

INTUITIVE AWARENESS:  
ISSUES IN EARLY MYSTICISM

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*NEGATIVE THINKING*

The main currents of medieval thought were shaped by dogmatics. In the cultural sphere of the Buddhist Far East Vasubandhu (ca. 320-400) and Buddhaghosa were the great compilers of Abhidharma dogmatics, while in Europe a corresponding development took place in positive theology that shows a strong Abhidharma flavor. This theology defined and systematized the truth of faith embodied in the teachings of the Church, i.e., in scripture, tradition, and the dogmatic definitions, laying the foundation for speculative theology. The beginnings of this systematization appeared in Peter Lombard and its methodology was established by Dionysius Petavius.

At the same time, a contrasting development was taking place in the form of negative theology, principally represented by the works of Pseudo-Dionysius (that is, those falsely ascribed to Dionysius the Aereopagite). The author of these texts complemented the positive language of the first way of affirmative theology (*kataphatikē theologia*) by a second, higher way of negative theology (*apophatikē theologia*), thereby evolving a third way through which negative theology led to an encounter with God in ecstasy through mystic immersion in superessential light. This negative apophatic

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thinking had a profound influence on the medieval mystics,<sup>1</sup> and indeed the thought of figures as late as Thomas a Kempis and Bonaventure may be described as forms of negative theology.

For the Asian analogue of this negative approach we must first turn our attention to the mystics of Mahāyāna Buddhism who taught the principle of emptiness.

#### EMPTINESS: THE DENIAL OF ESSENCE

Mahāyāna Buddhism based its insight into emptiness (*śūnyatā*) on the notion that all phenomena exist in interdependency. The root of the term *śūnya* (empty) means "to be swollen, to be hollow," for something that is swollen is hollow (or empty) on the interior. The Sanskrit term *śūnya* also refers to the modern mathematical symbol for zero.<sup>2</sup> The translators of the Chinese Buddhist canon rendered it through a character meaning "void sky" 空.

Mahāyāna Buddhists, particularly the philosophers of the Mādhyamika school, taught that there are no really existing things in fact, that all things are simply appearances and their true nature is empty and "lacks" any essence.<sup>3</sup> Nor does their non-being itself constitute an essence. Rather, all things arise conditioned by all other things. Emptiness is not nothingness or annihilation; it is the abandonment of the contrareity between dualities such as affirmation and negation, being and non-being, eternity and annihilation. In this sense, emptiness is the relationality of all things.<sup>4</sup>

The teaching on emptiness is frequently expressed through the use of simile. *The Diamond Sutra* teaches:

As stars, a fault of vision, as a lamp,  
A mock show, dew drops, or a bubble,  
A dream, a lightning flash, or a cloud,  
So should one view what is conditioned.<sup>5</sup>

The simile of the sky's void 虛空 occurs early in the Mahāyāna canon as a simile for the notion of emptiness. It is probably

for this reason that the Chinese translators chose the ideograph 空 to translate *sūnyatā*.

This notion of emptiness as negating any permanent essence was based on the idea of "impermanence" in early Buddhism. In later Mahāyāna teaching it grew in importance to form the basic idea of Mahāyāna Buddhism and the underlying supposition for all its teachings.

By contrast, the West did not evince such a full-fledged denial of essence. When it did, the force of the denial was greatly diminished by the Aristotelian idea of essence which held sway for a long period of time. We may note here the criticism of Bertrand Russell against this notion of the Aristotelian essence which had flourished for so long in the West:

"Substance," when taken seriously, is a concept impossible to free from difficulties. A substance is supposed to be the subject of properties, and to be something distinct from all its properties. But when we take away the properties, and try to imagine the substance by itself, we find that there is nothing left. To put the matter in another way: What distinguishes one substance from another? Not difference of properties, for, according to the logic of substance, difference of properties presupposes numerical diversity between the substances concerned. Two substances, therefore, must be *just* two, without being, in themselves, in any way distinguishable. How, then, are we ever to find out that they are two?

"Substance," in fact is merely a convenient way of collecting events into bundles. . . . A mere imaginary hook from which the occurrences are supposed to hang. They have in fact no need of a hook, any more than the earth needs an elephant to rest upon. Anyone can see, in the analogous case of a geographical region, that such a word as "France" (say) is only a linguistic convention, and that there is not a *thing* called "France" over and above its various parts. The same holds of "Mr. Smith;" it is a collective name for a number of occurrences. If we take it as

anything more, it denotes something completely unknowable, and therefore not needed for the expression of what we know.

"Substance," in a word, is a metaphysical mistake, due to the transference to the world-structure of the structure of sentences composed of a subject and a predicate.<sup>6</sup>

Russell's argument that the idea of essence cannot be established validly parallels the criticism of realism by Nāgārjuna and Āryadeva.

