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Buddhist aspects of Spinoza's thought

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BUDDHIST ASPECTS
OF SPINOZA'S THOUGHT

BY

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PREFACE

The aim of this dissertation is to demonstrate that notwithstanding differences of period, culture and metaphysical approach, the Buddha and Spinoza arrived at strikingly similar insights concerning the nature of the universe, the human condition and the place of man in that universe. While it explores the significant parallels in the philosophies of the two, it does *not* attempt to establish any direct influence of Buddhism upon Spinoza's thought. There is no evidence that Spinoza was acquainted with Buddhist teachings and as far as we know Schopenhauer was the first major Western philosopher to acknowledge an indebtedness to the Eastern tradition and to Buddhism in particular.

It is remarkable how, when stripped of the antiquated trappings dominating the scriptures wherein his thought has been transmitted and the dogmatic tone that crept into the body of teachings after his eventual divinization by misguided disciples (causing Western thinkers too often to dismiss it as simplistic), the underlying world view and moral philosophy of the Buddha retains philosophic interest even in the context of modern Western thought. Given the deep affinities that I find between his *Weltanschauung* and practical moral teaching and those of Spinoza despite the vast difference in metaphysical approach, it seemed that an exposition of the parallels in their thinking would be an effective way of pointing up the continued relevance of the Buddha's thought through the centuries. This exposition will further serve to refute commonly held misconceptions about Buddhist and Spinozist thought vis-à-vis world view and analysis of the human condition. In the process of clarifying their thought, it will seek to point up the inac-

curacy of claims that Spinoza's philosophy conveys a spirit of resignation, futility and despair, and that Buddhism is a pessimistic, ascetic philosophy that negates life and seeks escape from reality in Nirvana.[1] These philosophies, in fact, are neither pessimistic nor optimistic, but realistic. Far from seeking escape from reality, they seek full understanding of the human condition and complete realization of the truth of existence in the world as it is when stripped of illusion.

As I see it, most of the misconceptions about Buddhism originate in an inaccurate understanding of the word *dukkha*, caused no doubt by its frequent translation as "suffering." Although it can refer to extreme anguish, giving rise to the false notion that the Buddha viewed the human condition as a state of unmitigated horror, *dukkha* also comprises the entire spectrum of unsatisfactory states characterizing existence, including the vague sense of malaise that gnaws at consciousness even in moments of joy, the sense of dissatisfaction arising from the awareness that such states of necessity cannot be perpetuated. Contrary to taking a negative approach that denies life, both the Buddha and Spinoza offer positive philosophies, affirming the high degree of happiness and perfection that can be realized in active participation in the world despite the inevitable unsatisfactoriness or suffering that arises, and in the realization that salvation does not lie in a realm beyond but in a condition of atonement (at-one-ment), in the

[1] For example, in commentary on Spinoza and the Buddha, it is claimed that "A dead God spreads the spirit of gloom, and over the world of Spinoza hovers a spirit of resignation and despair" and that "Both believed that human life is only a typographical error of eternity, purposeless, aimless, useless, meaningless. To both life was a minus or an irrational magnitude; for they peered at it from the vantage point of a grave digger espoused to a midwife." See S. M. Melamed, *Spinoza and Buddha: Visions of a Dead God* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1933), pp. 18, 275.

knowledge of the unity that the apparently separate individual has with the whole of nature. And, to refute the common characterization of them as mystics, it will be shown how the Buddha holds that Nirvana can be realized only through the practical application of the Eightfold Path and how Spinoza sees reason and scientific knowledge not as opposed to intuitive knowledge but as essential to its grasp.

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

In the Sixth Century B.C., Gautama Siddhartha abandoned noble status, family and material comfort to seek out improved understanding of the world, the human condition in it and, ultimately, a remedy for what he came to see as the inevitable suffering characterizing all of existence. Having arrived after deep meditation at awareness of the unity of the apparently separate person with the whole of nature and at a Middle Way through which one could achieve the happiest state possible within the constraints of conditioned existence, and thereby become the "Enlightened One," i.e., the "Buddha," he set out to show this way to his fellows, stressing the necessity for each ultimately to abandon the given and to pursue independently the final goal of perfected realization of truth, discouraging intolerance of other teachings and, above all, the idea of divinization. For the Buddha, as this study will show through examination of his teachings as related in the scriptures, the ultimate goal of philosophic endeavor is, through understanding of the world "as it is" when stripped of illusion, to find a remedy for human suffering, and communicate it to others. It is for this reason that he, as well as followers, likened his function to that of a physician. He did not enter the arena of metaphysical speculation, but limited his inquiry and teaching to the practical matter of showing the way to achieving the highest good available to man, setting aside as irrelevant those matters not contributing to that end.

Spinoza, as had the Buddha, set out from the beginning of his philosophic pursuits to develop and deliver to others a practical philosophy aimed at reducing suffering by prescribing what he saw as a

remedy for the disorder engendered by confused ideas and attachment grounded in illusion, and by pointing the way to a lasting happiness grounded in sharpened understanding of the world as it is, particularly in terms of one's unity with it. While Spinoza grounded his ethical teachings in one of the most meticulously constructed metaphysical systems ever devised, he is more aptly presented (as he is in fact in Edwin Curley's heading of his translation of the *Ethics*) as a "Metaphysical Moralist" than as a "Moralist Metaphysician." That Spinoza's philosophic efforts were from the first ethical and practical in orientation is clear from his *Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect*, now regarded as his earliest work,[1] though not published before inclusion in his *Opera posthuma* in 1677. At the very outset of the tract, he states his resolve and goal to be "to find out whether there was anything which would be the true good, capable of communicating itself and which alone would affect the mind, . . . [and] once found and acquired, would continuously give me the greatest joy, to eternity," and shortly after indicates his aim to achieve "the highest good" by arriving at a "knowledge of the union that the mind has with the whole of nature" and striving "that many acquire it with me" (*Emendation*, 1, 13, 14). It is particularly interesting that he explains that it was by "persistent meditation" that he came to see that he was "forced to seek a remedy . . . like a man suffering from a fatal illness" (*Emendation*, 7), noting that all things men ordinarily strive for not only provide no remedy, but in fact hinder the preservation of their being. Spinoza's search for the ultimate good that would provide a corrective to human suffering became a lifelong endeavor

[1] See Edwin Curley, ed. *The Collected Works of Spinoza*. Vol. I (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985), pp. xiii, 3-4.

culminating in the *Ethics*, wherein he continues and minutely develops ideas first set forth in the unfinished *Emendation*. His statement of intent to explain those things necessarily following from the essence of God, "not indeed all of them . . . but only those that can lead us by the hand, to the knowledge of the human Mind and its highest blessedness" (*Ethics*, Introduction to Part II) echoes the intent expressed in the *Emendation* "to direct all the sciences toward one end and goal, *viz.* that we should achieve . . . the highest human perfection. So anything in the sciences which does nothing to advance us toward our goal must be rejected as useless — in a word, all our activities and thoughts are to be directed to this end" (*Emendation*, 16). This rejection of the "useless" is in the same spirit as the Buddha's stated intent to treat only those matters tending to enlighten for promotion of well-being and refraining from speculation on "questions which tend not to edification."[2]

[2] *Majjhima-Nikaya*, in Henry Clarke Warren, ed. *Buddhism in Translations* (1896; rpt. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass: 1987), pp. 117-121.

CHAPTER I
SPINOZA'S *DEUS SIVE NATURA* AND BUDDHISM'S *DHARMAKAYA*

For both the Buddha and Spinoza the principal task and final goal of philosophic pursuit is the practical matter of understanding human life as it is when stripped of common false notions and acquiring the faculty of goodness and happiness in this, the only world. In fact, Alfred North Whitehead's remark on Buddhism as a "colossal example . . . of applied metaphysics"[1] could with even more validity be applied to Spinoza's ethical teachings. While the Buddha conceived his remarkably similar world view of the Oneness of all in an integrated causal network and developed from it a consistent ethical doctrine based principally on metaphysical insight and psychological observation, Spinoza found it necessary to support his description of the way things are and the ethical teachings logically emanating therefrom by grounding them in a rationally persuasive, meticulously constructed metaphysical system.

Spinoza's concept of a unique infinite substance identified as God/Nature (*Deus sive Natura*) is the bedrock of his metaphysics and consequently of his philosophy of mind and ethical theory. Differing from Descartes, who in constructing his metaphysical system appeals to a first person's privileged access to his own mental states and is satisfied with the contingently true *cogito* as an indubitable foundation upon which to build his proof of God and the real existence of the external

[1] A. N. Whitehead, *Religion in the Making* (New York: Macmillan, 1926), p. 49; cited in *The Buddhist Tradition*, ed. William Theodore de Bary (New York: Vintage Books, 1972), p. xvi.

world, Spinoza denies the notion of a separate distinct self and is intent on grounding his metaphysics solely in the necessary. Observing what he deems "the proper order of Philosophizing" Spinoza takes the third-person viewpoint of the rational observer viewing things *sub specie aeternitatis* and, reversing Descartes' order, begins with God/Nature "because it is prior both in knowledge and in nature" (E. II, Prop. 10, Schol.), and through a deductive process establishes God as the efficient cause of the existence and essence of contingent finite beings, as well as that "in" which exist all things that can be said to exist.

In line with the Aristotelian concept that had prevailed in Scholastic doctrine, and that Descartes had been constrained to deal with, Spinoza admitted the notion of an ultimate constituent of reality, substance, that is conceivable and intelligible in isolation into the construction of his metaphysics. Whether he truly believed it to be an absolute existent, separable from its modes and attributes, could be argued. What is clear is that he held its postulation and precise definition to be a fundamental requirement for clear thought and discourse on the nature of reality as far as we can understand it, particularly if he was to refute convincingly the predominant Cartesian metaphysics and philosophy of mind that had to be discredited if he was to construct an ethics grounded in a persuasive non-dualist theory.[1a]

Maintaining that the nature of a thing must be explained with

[1a] In this dissertation I refer to Spinoza as a non-dualist rather than as a monist on the basis of Letter L wherein Spinoza states that "a thing can only be called one or single in respect of existence, not in respect of essence . . . Now, since the existence of God is His essence, and of His essence we can form no general idea, it is certain, that he who calls God one or single has no true idea of God, and speaks of Him very improperly" (Spinoza, *Correspondence*, trans. R.H.M. Elwes [New York: Dover Publications, 1955], p. 369).

reference to its cause, i.e., to understand the effect one must understand the cause, Spinoza defines substance causally as "what is in itself and is conceived through itself, i.e., that whose concept does not require the concept of another thing, from which it must be formed" (E. I., Def. 3). This notion that substance is the "cause of itself," having no dependence on any external causal relations for its existence or continuance, entails the correlative understanding of it as existing necessarily, as "that whose essence involves existence, *or* that whose nature cannot be conceived except as existing" (E. I., Def. 1).

Spinoza affirmed that the clear and distinct idea of God/substance as eternal and infinite essence existing necessarily can be thought without contradiction. Establishing the reality of this most perfect Being with a version of the ontological argument, he asserted that "perfection . . . does not take away the existence of a thing, but on the contrary asserts it. . . . So there is nothing of whose existence we can be more certain than we are of the existence of an absolutely infinite, *or* perfect Being — i.e., God" (E. I, Prop. 11,Schol.). Spinoza's concept of God is further defined as "a being absolutely infinite, i.e., a substance consisting of an infinity of attributes, of which each one expresses an eternal and infinite essence" (E. I, Def. 6). In his system substance as it is in itself, or as the cause of itself, "must be understood through its essence alone" (*Emendation* [92]). Since he stipulates that one substance cannot produce another substance, and that there cannot be two substances with the same attributes or essence, substance is established as unique, indivisible and infinite. In his interpretation of God as the immanent, rather than the transcendent cause of the universe and his definition of finite particulars as "nothing but affections of God's

attributes, *or* modes by which God's attributes are expressed in a certain and determinate way" (E. I, Prop. 25 Cor.), Spinoza distinguishes between *Natura naturans*, by which he understands "what is in itself and is conceived through itself . . . i.e., God insofar as he is considered as a free cause" (E. I., Prop. 29, Schol.) and *Natura naturata*, understood as creation, or "whatever follows from the necessity of God's nature" (E. I, Prop. 29, Schol.). This distinction brings to mind not only Giordano Bruno's distinction between *Natura naturans* and *Natura naturata*,[1b] but more significantly for the present study, the Upanisads' distinction between Brahma (the pure Absolute) in itself and Brahma as manifested in the universe.[2] For Spinoza although God/Nature has an infinity of attributes, only two, thought and extension, are known to us. These are postulated as equal in status, neither having priority over the other.

In its extended aspect, God/Nature exists in and through finite corporeal entities, each one indispensable to the whole and expressing the perfection of God/Nature in its own unique limited way. Contrary to Descartes, who postulated a transcendent God as creator and constant conserver of the universe, Spinoza did not admit the possibility of an external first cause or source of motion. He postulated motion-and-rest as the infinite and eternal mode of extension and characterized the physical world as a self-contained system of ever-changing simple bodies that combine to form more complex bodies, differentiated,

[1b] As pointed out by Frederick C. Copleston in *History of Philosophy*. Vol. IV (New York: Image Books, 1985), p. 209.

[2] *A Source Book in Indian Philosophy*, ed. Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan and Charles A. Moore (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1957), p. 38.

however, in kinetic terms only, by reason of their capacity to move from one state to another. The parts composing an individual may become greater or less, but as long as "they all keep the same ratio of motion and rest to each other as before" the individual "will likewise retain its nature" (E. II, Prop. 13, Lemma 5), one body being distinguished from another only by "motion and rest, speed and slowness" (E. II, Prop. 13, Lemma 1). By proceeding in this way to infinity, "we shall easily conceive that the whole of nature is one Individual, whose parts, i.e., all bodies, vary in infinite ways, without any change of the whole Individual" (E. II, Prop. 13, Lemma 7, Schol.). In his conception of the extended aspect of substance, space, as well as bodies, has objective reality. In his *Principles of Descartes' Philosophy*, Spinoza notes that "Body and extension do not really differ . . . , and space and extension do not really differ . . . , therefore . . . space and body do not really differ' (*Principles* II, Prop. 2, Dem.). Moreover, both are inconceivable in the absence of substance, for "Where there is Extension, or Space, there is necessarily a Substance" (*Principles* II A.21, Lemma 1).

While motion-and-rest is the infinite and eternal mode of God/Nature under the attribute of extension, intellect ("absolutely infinite understanding") is its counterpart under the attribute of thought. Finite minds, as modes of God, are inseparable from the divine intellect that forms their essence. In like manner, the infinite intellect of God is manifested in *Natura naturata*, existing in and through the totality of finite minds to the extent that these possess clear and distinct ideas. Not only is God not to be construed as having will, but for Spinoza it is meaningless to ascribe intellect to God as God is in itself under the aspect of *Natura naturans*. According to Spinoza, "if will and intellect

do pertain to the eternal essence of God . . . the intellect and will which would constitute God's essence would have to differ entirely from our intellect and will, and could not agree with them in anything except the name. They would not agree with one another any more than do the dog that is a heavenly constellation and the dog that is a barking animal" (E. I, Prop. 17, Schol. II). Rather than ascribe will and intellect to God as God is in itself under the aspect of *Natura naturans*, Spinoza holds that "our Mind, insofar as it understands, is an eternal mode of thinking, which is determined by another eternal mode of thinking, and this again by another, and so on, to infinity; so that together, they all constitute God's eternal and infinite intellect" under the aspect of *Natura naturata* (E. V, Prop. 40, Schol.).

While substance as *causa sui* is independent of any external determinations for its existence, attributes or modifications, its status as first cause demands that particular finite things, whose essence does not involve existence or duration, proceed necessarily from it, so that "whatever exists expresses the nature, *or* essence of God in a certain and determinate way" (E. I, Prop. 36, Dem.) and "nothing exists from whose nature some effect does not follow" (E. I, Prop. 36). Under Spinoza's dual aspect theory of substance the order and connection of ideas is identical to the order and connection of things. Whether substance is conceived under the aspect of thought or extension, there exists a single order of causes and "whatever has been determined to exist and produce an effect has been so determined by God" (E. I, Prop. 28, Dem.). Within such a rigidly determined nexus of interdependencies, God alone is a free cause and any appearance of contingency or freedom among finite modes is attributable solely to ignorance and

unclear understanding. Although God is a free first cause, it is only so in the restricted sense that it is compelled by nothing external and exists and acts solely from the necessity of its nature. it is not free in the sense that it could have created a different set of laws or acted other than in conformity with the necessity of its own nature. God is the efficient cause of all things comprehended by the infinite intellect and, although whatever has been determined to exist and produce an effect is ultimately determined by God, finite particulars, which do not have necessary existence, do not proceed directly from the absolute nature of an attribute of God, but rather, mediately, that is, they are "determined to exist and produce an effect by God or an attribute of God insofar as it is modified by a modification which is finite and has a determinate existence" (E. I, Prop. 28, Dem.).

