Buddhism by saying: I understand, so that I need not believe.

And thus we stand here where we were in the beginning, faith and emotion opposed to reason. Like other religions based on faith, Christianity is a passion. And though it may be true that this is an age in which reason claims for leadership, it must also be admitted that there never will be a time in which passion will find no place. It may even happen that passion will dominate reason. But as long as thought is free to think and men will be allowed to discuss their differences dispassionately, as long as there will be men and women who do not betray the truth by compromise, so long also will there be room for Christianity and Buddhism to suit the different temperaments of East and West. The hot and temperamental East preferred the cold reasoning of Buddhism, while the cold and calculating West preferred the passionate heat of faith and love.

But, I think that there is more in it than the difference between ice-cream and a hot-water-bottle. For both are higher aspects of life, though the aspects differ. Both show to man that there is more in life than money and the power it can buy. Along different roads they try to lead man up along the path of virtue. And in this we can not only tolerate one another, but we have learned to appreciate and even to love. For even if I cannot understand the other road of which Christ spoke when pointing to himself saying: "I am the Way, the Truth and the Life" (John:

XIV, 6)—even though I prefer the Buddha's Noble Eightfold path, his Middle Path, avoiding the extremes of love of sense and hate of life—still I know that man is not made of brain alone, and that there are sentiments in him which cry for satisfaction, and which man's weakness cannot afford to ignore. For those, Buddhism will appear morbid, while they in their turn will be found sentimental in their emotional life of faith. It is all a question of growth. And if religion is a way of life, there must be in that life also different stages of growth. And until we shall have outgrown all that in the perfection of life, there will be the need of different schools, of different -isms. Understanding that, there cannot be any intolerance, but only the wish that all may grow in purity of life and sincerity of truth, wherewith to serve others.

I feel sure that my audience has not been offended by the strong words I sometimes used in argument. It was not my intention to hurt; but if, while expressing my convictions and trying to convince my audience, I have overstepped the boundaries of parliamentary language, and if I thus unintentionally have caused some pain of mind to those who do not share my convictions, I most humbly tender my apologies.

And finally I thank my reverend opponent most sincerely for the fine spirit in which he endured the violence of my attack, for the sympathy wherewith he approached the teachings of Buddhism, and for giving expression so eloquently to his own deeper and most sacred feelings.

About the Author

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

He died on 15 September, 1988.