While the idea of creation out of nothing (*creatio ex nihilo*) existed in the tradition that flowed from Judaism into Christianity,<sup>7</sup> it differed from Mahāyāna teaching in the sense that the world was considered really to exist after it had been created.

A closer parallel to the notion of emptiness can be found in the Hellenistic West when we correlate the Buddhist idea of Reality-Limit (*bhūtakoi*) to the Greek idea of full, perfect nature (*plērōma*); or correlate emptiness to *kenōma* (emptiness) or Philo's *vacuum* (void).<sup>8</sup> Again, one can find a medieval Western analogue to emptiness in the teaching of "the desert of the godhead" in Ruysbroeck's "idle emptiness"; or in Eckhart's statements about "the still wilderness where no one is at home," "naked orison," and "the naked intent stretching unto God"; or in "the dark abyss" spoken of by Ruysbroeck and Tauler, an idea warmly received by those steeped in self-negation and self-denial. All of these ideas parallel the Buddhist doctrine of no-self. In the *Theologia Germanica* (ca. 1425) one frequently comes across terms that call to mind Buddhist technical terms. For example, "non-attachment" corresponds to *asaṅga* (non-attachment), "narrow views" to *viparyāśa* (erroneous ideas), "self-delusion" to *avidyā* (ignorance), "the way things are" to the *tathātā* (suchness), "union" to *eka* (unification) or *advaya* (non-duality), "empty" to *sūnyatā* (emptiness), and "desire" to *trṣṇā* (thirst).<sup>9</sup>

## ABSOLUTE NEGATION—SILENCE

The notion of apprehending the absolute negatively is said to have appeared *first* in Egypt. Centuries before the Psalms of the Israelites and David, there lived in Egypt an anonymous poet who, when addressing God in prayer, approached him not as friend or savior, not as something wrought in the likeness of human form or as a symbol enclosed in stone:

God cannot be seen with the eyes. He is without priests and needs no offerings. He is enshrined within no temple, His seat is unknowable. He is contained in no divine shrine or painted statue. There is no place that can be called his dwelling. His heavenly name is unknowable, his form cannot be manifested. To attempt to symbolize God is a vain activity. His seat is within heaven and earth, but he cannot be domesticated in any shrine wrought by human hands.<sup>10</sup>

One can find here, at a time that goes back even before the *Rig Veda* in India, a parallel to the teaching of the *Upaniṣads* that the absolute can be apprehended only in a negative fashion. This is almost a duplicate of the doctrine of the *Prajñāpāramitā* scriptures, and especially of Nāgārjuna's exposition of the point in his *Stanzas on the Middle Path*:

When mental activity ceases there are no referents for language. Reality neither arises nor passes away, in fact it is like cessation (18.7).

Despite the fact that the ancient Western philosophers did in some sense admit the existence of essences, the opinion that it is impossible for those essences to be conceptually apprehended appeared in the West quite early at a time probably not far removed from that of Nāgārjuna. Among those who held this opinion may be counted the Neo-Platonic and Gnostic sects,<sup>11</sup> particularly the later Neo-Platonists such as Proclus and Damascius, as well as their Christian counterparts, Origen and Dionysius the Aeropagite.

The *Mystical Theology* of the latter can indeed be described as a Christian version of *Heart Sutra*,<sup>12</sup> which teaches that truth is communicated only through silence. That is why it is said that "the silence of Vimalakīrti is like thunder." This orientation toward silence is also apparent in the Western mystical tradition. Not only William James, but Dionysius the Aeropagite, who stands at the source of Christian mysticism, described absolute truth only in negative terms. The original cause of all things is not soul or intelligence, but something ineffable and unconceivable. The absolute is not many, not sequential, not great. In it there is no smallness, no equality or inequality, no similarity or dissimilarity (again the terms of the *Prajñāpāramitā*). It transcends all descriptions of any kind. In fact Dionysius completely negates any such limitations, not because truth lacks such descriptions but because it transcends all of them, because truth differs from all descriptions of truth. This same method of attaining awareness of the absolute was advocated by Nicholas of Cusa and Giordano Bruno.

It is also possible to find notions that parallel emptiness as the ultimate principle in ancient China. The *Lao Tzu* says:

The *tao* is always non-active; thus neither is it not active (37:4).

