

## CHAPTER I

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### TACIT ASSUMPTIONS

Many of the metaphysical theories of Buddhism must appear remote, inaccessible and elusive to the average reader who is unprepared for them. This is because they presuppose a close and long-standing familiarity with the laws of the spiritual universe and with the rhythms of a spiritual life, not to mention a rare capacity for prolonged disinterested contemplation. In addition, Buddhist thinkers make a number of tacit assumptions which are explicitly rejected by modern European philosophers. The first, common to nearly all Indian,\* as distinct from European, 'scientific', thought, treats the experiences of Yoga as the chief raw material for philosophical reflection. Secondly, all 'perennial' (as against 'modern') philosophers agree on the hierarchical structure of the universe, as shown in (a) the distinction of a 'triple world' and (b) of degrees of 'reality', and (c) in the establishment of a hierarchy of insights dependent on spiritual maturity. Thirdly, all religious (as against a-religious) philosophies (a) use 'numinous' as distinct from 'profane' terms, and (b) treat revelation as the ultimate source of all valid knowledge. This gives us no fewer than six tacit assumptions which are unlikely to be shared by the majority of my readers. Since they define the range and context within which Buddhist thinking is relatively valid and significant, I must say a few words about each of them one by one.

1. The mutual incomprehension of Eastern and Western philosophy has often been deplored. If there is even no contact between 'empiricist' European philosophy on the one side, and that of the Vedānta and Mahāyāna on the other, it may be because they presuppose two different systems of practice as their unquestioned foundations—science the one, and yogic meditation the other. From the outset all philosophers must take for granted some set of practices, with specific rules and aims of their own, which they regard both as efficacious and as avenues to worthwhile reality.

\* Except for the comparatively rare Cārvākas, or 'materialists'.

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It is, of course, essential to grasp clearly the difference between sets of practices, or 'bags of tricks' which regularly produce certain results, and the theoretical superstructures which try to justify, explain and systematize them. The techniques concern what happens when this or that is done. The theories deal with the reasons why that should be so, and the meaning of what happens. However gullible and credulous human beings may be about speculative tenets, about practical issues they are fairly hard-headed, and unlikely to persuade themselves over any length of time that some technique 'works' when it does not.

Yogic meditation, to begin with, demands that certain things should be *done*. There are the well-known breathing exercises, which must be performed in certain definite bodily postures. Certain foods and drugs must be avoided. One must renounce nearly all private possessions, and shun the company of others. After a prolonged period of physical drill has made the body ready for the tasks ahead, and after some degree of contentment with the conditions of a solitary, beggarly and homeless life has been achieved, the mind is at last capable of doing its proper yogic work. This consists in systematically withdrawing attention from the objects of the senses.<sup>1</sup> And what could be the aim and outcome of this act of sustained introversion—so strikingly dramatized by Bodhidharma sitting for nine years cross-legged and immobile in front of a grey wall? All the adepts of Yoga, whatever their theological or philosophical differences, agree that these practices result in a state of inward tranquillity (*śamatha*).

Many of our contemporaries, imprisoned in what they describe as 'common sense', quite gratuitously assume, as 'self-evident', that all the contents of mental life are derived from contact with external sense-data. They are therefore convinced that the radical withdrawal from those sense-data can but lead to some kind of vague vacuity almost indistinguishable from sleep or coma. More than common sense is needed to discover that it leads to a state which the Indian yogins, who under the influence of Sanskrit grammar were almost obsessed with a desire for terminological precision, called one of 'tranquillity', full of ease, bliss and happiness. Likewise a Bornean Dayak must find it difficult to believe that hard, black coal can be changed into bright light within an electric bulb. There is ultimately only one way open to those who do not believe the accounts of the yogins. They will have to repeat the experiment—in the forest, not the laboratory—they will have to do what the yogins say should be done, and see what happens. Until this is done, disbelief is quite idle,

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and on a level with a pygmy's disbelief in Battersea power station, maintained by a stubborn refusal to leave the Congo basin, and to see for himself whether it exists and what it does. In other words, it seems to me quite unworthy of educated people to deny that there exists a series of technical practices, known as Yoga, which, if applied intelligently according to the rules, produces a state of tranquillity.<sup>2</sup>

