



**RATIONALITY
AND MIND IN EARLY
BUDDHISM**

FRANK J. HOFFMAN

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*Rationality and Mind
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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.

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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*¹. 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:²

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*.

Asian thought is both accurate and non-trivial to the extent that it is both textual and philosophical. Yet this does not mean that the texts have to be strait-jacketed into an alien and perhaps pre-conceived philosophical framework. An example of this is to be found in Conze's treatment of *dhamma* in a dialectical manner.³ The trouble is, if one begins with a particular view into which it would be nice if the texts fit, the likelihood is strong that one will end by representing the texts as if they were amenable to an alien mold, or of making baseless assertions.

Some scholars, such as Niels Nielsen, make a distinction which I find useful in beginning to characterize the approach taken in this work. Nielsen (with John Y. Fenton) writes:⁴

The *emic* (inside) *meaning* of a religious tradition is a description of that tradition by its adherents using their own language and their own categories and systems of organization. . . . In practice, most investigators use *etic* (outside) *interpretive categories* devised within their scholarly disciplines in addition to emic categories. . . . Emic and etic approaches can be complementary and mutually corrective.

Throughout this work wherever practicable both emic and etic perspectives on an issue are presented. The etic interpretive categories which comprise my frame of reference are taken from philosophy of religion and Buddhist studies.

In this century there has been a movement away from a judgmental Christo-centric point of view in the academic study of religion toward a more descriptive, less obviously biased view. Yet in Pāli Buddhist scholarship there remain apologetical strands, with proponents of, say, empiricism and ecumenism offering various interpretive filters through which to see Buddhism.⁵ Although I think that some knowledge of contemporary philosophy is an asset in studying Buddhism, it is not useful in any wholesale way by the imposition of a type of thought as a mold to be set on the Buddhist texts. And there is no suggestion here that any particular philosopher is an *avatāra* of the Buddha Gotama. Philosophical sensitivity may be useful in making a conceptual map of part of the early Buddhist terrain, and in a vigilance as regards both internal and external criticisms which apply to Buddhism. As orientalists so rightly insist, attention

to the language (in this case, Pāli) is essential. The intent is to turn away from apologetics as an over-all strategy and back to description with some critical notice, taking understanding as the basic task.

Where occasionally comparisons are made between what the early Buddhist texts say and what philosophy of religion works say, the comparisons are not regarded as valuable somehow for their own sake, nor as causal influence accounts, nor as concealed apologetics to make Buddhism seem respectable (for the view taken is that it *is* respectable), but only for the sake of understanding. If it should turn out that there is some clarity in the Buddhist vision (along with some difficulties), this should not be surprising, nor taken as evidence of apologetic intent. Hence, if the philosophy of religion can aid comparative understanding without doing violence to the texts, the absence of exact Pāli equivalents to its distinctions (e.g., between endless and eternal life as two views of immortality—Ch. 6) will be acceptable as a matter of course.

An underlying assumption of this study is the view that differences between religions are at least as important as similarities. At a sufficiently lofty level of generality various things may be said to be similar. But what one needs to keep in mind is: what is the point in so saying? Ninian Smart's blistering attack on the 'thesis of religious unity' does seem to me clearly on the right track.⁶ By contrast, philosophers and religionists have often stressed the importance of unity. F. S. C. Northrop, in *The Meeting of East and West*, holds that philosophical systems have been outmoded by science and that what is needed is a scientifically grounded philosophy *unifying* the world. And more recently some philosophers of religion, such as John Hick, offer a thin-line theism as the solution to the problem of *unity* in the face of religious pluralism. Rather than taking these sorts of approach, the diversity among and competition between different religions might be seen as a sign of great human vitality, rather than as something to be homogenized under the rubrics of positivism and of theism as in Northrop and Hick respectively.*

*In taking this position I do not go so far as to condone violence between members of different religious persuasions as Swinburne seems to do. See Stewart R. Sutherland, *God, Jesus and Belief* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1984), p. 25.

Accordingly, if the differences between religions are instructive, a contextual study (and here the context is a set of texts) is indeed in order. This does not rule out the possibility of criticism, however, as Ch. 1 argues. And a contextual approach may bring to light what, for some, are surprising possibilities of religion. That, for example, there is a religion which does not accept the concept of a Creator God (Pāli: *Issara*) may indeed surprise those accustomed to define religion as belief in God or as man's response to the transcendent. And it would be folly to suggest that early Buddhism is not a religion at all. For it is neither philosophy in the sense of argument and counter-argument (the 'wordy warfare' rejected by the Buddhists), nor some sort of science or magic, and it plays a structurally analogous role in the lives of believers to what we should call religion in the West.

On the view that understanding is basic to the study of religions and philosophical criticism of them is possible, it is neither necessary nor helpful to assume that early Buddhism is either superior or inferior to the later developments in Buddhist tradition as a result of its chronological position. It is as unfounded to assume that the mere fact of the *Nikāya* literature being earlier than other Buddhist works makes them 'more true' as it is to assume that 'truth is an unfolding development' so that the latest Buddhist trend would have the current, but not the final, word.

With the eye of an historian, B.C. Law observes that early Buddhism provides:⁷

germs of a philosophical system which came to be more logically and consistently systematized later on.

Taken as the historical point that there is indeed continuity and development in the Buddhist tradition, this is surely right. But what is not correct is the suggestion that early Buddhism is less logical and less consistent than later developments. This suggestion would require a detailed demonstration, but it is not clear how it *could* be shown. For the early texts and, for example, the *Abhidhamma* texts are not on the same level, and hence comparison in terms of logic and consistency (characteristics generally ascribed more to the latter) amount to stacking the deck in the following way.⁸ It is rather like comparing the *Bible* with the *Summa Theologica*, and then dismissing the former as less logical and consistent.

The view that the early Buddhist texts are insufficient by themselves and must be supplemented by studies of the commentator, Buddhaghosa, has particular appeal in some circles, and seems to be based on the sort of mistaken view held by Law according to which the early Buddhist texts are unsystematic ramblings. The assumption that the texts are insufficient without the commentaries emerges, for example, in a review of A.K. Warder's *Indian Buddhism* in which Alex Wayman writes:⁹

My own position is that a restriction to either one of the two sides (the scriptures and the commentaries) is structurally convenient for writing a book and not for solving problems: to solve problems one must include all the possible evidence and therefore cannot restrict himself to the scriptures or to the commentaries exclusively.

Just reading the commentaries would, indeed, be peculiar, since they presuppose knowledge of the texts to which they refer. (It is not clear that anyone actually does this, but I leave that point aside.) The converse, however, is not true. For reading early Buddhism without the commentaries enables one to gain an understanding which would not be possible if the commentaries are taken into account. Of course it is possible, alternatively, to gain an understanding of Buddhism by taking *both* the early Buddhist texts and the commentaries into account. One may take the former sort of understanding as valuable without saying that no one should attempt the latter. Whether, therefore, it is a 'restriction' to keep to the early texts and not take into account the commentaries, depends on what kind of understanding is sought for, on what one takes as the problem to be solved. I think that an important kind of understanding about Buddhism is to see what can be said about the early Buddhist view on topics concerning rationality and mind. If this is the problem that one starts with, then not considering the commentaries is certainly not a restriction, but a methodological necessity.