One can indeed discuss whether the Buddhist notion of emptiness parallels the Taoist "empty nothingness" 虛無, but as a matter of fact those who introduced Buddhism into China did consider them to be identical, as shown in a passage from *The Larger Sukhāvātī-vyūha Sūtra*:

Their countenance and demeanor are transcendent and wondrous. Their appearance is wonderful, being neither divine nor human. They have all received bodies of spontaneous emptiness (自然虛無之身), bodies of no limitation.<sup>13</sup>

## THE LOGIC OF NEGATION

The Mādhyamika philosophers denied change in the phenomenal world and presented a logic in which truth is unable to be expressed in language. Nāgārjuna, the patriarch of the Mādhyamika school, states in the preface to his *Stanzas on the Middle Path*:

[In the universe] there is nothing destroyed, nothing born; nothing that passes away, nothing that endures; nothing that is a unity with itself, nothing differentiated from itself; nothing that comes [toward us], and nothing that goes [away from us]—this is the explanation of dependent co-arising taught by the Buddha (1:1-2).

Dependent co-arising means interdependence here and relationality.<sup>14</sup> It is synonymous with emptiness. It is this relationality of which change is negated, and since no change occurs in the basic nature of such relationality, there is no cause for either depression or elation.

The Taoists did not always agree, however. As Fung Yu-lan explains:

Wang Pi refers to the Way or Tao (道) as "non-being" (wu 無),<sup>15</sup> without, however, explaining very clearly what he means by this term. But when we turn to the *Chuang Tzu Commentary*, it becomes apparent that "non-being" is there interpreted as actually signifying a state of nothingness. In other words, it is equivalent to what we would today describe as a mathematical zero. Hence *Tao*, since it is "non-being," cannot be regarded as the first cause or prime mover for things in the world of being. On the contrary, we are told that all things are the way they are simply because of an inherent natural tendency which causes them to be thus.<sup>16</sup>

In opposition to the Buddhist doctrine of *sūnyatā* or nothingness, Chang Tsai (1020–1077) employed his key meta-physical concept of *ch'i* to prove the existence of the objective universe. His arguments were drawn from empirical data which he painstakingly gathered and reflected upon. This does not mean, however, that Chang Tsai is an epistemological empiricist in the sense that sense perception is the source of knowledge and that the existence of the external world is reduced to the awareness of the mind; in fact, this position is exactly what he attacked. Further, as a methodological skeptic his skeptical attitude is evidenced by an often quoted saying: "If one can doubt what seems to others not to be doubtful, he is making progress" (6.108). Chang Tsai would doubt the reliability of any proposition until it could be proved to be so."<sup>17</sup>

Nāgārjuna's argumentation in negating motion has frequently been compared to Zeno's. Similarities between these two thinkers have often been pointed out, particularly the similarity in their refutation of motion. But there are fundamental differences between Zeno and Nāgārjuna. The criticism has been leveled at Nāgārjuna that "his negative judgment is a negation of judgment."<sup>18</sup> This amounts to the claim that the Mādhyamika negation of movement is, properly speaking, the negation of the affirmative judgment about movement. But we should note that his whole criticism of the notion of movement does not deal with the judgment about motion, but about motion taken in a most "realistic way."<sup>19</sup>

Some of Nāgārjuna's arguments would appear to be sophistry, but are in fact attempts to break through an essentialist way of thinking, especially in the well-known version of the Sarvāstivāda school. Such a criticism also appears in the Platonic Dialogues. The *Theatetus* quotes Socrates as saying:

A little instance will sufficiently explain my meaning: Here are six dice, which are more by a half when compared with four, and fewer by a half than twelve—they are more and also fewer. How can you or anyone maintain the contrary?



. . . Again if I were to say that I who am of a certain height and taller than you, may within a year, without gaining or losing in height, be not so tall—not that I should have lost, but that you would have increased. In such a case, I am afterwards what I once was not . . . .<sup>20</sup>

Nāgārjuna makes a similar remark:

When one attempts to work with discrete idea of seeds and sprouts, then it is impossible for the sprout or the fruit to come from the seed, or for the seed to come from the fruit. If things exist (as discrete essences), then father and sons are indistinguishable.<sup>21</sup>

Śāntideva states in a like vein in his *Bodhicaryavātāra*:

Even if one were to claim that the father existed when the son did not yet exist [and is thus distinguished from him], how then could the son ever be born? And if the son does not exist, neither can the father exist. Therefore neither father or son exist [as discrete essences].<sup>22</sup>

A parallel here between East and West may be laid out as follows:

*Realism*

Plato

Sarvāstivāda

*Criticism of Realism*

Arguments against Plato

Nāgārjuna

In its methodology, Mādhyamika philosophy is quite close to the philosophy of Pyrrhon (360-275 B.C.E.) and the Sophists. Chrysippus (280-207 B.C.E.) maintained that opposites imply one another, that good without evil is a logical impossibility:

There can be nothing more inept than people who suppose that good could have existed without the existence of evil. Good and evil being antithetical, both must needs subsist in opposition.<sup>23</sup>

This logical principle would have been approved by Nāgārjuna, who himself stressed that "purity and defilement exist in interdependence."<sup>24</sup>