The principal intent of both Spinoza and Buddha as philosophers was to find a way to reduce suffering and to show others the way to as peaceful and happy a life as possible by removing common false notions and teaching emancipation from bondage by improving their understanding of how the world is. While Spinoza, in conformity with the philosophic climate of his time, dealt with the issue of substance and provided a logically defensible metaphysical grounding for his ethics, the Buddha entered more directly into the practical matter of showing the path to freedom from the false notions of separateness and self. He, in fact, expressly declined to enter into metaphysical speculation on what he considered "questions which tend not to edification" and distract from the primary goal of eliminating *dukkha* (suffering inherent in man's life). When confronted by a disciple with a metaphysical or cosmological problem, such as whether the world is eternal or not

eternal, finite or infinite, the Buddha, who proclaimed himself "free from all theories"[2a] would at times remain silent to indicate that such questions were inappropriate to the case, or their final answers, if any, inexpressible within the constraints of language, or he would remind his audience of his purpose, asserting that "whether the dogma obtain . . . that the world is eternal, or the world is not eternal, there still remain birth, old age, death, sorrow, lamentation, misery, grief and despair, for the extinction of which in the present life I am prescribing."[3] Indeed, as he saw it, not only did such metaphysical speculation fail to contribute to the elimination of suffering, but it in fact added to it, generating more confusion, disillusionment and frustration in the world, with its intricately complex and unverifiable conclusions. A theory such as whether the world is eternal was to be dismissed as merely "a jungle, a wilderness, a puppet-show, a writhing and a fetter, . . . coupled with misery, ruin, despair, and agony," and since such theories, moreover, do "not tend to aversion, absence of passion, cessation, quiescence, knowledge, supreme wisdom, and Nirvana," the Buddha declined to adopt any of them.[4]

The only metaphysical views expressed by the Buddha were those he held essential to the realization of his task of finding and showing the path to the elimination of suffering and these were presented more as self-evident insights than as doctrine supported by complex theorizing. Essential to the elimination of suffering via the

[2a] *Questions Which Tend Not to Edification*, trans. from the *Majjhima Nikaya* and constituting Sutta 72 in Henry Clarke Warren, *Buddhism in Translations* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1987), p. 125.

[3] *Questions Which Tend Not to Edification* in Warren, p. 121.

[4] *Questions Which Tend Not to Edification in Warren*, p. 125.

elimination of all notion of self was the realization of impermanence as one of the three fundamental characteristics of existence, along with egolessness (insubstantiality) and suffering (*dukkha*). His basic teaching that it is "a fact and the fixed and necessary constitution of being, that all its constituents are transitory"[5] (to an extent prefiguring in Spinozism the dynamic character of simple bodies) was upheld and developed by the Theravadins and most of the subsequent schools of Buddhism. While the Theravadins remained committed to the original spirit of the Buddha's teachings, never postulating or seeking an identifiable, knowable substratum serving as enduring basis of change, the Mahayana ("Greater Vehicle" of salvation) school of Buddhism, which developed later and forms the second main tradition in Buddhist teaching, was strongly given to metaphysical speculation and offered theories deviating from the spirit of "orthodox" Theravada Buddhism. Although specifically Mahayana sutras such as the *Awakening of Faith*, the *Diamond Sutra* and the *Lotus of the Perfect Law* are "not recognized as authentic"[6] by Theravadins, whose teachings form the main basis of comparison in the present work, some main elements of Mahayana metaphysical doctrines will be briefly considered. These will be discussed here principally because the non-dualistic theory of an Absolute posited therein in many ways prefigures Spinoza's theory of substance as *Deus sive Natura*. However, they are interesting also in that the tracing of their subsequent development as doctrine reveals that despite obvious differences, there exist noteworthy parallels in Eastern and

[5] "The Three Characteristics" trans. from the *Anguttara-Nikaya* in Warren, p. xii.

[6] *The Teachings of the Compassionate Buddha*, ed. with commentary by E. A. Burtt (New York: Mentor Books, 1982), p. 126.

Western philosophies with respect to the evolution of philosophic issues arising from the intrusion into their respective *Weltanschauungen* of the unwieldy notion of a substratum, or essence of Being, grounding the phenomenal world.

While Theravadins honor the Buddha simply as a human being and teacher without any divine status or kinship, who preached the message of *dukkha* for the salvation of mankind, to the Mahayanas Buddhahood is expanded to include a cosmological and theological aspect as well. In their system the entire phenomenal world is seen as the manifestation of the "Truth Body" (*Dharmakaya*) of the Buddha. The Dharmakaya, also called "Suchness," represents "the oneness and totality of things"[7] free from all taint of opposition and duality. Just as Spinoza holds that God/Nature is the immanent cause of all things, an all-inclusive whole which may be comprehended either under the aspect of *Natura naturans* or *Natura naturata*, for the Mahayanas, "the world of sentient beings is not different from the *Dharmakaya*; the *Dharmakaya* is not different from the world of sentient beings. What constitutes the *Dharmakaya* is the world of sentient beings; and what constitutes the world of sentient beings is the *Dharmakaya*."[8] Like Spinoza's God/Nature, the *Dharmakaya* is infinite, indivisible and eternal. Asvaghosha describes the *Dharmakaya* of the *Tathagata* (i.e., "One who has found Truth," synonymous with the Buddha) as a body having "infinite forms," adding "The form has infinite attributes. The

[7] Asvaghosha, "The Doctrine of Suchness," from the *Mahayana sraddha-utpadda* (Awakening of Faith in the Mahayana) in *World of the Buddha*, ed. Lucien Stryk (New York: Grove Weidenfeld, 1968), p. 248.

[8] Sthiramati, from *Discourse on the Mahayana-Dharmadhatu* in Stryk, p. 297.

attribute infinite excellencies."[9] And as Spinoza holds that substance is *causa sui* and that one substance cannot create another substance, the Mahayanas define the *Dharmakaya* as uncreated: "It comes from nowhere, it goes to nowhere; . . . nor is it subject to annihilation . . . It is the One, devoid of all determinations."[10] Moreover, among the *Dharmakaya*'s infinite attributes, two are comparable to the attributes of thought and extension as posited in Spinoza's metaphysics. Just as "absolutely infinite understanding' is the fundamental mode of Spinoza's God/Nature under the attribute of thought, expressing itself in finite particulars, the Dharmakaya "universally emits the rays of the Light of Intelligence" and illuminates creation, and with an "intellectual light . . . unfolds the mindflowers of all beings."[11] Moreover, as all finite bodies are characterized by Spinoza as modes of God/Nature under the attribute of extension, the Dharmakaya is seen as presenting "itself in all places in all directions, in all dharmas, and in all beings"[12] and, having "All forms of corporeality . . . involved therein, it is able to create all things."[13] Like Spinoza's substance, the *Dharmakaya* is not subject to external compulsion: "Its freedom or spontaneity is incomprehensible." It is an absolutely free cause, and just as God/Nature is subject only to the laws of its own nature, so the Dharmakaya is the efficient cause of finite beings, determined only by

[9] Asvaghosha, *Doctrine of Suchness* in Stryk, p. 251.

[10] *The Vicesacinta-Brahma-Pariprccha Sutra* in Stryk, p. 271.

[11] *The Avatamsaka Sutra* in Stryk, p. 273.

[12] ibid., p. 272.

[13] ibid., p. 271.

the universal law of causation by which it assumes "any concrete material body as required by the nature and condition of karma."[14].

Another common feature of Spinoza's concept of *Deus sive Natura* and the Mahayana conception of the *Dharmakaya* is the postulation in both of the real existence of space within the Absolute Whole, although with differing rationales. While Spinoza goes along with the Cartesian view the "space and body do not really differ" (*Principles* II, Prop. 2, Cor.), equating it with extension, so as to avoid postulating the existence of a void, the Mahayanas, in their idealistic conception of the Absolute develop the ubiquitous aspect of it and characterize the *Dharmakaya* as "like unto space," which "contains in itself all material existences and all the vacuums that obtain between them."[15] The Mahayana affirmation and development of the theory of the positive existence of nothing culminates in the philosophy of Nagarjuna, the late second-century A.D. Mahayana dialectician and founder of the Madhyamika school postulating Emptiness or the Void (*çunya* or *sunya*) as what embraces empirical phenomena. The metaphysical position that phenomena are illusions and that only Emptiness has Absolute Being led to the conclusion that all positive assertions about the world are impossible and the terms "truth" and "falsity" are relative or meaningless. The Madhayamika School saw its doctrine as irrefutable because "there are no errors in emptiness . . . Because it is on account of emptiness that all things are possible, and without emptiness all things will come to naught."[16] To the claim that the extreme nihilism

[14] loc. cit.

[15] loc. cit.

[16] Nagarjuna, *Madhyamika Castra* (Discourse on the Middle Path) in Stryk, p. 286.

of the Madhayamika School not only contradicts our ordinary experience of things but in addition results in a logical absurdity, rendering unreal the actions, thoughts, indeed the very existence of the Buddha, as well as the metaphysical speculations of the Madhayamikans themselves, Nagarjuna responded that there exist two forms of truth (*satya*): relative truth, which falls short of true knowledge, and absolute truth, prefiguring Spinoza's distinction between common notions and adequate knowledge of the essence of things (as well as Plato's distinction between true opinion, *doxa aletheia*, and absolute knowledge of essences). To those merely equipped with relative or conventional truth, "unable to grasp the deep and subtle meaning of Buddhism,"[17] the phenomenal world has real being. However, the enlightened bodhisattva (the Mahayana counterpart of the Theravada arahant, or perfected individual) possesses insight into the absolute truth of Emptiness as the essence of being, which "is beyond verbal definition or intellectual comprehension."[18] Just as Spinoza was to hold that the lower levels of knowledge are requisite to intuitive knowledge of essences, the dialectician Nagarjuna maintained that "if not for relative truth, absolute truth is unattainable."[19]

While "orthodox" Theravadins do not recognize the validity of the metaphysical speculations advanced by the later theorizing disciples of the Buddha, which they justifiably see as corrupting the original spirit of his thought, the Mahayanas defend their doctrines, claiming that the level of the Buddha's discourses was geared to meet the intellectual

[17] ibid., p. 285.

[18] ibid., pp. 285-286.

[19] ibid., p. 286.

capacity of his listeners. While the teaching of the Theravadins is seen by them as representing a simplified, limited disclosure of truth, the sophisticated doctrines of the Mahayanas are legitimized by their adherents as representing truths the Buddha would have revealed to a more enlightened, philosophically sophisticated audience. According to Nagarjuna, for whom the teachings of Buddhism are epitomized in what he sees as the indisputable concept of the Void, "The World-honored One knew well the abstruseness of the Doctrine which is beyond the mental capacity of the multitudes and was inclined not to disclose it before them."[20]

While both Spinoza and Theravada Buddhists grant the extended aspect of phenomena as mind-independent entities (Spinoza defining bodies as modes of God under the attribute of extension, and Theravadins depicting a dynamic reality composed of separate, transitory conditioned things, "samkhara"), the philosophic development following both brought about an idealist reaction. For instance, in Mahayana Buddhism, a counterpart to Berkeley's idealist position is found in the thought of the brothers Asanga and Vasubandhu, philosophers of the fourth century A.D. and members of the Vijnanavada (Doctrine of Consciousness) school according to which the ultimate reality is Absolute Mind and phenomena are no more than illusory mind-dependent products of sense consciousness that arise from ignorance and failure to see clearly. According to the *Surangama Sutra*, which is representative of their thought, "every phenomenon that presents itself to our knowledge is but a manifestation of the mind . . . which is the

[20] loc. cit.

true substratum of all."[21] Although the ignorant mind projects a world of phenomena, the enlightened mind which perceives "the empty character of the universe" is assimilated to Absolute Mind, described as "universally diffused," and comprehending "all things within itself."[22] As in Spinoza's metaphysics, the finite mind must be conceived in and through absolute intellect, so that the enlightened mind that perceives the empty nature of things partakes of Buddha-consciousness and is "not to be destroyed, but remaining ever the same; it is identical with the substance of Buddha."[23]

[21] Burtt, p. 187.

[22] ibid., p. 194.

[23] loc. cit.

CHAPTER II
THE CONCEPT OF SELF

For Spinoza and the Buddha the way to blessedness and Nirvana (respectively) is not primarily through deeds or faith, but through cultivating right understanding of how things are. Given the absence of real differentiation among constituents of the world as viewed by both, one can approximate right understanding only to the extent that he eliminates the false notions of particularity and permanence from his thinking. Since for both the illusion of egoity is the principal cause of unsatisfactory interrelationships as well as private suffering and sense of imperfection, in both ethical doctrines freedom from this illusion is seen ultimately to promote altruistic endeavor as well as the greater personal equanimity that advances one on the path to salvation.

Although Buddhism does have in common with Hindu philosophy features such as the notion of karma and an ethics of non-attachment, the Buddha radically departs from traditional Indian thought on the issue of Self. While Hinduism subscribes to the doctrine (elaborated in the Upanisads) of a Self or *Atman* conceived under the dual aspect of: (a) the universal Self synonymous with Brahma or Reality, which dwells "in all things, yet is other than all things," as their external and immanent cause,[1] and (b) the individual self, partaking of the divine cosmic Self, *Tat tvam asi* (That art

[1]*Brhadranyaka Upanisad* in *A Source Book in Indian Philosophy*, ed. Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan and Charles A. Moore (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1957), p. 84.

thou),[2] the Buddha argues, along lines anticipating Hume, that neither reason nor the experience of introspection gives validity to the notion of a substantial, immutable self and, indeed, establishes it as "a fact and the fixed and necessary constitution of being, that all its elements are lacking in an ego [substantial, permanent self-nature]."[3] As will be shown in the following, he offers the doctrines of Conditioned Genesis and an analysis of being into Five Aggregates to support this assertion that the idea of an abiding substance in man that could be termed "Self" is a false belief which, while it may have validity as conventional truth, does not partake of ultimate truth. This doctrine of *Anatta* (No Soul or No Self), which denies the existence of a Self in the sense of an eternal spiritual entity capable of existence separate from the body, is fundamental to the Buddha's world view, and provides the basis for the intellectual and psychological conditions necessary to the elimination of *dukkha* and to the realization of Nirvana. To the Buddha, as later for Spinoza, man is part of a Nature conceived as a dynamic non-dualistic whole in which all things are inextricably conjoined and mutually conditioned by the same laws. As Spinoza defines finite particulars as "modes" of an immanent *Deus sive Natura*, by which he understands "the affections of a substance, or that which is in another through which it is also conceived" (E. I, Def. 5), the Buddha excludes all notions of a transcendent Being from his world view and sees created entities, not as separate objects, but as permutations of an eternal energy

[2]*Chandogya Upanisad*, ibid., p. 69.

[3]*Anguttara-Nikaya*, ibid., p. 274.

immanent in the universe, which is neither created nor subject to destruction. From the holistic standpoint of both thinkers, individuality is an illusion, all distinctions being relative and arbitrary. In a very real sense, for both, one is not born into the world, but is an integral part of it, a form or mode of the one fundamental stuff/energy that constitutes reality.

According to the Buddha, the tenacity of the false notion of a separate enduring self is in part attributable to the faculty of memory, which produces an impression of continuity, and to language, which perpetuates and develops the deception, referring the pronoun "I" to what is erroneously assumed to exist as a corresponding substantial object. In reality, however, all *dharma*, i.e., "all things and states conditioned or unconditioned,"[3a] are without a self and what is conventionally designated "I" or "ego" is for the Buddha merely a composite of ever-changing physical and mental forces or energies separable into five Aggregates: (1) the Sensuous, (2) Sensations, (3) Perceptions, (4) Volitional tendencies and (5) Consciousness. These Aggregates are unstable and in constant interaction, arising, changing and passing away in a stream of becoming. There is no continuous personal identity that underlies or sustains the flow of Aggregates, only "an uninterrupted succession of mental and physical states. One state ceases to exist and another comes to exist. The succession is such that there is, as it were, none that precedes, none that follows. Thus it is neither that same person nor yet a different

[3a]Walpola Rahula, *What the Buddha Taught* (London: Gordon Fraser, 1978), p. 143.

person which goes to the final summation of consciousness."[4] What is conventionally thought of as "I" is in reality ontologically elusive. It is neither the objective referent of the sum total of Aggregates nor is it something other, over and above, the sum total. To clarify this point, Nagasena, a prominent expositor of the Buddha's teaching, compares the identity of an existent "self" with that of a chariot, which he asserts is neither the assemblage of parts comprising it nor something other than these. To a certain extent anticipating Wittgenstein's language theory, he points out that "chariot" is merely "the epithet, designation, appellation, style, name" that "comes into use" when there exist certain objects present in a specific configuration, employed for a commonly understood purpose. In the same way, he continues, when the Five Aggregates are present, the expression "living being" is applied to it, and a name accorded for conventional use, although the referent possesses no ontological reality. Despite the designation of a name, "In the highest sense of the word, . . . no 'individual' is thereby assumed to exist."[5] Teaching the Buddha's precept that there is no ground to assume a Self

[4]Nagasena, *Questions of Milinda* in *World of the Buddha*, ed. Lucien Stryk (New York: Grove Weidenfeld, 1968), p. 95.