But setting the problem in this way, is what the historical Gotama Buddha actually taught uncovered? It would be naive to rule out the possibility of interpolations having changed the record after all these centuries. From the viewpoint of critical

scholarship all one can claim is to be studying a set of very early texts.

Even from a Buddhist viewpoint, however, the historicity of Gotama in particular does not matter much. For the Buddhist path or doctrine does not depend on the historicity of Gotama in the way that Christianity depends on the historicity of Jesus and on his resurrection. Buddhism 'depends on' Gotama in the sense that he is viewed as the turner of the wheel of doctrine in the present eon. But Gotama is not viewed as the first such Buddha, nor the last. He is considered as a torchbearer, not an initiator, and the path or doctrine is viable or obtains regardless of whether a *Tathāgata* appears in a particular age to illuminate it.

Thus, the path or doctrine does not 'depend on' Gotama in the sense that if he had not become a *Buddha* (in this eon 'the Buddha') one could not possibly achieve the highest goal of Buddhist life. Granted that it would be very much more difficult without such a Buddha to show the way, yet the way is *in principle* discoverable by anyone. By contrast, whether as a matter of fact or as a matter of definition of 'Christian', the vast majority of Christians hold that if Jesus were not the Christ and had not redeemed mankind, one could not achieve Christian salvation. The result is that even if someone were to provide new, cogent evidence to show that Gotama did not exist as a historical person at all, such a demonstration would not affect the validity of the path or doctrine at all.

Jesus' existence is logically a pre-condition for his undergoing a resurrection, as Gotama's existence is logically a pre-condition for his becoming a Buddha. Yet whereas if it could be shown that the Biblical Jesus did not exist Christianity would be undermined, if it could be shown that Gotama did not exist, Buddhism would not be undermined. So it is not the historicity of Gotama which supports Buddhism, unlike the situation with Christianity.

It should not, however, be overlooked that it might make some difference in practice to the tenacity with which Buddhists hold their faith if it could be shown that, although Gotama existed, he was an unenlightened charlatan either in reference to his expressed view of enlightenment or according to some supposedly more developed view of what counts as enlightenment (not fully enlightened). In this respect the situation of Buddhism is ana-

logous to the Christian situation, in which Jesus must be seen as the Christ if the religion is going to be viable. Yet there is this difference: that in these cases one is not concerned specifically with the existence, the historicity, of the religious leaders.

For the record, I see no convincing reasons for denying the historicity of Gotama. But as the study concerns a set of texts which would be regarded as Buddhist even if it turned out that there never existed a Gotama, the understanding which this study offers is not contingent on the existence of a particular person.

The overall aim is, in terms of methodology, to eliminate several obstacles which some scholars have thought made an understanding of the content impossible, and in terms of content, to develop an understanding of rationality and mind in early Buddhism. Throughout, I develop the overall argument in such a way as to interest both philosophers and Buddhologists, and it is this approach, just as much as particular conclusions, which marks whatever originality the work may lay claim to. Although there have been other works on the 'psychology' of Pāli Buddhism, there are few if any written by scholars with philosophical training.

This type of work on the interface between the philosophy of religion and Buddhology is a new possibility for religious studies. There has long been critically-oriented writing concerning conceptual difficulties in Christianity, and while the study of Oriental thought was in its infancy in the West, it was important that some scholars took an apologetical stand on behalf of Asian religions in order to stimulate interest in the subject and in order to jolt some out of a Christo-centric complacency. But that time is past. Every year one is inundated with popular books on Asian thought which recapitulate well-worn doctrines in non-technical language with varying degrees of accuracy. There is a need for scholars to do for Buddhism and other religions what philosophers of religion have been doing for Christianity in presenting conceptual problems. What is needed is, on the one hand, sympathetic understanding of what is internally coherent and linguistically precise in the language of the Asian texts studied, and, on the other hand, attention to Asian thought from a critical philosophical point of view. The former alone leads to a head-in-the-sands ostrich attitude characteristic of foolish complacency; the latter alone leads to arrogant misunderstanding.

In this study it is not that philosophy has only an external

(etic) and critical function here. It may function in this way (e.g., a difficulty in reidentification of persons is shown), and yet also philosophy may be useful for internal (emic) understanding (e.g., the endless life/eternal life distinction is shown applicable) in a way which elucidates the texts.

It is important to distinguish the approach of the present work from comparative philosophy. Generally (but not, I think, necessarily), comparative philosophy tends toward either apologetics or condescension with reference to one of the things compared.¹⁰ While these attitudes do not in every case preclude understanding, if held at the *outset*, they can take the form of a one-sided selectivity towards the facts which makes understanding difficult or impossible. Comparisons are useful when they enable one to see the subject in a fresh way, without distorting it.¹¹ Comparisons are occasionally made here, but there is no overall strategy of a comparative sort.

Some have thought that the fourfold logic sometimes employed in early Buddhism is self-contradictory or else unintelligible. If this were so, it would be impossible to begin understanding early Buddhism at all from a Western viewpoint. Ch. 2 examines the fourfold logic and concludes that it is not self-contradictory or senseless, explaining that it is not a specifically formal logical principle but an heuristic one for debate.

Ch. 3 answers the objection that early Buddhism is emotively flawed as Ch. 2 had done for the charge that it is logically flawed. It does so by examining the concept of *dukkha*, which turns out to be a descriptive-cum-evaluative concept and one which provides no support for a view of early Buddhism as 'pessimistic'.

Having argued against considerations of methodological, logical and emotive points (in Chs. 1, 2 and 3 respectively) which seek to cut off further inquiry by asserting that early Buddhism is unintelligible apart from the commentaries, logically 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 I, and in II the problem of the compatibility of 'no soul' (*anattā*) doctrine and rebirth and the problem of reidentification of persons is discussed.

In Ch. 5 the concern is with the notion of 'verification' in relation to the early Buddhist rebirth doctrine. Part I discusses *saddhā* (faith, confidence) and II sees *abhiññā* (special sorts of

knowledge and powers) in the light of the importance of *saddhā*. On the basis of I and II the Buddhist empiricism thesis is rejected in III.

In Ch.6 the deathless (*amata*) is explained in such a way as not to conflict with *anattā* doctrine. Views of *nibbāna* are discussed, the distinction between *parinibbāna* and *nibbāna* defended, and *parinibbāna* explained in terms of 'eternal life' but not 'endless life'.

NOTES

¹*Dīgha, Majjhima, Aṅguttara, Saṃyutta, Khuddaka.*

²Agehananda Bharati, *The Tantric Tradition* (London, Rider & Co., 1965), p. 13.