So much about the technical substructure. The ideological superstructure, in its turn, consists of a number of theoretical systems, by no means always consonant with each other. Theologically they are Hindu, Buddhist or Jain. Some are atheistic, some polytheistic, others again henotheistic. Philosophically some, like Vaiśeṣika and Abhidharma, are pluralistic, others, like Vedānta and Mādhyamika, monistic. These two monistic systems, again, seem to be diametrically opposed in their most fundamental tenets—the one claiming that the Self (*ātman*) is the only reality, the other that it is just the absence of a self (*nairātmya*) which distinguishes true reality from false appearance.

On closer study these disagreements do, however, turn out to be fairly superficial. All these 'yogic' philosophies differ less among themselves than they differ from the non-yogic ones. They not only agree that yogic practices are valid, but in addition postulate that these practices are the avenues to the most worthwhile knowledge of true reality, as well as a basis for the most praiseworthy conduct, and that, as the source of ultimate certainty, the yogic vision itself requires no justification. Only in a state of yogic receptivity are we fit and able to become the recipients of ultimate truth. Observations made in any other condition concern an illusory world, largely false and fabricated, which cannot provide a standard for judging the deliverances of the yogic consciousness.

A closely analogous situation prevails in Western Europe with regard to science. In this field also we can distinguish between the technology itself and its theoretical developments. The prestige of the scientific approach among our modern philosophers seems to me entirely due to its applications. If a philosopher assures us that all the 'real' knowledge we possess is due to science, that science alone gives us 'news about the universe'—what can have led him to such a belief? He must surely have been dazzled by the practical results, by the enormous increase in power which has sprung from the particular kind of knowledge scientists have evolved. Without these practical consequences, what would all these scientific theories be? An airy bubble, a diversion of otherwise unoccupied mathematicians, a fanciful mirage on a level with *Alice in Wonderland*. As a result of science,

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considerable changes have recently occurred in the material universe. Although by no means 'more enduring than brass', the monuments to science are nevertheless rather imposing—acres of masonry, countless machines of startling efficiency, travel speeded up, masses of animals wiped out, illnesses shortened, deaths postponed or accelerated, and so on. This scientific method demonstrably 'works', though not in the sense that it increases our 'tranquillity'—far from it. All that it does is to increase 'man's' power to control his 'material environment', and that is something which the yogic method never even attempted. Scientific technology indeed promises limitless power, unlimited in the sense that by itself it places no limitations, moral or otherwise, on the range of its conquests. Very little notice would presumably be taken of the thought-constructions of our scientists if it were not for their impressive practical results. Dean Swift's *Voyage to Laputa* would then voice the general attitude, including that of the majority of philosophers.

As with Yoga, the bare technology is also here clothed in numerous theories, hypotheses, concepts and philosophical systems, capable of considerable disagreement among themselves. But all scientific philosophies agree that scientific research, based on the experimental observation of external objects,\* is the key to all worthwhile knowledge and to a rational mode of life.

But though I were to speak with the tongues of angels, my 'empiricist' friends will continue to shrug their shoulders at the suggestion that Yoga and other non-scientific techniques should be taken seriously. As professed 'humanists' they might be expected to have a greater faith in the depth and breadth of the human spirit and its modalities. As 'empiricists' they might have a more catholic notion of 'experience', and as 'positivists' a clearer conception of what is, and what is not, a 'verifiable' fact. And even as 'scientists' they ought to have some doubts as to whether the world of sense-bound consciousness is really the whole of reality. But alas, a staggering hypertrophy of the critical faculties has choked all the other virtues. Contemporary empiricist and positivist philosophers, in their exclusive reliance on scientific knowledge, are guilty of what Whitehead has charitably called a 'narrow provincialism'. Usually unfamiliar with the traditional non-scientific techniques of mankind, they are also, what is worse, quite incurious about them. At best these techniques,

\* The data of introspection have given rise to much uneasiness in this scheme of things. The most logical solution seems to be that of Behaviourism, which transforms psychic events into externally observable objects.

if noticed at all, are hastily interpreted as approximations to scientific ones, worked out by ignorant and bungling natives groping in the dark. On the wilder shores of rationalism it is even rumoured that 'the poet was the primitive physicist'.<sup>3</sup> With a shudder we pass on.

