

## PREFACE

This book sets out to discuss and interpret the main themes of Buddhist thought in India.\* The time is not yet ripe for the production of a comprehensive academic handbook, and in any case such an undertaking would require much more space than I had at my disposal. There has been no room to do justice to the infinite details of Buddhist philosophizing, and also the references at the end have been kept brief and might have been multiplied indefinitely. The emphasis is everywhere on those aspects of the doctrine which appear to me to be indubitably true or significant. Throughout I have aimed at furthering the understanding, as distinct from the bare knowledge, of Buddhist thinking. It would have been easier to string together a lot of quotations, but what would have been gained in ostensible erudition would have been lost in demonstrable insight. In presenting Buddhist philosophy as an intelligible, plausible and valid system, I have never lost sight of its function as a spiritual method designed to win emancipation from this world. 'As contrary to the ways of the whole world has this Dharma been demonstrated. It teaches you not to seize upon dharmas, but the world is wont to grasp at anything.'†

*Buddhist Thought in India* had from the very start been planned as a sequel to my *Buddhist Meditation* (Allen & Unwin, 1956, 1959), which is a collection of the most important traditional accounts of Buddhist meditational practices. Some familiarity with these practices will greatly assist the reader of this book, which derives the tenets of Buddhist philosophy from the meditational experiences of the Buddhist yogins.

It is now thirty years since this book was first begun. Its completion has been postponed and its execution partly spoiled by a new threat to quiet contemplation which even fifty years ago was happily almost unknown and which never troubled the Buddhists at the time when their philosophy took shape. No jets ever cut *them* short at the decisive point. The ideas expounded in this book are only too easily disturbed by the hideous and brutish noises emanating from machines of all

\* The developments of the Mahāyāna in China and Japan have been omitted, for no other reason than that I do not know the languages. This limitation is not as serious as it sounds. Most of the creative work was done in India, and even 'Zen' is not half as original as it has been made out to be.

† *Perfect Wisdom in 8,000 Lines*, xv 305.

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kinds,\* and by the constant interruption of the deep brooding indispensable to their comprehension. This almost universal noisiness may well be no more than a secondary symptom of an eclipse which has darkened the spiritual life for many centuries already. With increasing frequency I have in recent years been in the grip of the agonizing intellectual paralysis of which Wordsworth spoke when he said in his Preface to 'Lyrical Ballads'† that 'a multitude of causes, unknown to former times, are now acting with a combined force to blunt the discriminating powers of the mind, and, unfitting it for all voluntary exertion, reduce it to a state of almost savage torpor'. And Wordsworth wrote at a time when the English countryside was still unshaken by the eruption of noisy metal boxes. Even the Industrial Revolution, certainly somehow connected with the dark clouds which obscure the spiritual life, had barely begun.

After reflecting for many years on the causes which might have demolished the spiritual tradition of mankind, I have reluctantly come to the almost incredible conclusion that the life of the spirit is not governed by natural causes. To quote St Paul,‡ 'we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places'.

Three stages can, in fact, be distinguished in the decline of spiritual knowledge. First, about five centuries ago, both in Asia and in Europe, spiritual creativeness began to wane, and no authoritative religious work of outstanding genius has been produced since that time. A book on bio-chemistry is normally the more informative the more recent it is. With religious books it is very much the other way round. By the nineteenth century, even spiritual perceptiveness had reached a low ebb, as shown, to take only two examples, by Wordsworth's statement quite at the beginning of the century, and Nietzsche's remarks about God being dead towards its end. Now, in the middle of the twentieth century, the living tradition of spiritual knowledge is almost extinct, the organized centres of spiritual contemplation have

\* The list, at present, comprises cars, motor cycles, lorries, wirelesses, television sets, electric drills, helicopters, and, of course, aeroplanes roaring, whining and screaming overhead. I shudder to think what else will have turned up by 1970.

† *The Poetical Works of W. Wordsworth*, ed. Th. Hutchinson, 1917, pp. 935-6. I owe this reference to the kindness of Richard Hoggart.

‡ Eph. vi. 12.—N.E.B.: 'For our fight is not against human foes, but against cosmic powers, against the authorities and potentates of this dark world, against the superhuman forces of evil in the heavens.'