³For details see my review of E. Conze, *A Short History of Buddhism in Religious Studies*, vol. 16, no. 4 (Dec. 1980), pp. 506-509.

⁴Niels Nielsen (*et al.* eds.), *Religions of the World* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1983), p. 6.

⁵Examples of these sorts of advocacy may be found in K.N. Jayatilleke and Lyn De Silva.

⁶Ninian Smart, *The Yogi and the Devotee* (London: Allen and Unwin), 1968.

⁷B.C. Law, *History of Pāli Literature*, vol. I (London, 1933), p. 239.

⁸These two are not being compared with respect to authoritativeness, so there is no assumption here that early Buddhism is authoritative and other strands of Buddhism 'heretical'.

⁹Alex Wayman, review of A.K. Warder, *Indian Buddhism* in *Journal of Indian Philosophy* 6, 1978, pp. 415-427.

¹⁰In his monograph, *Comparative Aesthetics* (University of Hawaii Press), Eliot Deutsch provides three examples of comparative philosophy with reference in each case to shared problems in two different traditions. This is a glimmer of light in the darkness, considering what sometimes counts as 'comparative philosophy'. On the methodological side, however, more needs to be said about whether and how one can identify 'the same problem' in two different traditions.

¹¹Elsewhere (*Middle Way*, vol. XI, no. 3, 1976, p. 119) I have made some comparative remarks but qualify them in order to avoid distortion.

CHAPTER 2

RATIONALITY AND LOGIC

In order for an understanding of early Buddhism to take root it is necessary to see that it is neither logically unintelligible nor perversely pessimistic. In this chapter and in the following one respectively these two charges are examined.

The standard method of demonstrating unintelligibility in a system of ideas is to uncover self-contradiction in it. It does not follow from the fact that a system of ideas has no self-contradictory propositions, however, that its basic concepts are intelligible. For example, someone might argue that there is a form of theistic belief which can be stated without self-contradictory propositions, but that the concept of God is itself fundamentally unintelligible. Such an argument might take the form of showing that some of the attributes of God (*e.g.*, omniscience and immutability) are logically incompatible.

The focus of this chapter is on one common charge of unintelligibility which asserts that the third part of early Buddhist fourfold logic is a self-contradiction and that early Buddhists were confused in entertaining it as a logical possibility.* As Staal observes:¹

We are often told that Indian philosophers do not accept the law of contradiction. This may well be one of the causes of the neglect of Indian thought by Western philosophers: for nobody desires to study a body of propositions when he is at the same time told that their contradictories may hold as well.

Before turning to a consideration of the fourfold logic in particular, it is appropriate to consider whether there is any general statement concerning self-contradiction to be found in early Buddhism. At *Majjhima Nikāya* I.232 the Pāli reads:²

* The discussion which follows is a shortened and slightly revised version of my article, 'Early Buddhist Four Fold Logic' in *Journal of Indian Philosophy*, vol. 10 (1982), pp. 309-337.

Manasikarohi Aggivessana, manasikarivā kho Aggivessana byākarohi, na kho te sandhiyati purimena vā pacchimaṃ pacchimena vā purimaṃ.

In *Middle Length Sayings* B. Horner translates this passage as:³

Pay attention, Aggivessana. When you have paid attention, Aggivessana, answer. For your last speech does not agree with your first, nor your first with your last.

The word 'speech' has been supplied by the translator, presumably because the appropriate verb *vadesi* occurs previously as the likely referent of the elliptical construction. The non-agreement in question is thus a non-agreement of utterances. While two psychological states, utterances, sentences, or propositions may in one way or another 'fail to agree', the logical principle of contradiction is formulated by logicians as applying specifically to propositions, rather than to utterances, for example.

Nothing in the text suggests that the sort of lack of agreement in the Pāli is specifically formal logical agreement. And in order to have a point to the effect that there is a formal logical principle of noncontradiction, there would have to be some word comparable to 'proposition' referred to here. Instead one finds that the referent is 'speech'. Thus, I would translate '*na kho te sandhiyati purimena vā pacchimaṃ pacchimena vā purimaṃ*' as 'you do not indeed connect the latter (utterance) with the former (utterance), nor the former with the latter'.

Seeing the Pāli passage in its context may be helpful. Aggivessana states that the five aggregates comprise the self, but also admits that they are impermanent. Gotama Buddha points out that these utterances do not agree with one another. 'But is it fitting', he is depicted as saying, 'to regard that which is impermanent, anguish, liable to change as "This is mine, this am I, this is my self?"' And the story continues with Aggivessana's response: 'This is not so, good Gotama.' Since it is included in the meaning of the term 'self' ('*attā*' in Pāli, '*ātman*' in Sanskrit) that it is permanent, for one thing, anything proposed as a 'self' was definitionally disqualified without this characteristic. Hence, Aggivessana's former characterization of what the self is does

not cohere with his latter admission of what the term 'attan' means.

At *Majjhima Nikāya* I. 378 there occurs another interesting case, which reads:⁴

Gahapati gahapati, manasikarivā kho gahapati byākaroḥi, na kho te sandhīyati purimena vā pacchimaṃ pacchimena vā purimaṃ. Bhāsītā kho pana te gahapati esā vācā: sacce ahaṃ bhante patiṭṭhāya mantessāmi, hotu no ettha kathāsallāpo ti.

Horner translates this as:⁵

Householder, householder! Take care how you explain, householder. Your earlier (remarks) do not tally with your later, nor your later with your earlier. And yet these words were spoken by you, householder: 'I revered sir, will speak as one grounded on the truth. Let us have some conversation here.'

Again *sandhīyati* occurs, and this time is translated as 'tally' rather than as 'agree', but unlike in the preceding example, the relationship between consistency and truth is noted: one cannot be speaking in accord with the truth if what one says is inconsistent. Yet it is noteworthy that '*sacca*' (translated as 'truth' above) can mean both 'real' as well as 'true', truth of being or authenticity on the one hand being indicated by the same word as truth of utterance on the other. The last quoted Pāli selection contains an example of the latter usage, and the former is exemplified in such terms as '*saccanāma*', doing justice to one's name, bearing a true name, as said of Gotama Buddha, for example.⁶ The idea is plainly one of being true to one's name in the sense of living as one's name implies. For instance, since 'Buddha' means 'enlightened one', the appropriate behaviour is required in order to be *saccanāma*.⁷ Another example of '*sacca*' in the sense of 'truth of utterance', this time from *Samyutta Nikāya* (4, XLI VII, 8) runs as follows:

Sace te bhante purimaṃ saccam pacchimaṃ te micchā
sace pana te bhante pacchimaṃ saccam purimaṃ
te micchā.

As rendered by C.A.F. Rhys Davids in *Kindred Sayings* this means:⁸

If, sir, your first assertion was true, your last was false.
And if your last was true, your first was false.