To judge all human techniques by the amount of bare 'control' or 'power' they produce is patently unfair. Other goals may be equally worth striving for, and men wiser than we may deliberately have turned away from the pursuit of measureless power, not as unattainable, but as inherently undesirable. A graceful submission to the inevitable is not without its attractions, either. A great deal might be said, perhaps, for not wanting more power than can be used wisely, and it is much to be feared that the 'captors of an unwilling universe'\* may end as many lion tamers have ended before them.

Of all the infinite facets of the universe, science-bound philosophers will come to know only those which are disclosed to scientific methods, with their ruthless will for boundless power and their disregard for everything except the presumed convenience of the human race, and they cannot prove, or even plausibly suggest, that this small fraction of the truth about reality is the one most worth knowing about. As for the vast potentialities of the human mind, they will bring out only those which have a survival value in modern technical civilization. Not only is it a mere fraction of the human mind that is being used, but we may well wonder whether it is the most valuable section—once we consider the ugliness, noisiness and restlessness of our cities, or the effects which the handling of machines has on workers, that of scientific tools on scientists. At present it looks as if this mode of life were sweeping everything before it. It also demonstrably sweeps away much that is valuable.

2a. Turning now to the 'triple world', we find that the unanimous tradition of the Perennial Philosophy distinguishes three layers of qualitatively different facts—natural, magical and spiritual. The constitution of man is accordingly composed of three parts, reality presents itself on three levels, and threefold is the attitude we can adopt towards events.

In man we have body-mind as the first constituent, the 'soul' as the second, and the 'spirit' as the third. In the objective world, the first level is the body of facts which are disclosed by the senses and scientific observation, and arranged by common sense and scientific theory. The second comprises a great variety of facts which with some

\* *Quis neget esse nefas invitum prendere mundum  
Et velut in semet captum deducere in orbem?* (Manilius II 127-8).

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justice are called 'occult', because they tend to hide from our gaze. They weighed heavily with our forefathers, but are now widely derided. An example is astrology, or the study of the correspondences which may exist between the position of the celestial bodies on the one hand and the character, destiny, affinities and potentialities of people on the other. In addition this second level includes the activities of the psychic senses, such as clairvoyance, clairaudience, pre-cognition, thought transference, etc., the huge field of myths and mythical figures, the lore about ghosts and the spirits of the departed, and the working of 'magic', which is said to cause effects in the physical world by means of spells and the evocation of 'spirits'. Thirdly, the spiritual world is an intangible, non-sensuous and disembodied reality, both one and multiple, both transcending the natural universe and immanent in it, at the same time nothing and everything, quite non-sensory as a datum and rather nonsensical as a concept. Indescribable by any of the attributes taken from sensory experience, and gained only by the extinguishing of separate individuality, it is known as 'Spirit' to Christians, as 'emptiness' to Buddhists, as the 'Absolute' to philosophers. Here our senses are blinded, our reason baffled, and our self-interest defeated.

The three worlds can be discerned easily in our attitudes, say, to cold weather. The common-sense reaction is to light a fire, to wear warm clothing, or to take a walk. The magician relies on methods like the *gtum-mo* of the Tibetans, which are claimed to generate internal heat by means of occult procedures. They are based on a physiology which differs totally from that taught in scientific textbooks, and depend on the manipulation of three mystic 'arteries' (*nadis*), which are described as channels of psychic energy, but which ordinary observation fails to detect, since they are 'devoid of any physical reality'.<sup>4</sup> Finally, the spiritual man either ignores the cold, as an unimportant, transitory and illusory phenomenon, or welcomes it, as a means of penance or of training in self-control.

