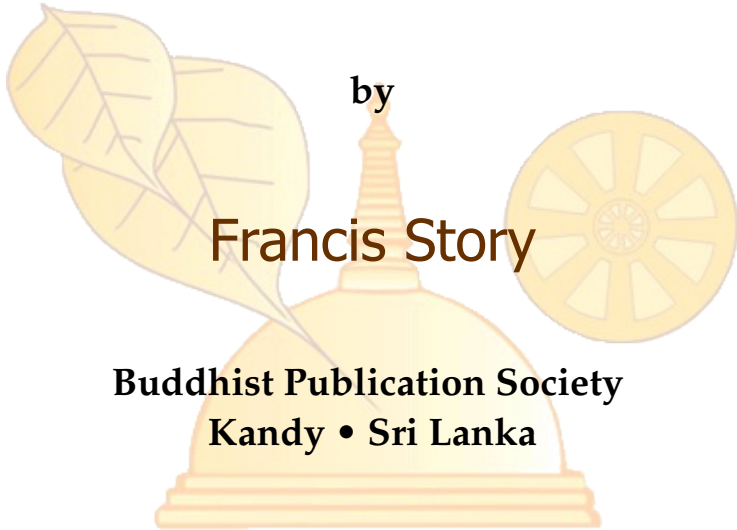
Wheel Publication No. 80/81

Dialogues on the Dhamma

Francis Story

Dialogues on the Dhamma



by

Francis Story

Buddhist Publication Society
Kandy • Sri Lanka

The Wheel Publication No. 80/81

1st Edition: 1965
2nd Impression: 1974

BPS Online Edition © (2008)

Digital Transcription Source: BPS Transcription Project

For free distribution. This work may be republished, reformatted, reprinted and redistributed in any medium. However, any such republication and redistribution is to be made available to the public on a free and unrestricted basis, and translations and other derivative works are to be clearly marked as such.

Author's Note

Mr. Thompson and the *Upāsaka*, the protagonists in these discussions, are imaginary characters. But the questions are real ones, which have been posed at various times by people interested in the Dhamma. It is hoped that the answers given to them here will be helpful to all those to whom the same problems have presented themselves.

> "You have come from afar, O Sabhiya," the Blessed One said, "longing to ask questions. I shall put an end to your doubts when I am asked those questions. In regular order, and rightly, I shall explain them to you.
>
> "Ask me then a question, O Sabhiya. Whatsoever is in your mind, that question I will explain and put an end to your doubt."
>
> Then thought Sabhiya, the *Paribbājaka*, "Marvellous it is, and wonderful indeed! This reception, such as I have not from other *samaṇas* and *brāhmaṇas*, has been given me by Gotama!" And gladdened, rejoicing, delighted and highly elated, he asked the Blessed One a question."
>
> —Sabhiya Sutta – Sutta Nipāta

"There are, O Monks, four ways of answering

questions: there are questions requiring a direct answer, questions requiring an explanation, questions to be answered by counter-questions and questions to be rejected (as being wrongly put)."

—Aṅguttara Nikāya II 46

Dialogues on the Dhamma

I

Mr. Thompson: Good evening, Sir, I have seen you several times on my visits to this temple, and have been told that you are an *upāsaka*. That means a lay follower of the Buddha, doesn't it?

The Upāsaka: Yes, Is there anything I can do for you?

Mr. T: I was wondering whether you would mind answering a few questions for me. You see, I have been reading some books on Buddhism and find its doctrines very appealing. But there are a number of points that are not quite clear to me, and I should be very grateful for any help you could give.

U: Why, certainly, I hope you will ask me freely about anything you wish to know. I'll try my best to answer your questions.

Mr. T: That is very good of you.

U: Not at all. We consider it a great privilege and a deed of merit to give instruction in the Dhamma when it is asked for. So go right ahead and ask me anything you like. All I ask in return is that you keep an open mind and give serious thought to what I shall say, because the doctrines of

Buddhism are not dogmas, to be absorbed without reflection, but universal truths which, to be of benefit, must be understood in all their implications. Buddhism invites, indeed, I would say, insists upon a critical attitude of mind, yet one that is sufficiently flexible to accept a new idea when it is shown to be in accordance with reason, observation and experience.

Mr. T: Yes, that much I have gathered from my reading. So, Sir, as you have given me licence to question freely I shall start with a point that has been bothering me. I hope you won't mind if I put it very bluntly?

U: I assure you I shall not mind in the least. But blunt questions sometimes elicit sharp answers, you know! So you must not mind that, either.

Mr. T: Good! I can see by your smile that we shall understand each other very well. Since I want to get at the truth I would rather that we spoke straight to the point—as philosophers rather than as diplomats! Well then, my first question is this: Isn't Buddhism a selfish doctrine since its aim is perfectionist, with *Arahantship* [1] as the goal?

U: Put like that, your question sounds as though you consider that the aim of making oneself perfect must necessarily be a selfish one, but I don't think that is quite what you mean, surely?

Mr. T: Not exactly. I mean, shouldn't one try to help others to gain perfection, as well as striving for it oneself?

U: There is a twofold answer to that, and you can place the emphasis on whichever aspect of it you like better. To begin with, one who is trying to make oneself perfect **does** help others. Not only by example, which is the strongest influence of all, but also by teaching. Buddhist monks have always had it as one of their functions (although not necessarily a duty) to teach the Dhamma to lay people, especially to children. In the Buddhist countries, formerly, bhikkhus were the chief educators, and they always gave first place to religious instruction, as being that which ultimately is of the greatest benefit to mankind. But as you know, Buddhism does not point to any external means for attaining "salvation." In the end, we all have to strive individually, and reach the goal individually. Beyond a certain point no one can help another. Even a Buddha can only show the Way; he cannot tread it for us. Furthermore, one who is himself still sunk in the mire of ignorance cannot lift another person out of it, or even render the same help as can one who is standing on firm ground. A Buddha or an *Arahant* is one who is on firm ground, and it is he who can do most to help others out of the quagmire. So if we want to render the most effective aid it is surely our first task to get out ourselves. Until we have done that, we may be able to extend a little help by way of teaching what we know to those who know less, but that should never be allowed to obstruct our first aim, which must be to liberate ourselves.

Mr. T: Yes, I see your meaning. I suppose to understand Buddhism properly one has to give up thinking in terms of

"leading others to God."

U: Precisely. We can light a lamp for others here and there as we go along the path ourselves, and every conscientious Buddhist will do so, by making use of whatever opportunity comes his way of making the Dhamma known to others. It is then up to the others to take advantage of the light or not, as they wish. Truth cannot be associated with compulsion. It has to be accepted freely and followed freely. We cannot drill others into Perfection—only ourselves. But I do want you to realize that to have attained perfection—the complete eradication of ignorance and craving—means to have destroyed selfhood and egotism. So how can it be selfish?

Mr. T: I must confess I hadn't thought about it in that way. It is true, of course. But I was also thinking of social obligations and relationships. Is the doctrine of "withdrawal from the world" and renunciation compatible with social development and "team spirit"?

U: If one were to withdraw from the world out of a spirit of misanthropy, as certain hermits have done and still do, certainly it would be a negative act, a repudiation of society and one's responsibilities towards it. But in a civilization given over to materialism and competitiveness it is a good thing that some people should point the way to a simpler and healthier way of life, by renunciation. When I say healthier I mean just that—a life that is not dominated by greed for possessions, for sense-gratification or for power

over others. It is these things that have brought our present civilization to the brink of destruction, without giving any real, lasting happiness to anyone in the process. In Buddhism, renunciation of the world is a positive act, not a mere negation. It leads to a life that is sane, balanced and integrated to the highest degree. If people purify their lives, live in accordance with sound ethical principles, and exert themselves to get rid of selfishness and the aggressive instincts that arise from it, then social progress follows automatically. Those who practise renunciation introduce new and more wholesome values into life, and their influence is felt permeating society. In fact, this is the only true way to bring about genuine social reform. All improvements in human life must come from within, as an organic growth of human consciousness, out of the developing sensitiveness and refinement of man's nature. It is useless trying to impose reforms of any kind from without, by laws and acts of government. On the contrary, such legal enactments have force and validity only when they are an expression of the real character of the people. The goodness of society is the goodness of the people.

Mr. T: You mean that every society is just an extension of the personality of those composing it? And that the mass personality can be influenced for good by the example and teaching of those who reject the lower values in favour of higher ones?

U: You have put it very well. Our civilization is primarily a commercial one; it is built up on the intensification and

multiplication of "wants". But this encouragement to perpetual *wanting* of one thing after another is nothing but the systematic cultivation of discontent. That in turn breeds conflict—and so we get crime within society, and hatred and suspicion among societies. And the more man is integrated with society, the harder it is for him to withstand its pressures. Being forced to accept the prevailing values, he strengthens them by his acceptance, and so there are reciprocal movements, from society inwards and from the individual outwards into society, which accelerate the trends, good or bad, of the age. Now all these mass movements tend to flow along the lower channels of human nature, the grooves worn by greed, hatred and delusion. This is a state of things that can be corrected only by giving the individual opportunity to cultivate detachment, and by setting before him, in place of examples of successful acquisitive competition, examples which prove that our real happiness lies in our capacity for doing without, of being self-sufficient. It is not expected that every man should practise total renunciation, but those who do so help others, by their example, to loosen the bonds of craving, and so create a healthier, sounder type of society.

Mr. T: Then what about social service?

U: Well, it is a good thing, of course, and Buddhism encourages it. But even social work may be a failure if it is not grounded on a genuine love for one's fellow-men. If it is not inspired by a real altruism, which stands as the opposite to a desire to win esteem for oneself or to impose one's will

on others, it can do more harm than good. And even good intentions are not enough, without sympathy and understanding. That is why we find so much well-meant blundering in the world. But if people improve, social conditions improve—that is the teaching of Buddhism. As for the "team spirit" you mentioned just now, surely it springs up most naturally and strongly where there is least selfishness, least acquisitiveness and individual competition, and most desire to work for a goal beyond that of self. Buddhism maintains that the world should always be guided by men of wisdom and insight, and it has always been from the ranks of those who have renounced the world —the entirely disinterested spirits—that such men have been drawn. They are the guiding lights of humanity, and a world bereft of them would be in spiritual chaos.

Mr. T: But shouldn't the Sangha devote itself explicitly, at least in part, to social service? Why doesn't it do so?

U: Well, you know, making oneself perfect, in the Buddhist sense, is really a full-time job! And that is what a bhikkhu really takes the robes for. May be he does not expect to achieve it in this life—few do, in fact—but his main task is to cleanse his mind of the impurities as much as he possibly can, and that, if it is done intensively, leaves little time for anything else. It is not a thing that can be done in the midst of distractions, and no social work can possibly be undertaken without getting oneself involved in distracting situations and becoming burdened with cares—to say nothing of the feelings of aversion that are likely to arise if

one is engaged in a battle against man's greed, stupidity and callousness. The bhikkhu's social work consists in teaching the Dhamma, and that is the greatest contribution anyone can make to the welfare of others. If the laymen, who from choice are still in contact with worldly things, take the Dhamma to heart, they will look after its social application. One cannot sincerely practise the meditation on *mettā*, universal benevolence, without feeling the urge to give it some practical form. The bhikkhu plays his part in social service by helping to make good lay Buddhists. If he achieves that, everything else follows.

Mr. T: You said just now that it is not necessarily a bhikkhu's duty to teach the Dhamma.

U: In the strictest sense there are only two duties enjoined on a bhikkhu, the *dve-dhurāni* or twofold charge of the bhikkhu's life. One is *gantha-dhura,* the task of studying the Dhamma as it is written in the texts. The other is *vipassanā-dhura,* the practice of meditation leading to insight. Any instruction that a bhikkhu gives to others, as the outcome of his mastery of either sphere of the monk's endeavour, is something additional, which he takes on out of kindness to his pupils or lay supporters. He is not forced to teach, simply because it is not everyone who is capable of teaching, even though he may know the subject himself. There may be impediments which prevent his preaching. This, incidentally, is one of the distinctions which show that a bhikkhu is not a "priest". But the Buddha did indeed impress certain other obligations on the monks, if they were

able to carry them out, and if occasion arose. One was the duty of the bhikkhus to take care of their companions who were sick; another was to give hospitality to visiting bhikkhus and to look after their needs. And he often emphasized, as the *Vinaya* shows, that the monks were to respect the convenience of their lay supporters in the matter of meals and the other necessities provided for them. For example, the rule of not eating solid food after midday was instituted by the Master, among other reasons, to prevent undue inconvenience to the householders. And of course it is the bhikkhu's duty to observe faithfully the 227 rules of the Sangha. This in itself is no light obligation. It can only be carried out consistently by those who have given up all other duties of a more worldly kind.

Mr. T: Yes, I see the truth of that. Now, I am interested in what you remarked about not being "priests". Can you tell me what other distinction marks the difference between them?

U: A priest is someone who is authorized to act as a mediator between human beings and a god or gods. The bhikkhu is not a functionary of that kind at all. Hence he is not obliged to officiate at any ceremonies, offer up any prayers, give any absolution or perform any sacrificial rites. Buddhism does not recognize any of those offices of a priesthood. All ceremonials, rituals and ecclesiastical performances, designed to awe and impress the multitude, are *sīlabbataparāmāsa*—useless observances. Buddhism has no place for them.

Mr. T: Thank you. You have certainly cleared up for me the matter of the bhikkhu's role in social progress. I have always felt that if the spirit of love and service can be strengthened in the hearts of the people, it must result in the betterment of conditions everywhere. But I wasn't quite sure what part the religious ought to play in translating thought into action. Now I have a question of a different kind—one touching on doctrine.

U: Well, what is it?

Mr. T: It's this: doesn't the Buddhist conception of heaven and hell as rewards and punishments amount essentially to the same as Christianity teaches?

U: In the sense of moral retribution, yes, there is a similarity. But consider the differences; they are far greater.

Mr. T: In what way?

