

II.—“INDIAN PHILOSOPHY”: SOME PROBLEMS.

BY S. RADHAKRISHNAN.

My book on “Indian Philosophy” has been kindly received and I take this opportunity to thank all my critics for their appreciation and sympathy. I propose to deal in this paper with a few controversial issues that the book has raised, such as, the method of philosophical interpretation, the value of comparative studies, the teaching of the Upanisads, the alleged atheism of Buddha, and the metaphysics of Nāgārjuna.

I

The historian of philosophy must approach his task not as a mere philologist or even as a scholar but as a philosopher who uses his scholarship as an instrument to wrest from words the thoughts that underlie them. A mere linguist regards the views of ancient Indian thinkers as so many fossils lying scattered throughout the upheaved and faulty strata of the history of philosophy, and from his point of view any interpretation which makes them alive and significant is dismissed as far-fetched and untrue. A philosopher, on the other hand, realises the value of the ancient Indian theories which attempt to grapple with the perennial problems of life and treats them not as fossils but as species which are remarkably persistent. The reactions of the human mind to the problems of philosophy which are recorded in the Upanisads or the Dialogues of Buddha are to be met with in a reincarnated form in some of the most flourishing systems of the present day. Though the sayings of the ancient Indians may be scattered, ambiguous and unco-ordinated, there is no reason to assume that their logic was as full of lacunæ as are their literary remains. It is the task of creative logic, as distinct from mere linguistic analysis, to piece together the scattered data, interpret for us the life they harbour and thus free the soul from the body. Max Müller wrote: “What I feel is, that it is not enough simply to repeat the watchwords of any ancient philosophy, which are

easily accessible in the Sūtras, but that we must at least make an attempt to bring those ancient problems near to us, to make them our own, and try to follow the ancient thinkers along the few footsteps which they left behind." ¹ Collection of facts and the collection of evidence are an important part, but only a part, of the task of the historian who attempts to record the manifold adventures of the human spirit. ² He must pay great attention to the logic of ideas, draw inferences, suggest explanations and formulate theories which would introduce some order into the shapeless mass of unrelated facts. If the history of philosophy is to be more than a bare catalogue of facts about dead authors and their writings, if it is to educate the mind and enthral the imagination, the historian should be a critic and an interpreter and not a mere mechanical 'ragpicker'.

II.

The cultivated in both east and west desire now a mutual understanding, and nothing is so useful for it as comparative studies. There are dangers to which the method is open, since it is very difficult to be discriminating for the European scholar or the Indian interpreter. The works in the "Religious Quest of India" series written by European missionaries living in India, though they mark an advance on the publications of the missionaries of a previous generation, are not unprejudiced accounts of Indian thought, since they are written with the explicit aim of presenting Christianity as the final goal of Indian thought. Many of the western students of Indian culture are convinced that Indians have been stunted in soul from the beginning and that it is quite beyond them to find out for themselves anything worth while in philosophy or religion, not to speak of science, art and literature. They are certain that the western nations had held for all time the monopoly of effective culture

¹ *Six Systems of Indian Philosophy*, p. 293.

² Cf. Hegel: "For, in thought and particularly in speculative thought, comprehension means something quite different from understanding the grammatical sense of the words alone, and also from understanding them in the region of ordinary conception only. Hence we may possess a knowledge of the assertions, propositions, or of the opinions of philosophers; we may have occupied ourselves largely with the grounds of and deductions from these opinions and the main point in all that we have done may be wanting—the comprehension of the propositions." Hegel compares such non-philosophical historians of philosophy, "to animals which have listened to all the tones in some music, but to whose senses, the unison, the harmony of their tones has not penetrated."—*History of Philosophy*, E.T., vol. i., p. xxv.

and philosophising. They attempt to establish the higher antiquity and superiority of the European civilisation and trace everything great and good in Indian thought to the Christian era. They declare that many of the achievements for which the ignorant give credit to the Indian are really borrowings from Greece. They are inclined to date the hymns of the Rg Veda and the civilisation reflected in them much later than Babylonian and Egyptian culture.

While the western scholar is inclined to dismiss as unfair all attempts to compare the 'crude and primitive' speculations of ancient India with the mature systems of the west, there are not wanting critics in India who feel a sort of old pride injured when they find Indian thought compared with the western. They think, that, in matters of religion and philosophy, at any rate, India is far superior to the west and that western thought is jejune and primitive when compared with the Indian.

With these judgments one sympathises or not according to one's taste. But mutual understanding is not possible without mutual respect and sympathy born of it. If we are true to history, we shall see that each nation has had its own share of the inner light and spiritual discovery. No cultural or religious imperialist who has the settled conviction that he alone has all the light and others are groping in darkness can be a safe guide in comparative studies. The reliable interpreter should adopt the empirical method of investigation with a reasonable exercise of intelligence and imagination. While he should discuss Indian views in terms of modern thought and relate them to the problems of the day, he must be cautious and careful in the use of his terms, which may be really different though apparently equivalent. He must avoid substituting modern arguments for ancient lines of thought. In an enterprise of this kind, one is always liable to be accused of reading the one into the other, but there is this difficulty in all historical work. The only safeguard against this risk is through the adoption of the comparative method. We should then be able to bring out what is characteristic of each tradition and appreciate its value.

III.

Many of my critics were puzzled by my discussion of the Upaniṣads, since I did not fly a banner and fix a label to my view. My criticism of the theory of "illusion," generally associated with Saṃkara's metaphysics and supported by Deussen, led some of my critics to imagine that I was opposed

to Śaṅkara's view. My indifference to personal theism made it equally clear to some others that I was not friendly to Rāmānuja's interpretation. But if one is not a follower of Śaṅkara or of Rāmānuja or any other classical interpreter, it is assumed that one can only be a reveller in strange unphilosophical confusion. I submit that my interpretation of the Upaniṣads is not an unreasonable one, though it may seem to differ from this or that tradition in this or that point.

Scholastic explanations overwhelm the teaching of any original genius. We tend to see Socrates with the eyes of Plato, or Plato with the eyes of Aristotle or Plotinus. The Upaniṣads are generally interpreted in the light of one or the other of the great commentators. My endeavour was to show how the Upaniṣads lent themselves to divergent developments and whether it was not possible to give a coherent account of their teaching which would do justice to the main principles of the two chief interpreters, Śaṅkara and Rāmānuja. If we can find a single point of view from which the different interpretations can be reconciled and understood—it may be that no such point of view exists—but if one can be found, it is likely that we can understand the teaching of the Upaniṣads better. In philosophical interpretation, the most coherent view is the most true.

The Upaniṣads speak with a double voice in describing the nature of ultimate reality. They sometimes make it the absolute which cannot be characterised by the phenomenal categories; at other times they identify it with the supreme person whom we are to adore and worship. As the result of this, we have two views about the nature of the world. In some passages, the world is regarded as an accident of Brahman (the absolute) and in others as organic to God. A careful reader perceives these two tendencies running through the Upaniṣads, one which regards the absolute as pure being and makes the world an accidental appearance (*vivarta*) of it, and the other which looks upon the absolute as a concrete person of whom the world is the necessary expression.¹ The former view is nearer Śaṅkara's and the latter nearer Rāmānuja's. I admit that "it is difficult to decide whether it is the Advaita (or non-dualism) of Śaṅkara or the modified position of Rāmānuja that is the final teaching of the parent gospel."²

The only intelligible reconciliation between two such apparently discordant notes seems to be through the device

¹ See pp. 168, 172-173, 184-185, 202.