Technical progress and scientific habits of thought increasingly restrict us to the natural level. Magical events and spiritual experiences have ceased to be familiar, and many people do not admit them as facts in their own right. By their own inner constitution the three realms differ in their accessibility to experience, the rules of evidence are by no means the same in all three, and each has a logic of its own. In the infinitude of the spiritual realm no particular fact can be seized upon by natural means, and everything in the magical world is marked by a certain indefiniteness, a nebulosity which springs partly from

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the way in which the intermediary world presents itself and partly from the uncertainties of its relation to the familiar data of the bright daylight world of natural fact. Every student of the occult knows that in this field the facts are inherently and irremediably obscure. It is impossible to come across even one magical fact which could be established in the way in which natural facts can be verified. There is a twilight about the magical world. It is neither quite light nor quite dark, it cannot be seen distinctly, and, like a shy beast when you point a torch at it, the phenomenon vanishes when the full light is turned on.<sup>5</sup>

The situation becomes more desperate still when we consider the spiritual. Here it is quite impossible to ever establish any fact beyond the possibility of doubt. The Buddhists express this by saying that Nirvana is 'sign-less', i.e. it is of such a nature that it cannot be recognized as such (cf. p. 71). This is really a most disconcerting thought. Spirit is non-sensuous and we have no sense-data to work on. In addition, spiritual actions are disintegrated when reflected upon. If they are not to lose their bloom, they must be performed unconsciously and automatically. Further, to be spiritual, an action must be 'unselfish'. It is in the nature of things quite impossible ever to prove with mathematical certainty that an action has been unselfish, because selfishness is so skilful in hiding itself, because insight into human motives is marred by self-deception, and, in any case, at any given time the motives are so numerous that no one can be sure of having got hold of all of them. I. Kant has spoken the last word on this subject when he points out that 'in fact it is absolutely impossible to make out by experience with complete certainty a single case in which the maxim of an action, however right in itself, rested simply on moral grounds and on the conception of duty. Sometimes it happens that with the sharpest self-examination we find nothing beside the moral principle of duty which could have been powerful enough to move us to this or that action and to a great sacrifice; yet we cannot infer from that with certainty that it was not really some secret impulse of self-love, under the false appearance of that idea, that was the actual determining cause of the will. We like then to flatter ourselves by falsely taking credit for a noble motive, whereas in fact we can never, even by the strictest examination, get completely behind the secret springs of action; since, when the question is of moral worth, it is not with the actions which we see that we are concerned, but with those inward principles of them which we do not see.'<sup>6</sup>

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Here is one of the inescapable difficulties of the human situation. All the meaning that life may have derives from contact with the magical and spiritual world, and without such contact it ceases to be worth while, fruitful and invested with beauty. It seems rather stupid to discard the life-giving qualities of these realms simply because they do not conform to a standard of truth suited only to the natural world,\* where to the scientist phenomena appear worthy of notice only if they are capable of repetition, public observation, and measurement. They are naturally more inaccessible to natural experience than natural things are. The methods of science, mighty and effective though they be, are useless for the exploration of two-thirds of the universe, and the psychic and spiritual worlds are quite beyond them. Other faculties within us may well reveal that which the senses fail to see. In Buddhism faith, mystical intuition, trance and the power of transcendental wisdom are held to disclose the structure of the spiritual and intermediary worlds. No one can be said to give Buddhist thinking a fair chance if he persists in condemning these sources of knowledge out of hand as completely futile and nugatory (cf. pp. 28 *sq.*).

2b. Next, the perennial philosophy assumes that there are definite 'degrees of reality'. In this book we will be told that 'dharmas' are 'more real' than things, the images seen in trance 'more real' than the objects of sense-perception, and the Unconditioned 'more real' than the conditioned. People at present can understand the difference between facts which exist and 'non-facts' which do not exist. But they believe that facts, if real, are all equally real, and that qualitative distinctions between them give no sense. This is the 'democratic' viewpoint in vogue at the present time, which treats all facts as equal, just as all men are said to be equal.† In science nothing has any 'meaning', and 'facts' are all you ever have.

At the time when Buddhism flourished, this would have seemed the height of absurdity. Also the leading European systems of that time, like those of Aristotle and Plotinus, took the hierarchy of levels of reality quite for granted, and were indeed entirely based upon it.

\* There is also something mean and timid about the caution of someone who wishes everything to be established beyond any reasonable doubt, and to have it inspected again and again with myopic and distrustful eyes.

† The structure of the universe always reflects the structure of society. Likewise it is interesting to note that those who replace ontology by epistemology are Protestants who repudiate collective or corporate authority, whereas Roman Catholics, Marxists and Buddhists believe that meaningful statements can be made about the 'real being' of things.