U: Surely the most obvious difference is that the Christian heaven is an eternal reward, and its hell an eternal punishment, whereas the heavens and hells—or states of purgation would be a better term—taught by Buddhism are impermanent like all other conditioned states. Buddhism does not teach that it is just to inflict an eternity of torment on a being for a wrong action that was limited, both as to its carrying-out and in its effects, by earthly time. Even if a man were to be the worst possible sinner all through his life, it would hardly justify consigning him to hell for all eternity. And it is not in human nature to be so consistently bad. Likewise, no ordinary man during his lifetime could be so

free from wrongdoing as to deserve eternal bliss in a heaven, without some further purification. And since moral purification can be achieved only by and through the mind and volitional action and not merely by undergoing a period of physical torture, it can only come about through repeated trial and development in the world of sense-desires—that is to say, through rebirth again and again in this and other worlds. Buddhism teaches that "punishment" is exactly commensurate, in duration and degree, with the wrong action that has brought it about. The same applies to the happy results of good actions. When the results of the good or bad kamma are exhausted, the being leaves the state of reward or punishment and is re-born elsewhere. But we do not really like to use the words "punishment" and "reward", because these results come about as the operation of natural law—a law which is quite impersonal and at the same time inescapable. They are not inflicted or awarded at the whim of a deity who can forgive or increase punishments arbitrarily. The law of moral retribution is an automatic process. That is another very important difference between the Buddhist and the Christian concepts. It is important because it does away with the idea of vengeance in justice. If there were a God who was omnipotent he could forgive and wash out all sins; if he does not, his justice is only another word for revenge. But Buddhism shows that it is the individual himself who passes judgment, in the very act of performing a deed. It is he who sends himself to heaven, or consigns himself to a state of suffering, not a

jealous and revengeful God, who is himself impervious to harm from his creatures.

Mr. T: Then do Buddhists really believe in hell? I don't!

U: Whether one believes in it or not has no real bearing on the principle involved, which is that of moral retribution. To believe in "rewards"—that is, heaven—but not in "punishment" is to make good and bad, right and wrong, meaningless words. If you reject hell, you must reject heaven likewise. If you are prepared to do that, well and good—but you are left with nothing more than materialism. That vile and odious crimes against humanity should go unpunished without any evil consequence whatever to their authors, is incompatible with any concept of right and wrong. Now it is a fact that many Christians have more or less had to discard the idea of hell, simply because the concept of eternal punishment, no matter how terrible the wrongdoing, is so manifestly unjust, as I have shown. But Buddhists have no need to reshape their Teacher's words to fit more humane modern ideas. Jesus Christ spoke of eternal damnation, of "the everlasting fire". [2] The Buddha spoke of states of suffering in which beings, on account of their evil deeds, may be reborn for periods varying from a day to an aeon. If we do not accept the principle of moral retribution to this extent we ought logically to close all prisons and abolish all punitive laws on earth. But I do not know of anyone except of a few extremists who advocate that measure.

Mr. T: No doubt that is so. But can one really suppose, in this twentieth century, that there is a place of fiery punishment situated somewhere in the bowels of the earth? Has not the belief in hell come about because primitive man regarded the craters of volcanoes and seismic fissures in the earth as being the gateways to the supposed infernal regions?

U: Possibly. And it is just possible that the Buddha when he spoke of *Niraya* was making use of the current ideas of his time to illustrate an important moral truth. However that may be, we do not have to ascribe a geographical location to either hell or heaven. They are states we can recognize around us and within us. Wherever people are suffering extremes of physical or mental pain, there is a kind of hell. Wherever they are transported by a passing phase of happiness, there is a type of heaven. The man whose mind is darkened by the insanity of hate is in hell, while he who is temporarily lifted outside himself by the ecstasy of religious joy, or even one who is momentarily lost in the contemplation of something beautiful, is in heaven. What are these but states of mind? And what, if it comes to that, is this world of our senses but a state of mind?

Mr. T: You mean that all of it is only a subjective experience?

U: Not quite that, either. The world has an objective reality, of a conditional and relative kind, and so have the heavens and hells. But to the extent to which they correspond to

states of mind, this world itself can take on the aspect of either a heaven or a hell. Buddhism avoids both the materialist and the subjectivist or idealist interpretations of the world. But anyone who has seriously thought about the implications of modern physics can scarcely deny the possibility of other planes of existence—spheres of being that are in every respect as "real" on their own level as our present one is for us. That is what most thoughtful Buddhists today believe in, and it is strictly in accordance with the Master's teaching. And, by the way, do you really consider that the theory that the belief in hell arose in the primitive mind from the observation of volcanic fires, and nothing else, is a fully adequate explanation?

Mr. T: Yes, it seems very reasonable.

U: But don't forget that Dante's inferno had its frozen hell, Cocytus, as well as a burning one—just as Buddhism has! In fact, the visions of hells and heavens described by the poets and mystics of all religions bear a surprising likeness to one another, despite all the doctrinal differences that surround them.

Mr. T: Now that you mention it, it does seem rather suggestive. Swedenborg, I remember, claimed to have seen some very gruesome nether worlds in the course of his astral explorations. Would you say that his experiences were genuine ones, not hallucinations?

U: Why not? All kinds of people have had such experiences, and Buddhism does not claim to have the monopoly of

knowledge regarding other states of saṃsāric existence. What it does claim is to have the sole means of gaining release from the saṃsāric planes—that is, the Noble Eightfold Path.

Mr. T: Since we are on the subject of doctrine, is *avijjā*, ignorance, the first cause in Buddhism? There must be a first cause, mustn't there?

U: In a consistent system of causality, such as that taught by Buddhism, there cannot be a first cause. There cannot be a something which arises spontaneously out of nothing, for if such causeless arising were possible, the entire system would be invalidated. Furthermore, true causal relationships exist only in a temporal sequence. But we do not consider *avijjā* as being a cause in this temporal relationship sense. It is a conditioning factor. In the formula of dependent origination (*paṭicca-samuppāda*) [3] ignorance is the supporting factor of *taṇhā*, or craving, and these two in combination bring about the other supporting factors, some of which are co-existing auxiliary causes. Nothing can stand by itself as sufficient cause; it must always combine with something else in supportive co-ordinate relationship. When it is said that "dependant upon ignorance arise kamma formations (*saṅkhārā*)" it is implied that the eighth link of the process, craving, is also present. So, when ignorance is eliminated, craving disappears at the same time, and the other factors, grasping (fastening on to life), the process of becoming, rebirth and decay-and-death consequently cease to arise. That is how the entire process

can be brought to an end. But as to a beginning—a first origination in time—there could not have been one, for nothing can spring up uncaused, yet proceed to function as a cause. There could not have been any time when this process of coming-to-be did not exist. *Avijjā* is placed first in the formula only because in explaining the process a start has to be made at some point, and it is convenient to fix on ignorance because it is the nearest approach we can make to define the fundamental and ubiquitous characteristic which makes all the other factors operate. Once we recognize that without ignorance there could be no craving, we are able to appreciate the part that ignorance plays in producing the link that follows it, namely, kamma-formations. In reality, *avijjā* and *taṇhā* are both present along with all the other links that are named subsequently.

Mr. T: Then Buddhism maintains that there was no first cause?

U: Yes, and not only Buddhism. Some outstanding philosophers of our own time are agreed that the belief most people hold, that there must have been a first origin of the cosmos, comes about through an error in thinking. It is largely the result of a misconception regarding the nature of time and causality, our notions of which are limited by the fact that the mind itself functions in time and so is confined to a very narrow view of the relationships that subsist in other dimensions. We tend to think in analogies, and most of these analogies are false. They do not really correspond to things as they are.—Do you have a watch?

Mr. T: Why, yes … I'm sorry if I'm taking up your time. It's now—let me see ...

U: Never mind the time. That isn't what I meant. I see you have a watch. Well now, from the fact that you have a watch, we can safely infer that the watch had a maker, can't we?

Mr. T: Of course.

U: And from that, people deduce that the world must have had a maker, who is the first cause of all. But it shows nothing of the kind, because the maker of the watch did not exist uncaused. He was the offspring of his parents, and they of theirs. And no matter how many generations back you may go, you cannot find any ultimate origin of the watch. All you find is an ever-increasing number of tributary streams of causality. And that is only one side of the causal process; on the other you find that there is no ultimate origin of the metals that compose the watch. So you see the falseness of the analogy, don't you?

Mr. T: Indeed, yes. It is false in more ways than one, because it assumes also that one cause alone—the watchmaker—could be sufficient to produce the watch, whereas it is obvious that even if the watchmaker existed he could not make a watch without the metals. And if the metals existed, but no watchmaker, there would still be no watch. Also, someone had to make the watchmaker's tools. [4]

U: Now you see the necessity for co-ordinate causal factors,

for separate streams of causality converging to the one end. It is precisely this rather complex system of causality that Buddhism teaches. But, you know, this is a very profound philosophical subject, and it is not enough to be given just a brief summary of the conclusions. To understand it properly one must examine the Buddhist doctrine of dependant origination in detail, and also relate it to the supplementary doctrines, such as the doctrine of *paccayā*, which deals with conditionality and relationships, and *niyāmatā*, the order of cosmic necessity. All these things form a part of the analytical knowledge of the Dhamma (*Dhamma-paṭisambhidā*) by which we become able to grasp the true nature of phenomena. Along with these it is a help for modern people to take into account some of the ideas of our contemporary scientific philosophers. If you do that you will find that together they form a perfectly convincing picture of the world we live in, so far as it can be known through the intellect.

Mr. T: Then Buddhism is not simply an intellectualism?

U: Certainly not. So far as the intellect is capable of analyzing the elements of the world accurately, it marches with Buddhism. That is why there is no conflict between Buddhism and those ideas which are veridical products of the scientific method. But to confront absolute truth, to comprehend the real order of things in its entirety, one has to transcend the intellect. The intellect selects, narrows the range of cognition and arranges things in its own way, and in so doing imposes the limitations of its nature. We have to

break through those conceptual barriers and grasp reality on a different level. That is the great objective of the Buddhist meditation practices—they are to develop the higher consciousness that reaches beyond the intellect. That higher consciousness alone is capable of seeing reality face to face.

Mr. T: Then, if I understand you rightly, Buddhism does not deny the validity of those empirical truths which are capable of being known intellectually, but it definitely asserts that the intellect itself can never come to grips with the final underlying truth of things?

U: Yes, that is just it. And that is precisely what present day philosophers for the most part believe, also. But since few of them admit the possibility of a higher faculty than the intellect, or of a transcendental order of experience, truth must always appear to be inaccessible. There are some notable exceptions to this, of course. An increasing number of modern thinkers are drawing very close to Buddhism. That is why comparative study of their ideas, along with the ancient teachings of the Buddha, is so rewarding. Some of our present-day scientific philosophers are, all unconsciously, making it easier for the Western mind to understand the concepts of Buddhism. And that is quite natural—they are approaching the same truth by a different, more roundabout route. The Buddha went towards it directly—through the mind itself, which is the basis of all phenomena—instead of trying to get at it through the facts of the physical world alone, as the scientist does.

Mr. T: Yes, I see that the Buddha approached the knowledge of things as they are through the facts of psychology rather than through physics.

U: That is so. And yet we find that his general teaching concerning the physical world is also accurate. It is a true picture in broad outline. [5] Its details, as western man is interested in them, were of no concern to one who taught only Suffering and the way to its cessation. What the Buddha showed were the fundamental principles of life, its impermanence and 'substancelessness', and consequently its 'unsatisfactoriness'—and these principles are found in the physical as well as the mental realm.

Mr. T: You are referring, I suppose, to the three characteristics of phenomena, impermanence, suffering and egolessness. [6] But why should what is impermanent be painful—why suffering? It does not seem to follow at all necessarily. And there is so much good in the world, after all.

U: Surely the joy that slips through our fingers, that fades and dies even as we experience it, is a source of suffering? If we say it is not, that can only be because we expect to experience the same joy, or something similar, again later on. Man can endure the passing of his happiness only through the expectation of gaining it once more. If that expectation is taken from him, he sinks into despair. So it is the renewal of happiness that we are always looking forward to, that keeps us going. And we allow this to

compensate us for the knowledge that no individual experience of happiness can be permanent. In fact, man lives alternating between memory and hope.

So far as the second part of your question is concerned, Buddhism does not deny that there is good—in whatever way you understand that term—in the world. It simply affirms that on the whole the suffering outweighs the good. And most thinking people who are aware of the condition of the great mass of living beings, must and do agree with this. It is only the superficial mind, or the mind that is totally engrossed in its own present felicity, that can resist the conclusion.

Mr. T: Hm … That's a pretty pessimistic outlook, isn't it?

U: It would be, if Buddhism offered no hope. But as regards the world, it is simply realism. Buddhism offers the cessation of suffering—Nibbāna. That is the sole permanent good—*dhuva* and *parama sukha*—in which suffering can arise no more.

Mr. T: So we are to desire Nibbāna. But isn't desire craving? And isn't craving for Nibbāna a contradiction?

U: Why?

Mr. T: I mean, if Nibbāna is the cessation of craving, it must be a contradiction to crave for it. But isn't wanting it, or hoping for it, a sort of craving? Does Buddhism make a distinction between that and all other kinds of craving?

U: No distinction of a functional kind can be made between

one craving and another. The desire for Nibbāna is an aspiration—a higher form of craving. But it acts in the same way as any other desire when it furnishes the motive for action. All effort is grounded in the wish to gain an objective, and if there were no wish for Nibbāna there could be no striving for it. There is no contradiction in the desire to end desire; for the moment Nibbāna is attained, the desire for it ceases. While the means of gaining the end are being practiced, all the other cravings which stand as hindrances are gradually eliminated, until there is only the one desire left. The desire for Nibbāna is therefore the last and highest desire. And since no one goes on desiring what he has already got, it comes to an end the moment its objective is gained. It is the one desire that is not self-regenerating.

Mr. T: I see now that my question was rather unconsidered. How prone we are to verbal entanglements! But isn't the Buddha's teaching of the ending of suffering by the ending of craving, with the consequent ending of existence, rather like a stab in the throat as a cure for toothache?

U: Well, to make your analogy more fitting you will have to assume that the toothache is *absolutely incurable,* and that any kind of treatment can give only temporary alleviation. Because there is no way of putting an end to suffering in *Saṃsāra* except by ending the round of rebirths. Don't you think many people would prefer a stab in the throat to going through eternity with an eternal toothache? But the picture is far too dramatic. It is one of those analogies whose

terms do not correspond to the situation at all. The "ending of existence" is nothing more than the ending of a process of "becoming", in which there has never been any true *being.* That is why it is wrong to think of Nibbāna as annihilation. There is no "self" to be annihilated. When the current of causal becoming is brought to an end, the factors of phenomenal personality do not arise any more. That is all that can be expressed in words. But to imagine Nibbāna as a kind of spiritual suicide is completely wrong.

Mr. T: Forgive my saying so, but that sounds rather like an evasion. For us, life is the phenomenal personality. What alternative can there be to either existing or not existing?

U: When the Buddha was asked that, he replied in effect that the question was wrongly put. Actually, the whole problem hinges on what one means by "existence". The phenomenal personality, by which is meant the five *khandhas*, exists as an aggregate of mutually-supporting factors, one of which, the physical, or *rūpakkhandha,* has a spatial as well as temporal existence.