She translates the assertions as: 'I would have you look, sirs, how straight is this housefather Citta, how guileless is this housefather Citta, how ingenuous is this housefather Citta', and 'I would have you look, sirs, how crooked is this housefather Citta, how crafty, how dishonest is this housefather Citta'. In this context the former is uttered by Nigaṇṭha after Citta states that he does not have faith (*saddhā*) in Gotama's teachings; the latter after Citta clarifies that instead of faith he has knowledge and vision (*jānanto passanto*) of Gotama Buddha's teachings. Nigaṇṭha is evidently not pleased with these teachings.

There is a problem in interpreting '*sacca*' and '*micchā*' if one goes only by the textual references provided for these terms in the Pāli Text Society's dictionary. For while this work lists meanings of '*sacca*' supported by textual references which exemplify the dual meanings of truth of being or authenticity as well as truth of utterance, its account of '*micchā*' cites no textual references in which falsity of utterance is meant, despite the fact that 'false' is listed as a possible meaning. Aside from compounds (in which it typically has an ethical slant), the dictionary lists these meanings: 'separate', 'opposite', 'contrary', 'wrongly', 'in a wrong way', 'false'. After 'false' references to *Sutta Nipāta* verses 438 and 815 are given, but these in fact have to do with *living wrongly* from the early Buddhist viewpoint ('*micchāladdho*' and '*micchā*' being used to condemn pride and lechery respectively), rather than with falsehood as a property of utterances.⁹ The last passage quoted above (*KS*, p. 207) might well have been cited as a usage of '*micchā*' as a property of utterances.

In addition to its application to speech or utterances, '*micchā*' is also applied to *diṭṭhi* (views or speculative views, depending on context), and to *sankappa* (intentional thoughts), for example. Of course right and wrong are opposites just as true and false are, and a justification for holding that '*micchā*' means 'wrong' sometimes and not always 'false' (contra *PTS dictionary*) consists in the fact that, e.g., '*sammāvācā*' is used as right view in contrast to wrong view.

It is also important to notice that there are terms to mark a distinction between 'intentional thoughts' and 'utterances' ('*saṅkappa*' and '*vācā*'). Hence it is not plausible to argue that there is no rough linguistic basis for a distinction between propositions and speech and that if there had been one, the early Buddhist view *would have been* a view about propositions. If there had been any interest to state a formal logical principle and use a notion of proposition, this could have been done. In fact, I find no occurrences in early Buddhism of the terms for proposition listed in A.P. Buddhadatta's *English-Pāli Dictionary viz., kattukamyatāññāpana, pakāsana, and mūladhamma.*

Utterances, unlike propositions or thoughts, may be soft or loud, said in haste or in a drawl, made in a cubicle or in a theatre at a certain time, *etc.* whereas none of these are true of propositions or of thoughts in the same sense. But in saying this it is not being suggested that propositions or thoughts inhabit a ghostly realm somewhere, nor that early Buddhism offers a theory or a technical distinction between thoughts and utterances. But had this technical distinction been important, appropriate terminology could have been devised. In fact, many such theoretical concerns are unimportant from within the context of liberation-oriented early Buddhism.

Philosophers will notice that articulating the distinction between propositions and thoughts, on the one hand, and utterances, on the other, may well hide a dualist snare, and rather than risking a fall into it, it is preferable just to say that different things may be truly said of the one which are not true of the other.

I do not find Jayatilleke clear on the relationship between propositions and utterances. And he is not very clear about whether early Buddhism in fact contains a formal statement of the principle of Contradiction, or just that here we come very close to a formal statement of the principle.

At one point he states:¹⁰

Citta is anxious to show that Nigaṇṭha Nāttaputta is contradicting himself and says, *sace purimaṃ saccaṃ pacchimaṃ te micchā, sace pacchimaṃ saccaṃ purimaṃ te micchā*, i.e. if your former statement (p) is true, your latter statement ($\sim p$) is false and if your latter

statement ($\sim p$) is true, your former statement (p) is false. In other words, in the above situation when the statements are of the form $\sim p$ and p , it cannot be the case that both p and $\sim p$ are true ($\sim(p, \sim p)$), which is the formal statement of the principle of Contradiction.

In order for Jayatilleke's interpretation above to work, however, his word 'statement' must be construed as 'proposition' (rather than as 'utterance'), but in that sense there is no referent in the Pāli passage. The text makes it clear that it is *utterances* which are the foci of attention (not thoughts or propositions), and by using p and $\sim p$ as signs for propositions, Jayatilleke is led to the mistaken conclusion that the text gives a 'formal statement of the principle of Contradiction'. By using the words '*bhāsitaṃ*' ('saying') and '*etad avoca*' ('this said'), the text makes it perfectly clear that the former and latter, the *purimaṃ* and *pacchimaṃ*, which contradict one another are utterances. Other examples bear this out as well, and I have found no counter-evidence in the five *Nikāyas*. Thus I conclude that Jayatilleke's interpretation above is mistaken.

In early Buddhism views, thoughts, and utterances may or may not be false as distinct from whether or not they are wrong, and when the early exclusion of self-contradiction is formulated, it is clear that it is not formulated as a formal logical point but one about utterances. Perhaps if there *had* been a concern to make a point about proposition, the word '*vāda*' could have been used, yet it is often translated as 'speech' and only in its usage as 'view', 'doctrine', or 'belief' is there any approximation to 'proposition', and even here it is not close. For in this sense it means 'emphatic or formulated speech' in the sense of 'doctrine'. The fact is that there is no early Buddhist term which might be translated as 'proposition' without a good deal of extrapolation. There is a term for 'wrong speech' and 'lie', however ('*musāvāda*'), so that 'false speech' ('*micchāvāda*') is distinguishable from 'wrong speech' ('*musāvāda*' in the first of two meanings just mentioned).

'*Micchā*' is applied to views (*diṭṭhi*), thoughts (*saṅkappa*) and utterances (*vācā*), meaning 'false view', 'false conception', 'false speech' respectively, according to a translation by Horner.¹¹ Thus, in early Buddhism a distinction is evident between false utterances

or speech, on the one hand, and wrong utterances or speech and lies, on the other hand, so that it is clear in the passage cited that the focus is on truth and falsity rather than on rightness and wrongness. When applied to utterances, 'sacca' and 'micchā' mean 'true' and 'false' respectively, unlike 'sammā' and 'musā' which in this application mean 'right' and 'wrong' respectively.

But if, as is argued here, the principle of contradiction is not a formal logical principle in early Buddhism, what sort of principle is it? The interpretation which I would like to suggest is that, in keeping with the long tradition of debate which has flourished in India since pre-Buddhistic times, the status of the principle of contradiction can best be understood as that of a rule for discussion.

It is of course obvious that any system of linguistic symbols that communicate information will, *qua* system, have an informal logic. Only, it cannot be concluded that the early Buddhist texts put forth the principle of contradiction as a rule in informal logic, since they recognized no distinction between formal and informal logic, and since to see oneself as putting forth the latter one must know what counts as the former. But from a later and external point of view one may describe the concern as 'informal logic'. I would prefer to say that they had, and saw themselves as having, an heuristic principle for debate.¹² It is an heuristic principle in the sense of being a *principle of method* on the basis of which one can *discover* things: without it, one cannot find out, discover, or establish anything at all.