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The lowest degree of reality is 'pure matter', the highest 'pure form', and everything else lies somewhere in between. The higher degrees of reality are more solid and reliable, more intellectually satisfying, and, chief of all, they are objectively 'better' than the lower, and much more worth while. *Ens et bonum convertuntur*. In consequence contact with the higher degrees of reality entails a life which is qualitatively superior to one based on contact with the lower degrees. This is what sticks in the throat of the present generation. For here we affirm that 'judgments of value' are not just subjective opinions, which vary with the moods of people, or their tastes or social conditions, but that they are rooted in the structure and order of objective reality itself.\*

If the value of life depends on contact with a high level of reality, it becomes, of course, important to ascertain what reality is in its own-being (*svabhāva*), and to be able to distinguish that from the lesser realities of comparative fiction which constitute our normal world of half-socialized experience which we have made ourselves so as to suit our own ends. To establish contact with worthwhile reality has always been the concern of the exponents of the 'perennial' philosophy, i.e. of most reputable philosophers of both Europe and Asia up to about AD 1450.

About this time there began in Europe that estrangement from reality which is the starting-point of most modern European philosophy. Epistemology took the place of ontology. Where ontology was concerned with the difference between reality and appearance, epistemology concentrated on that between valid and invalid knowledge. The Occamists who set the tone for all later phases of modern philosophy asserted that things by themselves have no relations to one another, and that a mind external and unrelated to them establishes all relations between them. Ontology as a rational discipline then lost its object and all questions concerning being *qua* being seemed to be merely verbal. Science should not concern itself with the things themselves, but with their signs and symbols, and its task is to give an account of appearances (*salvare apparentias*), without bothering about the existence *in esse et secundum rem* of its hypothetical constructions.<sup>7</sup> In consequence, thinkers seek for 'successful fictions' and 'reality' has become a mere word.

\* In addition, of course, the very assumption of qualitative differences in the worthwhileness of life has no scientific foundation, because 'science', as we know it, has no eye for quality, but only for quantity. Likewise no moral qualifications are required of scientists, and the quality of their lives is unimportant when their findings are judged.

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It is remarkable that 1,400 years before the Mahāyāna Buddhists had taught almost exactly the same (cf. pp. 197-8). When they realized their estrangement from reality, they looked for a reality more real than they found around them, i.e. for the 'Dharma-element' itself. Modern philosophy concludes that it is better for us to turn our backs on nebulous ideas about reality as such, and to concentrate on gaining power over the environment as it appears. Power by whom, and for whom? Here a philosophy which teaches that the particular alone exists and that universals are mere words, finds refuge in an abstraction called 'man', who is somehow regarded as the highest form of rational being, and for whose benefit all these developments are said to take place. To Nāgārjuna and his followers this by itself would seem to indicate a serious logical flaw at the very basis of such doctrines.

2c. Finally, and that is much easier to understand, the hierarchical structure of reality is duplicated by and reflected in a hierarchy among the persons who seek contact with it. Like is known by like, and only the spirit can know spiritual things. In an effort to commend Buddhism to the present age, some propagandists have overstressed its rationality and its kinship with modern science. They often quote a saying of the Buddha who told the Kalamas that they should not accept anything on his authority alone, but examine and test it for themselves, and accept it only when they had themselves cognized, seen and felt it.<sup>8</sup> In this way the Lord Buddha finds himself conscripted as a supporter of the British philosophical tradition of 'empiricism'. But who can do the testing? Some aspects of the doctrine are obviously verifiable only by people who have certain rather rare qualifications. To actually verify the teaching on rebirth by direct observation, one would have to actually remember one's own previous births, an ability which presupposes the achievement of the fourth *dhyāna*, a state of trance extremely scarce and rarefied. And what width and maturity of insight would be needed to actually 'know' that the decisive factor in every event is a 'moral' one, or that Nirvana means the end of *all* ill! The qualifications are moreover existential, and not merely intellectual. Buddhism has much to say about the spiritual hierarchy of persons, for what someone can know and see depends on what he is. So the saint knows more than the ordinary person, and among the saints each higher grade more than the lower. In consequence, the opinions and experiences of ordinary worldlings are of little account, on a level with the mutterings of housepainters laying down the law about Leonardo da Vinci's 'Virgin of the Rocks'.