Although the Buddha offers a very attenuated concept of a person and does not attempt to deal with the problem of reconciling personal identity with the dynamic character of the Aggregates, given his theory of conditional causation, which steers clear of the extremes of eternalism and annihilationism and holds that nothing is ever created *ex nihilo* or completely destroyed, it is possible that he might have seen merit in a stream of consciousness theory (similar to that proposed by William James) whereby even though one mental state is at every moment different from the preceding one, it is at the same time appropriative of it (the effect being contained in the cause and understandable in terms of it), as such providing a sense of continuous personal identity.

[5]Ibid., p. 93.

behind the five combined Aggregates that we call a "being," explaining how the five Aggregates together are *dukkha* itself, the fourth-century monk, Buddhaghosa, explains: "Mere suffering exists, but no sufferer is found; the deeds are, but no doer is found."[6]

For the Buddha, none of the five Aggregates has priority over the others and none can function alone. It is to have wrong understanding to identify the self with mind or to accord special status to consciousness, as the mind is merely a sixth faculty which can be "controlled and developed like any other faculty."[7] As Buddhaghosa, the great commentator on Theravada thought, explains, "What is meant by the venerable N.N. is only the five groups, the six organs of sense, the six objects of sense, and the six sense-consciousnesses."[8] Consciousness is not to be conceived as a "ghost in the machine," to adopt Ryle's term, or as a "living principle within, . . . which with the eye sees visible objects, with the ear hears sounds . . . with the mind perceives the Doctrine" etc.[9] Rather, consciousness and sense awareness arise as a result of the presence of sense organs along with perceivable entities. As stated in *Milindapañha*, an exposition of Theravada thought, "because of the eye and because of visible objects arises the sense of sight; simultaneously are produced contact, sensation, perception, thought, focussing of thoughts, vitality, attention. Thus do these physical and mental states origi-

[6]*Visuddhimagga* in Rahula, p. 26.

[7]Rahula, p. 21.

[8]Buddhaghosa, *Vissudhi Magga* in Stryk, p. 152.

[9]Nagasena, *Questions of Milinda* in Stryk, p. 104.

nate from a cause, *for there is no soul involved in any of them . . .* Because of the mind and because of objects of thought arises mental consciousness; simultaneously are produced, contact, sensation, perception. . . ." (etc.) [10]

Although there is no self in the absolute sense, for the sake of practical convenience within the common domain of received ideas, the Buddha suggests identifying oneself with the body rather than mind or consciousness. In the Samyutta-Nikaya he explains: "This, monks, that we call thought, that we call mind, that we call consciousness, is that to which the uninstructed many-folk cleave; it is that which they stress as 'mind,' thinking: 'This is mine, I am this, this is my Self.' It were better, monks, if the uninstructed many-folk were to approach this body, rather than the mind, as Self. Why should this be so? . . . This body is seen enduring . . . But this . . . that is called thought and mind and consciousness, this by night and day dissolves as one thing and reappears even as another."[11] When faced with students' questions regarding the mind-body problem, the Buddha preferred to remain noncommital, explaining: "I have not elucidated that the soul and body are identical; I have not elucidated that the soul is one thing and the body another," because "this profits not."[12] For him "the view that the life-principle and the body are the same" and "the view that the life-principle is one thing

[10]Nagasena, *Questions of Milinda* in Stryk, pp. 106-107 (emphasis in text).

[11]*Samyutta-Nikaya* in Stryk, p. 198.

[12]*Questions Which Tend Not to Edification* in Stryk, pp. 148-149.

and the body another" are both "dead ends."[13] However, though the Buddha preferred not to engage in the battle of words and theories to account for apparent interaction between mind and body for the reason that he saw language as a human construct inadequate for the reflection of true realities, it appears that he did adhere implicitly to some form of parallelism between the Aggregate of the Sensuous (Matter) and those Aggregates comprising the mental under the direction of volition. In the *Anguttara-Nikaya* he comments that "having willed, one acts through body, speech and mind,"[14] and it is his view that like sensation, perception and consciousness, which are of six kinds acting in tandem with the six faculties (eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, and mind), so there are six kinds of conscious motivation, each parallel to its corresponding faculty and its causal manifestation in the external world.

For the Buddha the world was largely "grasping after systems, imprisoned by dogmas," dichotomized by questions of existence and non-existence.[15] As he saw it, the ontological positions, "everything exists" and "everything exists not," are also "dead ends."[16] Accordingly, he rejected not only eternalist theories positing the notion of a permanent, immutable self or ego, but also annihilationist theories ("I have no self") since they not only implicitly accept the existence of a self that is to be denied ("By non-self I perceive

[13]*Samyutta-Nikaya* in Stryk, p. 185.

[14]Anguttara-Nikaya in Rahula, p. 22.

[15]Samyutta-Nikaya in Stryk, p. 183.

[16]ibid., 184.

Self"),[17] but, in addition, assert the complete dissolution of mental energies after the death of the body. For the Buddha, who adopted the Middle Way rejecting the two extremes of permanence (*sasvatal*) and nihilism (*uccheda*), both theories were seen as "fetters" arising from reflecting "unwisely (unnecessarily)" and becoming "enmeshed in views."[18] Rather than adhere to either dogmatic bias, the Buddha recommended taking the mental standpoint that "It is not my self; it is just ill-uprising that uprises, ill-being stopped that is stopped." A person who cultivates right understanding and whose outlook is unhampered by the abstract accoutrements of excessive intellectualizing "neither doubts nor is perplexed; by not depending on others, knowledge herein comes to be his own."[19]

Spinoza, holding that "Whatever is, is in God, and nothing can be or be conceived without God" (E. I, Prop. 15), likewise sees what is conventionally thought of as a separate self as integral part of nature, rather than as distinct entity. For Spinoza, as for the Buddha, it is a false notion that there is an ontologically distinct thinker behind the thought, thought and thinker being united in the Oneness of all things. Refuting the doctrine of a separate spiritual substance that would affirm the existence of an underlying component preserving an individual's identity, Spinoza asserted that finite minds are modifications (or modes) of God/Nature under the attribute of thought, and what is referred to as a particular individual is

[17]Majjhima-Nikaya in Rahula, p. 101.

[18]ibid., pp. 101-102.

[19]Samyutta-Nikaya in Stryk, p. 184.

in effect a mode of the one God/Substance in which inheres an endeavor to persist in its own being (*conatus*). Whatever essence that the individual can be said to have can be expressed only in terms of its *conatus*, never in terms involving completeness and self-sufficiency, as with substance. In this, Spinoza seems closer to the truth than Descartes, whose *cogito* (as Spinoza pointed out in *Descartes' "Principles of Philosophy"*) does not, as claimed, conclusively establish the ontological reality of the separate "I" to which it appeals, much less its quality as distinct spiritual substance. Spinoza could aptly have pointed out that Descartes' foundation for knowledge would have been less disputable had it read: "Thinking is going on, therefore something exists."

Rather than incorporate the notion of spiritual substance into his system, Spinoza steers clear of the extremes of both materialism and idealism and sees only one infinite substance immanent in the universe which, reminiscent of the Mahayana *Dharmakaya*, is "by its nature, infinite, immutable, indivisible" (E. II, Prop. 10, Schol.), in which "the essence of man is constituted by certain modifications of God's attributes" (E. II, Prop. 10, Cor.). Spinoza's dual aspect theory holds that the mind and the body "are one and the same Individual, which is conceived now under the attribute of Thought, now under the attribute of Extension" (E. II, Prop. 21, Schol.). Just as the Buddha, recognizing no priority among the complex of Aggregates defined as a human being, or the ability of any one to function independently of the others, stated with regard to Name ("whatever entities in this complex are . . . of the mind") and Form

that they are "dependent one upon the other" and "invariably come into existence together,"[20] so Spinoza asserts the dependency of consciousness on matter and stresses the parallel status of mind and body. For Spinoza, the mind is the idea of the body (its object), and its representation under the attribute of thought. Accordingly, the "first thing that constitutes the essence of the Mind is nothing but the idea of an actually existing Body" (E. III, Prop. 3, Dem.). The mind and body are ontologically one in that "Between the Idea and the object there must necessarily be a union, because the one cannot exist without the other" (*Short Treatise*, Part II, Chapt. XX, Note 10), and together they express the essence of a single substance, God/Nature.

As shown above, neither the Buddha nor Spinoza accepts mental things as inner realities, as does Descartes, and even some contemporary materialists, *volens nolens*.[21] Interesting parallels can be drawn between the views of the Buddha and Spinoza on consciousness as a contingent state causally determined. According to the Buddha, consciousness cannot arise independently of determining conditions and the external world. Insisting that consciousness is not an absolute, self-sufficient entity, the Buddha stressed that consciousness needs matter, sensation or perception as its

[20]Nagasena, *Questions of Milinda* in Stryk, pp. 99-100.

[21]See Arthur W. Collins, *Thought and Nature* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1985), pp. 21-22 for comments on how in effect Cartesian thinking is implicit in the reliance of materialist philosophy of mind on the assumption of the inner reality of the subject matter of first-person psychological statements to which the "I" has special access.

means and were one to speak of a consciousness apart from these, "'he would be speaking of something that does not exist.'"[22] Just as the Buddha believed that ideas formed by the mind (*manas*) are dependent on external affects, Spinoza holds that all thought, under which he includes "all operations of the will, the intellect, the imagination and the senses" (*Principles*, Part I, Def. 1), requires an idea (i.e., "a concept of the Mind that the Mind forms because it is a thinking thing" (E. II, Def. 3) and that this idea must be of an object, "a thing which actually exists" (E. II, Prop. 11, Dem.). Spinoza's view that ideas do not arise *ex nihilo*, that for the existence of an idea both a thinking attribute and an object in nature are necessary, is comparable to the Buddha's contention that thoughts and ideas, along with mental consciousness itself arise and are conditioned by physical experiences as perceived by the faculty of mind. For Spinoza, all thought requires an idea and there "are no modes of thinking, such as love, desire . . . , unless there is in the same Individual the idea of the thing loved, desired, etc." (E. II, Dem. 7, Axiom. 3). Spinoza rebuts Descartes' solution to the mind-body problem (affirming the pineal gland as the point of interaction between the spiritual and corporeal substances) with the dual aspect theory that proposes a parallelism between thought and extension as expressed in the finite modes of mind and body and rules out interaction between the two ("The Body cannot determine the Mind to thinking, and the Mind cannot determine the Body to motion, to rest or to anything else" [E.III, Prop. 2]). For every idea that arises in the mind there is a

[22]*Samyutta-Nikaya* in Rahula, p. 25.

corresponding physical event and vice versa with which it is identified, differing only in aspect. The parallelism between the logical order of the mind and the physical order of things brings it about that whether nature is conceived under the attribute of thought or extension, "the order of actions and passions of our Body is, by nature, at one with the order of actions and passions of the Mind" (E. III, Prop. 2, Schol.).

For both the Buddha and Spinoza nature, as a causal network of finite physical and mental manifestations, is viewed as a dynamic, vibrant whole ceaselessly rearranging and recreating itself in infinite permutations so that nothing entirely new is ever created or destroyed. In Buddhist thought, the finite determinations of the universal energy immanent in the world find one form of realization in the five Aggregates combining to create the individual known pragmatically as "I" or "Self" to which wrong thinking accords permanent identity. These Aggregates, despite the illusion of continuity, are in a condition of incessant variation, every moment arising and dying according to the law of cause and effect. Buddhaghosa sought to emphasize the point in his comment that "Strictly speaking, the duration of the life of a living being is exceeding brief, lasting only while a thought lasts."[23] Even after death, when the body decays and the force, *prapti*, which formerly bound the Aggregates together is dissolved, the five Aggregates are not annihilated, but continue in the dynamic process, ultimately finding reincarnation in another life, not, of course, in the sense of a permanent soul/person that

[23]Buddhaghosa, *Vissudhi Magga* in Stryk, p. 155.

passes from one life into another, but in the sense of a combination of physical and mental energies that reforms in a continued drive to exist and re-become.

The Buddha's comparison of what we call an individual to "a mountain river, flowing far and swift" having "no moment, no instant . . . when it stops following"[24] (which brings to mind Cratylus' idea that all things are in such flux that it is impossible to step into the same river even once),[24a] anticipates Spinoza's dynamic conception of a universe governed according to laws of efficient causality wherein motion and rest is the "infinite and eternal" mode of God/Nature under the attribute of extension, and the proportions of motion and rest in individual bodies are constantly changing (although the total of proportions in nature remains constant). In the constantly shifting plane of existence, "Each and every particular thing that comes to exist becomes such through motion and rest" (*Short Treatise*, Preface, Part II, 7) and the "differences between [one body and another] arise only from the different proportions of motion and rest." All change in Spinoza's metaphysics is attributable to interaction of external bodies upon one another affecting each other's proportion of motion and rest, with retention of an individual's nature completely dependent upon its part's retention of the same ratio of motion and rest to each other. (See Ethics II, Prop. 13, L. 5.) It is essential to keep in mind that the cessation of individual nature in

[24]*Anguttara-Nikaya* in Rahula, pp. 25-26.

[24a]See Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, in Vol. II of *The Complete Works of Aristotle*, ed. Jonathan Barnes (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985), pp. 1594-1595, where he comments on Cratylus' more extreme version of Heraclitus' idea.

a finite mode, occurring when other bodies act on it with such force that the proportion of motion to rest cannot be sustained, does not entail annihilation, but rather a transformation in which the attributes of thought and extension persist (as do the five Aggregates in Buddhism) despite alteration of the proportion of motion and rest previously characterizing that individual. To help explain the Buddha's views on the elusiveness of personal identity, Nagasena in his exposition of Buddhist thought points out that the "individual" who undergoes the various stages of development from embryo to childhood to adulthood, etc. is "'neither that same person nor yet a different person'" from the one "'which goes to the final summation of consciousness.'"[25] Spinoza appeals similarly to common sense observation, and adds the support of theory in his explanation that "our body had a different proportion of motion and rest when we were unborn children, and later when we are dead, it will have still another. Nevertheless, there was before our birth, and will be after our death, an Idea, knowledge, etc. of our body in the thinking thing, as there is now. But it was not, and will not be at all the same, because now it has a different proportion of motion and rest" (*Short Treatise*, Preface, Part II, 10).

As the Buddha distinguishes mental consciousness, which has the mind as its basis, from the other five forms of consciousness (identified in terms of the sense faculty through which they arise), pointing out that it arises "on account of the mind and mind-objects

[25]Nagasena, *Questions of Milinda* in Stryk, p. 95.

(ideas and thoughts)."[26] Spinoza distinguishes self-consciousness as that form of consciousness which occurs when the mind introspects and forms an idea of itself, so that "the idea of the Mind and the Mind itself are one and the same thing, which is conceived under one and the same attribute, viz. Thought" (E. II, Prop. 21, Schol.) and "man . . . is conscious of himself through the affections by which he is determined to act" (E. III, Prop. 30, Dem.). As he saw it, it is the consciousness of one's self and one's actions without understanding of the causes by which they are determined that is the source of the illusion of free will and separate, permanent identity (see E.II, Prop. 35, Schol.). For Spinoza, not only may one not distinguish the free will of a self, but to make any assertions at all about the will is to use words for which one has no idea, since (*pace* Descartes) "all are ignorant of what the will is" (E. II, Prop. 35, Schol.). Although the Buddha does recognize will as a mental activity about which there can be discourse, according to his doctrine of Conditioned Genesis (which teaches the relative, interdependent status of all *dharmas*) will is not absolute and free, but rather a mental activity contingently determined. The Buddha's characterization of volition as a mental construction belonging to the Aggregate of volitional tendencies is to an extent in line with Spinoza's interpretation of will as "only a being of reason" (Letter 2, Sept. 1661). Contradicting Descartes' two-faculty theory of judgment which sees will as an absolute, free faculty, acting in tandem with the under-

[26]*Mahatanasamkhaya-sutta* in Rahula, p. 24.

standing (serving the twofold purpose of rendering it compatible with the teachings of the Catholic Church and accounting for error seen to arise when the unbounded will assents to propositions put forth by the intellect which is limited in its capacity), Spinoza holds that since the will and the intellect are nothing apart from the singular volitions and ideas themselves, and the singular volitions and ideas are one and the same, it follows that "the will and the intellect are one and the same" (E. II, Prop. 49, Cor. and Dem.). As the Buddha holds in his doctrine of Conditioned Genesis that nothing, not even the very notion of free-will, is absolute and "free from conditions,"[27] Spinoza affirms that "In the Mind there is no absolute, or free, will, but Mind is determined to will this or that by a cause which is also determined by another, and this again by another, and so to infinity" (E. II, Prop. 48). Moreover, as the Buddha discredits the notion of a soul or "living-principle within" that sees, hears, wills, etc. Spinoza argues that since "The Mind is a certain and determinate mode of thinking" it cannot be a "free cause of its own actions" or have an "absolute faculty of willing and not willing," or for that matter, any other absolute faculty such as understanding, desiring, loving, etc., dismissing these as "fictions" (E. II, Prop. 48, Dem. and Schol.). And from Spinoza's propositions that "all things have been determined from the necessity of the divine nature to exist and produce an effect in a certain way" (E. I, Prop. 29) and that "The will cannot be called a free cause, but only a necessary one" (E. I, Prop. 32), it follows that even "God does not produce any effect by freedom of the will" (E. I,

[27]Rahula, p. 55.