The other four, which are mental—that is, sensation, perception, mental formations and consciousness—exist as a continūm in time. Now the existence of each of these is confined to the unitary moments of its arising, persisting and passing away, which are of only infinitesimal duration. These momentary existences are strung, as it were, on the line of causal relationship, "as beads are strung on a cord'", forming a progression through time. But the cord is purely

imaginary; like the line of the equator, it expresses only an idea; in this case, the idea of cause-effect relationship. There is no absolute identity between the conscious existence of one moment and that of the subsequent one. The only thing that links them is the knowledge we have that one arises because of the prior existence of another. It is from memory that we derive the sense of a persisting personality. But, although we may remember our childhood, we cannot say that we are the same persons, in absolute identity, as we were in childhood. If we were the same, we should not be remembering being children—we should be actually *being* children still. The fact that we remember shows that we are not the same. And sometime we experience very vividly the truth of this "otherness", when we think, "Could that really have been I?"

Mr. T: Yes, I know that feeling—the feeling of being a stranger to one's past self. It is rather disturbing when it comes very strongly.

U: Naturally; it is disquieting to the "ego". The process of change precludes any absolute identity of the personality between one phase and another of its progress through time. We have reached our present moment of existence through an infinite series of dead selves. And this present "self" is vanishing even as we think about it. So you see that Buddhism is right in refusing to consider existence as a static quality of some enduring "things", and in refusing to place an imaginary "being" in opposition to an equally imaginary ṅon-being". The terms of the problem as it is

presented in that way simply do not correspond to the reality, with the result that any answer we were to give, affirming existence or non-existence, would be false.

Mr. T: That is a very difficult point to grasp, you know.

U: Indeed, yes. It is so extremely difficult for the average person that the Buddha himself, after he had realized it, at first thought it would be impossible to make anyone else understand it. But as I said before, modern scientific thinkers are independently reaching the same conclusion regarding what we call existence and personality. For the Westerner trying to understand the Dhamma, their approach to it is sometimes very helpful.

Mr. T: In what way?

U: Because they arrive at it by the path that the Western mind has become accustomed to take—via examination and analysis of external phenomena. To that they are now adding the study of the psychological phenomena as well. But because they still continue to treat it as a study of external events, in the psychology of others instead of within their own minds, their speculations are often at variance with one another. Many still hold, with Comté, that it is impossible to study the operations of one's own mind. And certainly it is not possible by the methods they use. To take an example, when Freud was making an analysis of his own dreams, he was not making a direct study of his mental processes in dream, but what he remembered of them. Therefore, although he was able to make a very accurate

report of what had supplied the content of his dreams, he could make no investigation of the means by which his consciousness registered them. No one can yet say just how the mechanism of consciousness in dreaming differs from that of waking, or even whether it differs at all. But the Buddhist system of mental development proves that the mind can be brought under direct scrutiny, its operations studied at the moment of their occurrence. That is the only way to reach a final understanding of what the personality consists of.

Mr. T: Well, that has certainly given me food for thought. I have just two more questions of this kind. The first stems from what you have just been saying about examining one's own mind. Does not a man know what is right, ultimately, by searching in his own heart, without regard for books or listening to teachers?

U: Do you mean ethically right, or right in the sense of what is ultimately true?

Mr. T: Both.

U: Then let us take your second meaning first. The Buddha was one who discovered absolute truth without a teacher. But to be able to do that, he had previously undergone a process of self-training and spiritual evolution through a long series of lives. Only relatively few beings are able to gain enlightenment for themselves, without a teacher; it is they who become *Sammā Sambuddhas* or *Pacceka* Buddhas. [7] It is not that anyone is debarred from attaining Buddhahood

– on the contrary, it is open to all; but it is better for most people to take the quicker path to Nibbāna under a guide. Those who take the more arduous path leading to Supreme Buddhahood do so to gain the special powers by which they can make the Dhamma known for the benefit of others. However, during the period in which the *Sāsana* of a supreme Buddha endures, and while the Teaching is still extant in the world, those beings who have reached the point at which they can attain Nibbāna do so through the teaching, not by their own unaided seeking. Obviously it would be waste of time and effort to search for the truth anew, when the teaching concerning it is still known to men.

Mr. T: Yes, of course, I see that.

U: Well, now, regarding the knowledge of what is ethically good, I think we can get the answer to your question from common observation. Does it not sometimes happen that men commit all kinds of crimes and atrocities, firmly believing that what they are doing is right and good? Believing, in fact, that they are carrying out the "will of God"? Do we find that "conscience" always supplies the right answer to any moral problem? Have not wars, persecutions and all kinds of evils been brought about by people acting, as they were convinced, in accordance with the highest moral principles, through some inner prompting of their own?

Mr. T: Yes, it does seem that conscience, the "inner voice" or

the "voice of God" is not always an infallible guide.

U: History shows that it has often been the worst guide possible. Think of the bloodthirsty persecutions of the Middle Ages; think of the unspeakable cruelties inflicted by men who piously believed that they were doing what was right and pleasing to God—the torturing and burning of heretics—to say nothing of the instances of men who have committed crimes of their own accord, under the influence of what they believed to be divine prompting. And if that is not enough, consider the horrible ritual sacrifices of human beings that have been carried out in the name of religion.

Mr. T: Yes, yes, I know. But surely modern civilized man …

U: Please go on.

Mr. T: Well—I mean … er …

U. Yes …?

Mr. T: Oh, all right … You think that modern civilized man is not any better?

U: Hardly, if at all. And if he were, would it not be the result of past conditioning? The study of behaviour shows that codes of conduct and ideas of right and wrong are not built-in features of man's nature; they have to be learned. And what is so learned is not any universal system of morality, but only the ideas prevailing in one particular place at some given period. So we find that actions which are condemned in one place are blessed with the full approval of society in others, and that at different times totally different standards

obtain. Where then is there any innate, infallible guide as to what is right and what is wrong? Where is the standard by which these values are to be measured? All we can say, from observation, is that some people have a more highly-developed moral sense than others, and that sometimes this shows itself at a quite early age. Where it exists it seems to be independent of heredity and, to a surprising degree, of environment as well. That is a fact which the behaviourists cannot explain; but Buddhism accounts for it by past kamma. Yet still it is the outcome of prior conditioning; the ethics and ideals have not come to birth spontaneously, but as the result of learning in previous lives. To that extent Buddhism agrees with the psychology of behaviourism; it maintains that all codes of conduct have to be learned; but by showing causes that are more remote than any operating in a single life, it is able to explain those anomalies which leave the findings of the behaviourists open to question. The sense of right and wrong is not inherent, and it is not of supernatural origin; it has to be acquired; but it is not always acquired in the present life alone. It can be carried over from one life to another, and that is one of the processes which make man's evolution possible. But what we have to remember is that people, besides being differently conditioned as to their ideas of right and wrong by the environment in which their minds develop, are also influenced by the ideas, appearing as instincts, some of which may be true whilst others are false, that they have "inherited" from their past existences. So there can never be

any certainty that what a man's "inner voice" tells him is right, is really so. It may be most terribly and disastrously wrong. That is why Buddhism holds that intuitive feelings of right and wrong are not a safe guide.

Mr. T: So religious teachings and teachers are always necessary?

U: Yes. But even there one must qualify the statement. We have seen already that much evil has been done in the name of religion, and that even today it is still possible for fanaticisms of a religious or pseudo-religious kind to incite men to commit grievous crimes against humanity. There are certain political ideas current in the world, which are invested with a kind of religious mystique capable of intoxicating their followers to frenzies of hatred and violence, and they are, unfortunately, extremely contagious. Cults that centre round the personality of some almost deified leader are the modern equivalent of the religious frenzies that drove men to madness in former days. These for the most part have their origin in some supposedly inspired teachings; the leader is given the reverence due to a superman, and even if he fails miserably and comes to a degraded end, there are still weak-minded and fanatical people who are ready to continue idolizing him. The world would be better without "teachers" of that kind.

Mr. T: Very true, indeed.

U: People have a strong tendency, you know, to rationalize their own selfish desires and make them "the will of God".

Men have even been known to commit murders at the instigation of some "inner voice" which they devoutly believed was the true voice of their deity. This is an extreme case of pathological delusion, of course, but it points to a fact of the first importance in normal psychology as well. History provides innumerable instances of men finding self-justification for their greed and aggressiveness by dressing their crimes in the trappings of religion. It is the most common device of all for making the baser instincts respectable.

Mr. T: Then how are we to know which teachers are to be followed, and which are not?

U: That is the point I was coming to. We can only apply the advice the Buddha gave to the Kālāmas when he said, "In cases where occasion for doubt exists, it is right and proper to doubt. Do not go upon mere report, or tradition or hearsay; neither go upon correspondence with holy writings, upon (unsupported) cogitation or specious reasoning; nor should you go upon the approval of accepted notions, nor upon the authority of one who may appear competent, nor be guided by the instinct of reverence, thinking, 'this ascetic is our teacher.' But, Kālāmas, when you yourselves know (by observation, experience and right judgment), 'Such things are bad, such things are blameworthy, such things are censured by the wise; such things, when undertaken and followed, lead to harm and ill', then you should abandon such things. But when you yourselves know, 'Such things are good, such things are

praiseworthy; such things are commended by the wise, such things, when undertaken and followed, lead to the good and welfare of all beings', then should you accept, hold to and follow such things." [8] In other words, we have to correct the promptings of the subconscious mind, which too often represents the lower nature, by using reason and intelligence. In that way we can form a correct judgment of whatever ideas are offered to us.

Mr. T: But could you give me a summary in brief of the Buddhist criterion of right and wrong?

U: Certainly. It is summed up in the words, "To abstain from all wrongdoing; to develop all good; to purify one's mind—this is the teaching of the Buddhas." And the basic distinction between what is good and what is bad is very simple in Buddhism. All actions that have their roots in greed, hatred and delusion, that spring from selfishness and so foster the harmful delusion of self-hood are demeritorious and bad. All those which are rooted in disinterestedness, friendliness and wisdom are meritorious and good. And this standard applies, irrespective of whether the deeds are of thought, word or physical act. The Pali word *lobha,* which I have just given as "greed", also includes excessive lust. *dosa* means hatred and anger, while *moha is* equivalent to *avijjā*; it stands for ignorance of the real nature of conditioned existence—ignorance of the fact that all the aggregates of personality are impermanent, liable to suffering and devoid of selfhood, and at the same time ignorance of the Four Noble Truths. *Lobha, dosa* and *moha*

are called the three roots of unwholesome action. When we have learned to analyze our thoughts, contemplating them objectively and dispassionately, we become able to know, distinctly and without any shadow of doubt, when any of these three unwholesome factors are present and when they are not. It is only by this intimate self-knowledge that we can develop a true instinct for what is right and wrong.

Mr. T: That is excellent! I really like that very much. Volumes have been written on ethics, from every possible angle, but it seems to me that this Buddhist concept, so simple and direct, gets right to the heart of the matter. It does not depend upon any questionable metaphysical ideas, but on fundamental truths of psychology. It is something that everyone can grasp, and prove for oneself. That much of Buddhism, at least, everyone must accept. But now my other question. It is about rebirth. How can there be rebirth? Isn't it really an impossibility?

U: Well, to that question I usually reply in the words of Voltaire: 'It is no more impossible to be born many times than to be born once! Even the old sceptic, Ferney, had to admit that he had been born, and that being so, he could find no reason for supposing the event to be unique in his experience.

Mr. T: That's all very well, but can rebirth be *proved?*

U: That depends on what you are willing to accept as proof. There have been many intelligent people who have believed in rebirth simply because it is the only view that gives any

meaning or purpose to life—the only conception that makes any sense of this muddled, apparently futile and inconclusive existence, with all its injustices, its insoluble problems and loose ends of experience. And further, it has seemed to them that if there is any survival beyond the grave, any kind of immortality at all, rebirth is the only form it could take, because the very essence of life is change. They have found these considerations a sufficient ground for accepting it. But there are also others who know it to be true by personal experience. You must surely know that of recent years much has been written on the many cases of people who have actually remembered previous lives, and have given evidence that proves the truth of their statements. And then there are the instances of those who virtually re-live their former existences whilst under hypnosis. Psychologists are now making a special study of these cases. Some of the subjects whilst under hypnosis speak foreign languages that are unknown to them in their normal state—a phenomenon which is known as xenoglossy. In any case we cannot dismiss the belief in reincarnation, which has played so large a part in the religious and philosophical thought of mankind from the earliest times, as mere moonshine, just because we ourselves cannot remember having lived on earth before. How much can any of us remember of our early childhood? Or of the years in between then and now?

Mr. T: Well, regarding what you said first, is it really necessary to assume that life has any meaning or purpose?

Granting that one life on its own—whether followed by immortality elsewhere, or not—does not make any sense, is there any reason why it should do so? May not the whole of existence be merely a gigantic cosmic accident?

U: It could be, of course, judged only by what our intellect makes of it. But doesn't it strike you as significant that the very people who hold that view themselves behave as though life had meaning, purpose and values? I have in mind one very eminent English mathematician and philosopher who on grounds of strict determinism denies all freewill to man, and believes, apparently, that life is nothing more than a particular function of matter, yet who shows more concern for humanitarian values and the survival of mankind than do many who claim to believe that man's nature and destiny are of paramount and supernatural importance. This same philosopher, who, if he were to conduct himself in accordance with his beliefs, should be sitting quietly in his study awaiting the inevitable outcome of mathematically-determined events, is instead actively engaged in trying to save humanity from a war of nuclear extermination, at great personal inconvenience and not a little real physical danger to himself. And this kind of conduct, from a man who has written, "Some people … derive comfort from the thought that if God made the world, He may wind it up again when it has completely run down. For my part, I do not see how an unpleasant process can be made less so by the reflection that it is to be infinitely repeated" [9] is somewhat unexpected. One might ask, 'Why

protest against the possible destruction of humanity if life is merely an unpleasant process that would be better brought to an end rather than infinitely repeated?

Mr. T: Well, there are certain philosophies that can only be treated as engagements of the intellect. No one could consistently live in accordance with them. But still, neither the fact that people believe in rebirth because it gives meaning to life, nor the evidence of those who claim to remember previous lives furnishes real, decisive proof, does it?

U: True. The final and conclusive proof lies only with those who personally remember having lived before. Only to them its truth is beyond dispute. But the weight of evidence, you know, is generally taken as being on the side which can show most facts or inferences in its favour. There are many we "know" to be true on this kind of evidence alone. Now in addition to the people who have given proof that they have lived before, we have a great number of philosophical reasons for believing in rebirth. And what is to be set against this? Nothing more than the fact that the enquirer himself cannot remember any previous existence. You must admit that it is scarcely reasonable to set up one's own individual experience against the great mass of evidence that can be brought up on the other side. That would be like refusing to believe that the earth is a sphere, just because one has not seen its rotundity with one's own eyes. In any case there is every reason why we should not all remember our previous births. If we did so, the complications of the

present life, which for many of us are already far too weighty, would become insupportable. There has to be "a sleep and a forgetting" but the forgetting is not always complete. We all bring something of our past into our present lives, even if it is only some traits of character.

