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modern *matters*.

Dr. Suzuki may now have entered into a new phase of life, a phase which will surpass such verbose discussions as this. Not only are we following him, he may be chasing after us.

(Translated by Shōjun Bandō)

BUDDHIST AND WESTERN VIEWS OF THE SELF

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There are at least two aspects of the Buddhist view of the self which differ quite radically from the predominant western view of the self. One is the emphasis upon self salvation ; the other is the an-atman doctrine in its two fold aspect of no substantial self and no eternal soul. The Buddhist scriptures contain many statements illustrating the first :

“By one’s self evil is done, by one’s self evil is left undone ; by one’s self one is purified. The pure and impure stand and fall by themselves, no one can purify another.”¹

“One should first establish oneself in what is proper, then only should one instruct others. Thus the wise man will not be reproached. If one would do what one teaches others, then, being himself well controlled, he would control others. For difficult indeed is self control.”²

“Therefore, O Ananda, be ye lamps unto yourselves. Rely on yourselves, and do not rely on external help. Hold fast to the truth as a lamp. Seek salvation alone in the truth.

¹ Clarence H. Hamilton, *Buddhism* (New York, 1952) p. 78.

² Venerable Acharya Buddhārakkhita Thera, *The Dhammapada* (Bangalore, 1966) p. 77.

Look not for assistance to any one beside yourselves."¹

"All that we are is a result of what we have thought; it is founded on our thoughts, it is made up of our thoughts. If a man speaks or acts with an evil thought, pain follows him, as the wheel follows the foot of the ox that draws the carriage."²

"All that we are is the result of what we have thought; it is founded on our thoughts, it is made up of our thoughts. If a man speaks or acts with a pure thought, happiness follows him, like a shadow that never leaves him."³

"Though he may conquer a thousand times, a thousand men in battle, yet he indeed is the noblest victor who would conquer himself.

Better, indeed, is self conquest than the conquest of others. Not even a Deva or a Gandhabba or Brahma can turn into defeat the victory of such a person who is self subdued and ever restrained in conduct."⁴

"Cease to do evil, learn to do good, cleanse your own heart : This is the teaching of the Buddhas."⁵

"Make an island refuge for yourself, strive hard and become wise. Rid of impurities and cleansed of stain, you shall not come again to birth and decay. One by one, little by little and from time to time, should a wise man remove his own impurities, just as a smith removes the dross of silver."⁶

"Easily seen is the fault of others, one's own, however, is difficult to see. Like chaff one winnows other's faults, but one's own one hides even as a crafty fowler hides behind

¹ Paul Carus, *The Gospel of Buddha* (Chicago, 1915) p. 234.

² E. A. Burt, *The Teachings of the Compassionate Buddha* (New York, 1955. Mentor Book) p. 52.

³ Thera, op. cit., p. 51.

⁴ Beatrice L. Suzuki, *Mahayana Buddhism* (London, 1959) p. 145.

⁵ Thera, op. cit., p. 113.

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sham branches."¹

"You yourselves must strive. The Tathagatas are only teachers. The meditative ones, who tread upon the Path, are released from the bonds of Mara."²

We are struck by several affirmations in the above passages. Each one is accountable for his own moral condition. One's purity depends on oneself. What a person is or becomes is determined by himself and no other. No one else can degrade us unless we let them do so. Heights of character are reached only as we will or choose and only as our acts are commensurate with our will. Whatever is achieved must be achieved through one's own effort. We cannot expect another to make the effort for us. Others can serve only as guides or lamps along the way. We are responsible for our actions and we cannot expect or demand that others be liable for them. One's faults cannot be blamed on others. They belong to us and we must be aware of and correct them ourselves. Our primary concern should not be to conquer others but ourselves, our own selfish desires and ambitions. Everyone must set his own house in order, or the disorder will belie his pronouncements and intentions.

In the passages cited the Buddha mentions no Deity we can turn to as in western religious thought, who will grant us salvation, either moral or eschatological. There is no all powerful God who will save us from the effects of our bad deeds, who will absolve us from our wrongs or who will by his suffering atone for or pay the penalty for them himself and thus enable us to evade moral responsibility. There is no Deity who can reverse the order of nature or the law of Karma, and by some miracle bring us to some end we should reach by ourselves. There is no supreme Being who will awaken us to a consciousness of our wrongs. Instead we must free our minds of slough and illusion so as to recognize them ourselves. There is no God who in some grand revelation tells us what is right and wrong ; instead we must search it out for ourselves. We cannot

¹ Thera, op. cit., p. 119.