² Pp. 258-259.

of a duality of standpoints. When we rise above the intellectual level and intuit the nature of reality, we see that there is nothing but the absolute, and the world is only the absolute, and the problem of the relation between the two does not arise, since the absolute and the world are not two distinct entities which require to be related. When we envisage the absolute from the human end, through the logical categories, we tend to view it as a whole which binds together the different elements in it. The absolute is looked upon as a personal God by whose power of self-expression or *māyā* the world is sustained. The absolute as pure being (*Śaṅkara*) and the absolute as a person (*Rāmānuja*) are the intuitional and the intellectual representations of the one supreme fact.¹ As these two lines of thought cross and recross in the Upaniṣads, *Śaṅkara* and *Rāmānuja* were able to support their views from them. As we shall see, *Śaṅkara* adopts this device of a duality of standpoints in attempting to harmonise the different texts of the Upaniṣads.

IV.

In my account of early Buddhism, I attempted to make out that it is "only a restatement of the thought of the Upaniṣads" with a new emphasis.² In spite of the absence of any specific reference to the Upaniṣads, it is admitted that the teaching of Buddha is considerably influenced by the thought of the Upaniṣads.³ Indifference to Vedic authority⁴ and ceremonial piety,⁵ belief in the law of Karma, re-birth⁶ and the possibility of attaining mokṣa or nirvāna⁷ and the doctrine of the non-permanence of the world and the individual self⁸ are common to the Upaniṣads and Buddha. While Buddha adopts the position of the Upaniṣads in holding that absolute reality is not the property of anything on earth, that

¹ See pp. 168, 172, 180-181, 184-185, 258-259.

² P. 361; see also pp. 375 ff.

³ As orthodox a Hindu thinker as Kumārila declares that even the Buddhist views of subjectivism, momentariness and non-self theory derive their inspiration from the Upaniṣads. "Vijñānamātrakṣaṅghaṅgaurā-tuṅyādivādānām api upaniṣad prabhavatvam." *Tantravārtika*, i, 3, 2.

⁴ *Muṇḍaka Up.*, i, 1, 5.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 2, 7-10; *Brh. Up.*, i, 4, 15.

⁶ *Chān. Up.*, v, 10, 7; *Kātha*, v, 7; *Śvet.*, x, 11-12.

⁷ *Chān. Up.*, iv, 15, 5-6; *Brh.*, vi, 2, 15; *Śvet.*, i, 7, 8, 11.

⁸ The changing character of the world is denoted by the word 'jagat'. *Īśā Up.*, 1; *Brh. Up.*, iii, 1, 3; cf. 'sarvam mṛtyor annam,' *Brh.*, iii, 2, 10; also i, 3, 28. In *Kātha*, i, 12, *svarga* or heaven is described as a place where hunger and thirst, sorrow, old age and death are absent. The futility of the greatest earthly pleasures is brought out in *Kātha*, i, 26-28.

the world of saṃsāra is a becoming without beginning or end, he does not definitely affirm the reality of the absolute, the self and the state of liberation. He does not tell us about the state of the enlightened after death, whether it is existent, non-existent, both or neither, about the nature of the self and the world whether they are eternal, non-eternal, both or neither, whether they are self-made, made by another, both or neither. As a matter of fact these questions were reserved issues on which Buddha did not allow any speculation. While there is no doubt that Buddha refused to dogmatise on these problems, it is still an interesting question, if it can be answered at all, what exactly the implications of this refusal are.

The three questions, whether there is an absolute reality exempt from the changes of the world, whether there is a permanent self distinct from the changing aggregates, and whether nirvāna is a state of positive being, are different sides of the one fundamental problem of metaphysics. If there is an ultimate reality which is not subject to the laws of the world of change, then nirvāna is the attainment of this sphere of reality and the enlightened one is the permanent self. If there is not an absolute reality, then there is no permanent self and nirvāna is nothingness. The former view is nearer the religious idealism of the Upaniṣads and the latter is nearer the negative rationalism of scientific metaphysics.

Whatever Buddha's personal views may have been, he declined to engage in discussions about metaphysical questions on the ground that they were not helpful to the seeker of salvation. His avoidance of all metaphysical themes is irritating in its vagueness to the modern historian of philosophy who is anxious to give a label to every thinker and system of thought. But Buddha eludes his grasp. Was his silence an apology for uncertainty? Was he a mentally timid man afraid of speaking out or was he merely sitting on the fence? Was his mind vague and hazy or was he attempting to avoid the danger of being deceived? Was he facing both ways, indifferent to the positive and the negative implications of his teaching? There are only three alternatives open to us. Buddha admitted the reality of the absolute or did not admit its reality or did not know the truth about it. Let us try to determine whether his thought was negative, agnostic or positive in character.

At once, we are confronted by the difficulty that we do not possess any written record of Buddha's teachings. The Pāli Canon came into its present shape long after the death of

Buddha. It contains matter some very old and some rather late. It is therefore difficult to say with certainty how much of the Canonical Buddhism is due to Buddha himself and how much is later development. In ancient India, many of the discourses and utterances of the teachers are preserved in memory by their disciples and transmitted to the generations that follow. Such has been the case with the great Vedic literature. The same is true of Buddha, who founded in his lifetime a regular order and gathered round himself a body of disciples who became the representatives of his teaching. Though we cannot be sure that we have the *ipsissima verba* of Buddha, there is no doubt that we possess, to a considerable extent, the substance and the profound depth of his teaching. If we doubt the authenticity of Buddha's great deliverances on the four noble truths, the eight-fold path, and the exhortations attributed to him in the *Mahāparinibbāna Sutta* and *Sutta Nipāta*, we may as well doubt the authenticity of the teachings attributed to the Yājñavalkya Sāṅḍilya and Uddālaka.¹ Attempts are made to date the agnostic or the negative or the positive passages as earlier and assign them to Buddha and treat others as the contributions of his followers, in the interests of this or that interpretation of early Buddhism. But to start with the idea that all passages which conflict with one's reading of Buddha's silence are later, is a circular argument; for the ground on which they are regarded as later is just that they contain indications of a different outlook. Taking our stand on the texts which are generally acknowledged to be Buddha's, let us try to find out what metaphysical standpoint they suggest.

V.

The negative interpretation of his silence is the most popular one. Hindu thinkers, early Buddhists and many modern students of Indian thought adopt this view.² Buddhist studies aroused much interest in the west during the second

¹ According to Rhys Davids, the four greater Nikāyas and the greater part of such books of the lesser Nikāyas as *Itivuttaka* and *Sutta Nipāta* are as old as 400 B.C. and that of the *Vinaya Mahāraḡga*, *Cullavagga* i.-x. is as old as 300 B.C. From the representations of the Buddhist stories and legends on the reliefs and monuments of Sanchi, etc., it is clear that about the middle of the third century B.C. we had a body of Buddhist texts designated pitakas and divided into five Nikāyas.

² Cf. Professor Macdonell: Buddha "left no doubt about the goal to which his teaching led, the cessation of all the saṃskāras, annihilation of all the skandhas, eternal death"—*Hindustan Review*, 1923, p. 93.

half of the nineteenth century, when men's minds were swayed by scientific metaphysicians like Herbert Spencer and Auguste Comte. Naturally Buddhist scholars felt that the silence of Buddha was a cloak for negative rationalism. Buddha shrank from confessing his faith for fear that he might startle his followers out of their wits. If we accept this view, not only does Buddha's philosophy become incoherent but his character is also compromised. There are ever so many passages, admittedly Buddha's, which cannot be accounted for on this view. Besides, the success of Buddha's teaching at a time when the great gods Viṣṇu and Śiva were rising into prominence will be difficult to explain. We have evidence to show that the early converts to Buddhism were religiously minded. The *Mahāśudassana* and *Cakkavattisihanāda Suttantas* reveal to us that the minds of the early Buddhists were filled with the legend of the Sun-God. A negative creed was not likely to impress the jatilas or fire-worshippers who were among the early converts to Buddhism.¹ A philosophy which denies the reality of an ultimate spirit, repudiates the reality of the self and promises men annihilation as the reward of a virtuous life, is not likely to kindle in the human heart any enthusiasm for its founder or fervour for his teaching. To assume that such a barren rationalism appealed to the Indian heart of the sixth century B.C., is to ignore all laws of psychology. So careful a scholar as Prof. Berriedale Keith declines to believe that Buddha was a negativist. He holds that the passages of the Pāli Canon which interpret the practical agnosticism of Buddha as a definite negativism are not to be taken as a serious account of Buddha's teaching.²

VI.