Mr. T: Well, I must say, that is very reasonable. I can see that whereas one fact in isolation, or even three or four, may not be impressive as evidence, when a great number of facts drawn from different sources all point to one conclusion, we have something like a solid body of evidence. Thank you very much for being so patient with me. I shall give very careful thought to what you have said. May I come and see you again?

U: Of course. I am happy to find that you are interested in the Dhamma sufficiently to ask questions about it. Buddhism welcomes questions, you know. There are no sacred mysteries in our creed; there is nothing that has to be treated with reverential awe as being too holy for human understanding.

Mr. T: Yes, that is what I find so attractive about Buddhism. Thank you once more. I shall come back again when I have digested what you have given me today.

II

Mr. T: What you said to me at the end of our last talk, about the openness of Buddhism to enquiry, prompts me to ask you this: 'Is Buddhism a form of rationalist atheism, or an atheist humanism?

U: Any attempt to label Buddhism, or to fit it into any of the categories of Western thought, which incline to separating the philosophical from the religious, is bound to be misleading. Buddhism is atheistic in the strict sense of rejecting belief in a Creator-god. It is not atheism in the sense of rejecting all belief in a superior order of being or a spiritual purpose in life. It is necessary to mark that distinction, because too often people mistakenly believe that there can be no religious or ethical values without a supreme power, a God in some form or another. In Buddhism the supreme power is the natural law of cause and effect, from which comes the moral order of kamma, or actions, and *vipāka*, or results. The ethical teaching of Buddhism is intrinsically a part of the concept of man's highest purpose, which is to gain his release from the painful conditions of saṃsāra. The goal and the means to it cannot be separated. If there were an omnipotent God, he would be able to release man from his bondage to kamma; and if that God were all-compassionate, he would certainly

do so. As I have already explained to you, Buddhism is rationalistic, but it goes beyond rationalism in the scope of its vision of causes unseen. The rationalism which we speak of today is limited to a very small section of the total human experience, and by itself can never encompass the ultimate truth of things. Buddhism, on the other hand, continues where this limited rationalism leaves off; it expands the principles and the frontiers of reason and finally it teaches us how, by developing higher faculties, we may finally transcend the realm of sense-perception and conditionality. In much the same way, Buddhism also has a likeness to humanism. It holds that man is the measure of all things, and can by his own efforts solve the riddle of life; and further it maintains that the human values are the sole standards and arbiters of morality and progress. It does not have to fall back on such theological distinctions as a supposed difference between man's justice and God's. But Buddhism goes beyond mere humanism when it claims that man can become superhuman. The values of humanism, fine as they are, are not enough to form the basis of a progress that aims at lifting man right out of the human situation. The humanist philosophy can only leave man where he is at present, with all his imperfections, his perplexities and his uncertain ethical values fundamentally unchanged.

Mr. T: Why so?

U: Because humanism on its own does not provide any ultimate standard by which man's progress is to be

measured. It measures man only by man, and you cannot measure a thing, either quantitatively or qualitatively, by itself. Buddhism provides a standard for normal life and a higher standard for it to measure up to as well—the standard of *Arahantship*. The second, which is the standard of man perfected, is constant and immutable. It serves to mark humanity's highest level, at any time and in any situation. So it gives us a clearly defined goal at which to aim, the state of absolute 'desirelessness', dispassion and enlightenment.

Mr. T: I see. But, if enlightenment comes at all, why does it not come all at once, instead of in four stages?

U: You mean the four stages of *Sotāpanna, Sakadāgāmi, Anāgāmi* and *Arahatta*? Well, all progress is made in stages, isn't it? In this case the four stages represent definite psychological changes, each of which occurs at a certain point in consequence of the changes brought about by the preceding stage. You see, there are ten mental obstructions which stand in the path of self-purification, or as fetters (*dasa saṃyojana*) bind us to the wheel of existence. Now all beings have been bound by those ten fetters throughout innumerable cycles of existence, and they are very strong. They cannot be broken all at once. Therefore the Buddha taught a gradual training, a progress by recognizable stages.

Mr. T: Please tell me about the ten fetters.

U: They are (1) delusion of selfhood, (2) doubt or uncertainty, (3) belief in the efficacy of rites and ceremonies;

or, in short, superstition, (4) sensual craving, (5) ill-will. These five are called lower fetters, because they bind beings to the planes of sense-gratification. Then come (6) craving for existence in the fine-material worlds, (7) craving for existence in the formless worlds, [10] (8) pride, (9) restlessness, and (10) ignorance. This second group of five is higher fetters, in the sense that they bind beings to the fine-material and formless worlds.

Mr. T: Then how do they separate into four stages?

U: In this way: when the first three fetters are broken one becomes a *Sotāpanna*, which means that one has become confirmed in the knowledge of the truth. One who has reached this stage becomes incapable of committing any of the unwholesome deeds that lead to rebirth in sub-human realms of suffering. *Sotāpanna* literally means "Stream-winner"—he has entered the stream that leads surely to Nibbāna. After that comes the disciple who has reached the next stage, by weakening the next two fetters, four and five. He is called a *Sakadāgāmi* or "Once-returner", because even if he fails to reach Nibbāna in the current life, he is bound to do so in the next birth. Then comes the *Anāgāmi* who has completely destroyed all the first five fetters; he is called *Anāgāmi* or Non-returner" because if he does not gain Nibbāna before he dies he will reach it in his next birth, which takes place in *Suddhāvāsa* or the Pure Abodes. There he attains *Arahantship*, and passes straight to Nibbāna without returning to the sensuous planes. The fourth and last stage is of course that of the *Arahant*, who has broken all

the fetters, burned out all the defilements and brought the grasping-formations to an end. For him there is no rebirth.

Mr. T: So Nibbāna is attained when these Ten Fetters are broken?

U: Yes, in this present life itself all the stages can be accomplished.

Mr. T: Then cannot Nibbāna rightly be called the "Kingdom of Heaven"? Doesn't that also mean the ending of suffering?

U: Right thinking depends so much, you know, on the right use of words. That is why we try to be as exact as possible in terminology when we present Buddhist ideas. What exactly do people mean by "Heaven"? If that question could be settled, the answer could be found at once. If in thinking of "Heaven" we mean what is intended by the phrase "Heaven lies within us", then there certainly is a likeness to the Buddhist concept of Nibbāna as it is experienced whilst the *Arahant* is still in the flesh. That is the subjective "Heaven", the state of mind that knows its own happiness and security, and is fully detached from the troubles of earthly life. But if "Heaven" means a place of bliss which is a kind of superior copy of the best of life on earth, it does not correspond to Nibbāna at all. Buddhism recognizes heavens of that kind, but Nibbāna is above and beyond them. Those heavens are impermanent—and there indeed one might find a correspondence between them and the heaven of which it is said, "Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away" [11] in the

Christian scriptures. Those words are better fitted to a Buddhist than Christian setting, since the Buddhist heavens and hells are subject to the law of impermanence and causality, but the Dhamma which teaches that law is everlasting. Universes arise and pass away, but the law remains the same forever. And Nibbāna, which is outside the realm of condition and causality, also remains unchanging. So, as Buddhists, we should simply amend the phrase to "Heaven and earth shall pass away, but the Law of Causality shall not pass away." Nibbāna does not come into it at all, because it is not within the causal law. It cannot be compared to any idea of a heaven in which phenomenal personality, with its inevitable arising, decay and destruction, continues to manifest.

Mr. T: I see. But now there is another comparison I should like to make. It concerns what is meant by *Saddhā*. If the Buddha's teaching requires faith, is not a Christian justified in arguing that it is merely a matter of developing the faculties to become able to perceive the truth of the revealed dogmas of the Christian Church, and so there is no difference between Buddhism and revealed religion in that respect?

U: *Saddhā* means *confidence* more than faith. When we are sick and go to a physician, why do we believe—or at least hope—that he can cure us?

Mr. T: Well, I suppose because he has got his degrees, has an established practice and has shown his capability by

curing others.

U: Exactly. And for the same reason when we wish to learn any art or science we go to a teacher whose ability has been shown in practice. Doesn't that mean that we have confidence in the doctor or teacher?

Mr. T: Yes, of course.

U: But it does not come from direct knowledge that he can cure or teach us? There is no absolute certainty about it?

Mr. T: No, we can be absolutely certain only after the event.

U: Then it can also be called faith, can't it?

Mr. T: Yes.

U: But "faith" is a rather emotionally-loaded word, which we usually reserve for the mysteries of religion. It implies belief not confirmed by reason—even belief in defiance of reason. Now a Buddhist's confidence in the Buddha is just the kind we have in a good physician or teacher. It is not blind faith, because we have substantial grounds for it. The doctrine the Buddha offers us is one that we can believe in first of all intellectually, because it conforms to what we can see and prove empirically as to the nature of the world. And, like the physician, the Buddha has effected his cures. We know that his method is effective in putting an end to suffering because it has done so for so many people during the last 2,500 years. It is, one would say, a very old, established practice indeed. So we have that much confidence in the Buddha's Dhamma before we start on the

treatment. It does not ask us to believe in any improbable dogmas, and certainly not in anything that goes against fundamental reason. It is not based on myths, or legends, but on observed facts of experience—the truths of impermanence, suffering and non-self. Those cardinal truths, irrespective of miracles or revelations, attest the solid foundation of Buddhism in the knowledge of things as they are. And since everything else in the Dhamma springs logically from those three facts of observation in a coherent and articulated system, we surely have the most emphatic reason for feeling confidence in the Physician and Teacher. And lastly, it invites us to "come and see" for ourselves. We are asked only to suspend our doubts until such time as we have clear proof, by direct experience, that the Teaching is true. This comes with the first attainment, after which doubt *(vicikicchā)* cannot arise any more.

Mr. T: That, I see, is quite different from making faith a pre-requisite of revelation. When one considers how many of the finest intellects in the Christian Church have struggled against doubt, blaming themselves for their inability to believe and fearing that the longed-for revelation will be withheld from them because of it, one realizes what a stumbling block this demand for unquestioning faith can be. Now that you have entirely satisfied me on that point, I shall be glad if you can clear up another matter for me. Does the Buddha teach that the world is a dualism of good and evil, as Manichaeism is supposed to do?

U: That is not a question that can be answered with plain

yes or no. To begin with, we should suppress the emotional overtones that accompany such words as “good” and “evil”.

Mr. T: Why?

U: Because they interfere with our view, which should be as far as possible detached, objective and scientific. In any case, “good” and “evil” are very loose terms. What is good for one person may be evil for another. Man exterminates pests and certain kinds of animals for his own “good” (as he imagines), but the effect so far as the animals are concerned is decidedly evil. So it is, even with actions concerning man and man. It is extremely difficult to make a hard and fast division between what it good and what is evil—a distinction that will remain valid for all occasions and eventualities. These are words that really describe different viewpoints, rather than fixed qualities.

Mr. T: But still, we do know in a broad general way what is meant by good and evil.

U: No doubt. But can we always be agreed as to what is good or evil in specific instances? Can we, when our own interests are in conflict with those of someone else? Practical experience shows that we cannot, so long as the feeling of selfhood sways our judgment. If we could, human beings would live in a greater measure of peaceful agreement than they have ever shown themselves able to do. The fact is that we all measure good and evil according to the way events afford us either pleasure or pain. So, for the purpose of this discussion it would be better if we were to substitute some

other terms for "good" and "evil". They are really too subjective to be very helpful in our present enquiry. In Buddhism, where "evil" denotes the pain inherent in life it is defined as "suffering". Where it denotes moral wrong it is called "unwholesome action" (*akusala*-kamma). These terms are on the whole much more satisfactory for a precise treatment of the subject than are the "good" and "evil" of theology.

Mr. T: Yes, I grant that they are more precise. But suppose, then, we were to define "evil" broadly and whatever causes pain to living beings, and "good" as whatever gives them pleasure?

U: Well, we can accept that definition for the moment, and try to find an answer to your question along those lines. Only I must ask you to remember that it is still not an entirely satisfactory definition, because things that give pleasure are not always good. Very often they are bad in themselves, or they bring "evil" consequences to our selves or to others. But let us see what the believers in dualism themselves meant by their distinction. The Manichaean idea of two powers or cities, light and darkness, was derived from Zoroastrianism, which postulated two coeval, co-eternal and equally potent powers in the world—the creator of all good, Ahura Mazda, and the force of evil, Ahriman. It explained the presence of good and evil side by side as the inveterate opposition of these two equally matched personages. It was a ditheism, and as such it overcame the difficulties that present themselves when belief in one single

Creator-god makes him necessarily responsible for both good and evil in the world. The Zoroastrian and Manichaean position was to some extent more logical than that of monotheism; but it had one unhappy result, which was that the power of evil tended to receive as much worship, if not more, than the power of good. This was really unavoidable; it followed upon the recognition that there is on the whole more evil than good in the world.

Mr. T: I'm not altogether prepared to agree with that.

U: Perhaps not. But remember that in Christianity also, the Devil is called "the Prince of this world". And also I must ask you to bear in mind, again, that when I use the word "evil" I intend it to mean whatever is painful and a source of suffering and grief. Don't be led away by those emotional overtones I warned you about at the start!

Mr. T: Hm… Well, exactly how did the Zoroastrians measure good and evil?

U: I'm afraid they measured it just as most people always do. "Good" was what was beneficial to them, or seemed so; "evil" was what was harmful. In the *Pahlavi* scriptures, Ahura Mazda goes about creating things for the good of man, such as crops, fruit trees, fair weather and so on. Ahriman follows behind him creating blight, locusts, storms, disease and floods. Everything that Ahura Mazda creates Ahriman mars. But you can see that this concept of what is good and evil is a very narrow and parochial one. It is all centred about man and his needs. Suppose that we

consider it from the point of view of the locusts, rats and other vermin that Ahriman is supposed to have brought into being. To them, the works of Ahura Mazda and Ahriman would appear equally good—except that they would regard man as the creation of the evil spirit. But the dualists never gave that a thought. They were concerned only with themselves and their own welfare. And of course they had no idea of the balance which nature preserves, in which every species of living being plays a part in the general economy of the world.

Mr. T: Meaning…?

U: Meaning that, for example, if man succeeds in utterly exterminating one form of pest, another, which the destroyed pests formerly kept in check, increases—with perhaps even more harmful effects than before. This is a fact that man never realized until he was able to make practical experiments in the wholesale destruction of parasites, predatory animals and the like. And even in the question of weather, the Zoroastrians of course did not realize that storms and fair weather alike are all part of the climatic system of the earth, and that you cannot have one without the other. So you see that what they meant by "good" and "evil" was really nothing more than the balance of opposites. By personalizing these they made two deities in eternal conflict.