Prop. 32, Cor. I). The Buddhist parallel to Spinoza's denial of free will and selfhood in separate substances even to the Absolute (God) is evident in the *Dhammapada*, the ancient compilation of selected utterances attributed to the Buddha. Since the term "dhamma" (Skt. "dharma") includes not only conditioned things and states, but also the three unconditioned: (1) space, (2) Nirvana and (3) extinction caused by absence of a productive cause, it follows that the verse in the *Dhammapada* that says: "all dhammas are without Self," means that not only is there no Self in the Five Aggregates, but nowhere else either, not even in the Absolute/Nirvana[28] which in Mahayana thought becomes identified with the phenomenal world of becoming, unfolding in a cycle of birth and death (*samsara*) determined according to the law of *karma*.

[28] See Rahula, pp. 57-58.

CHAPTER III
DUKKHA AND HUMAN BONDAGE: THEIR ROOTS IN CRAVING/ENDEAVOR AND THEIR REMEDY IN TRUE UNDERSTANDING

For both the Buddha and Spinoza craving/endeavor, termed *tanha* by the former, and *conatus* by the latter, constitutes the pre-eminent driving force in the universe, responsible for whatever essence finite beings may be said to have, as well as their determined activity. Moreover, both trace the root of all suffering to craving/endeavor generated by ignorance of: (a) the real nature of the universe and (b) the human condition vis-à-vis that reality. Having isolated what they saw as the basic cause of all human misery and found what they believed to be the best possible remedy, both practical philosophers considered it their fundamental task to show the way to freedom from the tyranny of futile states such as fear and hope by raising the finite mind above the illusory world given in sense perception to a level of knowledge and intuition where complete understanding of the Oneness of being and one's participation in it is realized.

Dukkha (suffering/unsatisfactoriness) is the first of the Four Noble Truths that, together with the Eightfold Path, constitute the *Dhamma* (Truth) of Buddhism. There are, according to the Buddha, three main ways in which existence is *dukkha*. There is the *dukkha* that is inherent in the human condition and to which all are subject, such as birth, old age, sickness, death, loss, failing to get what one wants (*dukkha-dukkha*). There is *dukkha* produced by the impermanence and constant change that characterizes the entire universe (*viparinama-dukkha*), bringing it about that even if one were to experience a moment

of such unalloyed beauty that one could ask of it "*Verweile doch! du bist so schön,*" it could not possibly be perpetuated. Finally, there is the *dukkha* identified with the five Aggregates of attachment *(samkhara-dukkha)*, since that suffering is seen not as something that contingently arises, but rather as necessarily included in and engendered by the very way that man is constituted.

The second "Noble Truth" of Buddhism is that it is *tanha* (thirst, craving, desire), ultimately rooted in the false notion of a permanent, substantial ego, that gives rise to suffering and the apparent continuity of beings. The Buddha distinguishes three principal forms of *tanha*, manifest in craving for:

1. Sensual pleasure, which is of six kinds and produced by contact of what he calls the six organs of sense (eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, mind) with their corresponding objects in the physical world, generating a craving for visible forms, sounds, smells, tastes, tactile things, and mental objects (ideas, views, theories, opinions), respectively.

2. Permanent existence, arising from the false notion of a soul that transcends physical being.

3. Self-annihilation or non-existence, traceable to the erroneous view that the Aggregates conventionally referred to as "I" constitute an entity subject to obliteration upon the physical death of the body.

The craving impulse was seen by the Buddha as constituting the basic energy of the universe and the immediate cause of re-becoming. It was, in fact, considered by him to drive the evolutionary process accountable for the development of complex and varied forms of life from simple organisms and therefore ultimately responsible for whatever distinctive essence a thing may appear to have. However, although

"tanha" is seen as the fundamental generative principle, the Buddha rejects the notion of any teleological progression of the life forms or any principle of final causality operative within the universe, noting in fact that the gradual refinement of the sense organs had the effect of intensifying the grasping impulse that is at the root of all human suffering. The Buddha's view that it is essentially ignorance that makes the world go round, fueling the craving impulse and generating those volitional acts ("karma") which perpetuate the cycle of rebirth, is elucidated in his Doctrine of Conditioned Genesis in which he teaches that:

> On ignorance depends karma;
> On karma depends consciousness;
> On consciousness depend name and form;
> On name and form depend the six organs of sense;
> On the six organs of sense depends contact;
> On contact depends sensation;
> On sensation depends desire;
> On desire depends attachment;
> On attachment depends existence;
> On existence depends birth;
> On birth depend old age and death, sorrow, lamentation, misery, grief, and despair. Thus does this entire aggregation of misery arise.[1]

Within the Doctrine of Conditioned Genesis, which operates according to the principle of efficient causality (the pre-eminent explanatory principle in the Buddha's understanding of the universe), the Buddha discerns "three connections of cause and effect and of cause and a predecessor," that between: (a) karma and rebirth-consciousness, (b) sensation and desire and (c) existence and birth.[2]

[1] *Samyutta-Nikaya* (xxii.9016) in Henry Clarke Warren, *Buddhism in Translations* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1987), p. 166.

[2] Buddhaghosa, *Visuddhi-Magga* (Chapt. xvii) in Warren, p. 176.

This whole cycle of existence is governed by cause-effect relationships that are partly mechanistic and subject to the laws of physics and partly mental, determined by the actions of the will. However, although the Buddha sees the universe as a self-contained unit fueled by *tanha* and consisting of mutually conditioned entities arising and passing away according to the natural law of cause and effect so that nothing is ever completely destroyed nor created *ex nihilo*, he firmly rejects the idea of a first cause of *tanha*, and asserts that "the first beginning of ignorance cannot be discerned, nor can one say, 'Before a given point of time there was no ignorance, it came into being afterwards.'"[3] Rather, the joint arising of "tanha" and ignorance, as well as the means to their eradication, are inseparable from the five Aggregates, i.e., *dukkha* itself.

After characterizing *dukkha* as the fundamental way of being in the world and tanha as its direct cause, the Buddha proclaims the third "Noble Truth" of the cessation of suffering, and, by establishing a direct correlation between one's level of understanding and the way in which desire manifests itself with respect to its object, teaches the way by which the finite mind can be lifted from the miserable condition of ignorance and enslavement to sensual desire and brought to the level of wisdom and well-being through realization of the fundamental truth immanent within it, i.e.,, attainment of the state of Nirvana. Proceeding on the principle that the source of suffering must be understood before it can be overcome, the Buddha vividly describes in The Fire Sermon, one of his most crucial discourses, how, among the unenlightened multitude, the six organs of sense as well as their corresponding objects and the consciousness relating to each are burning with the three fires

[3] *Visuddhi-Magga* (Chapt. xvii) in Warren, p. 171.

of: (a) lust, craving after sensual desire; (b) hate, resulting from the frustration of desire; and (c) disillusion, seen as inevitably accompanying the satisfaction of desire. Moreover, "whatever sensation, pleasant or painful or neither-painful-nor-pleasant' that arises on account of a sensory impression (including mental) is also on fire.[4] This *tanha*, conditioned by the sense faculties, is seen by him as a form of "bondage."[5] Distinguishing between two forms of knowing, *anubodha* or "knowing accordingly" and *pativedha*, "penetration,"[6] the Buddha places desire generated by sensation on the lowest level of understanding, where the Aggregates conventionally referred to as "Self" are governed by false consciousness and directed by data given in sense perception. At this stage truth is seen to consist in the adequation of subject and thing and Being is viewed as something which can be quantified, analyzed and ultimately mastered, the univocal product of the finite intellect. For those functioning at this level of understanding, words are thought to mirror the structure of the world, to capture the essence of things conceived as separate, enduring, concrete objects. One has not yet learned to experience life directly, but comprehends it on the basis of hearsay, general opinion, and propositions put forth by the collective "they," all of which thwart the pursuit of rational autonomy.

The Buddha, affirming that liberation through detachment can be attained only through conscious awareness of how things are and

[4] *The Fire Sermon*, in Walpola Rahula, *What the Buddha Taught* (London: Gordon Fraser, 1978), p. 96.

[5] See for example the *Dhammapada* in which the Buddha states: "Him I call indeed a brahmana who knows the destruction and the return of beings everywhere, who is free from bondage, welfaring, and awakened" in *The Teachings of the Compassionate Buddha*, ed. E. A. Burtt (New York: Mentor, 1982), p. 72.

[6] Visuddhimagga in Rahula, p. 49.

direct insight into the human condition, warned against accepting the authority of received ideas, noting the often conflicting dogma put forth by "experts." To this end he admonished his followers not to "be misled by report or tradition or hearsay . . . But when you know for yourselves: These things are not good, these things are faulty, these things are censured by the intelligent, these things, when performed and undertaken, conduce to loss and sorrow — then do you reject them."[7] It is in accordance with the principles of freedom and individual responsibility that the Buddha offers his fourth "Noble Truth" of the way leading to the cessation of "dukkha," "The Noble Eightfold Path" (The Middle Way). This Path, along which are perfected the three essentials of Buddhist training — ethical conduct, mental discipline and wisdom, consists of: (1) right understanding, (2) right thought, (3) right speech, (4) right action, (5) right livelihood, (6) right effort, (7) right mindfulness and (8) right concentration. On an ontological level the Middle Way rejects the extremes of nihilism and eternalism, admitting neither the doctrine that a human being is nothing, nor the doctrine that he has an eternal soul, while on an ethical level, it prescribes a life of moderation and self-control midway between the extremes of sensual indulgence, characterized as "low, vulgar, common, ignoble," and asceticism, rejected as "useless" as well as "painful".[8] This Path was intended only as a practical guide pointing the way, not a fixed road to be followed rigidly without thought to individual modification. Condemning all

[7] *Anguttara-nikaya* in *World of the Buddha*, ed. Lucien Stryk (New York: Grove Weidenfeld, 1968), p. 179.

[8] "The First Sermon" in *A Source Book in Indian Philosophy*, ed. Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan and Charles A. Moore (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1957), p. 274.

forms of dogmatism and tyranny, the Buddha did not seek to establish a system of inflexible doctrine to be accepted on blind faith; there was nothing hidden, as he put it, in "the closed fist of the teacher."[9] Rather, in a spirit of tolerance encouraging free inquiry, the Buddha insisted that one apply his own common sense, reason and intuition in evaluating the merits of all doctrines, including his own, and urged that any precepts found contrary to common sense and the basic instinct for well-being be rejected outright. Accordingly, the Buddha warned against placing the onus of salvation on a codified system of ethics to be slavishly adhered to by unquestioning disciples (bearing, like Nietzsche's camel, their burden of "Thou shalt") with the same vigor with which he rejected recourse to the beneficence and grace of a personal transcendent being. Emphasizing the necessity of ultimate self-reliance, the Buddha likens his teaching to a raft, which one uses for crossing over to the shore of a new realm, but which one then beaches in order to pursue his own way to his final goal, advancing thereafter only by his own reason and intuition. As the Buddha explained to the monks in the *Samyutta-nikaya*, the stretch of water to be crossed, is "a synonym for the four floods: for the flood of pleasures of the senses, for the flood of becoming, for the flood of views, for the flood of ignorance," while the "hither shore beset by dangers and fears" is "a synonym for corporeality," the realm of perception and duality, and "the farther shore, secure and without fears, . . . is a synonym for nirvana."[10] The Buddha's metaphor of the raft prefigures Wittgenstein's metaphor of the ladder at the conclusion of the *Tractatus*, to be used in the initial climb to

[9] *Buddha's Farewell Address* in Burtt, p. 49.

[10] *Anguttara-nikaya* in Stryk, p. 204.

truth, but *not* to be retained.

The Buddha, declaring that one must seek "salvation in the truth alone,"[11] holds knowledge and wisdom as the principal means of liberation from "dukkha," of realizing Nirvana. To this end, he offers the intellectual component of his Eightfold Path, including:

(a) right understanding leading to "penetration" ("pativedha") of things as they are. At this level the moorings of words and labels securing one to the world of appearance have been released and one realizes that reality offers "no ports in a storm," that ultimately one must be a "refuge to oneself."

(b) right thought, the spirit of detachment and dispassionate caring that develops, *pari passu*, along with right understanding. Right understanding and right thought together form wisdom.

The Rhinoceros Discourse (*Khaggvisana Sutta*), supposedly delivered by the Buddha in compliance with the request of his favorite disciple, Ananda, represents one of the most powerful expressions of the way to wisdom, urging detachment from all unwholesome alliances and situations characteristic of the realm of corporeality and duration, seen as inviting loss, disillusionment, and the perpetuation of "dukkha." This advocacy of solitariness and self-reliance, urging one to walk alone "like a rhinoceros," stresses the disciplined orientation of the Theravada School as well as reiterating the Buddha's appeals to independence and common sense. Reaching in solitude the level of right awareness, one is more keenly aware of how desire arises out of the urge towards completeness and immortality (represented in the Hindu tradition by the striving of the individual "atman" to penetrate the eternal Brahman and

[11] *Buddha's Farewell Address* in Burtt, p. 50.

in the West by Plato's characterization of Eros as arising from the drive/"epithumia" to correct a condition of need/"endeia" which manifests itself either in the narcissistic drive towards wholeness of self or the nobler ideal of union with Absolute Beauty), and how it follows that at the level of illusion, where ignorance determines the "ignoble craving" for that which is subject to birth, death, old age and corruption,[12] any attempt to realize the goal of fulfillment is doomed to futility. One constantly shifting group of Aggregates moving "like a puppet," deceiving "all foolish people with its femininity, masculinity, etc."[13] could not satisfy a condition of "endeia" for a like congerie of Aggregates. Especially since, as the Buddha notes, words do not refer to stable enduring entities, but rather to transient "dharmas" in a constant state of flux, so that any attempt to capture through language the essence of Being or universal abstractions expressive of feelings involves one in a quagmire of incoherence and meaninglessness.

There are strong parallels to be drawn between the Buddha's "tanha" and Spinoza's notion of "conatus" as the force or tendency by which "each thing, as far as it can by its own power, strives to persevere in its being" (E. III, p. 6). For Spinoza, as for the Buddha, this endeavor that everything has to persist in its own being, to increase its power and strive towards self-perfection, constitutes the driving force of the world that gives to everything (including man) whatever "essence" and degree of self-sufficiency it may be said to possess, i.e., it is "that which, being given, the thing is . . . necessarily posited and which, being taken away, the thing is . . . necessarily taken away; or that without

[12] "The Summum Bonum" trans. from *Majjhima-Nikaya*, and constituting Sutta 26 in Warren 333.

[13] *Visuddhi-Magga*, in Stryk, p. 151.

which the thing can neither be nor be conceived, and which can neither be nor be conceived without the thing" (E. II, D2).

"Conatus," like "tanha" is also the causal factor through which the determined activities of a thing in its striving to persevere must be understood, and for Spinoza, as for the Buddha, efficient causality is the fundamental principle by which the universe is explained. As the Buddha formulated the Doctrine of Conditioned Genesis and explained the law of karma in terms of cause-effect relationships, Spinoza sees causal connections as pre-eminent in *Deus sive Natura*, both under its aspect of *Natura naturans*, where God exists and acts as a free cause from the necessity of his nature (E. I, Prop. 17, Cor. 1 & 2), and where "God is the efficient cause not only of the existence of things, but also of their essence" (E. I, Prop. 25), and under its aspect of *Natura naturata*, where finite modes under both the aspects of thought and extension are explained in terms of efficient causality relative to causal interaction with other modes. As the Buddha denied a first cause of "tanha," holding that "only out of things that existed . . . come things that exist,"[14] Spinoza rejected the notion of a first cause of "conatus," asserting that "God's power is his essence itself" (E. I, Prop. 34), i.e., its "conatus," and that "from the necessity alone of God's essence it follows that God is the cause of himself" (E. I, Prop. 34, Dem.). Further, as the Buddha denied the existence of any teleological principle operative in the universe, so Spinoza insists that "Nature has no end set before it," dismissing all final causes as "nothing but human fictions" (E. I. Appendix II). As he sees it, all appearance of final causality in the world is nothing but the result of erroneously assuming that the purposive-

[14] *Questions of Milinda* in Stryk, p. 101.

ness noted in human actions must also be found in nature, and that natural occurrences must be the result of divine planning.