#### NEGATION OF NEGATION: THE STANDPOINT OF NO STANDPOINT

Nāgārjuna goes even further in advocating that one must also negate the principle of emptiness,<sup>25</sup> that is, that negation itself must be negated. This negation of negation constitutes a universal theme in Mahāyāna. As Nāgārjuna explains in his *Stanzas on the Middle Path*:

If something not empty existed, then something that is empty might exist. But nothing that is not empty does exist. How then could something empty exist? (13:7)

If there is no empty thing that exists, then emptiness as such cannot exist. The Chinese T'ien-t'ai sect, which inherited these ideas, presented as their basic formulation of this notion the principle that three truths interpenetrate each other. (1) All things have no ontological essence, i.e., are empty. This is the first truth of emptiness. (2) All things are simply appearances with a provisional, conventional existence. This is the truth of convention. (3) Although they do not really exist, the reality of all things as provisionally, conventionally existing is the principle of the middle path, the third truth. All things are to be understood in terms of these three insights. The notion of the negation of negation (a second-level negation) was expressed in the West by Meister Eckhart.<sup>26</sup> Moreover, the philosophy of emptiness carries no definite doctrinal content. Nāgārjuna's *Refutation of Vain Discussions* states:

If I were to have anything to advocate, then indeed I could be in error. But I have nothing to advocate. Therefore, I cannot be in error.<sup>27</sup>

With the same intent Āryadeva in his *Hundred Stanzas* states:

Non-existent people who advocate either that [all things] exist, do not exist, or both exist and do not exist, no matter how long they try, cannot refute this.<sup>28</sup>

The Mādhyamika philosophers felt certain that their own position was unassailable. The cultivation and realization by subsequent Mahāyāna Buddhists (including Zen) of mystic contemplation was grounded upon such an understanding.

This can be interpreted to mean that the Mādhyamika sect had no position of its own to validate.<sup>29</sup> Ordinarily dialecticians must demonstrate their thesis, whatever it may be. For example, the ideas of Plato, the absolute of Hegel or of Bradley all have their being in full accord with the process of reasoning. But Śaṅkara developed a new dialectical method wherein the absolute cannot be reached or attained through the processes of ascendant reasoning. This thesis can neither be refuted nor demonstrated, for *atman* must first be realized internally (*pratyak*). The first to present this dialectical method used by Śaṅkara was probably Nāgārjuna.<sup>30</sup>

In China Seng-Chiao (374-414) similarly advocated the position that it is impossible for either being or non-being to be described as either absolute or universal in regard to anything.<sup>31</sup>

In the West the skepticism of Arcesilas (315-241 B.C.E.) of the New Academy focused on logic. Arcesilas began the practice of refuting one's opponent in a learned and systematic fashion. He dealt with the dialectics of Plato in such a manner as to lend support to skepticism. The principle work of Sextus Empiricus also seems to have been composed with the hope of scoring points in debate, in which regard he resembles the Mādhyamika philosophers. According to Cicero, the skeptics were people who "sanctioned nothing as proved (*qui nihil probarent*)."<sup>32</sup> This position also resembles that of Mādhyamika, which considered the method of *reductio ad absurdum* (*prasaṅga*) to be the correct one. The Roman skeptics also report arguments based on the *reductio ad absurdum*.

As for wisdom herself, if she does not know whether she is wisdom or not, how in the first place will she make good her claim to the name of wisdom? Next, how will she venture with confidence to plan or execute any undertaking when there will be nothing certain for her to act upon? How can wisdom, while not knowing the final, ultimate good on which all things depend, acquit herself in practice?<sup>33</sup>

According to Cicero, the wise person (*sapiens*) "avoids being taken in and sees to it that he is not deceived," and the sceptics held that "nothing can be perceived" or grasped (*comprehendi*), an idea that parallels the teaching of the *Prajñāpāramitā* on the unattainable (*anupalabdhī*). This attitude is expressed in the phrase, "the wise man will restrain all acts of assent" (*adsensus, abhīniveśa*). We also find this attitude employed in Mahāyāna Buddhism. Again Cicero mentions the "perversity" (*pravitas*) of seeing the non-real as real, a condition the Buddhists called inverted thinking (*viparyāsa*). Furthermore Cicero takes a position against the senses, which are said to be "full of darkness," and argues against "everything that is approved in common experience (*consuetudo-samvṛti*)."<sup>34</sup> These attitudes also characterized Nāgārjuna and Āryadeva. In Mahāyāna Buddhism it is taught by the *Diamond Sutra* that:

One cannot see Buddha through his physical marks. All those marks are empty and vacuous—those varied marks are no marks and he who sees thus is he who sees Tathāgata. In such a Tathāgata, there is no enunciation of doctrine. Doctrine is like a raft—when one has reached the goal of transporting sentient beings, it is left behind.<sup>35</sup>

This kind of thinking is not absent in the West. The Christian heresy of docetism preached that Christ was not a material body, but only seemed (*dokeō*) to be one, thus earning it the name of docetism. This heresy highlights the influence of pagan, Hellenistic dualism with its denigration of the material world as evil and

defiled, an idea against which the early Church Fathers waged an intense campaign. Branded as heresy, this kind of thinking was virtually eradicated in the West.