Mr. T: Scientists believe now that in course of time we shall be able to control the weather …

U: And when that comes about it will be just another complication, just another source of conflict, in human life. For when one section of people needs dry weather for crops, another will want rain. If control of weather is practised on a regional basis it can only be a further cause of international tension, by interfering with world economics. Artificially produced dry weather in one region would probably cause floods in another.

Mr. T: Yes, I can see that man's power of controlling his environment artificially holds even greater dangers than those we confront now. However, to return to the main subject: the only point of dualism, then, is that it absolves God of responsibility for suffering?

U: Yes—but at the cost of admitting the existence of another power as mighty as God, if not mightier. So the omnipotence of God is abandoned. That supposed infinity of power can be reserved to a God only by attributing to him good and evil in at least equal measure. But very few monotheists are prepared to go along with Jacob Boehme when he speaks of "the evil that is in God." **[12]**

Mr. T: Truly, it does seem that God's omnipotence and infinite love are mutually exclusive ideas. They cannot both be the attribute of one and the same deity. Yet the *Vedāntists* claim to have an answer to that, don't they?

U: Yes, an answer of a sort. But it practically amounts to denying the existence of evil as an objective reality. It holds that all things emanate from God—therefore all things are

"good". And as a logical corollary of this, there is left no moral distinction between good and evil, right and wrong, either. This is actually what the teaching of the *Bhagavad Gīta* amounts to.

Mr. T: Dear me! Is that really so? Someone told me that what the *Bhagavad Gīta* teaches is pure Buddhism!

U: No, its ethical teaching is rather the opposite of the Buddha's. The *Gīta* tries to show that one may be a full Yogi whilst engaging in all the activities, good and bad, of the world. It is a sustained argument to the effect that violence is not necessarily evil kamma. According to this theory, morality is solely a matter of social obligations; a man's moral duty is whatever his caste, or station in life, requires of him. If he is of the warrior caste by birth, it is his moral duty to kill even his own relatives and preceptors, should occasion arise. The *Gīta's* teaching is expressly that so long as such actions are performed without desire for or clinging to the results (a psychological impossibility, by the way), but are made an offering to God, there is no sin attached to them. Buddhism denies this argument absolutely. But don't let us digress. Dualism, as we have seen, is an escape from the difficulties created by monotheism. But Buddhism does not postulate any supreme consciously-acting power, either of good or evil. [13] It teaches only the supreme law of cause and effect. It is in the working out of that law, in all its inescapable necessity, that man, judging from his own standpoint, finds these two apparently opposite effects which he labels "good" and "evil". But the causal law is an

operation of nature; in itself it is neither good nor evil. We may liken it to the law of gravity; without gravity nothing could remain in place on the surface of the earth. So then you will say the law of gravity is "good". But supposing you fall from a high building? Then, because it causes your death, the law of gravity is "evil"?

Mr. T: All right—I get your point. What we call good and evil are simply two aspects of one and the same law, which is in itself completely neutral. And from that Buddhism derives the principle of *kamma* and *vipāka*, actions and results, as you explained previously.

U: Yes. It may seem to you that I laboured the point, but you must admit that if I hadn't gone into it as I did, you would not have been ready to accept it merely on a dogmatic statement such as "good and evil are necessary and complementary to one another".

Mr. T: You are right—I shouldn't. But doesn't Buddhism regard man's nature as a sort of dualism of good and evil?

U: In man's nature there are the lower instincts, summarized as greed, hatred and delusion, all three of which are brought into play in man's character of an animal struggling for survival and seeking sensual satisfaction. But man is potentially something greater than this. He has higher aspiration, a higher scale of values, and so these two aspects of his nature come into play alternately. Buddhism teaches us to eliminate the lower nature and systematically cultivate the higher. By that means man can become greater

than the gods. He can become a *visuddhi-deva*—a god by purification.

Mr. T: Isn't that the same as becoming God, or becoming "one with God"?

U: Not at all. In those ideas God still has a personal identity and attributes. He is supposed to be the creator or source of all that is. As I have said before, there is no place for a God of that kind in Buddhism.

Mr. T: Well, since we are back again on the subject of God, what is the harm in developing the love of God, as the Christians and Vedāntists do? Is not love the noblest and most liberating sentiment? And if belief in, or worship of God—even if it is only a matter of faith, or even if he does not exist—helps us to develop love, isn't that a good thing?

U: As I pointed out in answer to one of your earlier questions, the idea of a supreme Godhead can be used to cover up some self-centred wish of one's own, as the wars of religion in the past have amply proved. Armies intent on pillage have marched into battle "in the name of God"; rulers have oppressed their subjects and subverted all human rights—in the name of "God"; ecclesiastical authorities have tortured and burned people alive for daring to disagree with their doctrines, all "in the name of God". And why is this? Obviously it is because nobody really knows anything about this God—what his will is, or how he expects man to act in any given situation. Every theistic religion differs on these questions. Therefore the

Buddha likened the love of God to loving a woman one has never seen, whose form and characteristics one does not know, and whose very existence is in doubt. He dismissed this kind of love as foolishness. [14] The love of a being whose attributes exist only in one's own imagination is at the best an unprofitable expenditure of the affections. One is most likely loving an image of one's own desires. Is not such love offered in the lively expectation of getting some reward from the deity? If God is needed only as a peg on which to hang one's love, what happens when the peg is nothing but an illusion? Buddhism teaches that it is far better to fix on real living beings as objects of *mettā bhāvanā*. [15] One then has something concrete and external to oneself on which to focus the concentrated mind of goodwill. You must see that it is easy to love a fabrication of one's own imagination, especially an image constructed in the form of a loving father and protector, but it is not so easy to love beings who have their own independent existence—an existence that may possibly be hostile to one's own. That is the real test of whether love is genuine and disinterested, or not. It is the cultivation of that kind of universal benevolence—entirely unconnected with any expectation of return or reward—that Buddhism prescribes as the real development of the heart of loving-kindness. This is the love that liberates. But the love of an imaginary being, a projection of one's own dreams, can never lead a man out of ignorance into the highest Enlightenment.

Mr. T: No doubt the love of God, when it is harnessed to

institutional and sectarian religion, often does give undesirable results, but isn't an ascetic who tortures himself out of devotion to a God still doing a good action? Isn't devotion spiritually profitable?

U: The Buddha was most emphatic on that point. Having tried to gain liberation by the most extreme asceticism himself, without result, he was in a position to speak with authority on it. The very first declaration he made, before preaching the Dhamma, was that the two extreme courses, self-indulgence and self-torture, were equally low, base and unprofitable. Self-torture is not conducive to sound health of mind or body. It can only bring on hallucinations and mental derangement, or, if the mind is stronger than the body, a physical breakdown before the mind gives way. That is what actually happened to the *Bodhisatta* himself; his weakened body collapsed and he could go no further on that path, but due to his strong mental powers his brain remained clear. But tell me this: why, in any case, should it be supposed that God is pleased by self-torture? Does he take delight in seeing men make wrecks of themselves?

Mr. T: No … No I must say, it doesn't seem likely.

U: Indeed, one would think that human life was painful enough, without voluntarily inflicting more suffering on oneself. But very often such extreme asceticism is itself the outcome of a pathological condition of the mind. Haven't you noticed how, in history, those given to self-torture were equally ready to torture others on the slightest provocation?

Mr. T: That's true—the Grand Inquisitor with a hair shirt under his habit!

U: Violence towards oneself is never very far from violence towards others. Buddhism condemns them both. It is not one of the cults of blood. But the self-torture of Hindu ascetics was originally not undertaken out of devotion to God, but to gain power through the strengthening of the will, so that the Gods themselves could be brought under compulsion. This is made very clear in the old Hindu stories of gods and ascetics, the *Purānas*. It is all part of the cult of power which underlies the Hindu system. The idea was that a man could make his will stronger than the Gods, by mortification of the flesh. It is only in early Christianity that we come across the paradoxical notion that a god of love can be pleased by self-torture. And in Christianity it did not gain widespread credence because the contradiction was too self-evident. It was so far from being universally approved that on several occasions the Vatican took action to suppress a sect of self-torturers, the flagellants; possibly because those who were eager to torture themselves could not be expected to fear torture from others.

Mr. T: Really? When did that happen?

U: Oh, some time between 1349 and 1389, in Italy. The leader of the sect was burned at the stake by order of the Pope. You can read about it in W. M. Cooper's *Flagellation and the Flagellants,* written in 1908. But in any case, the belief that the ego can be overcome by mortification of the body

has no psychological justification whatever; on the contrary, egoism is more likely to be increased by it. The pride of the ascetic in his asceticism is a byword. There are several allusions to it in the Buddhist texts. When Devadatta, the renegade bhikkhu, proposed stricter rules for the Sangha, one of the reasons he gave was that "people esteem asceticism". The Buddha rejected his proposals decisively.

Mr. T: Can you quote me anything the Buddha said on the subject?

U: Certainly. In the *Dhammapada,* verse 141, you will find this:

> Neither wandering naked, nor matted hair, nor dirt, nor fasting, nor lying on the raised ground, nor smearing the body with dust, nor (the ascetic pose of) squatting can purify a mortal who has not overcome doubt."

And again, in verse 394:

> "Of what use is your matted hair, O wicked man? Of what use is your deer skin? Within you is a thicket (of passion); only outwardly are you clean!"

Mr. T: Thank you. I am bound to agree that rigorous self-mortification may be undertaken out of vanity and a desire for renown, and even if at the beginning the motive was a higher one it may in the end produce spiritual pride. And it does seem to me that the idea of self-torture is quite out of

keeping with the modern spirit, which looks with suspicion on all forms of fanaticism.

U: I am glad you have grasped those points. Buddhism recommends a life of simplicity and austerity for the subduing of the passions. It is the Middle Way of moderation and sanity—a sound and healthy regimen that carries the full authority not only of the Buddha's personal experience but also the great weight of sane opinion throughout the ages. All truly great men have led simple, even spartan lives, practising self-restraint and avoiding all those excesses which encourage sensuality and dissipate vital energy. By such means the mind is kept clear, unclouded by the passions that warp judgment, yet the body is not deprived of anything necessary for its healthy and efficient functioning. That is the ideal life which Buddhism enjoins on everyone, monk and layman alike, but most strictly of course on the bhikkhu.

Mr. T: That is very reasonable indeed, and must meet with the approval of all sensible people. But now, leaving aside what we were talking about just now, the love of God, which you have made me realize, is of little value because in loving God each man is really loving a being of his own conception, fashioned in the likeness of his own desires and often with his own defects—leaving that aside, isn't the whole of the Buddha's teaching simply love?

U: The whole of the Buddha's teaching, as he often said, is simply the fact of suffering, its cause, its cessation and the

way to make it cease. Love, which is an attitude towards other beings, has an object and is therefore bound up with concepts; it can never on its own produce the insight-knowledge which is the crown of the Buddhist achievement. Love is an instrument—a necessary instrument—for eliminating the erroneous concept of selfhood and all the mental defilements that spring from self. And besides, it is a special kind of love that must be cultivated—not the self-assertive, possessive emotion that people usually mean by love. The Pali word *mettā* corresponds more closely to the Greek *agape*. It means universal, dispassionate benevolence. It is not the love we feel for any particular person who happens to be pleasing or agreeable to us. Still less is it the love that is associated with sensuality. And it is not a mere passing emotion, but a fixed attitude of mind, something which has become habitual through constant cultivation.

Mr. T: But just how does the Buddha's teaching of love differ from that of Christianity or Vedanta? Isn't that the kind of love they teach, also?

U: There are very important differences. Christianity says: "Love your enemies, and those that despitefully use you," and here there is a strong affinity with the teaching of the Buddha. But Christian love is confined to God and human beings; it does not include the lower forms of life, which according to Christian belief are created for man's use and pleasure. Now when I say this it is just to serve as a reminder of fact. In practice, many Christians show great love and kindness to animals, but this does not alter the fact

that the Christian religion does not call for it. Those people are extending love beyond the bounds required by their religion—or perhaps some of them substituting the love of animals for the love they cannot feel for their own kind. However that may be, it is only certain kinds of animals they love—those that are useful or agreeable to them. Others they hunt and kill without compunction. But in any case, when we are dealing with matters of doctrine we should never let ourselves be influenced by the behaviour of the followers of the various creeds; we should go straight to the teaching itself. Again, Christianity does not call on its followers to love the Devil, or the damned souls in hell; but Buddhism excludes nobody. The beings in the states of suffering are the greatest objects of compassion, and Buddhists are taught to share with them the merit of their good deeds, that their pains may be alleviated. And another difference is that Buddhist *mettā* is not an emotion which can turn into anger and violence, into furious denunciations of sinners and threats of eternal punishment. The love taught by Christianity always has its reverse aspect—loving righteousness involves hating evil. The injunction to "hate the sin but love the sinner" is really meaningless. It is impossible because the sinner and his sin cannot be separated—a man *is* his character, his personality, his actions. The fallacy of this idea of hating the sin but loving the sinner is shown in the fact that the God himself does not love sinners. If he did, he would not cast them into hell. He loves them only when they repent—that is, when they cease

to be sinners. Even God, it seems, cannot separate a man and his deeds in such a way that he can save the man and send only his deeds to hell!

Mr. T: Do you know, I never thought of that before! It is really appalling the way we accept meaningless words as being profound wisdom, simply because we never stop to think out whether they have a meaning or not … And so we go on deceiving ourselves. We use words as a sort of plaster, to cover up truth and reality, instead of using them to clarify our ideas. Really, it is shocking when one realizes it.

U: I am afraid the language of theology is designed more to that end than any other. That is what has put theology into irreconcilable opposition to philosophy in the West. To be quite plain, Christianity does not offer any reasoned basis for its teaching of love. No attempt is made to explain to man why he should love his enemy. It is simply given as a commandment of God; yet it is quite clear that the God himself does not continue to love those who persist in rebelling against him. Jesus himself often denounced sinners in anything but loving speech, as Bertrand Russell has pointed out in one of his essays. And one is bound to remember that this God who cannot forgive has not really been injured by the sinner. How can a puny mortal do any real injury to the "Eternal and Almighty God"? But the enemy a man is commanded to love and forgive is one who has done a very real injury to him, and may inflict another in the future. So what can one deduce from that?

Mr. T: That man is expected to be more loving and forgiving than God. That seems to me the sole and inescapable answer.

U: Yes, exactly.

Mr. T: But—but … Oh, dear … Excuse me—I feel a bit bewildered. These things seem so plain now—and yet—how was it I never thought of them before?