"Conatus" relates to the striving of both the body and the mind, which "as far as it can, strives to imagine those things that increase or aid the Body's power of acting" (E. III, Prop. 12). When this endeavor relates to the activities of the body and mind in conjunction, it is termed "appetite;" when appetite is accompanied by consciousness, it is called "desire." For Spinoza, desire "insofar as it is related to the Mind is the very essence of the Mind" (E. IV, Prop. 37, Dem.). This notion that the defining characteristic of the human mind is desire (impulses and strivings which "vary" as a "man's constitution varies" and are "not infrequently so opposed to one another that the man is pulled in different directions (E. III, Def. I), is strongly reminiscent of the Buddha's position that the five Aggregates themselves constitute "dukkha," seen as directly engendered by "tanha" (the second "Noble Truth"). It will be conceded that while Spinoza sees endeavor solely in terms of a person's or thing's power to persist in its own being, the Buddha includes thirst for non-existence among the three basic forms of desire. Both the Buddha and Spinoza view suicide as an act that can never be virtuous. For Spinoza, suicide is contrary to man's essence/"conatus" to strive for persistence in being. As he sees it, virtue is "nothing but acting from the laws of one's own nature" (E. IV, Prop. 18, Schol.) and "that a man should, from the necessity of his own nature, strive not to exist, or to be changed into another form, is as impossible as that something should come from nothing" (E. IV, Prop. 20, Schol.). Since virtue is synonymous with power, which expresses itself in the natural striving to persist in being, it follows that "no one, . . . unless he is defeated by

causes external, and contrary, to his nature, neglects to seek his own advantage, *or* to preserve his being" (E. IV, Prop. 20, Schol.). The Buddha, despite intentness on liberation from suffering, likewise rejects suicide as an act never defensible, reasoning that the virtuous and knowledgeable are "like a medicine in destroying the poison of human corruption" and such individuals have an obligation to remain alive in order to promote the welfare of others.[15] The Buddha's views on the subject, expressed in the Milindapanha, a text of Theravada thought, in addition to demonstrating an affinity with Spinoza's conclusions on the unworthiness of suicide, also vindicate Theravadins of the charge of "selfishness" directed against them by the Mahayana School.[16]

As the Buddha established a causal connection between "tanha"and "dukkha" as generated by ignorance, so Spinoza, in his analysis of the way to salvation, discerns the relationship between "conatus" and pleasure and pain as conditioned by the quality of understanding. Spinoza, applying his dynamic conception of reality to his account of human affects, holds that external objects affect the body in such a way as to either increase or diminish its endeavor to persist in its being. In accordance with his idea of the parallelism between mind and body, physical events have corresponding modifications in the

[15] *Milindapanha* in Warren 437.

[16] It can likewise be stated in defense of this older, "orthodox" school of Buddhism, that when the Buddha proclaims the three characteristics of existence to his original disciples, he does not then advise them to withdraw into the experience of Nirvana. Rather, in a text also from Theravada literature, he insists that "whether Buddhas arise or whether Buddhas do not arise" these truths are to be "discovered and mastered," and when a Buddha has done so he then "announces, teaches, publishes, proclaims, discloses, minutely explains, and makes . . . clear." This injunction is repeated by the Buddha to his followers *three times* in a spirit of compassion and generosity for the well-being of others. "The Three Characteristics" from *Anguttara-Nikaya* in Warren, p. xii.

mind, so that anything that increases or diminishes the body's power of acting has a corresponding effect on the mind's power of thought. Human beings strive, therefore, after those things which are perceived to increase the endeavor towards power and perfection, giving rise to joy, with the same perseverance as they attempt to frustrate or destroy whatever diminishes "conatus" and gives rise to sorrow or dissatisfaction.

As the Buddha distinguishes between the "ignoble craving" for things "corruptible" generated by ignorance and the "noble craving" for Nirvana, concomitant with wisdom, so Spinoza establishes a relation between understanding and the quality of the object desired and holds that "both insofar as the Mind has clear and distinct ideas, and insofar as it has confused ideas, it strives, for an indefinite duration, to persevere in its being and it is conscious of this striving it has" (E. III, Prop. 9). Comparison can be drawn between the Buddha's view of "ignoble craving" as described for example in the Fire Sermon and Spinoza's account of human bondage as "Man's lack of power to moderate and restrain the affects" (E. IV, Preface). For both the Buddha and Spinoza suffering is a direct result of desire generated by sense perception, relegated to the lowest level of understanding, wherein things are seen as separate, freely acting entities rather than intricately bound and determined, as they actually are. As (in the Doctrine of Conditioned Genesis) the Buddha teaches that desire is conditioned by sensation, and that sensation is conditioned by contact between external objects and the six sense organs, Spinoza asserts that in human bondage desire is conditioned when the mind's ideas of external objects affecting the body are imagined confusedly according to the order of bodily modifications rather than known "clearly and distinctly" according to the logical order

of nature. A mind in human bondage functions at what Spinoza terms the level of imagination. Emotions are not seen as active, arising from the mind's capacity for clear and distinct ideas, but rather as passively determined by bodily modifications in response to external stimuli. They are "confused" ideas, "by which the mind affirms of its body or some part of it a greater or lesser force of existing than before" (E. III, General Definition of the Affects). Spinoza points out how anything might accidentally become a source of love, characterized as joy and the heightened sense of power and well-being accompanied by the idea of an external cause, or hate, sadness and the sense of diminished power of mind and body accompanied by the idea of an external cause (E. III, Prop. 13, Schol.). As the Buddha observed that desire for things corporeal inevitably gives rise to the "fires" of anger and disillusion, Spinoza notes that at the level of imagination, love for quantifiable particulars subject to duration necessarily leads to unhappy states such as, "Hate, when someone takes the thing he loves away from him" (*Short Treatise*, Chapter XIV, On Longing), and "the greatest sadness" when sensual desire has been gratified (*Emendation*, 4).

In imagination (*cognitio primi generis*) there can be no idea having intrinsic truth, i.e., truth "in itself without relation to an object." There can only be an "extrinsic" denomination of truth in "the agreement of the idea with its object" (E. II, Def. 4 & Exp.). This object, given in a "disconnected" and "fortuitous" manner in sense perception, provides only a distorted form of knowledge to the subjective consciousness and is the source of error, as, for example, when the sun appears small and near to the eye although its greater actual size and distance can be determined precisely through mathematics. To this level of

knowledge also belong universal generalizations, formed by the mind from its contact with particular instantiations. Although these ideas are not clear and distinct and are not made by all in the same way, they are acknowledged to have practical utility in the everyday world of experience. Like the Buddha, who emphasized the importance of seeing clearly as a means to raise consciousness to a higher level of awareness while not disclaiming the utility of conventional truths of experience, Spinoza is also intent on training the mind to pursue intuitive knowledge without, however, denying the usefulness of the construct of practical knowledge. Spinoza holds that even the confused ideas of imagination emanating from finite minds as modifications of the divine intellect do not constitute absolute falsehood, but rather represent a privation, a lack of knowledge of the true causal order in Nature that renders them less perfect than the adequate ideas characteristic of common notions (*cognitio secundi generis*) and intuitive knowledge (*scientia intuitiva*).

The Buddha's distinction between "knowing accordingly" and "penetration" is paralleled in Spinoza's distinction between imagination and intuition, and although the Buddha does not specifically speak of anything comparable to Spinoza's second level of knowledge, scientific knowledge, he does hold that rational investigation of the "Dharma" is essential and he does include the acquisition of the four analytical sciences as requisite to the attainment of Nirvana.[17] Within these categories, however, the similarity between their respective epistemological

[17] According to Warren, the four analytical sciences seem to have to do with meaning, etymology and terms expressing "insights of a saint," which would differ from the "common notions" that Spinoza sees as the logically related principles forming the basis of mathematics and physics. See Warren, Index: Analytical Sciences, p. 497.

positions is further evidenced by a like suspicion of words and images whose "essence" he sees as "constituted only by corporeal motions, which do not at all involve the concept of thought" (E. II, Prop. 49, Schol. II). His wariness with respect to words is grounded principally in his observation that since they are "established according to the pleasure and power of understanding of ordinary people," they can only be "signs of things as they are in the imagination, but not as they are in the intellect" (*Emendation*, 89).

Despite his idea that at the level of imagination, the mind is in human bondage, passively affected by bodily modifications in response to external affects, it is Spinoza's view that an emotion is no longer a passion once it is clearly understood. he not only holds that "an affect which is a passion ceases to be a passion as soon as we form a clear and distinct idea of it" (E. V, Prop. 3), but adds that "to every action to which we are determined from an affect which is a passion, we can be determined by reason, without that affect" (E. IV, Prop. 59). Further, it belongs to the very essence of the mind to form clear and distinct ideas since it is a mode of the infinite attribute of thought. Indeed, all minds possess to some extent clear and distinct ideas, such as those ideas concerning the properties of extension arising from our mind's union with the body and the ideas of relations between it and other bodies. This view that although partial knowledge of some things gives rise to human bondage, the mind, as a manifestation of the divine intellect can attain freedom through its innate capacity for absolute understanding, is paralleled in the Mahayana teachings concerning the relation of the finite mind as modification of Buddha consciousness to the Dharmakaya. According to this School, even though "the multitude of people are said

to be lacking in enlightenment because ignorance prevails there from all eternity, because there is a constant succession of confused subjective states from which they have never been emancipated," nevertheless, "the essence of the mind is eternally clean and pure." It is only when "the oneness of the totality of things is not recognized," that "ignorance as well as particularization arises." It is "when the mind is disturbed [that] it fails to be a true and adequate knowledge; . . . [that it will be] changeable, unfree, and therefore the source of falsity and defilements . . . "[18]

Although the Buddha and Spinoza are intent upon showing the way to salvation from the bondage of ignorance and passion, they both emphasize that the final goal must be pursued in independent solitude. And both insist that their radical insight into the nature of man and his place in the universe is not a cause for despair or "Angst" in the face of the "No thing." Rather, the realization that there exists no transcendent Being to whom one can turn for solace, that the Infinite is within oneself, is seen by them as a "joyful wisdom" that makes it possible to attain freedom and perfection through understanding and to affirm every aspect of existence with courageous "amor fati."

[18] Asvaghosha, *Mahayana-sraddha-utpadda* in Stryk, pp. 249-250.

CHAPTER IV
ETHICAL THEORY AS RELATED TO THE BUDDHA'S KARMA AND SPINOZA'S EFFICIENT CAUSALITY

The moral philosophies of the Buddha and Spinoza have in common the purpose of helping man reduce his inevitable suffering through understanding of the causal factors operative in nature and of placating to whatever extent possible his yearning for transcendence despite awareness of his determined finitude. The ethical theories of each aims at freedom through sharpened understanding, and develops as a consequence of a clearly elucidated view of the oneness of man with nature, conceived as an incessantly changing unified whole governed by ineluctable laws of cause and effect. Further, the practical moral teachings of both are grounded in the position that moral perfection can only exist in tandem with wisdom and that a true understanding of the mind as a part of nature and of its capacities is indispensable to the attainment of harmonious well-being.

The Buddha's naturalistic ethical theory emerges from his identification of impermanence, insubstantiality and "dukkha" as the three characteristics of existence and what he sees as the impossibility of arriving at any *a priori* ethical truths upon which to establish an objective, universally valid moral code. Although recognizing relative good and bad within the cycles of birth and death, "samsara," the Buddha denies the existence of any absolute good or bad, preferring to characterize actions and thoughts as either skillful or

unskillful, wholesome or unwholesome. Taking a utilitarian approach, the Buddha deemed skillful (or wholesome) those acts or thoughts that promote harmony and serene well-being and unskillful (or unwholesome) those that hinder them. The *Majjhima-nikaya*, an early Buddhist scripture, teaches that "Whatever action, bodily, verbal, or mental, leads to suffering ("byabadha," literally, illness) for oneself, for others or for both, that action is bad ("a-kusalam"). Whatever action, bodily, verbal, or mental, does not lead to suffering for oneself, for others or for both, that action is good ("kusalam"),[1] so that the consequences for oneself, as well as for others enters into the determination of whether an action is to be considered good or bad.

It follows from the Buddha's rejection of the notions of absolute good and evil and his concept of the causal process that there can be no notion of sin in his ethical system. Nor are there any articles of faith in Buddhism (except the belief in the possibility for every individual to raise his level of awareness) and, of course, no transcendent entity, surveying humanity and dispensing rewards and punishments. According to the Buddha, the source of all apparent evil in the world is ignorance ("avijja") and false views ("miccha ditthi"),[2] arising from an inadequate understanding of "how things are." Recommending a tolerant, uncritical acceptance of every facet of human existence, the Buddha did not condemn or judge any

[1] "Ambalatthika-Rahulovada-sutta" of the *Majjhima-nikaya*, 1.414ff, quoted in David J. Kalupahana, *Buddhist Philosophy: A Historical Analysis* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1976), p. 62.

[2] Walpola Rahula, *What the Buddha Taught* (London: Gordon Fraser, 1976), p. 3.

actions, feelings, or thoughts as right or wrong, but rather believed that they should be objectively and dispassionately observed and analyzed in terms of their causes and consequences. Through the cultivation of Right Mindfulness, the category of the Eightfold Path concerned with the perfection of mental discipline, the mind can be freed from the illusion of subjectivity and overcome feelings of aversion or covetousness towards the body, sensations, perceptions and mental constructions, thinking with respect to each of them, "This is not mine, this is not me, this is not my soul." Rightly understanding the Aggregates in this way, contemplating body in body, mental states in mental states in a detached condition as objects in the world without associating "self" with any of them, one learns to "develop a state of mind like water," advisable in that "men throw all manner of clean and unclean things into water and it is not troubled or repelled or disgusted."[3] Right mindfulness is further developed and reinforced by right effort, through which one strives to cultivate and retain wholesome thoughts and dispel those unwholesome mental states detrimental to equilibrium. For the Buddha, frequently represented as a physician healing the sufferings of the world, apparent evils such as the "Five Hindrances" of (1) sense desire, (2) anger, (3) torpor and languor, (4) restlessness and worry, and (5) doubts, are seen as poisons harmful to the well-being of the mind and body against which his teachings are offered as a remedy. The view of the Buddha as a doctor, "Bhisakka," whose wisdom purges the world of

[3] *Majjhima-Nikaya*, 1.420ff in *The Buddhist Tradition*, ed. William Theodore de Bary (New York: Vintage Books, 1972), p. 27.

the disease of suffering, is found not only in the Theravada text, *Milindapanha*, where it is stated that "of all the medicines of the world that are antidotes for poisons, there is none equal to the Medicine of the Doctrine,"[4] but also in the Mahayana "Parable of the Physician,"[5] as well as in the Nara period of Japan (708-781) during which the Buddha was extolled as "Yakushi," or the "Healing Buddha."[6]

Ethical conduct, "Sila," grounded in love and compassion for all living beings, is one of the three essentials of Buddhist training (along with wisdom and mental discipline) and is addressed in the Eightfold Path under the categories of Right Speech, Right Action and Right Livelihood. Right Speech entails refraining from malicious and harsh utterances and avoidance of careless and useless comment, as well as abstention from lies and prevarication. In accordance with his principle of controlled moderation, the Buddha points out that speech should be "memorable, timely, well-illustrated, measured, and to the point."[7] Right Action involves honorable and peaceful conduct, mindful cultivation of the pleasant and useful, and careful avoidance of unskillful deeds, such as those "committed from partiality, enmity, stupidity, and fear."[8]

[4] Nagasena, *Questions of Milinda*, in *World of the Buddha*, ed. Lucian Stryk (New York: Grove Weidenfeld, 1968), p. 132.

[5] *Parable of the Physician* in *The Teachings of the Compassionate Buddha*, ed. E. A. Burtt (New York: Mentor Books, 1982), pp. 160-161.

[6] *The Buddhist Tradition*, ed. de Bary, pp. 265-67.

[7] *Digha-Nikaya*, 1.4ff in de Bary, p. 34.

[8] *Digha-Nikaya*, 3.180ff in de Bary, p. 40.