When the householder, Upāli, violates this rule (in the example previously quoted), Gotama Buddha perceptively points out the inconsistency of his doing so with his claim to be speaking in accordance with the truth, thus illustrating the considerable importance to be attached to this rule. The consequence of violating the heuristic principle of noncontradiction is that one thereby relinquishes any claim to be saying something that is true.

A different sort of consequence (or putative consequence), one which is mythologically articulated, obtains when the rule is violated that in discussion a legitimate question should be answered at least on its third repetition. The penalty mentioned for this violation is having a thunderbolt bearing *yakkha* (identified with Indra) shatter one's skull into seven pieces!¹³ We are told that the same Aggivessana who violated the rule of contradiction

almost violates the latter rule about answering as well, barely averting his doom by answering after the second repetition while the fiery thunderbolt is overhead. In early Buddhism these rules were powerful weapons against ignorance masquerading as knowledge.

Aside from the exegetical line of argument already given for the thesis, *contra* Jayatilleke, that the early Buddhist principle of contradiction is an heuristic rather than a formal logical one, another line of argument is possible on historical grounds. The exegetical argument shows that in early Buddhism noncontradiction is simply a basic rule for debate, there being here no concern for propositions and logic. The historical point can also be made that there is no evidence of a concern for formal logic and propositions in any school of thought in India at the time of the Buddha.

In his chart on the development of Indian logic, Staal lists the work of Kaṇāda in the first century A.D. as the first to be done on logic in a narrow sense. Staal himself opts for such a broad sense of 'logic', however, (congruent with his sweeping claim: 'the history of Indian logic covers at least 23 centuries...') that the distinctions between logic, grammar, and ritual become blurred.¹⁴ It is important to specify, however, that formal logic plays no role in early Buddhism.

At this point it is appropriate to return to the problem of interpreting the 'both X and not X' part of the fourfold logic. In view of the clear occurrence of the heuristic principle of contradiction that I have shown to pertain to utterances, it would be inconsistent if the third part of the often-used fourfold formula should turn out to violate that very principle. (It is beside the point that Gotama does not urge acceptance of the third lemma in particular, for if early Buddhism considers a self-contradiction as a possibility, then it is fundamentally mistaken.)

Since the literal translation of the third part of the fourfold logic is senseless, the question arises: is there any non-literal but textually consistent interpretation of the third position that makes sense in the early context. One item of internal evidence supporting the contention that either the third or the fourth position does not mean what a literal translation conveys is that on a literal rendering they are semantically equivalent. Although the early Buddhist viewpoint does not include a formal logic, the

following formal *parallel* may be constructed in order to demonstrate semantic equivalence.* Taking p and $\sim p$ as parallel to the third position and $\sim(p \wedge \sim p)$ as parallel to the fourth position:

$$\sim(p \wedge \sim p) \equiv \sim p \wedge \sim \sim p \equiv p \wedge \sim p.$$

But if this is the case, then both the third position and the fourth are self-contradictory, and the two self-contradictions are semantically equivalent as nugatory. Yet since the early Buddhist perspective recognizes the two as distinct views, the formal symbolism above cannot be an accurate rendering. Hence, my strategy is to offer an alternative model for understanding the fourfold pattern.

To begin with there are some points about the Pāli which need to be kept in mind for a clearer view of the matter. There are passages which indicate that the fourth, 'neither..nor', is literally meant as in the *Samyutta Nikāya* (Pāli Text Society edition, II, pp. 19-20) lines:

- 7 Kim nu kho bho Gotama sayamkatam dukkhanti
Mā hevaṃ Kassapāti Bhagavā avoca
- 8 Kim pana bho Gotama paramkatam dukkhanti
Mā hevaṃ Kassapāti Bhagavā avoca
- 9 Kim nu kho bho Gotama sayamkatañca paramkatañca
dukkhanti
Mā hevaṃ Kassapāti Bhagavā avoca
- 10 Kim pana bho Gotama asayaṃ-kāram aparaṃ-kāram
adhicca samuppannaṃ dukkhanti
Mā hevaṃ Kassapāti Bhagavā avoca

The Pāli Text Society translation of the passage is:¹⁵

- 7 'Now then, Master Gotama, is suffering wrought by one's self?'
'Not so verily, Kassapa', said the Exalted One.
- 8 'What then, Master Gotama, is one's suffering wrought by another?'
'Not so verily, Kassapa,' said the Exalted One.
- 9 'What then, Master Gotama, is suffering wrought both by one's self and by another?'
'Not so verily, Kassapa,' said the Exalted One.

*I have benefitted by discussing this point with Prof. Steve Satris.

- 10 'What then, Master Gotama, has (the) suffering [which is] wrought neither by myself nor by another, befallen me by chance?'

'Not so verily, Kassapa,' said the Exalted One.

As an aside it should be noted that the phrase '*kim nu kho*' in line 9 has been translated in the same way as '*kim pana bho*' in lines 8 and 10 due to an oversight. It should be translated as in line 7 to convey the parallelism of the Pāli verse. Also, the term '*bho*' has a familiar tone (vocative of the formal '*bhavant*' meaning 'sir' or 'lord'), and was much used by the brahmins as a form of address for equals or inferiors. Hence they are called '*bhovādins*'.¹⁶ The term '*bho*' is rendered by the translator as 'Master' in an attempt to approximate the mild condescension or familiarity of '*bho*' in this context, and should not be thought of as 'Master' in the sense of teacher. Thirdly, the words '*mā h'evam*' which report the Buddha's attitude above do not indicate a simple denial, but rather a prohibition. 'Do not say so' is thus an appropriate translation, as Kalupahana points out.¹⁷

'*Adhicca samuppannaṃ*' means 'uncaused, sprung into existence without a cause', so that in the above passage the fourth position represents a rejection of the self-caused/other-caused dichotomy altogether, as the phraseology of '*asayaṃ-kāraṃ*' (not self-caused) and '*aparaṃ-kāraṃ*' (not other-caused) indicates. Thus, if the fourth position is literally interpreted (e.g., 10 above as referring to 7 and 8), it makes sense as a rejection of the first and second as offering an overly simple dichotomy. But as previously shown, the third and fourth cannot both be interpreted literally unless the unpalatable consequence of their equivalence is admitted. Consequently the question arises as to whether and how the third position can be given a non-literal interpretation.

As a starting point recall Jayatilleke's interpretations of two Pāli phrases as 'he is semiconscious' and 'the universe is finite (in some dimensions) and infinite (in other dimensions)' presented previously. On this view the third position is a qualified assertion, intermediate between the first and the second, and a tacit convention operates such that statements in the fourfold logic of the form 'both X and not X' are elliptical, leaving out 'in part' after each X. On the basis of the preceding considerations the following schema may be constructed:

- (1) there exists an X such that characteristic y applies;
- (2) there exists an X such that y does not, but z does, apply;
- (3) there exists an X such that both y and z apply in part;
- (4) there exists an X such that neither y nor z apply.