U: In the case of *Vedanta*, again, love is directed mainly towards a God—one who is conceived either as endowed with qualities, the personalized or *Saguṇa Brahman,* or as being 'qualityless', the neuter or *Nirguṇa Brahman.* No matter which of these two aspects of godhead may be its object, what I have already said about the love of God applies here as well. So far as the love of real beings is concerned, it is limited, for all but ascetics and yogis, by the obligations of caste. We have already referred to the teaching of the *Bhagavad Gīta* concerning the duty of a *kshatriya*, one of the ruling warrior caste, and how it involves taking life, and I have said that the Buddha, who was himself a *kshatriya*, opposed this concept of duty absolutely. Buddhism makes no compromise on this question; the first of the Five Precepts, which is the undertaking to abstain from killing, shows how literally the spiritual love towards all beings is to be cherished and observed by the follower of the Buddha.

Mr. T: Buddhism is certainly very consistent. Its theoretical view of life—if I may use the expression—and its ethics are

all of a piece. I have not found such a closely-knit integration of the two in any other religion.

U: That is because the ethics of Buddhism spring logically and inevitably from its view of the cosmos as a whole. When the law of cause and effect with which we are familiar in the physical world is expanded to include the world of moral values, then a consistent and homogeneous system is the inevitable result.

Mr. T: Yet I wonder whether the moral rules can always be applied consistently.

U: In what respect?

Mr. T: Well, you referred just now to the First Precept, to abstain from killing. But is it possible for man to live in health and comfort on this planet without taking life in one way or another? Even to raise crops for food, vermin and pests have to be exterminated. And what about bacteria? For example, does the treatment of germ-borne diseases by antibiotics involve a breach of the First Precept?

U: It may seem strange to you, but that question touches on an important point in Buddhist ethical psychology. The first fact we have to grasp about kamma is that it is primarily intention. That, incidentally, is how craving comes to be implicated in actions. A kamma, in the sense of a deed that bears good or bad results to the doer, is an action performed knowingly, in full awareness of its immediate consequences, and desiring those consequences. With more remote effects we can hardly be concerned, because often they are beyond

our control. We cannot be held morally responsible for them. But we are responsible for whatever it is we wish to do, when our intention is carried out. So the Buddha said: "Kamma, I declare, O monks, is volition." We are not responsible for any effects, good or bad, which we have not intended. Do you follow me so far?

Mr. T: Yes, of course. That is plain common sense.

U: Nevertheless, one Indian school of thought holds otherwise. [16] Anyway, in consonance with its teaching of kamma as volition, Buddhism states that for an act of killing to be complete and kammically potent, four conditions must be present. There must be the knowledge that the creature is living, the intention of killing it, the act of killing and the creature's death. Here, by the way, I must point out also that the intention of killing alone does not constitute the kamma of killing. It only does so when it is followed by the act and its result. The thought of killing is an unwholesome mental kamma, but it does not amount to killing unless it produces the actual deed. All the same, thoughts of killing should always be avoided because the thought is father to the deed.

Mr. T: Yes, quite so. But what bearing does this have on the use of antibiotics?

U: Just this: all medical practice, from the earliest times, must have included preparations whose action was that of destroying bacteria. But since it was not then known that the action of these herbal and other decoctions was to kill

minute forms of life which caused the disease, those who employed the medicines were not aware that they were taking life. Their sole intention was to cure sickness. So they were certainly not guilty of conscious killing and no evil kammic consequences would follow for them. But we today are no longer unaware of the bacteriological causes of disease, and when we give treatment we are knowingly taking life. It is in the light of that knowledge that we have to consider your question.

Mr. T: Yes, indeed. It seems that modern science has complicated life for us in this way, as well as in so many others.

U: Well, of course there are systems of medicine which do not employ any of the products of animal life and do not aim directly at destroying bacteria. They simply help the body's vital powers of resistance and natural processes then overcome the bacteria. An organism can protect itself very well by its own method of producing antibodies.

Mr. T: But still I don't think it is going too far to say that there are certain diseases which are too malignant and swift in their onslaught to be dealt with in that fashion.

U: Yes, I will grant that. In such cases it is imperative to destroy the bacteria or the virus before it kills the patient. It is one of the dilemmas which are perpetually lying in wait for those who live and act in the world. A bhikkhu who is solely bent on attaining Nibbāna will not care about the preservation of his life to the extent of involving himself in

unwholesome moral action. Ideally, he will take the view that if, through some bad kamma of the past, he is to die before attaining Nibbāna, he should resign himself to it; if he is not, his body will deal with the disease in its own way. But when we are considering the case of ordinary people, we have to look at it from a different standpoint. There is, as you know, one law for the world—the law of self-preservation—and another law for those who seek Nibbāna —the law of self-renunciation. Those who still follow the law of the world keep the Precepts according to their capacity. If they break them they do so in full awareness of the consequences to themselves. For the Buddha has distinctly taught, 'Such and such is wholesome action, and such is its good result; such and such is unwholesome action, and such is its evil result'. But also he has said, 'He whose evil deed is covered by a good deed (*kusalena pithīyatī*) illumines this world like the moon emerging from clouds'. [17] This was in reference to Aṅgulimāla, who abandoned a life of violence, renounced the world and became an *Arahat*. After his attainment, Aṅgulimāla had to endure great distress as the result of his past deeds, but by having cut off the round of his rebirths at that point he saved himself from æons of suffering in hell. But Aṅgulimāla's sin was that of taking many human lives, and in force of kamma the killing of bacteria can in no wise be compared to that. There is, indeed, a scale of values accorded to the moral culpability involved in the taking of life, and sub-microscopic organisms are at the bottom of the

scale. There is a mitigating element, also, in the fact that the foremost intention of the doctor who administers the antibiotics or other bacteria-destroying drugs, is to cure the patient. Therefore, the unwholesome mental factor of hatred, which is present in all acts that have killing as their direct objective, is lacking. The suffering that is alleviated is far greater than any pain inflicted on the bacteria, if indeed there is any at all. We may apply the same principle to all other acts which, although they result in death to certain organisms, are not primarily performed with that intention, but are carried out for the welfare of higher organisms such as man. But still I must repeat that one who is intent on his own ultimate and lasting good will eschew all such actions.

Mr. T: I understand. It is in the end a question of personal choice—whether we choose the immediate good, which is not enduring, or the ultimate good, which is the only real and permanent good.

U: Yes, and there is still another aspect of this problem, which is really a very complex one. It is that if man were to lead a more natural, healthy life, eating pure, unadulterated food and living in accordance with Dhamma, he would have less need—possibly none at all—for antibiotics, serum prepared from living animals and all the other treatments that depend upon animal experimentation. The bad kamma that is generated by these methods of investigating and treating disease, particularly by vivisection, is itself one of the causes of man's increasing proneness to disease, and so a vicious circle is set up. Man will never succeed in

conquering disease by torturing animals. The proof of this lies in the fact that by mutation and adaptation nature produces new strains of micro-organisms which are impervious to the old treatments. New variations of the diseases then make their appearance, and further experiments on animals are carried out, to find new remedies. It has even been questioned recently whether vaccination is really effective against smallpox. This is strange indeed, considering that vaccination has been used effectively for the past hundred years. If there is any room at all for doubt in the matter it can only mean that something has changed. If a new strain of the virus is beginning to appear, medical science is more or less back where it started so far as smallpox is concerned. First the new strain will have to be isolated, then experiments will have to be made on more unfortunate animals to produce a new vaccine—and so the wheel of kamma and *vipāka* goes on drearily and endlessly turning.

Mr. T: Then you do not deny altogether that experiments on living animals have contributed to our understanding and treatment of disease?

U: No, certainly not. To deny it would be to go against all the clear evidence. But I say most emphatically that it is not the right way of dealing with the problem. Man brings diseases on himself by weakening the natural resistance of his body, through unnatural and unwholesome living, through contaminated atmosphere, food de-natured and adulterated by chemical preservatives, and last but not least,

through wrong thinking and acting—and then he subjects animals to unspeakable torture in order to find remedies for his self-produced ailments. Such a course can never be morally defensible; in the light of the law of kamma it is seen to be self-destructive.

Mr. T: I am sure you are right in saying that many of our diseases would vanish if we led healthier and more natural lives. And in view of what we know now about psycho-somatic sicknesses most people would agree that our bodies would be healthier if our minds were better regulated. The trouble is that people don't know how to set about straightening out their minds.

U: That is where Buddhism could help them. Do you know that the Buddha expressly said that sickness increases when people live without regard for the moral law? There is a definite connection between disease and the moral standards of the people in general. In a very real sense, disease is the outward and visible sign of an inward corruption. I do not mean that all sick people are wrong-doers in this present life, but that the prevalence of sickness in a society is an index of declining moral standards which affect every member in some degree. Does that seem improbable to you?

Mr. T: No, I cannot say that it does. Psychiatry has even gone some way towards establishing it as a scientific fact. Anyway, we have enough data to show that there is a connection. But now, with your permission I should like to

go back for a moment to the subject of intention which you were explaining in connection with kamma. Doesn't an absolutely pure motive justify *any* action?

U: If you mean by that, 'does the end justify the means', the answer is 'no'. An action that is bad in itself can never produce good, no matter what the motive may be. It is not *any* action that can be performed with a pure intention, only a good one, so that in Buddhism the question does not arise.

Mr. T: What I had especially in mind is whether killing for mercy is not justified. Supposing, for example, that an animal is in dreadful pain and cannot be relieved, surely it is merciful to put the creature out of its misery?

U: Well, I will ask *you* a question now. Are you in favour of euthanasia for human beings, in similar circumstances?

Mr. T: As a matter of fact, I had a discussion on that subject with a friend recently. He is a deeply religious man while I, as you will have gathered, am a bit of a freethinker. On the whole, and with some important reservations, I argued in favour of a human being's right to take his own life if he is suffering from a painful and incurable disease.

U: But you weren't, I suppose, in favour of someone else taking the responsibility of "putting him out of his misery"?

Mr. T: Only with his knowledge and consent. After all, a man is a rational and responsible creature, whereas an animal is not.

U: Let us leave animals out of it for a moment, please. What

position did your religious friend take?

Mr. T: As you would suppose, he argued that life is a divine gift, something which man cannot bestow or restore, and so no one has any right to terminate his own life, or get another person to do it. And he also maintained that human suffering has a purpose and meaning; it is a trial or purgation. Pain is something sent by God, which man should bear in patience and resignation to the divine will. I replied that might be so or not, but it was a very slender possibility on which to doom countless people to a life of torment. If he really believed in the purgation theory he should also be against the administering of sedatives and anaesthetics. The only point I would concede was that euthanasia could be a very dangerous instrument, and should only be resorted to under very strict conditions.

U: Well, now I know your ideas on the subject as it concerns human beings, let us return to the animals. Buddhism holds that the pain of animals is also not without meaning. If it is the result of previous bad kamma in a human life it will have to run its course until the kammic potency is exhausted, which means that even though we may succeed in ending it by taking the animal's life, we are only causing an interruption in the current of resultant experience. The suffering will be resumed again in some other life, until the whole of the bad kammic force is expended. Buddhism does not make the distinction that theistic religion makes between man and animals by claiming that man's suffering has a meaning and purpose, whereas that of the animals has

none. If the pain is caused by past kamma no outside agency can prevent it running its course. That is the first point to be considered. The next is that Buddhist psychology shows that no act of killing can be carried out without the arising of a thought of ill-will or repugnance. At the moment when the lethal act takes place, when the thought of killing becomes transformed into deed, whatever motive may have been in the mind previously is superseded. If it were not so, if in that critical moment the mental impulse of aversion did not arise, the deed could not be done. It may seem to you that putting an animal into a gas receptacle is a detached and passionless deed; but nevertheless the psychic genesis of the act is an impulse of aversion. The plain truth is that when a man performs what he believes is a mercy-killing it is because the pain of the animal is repugnant to him; it disturbs his mind and he experiences subconsciously a dislike of the object that has aroused the disagreeable sensation. Below the threshold of awareness he transfers his hatred of the pain to the animal, which then becomes the symbol of the pain and the object on which he vents his feeling of resentment. So, whether considered from the standpoint of the animal's welfare or that of the "mercy-killer", the deed is a mistaken and unwholesome one. Buddhism teaches that we should endeavour, as far as possible, to treat a sick animal as we should a sick human being—to alleviate its suffering as much as we can, but not to interfere with the working out of its kammic life-pattern. It could well be that if the evil

kammic result, the *vipāka*, is allowed to run its full course here and now, the animal might be reborn in a higher state when the present life has come to its natural end. But that could not happen if its life were to be cut short with a residue of bad *vipāka*, still to be undergone.

Mr. T: I am really surprised to find that Buddhist psychology is so profound and searching.

U: It has to be, because the seeking out and recognition of motive is its primary concern. It is, you must remember, essentially an *ethical* psychology. That is why some of its terms and classifications seem a little strange to the Western mind.

Mr. T: But does Buddhism consider that all pain is the result of bad kamma?

U: No. Some forms of suffering are the mere result of being a living organism. They are the price we pay for our existence in Saṃsāra, the condition brought on by our craving. So we can never tell precisely whether a particular affliction is the result of past kamma or not. In any case, even a disease which has kamma for its principal cause must also depend to a certain extent on physical conditions to bring it about. If that were not so, Buddhism would have no use for medicine or surgery. But on the contrary, we should regard every disease as being possibly curable, so long as there is life in the patient. If it is caused by kamma, we cannot tell at what point the bad *vipāka* may come to an end and the patient recover. Many people have lived to a

ripe age after having been given only a few months of life by their doctors. It would be a mistake to blame the doctors for such apparent errors; their prognosis may have been perfectly correct, by all the clinical evidence available at the time they made it. Yet cases have been known in which the most incredible physical restorations have come about quite naturally, after the patient has been given up for lost.

Mr. T: I feel bound to say that the Buddhist explanations of all these obscure matters are more convincing than any I have yet come across. They throw light in the most unexpected places. There is no reply to this! The interest I felt at the beginning has increased tremendously, and I now wish to go into Buddhism in greater detail. Is it necessary for me to learn the *Pali* language to get a true insight into the Dhamma?

U: Not at the beginning. You can get an excellent general idea of Buddhism without that, provided you are careful in your choice of books. But as you go deeper in your studies you will find it necessary to acquire a vocabulary of certain *Pali* technical terms, because for many of these there are no really satisfactory equivalents in English. You will learn them as you go along. Then as you proceed further you will probably feel a desire to learn the language, if only to be able to compare translations with the original texts and so clear up doubtful points for yourself. Not all interpretations of Buddhism, or even translations, are equally reliable, you know.

Mr. T: I suppose not. It must be easy to make errors, in interpreting a system so complex and in so many points different from anything the Western mind is accustomed to. —Well, thank you again. I shall look forward to our next meeting, when I expect to have some further questions to ask you.

III

Upāsaka: Well, Mr. Thompson, you are back again, I see. Just now I noticed you making an offering of flowers at the temple shrine. That is a very nice gesture, coming from a freethinker!

Mr. T: I felt I wanted to pay my tribute to the great Teacher.

U: People may have thought you were a visiting politician!