Right Livelihood can only be practiced by abstaining from occupations that involve dishonesty or are liable in any way to cause harm or deprivation to any living being, whether directly or indirectly. On its ethical level the Eightfold Path seeks the middle way between the extremes of asceticism and self-indulgence, prescribing moderation under the guidance of reason with respect to the practical application of its precepts in order to cultivate harmony and unity within the individual psyche as well as among all people. Comparing the Aggregates of phenomenal personality to a lute which must be perfectly tuned to produce harmonious music, the Buddha teaches that "too much zeal conduces to restlessness and too much slackness conduces to mental sloth," admonishing his disciples to cultivate excellence as a rational mean and to "strike a balance between these two extremes and develop an even tempo of spiritual equilibrium."[9] Although Buddhism employs the adjective "right" in naming the factors of the Eightfold Path, the term is not to be understood as referring to a rigid, authoritarian system of morality, but rather is intended only in the sense of "appropriate," with the criteria of correctness determined by time, circumstance and an individual's level of understanding.

Compassion tempered by wisdom is a unifying element governing ethical theory and constitutes one of the four cardinal virtues of Buddhism, along with friendliness, joy, and equanimity. It, moreover, constitutes one of the four Sublime States included in the principal subjects for meditation. Central to the Buddha's universal

[9] *Vinaya-pitaka* in Stryk, p. 212.

insight is that all living creatures merit compassion and respect by virtue of their participation as interdependent elements of Reality and their common inheritance of the three characteristics of existence. Compassion practiced with a view to integrating one's notion of self with the fundamental unity of existence was proposed by the Buddha with self-interested as well as altruistic justification. Not only does absorption of the phenomenal self within the totality of nature necessarily entail deliverance from craving and suffering engendered by false notions of particularity, but it moreover has the karmic effect of bringing about the greater personal strength and serenity seen as inevitably resulting from wholesome acts of benevolence conducive to the well-being of the whole.

Spinoza, arrving at a comparable naturalistic ethical theory, likewise denies the existence of moral absolutes, interpreting "good" and "evil" not as objective realities, but as relative terms rooted in desire and arising from an inadequate understanding of God/Nature. Necessity, which is mentioned by the Buddha as one of the four characteristics of causation (in the "Discourse on Causal Relations"),[10] is of course also fundamental to the theory of causation grounding Spinoza's ethics, according to which all beings as modes of the divine substance have been brought into existence by God in the highest perfection possible according to eternal, immutable laws of nature. As he sees it, only when individuals are compared to one another or to a previous condition does the imagination form the ideas of "good"/"evil," "perfect"/"imperfect," which do not pertain to

[10] See Kalupahana, *Buddhist Philosophy*, p. 27.

anything positive in the essence of things considered in themselves, but rather represent "beings of reason," approximations to an ideal which the mind forms by comparing individuals of the same genus or species to one another and developing general notions of the degree of reality or perfection most appropriate to it. In Spinoza's view, "evil" and "imperfection" are extrinsic notions which do not inhere in acts and intentions as positive deprivations, but rather represent "negations," or "privations" of reality, understood as a "pure and simple lack which in itself is nothing" (Letter 21, January 28, 1665). To elaborate this idea Spinoza offers the example of a blind man, pointing out that although (from invalid comparisons formed by the imagination) he is considered deprived of vision, in the absolute sense, he cannot be considered as deprived of that faculty since seeing does not pertain to his essence, the distinctions formed by the mind between "good"/"evil," "perfect"/"imperfect" being arbitrary and having no basis in nature. He asserts that when considering the internal constraints imposed upon God by the necessity of his nature, one can "no more affirm of that man than of a Stone, that he is deprived of vision. For at that time vision no more pertains to that man without contradiction than it does to the stone, *since nothing more pertains to that man, and is his, than what the Divine intellect and will attribute to him*" (Letter 21, January 28, 1665. The emphasis is Spinoza's).

In addition to holding that everything as a modification of God/Nature contains perfection extending as far as that particular thing's essence and that only when something is compared to some-

thing similar possessing more reality does the imagination conceive the idea of perfect/imperfect, good/evil, Spinoza maintained that these terms themselves have only relative value in the sense that the same thing might seem good to one person and evil to another or alternately good and evil to the same person at different times. Further, these evaluations are conditioned by desire and reflect the mind's inadequate ideas that are passively determined by bodily and external modifications. As the Buddha taught that craving was at the root of all karma (good and bad) and that volitional activities were causally conditioned by contact between the six sense faculties and the external world, Spinoza maintains that at the level of imagination endeavor determining volitional activities is conditioned by the mind's ideas of bodily modifications in response to external affects. Any encounter between finite modes perceived as useful in effecting a conscious transition to a heightened sense of power and well-being produces joy and is termed "good;" conversely, whatever relation is imagined to diminish the endeavor to persist in being induces sadness and is called "evil." Fundamental to Spinoza's naturalist ethical theory is that "we neither strive for, nor will, neither want, nor desire anything because we judge it to be good; on the contrary, we judge something to be good because we strive for it, will it, want it, and desire it" (E.III, Prop. 9, Schol.). However, although there are emotivist aspects to Spinoza's correlation of good with pleasure and evil with pain, pointing up the relative and subjective aspects of ethical evaluations, he nevertheless maintains that the universal ideas formed by the mind have the practical utility of

furnishing an ideal of human nature towards which one can aspire. It is within this restricted context that Spinoza, like the Buddha, offers a defintion of "good" as whatever is consonant with human nature and useful in the preservation and perfection of our being, while "evil" is whatever is detrimental to this endeavor, and points up the advantage of applying the terms despite their relative nature. "For because we desire to form an idea of man, as a model of human nature which we may look to, it will be useful to us to retain these same words with the meaning I have indicated. In what follows, therefore, I shall understand by good what we know certainly is a means by which we may approach nearer and and nearer to the model of human nature that we set before ourselves. By evil, what we certainly know prevents us from becoming like that model. Next, we shall say that men are more perfect or imperfect, insofar as they approach more or less near to this model" (E. IV, Preface).

For Spinoza, as for the Buddha, the denial of absolute values in the universe entailing rejection of the idea of ethical truths known *a priori* leads to the rejection of the notion of sin. Since everything happens according to the necessity of God"s nature, nothing can possibly be contrary to his law. Anticipating in significant respects the naturalistic ethical theory developed by Hume, Spinoza denies the objective status of sin, observing that many of the actions "detested" in man are looked upon "with pleasure and admiration in animals" (e.g., "the warring of bees" and the "jealousy of doves") (Letter 19, Jan. 5, 1665). As he sees it, the notion of sin, like that of evil, represents confused ideas of the imagination and is grounded

in nothing positive expressing essence. "Just and unjust, sin and merit, are extrinsic notions, not attributes that explain the nature of the mind" (E. IV, Prop. 37, Schol. 2). Like good/evil, beauty/ugliness, the concept of sin exists "only in relation to our intellect, not in relation to God's" (Letter 19) and arises from comparing human beings to one another and judging them all equally capable of the highest perfection possible. However, although the varying degrees of perfection attainable by individuals brings it about that none can be condemned as sinners, not all are able to attain blessedness. This view that an inherent difference among men necessarily excludes some from enjoyment of the highest good is paralleled by the Buddha's assertion that like lotuses which grow beneath, on the surface, or blossom above the water, individuals though capable of moral advancement will attain to varying degrees of the *Summum Bonum* according to their capacity. But, while the Buddha refrained from entering the areas of political theory and socially established standards of good and evil, fearing their tendency to degenerate into intolerance and dogmatism, Spinoza held that although moral distinctions have no reality in an absolute sense, within civil society good/evil may be defined by the common agreement embodied in laws. Within such social orders, sin is "nothing but disobedience" to those laws (E. IV, Prop. 37, Schol. 2), but the transgressor, remaining in bondage to the passive emotions is nonetheless justifiably censured, although excusable by the necessity of his nature. In a letter to Oldenburg, Spinoza states: "he who cannot govern his desires, and keep them in check with the fear of the laws, though his weak-

ness may be excusable, yet he cannot enjoy with contentment the knowledge and love of God, but necessarily perishes" (Feb. 7, 1676).[10a]

For Spinoza and the Buddha the insight that human beings, as an inalienable part of the unity of existence, are governed by the same eternal laws of causality determining all natural phenomena led to a morally neutral, scientific approach to ethical theory aimed at showing the way to as serene a *modus vivendi* as possible given the constraints imposed by the laws of nature. As the Buddha believed mental states and actions should be objectively analyzed with respect to the conditions of their origin and cessation, rather than evaluated as free choices, Spinoza proposed to treat man not as an autonomous "dominion within a dominion" of nature, possessed of infinite free will with which to govern passions, but rather as a part of nature, considering "human actions and appetites just as if it were a Question of lines, planes, and bodies" (E. III, Preface). It is from the three fundamental passions of desire, joy and sadness at the basis of all ethical evaluations that Spinoza deduces logically the character of all other affects, presenting his analysis in axiomatic form, he demonstrates the unsatisfactoriness of passive emotions arising in response to external stimuli, revealing some traditionally encouraged affects as useless, ultimately rooted in pain and illusion. For example, contrary to the commonly held view, hope is shown as just another ill to emerge from Pandora's Box, rather than the one

[10a] The issue of moral responsibility, given these views on sin, will be treated in Chapter V.

bright exception. The affect of hope is seen by Spinoza as "an inconstant Joy, born of the idea of a future or past thing whose outcome we to some extent doubt" (E. III, Def. of the Affects, XII). Since it cannot exist without sadness and fear and manifests an ignorance of the logical necessity immanent in nature, it behooves the man of reason to strive to free himself of this passive affect to whatever extent possible. For Spinoza, who holds that "Self-esteem is really the highest thing we can hope for" (E. IV, Prop. 52, Schol.), repentance, commonly encouraged, is likewise shown in a negative light since it "is not a virtue, or does not arise from reason; instead, he who repents what he has done is twice wretched, or lacking in power" (E. IV, Prop. 54).

However, although all affects are ultimately derivable from desire, joy and sadness, not all are passive reflections of bodily modifications. Designated as active emotions are those that proceed from the mind insofar as it is determined by reason alone and has clear and distinct ideas. Reminiscent of the Buddha, who held joy to be one of the essential factors of enlightenment, Spinoza saw active emotions as having unique reference to desire and joy, never originating from sadness, for "by Sadness we understand the fact that the Mind's power of acting is diminished or restrained" (E. III, Prop. 59, Dem.). All actions that follow from affects related to the mind insofar as it understands he relates to strength of character, under which is subsumed tenacity and nobility. Tenacity, concerned with the cultivation of virtues to the agent's advantage is understood as "the Desire by which each one strives, solely from the dictate of

reason, to preserve his being" (E. III, Prop. 59, Schol.). This active emotion is promoted from a utilitarian perspective of rational self-interest as well as for the common good in that Spinoza prescribes the life of reason as most useful and consonant with one's nature, as well as observing that it is only "when each man most seeks his own advantage for himself" in the endeavor to preserve his being that "men are most useful to one another" (E. IV, Prop. 35, Cor. 2). Moreover, for Spinoza who uses virtue in the original Latin sense of strength and empowerment, "the more each one seeks his own advantage, and strives to preserve himself, the more he is endowed with virtue, or what is the same, the greater is his power of acting according to the laws of his own nature, i.e., of living from the guidance of reason" (E. IV, Prop. 35, Cor. 2). Included under the rubric of tenacity are moderation, sobriety and presence of mind in danger. As the Buddha rejects asceticism as well as profligacy, counseling a life of harmony and balance necessary to the spiritual equilibrium characteristic of a fully integrated human being, Spinoza advises against asceticism, prescribing a life of moderation as most pleasant and useful to the preservation one's being, noting, in fact, that "It is the part of a wise man . . . to refresh and restore himself in moderation with pleasant food and drink, with scents, with the beauty of green plants, with decoration, music, sports, the theater, and other things of this kind, which anyone can use without injury to another" (E. IV, Prop. 45, Cor. 2, Schol.). Neither the Buddha nor Spinoza disprizes material well-being, but in fact (as did Aristotle) both promote it as a valid component of the good life, although sub-

ordinating it in importance to virtue and studious moral development. The Buddha's recommendations to lay followers included a list of requisites for earning wealth: "dauntless energy in wealth, mindfulness in keeping what is earned, simple living, and keeping company with good people."[11] And Spinoza points out the capacity of money to assist in the endeavor to persevere in being, noting that since the body requires continuous and varied nourishment as well as the assistance of others for its well-being, "money has provided a convenient instrument for acquiring all these aids" (E. IV, Appendix XXVIII). Despite their appreciation of the practical needs of life, both of course emphasize that the acquisition of wealth should be guided by reason and serve as a means for the attainment of happiness rather than as an end in itself. The Buddha points out that material happiness is "not worth one sixteenth part" of the contentment arising out of a blameless and virtuous life,[12] and Spinoza maintains that joy accompanied by the idea of money as its cause "is a vice only in those who seek money neither from need nor on account of necessities, but because they have learned the art of making money and pride themselves on it very much" (E. IV, Appendix XXIX).

Spinoza's second aspect of strength of character is nobility, understood as "the Desire by which each one strives, solely from the dictate of reason, to aid other men and join them to him in friendship" (E. III, Prop. 59, Schol.). While moderation and sobriety are components of tenacity, courtesy and mercy are among those of

[11] *Sigalovada Sutta* in Stryk, p. 236.

[12] *Anguttara-Nikaya*, pp. 232-233, quoted in Rahula, *What the Buddha Taught*, p. 83.

nobility. As the Buddha pointed up the practical utility of selective friendship, recognizing four types of friends as beneficial: "The friend who is a helper, / The friend in weal and woe, / The friend who gives good counsel, / The friend who sympathizes."[13] Spinoza advocates the cultivation of wise and virtuous individuals in the interest of advancing one's own character development and well-being. Observing that numerous and varied encounters among modes heighten the endeavor to persevere and that our intellect would be "more imperfect if the Mind were alone and did not understand anything except itself" (E. IV, Prop. 18, Schol. iii), Spinoza maintains that there is nothing "more excellent" than that two individuals of the same nature should join together to form a single one twice as powerful. Further, as the Buddha taught that salvation and perfection were contingent on liberation from the false notion of egoity, Spinoza likewise urges the practical utility of integrating oneself with the totality of being and living in harmony with one's fellow man. Noting that "To man . . . there is nothing more useful than man," it is his view that one can "wish for nothing more helpful to the preservation of his being than that all should so agree in all things that the Minds and Bodies of all would compose, as it were, one Mind and one Body; that all should strive together, as far as they can, to preserve their being; and that all, together, should seek for themselves the common advantage of all" (E. IV, Prop. 18, Schol. iii).

Spinoza, as did the Buddha, ruled out the validity of compassion unruled by reason, commenting that, "he who is easily touched

[13] *Digha-Nikaya*, 3.180ff in de Bary, *The Buddhist Tradition*, p. 42.

by the affect of Pity, and moved by another's suffering or tears, often does something he later repents—both because, from an affect, we do nothing which we certainly know to be good, and because we are easily deceived by false tears," however adding that his remarks are intended expressly for the man living under the guidance of reason, making it clear that "one who is moved to aid others neither by reason nor by pity is rightly called inhuman" (E. IV, Prop. 50, Schol.). Though manifesting an affinity with the Buddha's view that benevolent feelings must be governed by reason, Spinoza does differ from him with respect to the scope of compassion. While the Buddha extends compassion to all sentient beings by virtue of their common participation in the three characteristics of existence, Spinoza maintains that though rational self-interest demands that human beings unite in friendship with each other, it does not require that they extend this bond to include "lower" animals. While not denying that they have senations, Spinoza does deny that on that account "we are therefore not permitted to consider our own advantage, use them at our pleasure, and treat them as is most conveneient for us" (E. IV, Prop. 36, Schol. 1). This view, based to an extent on the theory that though all Individuals or composite bodies are animate, they are animate in "different degrees" (E. II, Prop. 13, Schol.), seems logically inconsistent with the rest of Spinoza's philosophy. It is difficult to understand why Spinoza relegates time, measure and number to concepts of the imagination (Letter 12, April 20, 1663), yet exempts degree from the inadequate ideas used arbitrarily to structure the world. The arguments that "because the right of each one is defined

by his virtue, or power, men have a far greater right against the lower animals than they have against men" (E. IV, Prop. 36, Schol. 1) and that because of their greater power human beings are justified in the use they make of animals is not convincing. Since it is impossible to see things as *noumena*, as they are in themselves independent of a finite perspective, there are grounds for questioning whether in reality (*sub specie aeternitatis*) there exists a hierarchy in nature that would validate Spinoza's claim, or whether in fact human beings have not actually established the criteria of superiority according to those properties which they happen to possess in the highest degree (reason, language, etc.), thereby assuming a "natural right" of dominion over the rest of nature.