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everywhere been smashed, 'progress and civilization' seem to have it all their own way, and a new breed of men who care for none of all this have crowded the earth with their presence.\* Looking at the surface of society, one may well believe that in spiritual matters the age of the moron has dawned. Though what goes on in the depths is hard to fathom.† Nevertheless I am well aware that it is a decidedly Quichotic undertaking to put one's name to a book in which these ancient and anachronistic ideas are treated as if they were immediately relevant to the conduct of life even at the present time.

In addition to being a voice crying in the wilderness, I also attempt to make a contribution to philosophical thought. Mathematics took a big step forward when Bolyai, Lobatshevsky and Gauss created non-Euclidian geometries, and showed that from different postulates alternative valid and coherent geometries can be constructed. Philosophy is bound to follow suit. The rapid growth of communications has brought Eastern and Western cultures face to face. So far European, and particularly British, philosophers have reacted by becoming more provincial than ever before. They will not be able to keep up this stance for ever. On the suppositions of Indian Yoga a philosophical system can be built which is as valid, cogent and coherent as those based on modern science. By showing this in some detail for Buddhist philosophy, I hope that European philosophers will one day be made to examine, question and substantiate their own latent presuppositions. At present the omens are, I admit, most unpropitious. With the honourable exception of Prof. H. H. Price, no Oxford or Cambridge professor would demean himself by paying the slightest attention to his colleagues of ancient India. The failure in communication was well illustrated in 1960 when an extremely intelligent journalist was generally applauded for publishing a widely read book devoted to the thesis that there is nothing to the 'wisdom of the East'. A closer analysis of his arguments‡ showed that he just

\* The future fate of this dragon's brood, this *populus quem terra creaverat*, has been well foretold by Ovid in *Met.* III. 95-130.

Exemploque pari furit omnis turba, suoque

Marte cadunt subiti per mutua vulnera fratres.

† Or, as Wordsworth put it in his Preface: 'reflecting upon the magnitude of the general evil, I should be oppressed with no dishonourable melancholy, had I not a deep impression of certain inherent and indestructible qualities of the human mind, and likewise of certain powers in the great and permanent objects that act upon us, which are equally inherent and indestructible'.

‡ For the evidence see my article on A. Koestler's *The Lotus and the Robot* in *The Hibbert Journal*, LIX, 1961, pp. 178-81.

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reiterated the vulgar prejudices of those who, from mere tribal sluggishness, are convinced that 'Western', i.e. Judaeo-Christian and scientific, modes of thinking are the unfailing standards of all truth. It is for the purpose of breaking down this kind of blindness and incomprehension that this book has been written.

In bringing out a new history of Buddhist philosophy, I must say a few words about my predecessors. The first attempt at a general survey was that of A. B. Keith, *Buddhist Philosophy in India and Ceylon*, 1923. It is now quite superseded, partly because in the meantime many new sources have become available, and partly because the superciliousness of his tone belongs to a phase in the treatment of subject nations which has now passed. E. J. Thomas's *The History of Buddhist Thought* (1933) is good on the Theravāda, but he obviously had never taken much interest in the Mahāyāna. Stcherbatsky's *Buddhist Logic* (1930, 1932; 1,018 pages) is a masterpiece of the first order, and in a class by itself. I feel almost ashamed to write on the same subject with so much less space at my disposal. As one would expect of a work published in Leningrad under Stalin's watchful eyes, Buddhism is here treated as a purely rational system, and the religious side ignored. All I can do to repay the immense debt I owe to Stcherbatsky is to challenge his fundamental position (cf. pp. 264 *sq.*). Two other works deserve being mentioned. L. Silburn's *Instant et Cause* (1955) is fairly erudite, but deficient in intellectual acumen, clarity of thought and *esprit de synthèse*. E. Frauwallner's anthology, *Die Philosophie des Buddhismus*, 1956, is an indispensable source book to which I owe much. The only difference between us is that I do not share Frauwallner's fondness for the Yogācārin, and that with Prof. Murti I regard the Mādhyamikas as the representatives of the central tradition of Buddhism.

Some sections of this book have been printed before, and I give thanks for permission to reprint them to *The Middle Way*, *The Hibbert Journal*, *Philosophy East and West* (III 2, 1953, pp. 117-29); University of Hawaii Press), *The Maha Bodhi Journal, East and West* (Rome), *The Aryan Path, Oriens Extremus* (IX 1, 1962) and *Self-knowledge*. St. Antony's College of Oxford deserves my gratitude for its support in the work involved in writing this book.

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