The second alternative of agnosticism, which does not apparently commit us to any definite view, has had the valuable and impressive support of Prof. Keith. He says: "It is quite legitimate to hold that the Buddha was a genuine agnostic, that he had studied the various systems of ideas prevalent in his day, without deriving any greater satisfaction from them than any of us to-day do from the study of modern systems, and that he had no reasoned or other conviction on the matter. From the general poverty of philosophical constructive power exhibited by such parts of the system as appear essentially Buddha's, one is inclined

¹ *Mahāragga*, i., 15 ff.

² *Buddhist Philosophy*, pp. 47 ff.

to prefer this explanation." "Agnosticism in these matters is not based on any reasoned conviction of the limits of knowledge; it rests on the two-fold ground that the Buddha has not himself a clear conclusion on the truth on these issues, but is convinced that disputation on them will not lead to the frame of mind which is essential for the attainment of nirvāna."¹

The 'agnostic' interpretation which makes out that Buddha refused to give answers to metaphysical questions simply because he had none to give, is hardly fair to Buddha's genius. If Buddha had himself no theory of life, it would have been impossible for him to give a larger meaning and a greater depth to life. It cannot be that Buddha voyaged through life without a chart, for then his system would be unintelligible and his passion for humanity inexplicable. If Buddha had no clear convictions on the nature of the ultimate goal of all striving, if he had no light on the mystery of nirvāna, how could he say that by perfecting one's nature one would attain the bliss inexpressible? The designation of 'Buddha,' 'the enlightened,' which he assumed leads us to infer that he had some definite views, right or wrong, on the ultimate questions. The depth of conviction which comes out in many exhortations to his disciples to follow the Norm to reach the truth, is hardly intelligible on the hypothesis of agnosticism. "Let a man of intelligence come to me," says Buddha, "honest, candid, straightforward; I will instruct him, teach him the Norm, and if he practice according as he is taught, then to know for himself, and to realise that supreme religion and goal for the sake of which clansmen go forth from the household life into the homeless state will take him—only seven days."² Buddha must be either an impostor or a deluded man to speak in this strain, if he had no clear views on the ultimate questions.

Besides, this interpretation does not reckon with the passages where Buddha says that he does not give out all the truths known to him. In the *pāsādika suttante*,³ he tells us that he does not reveal the truths in his possession, which are not likely to help one in one's moral growth. Saṃyutta Nikāya relates an incident, where Buddha, taking a bunch of leaves in his hand, explained to the assembled monks that, as the leaves in the forest outnumbered the leaves in his hand, so the truths which he knew but had not taught, outnumbered the truths which he had taught. While

¹ *Buddhist Philosophy*, pp. 63 and 45.

² *Dīgha N.*, iii., 56.

³ *Ibid.*, 134.

Buddha taught less than he knew and believed, his disciples seem to have believed rather less than what he had taught them.

Prof. Keith is not inclined to regard the agnosticism of Buddha as a reasoned one. Though it is not logically argued out, the view that it is difficult to solve ultimate problems by empirical understanding is familiar to the thinkers who preceded Buddha. If Buddha refused to say whether the world had a beginning or not, it may well be that either alternative seemed to him to be unsatisfactory. If Buddha “had studied the various systems of ideas prevalent in his time,” the somewhat reasoned agnosticism of the Upaniṣads would leap up to his eyes.

It is admitted that the agnosticism of Buddha, if it is absolute and not merely pragmatic as in the case of the Upaniṣads, is not creditable to his philosophic power, and those who adopt this view of Buddha’s silence are inclined to rate him as a philosopher of indifferent quality. But this is purely a matter of personal opinion. Buddha’s critical attitude to the different metaphysical theories—the sixty-two described in the *Brahmajāla Sutta* and the ten raised only to be set aside as not tending to salvation in the *Potthapāda Sutta*¹—as well as to the religious practices of his time, shows that Buddha is a thinker and critic of no mean order. To imagine that he was not a close thinker would be to deny metaphysical capacity to one who disputed many metaphysical schemes. It would be a strange insensibility for which there is little proof. Besides, no thinking man, not, at any rate, one of Buddha’s intellectual and moral stature, could live without some sort of belief about transcendent values.

Those scholars who support the hypothesis of agnosticism do so since that view alone fits in with their faith that Buddha’s teaching is emphatically a species of primitive thought. They reject other interpretations on the ground that they are too logical to be primitive. We need not say that the view which pictures Buddha as a narrow-minded rationalist, an indifferent psychologist and a bad philosopher, is hardly calculated to convince or even trouble those who do not share the assumptions of the critics. Such a vague dreamer is obviously one who could never have had any large religious influence even in the India of the sixth century B.C.

¹ Digha N., i., 187 ff.

VII.

If we believe that Buddha was not a vague dreamer or a hypocrite, but a sincere and earnest soul of an anti-dogmatic turn of mind, then a chance phrase or a significant touch may contain, to the careful observer, the clue to his general position which is the permanent background of his life and thought. The spirit of this metaphysics will be all-pervading though it may be seldom expressed.

The emphasis laid by Buddha on the impermanence and non-substantiality of the world is plainly in harmony with the depreciation of all empirical existence which we find in the Upaniṣads.¹ The crucial question is, whether Buddha's condemnation of the world of experience is the result of his acceptance of an absolute reality, as in the case of the Upaniṣads. When one says that one does not believe in reality or God, one only means that one does not believe in the popular ideas of them. When Buddha scrapped inadequate conceptions, it can only be in comparison with a more adequate one. As a matter of fact, nowhere did Buddha repudiate the Upaniṣad conception of Brahman, the absolute. In the *Kathāvattu*, where different controversial points are discussed, there is no reference to the question of the reality of an immutable being. All this indicates, if anything, Buddha's acceptance of the Upaniṣad position. Besides, the famous sermon at Benares suggests strongly the reality of an absolute realm. The descriptions of the absolute as neither existent nor non-existent, nor both nor neither, remind us of similar passages in non-Buddhist texts where they are used to deny not the absolute, but empirical descriptions of it.²

Why then did Buddha not admit in express terms the reality of the absolute? Buddha refused to describe the absolute, for that would be to take a step out of the world of relativity, the legitimacy of which he was the first to contest in others. The absolute is not a matter of empirical observation. The world of experience does not reveal the absolute anywhere within its limits. The Upaniṣads admit as much and warn us against applying the categories of the phenomenal world to the ultimate reality. The seer of the Upaniṣads, when called upon to describe the nature of the

¹ "The wise seek not the stable (dhruvam) among things which are unstable (adhruveṣu) here," *Katha Up.*, iv., 2.