In Mahāyāna Buddhism the understanding that flows from practice is called the perfection of wisdom (*prajñāpāramitā*), which combines with the fullness of the five perfections of giving, discipline, patience, zeal, and meditation to give us the six *pāramitā*, of which wisdom is the most important. Similarly, *gnosis* referred to the state of consciousness for the proponents of Christian docetism. Indeed the terms *prajñā* and *gnosis* come from the same root in the Indo-European languages. Subsequently Mahāyāna Buddhists came to worship this perfection of wisdom in an array of Buddhas and Bodhisattvas as a feminine principle, just as in later Gnosticism, wisdom (*sophia*) was revered as a feminine principle. Later this feminine principle was converted into a metaphysical principle. Indian *prajñā* not only became the womb for all good qualities, but was also regarded as the Buddha-mother (Bhagavati) that gave birth to all Buddhas, in much the same way that the Western Sophia came to be regarded as the source of all creation.

#### A BASIS FOR PRACTICE

Those who delight in this logic of negation direct their practice toward separation from all attachments and hindrances and make this their life goal. Plato was a rather typical moralist of a vigorous ascetic bent, not a theoretical skeptic. Unmoved by worldly affairs, he strove constantly to cultivate an aloofness from his surroundings.<sup>36</sup> The same can be said of numerous Buddhist and Hindu saints. In ancient India the question arose as to whether those who advocated emptiness (*śūnyavādin*) were nihilists (*nāstika*). The Mahāyāna position was that the doctrine of emptiness did not advocate nihilism. Emptiness is rather the principle that established everything. It represents both the ultimate realm and a foundation for practice, whence the Mahāyāna insistence that it is the true ground upon which ethical value is constructed. In emptiness nothing exists, and yet all things come from empti-

ness. It is like a mirror in which everything can be reflected because nothing exists in it.

The likening of the consciousness of direct religious insight and wisdom to images reflected in a mirror, the simile of the mirror as a medium reflecting the sacred, is found in China and India, in Buddhism, in Greece, and in Christianity.<sup>37</sup> In Mahāyāna, especially in Vijñaptimātratā, the wisdom realized through the conversion of the ālaya consciousness that forms the basis for our existence is termed "mirror wisdom." In the history of Chinese Ch'an, we read of the monk Shen Hsiu who understood the realization of enlightenment as the removal of dust from the surface of a mirror, in contrast to which the Sixth Patriarch, Hui Neng, advocated that the Buddha-nature had no need for any cleansing because it is originally pure—a point that subsequently became orthodox Ch'an doctrine.<sup>38</sup> But we must not forget that no matter how valued and esteemed as the "orthodox teaching" the system of Hui Neng may be among Japanese Zen followers, on the Chinese mainland, at least up to the time of the People's Republic, the northern Ch'an of Shen-hsiu continued to be observed at such places as Mount Omei, despite the fact that this strain of Ch'an has been dismissed in Japan.

Emptiness encompasses everything; there is nothing that stands over against it. Emptiness excludes nothing and opposes nothing. The true mark of emptiness is that it is essentially nothing, and yet it is the fullness of existence. It is the ground upon which all things come to be. It is a living emptiness. All appearances come about within it. Those who understand emptiness become compassionate (*maitrī*, *karuṇā*) toward all living creatures filled with life and power. Compassion is the reverse side of emptiness, encompassing everyone. In Mahāyāna the ground support through which all that is comes to be, is emptiness. Therefore, "the understanding of emptiness" is said to be universal wisdom. Emptiness is like a piece of clear jade in which images are reflected. Place it in front of a flower and a flower will appear in it. Place it in front of the empty sky and nothing will appear in it because only the empty form of the sky will be reflected. The reality of emptiness is unknowable and, just as crystal can reflect a variety of images, so

many phenomenal forms come to appear in emptiness spontaneously. When one understands emptiness, good conduct is elicited spontaneously. The practice of emptiness is conduct elicited in a spirit of magnanimity, graceful like a bird flying freely in the sky.

The track of the swan through the sky  
Never leaves traces —  
Its path is soon forgotten. (Dōgen)

Insight into emptiness is presented in Mahāyāna as the foundation for such practice. Practice must be based on insight into emptiness. As the *Diamond Sutra* teaches: "Having no place to abide, one must elicit this mind."<sup>39</sup> The Bodhisattva saves immeasurable, innumerable, unlimited sentient beings, but if he thinks that it is he himself who saves sentient beings, then he is not a true Bodhisattva. Hence, the savior is empty, the sentient beings to be saved are empty, and the realm attained through salvation is empty.