Mr. T: Never mind that. My offering was genuine. Having done some more reading since I saw you last, I am more than ever impressed by the Doctrine. Apart from everything else, it has a coherence and logic that is beautiful in itself—the beauty one finds in mathematics, or in the majestic inevitability of a Bach fugue. One feels that this truly is the law that holds the stars in their courses, that it presents things as they really are, and that nothing in it could possibly be otherwise than as it is.

U: Yes, naturally. It is the law of the universe, the "thusness" of things, which in Pali is called *tathatā*.

Mr. T: But now, to descend from the cosmic to the—er, mundane, I have just noticed some people making offerings of rice and other food to the Buddha-image. I have seen this done before, and it has always struck rather a jarring note to me. Offering flowers, incense and even pure water I can

understand. But food … Surely they do not believe that the Buddha, who passed utterly away "into the state wherein there is no possibility of the grasping factors arising," as I have read, is in need of material human food? Or that the Buddha image can eat it?

U: Of course they do not. It is nothing more than a symbolic gesture. But if it is done with the right mental concentration it produces a good kammic impulse resembling that generated by giving food to the living Buddha. The Buddha-image is always just a substitute for the presence of the Teacher who is no longer with us.

Mr. T: Hm … Well, that calls for rather more imagination than I can muster. I should prefer to see the food eaten by a hungry man. However, I realize that is just a point of view —perhaps my Western mind is too literal. Anyway, I am told the food is not wasted.

U: No, it is distributed to the poor after having been offered.

Mr. T: I am glad to know that. There are too many hungry children in the world for symbolic feedings to be justified, if they were to involve waste. It would be too costly an exercise of the imagination and I cannot believe that the Buddha would have approved of it.

U: Buddhists understand that very well. You need have no fear that Buddhism encourages heartless waste. The offering to the Buddha is simply a preliminary gesture; it really means that the food is to be given to the poor, in honour of the Buddha's teaching of *dāna*, generosity. If it were wholly

a kind of make-believe it would be ritualism, which Buddhism condemns. You will remember that the third of the ten fetters, as I told you, is addiction to vain virtues and observances, or *sīlabbataparāmāsa.*

Mr. T: Yes, one of the things that I, and many others, find so attractive about Buddhism is that it dispenses almost entirely with the external trappings of religion, which to so many people today are tedious and meaningless. It seems to me that the only purpose which communal worship serves is to give people a sense of solidarity. They no longer get the kind of mystical exaltation which possibly people got from it in the past. But I have noticed one thing, which I want to ask you about. It seems to me that most of the Buddha's discourses, and his training in general, were given for the monks. What exactly does the laity get out of Buddhism?

U: That is a quite mistaken impression. Some of the most important of the Buddha's sermons were delivered to lay people—people of every walk of life, from kings to scavengers. One of the best known of the sermons to householders is the Sigālovāda Sutta, [18] which gives comprehensive advice on the good life that is as true today as when it was first uttered. And there are many others. In addition to that, nearly all the *suttas* give some counsel which can be beneficially applied by both monks and laymen. They have a universal relevance. The Dhamma offers a code of living to everyone, the highest and best the world has ever known. It is a path to happiness, both here and in future states, which everyone can follow.

Mr. T: But can a layman attain Nibbāna?

U: He can go a long way towards it. If he goes as far as attaining one of the three stages of purification prior to *Arahantship* he will almost certainly lose all desire to continue with worldly life. He will then take the Yellow Robe if his responsibilities allow him to.

Mr. T: Ah, yes, of course—with the waning of desire, that would be a quite natural result.

U: But of course it is much more difficult for a layman, surrounded by distractions and sensual enticements, to tread the path to the end. For him it is a considerable achievement if he can manage to observe the Five Precepts faithfully all his waking hours. But he should certainly put forth effort to do so, and supplement his self-training by observing the eight or ten precepts [19] on Uposatha Days.

Mr T: What are Uposatha Days?

U: I suppose the best term for them would be "retreat days," as that conveys the idea better than any other. They are not fast days in the sense of abstaining entirely from food. The *Uposatha* days fall on the new moon and full moon dates, and the days of the first and last lunar quarter. In practice it is usually the full moon days that are observed by lay people. On those days they withdraw themselves from all worldly concerns and take on the major precepts of a bhikkhu, including that of not eating after midday. They spend the day usually in a temple, meditating, hearing the Dhamma or discussing it quietly among themselves. It is a

very beneficial practice, and one that was strongly urged by the Buddha. There is no special sabbatarian significance in the days; they are just the natural landmarks of the lunar calendar.

Mr. T: I should like an opportunity of doing that myself. Would there be any objection?

U: Of course not. I will gladly arrange for you to spend the next full moon day here at this temple. Your meal will be provided, and if you would like to wear the customary white clothes I will see that you are properly fitted out.

Mr. T: That is very good of you indeed. But is there any reason for wearing special clothes? Isn't that rather like the European habit of dressing up to go to church?

U: The white clothes are not essential. What is essential is the right mental attitude, and special clothes which by their colour symbolize purity, help to put us into the right frame of mind. So it is not just a mere convention. You might call it a psychological device.

Mr. T: Well, that helps. We have become conditioned to respond to satisfying phrases and the more solemn and scientific-sounding they are the better! Anyway, I see the point. One needs all the help one can get, to maintain a religious attitude of mind in these days. But, as we are on the subject of the Buddhist precepts, I notice that they are all stated negatively. Why should they not be positive? For instance, why should not the first precept, not to kill, be stated as a positive instruction to *respect* life or to *protect* it?

U: Because all morality must start by abandoning wrong actions. The precepts are actually positive injunctions to refrain from certain acts which are harmful. Old rubbish has to be cleared away before a new building can be erected. The Ten Commandments all begin with "Thou shall not—." Buddhism substitutes "I shall not—," because the precepts are undertaken voluntarily. The difference that is sometimes made between positive and negative virtues is largely an artificial one; all restraint from wrong action is a positive virtue. But out of these necessarily negative statements of what are really positive virtues there does emerge a concept of virtue which is actively manifested, which expresses itself in an outflow of tenderness for all that lives and suffers. There are four qualities of the heart which, when they are developed and magnified to their fullest, the Buddha declared, lift man to the highest level of being, where he abides like unto the gods. That is the literal meaning of the name *brahma-vihāra,* [20] which is given to them. They are *mettā, karuṇā, muditā,* and *upekkhā*—benevolence, compassion, sympathy and equanimity. These are not only to be practised in daily life, but also to be cultivated as meditation exercises, when they produce full concentration of mind and *jhānic* consciousness. They are the keys which unlock the gates of rebirth in the Brahma worlds. In practice they represent the ultimate ethical ideal to which man can aspire in his relations with other beings, for they make no distinction between the hostile and the friendly, the sinner and the saint, the Brahmas of high heaven and the worm

beneath the foot—as calm, pure, dispassionate love reaches out to all and encompasses all. This is how the Buddha described the practice of boundless loving-kindness in some passages from the Karaṇīyametta Sutta:

> Whatsoever living beings there are,
> Be they weak or strong … small or large —
> May all beings, without exception, be happy.
> Whether they be visible or invisible,
> Dwelling afar or near at hand,
> Already born or about to be born —
> May they all, without exception, be happy.
> …
> Just as a mother lovingly protects
> Even with her life, her only child,
> So should one cherish boundless friendliness
> And good will towards all living beings.
> With heart of loving kindness grown immeasurable,
> One should permeate the world, above, below
> And transversely in all directions, with a love
> Unobstructed, free from all envy and hate.
> …
> Here in the world this is the highest, holiest life.

Mr. T: Yes, that is positive enough, and active, so far as the mind is concerned. But what about turning thought into deed? If the loving-kindness is no more than a cerebral activity, an attitude of mind and nothing more, how can one be sure that it is a genuine feeling? If it is never put to

practical test, in some situation that calls for self-sacrifice or active work for someone else's good, can one ever be certain that it is not self-deception? May one not be humbugging oneself, to put it crudely?

U: Not if one also practises self-examination and analysis, in the thorough way Buddhism teaches. If one does not do that —yes, there is a possibility of deceiving oneself. Some people do indeed manage to convince themselves that they have boundless loving-kindness, when their actions show very clearly—to everyone but themselves—that they have not. But that possibility is present in every idea one has of oneself. The only safeguard against it, as I have said, is the deep self-knowledge that comes of minutely examining one's thoughts and motives, impersonally and without bias in one's own favour.

Mr. T: But would it not prevent any such self-deception if, right at the start, the precepts were to be framed as I suggested: instead of the injunction not to kill, a positive instruction to respect and protect life?

U: I think a moment's reflection will show you that it would be quite impracticable. No one could literally obey an instruction to protect life, without making his own life impossible. He would be all the time going about trying to prevent butchers from slaughtering animals and gardeners from spraying their rose trees. And if he professed to obey the commandment (for that is what it would be) whilst knowing that he could not possibly carry it out, it would be

just meaningless words. He would be left with no choice but to be a hypocrite. As for respecting life, if the phrase has any meaning at all it is surely covered by the resolve not to kill. I do not know in what other way we could show respect for life.

Mr. T: You surprise me! Why do you say "if the phrase has any meaning at all"?

U: Because to a Buddhist there is no concept of "life" in a collective sense; there are only living beings, individual organisms. And the life in them is not divine, or divinely bestowed; it is the result of past kamma actuated by craving. Therefore the Buddhist attitude is not one of respect, but of compassion. The phrase "reverence for life [21] " is not found in Buddhism; its place is taken by compassion for living beings.

Mr. T: I see you are determined to resist any theistic terms or ideas.

U: If I am, it is not for the sake of verbal quibbling, but in the interests of straight thinking. Tell me, now, can anyone seriously say that he has reverence for cockroaches or tuberculosis bacilli?

Mr. T: Hardly, I suppose.

U: Well then, you see for yourself the phrase is meaningless. It can only lead to confused thinking. And what would you say of man who undertook to "protect" those forms of life?

Mr. T: Well—I surrender that point! But I am wondering

whether it is any more feasible to feel compassion for them.

U: When they are considered as beings bound to the wheel of suffering *like oneself,* then there is true compassion. But it does not require that we should engage in fight with other organisms to preserve their lives. In Buddhism kindness and compassion take the form of not interfering harmfully with the destinies of other beings, but of wishing them well. When they die, whether it be naturally or at the hand of someone else, may they be reborn in some happier state! If they live, may they be free from unnecessary suffering! Such thoughts as these reach as far as loving-kindness can go without entering into the conflict between one creature and another, and so changing its own nature. If sides are taken, hatred creeps in and the *mettā*, which to be illimitable must be without distinctions or biases, is marred—we are then back at the more primitive level of "loving the righteous but hating sinners," each being personified for us by some specific individual.

Mr. T: But then, to take a concrete example, what if we should happen to see a murder being committed? Are we to do nothing to prevent it?

U: In that case a Buddhist, like everyone else, will feel a spontaneous urge to go to the aid of the victim. But he should try by every means to avoid using force. If he cannot protect the victim by non-violent means, then it is for him to decide whether he shall use force or not, and if he does, how far he is prepared to go. He should never exceed the limits

of strict necessity. Here I am speaking of the ordinary layman; the case of a bhikkhu, and particularly one who is striving earnestly to gain Nibbāna, and has renounced all other concerns and responsibilities for the sake of deliverance, is different. He should confine his intervention entirely to non-violent measures.

Mr. T: And if those fail?

U: Then they fail.

Mr. T: And the unfortunate victim dies! Then does Buddhism teach that it is more important for a man to preserve his own virtue, when by a lapse from his virtue he might save another's life?

U: It leaves the decision to the individual. It is for him alone to decide which he considers more important, and to act accordingly. But if he is one who is seeking the supreme good, the Buddha's words carry the greatest weight: "Let no one set aside his own good for that of another, however great it may be."

Mr. T: That is a hard teaching, it seems to me.

U: The point of it is that the one who is cultivating universal benevolence must not discriminate in any way. For him there should be no "aggressor" and no "victim", but only two beings equally caught up in the web of suffering, for who he must feel equal compassion. The Buddha illustrated it in this way: You are one of four monks, practising *mettā bhāvanā* in a forest cave. One of the monks is friendly

towards you, another is hostile, the third is neutral. Armed robbers appear at the entrance and demand that you shall give them one of your number to be sacrificed to their deity. Which of the monks shall you give—your enemy, your friend, the one indifferent to you, or *yourself*? The answer is 'None—not even yourself'. Your *mettā* for each must be equal and undiscriminating. If the robbers wish to commit a ritual murder you cannot prevent them, but they must choose the victim themselves. The moral responsibility is theirs alone. But now compare with this the *Jātaka* story in which the *Bodhisatta* gives his life to feed a starving tigress and her young. At first it would seem that two entirely different moralities are being taught. But it is not so. The *Bodhisatta* was accumulating good *kamma* by self-sacrifice; the meditating bhikkhus are striving to abolish all notions of distinction between self and others which stand in the way of boundless, undiscriminating *mettā*. Therefore none of them should discriminate against any of them, not even against oneself. His *mettā* for himself must be exactly the same as that which he feels for each of the others. The two parables show the distinction between the way of *kamma* and the way of the renunciation of *kamma*. In the *Jātaka* the Bodhisattva's virtue, or *pāramitā*, consisted of the accumulation of merit; the virtue of the bhikkhus consists of the abandoning of all merit except that of their *Jhāna*.

Mr. T: That is a difficult point, but I think I understand it now. At least, I can see why the bhikkhu should not resort to violence, even to prevent a murder.

U: You see, there are two kinds of merit—that which brings a worldly result and that which leads to supra-mundane classes of consciousness.

Mr. T: Very well, then can you tell me how *kamma* will operate in the case of an ordinary person who chooses to use force to prevent a murder?

U: No one can calculate, precisely the consequences of an act from the viewpoint of kamma. So much depends upon the actual state of the mind—on what wholesome or unwholesome mental concomitants are present—when the act is performed. But in the case of a layman who elects to use force in a situation of that kind for the sake of the victim, the bad *kamma,* if any, must be quite light—perhaps less than he generates in many of his daily activities. The fact that he is not acting from any selfish motive must mitigate it to a very great extent. If he should sustain injuries as the result of his intervention, the bad *vipāka* may be completely exhausted in the course of the pain he suffers then. And if he can by self-knowledge and control succeed in using the minimum of force necessary, without any impulse of anger or hatred towards the aggressor, but only feeling pity for the victim, then it is possible that there would be no bad kamma present at all. But to act in that utterly passionless manner is extremely difficult.