² *R. V.*, x., 129, 1-2; *Bṛh. Up.*, ii., 3, 19; iii., 8, 8; *Isā Up.*, 1 and 5; *Katha Up.*, iii., 15; *Muṇḍaka*, i., 1, 6; ii., 2, 1; *Svet.*, vi., 11; *Maitrī*, iv., 17.

absolute, kept silent, and when the question was repeated, he persisted in his silence and ultimately declared that "the Ātman is silence" (Sāntoyam ātmā). "Where the eye goes not, speech goes not, nor the mind; we know not, we understand not how one would teach it."¹ It is "other than the known and above the unknown."² Often the Upaniṣads give negative descriptions of the absolute.³ But the conception of the absolute as something unknown and incomprehensible, without beginning or end, without shape, substance or dwelling-place, is too exalted for ordinary people. So the Upaniṣads indulge in positive descriptions to satisfy the interests of religion and make known that the unutterable absolute is none the less positive in character. While the Upaniṣads did not dare to be loyal to the tremendous admission of the incomprehensibility of the absolute, Buddha, more consistently, refuses to apply any category of the empirical world to the absolute reality. While he makes out that the absolute is not the world of change, that the self is not the empirical determinations of bodily form, perceptions, feelings, dispositions and intellect, that nirvāṇa is not empirical being, he does not say what these are,⁴ since they are incapable of logical verification. Their reality is intuited by the freed, and others have to accept it on authority. But when once authority is admitted, there is no reason why the authority of the Vedas should not be accepted in favour of the Vedic gods. There is no reason why Buddha's view should rank higher than ever so many dreams of the human heart and shadows of the human mind which people are called upon to accept on the authority of others. The Upaniṣads assert and Buddha agrees, that it is not possible for us to attain theoretical certainty on the ultimate questions, and those who profess to have attained it are charlatans anxious to impose on the vulgar. While Buddha destroyed the dogmatism of his predecessors he did not wish to substitute any dogmatism of his own in its place. For such a procedure would encourage disputations which hinder spiritual growth. Buddha declares that he does not reveal the truths he knows, not only because they are not helpful to the seeker of liberation but also because men hold different opinions regarding them.⁵ In his time, fruitless discussions

¹ Kena Up., i., 3; see also Kaṭha Up., vi., 12-13; Mund., iii., 1, 8.

² Kena, i., 4.

³ Brh. Up., ii., 3, 6; iii., 8, 8; iii., 9, 26; iv., 2-4; Kaṭha, iii., 15; Mund., i., 6.

⁴ Cf. Augustine: "We can know what God is not, but not what He is," *Trinity*, viii., 2.

⁵ *Udāna*, p. 11; *Saṃyutta N.*, v., 437; *Dīgha*, i., 179.

had become almost a mental disease. The Hindu thinkers seemed to Buddha to be neglecting the deeper needs of life in their anxiety to grapple with the bottomless issues of thought. So Buddha exhorted his followers to withdraw from the strife of systems and direct their attention to religion as the life and the way leading to the attainment of truth. Truth will work itself out in us, when we free ourselves from prejudices, let reality reflect itself in us and modify our very being. Truth is to be found in life itself. It is not a matter of learned controversy but a spiritual necessity. In view of the obvious limits to the logical investigation of reality, Buddha did not think it his duty to satisfy the metaphysical craving, though he had definite views on the metaphysical questions.

Within the limits allowed by logic, Buddha describes the ultimate principle of the universe as the law or the Dharma. The precise significance of the concept of Dharma will become clear if we look into its previous history in Vedic literature. We have in the Rg Veda the conception of Rta as moral and physical order. It is not the creation of God but is itself divine and independent of the gods who are said to be its custodians. The moral order of the world controlling the problems of life in its different spheres of law, custom and morality is called Dharma. In the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* it is said that, after creating the classes of Ksatriyas, Vaiśyas and Sūdras, the supreme "created a better form, the Law of Righteousness (Dharma). There is nothing higher than the Law of Righteousness (Dharmāt param nāsti). . . . Verily, that which is the Law of Righteousness is Truth (Satyam). . . . Verily both these (Satyam and Dharma) are the same thing."¹ The Vedic Rta stands for both Satya and Dharma.² In the *Taittirīya Upaniṣad*, the perfected soul who has felt the unity of his soul with that of the world sings, "I am the firstborn of Rta (or the Real), earlier than the gods and the centre of the immortal."³ Similarly in the *Kāṭha Upaniṣad*, where a passage from the Rg Veda⁴ is substantially repeated, Rta is identified with the supreme spirit.⁵ The identity of Dharma and Rta with Satya is a

¹ I., 4, 14. See also Brh. Up., iv., 15, 1; Iṅa Up., 15; "The face of the real is covered over with a golden vessel; O pūṣan, do thou uncover that, for one whose law is the real (satyadharmāya) to see."

² Rta has for its negative an-ṛta which is a-satya as well as a-dharma.

³ Aham aṣmi prathamajā rta'sya, pūrvam devebhyo nūbhā'yi.

⁴ iv., 40, 5; see also Vājasaneyi Śaṁhitā, x., 24; xii., 14; Tait. Saṁ., iii., 2, 10, 1; Sat. Brāh., vi., 7, 3, 11. Rangarāmanuja, commenting on Kāṭha, v., 2, identifies ṛtam with aparicchinnasatyarīpabrāhmātmakam.

⁵ V., 2; see Śaṁkara on Tait, iii., 10 and Kāṭha v., 2.

doctrine as old as the Rg Veda and the Upaniṣads. The one absolute reveals itself to the philosophically minded as Eternal Truth or Reality, and the way to it is through wisdom (jñāna) and faith (śraddhā). This is the view which the Upaniṣads emphasise. To those religiously inclined, the absolute seems to be Eternal Love and the way to it is through love (prīti) and devotion (bhakti). This view is stressed by some of the later Upaniṣads, the *Bhagavadgītā* and the purāṇas. Those who are ethically disposed look upon the absolute as Eternal Righteousness and hold that we can attain it through service and self-sacrifice. The one absolute which is at once Light, Love and Life reveals itself in different ways to the seekers of different temperaments.

Buddha's whole attitude is a predominantly ethical one, and naturally the ethical aspect of the absolute, its character as righteousness, appeals to him most. The place assigned by the Upaniṣads to Brahman is given to Dharma by Buddha.¹ Dharma controls all things. In the *Agāṇṇa Suttanta*, the evolution of the world and the gradation of beings in it are said to be conditioned by the principle of Dharma.² The path of the Brahman is called the way of the Dharma.³ The eightfold path is called indiscriminately the Brahmayaṇa or the Dharmayaṇa. The Tathāgata is said to have Brahman or Dharma as his body. He is said to become one with Brahman or one with Dharma.⁴ There are many passages in the Pali Canon where we are called upon to pay homage and reverence to the Dharma.⁵ In *Milinda*, Dharma is personified as the god of righteousness.⁶ Dharma is the

¹ Cf. Rabindranath Tagore: "This Dharma and the Brahman of the Upaniṣads are essentially the same . . . Dharma in Buddhism is an eternal reality of Peace, Goodness and Love for which man can offer up the homage of his highest loyalty, his life itself. This Dharma can inspire man with almost superhuman power of renunciation, and through the abnegation of self lead him to the supreme object of his existence, a state that cannot be compared to anything we know in this world, and yet of which we can at least have a dim idea, when we know that it is only to be reached, not through the path of annihilation, but through immeasurable love. Thus to dwell in the constant consciousness of unbounded love is named by Lord Buddha, Brahmavihāra or moving in Brahman," *Vistabharati Quarterly*, 1924, pp. 385-386.

² *Dīgha N.*, iii., 80 ff.

³ *Samyutta N.*, i., 141; *Theragīthā*, 689.

⁴ Buddha when he attained nirvāṇa is said to have become 'dharma-dhātusvabhāvātma'.

⁵ *Samyutta N.*, ii., 138; *Anguttara N.*, ii., 20.

⁶ Cf. Poussin: "If the Buddhists admit neither judge nor creator, at least they recognise a sovereign and infallible justice—a justice of wonderful insight and adaptability, however mechanically it acts. . . . In my opinion it is a calumny to accuse the Buddhists of atheism; they

highest reality and the things of the world are dharmas, as they are the manifestations of the one ultimate principle.

On the ground that bodily form, perceptions, feelings, dispositions and intellect are non-permanent, Buddha denies to them the character of self.¹ The changing character of the empirical self is illustrated by the metaphors of fire and the movement of water. The Sermon at Benares does not deny the existence of a self distinct from the changing empirical aggregates. Buddha declines to deny the reality of a permanent self in his conversation with Vacchagotta. The *Lankāvatāra*, a work written centuries after Buddha, suggests that Buddha accepted the 'self' theory only to beguile his hearers. It is unnecessary to assume that Buddha lowered his standards for the sake of expediency, when other explanations are available. When Buddha argues that nirvāna can be normally attained before the bodily death of the sage, and equates it with happiness of the highest order accompanied by the consciousness of the destruction of all rebirth, he tacitly admits the reality of the self. When he declares that the character of the enlightened one is beyond nature, and protests against the accusation that he teaches the destruction of the real,² he admits that the destruction of the five constituents does not touch the real self. The *Dharmapada* makes the self the lord of self and the witness of its good and evil.³ In the Sāṅkhya and the Advaita Vedānta, we have an exclusion from the self of all that belongs to the not-self, in the spirit of the Upaniṣads and Buddhism.