In 10 already mentioned it is 'chance' which is the reason given why a position of type (4) applies. The Buddha is depicted as rejecting attempts to involve him in speculative philosophical arguments, saying that he does not hold any alternative fourth position.¹⁸ And the fourth is explained with reference to one who is 'addicted to logic and reasoning'.¹⁹

Since a wide variety of fourfold examples occur in Pāli, it may not always be easy to see how a given example could admit of the third alternative, which requires distinguishable parts. Some of the examples used are: X understands, X exists, X is pleasing, X expects, in cases where each X has a fourfold pattern of possibilities.²⁰ Understanding is the sort of thing that one might have in part, and if X is pleasing it need not be completely so. Yet it may be more difficult to see whether and how one can have a 'partial expectation'. (Perhaps one can, as in: 'I rather thought he would come home on time, but was not very surprised when he did not'.) But what of the possibility that X may exist in part? In the context X is the *tathāgata*, and it is not absurd to suppose that some non-Buddhists took it (wrongly) that the Buddhist view is that in the case of the *tathāgata* part of what might generally be called mind (*mano*) continues to exist after death, and part does not. Gotama Buddha clearly is shown to reject this view in chastizing Sati for holding that Buddha teaches that *viññāṇa* ('consciousness') continues after death. I suggest that (3) as applied to the *tathāgata* may be understood as the view that part of the *tathāgata* survives death and part does not. If the part which was thought to survive (e.g., *viññāṇa*) is taken as a sort of permanent *ātman* surrogate, then it is obvious why the Buddha would not hold such a view, since the *anātmavāda* clearly precludes it.

The muddle of regarding the third and fourth positions as self-contradictory and equally meaningless results from taking them as formally symbolized: $p, \sim p, p \wedge \sim p, \sim(p \wedge \sim p)$. Instead I think they can be understood properly as existential statements *viz.*, there exists an X such that y obtains, there exists an X such that y

does not obtain but z obtains, there exists an X such that y obtains (in part) and z obtains (in part), there exists an X such that neither y nor z obtains.

Taking a wide range of examples and trying not to be one-sidedly selective, I nevertheless find that the instances of the fourfold pattern in early Buddhism fit this model. For instance, *dukkha* is self-caused, *dukkha* is not self-caused but other-caused, *dukkha* is both self-caused (in part) and other-caused (in part), *dukkha* is neither self-caused nor other-caused (but arises by chance).

Is there any evidence that the fourfold pattern is regarded as exhaustive of the possibilities on the questions to which it is applied? For example, consider this passage from the *Dīgha Nikāya*:²¹

Ime kho te, bhikkhave, samaṇa-brāhmaṇā amarā-vikkhepikā tattha tattha pañhaṃ puṭṭhā samānā vācā-vikkhepaṃ āpajjanti amarā-vikkhepam catuhi vatthūhi. Ye hi keci, bhikkhave, samaṇāvā brāhmaṇā vā amarā-vikkhepikā tattha tattha pañhaṃ puṭṭhā samānā vācā-vikkhepaṃ āpajjanti amarā-vikkhepam, sabbe te imeh' eva catuhi vatthūhi etesaṃ vā añña-tarena, n'atthi ito bahiddhā.

T.W. Rhys Davids translates the passage as:²²

These, brethren, are those recluses and Brahmins who wriggle like eels; and who, when a question is put to them on this or that, resort to equivocation, to eel-wriggling; and that in four ways, or in one or other of the same; there is no other way in which they do so.

Hence a special concern is the force of 'they do so in these four ways...there is no other way in which they do so'. Is this a contingent, historical fact that there happened to be four possibilities, or is it more than that—a rule for discussion to the effect that no more than the four possibilities were admissible? If interpreted in the latter way, the passage above is evidence in favor of Jayatilleke's view that the fourfold pattern was taken as exhaustive of the possibilities.

It is interesting to notice that the fourfold pattern is not always applied to debates in early Buddhism, and it might be thought that this is something odd or perhaps even inconsistent about early Buddhism. I do not think so, for understood in the way I suggest, something quite similar happens in other contexts in which there is no possible suggestion of an inscrutable 'Asian logic' at work. A notable example occurs in Hume's *Dialogues*, in which Philo lists four hypotheses on the nature of first causes:²³

that they are endowed with perfect goodness, that they have perfect malice, that they are opposite and have both goodness and malice, that they have neither goodness nor malice.

Of course no one would suggest that Hume ought always to use this fourfold pattern, nor that he is an Asian logician. Whether one uses the fourfold pattern depends on the issue and on the way one chooses to analyze it.

Whereas Jayatilleke thought the fourfold pattern to be a kind of logic superior to Aristotelian logic, I do not think that this comparison is adequate.²⁴ There is nothing in the fourfold logic, properly understood, which is either in conflict with, or in advance of, Aristotelian logic.

The main tasks completed here are those of clarifying the status of the early Buddhist principle of contradiction, and explaining how it is compatible with the third and fourth position of the fourfold logic. I have undertaken this task after finding various inadequacies in several accounts of the fourfold pattern. And now it is appropriate to summarize the main findings:

- (1) in early Buddhism there is a distinction between 'truth of being' and 'truth of utterance';
- (2) '*micchā*' is used in the latter sense in the formulation of the principle of contradiction (or noncontradiction);
- (3) there is no word for 'proposition' in early Buddhism, and hence no concern with formal logic;
- (4) thus, *contra* Jayatilleke, there is no formal logical principle of contradiction in early Buddhism, but rather an heuristic principle or rule for conducting discussions which makes self-contradictory utterances

illicit. If one calls it informal logic, that is only from an external point of view.

- (5) the fourfold logic is best understood as having the general form: 1) there exists an X such that characteristic y applies to it, 2) there exists an X such that y does not apply but z applies, 3) there exists an X such that y applies (in part) and z applies (in part), and 4) there exists an X such that neither y nor z apply;
- (6) on this account the third position of the fourfold logic does not violate the heuristic principle of contradiction, and thus there is no internal inconsistency;
- (7) on this account the fourth position indicates that some other state of affairs (not any of the preceding three) apply;
- (8) finally, the two views that Buddhism has an entirely different kind of logic from Western logic and that Buddhism is fundamentally confused in admitting self-contradictions as valid are both exposed as inapplicable to early Buddhism. Thus, the impossibility of understanding early Buddhism by such appeals is clear.

Throughout I have been concerned to look at early Buddhism in its own terms. When looked at in its own terms, one sees neither fundamental confusion cause for despair (Poussin: 'We are helpless'), nor a modern system of logic constructed in antiquity (Jayatilleke: 'the early Buddhist conception of logic was far in advance of its time').²⁵ In general a moral to be drawn is that in understanding an ancient world-view, as in understanding a primitive society, it is not necessary that the others be seen as having precisely our concerns in order to be saying or doing something significant.²⁶

NOTES

1J.F. Staal, 'Negation and the law of contradiction in Indian thought' in *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 25 (1962), pp. 52-53.