This same idea was taken over by Chinese Taoism: "You must not become conceited because it is you who by your own power save others."<sup>40</sup> During the same period Hinduism (*Bhagavad Gita*) taught that one should not focus on the fruits of one's actions but simply perform one's duty because it is one's duty. Here we see a stress on the positive meaning of practice as such. Indeed the main difference between Hindu mysticism and Brahmanistic mysticism—as also in Christian mysticism—is that it is far removed from quietism.<sup>41</sup> While Western thinkers are wont to emphasize life and Eastern thinkers to focus on meditation, at this time the roles were reversed.

The unattached practice advocated by the *Bhagavad Gita* teaches that one should act without attachment, not reckoning that such and such actions will result in such and such good results. A parallel kind of thinking was presented in the West by St. Paul, namely, that there is no necessity to make an external show of one's inner freedom from the world:

Those who have wives should live as though they had none,  
and those who mourn should live as though they had nothing

to mourn for; those who are enjoying life should live as though there were nothing to laugh about; those whose life is buying things should live as though they had nothing of their own; and those who have to deal with the world should not become engrossed in it. I say this because the world as we know it is passing away (1 Cor 7: 29-30).

On this point Schweitzer explains:

Here freedom from the world springs from faith in the imminent end of the world and the expectation of the kingdom of God. The life of this world is lived through the performance of the external actions that are needed to live in the world, but when one has become internally freed from the world, he already experiences the kingdom of God as his home. He (Paul) counterposed this teaching that granted that the world was still of use against the demand for world-rejection carried out externally, which was a highly valued option within his group.<sup>42</sup>

The idea of performing one's duty (*karma-yoga*) because it is duty is thought to have begun with Kant's categorical imperative. But Schweitzer pointed out:

The validation of the theory of the categorical imperative did not begin with Kant. This theory was already contained in Krishna's words, "Your concern must focus solely upon practice and take no heed of its results." But, while in Kant the content of that absolute duty is not clear, Krishna described it with precision, for he regarded that content as the sum of the various duties whereby a person spontaneously lives in accord with his position.<sup>43</sup>

One can say the same about Christian negative theology. As Rudolph Otto says:



This "negative theology" does not mean that faith and feeling are dissipated and reduced to nothing; on the contrary, it contains within it the loftiest spirit of devotion, and it is out of such "negative" attributes that Chrysostom fashions the most solemn confessions and prayers. He thereby shows once more that feeling and experience reach far beyond conceiving, and that a conception negative in form may often become the symbol (what we have called an "ideogram") for a content of meaning which, if absolutely unutterable, is none the less in the highest degree positive. And the example of Chrysostom at the same time shows that a "negative theology" can and indeed must arise, not only from the "infusion of Hellenistic speculation and native mysticism," but from purely and genuinely religious roots, namely, the experience of the numinous.<sup>44</sup>

The negative descriptions of Dionysius the Aeropagite, the unknowing (*nescio*) of Bernard, Ruysbroeck's "darkness into which all lovers lose themselves," the thought of Eckhart, are all developments that flow along this line. Eckhart awakens salvation through a philosophy of nothingness. In regard to "people who see God," Ruysbroeck writes that "their spirit is yet undivided and undifferentiated. Thus, apart from that unity they have no experience of anything else."<sup>45</sup> This directly parallels non-discriminative wisdom (*nirvikalpajñāna*) in Mahāyāna Buddhism.

The doctrine that "compassion-love," as the basic quality of human conduct, is identical with "understanding" of the absolute is of course not limited solely to Buddhism. The Mahāyāna notion that wisdom and compassion are identified through practice is found in various arguments of Thomas Aquinas. He teaches that "only God is essentially good,"<sup>46</sup> and that, at the same time as "God loves all existing things,"<sup>47</sup> "the fullness of knowledge exists within God."<sup>48</sup> Later Western thinkers treated this idea as normative and some even considered it to be an obvious fact.<sup>49</sup>

In Dante's *Divine Comedy* God is both love and knowledge, for the meaning of such love and such knowledge embraces the entire

universe. But *The Divine Comedy* is poetic in style and does not express the unity of love and knowledge systematically.

Oh Light eternal who only in thyself abidest, only thyself  
dost understand and to thyself, self-understood self-  
understanding, turnest love and smiling.