² Thera, op. cit., p. 129.

expect or obligate either our fellowmen or a supreme Being to do for us what we should do for ourselves. Self and self alone is the cause and bearer of suffering or wrong. Release can be expected only through accepting and acting in terms of the moral law of Dharma.

Let us now turn to the "no self" doctrine of the Buddha and the metaphysical position in which it is grounded. It is the view that there is no absolute, independent self explicitly distinct from all other selves, that there is no immortal soul antithetical to the body, and that there is no self which is separate from its thoughts and actions. The Buddha's position contrasts with western thought which views the self as an absolute in two respects, substantiality and individuality. Regarding the first, the self is an entity, a thing-in-itself. There is an essence to the self which cannot be eradicated, which persists under all conditions. The individual has a real existence which, although it may take different forms, continues through all time and circumstances just as, so it appears anyway, the mountain continues unaltered despite the wind and rain which beats upon it.

In the second place the self or individual has an absolute or substantive existence in that he exists independently of other selves. He is self contained, complete unto himself. He has an absolute self identity. He is not subordinate to another. In the West this has given rise to the philosophy of "rugged individualism," the self made man, as reflected in William Henley's poem *Invictus* :

"Out of the night that covers one
Black as the Pit from pole to pole,
I thank whatever gods may be
For my unconquerable soul.

It matters not how straight the gate,
How charged with punishments the scroll,
I am the master of my fate :
I am the captain of my soul."¹

¹ William Benet and Conrad Aiken. *An Anthology of Famous English and American Poetry*, p. 374.

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The belief in the immortal soul is a correlate to the premise of the absolute self. Judaism and Christianity conceive of the soul as immaterial, hypostatic and eternal. It too is a thing-in-itself. It has an existence distinct from the body, for man is a duality of body and soul. It is invisible yet real, just as air is. The soul is the spiritual essence of the individual. It is the vital or essential part of the self which at death is divested from the body and continues on. Like the body and the individual, each soul is unique and distinguishable from every other soul.

The Buddha rejected both concepts of a substantial self and an eternal soul. We see this in the following statements :

“Only through ignorance and delusion do men indulge in the dream that their souls are separate and self-existent entities.”

“The Buddha teaches that all conformations are transient, that all conformations are subject to sorrow, that all conformations are lacking a self.”

“All creatures are what they are through the karma of their deeds done in former and present existences.”

“Not in the heavens, not in the midst of the sea, not if thou hidest thyself away in the clefts of mountains, wilt thou find a place where thou canst escape the fruit of thine evil actions.”

“Practice the truth that thy brother is the same as thou.”

“The Tathagata teaches that there is no self. He who says that the soul is his self and that the self is The Thinker of our Thoughts and the actor of our deeds, teaches a wrong doctrine which leads to confusion and darkness.”

“He whose mind is free from the illusion of self, will stand and not fall in the battle of life.”

“There is not a self residing in Name and Form, but the co-

operation of the conformations produces what people call a man."

"As there is no self, there is no transmigration of self; but there are deeds and the continued effect of deeds."

"All beings have karma as their portion; they are heirs of their karma; they are sprung from their karma; their karma is their kinsman; their karma is their refuge; karma allots beings to meanness or to greatness."¹

These passages contain the Buddha's central teaching regarding the self. The self is a process not an entity. It is a capacity not a thing. The quintessence of man is quality not quantity. The self is an aggregate of form, feelings, perceptions, dispositions and consciousness and as such can be broken up or dissolved. It is not constant but changing. As one author has written: "All individuals are a series of momentary states of consciousness... The self is a stream of cognitions... It is a series of mental and bodily processes which are impermanent."² The self is not absolute but relative and conditional. For each one life is "an unbroken series of states; each of these states depends on the condition just preceeding it and gives rise to the one just succeeding it."³ There are only momentarily existing selves and the term "I" has utilitarian value but no genuine equivalent: "In the place of an individual, there exists a succession of instants of consciousness... The consciousness of I does not reside in an eternal soul, but is a contingent phenomenon arising by way of cause and effect... That we give to such individuals a name and form is a pragmatic convention, and not the evidence of any inner reality."⁴ There is no independent self for the self is a network of relationships. Each self is but a part of an

¹ The quotations are taken from Carus', *The Gospel of Buddha*, pages 153, 160, 151, 149, 115, 81, 119, 159, 117.