2V. Trenckner (ed.), *Majjhima-Nikāya* (London: Luzac and Co. for the Pāli Text Society, 1964), vol. I, p. 232.

3I. B. Horner (ed.), *Middle Length Sayings* (London: Luzac and Co. for the Pāli Text Society, 1967), vol. I, p. 285.

⁴Trenckner, *op. cit.* p. 378.

⁵Horner, *op. cit.* vol. II, p. 43.

⁶T. W. Rhys Davids and William Stede, *The Pāli Text Society's Pāli-English Dictionary* (London: Pali Text Society, 1972), p. 668.

⁷The claim is that behavior is the criterion for identifying the states of consciousness of others, but not that states of consciousness are identical with behavior.

⁸F. L. Woodward (ed.), *The Book of the Kindred Sayings* (London: Pāli Text Society, 1980) vol. IV, p. 207. This is incorrectly cited (due to typographical error) as p. 270 in my article, 'Early Buddhist Four-fold Logic' in *Journal of Indian Philosophy* 10 (1982), p. 326.

⁹Lord Chalmers, *Buddha's Teachings* being the *Sutta-Nipāta* or Discourse Collection (Cambridge, Mass. and London: Harvard Oriental Series, 1932).

¹⁰K. N. Jayatilleke, *Early Buddhist Theory of Knowledge* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1963), p. 334.

¹¹Horner, *op. cit.* vol. II, p. 71.

¹²A relevant sense of 'heuristic' is given in *A Supplement to the Oxford English Dictionary* II, H-N (1976) as 'a rule or item of information used in such a process' of decision making (B 1 b).

¹³Horner, *op. cit.* vol. I, p. 285.

¹⁴J.F. Staal, 'Indian Logic' section of 'Logic, History of' in *Encyclopedia of Philosophy* vol. 4 (New York: Macmillan, 1967), pp. 520-523.

¹⁵Mrs. Rhys Davids and F.L. Woodward (eds.), *The Book of the Kindred Sayings* (London: Pāli Text Society, 1922), vol. II, p. 15.

¹⁶T. W. Rhys Davids and William Stede, *op. cit.* p. 509.

¹⁷David J. Kalupahana, *Causality: The Central Philosophy of Buddhism* (Honolulu: University Press of Hawaii, 1975), p. 143.

¹⁸Horner, *op. cit.* vol. II, p. 177.

¹⁹T. W. Rhys Davids (ed.), *Dialogues of the Buddha Part I* (London: Pāli Text Society, 1899), vol. II, p. 36. Sacred books of the Buddhists Series, F. Max Muller (series ed.), reprinted in 1977.

²⁰Horner, *op. cit.* vol. II, p. 97; vol. II, pp. 177-178; vol. III, p. 184.

²¹T. W. Rhys Davids (ed.), *Digha-Nikāya* (London: Pāli Text Society, 1890), vol. I, p. 126.

²²T. W. Rhys Davids, *op. cit.* (1899), p. 40.

²³David Hume, *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion* (Edinburg, 1957), Norman Kemp Smith edition, p. 212.

²⁴K. N. Jayatilleke, *The Message of the Buddha* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1975), pp. 49 and 51.

²⁵Jayatilleke, *op. cit.* (1975) p. 51; Poussin quoted in Jayatilleke, *op. cit.* (1963), p. 333.

²⁶In drawing this moral I find inspiration in Peter Winch's article, 'Understanding a Primitive Society' in Bryan R. Wilson (ed.), *Rationality* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1977), pp. 78-111.

CHAPTER 3

RATIONALITY AND PESSIMISM

Aside from the challenge to early Buddhism on the grounds of fundamental unintelligibility which was examined in chapter 2, another sort of objection comes from those who regard it as wholly pessimistic and in that way 'irrational'. Commenting on this sort of objection E.J. Thomas writes:¹

It is not more pessimistic than other religions that have called life a vale of tears, and it is definitely optimistic in teaching that the cause of pain can be known, and that there is a way by which it can be removed. But in being pessimistic it is consistently so, and it requires that one who really knows that existence is pain shall devote all his efforts to stopping it, that is, to understand what the cause is, and then to remove himself from all contact with it. The ordinary man does not believe that existence is pain. Even when he despairs about ever attaining pleasurable ends, he is still under the impulse, the thirst for pleasure. Evidently such a one is incapable of admitting or understanding even the first Truth. He can only come to realize the Truths by a course of moral and intellectual training.

The answer to the charge of pessimism can only be given after some account of the meaning of *dukkha* and of the claim 'all is *dukkha*' have been presented. Then after dealing with the problem of whether or not early Buddhism is 'pessimistic', I propose to examine the issue of the nature of pessimism. Are there features of Buddhism, which exclude or render implausible an interpretation of Buddhism as pessimistic? This is the question to be addressed in the present chapter.

We are told that, unlike the ten questions (containing the tetralemma concerning the *tathāgata*) which have not been 'determined' ('*abyākata*' or '*avyākata*' in Pāli), *dukkha* has been determin-

ed by him.² And in view of its prominence in the first *ariyasacca* or 'noble truth', the concept of *dukkha* is so fundamentally important that it is worthwhile spending some time getting clear on just what has been determined. What is *dukkha*?

To begin with, it is noteworthy that the five aggregates which constitute personality are impermanent, and that whatever is impermanent is *dukkha*.³ And we find statements like 'formerly as well as now all these material shapes are impermanent, painful, liable to alternation.'⁴ While not being synonymous with 'impermanence' (*anicca*), *dukkha* thus has descriptive import (a) by virtue of the fact of change in the world. And as the following passage bears out, it also has descriptive import (b) in reference to a range of experience which is minimally that of deprivation, and which may be that of mental and/or physical pain of various sorts:⁵

Katamañ c' āvuso, dukkhaṃ ariyasaccaṃ—Jāti pi dukkhā, jarā pi dukkhā, maraṇam pi dukkhaṃ, so-kaparidevadukkhadomanassupāyāsā pi dukkhā. Yam p' icchaṃ na labhati, tam pi dukkhaṃ; saṃkhittena pañcupādānakkhandhā dukkhā.

A translation by I.B. Horner goes:⁶

And what, your reverences, is the ariyan truth of anguish? Birth is anguish and ageing is anguish and dying is anguish; and grief, sorrow, suffering, misery and despair are anguish. And not getting what one desires, that too is anguish. In brief, the five groups of grasping are anguish.

Here '*dukkha*' is translated by Horner as 'suffering' in its occurrence in the long and much used phrase beginning with '*soka*' ('grief'), while it is translated as 'anguish' in the other occurrences here. The passage characterizes *dukkha* in the primary sense in which it functions in the first noble truth in terms of several other concepts, among which *dukkha* occurs again (consider the primary sense as *dukkha*₁ and the other as *dukkha*₂). Apparently *dukkha*₁ is not semantically equivalent to *dukkha*₂, for otherwise the characterization would be at that point tautologous.