To the high fantasy here power failed; but already my  
desire and will were rolled—even as a wheel that moveth  
equally—by the love that moves the sun and the other  
stars.<sup>50</sup>

Beyond the widest of the circling spheres  
A sigh which leaves my heart aspires to move.  
A new celestial influence which Love  
Bestows on it by virtue of his tears  
Impels it ever upwards. As it nears  
Its goal of longing in the realms above  
The pilgrim spirit sees a vision of  
A soul in glory whom the host reveres.<sup>51</sup>

Although one can find such parallels between East and West, negative theology and mysticism remained secondary and peripheral in the West, while in East and South Asia at the very least they constituted a main doctrinal stream. Notions like emptiness were unable to secure a broad basis in the West, but were pervasive and accepted in Mahāyāna Buddhism in the East. (Even Pure Land doctrine is based on the logic of emptiness, which, at least on the surface, grounds its doctrinal reflection). Here we see an important difference between East and West. (To be continued)

#### NOTES

1. See Frits Staal, *The Study of Mysticism: Methodological Essay*, (Berkeley 1972), for recent research on Eastern and Western mysticism.

2. The zero, originally discovered by the Indians, was transmitted to the Arabs around 1150, and then introduced into the West. The mathematics of Arabia come from this Indian source and there is no specific Arabic mathematics.
3. The term *śūnya* in Sanskrit has the meaning of "to lack something."
4. Stecherbatsky translates the term *śūnyatā* as "relativity" or "contingency" (*The Conception of Buddhist Nirvana*, passim). Aristotle also takes the notion of relativity in a general sense. In his *Metaphysics* he understands *ad aliquid* not as one of the various distinct categories of differentiation, but as something included in all categories. He does not argue for the relative as something that has no being, but rather as being (*ens*) in the minimal degree. Thus for him the question of whether being (*ens*) is itself relative remains undetermined (Stecherbatsky, pp. 42-43). We are concerned lest the use of the term "relativity" in explaining Buddhist teaching lead to misunderstanding, and have therefore employed the term "relationality" at the suggestion of Professor Philip P. Weiner.
5. *Vajracchedika*, verse 32; T.8, p. 752c-753a. (Eng. transl. from Edward Conze, "The Diamond Sutra," *Buddhist Wisdom Books* (1966 ed.), p. 68.)
6. Bertrand Russell, *History of Western Philosophy* (1967 ed.), pp. 211-212.
7. See Kawada Kumatarō 川田熊太郎 "Creatio ex nihilo no kigen" (The Source of *Creatio ex nihilo*) in *Komazawa daigaku bukkyōgakubu ronshū*, 6 (Oct. 1975), pp. 1-8.
8. See Johannes Rahder, *Journal of Indian and Buddhist Studies*, 9.2 (1961), p. 754. (Jacques May's Translation of *Prasanna-padā*.)
9. I am drawing here on Edward Conze's "Buddhist Philosophy and Its European Parallels" in *Philosophy East and West*, 13.1 (April 1963), pp. 9-23.
10. Radhakrishnan, *Shūkyō ni okeru higashi to nishi* (East and West in Religion), Japanese transl. by Kanaya Kumao (金谷熊雄). p. 48.
11. For a recent good study on Gnosticism, see *Historia Religionum*. Vol. 1, "Gnosticism," Widengren and Bleeker, eds.
12. *Peri mystikēs theologias* I. 2; II. 1; III. 1, Chaps 4 & 5. Conze says: "The translations are apt to obscure the parallel, which

- becomes strikingly obvious as soon as the Greek text is consulted" ("Buddhist Philosophy," p. 17, n. 61.).
13. *Ta wu-liang-shou ching* 大無量壽經, T.12, p. 271c.
  14. I use the somewhat unusual term "relationality" (it is not a dictionary word) to interpret dependent co-arising in the same manner as does Professor Philip P. Wiener.
  15. In the *Lao Tzu* the term *tao* symbolizes creativity as a metaphysical absolute. See Arnolds Grava, *Philosophy East and West*, 13.3 (Oct. 1963), pp. 248-249.
  16. Fung Yu-lan, *A History of Chinese Philosophy*, transl. D. Bodde, vol. 2, (Princeton 1953), pp. 207-208.
  17. Siu-Chi Huang "Chang Tsai's Concept of Chi," *Philosophy East and West*, 18.4 (Oct. 1968), p. 256.
  18. T.R.V. Murti, *The Central Philosophy of Buddhism: A Study of the Mādhyamika System*, (London: George Allen & Urwin, 1955), pp. 155 and 160.
  19. Raymond Panikkar, "Mādhyamika and Indian Philosophy" *Philosophy East and West*, 16.3-4 (July-Oct. 1966), p. 126.
  20. B. Jowett, *The Dialogues of Plato*, 2:156-157.
  21. *Prasannapadā (Madhyamika-vṛttiḥ: mūlamadhyamaka-kārikās de Nāgārjuna avec la Prasannapadā commentaire de Candrakīrti*, Publiée par Louis de la Vallée Poussin, St. Petersburg, L'Académie Impériale des Sciences, 1903-1913. Bibliotheca Buddhica, p. 376.
  22. *Bodhicaryavātāra*, 9.114. See *Nyāyasūtra*, 2, 1, 41; 4, 1, 30.
  23. Russell, *History of Western Philosophy*, p. 257.
  24. *Mādhyamakakārikāḥ*, 23.10-11. See also 7.12.
  25. B. Russell raises the question of whether relativity is itself relative, only to reject it as meaningless. He often argues that "some superior people are fond of advocating that "all things are relative." But this of course is nonsense, for if all things are relative or if all things are taken to be relative to other things, how could they not exist? But it is possible to state that all things in the natural world are relative to the observer without falling into metaphysical absurdity." See B. Russell, *The A B C of Relativity*, p. 14.
  26. The phrase "nichtesniht, daz e was denne niht," ed. Pfeiffer, pp. 322, 539, is taken from P. Deussen: *Allgemeine Geschichte der Philosophie*, I.2, p., 136. See Paul Deussen, *The Philosophy of the Upanisads*, p. 149.
  27. *Vigraha-vyavartanī*, verse 29, cited in *Prasannapadā*, Poussin