3. Buddhism resembles the other world religions much more than it resembles modern science,<sup>9</sup> and its religious character colours its thinking in at least two ways.

3a. Until quite recently all human societies took the separation of the sacred and the profane for granted.<sup>10</sup> Certain places were set apart as 'holy places'. As in the distribution of space, so in the universe of discourse. Some words were 'numinous', others rational or ordinary. If treated as though purely rational, numinous terms suffer a great deal of distortion. An easy example is the word 'God'. 'Natural theology', or the Deists, used it as a 'rational' term. But, as Pascal put it, this 'god of the philosophers' is something quite different from 'the god of Abraham and Isaac'. An Oxford don showed his blindness for this distinction when he criticized Jehovah for describing himself by the tautological phrase 'I am that I am', when in fact he ought to have told us exactly *what* he was. M. Eckhart's beautiful meditation<sup>11</sup> on this phrase from the 'Book of Exodus' shows that *Ho Ōn* is clearly a numinous term of great profundity. No student of the Buddhist scriptures in the original can fail to notice that they abound in numinous words, such as Dharma, Buddha, Bhagavat, Arhat, Nirvana and Tathāgata.<sup>12</sup> Their prominence has many important consequences.\*

It accounts to some extent for the ambiguity and multivalence of nearly all the key terms of Buddhist philosophy. This disregard for the 'first requisite of an ideal language' which 'would be that there should be one name for every simple, and never the same name for two different simples'<sup>13</sup> is unlikely to be due to mere carelessness and thoughtlessness. Nor can it be blamed on the poverty of the available Sanskrit vocabulary. In fact, Sanskrit offers a wider range of philosophical synonyms than any other language except Greek. Probably the numinous character of the terms used is responsible. On closer analysis words such as *manasikāra* (attention), *upekṣā* (evenmindedness), *dhātu* (element) or *ākāśa* (space) turned out to contain a great variety of meanings. If the later Buddhists did not distinguish these meanings by separate terms,† the reason was that the traditional,

\* One of them is that parts of the doctrine were held to be so sacred that they had to be protected from desecration by the profane. The line between exoteric and esoteric shifted in the course of time, and thereby much uncertainty is thrown on the chronology of the doctrinal developments. We know roughly when certain doctrines were first made public, but among the initiated they may have existed a long time beforehand. See my *Short History of Buddhism*, 1960, pp. 36-8.

† As I have tried to do on pp. 89-90.

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though multivalent, terms were hallowed by the fact of their having been uttered by the Lord Buddha himself. It would therefore have been an act of impiety or sacrilege to replace them with profane, though perhaps more accurate, terms.

There are other reasons also for the multivalence of Buddhist technical terms. Those which concern the particularly sacred core of the doctrine disclose their meaning in a state of religious exaltation. To give them a precise logical definition would seem a task too trivial to bother about. Furthermore, semantic distinctions become important to the extent that communication has broken down. Among lovers communication is very easy. They understand each other perfectly well, and each one intuitively knows what the other's words mean. In the absence of such a bond of sympathy every word must be defined, and nevertheless misunderstandings continue to arise faster than they can be removed. Buddhist thinking was designed for a *samgha*, or 'community', of like-minded people, who at least in theory were more brethren than rivals, who had had the same training, never ceased to agree on fundamentals, and who understood one another's mental processes. When they heard these terms they simply 'knew' what was meant, just as an educated Englishman can read a piece of sophisticated prose without looking up the words in a dictionary, though also without being able to convey their full meaning to half-educated persons. In actual fact the meaning of words is defined by their usage among an élite of insiders, who among themselves rarely experience much difficulty. It is when the message has to be conveyed to outsiders that precise 'definitions', semantic distinctions, and so on, become necessary. A soteriological doctrine like Buddhism becomes a 'philosophy' when its intellectual content is explained to outsiders.<sup>14</sup> This is not a particularly rewarding task, but in this book I have undertaken it. It must never be forgotten that it involves a huge loss of substance.