² Jadunath Sinha, *Outlines of Indian Philosophy* (Calcutta, 1963) p. 87.

³ Satischandra Chatterjee and Dhirendramohan Datta, *An Introduction to Indian Philosophy* (Calcutta, 1960) p. 137.

⁴ Ananda K. Coomaraswamy, *Buddha and The Gospel of Buddhism* (Harper Torchbook edition, New York, 1964) p. 96.

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ocean of selves out of which it emerges and into which it returns. There is no absolute permanent self which continues unchanged even in the form of a soul.

What is there then? There are selves; they are only temporary however as "each Ego is a transient phenomenon arising momentarily out of and subsiding swiftly back into the whole."¹ Integral to Buddhism is the view that there is continuity as a result of the principle or law of Dharma. Just as one's present life is an "unbroken series of states," so there is an unbroken series of lives. Even as what we are in one moment in this life determines what we are in successive ones, so what we are in this life as a whole determines our next life — "There is rebirth of character but no transmigration of a self."² A well known example of this used by the Buddha was a flame passed from one candle to another. We see then that in Christianity the individual soul at the death of the body continues from one existence to another. In Hinduism the individual soul is handed on with its load of Karma from existence to existence. In Buddhism what is handed on is only Karma.

The metaphysical position on which the Buddha's view of the self rests is quite different from the dominant western metaphysical view. It is a combination of several positions. It is naturalistic in that he accepted the world of nature and objects as a fact or an existent. In this sense his metaphysics might be called a realistic idealism which recognizes the existence of non-ideal types of being but relegates them to a subordinate status. The Buddha's metaphysics is naturalistic also in his belief that reality is ordered by an internal not external or superimposed principle. All entities act in terms of the law of dependent origination. There is only natural not supernatural cause and effect. Everything that exists is dependent on something else for its coming into being and in turn does not perish without leaving some effect or giving rise to something else in turn. The law of Karma in the moral order has a

¹ J. G. Jennings, *The Vedantic Buddhism of the Buddha* (Cambridge, 1948) p. 515.

² Paul Carus, *op. cit.*, p. 153.

parallel principle in reality as a whole. He accepted singularism in that entities do have a separate existence but it is always momentary and relative, as every entity is set within the context of time. It comes into existence and goes out of existence, the duration in each case varying with the entity. Nothing lasts forever. Change and impermanence is the basic characteristic of our experienced world. It is the one attribute of existence we can be sure of.¹ In fact its certainty gives a sense of order and reliability to reality.

The Buddha's view includes organicism in that reality is a dynamic, pulsating complex of interrelationships. While entities may seem to have a separate existence, in actuality they do not. No entity is self created for it came into existence as a result of circumstances and existences prior to itself. When it goes out of existence, it will become parts of other existents. Nothing is ever completely lost ; it simply changes form as fire reduces wood to ashes. Even while it exists, its existence is dependent on existents outside itself, as a river lies on the earth surrounding it. Reality is a living whole. Like a biological organism it is composed of many parts and selves, no two of which are alike, but all of which are interdependent and interrelated.

The Buddha accepted monism in the sense that there is a oneness to the reality we know and experience. The river is not just the water we see. It could not exist without the land which forms its bed and shores. The banks however are a part of the plain through which the river meanders and the plain is a part of the mountains which forms its background. Reality is non-dialectical. It does not consist of sets of opposites in antagonism to each other but of differences which supplement one another and form a harmonious whole. The Buddha's philosophy exemplifies idealism in that he believed the universal to be more real than the particular. His idealism is combined with monism in that there is oneness be-

¹ In the Buddha's words, "All compound things are transitory ; they grow and they decay. All compound things are subject to pain ; they will be separated from what they love and be joined to what they abhor. All compound things lack a self, an atman, an ego." Carus, p. 158.

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tween states of existence as well as between phenomena and noumena. There is only one fundamental category, however, which may be indicated by several terms—being, consciousness, existence.¹ There are past, present and future existences all of which are related. There are various types of existence such as material and immaterial. We can give definite attributes to the former but not the latter.