- ed., p. 16.
28. *Catuṣataśāstra*, 16.25 (quoted in *Prasannapadā*, p. 16).
  29. Professor Murti indicates some similarities between the Mādhyamika philosophy and Kantian philosophy. Despite the criticisms of his research methodology by Dr. May, Professor Murti's main points remain significant. (Murti, *The Central Philosophy of Buddhism* (1959), pp. 102-111). Conze argues that there is no foundation for any parallel between Mādhyamika and Kantian philosophy (Explained in detail in Conze, *Philosophy East and West*, 12.2 (June 1963), pp. 107-109). But there is no doubt that there is at least a surface resemblance between the two rules of contradiction of Kant and the Buddhist way of dealing with speculative argumentation (*sthāpanīya* 捨置記).
  30. R.C. Pandeya, *Philosophy East and West*, 14.1 (June 1963), pp. 20-22.
  31. Richard H. Robinson, *Philosophy East and West*, 8.3-4 (Oct. 1958, Jan. 1959), pp.99-120.
  32. Cicero, "De Natura Deorum;" *Academica*, ed. and transl., H. Rackham, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1933), pp. 488-489; *Academia II* (Lucullus), 6.17. The below notes to note 43 are drawn from Conze, *Philosophy East and West* (1968), p. 18.
  33. Cicero, "De Natura Deorum;" *Academica II*, *op cit.* p. 499; *Academica II* (Lucullus), 8.24.
  34. Conze, "Buddhist Philosophy," pp. 16-18.
  35. *Vajracchedika*, verse 6; T. 8, p.749b.
  36. *Sextus Empiricus*, transl. R. G. Bury, 4 vols.; "1. Outlines of Pyrrhonism" (New York: G.D. Putnam's Sons, 1933), p. xxx.
  37. P. Demiéville, *Sinologica* 1.2 (Bale 1947). In Yamaguchi Susumu 山口 益 *Furansu no bukkkyōgaku no gojyūnen* フランスの仏教学の五十年 p. 1122.
  38. T. 48, p. 349a.
  39. T. 8, p. 749c.
  40. *Tao shih*, 145.
  41. Schweitzer, *Die Weltanschauung der indischen Denker*, p. 139.
  42. Schweitzer, *ibid.*, p. 146
  43. Schweitzer, *ibid.*, p. 148
  44. Rudolf Otto, *The Idea of the Holy* (Oxford University Press 1928), pp. 184-185.
  45. See Tauler, "Sermon on St. John the Baptist," in *The Inner*

- Way: *36 Sermons for Festivals*. New Translation, edited with introduction by Arthur Wollaston Hulton (London: Methuen and Co., 1901), pp. 97-99. See St. John of the Cross, *Noche Oscura*, vol. 1, Book 2, Chap. 17. Based upon E. Conze, "Buddhist Philosophy," p. 18.
46. *Summa Theologica* I.VI.3., p. 29.
47. *Summa Theologica* I.XX.2, pp. 121-122
48. *Summa Theologica* I.XIV.1, pp. 75-76.
49. In the West wisdom and compassion are correlated. In the phrase, "the infinite wisdom and goodness of the Creator" (N. Hawthorne, *Biographical Stories*, Chapter on I. Newton), goodness has the meaning of compassion.
50. Dante, *Divine Comedy*, transl., Carlyle-Okey-Wickstead. New York: Random House, 1950, pp. 605-606.
51. Dante, *La Vita Nuova*, transl. Barbara Reynolds (Penguin Books 1969), p. 99.