As demonstrated in the foregoing, the naturalistic utilitarian ethical theories of the Buddha and Spinoza emanate from their common view that there exist no moral facts, there being no objective scale of value, no ultimate universal design or purpose. In the absence of any transcendent Self, all notions of sin and theodicy are rejected and it becomes the function of man, as manifestation of an Absolute governed by eternal laws of causation to inject value into the universe and serve as the instrument of his own salvation or damnation as executed according to the Buddhist law of karma and Spinoza's theory of efficient causality. The doctrine of karma, adopted from the Hindu tradition and reformulated by the Buddha in such a way as to render it compatible with the doctrine of "anatta" (no self), is not associated with any absolute concepts of justice/injustice, good/evil. Rather, it is a natural law of causality, of action

and reaction, having no implications of reward or punishment. According to the law of karma, volitional acts inevitably have repercussions in the world, skillful actions producing wholesome effects, unskillful action producing unwholesome effects, whether directly or indirectly. The Buddha defines karma as volition—the will to exist, to persist in being, to beocme more, to accumulate, etc. It generates the striving forward resulting in continuity, whether through skillful, unskillful, or neutral volitional acts, whether conscious or unconscious. Karma never refers to the effect of actions, as commonly thought, but is understood in association with "tanha," born of attachment, for which one is held responsible.[14] Forms of unconscious volition, such as the desire to procreate to assure continuance, although not entailing active awareness on the part of the agent, could represent attachment born of an inadequate understanding of the nature of reality, for which one may be held accountable.

In his version of karma, the Buddha holds that although human actions are generated by causes, conscious and unconscious, their consequences are not to be considered as strictly determined, but rather as correlated in nature. That is, the effect does not depend only on the deed, but encompasses individuating factors and circumstances surrounding the act as well, such as the character of the instigator and the specific situation in which the act was performed. This broadening of the concept of causality to include

[14] See Rahula, *What the Buddha Taught*, pp. 31-32.

conditioning features correlating the act with appropriate repercussions brings it about that different people may experience different effects from identical deeds, or the same people may experience different effects under differing circumstances. Further, these consequences, which may be either obvious or scarcely perceptible, may be experienced directly by the Aggregates in this life or by the name and form that is reborn into another existence. This "conditional" theory of causation is put forth by the Buddha in the *Anguttara-nikaya*, wherein he rejects the strictly deterministic theory that "a man must reap according to his deeds," pointing out that this would exclude any opportunity for the "entire extinction of misery." Rather, emphasizing the element of correlation, the Buddha holds that "the reward a man reaps accords with his deeds" in the sense that his experience of the consequences of the deed depend upon such elements as the circumstances or the mindfulness or degree of attachment involved in the performance of the deed. For the Buddha, it is the fact that the appropriateness of consequences depends upon the nature of karma and the degree of understanding of the circumstances in which it is performed that affords the opportunity for "the entire extinction of misery."[15]

According to the Buddha, denying any notion of self or *atman*, a man is no more than the sum of his Aggregates and acts (bodily, vocal and mental karma). While the Upanisadic tradition thought in terms of an eternal "self" ("atman") that is the "doer" ("kartr") as well

[15] *Anguttara-Nikaya* (iii.99) in Henry Clarke Warren, *Buddhism in Translations* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1987), p. 218.

as the "enjoyer" (*bhoktr*) of consequences,[16] the Buddha, adopting a position midway between the extreme views of being and nonbeing, sees continuity of existence not as transmigration of an eternal self, but rather as just name and form that is perpetuated or reborn into a new life. Further, this name and form are neither the same nor different from the name and form that accumulated karma in the previous existence, although it is sprung from causes contained in it and its being is directly dependent upon it. Elaborating upon this position, the *Visuddhi-Magga* states: "It is only elements of being possessing a dependence that arrive at a new existence; none transmigrated from the last existence, nor are they in the new existence without causes contained in the old. By this is said that it is only elements of being, with form or without, but possessing a dependence, that arrive at a new existence. There is no entity, no living principle; no elements of being transmigrated from the last existence into the present one; nor, on the other hand, do they appear in the present existence without causes in that one."[17]

Seeing all volitional actions as rooted in craving engendered by ignorance, the Buddha set the ultimate goal at extinguishing all karma (both good and bad) with a view to bringing about liberation from the cycle of causation set forth in the formula for "Conditioned Genesis" that explains the round of rebirth, suffering, decay and death. It is true that Spinoza, unlike the Buddha, does not aim to extinguish desire, but rather, holding that "a Desire that arises from

[16] See David J. Kalupahana, *Buddhist Philosophy*, p. 46.

[17] Buddhaghosa, *Visuddhi-Magga* (xvii) in Warren, p. 238.

reason cannot be excessive" (E. IV, Prop. 61), seeks to transform the passive emotions of imagination into active emotions arising from the mind insofar as it is determined by reason alone and possesses clear and distinct ideas. And, unlike the Buddha in his theory of karma, Spinoza does not emphasize the causal connection between volitional action and condition after death (when, as he sees it, the proportion of motion and rest previously characterizing a finite mode has been radically altered), nor aim at the goal of extinction. Yet, despite these obvious differences, there are strong parallels to be drawn between the Buddha's law of karma and Spinoza's theory of efficient causality, arising out of the causal connection established by both between knowledge and happiness as it is realized in moral and intellectual perfection.

The Buddha's affirmation that unskillful acts of ignorance necessarily engender "dukkha," while wisdom advances one on the path to Nirvana, has affinities with Spinoza's account of the causal relation between varied degrees of knowledge and levels of well-being, according to which inadequate ideas passively arising from sense perception bring about human bondage, while the realization of blessedness is effected in intuitive knowledge and intellectual love of God. Since for Spinoza the order of actions and passions of the body parallels the order of actions and passions of the mind, the level of understanding (reflecting, as it does, the susceptibility of the mode to external determinations) has causal efficacy over the health of the body and mind in corresponding kind, bringing it about that "The idea of anything that increases or diminishes, aids or restrains,

our Body's power of acting, increases or diminishes, aids or restrains, our Mind's power of thinking" (E. III, Prop. 11). Further, for Spinoza, as for the Buddha, one's "Mind" and "Body" are not to be understood only in terms of the phenomenal individual, but more importantly as part of the unity of being in a cosmic sense, so that any causal process between beings is not to be seen as an isolated event, but as one having potential for infinite repercussions.

Both the Buddha and Spinoza find in hatred the emotion with the most deleterious repercussions. Drastically hindering liberation from the illusion of self, this psychologically eroding passion inevitably traps the mind in a confused involuted mode of thought and is magnified in the experience of "ressentiment." According to both analysts of human behavior, while hatred represents the greatest single impediment to the goal of enlightenment, it can be destroyed by the stronger, opposing force of love. The Buddha establishes it as "an eternal law" (*sanantana-dhamma*) that "Never in this world is hate / Appeased by hatred; / It is only appeased by love"[18] (underscoring the folly of concentrating this negative emotion on the elusive constituents of name and form erroneously thought of as "self"), and Spinoza sees it as a law of human nature that "Hate is increased by being returned, and, on the other hand, can be destroyed by Love" (E. IV, Prop. 46, Dem.). For both it is the understanding of the causal pattern in the psychic as well as physical realms that enables one to avoid unskillful behavior and attain freedom. The interrelatedness of the concepts of cosmic unity and cau-

[18] *Dhammapada*, 3-5, 201 in de Bary, *The Buddhist Tradition*, pp. 38-39.

sation in the thought of both brings it about that for both philosophers cause and effect are to be understood not as distinct occurrences of constant conjunction between separate, and only connected entities, but as essentially interdependent features of a grand unified network. According to Spinoza, the effect is necessarily wholly contained in the cause out of which it arises and understandable only in terms of this cause and the cause of it, and so on "to infinity." As he makes clear in one of the most crucial of his propositions: "Every singular thing, or any thing which is finite and has a determinate existence, can neither exist nor be determined to produce an effect unless it is determined to exist and produce an effect by another cause, which is also finite and has a determinate existence; and again, this cause also can neither exist nor be determined to produce an effect unless it is determined to exist and produce an effect by another, which is also finite and has a determinate existence, and so on, to infinity" (E. I, Prop. 28). Since we cannot construe this process of causation in linear temporal terms, going back to a cause which is itself not determined by another finite cause, it should be thought of as a network of causation, rather than as a chain. As such it has obviously strong affinities with the Buddha's law of Conditioned Genesis, according to which all things in the universe are interdependent, united in a framework of causality having no posited uncaused cause to which all finite existents can be traced. Grounded in the principle, "When this is, that is/This arising, that arises,"[19] which notably postulates cause and effect as

19 *Majjhima-nikaya*, p. 63 quoted in Rahula, *What the Buddha Taught*, p. 53.

simultaneous, rather than with effect following upon cause, the doctrine of Conditioned Genesis establishes the formula explaining the cycle of world process (including human existence) in terms of twelve factors, each of which is conditioned as well as conditioning. According to this doctrine nothing is absolute or independent. All things being relative and interdependent, there being no first cause to which all goes back (although ignorance heads the list), this not to be thought of as a chain, but rather as an infinite network of interwoven cyles of causation.

While *Natura Naturans* (God/Nature) is cause of itself, the above-cited Proposition 28, asserting all finite determined existents to be necesarily caused by other finite determined existents, tells us clearly that it cannot be considered as cause of *Natura Naturata.* Rather, taking Proposition 28 together with the assertion that "God must be called the cause of all things in the same sense in which he is called the cause of himself" (E. I, Prop. 25, Schol.), it is clear that we are to understand God/Nature as identical with it, the divine causality or self-determination of which the finite nexus is the extended counterpart, or modal expression. The grasp of *Natura Naturans*, deduced logically by pure reason, combined with the understanding of *Natura Naturata*, which can be perceived and investigated by practical reason, together yield the ethical system of Spinoza, while the Buddha, noting the futility of disputation on the antinomies engendered by metaphysical speculation,[20] declined to

20 See excerpts from the *Sutta-Nipata*, presented in *The Teachings of the Compassionate Buddha*, ed. E. A. Burtt, pp. 37-39.

treat issues such as self-caused causes and eternal substance, and grounded his ethics on an empiricist theory of causality directed by metaphysical insight into the unity of the world, rather than metaphysical affirmations yielded by pure reason.

Despite the stronger determination evident in Spinoza's theory of causation, it still admits the possibility of liberation from suffering to the extent that one is able to cultivate active emotions of reason through sharpened understanding of the logical necessity immanent in nature resulting in a disposition to live in harmony with that reality. As the Buddhist "arahant" attains liberation through the dissolution of the ego, inevitably accompanying insight into the causal principle governing the cycle of Conditioned Genesis, so Spinoza's rational individual is free to the extent that his understanding of the eternal laws of nature approaches the divine perspective and that this understanding is realized practically in the willingness to integrate himself with the unity of God and express that divinity according to his own unique *conatus*.

CHAPTER V
SALVATION THROUGH ENLIGHTENMENT: THE BUDDHA'S NIRVANA AND SPINOZA'S BLESSEDNESS

For neither the Buddha nor Spinoza is the concept of necessity or the denial of a separate distinct self to be viewed negatively as implying a nihilist world outlook or absolving humans of the responsibility of leading rationally governed lives committed to the welfare of oneself and others. Both hold that despite the constraints imposed by nature, liberation from the bondage of ignorance and passion is attainable through insight into the causal process governing the universe of which the individual is an inalienable part, striving towards total assimilation of oneself with the unity of that Reality. This goal of perfection and freedom through enlightenment is realized in the Buddha's Nirvana, the experience of serenity in the truth of one's unity with reality, and in Spinoza's ideal of blessedness, the experience of serenity in intellectual contemplation of the truth of one's unity with the infinite system of nature as identified with God.

The Buddha's insight that all karma (good and bad) is motivated by attachment and conditioned by contact between external phenomena and the six sense faculties led to his interpretation of the universe in terms of causal processes ("a person who sees causation, sees the *dhamma*[1]) and an account of human behavior that

[1] *Majjhima-nikaya*, 1.190-191, cited in David J. Kalupahana, *Buddhist Philosophy: A Historical Analysis* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1976), p. 64.

was diagnostic and explanatory, directed at attacking suffering at its root and showing the way to Nirvana through sharpening of understanding of how things really are. Observing that mental states and dispositions are causally conditioned and may be altered or destroyed through knowledge of the factors involved in their origin and cessation, the Buddha, often described as a physician ("Bhisakka") offers various remedies by which one may be healed of the afflictions of craving and suffering. Among the most effective is examination of negative feelings, such as hatred or anger, from a detached, analytical perspective. By divorcing mental states from the falsely grounded feeling of "I" associated with them, one comes to see them as having no basis in reality, and comes to understand how to cope with unwholesome thoughts and emotions through mind training and disciplined habits. An added remedy is to govern unwholesome thoughts based on illusion by developing stronger and dominating thoughts grounded in right understanding, with a view to cultivating a more objective outlook *vis à vis* all particulars subject to the three signs of being. For example, when passion threatens equilibrium it is suggested that ardor be diminished by thinking of the object of desire with scientific detachment as a mass of anatomical impurities and defilements. Buddhaghosa, the prominent Theravada commentator, points out in the *Visuddhi-Magga* that one could free himself from desire if he kept in mind that "as the body when dead is repulsive, so is it when alive," noting that "on account of the concealment afforded by an adventitious adornment, its repulsiveness escapes notice," and going on to portray this repul-

siveness in graphic detail.[2]

The corrective prescribed for the *dukkha* occasioned by attachment to that which is subject to death and decay involves the realization that the loss of such an object is not apportioned to an unfortunate few, but rather defines the human condition.In Buddhaghosa's *Story of Kisagotami*, a mother desperately seeking medicine that might help her dead child is told by the Buddha that he can help her only on condition that she procure mustard seed from a household where no one has died. Since she learns by repeated efforts that this is not possible, a cure is effected in the search wherein she learns from the Buddha the "law of death . . . that among all living creatures there is no permanence," the realization of which gives her the resolution to put away her attachment to the child and practice the Buddha's teaching, proceeding eventually to the stage of those "possessed of intuitive knowledge" wherein this truth is realized without the guidance of authority.[3]

Right understanding of *dukkha*, together with right mindfulness and the diligent application of the other components of the Eightfold Path, direct the mind away from the sphere of the transitory and concrete towards the realm of the eternal and infinite. As the gradual detachment from particulars is effected with improved seeing and understanding, the mind is less externally determined by sense impressions and more internally determined by reason and

[2] Buddhaghosa, *Visuddhi-Magga* (Chapt. I) in Henry Clarke Warren, *Buddhism in Translations* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1987), p. 298.

[3] Buddhaghosa, *The Story of Kisagotami* in *World of the Buddha*, ed. Lucien Stryk (New York: Grove Weidenfeld, 1968), p. 174.

insight until total liberation from suffering is attained in the condition of "unalloyed bliss" synonymous with the truth of Nirvana (*Pali: Nibbana*, literally, blowing out, extinction of perturbances and the passions in general). This experience of Absolute Reality is seen as the ultimate cure for the sickness occasioned by the three characteristics of being. "Just as medicine is the refuge of living beings oppressed by poison, so also Nibbana is the refuge of living beings oppressed by the poison of the Depravities."[4] Since Nirvana is beyond all concepts of "duality, relativity, time and space,"[5] its experience cannot be communicated except through negative descriptions. It is atemporal, "neither past nor future nor present."[6] The person who has attained Nirvana rejoices totally in the immediate experience. He is not bored by the present or regretful of the past, nor is he fearful of the future. Nirvana can be experienced irrespective of circumstances and although, like fire, it cannot be defined spatially, it is known to exist everywhere and is within the reach of those who diligently follow the Path (*Magga*) pointed out by the Buddha. Since Nirvana *is* Truth, beyond the relative concepts of cause and effect, it "is neither produced nor not produced nor to be produced,"[7] but rather, realized. While it is to be understood as the realization or experience of truth rather than as an experience of withdrawal, it cannot be defined as "positive"any more than "nega-

[4] *Questions of Milinda* in Stryk, p. 115.

[5] Walpola Rahula, *What the Buddha Taught* (London: Gordon Fraser, 1982), p. 38.

[6] *Questions of Milinda* in Stryk, p. 118.

[7] *Questions of Milinda* in Stryk, p. 118.

tive," since these are relative concepts employed by the finite mind to structure the world of phenomenal experience.