But Buddha could not confirm the reality of the self on empirical evidence. So he declines to answer questions about the non-phenomenal self, whether it was one with or different from the aggregates.⁴ He did not so much deny the permanent self as speculations about it. Referring to six different speculations about the nature of the self, Buddha says, "This, O monks, is a walking in mere opinion, a resort-

have at any rate taken full cognisance of one of the aspects of the divine" (quoted in *Buddha's Way of Virtue*, p. 13). Mr. Saunders says: "His (Buddha's) serene faith in righteousness and in the reality of the unseen, intangible values may be called religious; and we may well believe that knowing his people and their genius for religion, he believed that he might safely leave them to work out a religious interpretation of this law of causality." Mr. Saunders thinks that Buddha's insistence on the law of Karma and Dharma is a "notable contribution to an ethical theism," *Epochs of Buddhist History*, p. 3.

¹ See *Mahāvagga*, i, 6, 38; *Majjhima N.*, 35; *Mahānidāna Sutta*: *Dīgha N.*, ii, 66.

² *Alagaddupama Sutta*: *Majjhima N.*, i, 140.

³ 160.

⁴ *Majjhima N.*, i, 256.

ing to mere views, a barren waste of views, an empty display of views."¹ Pudgalavāda or belief in a permanent self was held by one branch of Buddha's early disciples. *Kathāvattu* attributes it to the Sammitiyas and Vajjiputtukas. We have in the Saṃyutta Nikāya the sūtra of the burden-bearer.² The Buddhist commentators, Buddhaghosa, Vasubandhu, Candrakīrti and Yasomitra, who are inclined to a negative interpretation of Buddha's teaching, explain it away, though it is difficult to believe that the changing aggregates are both the burden and the bearer thereof.

It is generally admitted at the present day that it is wrong to identify nirvāna with an "eternity of nothingness". The word 'nirvāna' means literally extinction, and what is extinguished is "craving, sorrow, rebirth"³ The earliest conception of nirvāna is that it is an inexplicable state which can be attained even here and now⁴ by the complete destruction of thirst (taṇhā) and the defilements of mind.⁵ It is a real condition where saṃsāra terminates and an ineffable peace is attained.⁶ The beautiful poetry of the Thera and the Therīgāthas is inspired by ideas of the bliss of nirvāna.

We cannot adequately describe the nature of nirvāna since it is not an object of logical knowledge. Though it is felt by those who share it as strongly positive, conceptually it is a negative state. Nirvāna is the negation of the empirical being bound by the law of Karma or Saṃsāra. "There is, O monks, that which is neither earth nor water, neither fire nor air, neither infinity of space nor infinity of consciousness, nor nothingness nor perception, neither this world nor that world, neither sun nor moon." "Where there is neither death nor birth, there neither is this world nor that, nor in between—it is the end of sorrow."⁷ But it is not nonbeing. "There is something unborn, unoriginated, unmade, uncompounded; were there not such a thing, there would be no escape from that which is born, originated, made and compounded."⁸ There is thus authority for the interpreta-

¹ Silācāra : *Dialogues of Buddha*, vol. i., p. 6.

² III., 25.

³ *Mahāvagga*, vi. 31. 7 ; S.B.E., vol. xiii.

⁴ See *Brahmajāla Sutta*.

⁵ Nandī samyojano loko vitakkasa vicāranā
Taṇhāya vipphānena nibbānam ity ucyati.

Sutta Nipāta, 1109 ; see also 1067.

⁶ Majjhima N., 139. Cf. Keith : "That nirvāna is real . . . doubtless accords with the general tone of the Canon itself," *Buddhist Philosophy*, p. 83.

⁷ *Udāna*, viii., 1 ; see also ii., 10, and *Itivuttaka*.

⁸ *Udāna*, viii., 3, 10. Cf. Chān Up., viii., 13, 1, where the Brahma-world into which the perfected pass is said to be uncreated, akṛtan. The state of release is described as uncreated, akṛtaḥ—Mund Up., i., 2, 12.

tion of nirvāna as something uncreate and endless¹ or as an uncompounded element different from the passing world.² *Udāna* alludes to the fate of the enlightened who have attained nirvāna. Even as the path of the fire when extinguished cannot be traced, even so the path of those who are completely freed cannot be traced. The Upaniṣads³ compare the supreme self with the fire the fuel of which has been consumed. Only the extinction of the fuel does not destroy the fire which ceases to be visible.⁴ As the Upaniṣads distinguish ultimate release (mokṣa) from the attainment of heaven (svarga), so Buddha distinguishes nirvāna from existence in paradise and warns his followers that desire for blissful existence in the formless world (arūpaloka) is one of the fetters which prevent the attainment of nirvāna.

Buddha evidently admitted the positive nature of nirvāna. He dismisses Yamaka's view of nirvāna as the night of nothingness, as a heresy.⁵ In the interesting conversation between King Pasenadi of Kosala and the nun Khemā, it is admitted that nirvāna is an ineffable state which does not lend itself to empirical description. The deep nature of the Tathāgata cannot be fathomed, even as the sands of the Ganges or the waterdrops in the ocean cannot be reckoned.⁶ Buddha refused to answer all questions about the nature of nirvāna, since the questions impede moral progress⁷ and nirvāna is inconceivable (ananuvejjo). "Whereof one cannot speak, thereof one must be silent."⁸

VIII.

The scientifically minded students of Buddhism tend to interpret the teaching of Buddha as a negative rationalism. Those who are impressed by the futility of modern attempts at metaphysical system-building are inclined to construe Buddha's doctrine as one of agnosticism ; and if they come

¹ *Milinda*, p. 271.

² Abhidharma. See *Psychological Ethics*, pp. 367 ff.

³ Svet Up.

⁴ Cf. Keith : "There is no doubt that the Indian idea of the extinction of fire was not that which occurs to us of utter annihilation, but rather that the flame returns to the primitive, pure, invisible state of fire in which it existed prior to its manifestation in the form of visible fire," *Buddhist Philosophy*, pp. 65-66.

⁵ *Samyutta N.*, iii., 109.

⁶ *Ibid.*, iv., 374 ; *Majjhima N.* i., 487.

⁷ *Samyutta N.*, ii., 223 ; *Majjhima*, 63.

⁸ The later schools of Buddhism, which interpret nirvāna as conscious union with the universe. Buddha or the awakening of the Buddha-self in the human heart, are nearer Buddha's teaching than those which view it as the cessation of all existence whatsoever.

across inconvenient passages, they declare that they are the work of Buddha's followers. Prof. Keith recognises that a positive philosophy affirming the reality of the absolute, the self and nirvāna, can be traced to the Canon, but he is reluctant to attribute it to the Buddha himself and so gives the credit for it to “a section at any rate of his early followers”.¹ The different readings of Buddha's silence on metaphysical questions are motivated by different acts of faith.² An impartial historian must strive not only for accuracy in his statements but also justice in his appreciations. While it is his duty to recognise the inconsistencies in a system, he must endeavour, if his interpretation is to be fruitful, to account for them by discriminating the essential from the accidental. It is not fair to insist on negativism or agnosticism where another explanation is not merely possible but is probably more in accordance with the ideas of the teaching of the early Canon. The ‘agnostic’ interpreter makes Buddha's silence a cloak for ignorance and the ‘negative’ interpreter looks upon it as an act of cowardice. On the former view, Buddha did not know the truth, but tried to save his face by evading all questions and asserting that they were unnecessary. On the latter he had definite views but since he had not the courage to oppose established opinions, he kept his views to himself. Those who regard Buddha as one of the world's greatest men, of whom what Plato said of Socrates in the *Phædo* is not untrue, that he was “the best, and also the wisest and most righteous of his time,” may be excused if they do not agree with the assumptions of the ‘negative’ and the ‘agnostic’ interpreters. If we do not want to compromise the philosophical power or the moral greatness of Buddha, we must accept the positive interpretation. It alone accounts for Buddha's metaphysical commissions and omissions and his ethical teaching which is a logical deduction from his metaphysics. It relates Buddha

¹ *Buddhist Philosophy*, pp. 63-64.