In brief the Buddha's philosophy could be called an axiological idealism, for he postulated that the category of Value is logically and metaphysically prior to that of Being. Being is the form in which value is infused, as water takes the shape of the container in which it is poured, and materiality is the form in which Being is manifest. From such a metaphysical position, as explicated above, come five basic theses of the Buddha that the individual has only a momentary existence, that there is no eternal soul, that what passes on is Karma, that there is no Deity to grant us salvation but that it comes through our efforts alone.

The Buddha believed that experience could verify those theses. It could not sanction the postulate of an eternal soul and a supreme Deity external to man and nature as claimed by western religions such as Judaism and Christianity. The concept of soul does not come from experience but is an inference, whose validity follows only if a dualistic metaphysics and a dialectical epistemology are valid. The concept of an external Deity is in a similar status. It is a dialectical inference from certain observed or experienced aspects of the universe. We experience the natural and infer the supernatural. Change implies not-change, cause and effect a first uncaused cause, finite the infinite; impermanence points to permanence, the particular the universal, the material the immaterial, and so on. The Buddha believed that, since the concepts of Deity, soul and a substantial self cannot be proven, it is better to assert only what can be asserted with certainty, namely value and change, and to construct a limited philosophy and eschatology from them.

¹ "As all things originate from one essence, so they are developing according to one law and they are destined to one aim which is Nirvana." Carus, p. 164.

The Buddha's objections were based upon pragmatism or practical grounds also for he noted the consequences of such beliefs. He opposed the undesirable religious practices which came with belief in salvation by an external Deity. The Buddha found an extensive system of ceremonialism, incantation, sacrificing and ritualism being practiced at his time. Its purpose for many was to placate and gain the Deity's favor. This reduced man's relationship with the Deity to a bargaining or barter level which is not conducive to true religion.¹ The Buddha declared, further, that ceremonialism appeals to vanity and pride; sacrifices involve the suffering of animals, and ritual dulls conscience and thought. The Buddha believed that, if there is a Deity, surely he is not a being "who could be manipulated by magic rites or sorcery."² The Buddha believed that such an eschatology also leads to the offering of good works as insurance for salvation. When good works are done for reward, the result is an impurity of motive which negates the act. A good deed must be done from a pure motive if it is truly virtuous or, as the Buddhist would say, the deed must be void of virtue.³

The Buddha opposed such a methodology of salvation also because of the undesirable attitude it gives rise to. He believed that it would lead to the view that "If God forgives us anyway, it makes little difference how we live."⁴ It would encourage not discourage one to do whatever he can to work out his own salvation. As one author has noted, the Buddha felt that "many abstained from action in the faith that God would be everything for them."⁵ Two more consequences which the Buddha believed came from such a view

¹ Khantipalo Bhikkhu in *What Is Buddhism* (Bangkok, 1965) p. 3 writes, "The prayer which asks benefits for oneself is quite foreign to Buddhist thought, the latter aiming as it does at selflessness."

² P. V. Bapat. *2500 Years of Buddhism* (Delhi, 1966), Foreword by S. Radhakrishnan, p. x.

³ "Rituals have no efficacy; prayers are vain repetitions; and incantations have no saving power. But to abandon covetousness and lust, to become free from evil passions, and to give up all hatred and ill-will, that is the right sacrifice and the true worship." Carus, p. 33.

⁴ Bapat, *op. cit.*, p. x.

⁵ Bapat, *ibid.*

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and which he opposed were arrogance of mind and selfishness of heart. The point has been put very succinctly in the statement that, "Theistic views generally fill men's minds with dogmatism and their hearts with intolerance. Doctrinal orthodoxy has filled the world with unhappiness, injustice, strife, crime and hatred."¹ If those religious views lead to such irreligious and unethical consequences, better reject them, the Buddha said.