3b. There are four possible sources of knowledge, i.e. (1) sense-perception, (2) reasoning, (3) intuition and (4) revelation. Buddhists regard sense-perception as basically misleading. If reasoning is taken to mean inference from sense-data, it is condemned together with its basis. Alternatively, as in European rationalism, it may mean the apprehension of an 'intelligible', as distinct from the 'sensible' world. The European rationalists believed that at least four different kinds of things cannot be deduced from sense-data, i.e. the laws of logic, the laws of mathematics, moral principles (as distinct from moral rules) and 'natural law' (as distinct from the actual laws of any

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given society.\* In the Buddhist scheme of things the study of the *dharmas* is a rational approach to intelligible entities. Cognition (*jñāna*) is established by paying attention to dharmas.<sup>15</sup> Those Buddhists who specialize in the Abhidharma constitute the rationalistic wing of this religion.†

The rationality even of the Abhidharma does, however, require four qualifications. (1) The rational approach is only provisional and preparatory, and must be followed by a spiritual intuition, the direct and unconceptual character of which is stressed by the use of such words as 'to see', 'to taste', 'to touch with the body'. Of the Dharma as the delivered 'see' it, the Buddha says that it 'is profound, hard to see, difficult to perceive, calm, sublime, not within the sphere of merely abstract thought (*atarka-avacara*), subtle, to be experienced only by judicious sages'.<sup>16</sup> Ready-made concepts are of no avail here, and what lies beyond the perceptible world of appearances also transcends the realm of logical thought. (2) The choice and definition of the dharmas recognized by the Abhidharma is not the result of independent examination, but leans heavily on the pronouncements of the Lord Buddha. The practice of the Abhidharma presupposes not only a knowledge of the items reckoned by *tradition* as dharmas, but also a willingness to accept just them as ultimate facts in their own right. (3) Only a Buddha or Arhat has experiences sufficiently wide or deep to test the whole range of the truth, and their testimony is therefore the one ultimate source and guarantee of the truth for all except the fully enlightened. (4) But if the truth of the Dharma cannot be wholly established by reason, does the rationality of Buddhism perhaps consist in that it teaches nothing that is incompatible with reason? This has often been asserted. No objective criterion does, however, separate the inherently reasonable from the inherently unreasonable. 'Rationality' depends on our habits of thought, and on what we are brought up to believe. If sufficient thought is applied to it, any proposition, however absurd it may seem at first sight, can be made to appear plausible. This may be seen by anyone who has watched a Thomistically trained Catholic argue in favour of miracles, the virgin birth of Christ, or even the bodily assumption of the

\* Some people maintain that modern science deals with 'conceptual constructs', and that their relationship to sense-data is difficult to ascertain. B. Russell has offered many solutions, but none of them has satisfied either him or anyone else.

† There are, of course, a few modern writers who make Buddhism quite rational by eliminating all metaphysics, reincarnation, all the gods and spirits, all miracles and supernatural powers. Theirs is not the Buddhism of the Buddhists.

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Blessed Virgin. Likewise, when they see fit, the Buddhists are capable of displaying a great deal of sweet reasonableness, but in the end this reasonableness is used to beguile people into accepting the most amazing deviations from common sense.

Bitter and incredible as it must seem to the contemporary mind, Buddhism bases itself first of all on the revelation of the Truth by an omniscient being, known as 'the Buddha', and secondly on the spiritual intuition\* of saintly beings. In all disputes the ultimate appeal is, however, not to the 'experience' of Tom, Dick and Harry, but to that of the fully enlightened Buddha, as laid down in the 'Buddha-word'. Unlike the Christians, the Buddhists had no small, portable, definitive though extremely ambiguous, gospel, recognized and accepted by all. In consequence they had some difficulties in arriving at a criterion of the authenticity of a sacred text, but the resulting embarrassments fall outside the scope of this book.<sup>17</sup>

\* It is difficult to give a definition of 'spiritual intuition' which fits all cases. As understood in Buddhism it differs greatly from the 'true imagination', 'the sympathetic identification with the universe' or the 'cosmic understanding' of specially gifted people like Nostradamus, Jacob Boehme or William Blake.