² Referring to the place of faith in the interpretation of philosophies of an earlier age, where we are wholly confined to written records, “usually fragmentary, often second-hand or of doubtful authority,” Prof. Burnet says: “A man who tries to spend his life in sympathy with the ancient philosophers will sometimes find a direct conviction forcing itself upon him, the grounds of which can only be represented very imperfectly by a number of references in a footnote. Unless the enumeration of passages is complete—and it can never be complete, and unless each passage tells exactly in the same way, which depends on its being read in the light of innumerable other passages not consciously present to memory, the so-called proofs will not produce the same effect on any two minds,” *Greek Philosophy*, pp. 1-2.

to his spiritual surroundings and makes his thought continuous with that of the Upanisads. The history of a nation's thought is an organic growth and not a mere succession of change on change.

IX.

If Buddha accepts the metaphysical standpoint of the Upanisads, how is it that Buddhism is regarded as a heresy by the Hindu thinkers? What is the explanation for the cleavage between the Hindu and the Buddhist systems of religion and culture?

The Hindu quarrels not so much with the metaphysical conceptions of Buddha as with his practical programme. Freedom of thought and rigidity in practice have marked the Hindu from the beginning of his history. The Hindu will accept as orthodox the Sāṃkhya and the Pūrva Mīmāṃsā systems of thought, regardless of their indifference to theism; but will reject Buddhism in spite of its strong ethical and spiritual note, for the simple reason that the former do not interfere with the social life and organisation, while the latter insists on bringing its doctrine near to the life of the people.

In deducing the consequences of the Upanisad philosophy with incomparable beauty and logic, Buddha showed the inconsistencies in the beliefs and practices of those who paid lip allegiance to the Upanisads. While the bold speculators of the Upanisads adventured on the naked peaks of the absolute, the masses of men were allowed to worship their little gods and perform the sacrificial ceremonies which they were supposed to demand. The elaborate sacrificial religion failed to command the confidence of the thoughtful in Buddha's time. As a matter of fact, the Vānaprasthas and the Yatis were exempted from them, and the doubt naturally arose whether even the householders could not dispense with the costly and complicated ritual. Buddha protested against those who were standing still in the letter and proclaimed that salvation was not external and legal but inward and spiritual.

The Upanisads advocated the principle of ahimsā or non-violence but not unreservedly. The Vedic outlook was so strongly entrenched that the Upanisads suffered Vedic institutions even if they were against the main spirit of their teaching. For example, the *Chāndogya Upanisad* declares that the aspirant after release should, among other things, "never give pain to other creatures except at certain holy

places,” i.e., during animal sacrifices.¹ But the slaughter of animals was in the highest degree offensive to Buddha² and he disallowed absolutely animal sacrifices.

While the Upanisads tolerated, even if they did not encourage the caste rules, Buddha’s scheme definitely undermined the institution of caste. He declared that individuals were higher or lower not according to their birth but according to their character.³ While the Brahmins reserved the study of the sacred scriptures to the members of the three ‘twiceborn’ castes, Buddha abolished all such restrictions. Admitting the intellectual pre-eminence of the Brahmins, Buddha ranked along with them the Sramanas and opened the latter order to the Śūdras and the Caṇḍālas. Sunita, the sweeper, was as readily taken into the fold as the high caste Brahmin.⁴

In spite of the reforms which he wished to introduce, Buddha lived and died in the belief that he was restoring the principles of the venerable Aryan faith. He did not think of himself as the founder of a new religion, though he was anxious to purify Brahmanical Hinduism and revivify the society round him. But the pioneers of progress are regarded in every age, with not unnatural suspicion, as the champions of revolt and rebellion. By putting spiritual brotherhood in place of hereditary priesthood, personal merit in place of distinctions of birth, logical reason in place of Vedic revelation, moral life in place of ceremonial piety, and the perfected sage above the Vedic gods, Buddha provoked the wrath of the Hindu priest who regarded him as an anti-social force. What made Buddha and his followers unpardonable heretics in the eyes of the Brahmin priests is the social revolution which

¹ Ahimsān sarvabhūtāny anyatra tīrthebhyah, viii., 15.

² See Kūṭadanta Sutta. Though Buddha insisted on a rigorous discipline for the monks, he did not interfere with the socio-religious practices of his disciples so long as they did not conflict with his central principles. He allowed the Brahmin Kūṭadanta to perform the sacrifices which did not involve the killing of animals. Kumāra Kassapa, an immediate disciple of Buddha, instructs Prince Pāyāsi that sacrifices which do not involve any cruelty are better than those which do. See *Pāyāsi Suttanta*: Dīgha N., ii. The highest sacrifice according to Buddha is love of humanity and moral life. See *Chān Up.*, iii., 16 and 17.

³ *Aḡāṇā Suttanta*: Dīgha N., iii.; *Sāmyutta N.*, ii., 138; *Anguttara N.*, ii., 20.

⁴ *Kassapaśihmūda Sutta*; *Samannaphala Sutta*, 14; *Aśokas Inscriptions* at Girpur and Sahabajgar. See also *Vinaya pitaka*, vol. ii., and *Madhurū Sutta*. Cf. “The katriya is the best of this folk who put their trust in lineage. But he who is perfect in wisdom and righteousness, he is the best among gods and men,” *Imbattha Sutta*.

they preached. There is nothing in the doctrine of Buddha which cannot be reconciled with Hindu thought ; but the conflict between a social system based on Brahmanical supremacy and one which denied it is radical. In theological discussions, which are generally heated, every dissenter is an atheist. If one does not share our illusions, he is a heretic ; if he adopts a different standard of morality, he is immoral. The protagonist of the Vedic sacrificial religion regarded Buddha as an enemy of the faith. When Buddha approached Bhāradvāya the Brahmin, as he was performing a sacrifice to the fire, the latter cried out, "Stop there, O shaven-headed one, there O Shamanaka, there thou of low caste".¹ Hindu orthodoxy adopted a similar attitude whenever there were protests against the Vedic religion. Maṇḍana Mīśra rebuked Śaṅkara for subordinating Vedic piety to knowledge of the absolute.² Buddha's revolt is not against the metaphysics of the Upaniṣads but against Brahmanical Hinduism. The schism became wider as the followers of Buddha acquired the zeal characteristic of the professors of a new learning.

X.

The four Buddhist schools profess to be loyal to the teaching of Buddha who discovered the elements of existence (dhammā), their causal connection, and the method to suppress their efficiency for ever. As against the Ajivakas who denied the influence of the past on the present, since the past was dead and irrecoverably gone, Buddha affirmed that 'everything exists' though things were looked upon as combinations of forces (saṃskārasamūha). Buddha maintained the existence of all things in the interests of moral life. The Sarvāstivādins (the Vaibhāsikas and the Sautrāntikas) uphold a pluralistic realism. The nāmarūpa of the Upaniṣads was elaborated by the Buddhists into the elements of matter (rūpa) and the four mental factors (nāma) of perceptions, feelings, dispositions, and intellect. Sense data are matter and the other four constitute the soul. Often the elements of existence are classified into the six receptive faculties (saḍāyatana), the five senses and manas and their six-fold objects.³ The

¹ *Tatr'eva muṇḍaka, tatr'eva samanaka, tatr'eva vasalaka, titṭhāhi.*

² "At that time, while Maṇḍane Mīśra having invited all the gods by the invocation of Śalagrama, was washing his hand of the darbha grass, he saw the feet of Śaṅkarācārya inside the sanctified circle. On inspection of his person he knew him to be a saṅghyāsin and was in a moment ruffled with clamorous wrath and cried out, 'Whence comes this shaven-headed man?'" (Kuto mundi) Anandegiri : *Śaṅkaravijaya*.