In keeping with his epistemology that one sound test of truth is the kind of consequences in the form of actions which follow from any belief, the Buddha emphasized the beneficial results of disavowing the substantial self, an eternal soul and an external Deity. If there is no substantial self, there is no ego which we feel compelled to constantly define, rationalize, promote or sell. If there is no substantial self, we shall not be motivated by self interest or consumed by self centered activity for, "whoever realizes all existences are non-ego, he cannot act from selfish motives, for he knows no self."² If there is no substantial self, there will be no absolute I and no ego barriers between men because there will be no absolute individualism which, as Suzuki pointed out, "incapacitates us to follow the natural flow of sympathy."³ If there is no substantial self, there is no I which possesses and we shall not be attached to either the I or the things it seeks to possess.⁴ Striving will seem foolish and struggle will lose its attractiveness. We shall no longer be in that position where, "When we take anything as a self (substantial and permanent), we become attached to it and dislike other things that are opposed to it."⁵ We shall accept the "suchness" of reality because we have gone beyond a dualistic attitude toward it for, as Toynbee has indicated, "a self cannot either shut out the rest of the Universe

¹ Bapat, *ibid.*

² Coomaraswamy, *op. cit.*, p. 139.

³ Daisetsu T. Suzuki, *Outlines of Mahayana Buddhism* (New York, 1963) p. 164.

⁴ "Dismiss the error of the self and do not cling to possessions which are transient but perform deeds that are good, for deeds are enduring and in deeds your karma continues." Carus, p. 117.

⁵ T. R. V. Murti. *The Central Philosophy of Buddhism* (London, 1956) p. 17.

or annex it."¹ If there is no substantial self, we can give up the placating of a savior Deity external to man and the universe as we pursue "the curse of individual immortality which strangely is so much sought after by some people."²

If we accept the Buddha's views we shall neither blame nor push off onto others things we are ourselves accountable for. We shall accept responsibility for ourselves in this and future existences. We shall recognize the essential oneness of reality, the fact that "All forms of life are sharing the same eternal Essence of life."³ If we accept that "there is never anything but the present," we shall find it easier to forget and forgive what has happened in the past; we shall not feel the insistent demand for assurances of a promising future "which make it impossible to live freely both in the present and in the promising future when it arrives."⁴ These themes are of immediate relevance to the West today with its unbridled individualism, its restless striving, its ceaseless seeking and mania for possessing. Christmas Humphreys with keen insight points out that it is the "Heresy of Separateness which causes the rival hatreds of the West, for once established that "I" am utterly different, separate from "You", and fratricidal wars in trade, politics, and in the open field will follow as a matter of course."⁵

To restate the thesis of this essay, the Buddha was dubious about, or at least did not affirm, the existence of an external Deity, an eternal soul, and a substantial self. The first two would encourage the individual to transfer his moral and eschatological responsibilities to God's shoulders.⁶ All three are inferences from experienced phenomena and entail a dualistic epistemology and metaphysics

¹ Arnold Toynbee, *An Historian's Approach To Religion* (New York, 1956) p. 290.

² D. T. Suzuki, *op. cit.*, p. 164.

³ Christmas Humphreys, *Buddhism* (London, 1958, Penguin Books) p. 150.

⁴ Alan W. Watts, *The Way of Zen* (New York, 1957, Vintage Book) p. 124.

⁵ Humphreys, *op. cit.*, p. 88.

⁶ In this paper no consideration has been given to the eschatological development in the Mahayana tradition where concepts such as the Bodhisattva and the Buddha Amitabha are found. Even they however do not have the same function as the saviour figure in Christianity.

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which the Buddha rejected. Belief in the first and second leads to religious practices which are base because they are selfishly motivated and involve the danger of man justifying his own desires and actions in terms of God. Belief in the third leads men to selfish and therefore unethical acts, to impure motivation of even virtuous acts, and to illusions of power and grandeur beyond finite man's capacity for handling.¹ In terms of the Buddha's outlook one does not have to believe in a personal Deity in order to be virtuous. Man has at least two alternatives. He can act in terms of God's will or he can do good for its own sake. The Buddha believed that acting in terms of the second has less inherent dangers, especially that of taking one's own will for God's.

What the Buddha was concerned about most was offering to mankind not a way for the forgiveness or cure of sin but a means of preventing sin from arising in the first place. He wanted man to deal with the cause of suffering and the primordial cause is internal not external to man. The urges for epistemological certitude, an absolute existence, and a separate selfhood must be given up. The attachment to existence itself must be overcome. Only then, he declared, shall we be freed of illusion and able to attain the state beyond the finite and the infinite, Nirvana.

¹ "Self is not a fit vessel to receive any great success; self is small and brittle and its contents will soon be split for the benefit, and perhaps also for the curse of others." Carus, p. 148.