Mr. T: Now I am wondering just what kind of social effect such an attitude might be expected to have. Its bearing, I mean, on crime, on social abuses and—what is particularly

relevant in these days when power movements and power-seeking groups threaten in some parts of the world to establish the rule of force—what weapon it leaves society to protect itself from such evils as, for instance, race-hatred and political persecutions. It seems there is no place in Buddhism for "righteous anger". How, then, are these evils to be counteracted? Does not moral indignation, the outspoken public condemnation of vices, cruelties and perverted ideologies, play a part in keeping society pure? Don't you think that a society which is too tolerant of obvious evils bears within it the germs of its own destruction?

U: We must never lose sight of the fact that the Dhamma is a teaching for individual salvation. It is hardly concerned with society as such because, as I pointed out in another connection, when individuals improve, society automatically improves as well. At the time when the Buddha lived and taught, the ordinary man had no say in the way society was held together, no influence at all in the affairs of the state, its laws or the trends of its development. When the Buddha wished to give advice concerning man's life within society he addressed himself to the kings, or to the elders who formed the governing bodies of the republics. It was they alone who held the reins of public affairs. And of course the problems they had to solve were relatively simple ones, and quite different from those that confront us now.

Mr. T: But it is just in those matters that man is most in need

of guidance today.

U: Yes. For better or for worse, the private individual is now involved more deeply than ever before, in national affairs, and so he is the more responsible for what goes on in the society of which he forms a part. Since you have put this question, and it is one that cannot well be ignored, I shall try to answer it. But you must understand that what I shall say is my own opinion only; the sole authority I can claim for it is that it is an interpretation of the situation which I believe to be in accordance with Buddhist principles. You have asked me whether too much tolerance of obvious evils is not a dangerous weakness in society. I am bound to grant that it could be a source of danger. The moral indignation of which you speak does act as a corrective, if it is aroused for a just cause. When we admit that in the relative scale of worldly values every virtue can become a vice if it is carried to excess, it is not difficult to see that the virtues of the monastery and the hermit's cave can be harmful if they are practised in a society in which unwholesome and disruptive forces are at work. But Buddhism does not by any means advocate this. For the majority of people – those who bear voluntarily the responsibilities of worldly life—it teaches, as it has ever done, the middle way. Since they enjoy the rights, privileges and securities which society gives them, they own a duty to society in return, which is to keep it healthy. They are under a moral obligation to resist—using means that are in accord with Buddhist principles—whatever influences are manifestly evil and detrimental to

society, or which threaten the welfare of their fellow-men. They should never, in any circumstances, tolerate cruelties, injustices or the oppression of the weak by the strong. There are today many means, short of physical violence, by which disapproval may be expressed, and if these are used effectively at the first appearance of vicious trends in society, the necessity of resorting to force later may be avoided. But if the weight of moral force is insufficient to stamp out some grave evil, then the state itself must take action. Even Asoka, who stands out as the pattern of a benevolent Buddhist king, did not disband his army or abolish the punitive laws that were necessary to guarantee his subjects' peace and security. Neither did the Buddha ever counsel a ruler to go to such extremes of non-violence; he simply called for a just and merciful administration of the realm, exhorting kings to look upon their subjects as their own children, for if the king and his ministers were good, the people would be good also, living as members of one united family.

Mr. T: I am relieved to know that Buddhism favours a realistic view of these matters, and does not except us to take a neutral and complaisant attitude towards social evils; for if it did, I am afraid it would be of little service to mankind as a whole today. Now, you just mentioned kingdoms and republics in the India of the Buddha's time. Is there any indication as to which system the Buddha himself considered best?

U: No, not enough to base any theory of 'rulership' upon.

The republics appear to have resembled the Greek republican states; they were governed by a senate—not elected by the people, but composed of men of known character and tested ability, chosen by their peers. The Buddha never drew any comparison between the two systems. But in the Buddhist texts, when the ideal state is depicted it is under the rule of a *Chakravartin*, or world-monarch, a man of sublime wisdom and compassion who rules according to Dhamma. It is, in fact, a benevolent autocracy. But this state of things appears only at a phase of evolution when civilization is at its highest peak and it is possible to rule without bloodshed. It seems to be tacitly assumed that at other times 'rulership' must share to some extent the defects of all *Saṃsāric* phenomena. [22] Buddhism has no belief in the perfectibility of human institutions—only in the perfectibility of individuals.

Mr. T: The idea of the *Chakravartin* seems to link up with the Messianic hope that is found in other religions—and his rule, perhaps, with the "Kingdom of God". How natural it is that men should long for a divine, or semi-divine ruler—one who will guide them out of the wilderness into the green pastures of peace, and cause the lion to lie down with the lamb, here on this very earth, so stained with blood! It seems to me that this is one of the archetypal dreams of man, something universal and perennial among the varieties of human hope.

U: It may be not a dream but a memory.

Mr. T: You mean …?

U: There have been world-monarchs in the past cycles of the world, just as there will be in the future. Who knows what subconscious memories of them have crossed the portals of death and rebirth? Or what expectations may have been born of those dimly-remembered things?

Mr. T: Yes … it is possible. I feel now more than ever I did the depth and breadth of this experience we call life, how infinitely it extends all about us, how it stretches back into unimaginable vistas of time. It is a thing I never understood before. The other day I was reading a poem, and all at once I had a feeling that the words were living things, with a meaning greater than their sense. It seemed as though the walls of the room had suddenly, silently, slid away and there was voidness—just voidness—but it contained all that has ever been, or will be. And it seemed to me that I knew everything, and had been one with that knowledge throughout all time … Strange … It seems to me that since I have been reading about Buddhism, thinking about it, something has grown to maturity in me, something that otherwise might never have come to the light … But I can neither describe it nor account for it. I can only say—perhaps I knew these things before.

U: Perhaps you did.

Mr. T: There is just one last question I want to ask. Just now you spoke of what should not be tolerated in society. It reminded me of a question I wanted to put to you earlier.

What is the proper attitude for a Buddhist to take to other religions? Should it not be one of absolute tolerance? As I understand it, that is what the Buddha taught.

U: Perhaps you think that in answering some of your questions about Buddhism in relations to other faiths I have not been as tolerant as I might have been?

Mr T: It had crossed my mind.

U: Well, in that case I am glad you have mentioned it. What do you yourself understand by religious tolerance?

Mr. T: I take it to mean not forcing others to give up their own beliefs—not using any kind of compulsion to make them change their religion; and, of course, not making any discrimination in one's attitude towards those of other faiths.

U: But do you think that reasoned, legitimate criticism of religious beliefs, with opportunity given to the other side to oppose you, constitutes intolerance?

Mr. T: Well—it could indicate an intolerant attitude of mind.

U: But in that case, can you name any single religious teacher, including the Buddha himself, who was not "intolerant"?

Mr. T: Actually, I thought the Buddha was the single exception.

U: Then you can never have read the many Suttas in which

the Buddha discussed matters of doctrine and practice with other religious teachers or their followers. In those discourses, such as the Brahmajāla, Ambaṭṭha, Soṇadaṇḍa, Kassapa, Sīhanāda, Poṭṭhapāda, Lohicca and Tevijja Suttas in the Dīgha Nikāya, the Buddha courteously but very firmly refuted different kinds of wrong belief. Can you tell me how he could have taught anything at all if he had refused to make comparisons between his own doctrines and those of other teachers?

Mr. T: Hm … No, I suppose he couldn't.

U: Exactly so. Having any kind of teaching to impart, must necessarily mean that some other teachings are contradicted. And supposing, further, that someone invites one to make a comparison between his religious beliefs and one's own, can one be called "intolerant" if the comparison does not turn out to be pleasing to him?

Mr. T: No, not really. Of course, a lot depends on how one expresses oneself.

U: More depends upon how sensitive the other person is about his faith. Buddhists are not particularly sensitive because they feel that Buddhism can be demonstrated rationally.

Mr. T: All right, I admit that "reasoned, legitimate criticism" is not intolerance—particularly if it has been asked for. But I take it that Buddhism is tolerant in the stricter sense that I mentioned first?

U: You had better have said "in the true sense", for when you said ṅot forcing others to give up their religion, and not making any discrimination against others on account of their faith" you were really defining true tolerance. That is the kind of tolerance the Buddha practised and advocated, and which Buddhists have always followed. After he had refuted erroneous beliefs, the Buddha still maintained that a man had a right to continue holding those beliefs, and that no one should attempt to coerce him out of them. And he went even further than that in teaching that all sincerely held beliefs should be respected, so long as they were not patently harmful doctrines. Buddhism in fact shows that all the great world-religions have some good moral principles which, if they are observed, will lead to a favourable rebirth. Doctrines may be erroneous, but if the actions they prompt are good and wholesome ones they will produce results as beneficial as those performed by a Buddhist. Morality based upon wrong views is called *diṭṭhinissita-sīla*; if it should happen to accord with morality based on right views its kammic action is the same, no matter what strange theories of the universe may have inspired it. The tolerance of Buddhism is grounded on two central facts: that happiness hereafter comes not through faith but through deeds; and Buddhism claims for itself no exclusive right of access to the heavenly realms. It claims only to show the sole way to exit from Saṃsāra. So the Buddha taught us to approve and respect whatever is good in other teachings, and furthermore, not to feel anger if his own Dhamma is

attacked. This is true tolerance, and it has been observed faithfully by Buddhists through 2500 years of the growth and expansion of the Sāsana. Buddhism has always spread in other ways than by conflict, violence and oppression. Surely that is a sufficient answer to your question. But it is certainly a mistaken idea of tolerance to believe that it forbids us to draw critical comparisons between the Dhamma and other religious teachings.

Mr. T: Yes, I see that now. There are some religions, you know, which hold that since they and they alone, are in possession of absolute truth and the means of salvation, they should not tolerate error.

U: Yes, I know. Many crimes have been committed in the name of that doctrine. In reality the exaltation of intolerance is nothing but a cover for dogmatic beliefs that cannot meet the light of reasoned criticism.

Mr. T: Well, Buddhism can certainly do that. I am grateful to you for all the time you have spent over my questions. I am rather ashamed now to realize that several of them need not have been asked. I could have thought out the answers for myself, if I had chosen to do so.

U: Never mind. Don't we all need help and guidance? Come to me again, any time you wish.

Mr. T: I shall come on the next full moon day.

U: Good! And the white clothes …?

Mr. T: Please have them ready. I shall be happy to wear

them.

U: And may you always be happy!

Mr. T: “May all beings, everywhere, be happy”.

Notes

1. *Arahantship*: the fourth and last stage of purification.
2. Math. 25, v. 41; Mk.9, v. 42–48.
3. See The Wheel No. 15a/b: *Dependant Origination* (*Paṭiccasamuppāda*) and Wheel No. 394 *Significance of Dependant Origination*.
4. See "Professor Paley's famous Clock Argument" by Max Ladner (in The Wheel No. 74/75: *German Buddhist Writers*, p. 57).
5. See *Buddhism and the Scientific Revolution* by K. N. Jayatilleke (**The Wheel No. 3 p.3**).
6. See *The Three Signata* by Prof. O. H, de A. Wijesekera (The **Wheel No. 20**).
7. *Sammā Sambuddha*: the Supreme Buddha, qualified to set in motion the Wheel of the Law. *Pacceka Buddha*: a Silent Buddha, one who has attained Enlightenment but is not qualified to teach.
8. See Kālāma Sutta transl. by Soma Thera, The **Wheel No. 8**.
9. Bertrand Russell, "Science and Religion" (*The Scientific Outlook*), 1931.
10. Fine-material and formless worlds: planes of the thirty-one abodes of *Saṃsāra* which correspond to highly refined and ethical states of consciousness.

11. St. Matthew 24, v. 35.

12. In his later works, e.g. the *Mysterium Magnum,* Jacob Boehme developed his theory of evil as being a direct outcome of the divine manifestation, the 'wrath side' of God.

13. Māra, the personified evil of Buddhism, appears in the texts sometimes as a real person, sometimes as an externalization of the mental defilements, often in the plural form. It is as a real person that he tempts the Buddha at the time of Enlightenment and later, to pass into Anupādisesa-Nibbāna without fulfilling his mission. But at no time after the Enlightenment does Māra appear to the Master in the guise of the grosser fetters; his temptation of the Buddha, whose defilements are eradicated, can only be on the highest level—the temptation to accept his Parinibbāna at once. This, the Buddha's concern for suffering humanity did not permit.

Buddhism has no concept of a power of evil which can work from the outside on a human will; evil can work only from within. Its source is the mind, and there only are the materials with which it works. Even conceived as a real personage, "Māra" is no more than the title of an office; the being, who holds that office in the texts, is itself destined to Arahatship in a future life. In a previous world-cycle the office was held by Mahā Moggallāna Thera, one of the present Buddha's Chief Disciples. This idea invites comparison with Origen's Gnostic doctrine, condemned by

the Christian church as a heresy, that even Satan would ultimately gain salvation.

14. Tevijja Sutta of the Dīgha Nikāya (The **Wheel No. 57/58**).

15. *Mettā Bhāvanā*: the meditation on universal benevolence, one of the four *Brahma Vihāras* (The **Wheel No. 6/7**).

16. Jainism, the teaching of Mahāvīra, a contemporary of the Buddha, holds that even involuntary actions constitute kamma, so that release from Saṃsāra can be gained only by abstaining from all activities. Mahāvīra is the Niganṭha Nātaputta of the Buddhist texts.

17. *Dhammapada* v. 173. Dhp. Com. XĪI, 6.

18. Translated in "*Everyman's Ethics*" (The **Wheel No. 14**).

19. Text in "*The Mirror of the Dhamma*" (The **Wheel No. 54**).

20. *The Four Sublime States* (The **Wheel No. 6**).

21. Schweitzer's phrase: a concept which has led to much confused thinking and to serious contradictions between theory and practice in the ethical life.

22. In illustration of this it is related that the *Bodhisatta* was once born as the son of a powerful monarch. As an infant he saw his father in the counsel chamber condemning criminals to punishment and death. Horrified, the Prince thought to himself: "If I inherit the Kingdom I too will have to commit such acts, for to a ruler they are unavoidable." From that time on, he feigned dumbness,

to disqualify himself for the throne

THE BUDDHIST PUBLICATION SOCIETY

The BPS is an approved charity dedicated to making known the Teaching of the Buddha, which has a vital message for all people.

Founded in 1958, the BPS has published a wide variety of books and booklets covering a great range of topics. Its publications include accurate annotated translations of the Buddha's discourses, standard reference works, as well as original contemporary expositions of Buddhist thought and practice. These works present Buddhism as it truly is—a dynamic force which has influenced receptive minds for the past 2500 years and is still as relevant today as it was when it first arose.

For more information about the BPS and our publications, please visit our website, or write an e-mail or a letter to the:

Administrative Secretary
Buddhist Publication Society
P.O. Box 61

54 Sangharaja Mawatha
Kandy • Sri Lanka
E-mail: bps@bps.lk

web site: http://www.bps.lk
Tel: 0094 81 223 7283 • Fax: 0094 81 222 3679

Table of Contents