³ The elements are classified into skandhas, āyatanas and dhātus. See Theragātha, 1255.

objects of manas are non-sensuous and are of sixty-four kinds. Sometimes in addition to the five senses, manas and the six-fold objects, six modes of consciousness are mentioned and we get the eighteen dhātus. Strictly speaking, there cannot be any distinction between internal and external or any real interaction between the separate elements, though popular usage indulges in these unauthorised conceptions.

According to the theory of pluralistic realism, knowledge is nothing more than the co-presence of consciousness with the object. As Prof. Stcherbatsky puts it: “A moment of colour. (rūpa), a moment of the sense of vision matter (cakṣuh) and a moment of pure consciousness (citta) arising simultaneously, in close contiguity constitute what is called a sensation (sparsā) of colour”.¹ It means that the element of consciousness appears qualified by an object and supported by a sense organ. Consciousness does not apprehend the sense organ but only the object, since there is a special relation of co-ordination (sārūpya) between the two. Consciousness is said to apprehend even as a light is said to move. The *Abhidharmakośa* says: “The light of a lamp is a common metaphorical designation for an uninterrupted production of a series of flashing flames. When this production changes its place, we say the light has moved. Similarly, consciousness is a conventional name for a chain of conscious moments. When it changes its place (i.e., appears in co-ordination with another objective element) we say that it apprehends that object.”² We have only a series of evanescent flashings of consciousness itself, but there is nothing that cognises. In the continuity of conscious moments, the previous moment is the cause of the succeeding one.

From this view it is but a step to the Vijñānavāda of the Yogācāras, which reduces all the elements into aspects of one receptacle consciousness (ālayavijñāna). Elements of existence (dharmas) are products of thought. Objects rise into consciousness as the result of our past experiences. The external world is the creation of our thought to which we give names and ideas.³ But the Yogācāra does not carefully discriminate between the individual and the universal consciousness. When he makes out that the distinctions of knower, known and knowledge are not real, but are due to a beginningless defilement of consciousness, when he compares the relation of particular conscious states to the universal

¹ Trayāṇām sannipātaḥ sparsāḥ, *The Conception of Buddhism*, p. 55.

² IX. : See Stcherbatsky, *The Conception of Buddhism*, p. 57.

³ Nāmasañjñāvyaḥāra. *Lankāvatāra Sūtra*, p. 86.

consciousness to one of waves to the sea, when he admits the eternal reality of tathatā and regards it as the only uncompounded reality (asāmskrtadharmā) and relegates all else to the region of relativity, when he reduces all dharmas to modes of one fundamental essence; he tacitly admits the reality of an absolute consciousness, though the subjectivistic tendency makes itself heard quite frequently. The Mādhyamikas subject the Yogācāra theory to a searching scrutiny. They contend that we cannot have any self-consciousness (svasamvitti), for a thing cannot act on itself. The finger cannot touch itself; nor can the knife cut itself. The Mādhyamikas view all the elements of existence as contingent on one another and so declare the world to be empty of reality or śūnya. Śūnya is also said to be the fundamental truth of all existence. Almost all students of Nāgārjuna's Mādhyamika metaphysics regard his system as nihilistic. In my account of it,¹ I made out that it was more positive than it was generally represented to be. I urged that Nāgārjuna believed in an ultimate reality, which was śūnya only in the sense that it was devoid of all empirical determinations. Let us try to determine whether Nāgārjuna's ultimate reality is or is not a stupendous void, an unmitigated negation.

XI

There is no doubt about Nāgārjuna's conception of the world as unreal or śūnya. The world of experience is bound by the relations of subject and object, substance and attribute, actor and action, existence and non-existence, origination, duration and destruction, unity and plurality, whole and part, bondage and release, relations of time, relations of space; and Nāgārjuna examines every one of these relations and exposes their contradictions.² If non-contradiction is the test of reality, then the world of experience is not real. The world is neither pure being nor pure non-being. Pure being is not an existence or an item of the world process; pure non-being is not a valid concept, for, were it so, absolute nothingness will be an entity, and what is by definition the negation of all existence will become an existent. Nothing is not a thing. Existence is a becoming. Things of the world are not but always become. They ever supersede themselves. They are neither self-existent nor non-existent, since they are perceived and induce action and produce effects. *Lalitavistara* says: "There is no object which is existent nor is there any which is non-existent.

¹ Pp. 643 ff.

² Pp. 645 ff.

One who knows the chain of conditional existence passes beyond both."¹ Nāgārjuna opens his work with the statement that things are neither transient nor eternal, neither produced nor destroyed, neither same nor different, neither coming forth nor passing away.² There is no real production (*samutpāda*) but only conditioned, relative, apparent (*pratitya*) production. There is no real destruction but only apparent destruction (*pratitya-samuccheda*); so with the rest. All things of the universe are conditioned and relative only. 'Sūnya' is the term used by Nāgārjuna to designate the conditioned character of the world.³ If a thing were real and unconditioned, then it must be free from origin and destruction.⁴ There are no objects in the world which are not subject to change and so the world is *sūnya*.

Nāgārjuna, as the upholder of the middle path, does not dismiss the world as mere illusion. His attack is directed against the theory of the self-existence of things, but does not in any way impair the conditioned existence of things. Candrakīrti, commenting on Nāgārjuna, says: "Our argument that objects are not self-existent affects the reality of the universe for you who accept the doctrine of the self-existence of objects. The view that objects are not self-existent does not touch our theory of the conditioned existence of objects."⁵

But it cannot be that Nāgārjuna treated the world as unreal and yet believed in no other reality. If all thought is falsification, there must be a real that is falsified. For, if there be no truth, then falsehood loses its meaning. There is no relative knowledge without absolute knowledge being

¹ Na ca punar iha kaścid asti dharma
So'pi na vidyati yasya nāsti bhāvāḥ
Hetukriyāparāṃparā jāneta
Tasya na bhōtīha astināstibhāvāḥ.

² Anirodham anutpādam anucchedam asāsvatam
Anekārtham anānārtham anāgamam anirgamam.

³ Yāḥpratityasamutpādaḥ Sūnyatām tām pravakṣyate.—M. K., xxiv.
Sūnyāḥ sarvadharmaḥ niḥsvabhāvayogena *prajñāpāramitā*.

⁴ Yady āsūnyam idam sarvam udayo nāsti na vyayah.—M. K., xxiv.

⁵ Bhavatas tu svabhāvavādināḥ, svabhāvāsya bhāvānām vaidhuryāt sarvabhāvāpavādaḥ saṃbhāvyaḥ; vāyantu pratityotpannatvāt sarvabhāvānām svabhāvam evam nopalabhāmahe, tat kasyāpavādam kariṣyāmaḥ, M. Vrtti, viii. There are passages which suggest the theory of absolute illusion. In xviii., Nāgārjuna compares the things of the world to dream castles in the air and the like:

Kleśāḥ karmāpi dehāscaphalānica

Gandharvanagarākārā maricisvapnasannibhāḥ.