Although it is disputable whether the former should be rendered as 'anguish' and the latter as 'suffering', Horner has seen the importance of assigning *different* meanings to them. T.W. Rhys Davids and Wm. Stede think that *dukkha* is 'to be understood as physical pain' in the combination of this term and *domanassa*, and render the '*soka* phrase' as 'grief and sorrow, afflictions of pain & misery, i.e. all kinds of misery'.⁷ However one interprets the precise meaning of *dukkha*₂, the important point to note is that the above passage shows that *dukkha*₁, has the much wider meaning indicated at (b) above.

One of the 'eighteen mental ranges' that a monk might achieve concerns *dukkha*. In achieving this mental range a monk 'ranges over the mental state that gives rise to sorrow'.⁸ The mental state which gives rise to sorrow is described elsewhere as the 'root of *dukkha*' which, when uprooted stops rebirth⁹. From the early Buddhist point of view this root is craving (*taṇhā*), a phenomenon which is, in theory at least, checkable not only for one's self but for others by anyone who, through meditation, masters a certain psychic power (*abhiññā*), enabling him to know the mind of another (telepathy, *cetopariyañāna*).

Since in early Buddhism it is a principle of nature, a principle of the way things are, that beings 'yearn for happiness and recoil from pain' (*dukkha*₂), it is appropriate to ask: where, if at all, does evaluation come into the picture? Is *dukkha* in any way an evaluative concept? The answer seems to be that in its more inclusive sense (*dukkha*₁) it is a characteristic of the *profane saṃsāra* in contrast to the 'no arising' and 'no falling' characteristics of the *sacred nibbāna* (with substrate).¹⁰ For *dukkha* is so by virtue of impermanence, as pointed out at (a), and the cessation of *dukkha* and the destruction of defilements (i.e., *nibbāna*) is not characterized by impermanence:¹¹

atthi bhikkhave tad âyatanam, yattha n' eva paṭhavī
na âpo na tejo na vāyo na âkâsânañcâyatanam na
viññâṇaṇañcâyatanam na âkiñcaññâyatanam na
nevaññânâsaññâyatanam n' âyam loko na paraloko
ubho candimasūriyâ, tad amham bhikkhave n' eva
âgatim vadâmi na gatim na ðhitim na cutim na up-
apattim appatiṭṭham appavattam anârammaṇam eva
tam, es' ev' anto dukkhassâ' ti . . .

atthi bhikkhave ajâtaṃ abhûtaṃ akataṃ asaṃkhataṃ,
 no ce taṃ bhikkhave abhaviṣṣa ajâtaṃ abhûtaṃ
 akataṃ asaṃkhataṃ, na yidha jâtassa bhûtassa katassa
 saṅkhatassa nissaraṇaṃ paññâyetha. yasmâ ca kho
 bhikkhave atthi ajâtaṃ abhûtaṃ akataṃ asaṃkhataṃ
 tasmâ jâtassa bhûtassa katassa saṅkhatassa nissaraṇaṃ
 paññâyati¹¹ti.

F.L. Woodward translates these *Udâna* passages as:¹²

Monks, there exists that condition wherein is neither earth nor water nor fire nor air: wherein is neither the sphere of infinite space nor of infinite consciousness nor of nothingness nor of neither-consciousness-nor unconsciousness; where there is neither this world nor a world beyond nor both together nor moon and sun. Thence, monks, I declare is no coming to birth; thither is no going (from life); therein is no duration; thence is no falling; there is no arising. It is not something fixed, it moves not on, it is not based on anything. That indeed is the end of Ill....

Monks, there is a not-born, a not-become, a not-made, a not-compounded. Monks, if that unborn, not-become, not-made, not-compounded were not, there would be apparent no escape from this here that is born, become, made, compounded.

The second Pâli passage here (after the ellipses) shows well the contrast between the sacred and the profane in the early Buddhist context.¹³ And it is interesting to note that in the preceding Pâli passage quoted just now 'the end of Ill' (*dukkha*₁) is characterized as neither arising nor falling, yet it is not characterized as 'something fixed' ('*thita*'), nor alternatively does it move. It is important to notice that *nibbâna* eludes conventional categories of experience and cannot, for example, be characterized as permanent by way of simple contrast with *samsâra* which is impermanent. This point also holds if one adopts the alternative translation of '*thita*' as 'eternal'. We have seen that 'everything impermanent is *dukkha*', but neither *anicca* (impermanence) nor

dukkha as characteristics of *saṃsāra* enter into straightforward logical opposition with talk about *nibbāna*. It is not said about *nibbāna* that it is permanent, for example, but that duration does not apply. Although sometimes called 'the highest bliss' (*paramam sukham*),¹⁴ *nibbāna* is often characterized only by way of negation. Flew says that such terms as 'apostate' and 'infidel' have 'both normative and descriptive meanings'. '*Dukkha*' is a concept of this sort, having both a descriptive component and an evaluative component.

In the phrase 'he knows as it really is, that this is *dukkha*, *yathā bhūtam*', 'as it really is', functions as an important qualifying phrase in that it brings home the descriptive-cum-evaluative aspect of the 'knowledge' of *dukkha*. There is an implicit contrast in any such talk of 'what is' with 'what seems to be', and in this context the implicit contrast is between the Buddhist (who knows *dukkha* as it really is) and the non-Buddhist (who does not understand *dukkha* in its more inclusive sense of *dukkha*). Thomas says: 'The ordinary man does not believe that existence is pain.'¹⁵ Although 'pain' is not a suitable translation of *dukkha*, Thomas' quotation correctly emphasizes that the generalized ordinary view is that there are painful feelings of various sorts, but not that 'all is *dukkha*'.

'*Agha*' (as in '*aghamulam*' or 'root of pain' at *Samyutta Nikāya* III, XXII, 31) means 'sin, error; evil, misery, distress, pain, adversity' according to Trenckner, who notes that '*agha*' is sometimes equivalent to '*dukkha*' and sometimes not.¹⁶ And the Pāli Text Society's dictionary says of '*agha*': 'the primary meaning is *darkness*'.¹⁷ Congruently it is also said that '*agha*' means 'the sky' considered as a dark empty void. *Dukkha*, however, does not have this latter meaning, and when the two terms are used synonymously this meaning of void or sky seems to drop out. For example, at *Samyutta Nikāya* vol. III, XXII, sec. 31 *agha* is used synonymously with *dukkha*, which had just occurred in sec. 13. In sec. 13 it is said that the five aggregates are *dukkha* and in sec. 31 that the five aggregates are *agha*. As Childers has noted, the terms mean the same here, and I suspect that both were purposely used in order to eliminate any loophole by means of which Buddhism might be incorrectly interpreted as having left open the possibility that in some sense or other suffering is not to be ascribed to the five aggregates.

