



**RATIONALITY  
AND MIND IN EARLY  
BUDDHISM**

**FRANK J. HOFFMAN**

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*Rationality and Mind  
in Early Buddhism*

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**DEDICATION**

to Leona M. Hoffman

## FOREWORD

Dr Hoffman has at his disposal an unusual combination of talents and resources. There are few scholars of Buddhism who have a competence and training in Western philosophical techniques and there are even fewer whose primary background is in Western philosophy who can cope with, let alone discuss, texts in Pali. Frank Hoffman is one of that select band as this book demonstrates. The importance of dialogue between East and West is unquestionable. What is more difficult to achieve is dialogue in depth and with sensitivity. This book achieves precisely that and I commend it warmly.

PROF. STEWART R. SUTHERLAND

*University of London,  
King's College*

## PREFACE

'Early Buddhism' is understood in this work as 'the Buddhism of the five *Nikāyas*'. Chapter 1 outlines a method of approach to the study of early Buddhism which is on the interface between Philosophy and Buddhology, but the use of philosophy is not seen as a wholesale imposition of a type of thought as a mold to be set on the Buddhist texts. Instead, attention to Pali language and to some problems of philosophical interest is regarded as jointly useful in making a conceptual map of part of the early Buddhist terrain, and in vigilance for applicable internal and external criticisms.

After arguing against considerations of methodological, logical, and emotive points (in Chapters 1, 2 and 3 respectively) which seek to eliminate inquiry by asserting that early Buddhism is unintelligible or perversely pessimistic, the next three chapters discuss mind. In Ch. 4 a discussion of the terms *citta*, *mano*, and *viññāṇa* is given in section I, and in section II the problem of the compatibility of the 'no soul doctrine' and rebirth, and the problem of the reidentification of persons is discussed. The problem of reidentifying persons across lifetimes cannot be dispelled by appeal to the Buddhist empiricism thesis (Ch. 5). But in rejecting the Buddhist empiricism thesis it is not being suggested that *parinibbāna* is a 'transcendent state', since (with light from Buddhist texts and contemporary philosophy of religion) *parinibbāna* may be understood as 'eternal life' rather than 'endless life' in a way which does not conflict with the 'no soul doctrine'.

The present work is a revised version of my Ph.D. dissertation in the University of London, King's College (1981). Without the Tutorial Studentship in Philosophy of Religion (1979-1981), the dissertation on which this book is based probably would never have been completed. I am therefore grateful to those who provided the award, especially to my supervisor, Professor Stewart R. Sutherland, then Chair of the Department of the History and Philosophy of Religion and now College Principal. One could not hope for a better blend of criticism and kindness in a dissertation supervisor. I would like also to thank my internal

examiner in the University of London, Rev. Dr. Michael Simpson (Heythrop College), and my external examiner from the University of Oxford, Professor Pichard Gombrich (Balliol College), for their criticisms and advice. Doing so does not imply, however, that this three-man dissertation committee subscribes to the views presented herein, for which I alone am responsible.

Several scholars of South Asia at the University of Hawaii deserve mention for the outstanding teaching which stimulated and maintained my interest as a graduate student there, especially Profs. Eliot Deutsch, David J. Kalupahana, Prithwish Neogy, Rama Nath Sharma and K.N. Upadhyaya. I must acknowledge the generous assistance of the Department of Philosophy and the Asian Studies Program for teaching assistantships and of the East-West Center for a grant, all of which enabled me to do preparatory studies prior to writing this work.

Finally I would like to thank Mrs. Jean Klemenc for outstanding editorial assistance, and the Research and Special Projects Committee of the University of Montevallo, for a grant provided by the University.



## CHAPTER 1

### UNDERSTANDING EARLY BUDDHISM

This is a study of the Buddhism of the five *Nikāyas*<sup>1</sup>. For convenience the term 'early Buddhism' is used here as a shorthand for 'the Buddhism of the five *Nikāyas*,' but in so doing it is not being suggested that all parts of the five *Nikāyas*, written in Pāli, are of the same chronological stratum. Scholars concerned with chronology may find reason to believe that even in the same collection or *Nikāya* there are passages comparatively later than the majority in the collection. The possibility of interpolations creeping in cannot be credibly ruled out by asserting dogmatically that the five *Nikāyas* are the very words of Gotama Buddha.

Nevertheless the *Nikāya* literature\* is clearly the earliest source material for the study of Buddhism, and is often appealed to by proponents of sects which characteristically focus upon other and later texts. There are various ways of studying Buddhism, both in terms of demarcating which texts to study, and in terms of the discipline primarily used to elucidate them (*e.g.*, philosophy). I make no claim that my procedure is the best or only valid one with which to study Buddhism, but only want to make my particular bias and interest clear at the outset. Agehananda Bharati once remarked on the separation of orientalists and philosophers:<sup>2</sup>

It is extremely difficult to make them meet, because a lot of cross-disciplinary studies are needed for both—the philosophers will have to read some original tracts of Indian thought in other Asian languages; and the orientalists will have to acquire some knowledge of contemporary philosophy, especially on the terminological side.

My hope is that this work succeeds in getting philosophers and orientalists talking to each other more, counter-acting the narrow-minded prejudice that exists in some quarters on both sides, that they have nothing to say to one another. In my view the study of

\*Throughout this work the phrase 'the *Nikāya* literature' refers to that of the five *Nikāyas*.















































































































































































































































