Candrakīrti argues that they are characterless like these and not illusory: 'gandharvanagarākārādivan niḥsvabhāvā veditavyāḥ'.

immanent in it. There is nothing empirical which does not reveal the transcendental. "O Subhūti, all things have for their refuge *sūnyatā*, they do not alter that refuge."¹ If things appear to be independent, such appearance is due to *māyā*.² "O Śāriputra, things which do not exist, when they are affirmed as existing, are called *avidyā*."³ If we mistake the phenomenal world for the noumenal reality, it is a case of *avidyā*. But we cannot understand the transcendental reality except through the world of experience; and we cannot attain *nirvāna* except through the understanding of the ultimate reality.⁴

The aim of the *Mādhyamika Śāstra* is to teach the nature of *nirvāna* which consists in the annulment of the whole world and is of the nature of bliss.⁵ *Nirvāna* which is the non-perception of things is the absolute truth.⁶ It is identified with *sūnyatā* in the celebrated work *Sataka*.⁷ Both *nirvāna* and *sūnyatā* are characterised in the same negative way. *Nirvāna* is neither existent nor non-existent but is beyond both.⁸ *Sūnyatā* is truth or "tathatā which neither increases nor decreases".⁹ In the *Astasaḥasrikāprajñāpāramitā*, *sūnyatā* is said to be profound. "The word 'profound,' O Subhūti, is the synonym of that which has no cause, that which is beyond contemplation, that which is beyond conception, that which is not produced, that which is not born of non-existence, of resignation, of restraint, of extinction or of final journey".¹⁰ When Nāgārjuna describes the ultimate reality as not created, not liable to destruction, not eternal, not passing away, he means that the real is opposed to all empirical characters. He describes his *sūnyatā* almost in the very words in which the *nirguṇa* Brahman is char-

¹ *Sūnyatāgatikā* hi, subhūte, sarvadharmāḥ, te tām gatim na vyatīvartante.

² Dharmataisā sarvadharmāṇām māyādharmatām upādāya. . . .

³ Yathā, śāriputra, na samvidyante tathā samvidyante evam avidyamānās tenocyante avidyete.

⁴ Vyavahāram anāśritya paramārtho na deśyate

Paramārtham anāgamyā nirvānam nādhigamyata iti.—M.K., xxiv.

⁵ Sarvaprapañcopaśamasivalakṣaṇam nirvānam śāstrasya prayojanam. M. Vṛtti; see also *Māndūkya*, Up., 7 and 12. Cf. Candrakīrti *Bhāvūbhāvāntardvayarahitātvaṭ sarvasvabhāvānutpattilakṣaṇā sūnyatā*.

⁶ Yo'nupalāinbhaḥ sarvadharmāṇām sā prajñāpāramitety ucyate.

⁷ *Sūnyatām eva nirvānam kevalam tad ihobhayam*.—Mr. Vṛtti, xviii.

⁸ Na cābhāvopi nirvānam kuta eva'sya bhāvatā

Bhāvūbhāvaparāpārs'aksayo nirvānam ucyate, *Ratnāvalī*.

⁹ M. M. Haraprasād Śāstri says: "There is in the midst of all these negative descriptions an inconceivable positive which is *sūnya*" *Journal of the Buddhist Text Society*, Vol. ii., pt. iii., p. vi.

¹⁰ xviii.

acterised in the Upaniṣads.¹ It is neither one nor multiple, neither existent nor non-existent.² Sūnya, the ultimate reality, cannot be comprehended by thought or described by words.³ "The learned call sūnyatā the annulment of all conceptions; even those who look upon it as sūnyatā are said to be incapable of improvement."⁴ Buddha says: "What description or knowledge can be given of an object that cannot be described by letters? Even this much—that it does not admit of representation by letters—is made by means of illusory attribution."⁵ In 'illusory attribution' we use a notion which is the closest approximation to the object studied but at once withdraw it since it is inadequate to its content.⁶ To know sūnya is to know all; if we do not know it, we know nothing.⁷ It will be very difficult to account for Nāgārjuna's metaphysics and his insistence on devotion (bhakti) if we do not admit the absolutist implications of his doctrine of sūnya.⁸

XII.

Much of the confusion is due to the ambiguous word 'sūnya'. It is applied to the world of experience as well as to the ultimate reality. The world of experience, built by the relations framed by intellect, is unintelligible. Consistently, Nāgārjuna denies that he has any thesis of his own to defend, since every intellectual proof would be subject to the same weakness. If intellect is incapable of explaining

¹ Kena., 3, 11; Brh., ii, 5, 19; iii., 8-8; Katha., iii., 15; Isā., 9-10; Mund., i., 6; Mānd., 7.

² Nāstiko divigatim yāti, sugatim yāti anāstikah
Yathābhūtaparijñānam mokṣam advaya nīritā.—*Āryaratnāvalī*.
One who holds it to be non-existent attains to misery while one who does not think so attains to happiness; but release is for those who have the true knowledge of reality which is neither existent nor non-existent.

³ *Bodhicaryāvatāra*, ix., 2.

⁴ Sūnyatā sarvadṛṣṭinām proktā niḥsaraṇam jinaih
Yeśām tu sūnyatādrṣṭis tēn asādhyān rabhāsire.—M.K., xiii.

⁵ Anaksarasya dharmasya Śrutih kā deśanā ca kā
Śrīyate yasya taccāpi samāropād anakṣara.—M. Vṛtti, xv.

⁶ See *Vedāntasāra*, 78.

⁷ M.K., xxiv., cf. Brh. Up., ii., 4, 5, 7-9; iii., 2, 1; iv., 4, 21; v., 1, 1; Mund., i., 3.

⁸ Rudolf Otto says: "What is true of the strange nothingness of our mystics holds good equally of the sūnyam and the sūnyatā, the void and emptiness of the Buddhist mystics. The void of the Eastern like the 'nothing' of the Western mystic is a numinous ideogram of the 'wholly other.' Nothing can be predicated of it since it is 'absolutely and intrinsically other than and opposite of everything that is and can be thought,'" *The Idea of the Holy*, E.T., p. 30.

experience, since it finds hopeless antinomies there, it cannot be expected to be more successful with regard to the ultimate reality. One is as mysterious as the other, and Nāgārjuna employs the same term 'śūnya' with reference to both. Truth is silence which is neither affirmation nor negation. In different senses, both the world of experience and ultimate reality defy description as existent or non-existent. If we take ultimate reality as true being, the world is not; if we take the being of the world as true being, ultimate reality is not. Both are śūnya though in different senses.

Towards the end of my discussion of Nāgārjuna's system, I suggested certain points of similarity between the Śūnyavāda and Advaita Vedānta.¹ Both of them regard the world as subject to change and therefore unreal.² The real, which transcends all distinctions of experience and knowledge, is admitted by both;³ only Nāgārjuna suggests it but does not work it out in all its fullness, as the Advaita Vedānta does. The doctrines of māyā and avidyā are taken up and developed considerably in the Advaita Vedānta. Virtue and vice are regarded in both as means to higher and lower stages in saṃsāra, while ultimate release remains entire and unaffected by these.⁴ In giving a rational, as distinct from scriptural foundation for the Advaita Vedānta, Gaṇḍapāda finds nothing so useful as the Nādhyaṃika theory. Many of his Kārikās remind us of Nāgārjuna's work.⁵ Not without reason does Vācaspati look upon the upholders of Śūnyavāda as those of advanced thought (prakṛṣṭamati), while the pluralistic realists (Sarvastivādins) are said to be of inferior thought (hīnamati) and the Yogācāras of middling (madhyama) ability.⁶

¹ Pp. 668-669.

² Śaṅkara would endorse this passage :

Jarāmaranadharmesu sarvabhāvesu sarvadā

Tiṣṭhanti Katame bhāvāḥ jarāmaraṇam vinā.—M.K. vii.

³ Candrakīrti's statement, sarvakalpanājārahita-jñānājūyanivṛttisvabhāvam, śivam, paramārthasvabhāvam, is true to Śaṅkara's conception of release and reality. See also S.B., iii., 2, 17; B.G., xiii., 12.

⁴ Dharmecāśāyadharmeca phalam tasya na vidyate, M.K., viii. Cf. Brh. Up., iv., 3, 21-22; Kātha, ii., 14.

⁵ Cf. Gaṇḍapāda's Kūrikā, ii., 32; iv., 22; iv., 88.

⁶ Bhāmati, ii., 2, 18.