There being no "self" to annihilate or to experience the reality of Nirvana, it is wisdom itself that is seen as realizing the absolute truth — that there are no absolutes, that all things are relative, conditioned, interdependent, transitory and egoless. Nirvana is described by the Buddha as "that condition wherein is neither earth nor water nor fire nor air; wherein is neither the sphere of infinite space nor of infinite consciousness nor of nothingness nor of neither-consciousness-nor-unconsciousness; where there is neither this world nor a world beyond nor both together nor moon-and-sun. Thence . . . I declare is no coming to birth; thither is no going from life; therein is no duration; thence is no falling; there is no arising. It is not something fixed, it moves not on, it is not based on anything. That indeed is the end of ill."[8] As Nirvana surpasses all terms of relativity and duality, it is beyond good/evil, joy/sadness. Rather than relegate it to the sphere of ethical evaluations, one must understand it as the complete destruction of greed, hatred, ignorance and suffering concomitant with perfected insight into the Four Noble Truths, the Three Signs of Being, and the causal necessity governing the cycle of Conditioned Genesis. Although knowledge supplied by the intellect is requisite to the attainment of Nirvana, its truth is beyond speculative reason or logical analysis. Only the Noble Eightfold Path, requiring diligent mind control and discipline can

[8] *Udāna* (Verses of Uplift), from *The Minor Anthologies of the Pali Canon*, Part II, in *A Source Book in Indian Philosophy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1957), pp. 327-328.

bring one to the cessation of *dukkha* and the truth of Nirvana. In addition to *Sila*, the component directed at progression towards Nirvana through ethical conduct, the Eightfold Path emphasizes mental discipline as indispensable to salvation. Not satisfied with the goals of meditation as practiced by ascetic contemporaries intent principally on attaining to various raptures ("dhyana"), the Buddha expanded the discipline of mental concentration to include development of powers to extinguish grasping once insight into the nature of things as they really are is achieved.[9] Among the forty subjects of meditation designed to provide this insight and raise consciousness to a higher level of awareness are: ideas of impermanence, unreality, passionlessness, meditation on in-and-out breathing, as well as skillful and wholesome ideas of compassion, friendliness and joy.[10] Buddhist meditation consists of nine "attainments," or hypnotic trances, through which aspirations are "etherealized" until "one has gotten rid of all desire for any but the more spiritual forms of existence."[11] The first trance, wherein reason and reflection are still exercised, is described as an aloofness from demeritorious thoughts and sensual pleasures. The ninth and highest trance, the Trance of Cessation, is that wherein the subject, "through having completely overpassed the realm of neither perception nor yet non-perception, arrives at the cessation of perception and sensation and before the

[9] Kalupahana, *Buddhist Philosophy*, p. 170.

[10] *Questions of Milinda* in Stryk, p. 128.

[11] Warren, *Buddhism in Translations*, pp. 282-283.

clear vision of wisdom all his depravity wastes away."[12] At this stage, the *arahant*, though still existing in the world, is internally determined, having attained liberation and salvation through absolute understanding of things as they really are, stripped of all illusion.

According to the Buddha, the *arahant* who has destroyed craving through attainment of Nirvana does not accumulate karma, since his meritorious acts are unaccompanied by attachment and desire and consequently he will not be reborn into another name and form. The question of what becomes of the saint after death when he has attained Parinirvana, the final passing away, and is free from all conditions of causality both external and internal, is dismissed by the Buddha as unanswerable, leading only to metaphysical entanglement that does not tend to edification. Since on an ontological level the Middle Way avoids the extremes of eternalism and annihilationism, "To say that he is reborn would not fit the case. To say that he is not reborn would not fit the case. To say that he is both reborn and not reborn would not fit the case. To say that he is neither reborn nor not reborn would not fit the case."[13] This fourfold negation, often employed by the Buddha in response to questions unanswerable within the constraints of language, is intended to convey his view that such questions are inherently senseless (like asking in what direction a flame goes when it is extinguished). In exactly the same way as fire becomes extinct when it lacks the fuel to sustain

[12] *Majjhima-nikaya*, i.173-175 in Warren, pp. 347-349.

[13] *Questions Which Tend Not to Edification*, *Majjhima-nikaya*, i. 487, in Warren, p. 127.

it, so the passions of the saint whose volitional acts are no longer nourished by desire become extinct when he attains Parinirvana. All sensation, perception, predispositions, consciousness, "by which one could predicate the existence of the saint" have "been abandoned, uprooted, pulled out of the ground like a palmyra-tree, and become non-existent and not liable to spring up again in the future."[14]

Spinoza likewise from the beginning directed his philosophic inquiry at finding and communicating to his fellows a way to reduce suffering by prescribing what he saw as a "remedy" to "heal the intellect" of the disorder generated by confused ideas, and by pointing the way to an independently realized happiness grounded in enhanced understanding of the world and "the union that the mind has with the whole of Nature" (*Emendation*, 7, 13, 16). Much as the Buddha noted that *dukkha* was conditioned by attachment to sensory particulars, seen as inevitably giving rise to desire, anger/frustration and delusion, Spinoza in the *Ethics* points out that "sickness of the mind and misfortunes take their origin especially from too much Love toward a thing which is liable to many variations and which we can never fully possess. For no one is disturbed or anxious concerning anything unless he loves it, nor do wrongs, suspicions, and enmities arise except from Love for a thing which no one can really fully possess" (E V, Prop. 20, Schol. V). Through his analysis of the affects occasioned by contact with transitory particulars and his observation that in evaluating objects of love/hate,

[14] *Questions Which Tend Not to Edification*, *Majjhima-nikaya*, i. 487, in Warren, p. 127.

pleasure/pain, the opinion of the other is of considerable importance (E. III, Prop. 31),[15] Spinoza brings us to his conclusion of the inevitable failure of passions arising from unclear ideas of the imagination and their outcome in human bondage.

However, while it is possible to grasp on an intellectual level the inevitable futility of passive desires, this understanding alone is not sufficient to overcome a condition of servitude. As Spinoza emphasizes, "A Desire which arises from a true knowledge of good and evil can be extinguished or restrained by many other Desires which arise from affects by which we are tormented" (E. IV, Prop. 15). As he sees it, this desire arising from the knowledge of good and evil must be not only cognitive but also actively expressed through adequate ideas realizing the power and perfection of both the mind and body. Consistent with his view that knowing must involve in equal measure the power and perfection of the body as well as the mind, Spinoza maintains that the desire that arises from knowing something truly must "follow in us insofar as we act. And so it must be understood through our essence alone . . . , and consequently . . . , its force and growth can be defined only by human power alone" (E. IV, Prop. 15, Dem.)

The distinction between knowledge as mere abstract understanding of good and evil as opposed to knowledge as an affective way of being in the world whereby the power of acting of both the

[15] Here Spinoza speaks of the "vacillation of mind" experienced when it is imagined that any object of love or hate produces an opposite reaction in others. Spinoza, *Ethics* in Vol. I of *The Collected Works of Spinoza*, ed. and trans. Edwin Curley (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985), p. 512.

body and mind is either increased or diminished,[16] brings about Spinoza's approving citation of Ovid: ". . . video meliora, proboque,/deteriora sequor . . . " (E. IV, Prop. 17, Schol.). Because of the psychological dissonance often brought about by the combat between true knowledge of good and evil and desires of the imagination by which we are tormented, Spinoza, reminiscent of the Buddha in his role as healer, offers several "remedies" against the occasional lapses which may occur in the mind's endeavor to overcome the passions. Among the remedies for the passive affects believed by him to be known to all people "by experience, though they neither observe them accurately, nor see them distinctly" (E. V, Preface), Spinoza lists:

1. Thinking of something else instead of the object of passion so that the affect will gradually subside and ultimately die. ("If we separate emotions, or affects, from the thought of an external cause, and join them to other thoughts, then the Love, or Hate, toward the external cause is destroyed, as are the vacillations of mind arising from these affects" (E. V, Prop. 2).
2. Forming a clear and distinct idea of the passion so that through the mind's better understanding of the reason for an extreme reaction provoked by an external object, it is no longer dominated by that affect ("An affect which is a passion ceases to be a passion as soon as we form a clear and distinct idea of it" [E. V, Prop. 3]).

[16] For interesting commentary on the development of Spinoza's idea of knowledge in the *Ethics* as compared with the *EU*, see Paul Wienpahl, *The Radical Spinoza* (New York: New York University Press, 1979), pp. 129-130.

3. Keeping in mind the idea that all things are necessary, for "An affect toward a thing we imagine to be free is greater than that toward a thing we imagine to be necessary" (E. V, Prop. 5, Dem.). This constant awareness of necessity is seen by Spinoza as especially increasing the power of the mind as it relates to its understanding of particular objects for, as he points out, the sadness occasioned by the loss of an object is less intense if this loss is known to be necessary, than it would be if it were imagined as rising from contingent conditions which might have been avoided. "The more this knowledge that things are necessary is concerned with singular things, which we imagine more distinctly and vividly, the greater is this power of the Mind over the affects, as experience itself also testifies. For we see that Sadness over some good which has perished is lessened as soon as the man who has lost it realizes that this good could not, in any way, have been kept" [E. V, Prop. 6, Schol.]).
4. Committing to memory certain maxims "for a correct principle of living" that can be applied by the mind to particular circumstances whenever needed (E. V, Prop. 10, Schol.). The Buddha's emphasis on habit and mental culture ("bhavana"), effected in contemplation of various intellectual and ethical topics, finds its counterpart in Spinoza's recommendation that practical maxims be habitually reinforced by constant meditation. having established it as a "maxim of life . . . , that Hate is to be conquered by Love or Nobility, not by repaying it with Hate in return," he adds that "in order that we may always

have this rule of reason ready when it is needed, we ought to think about and meditate frequently on the common wrongs of men, and how they may be warded off best by Nobility" (E. V, Prop. 10, Schol.).

Spinoza's analysis of the affects and of remedies prescribed for the moderation of the passions is requisite to an understanding of the active power of the mind ultimately to attain freedom and blessedness in the intuitive knowledge and love of God. As the Buddha held that the dispassionate attentiveness to all functions of the mind and body through meditation and right effort was essential to liberation from *dukkha* and the attainment of Nirvana, Spinoza maintains that an understanding of existence begins with an understanding of oneself and of particular things as God is expressed through them. ("He who understands himself and his affects clearly and distinctly rejoices . . . , and this Joy is accompanied by the idea of God" [E. V, Prop. 15, Dem.]).

Holding that "No affect can be restrained by the true knowledge of good and evil insofar as it is true, but only insofar as it is considered as an affect" (E. IV, Prop. 14), Spinoza does not aim at the complete eradication of the passions (an impossibility since they are a part of nature, and so long as the body endures the mind will always be subject to them to some extent), but rather at transforming the passive affects of the imagination into the more dominating active affects emanating from reason insofar as the mind possesses clear and distinct ideas. For Spinoza, "Only while the Body endures is the Mind subject to affects which are related to the passions" (E.

V, Prop. 34), and if clear and distinct knowledge practically realized "does not absolutely remove" affects that are passions, it assists in overcoming them and "at least it brings it about that they constitute the smallest part of the Mind" (E. V, Prop. 20, Schol. V).

For Spinoza, who identifies virtue with this affective understanding whereby the power and perfection of the mind and body are increased, the "greatest virtue" of the mind is "to know God" (E. IV, Prop. 28), and it is in this knowledge that our blessedness consists. "Indeed, blessedness is nothing but that satisfaction of mind that stems from the intuitive knowledge of God" (E. IV, Appendix IV). Like Nirvana, blessedness is the realization of the oneness of existence involving insight into the necessity, immanent in nature, that governs all things. As does the Buddha, Spinoza holds that the experience of truth is direct and immediate. According to Spinoza, one knows that an idea is true or that an idea agrees with its object because "truth is its own standard" (E. II, Prop. 43, Schol.). Further, to the extent that the mind has true ideas, it is part of the infinite intellect of God, "hence, it is as necessary that the mind's clear and distinct ideas are true as that God's ideas are" (E. II, Prop. 43, Schol.). The Buddha and Spinoza, moreover, have in common the view that although cognitive reason assists the mind toward the realization of truth, the experience of the reality of the oneness of existence is inexpressible in words, transcending all concepts of duality and relativity formed by the finite intellect. Further, just as Nirvana is beyond all value judgements, Spinoza holds that to the extent that God is understood as the cause of all things, the distinctions drawn

by the imagination between good/bad, joy/sadness are dissolved. As he explains, "Insofar as we understand the causes of Sadness, it ceases . . . to be a passion, i.e., to that extent it ceases to be Sadness. And so, insofar as we understand God to be the cause of Sadness, we rejoice" (E. V, Prop. 18, Schol.). According to Spinoza, intuitive knowledge can arise from the second kind of knowledge, scientific knowledge, but never from imagination, and is defined as the kind of knowing that "proceeds from an adequate idea of certain attributes of God to the adequate knowledge of the essence of things . . . , and the more we understand things in this way, the more we understand God" (E. V, Prop. 25, Dem.). For him knowledge of God is attained through clear and distinct ideas of particular things as expressions of the divine nature. ("The more we understand singular things, the more we understand God" [E. V, Prop. 24]). Insofar as singular things are conceived in their essence without "relation to a certain time and place," but as modifications of God and proceeding from the necessity of his nature, they are known "under a species of eternity" (E. V, Prop. 29, Schol.). As the Buddha's characterization of "egolessness" as one of the three signs of being eliminates all notion of separateness between thought and thinker so that it is wisdom itself that realizes the truth of Nirvana, for Spinoza the finite mind as a mode of God attains liberation and blessedness to the extent that it is able to join itself to the Idea of God and view the world *sub specie aeternitatis*. And according to both, this union with the truth is identical to freedom conceived as the power of the mind to conform to the necessity immanent in nature and thereby gain

release from the passive desires of sense perception and false notions of particularity by which it had previously been governed. In both cases freedom is attainable not in contingency, but rather in a mental attitude towards necessity, or, as Spinoza puts it, "in a manner of affirming and denying, so that the less indifferently we affirm or deny a thing, the more free we are" (Letter 21; January 28, 1665).

For Spinoza, as for the Buddha, salvation is not a state apart from this world to which virtue leads, but is rather a condition of the mind attainable in this life. "Blessedness is not the reward of virtue, but virtue itself" (E. V, Prop. 42). As an affect of reason, intuitive knowledge of the unity and necessity immanent in existence is expressed bodily through conduct that manifests a disinterested tolerance and respect for humanity. Further, like the *Dharma*, Spinoza's doctrine is directed at social as well as personal harmony. He makes clear that his doctrine "contributes to social life, insofar as it teaches us to hate no one, to disesteem no one, to mock no one, to be angry at no one, to envy no one; and also insofar as it teaches that each of us should be content with his own things" (E. II, Prop. 49, Schol. IV [C]). Spinoza's view that blessedness is not experienced in a withdrawal from the world, but in practical activity that affirms life ("A free man thinks of nothing less than of death, and his wisdom is a meditation on life, not on death" (E. IV, Prop. 67]), has its counterpart in the Buddha's teaching that he who has reached Nirvana "lives fully in the present," his "faculties pleased," enjoying his freedom from false notions of self in universal love and satisfy-

ing service to this fellows.[17]

Intuitive knowledge as the active expression of the power of the mind and body is identical to and simultaneous with the intellectual love of God.[18] Since "God is without passions, and is not affected with any affect of Joy or Sadness" (E. V, Prop. 17), he who loves God "cannot strive that God should love him in return" (E. V, Prop. 19), for to do so would manifest an inadequate understanding of God's nature. "If a man were to strive for this, he would desire . . . that God, whom he loves, not be God" (E. V, prop. 19 and Dem.). The intellectual love of God, realized to the extent that the mind attains to the level of eternal truths, is expressed through the finite mind's understanding love of particular things and is identical with God's love of himself. "The Mind's intellectual Love of God is the very Love of God by which God loves himself, not insofar as he is infinite, but insofar as he can be explained by the human Mind's essence, considered under a species of eternity" (E. V, Prop. 36). The intellectual love of God is "the highest good which we can want from the dictate of reason" and "the most constant of all the affects" (E. V, Prop. 20, Dem. and Schol.). Contrary to sensual love conceived at the level of imagination, the love of God arising from a clear and distinct idea of the nature of existence is directed toward "a thing

[17] *Samyutta-nikaya* I (PTS), p. 5 and *Majjhima-nikaya* II (PTS), p. 121, cited in Rahula, p. 43.

[18] Paul Wienpahl makes an interesting point on the possible influence of the Hebrew language on Spinoza's thinking, citing as an example the fact that the Hebrew verb for "to know," *Jadah*, also has the meaning "to love," and that "Jehovah" is a tenseless form of the Hebrew verb "to be." See Paul Wienpahl, *The Radical Spinoza* (New York: New York University Press, 1979), especially pp. 6, 38, 118.

immutable and eternal . . . , which we really fully possess . . . , and which therefore cannot be tainted by any of the vices which are in ordinary Love, but can always be greater and greater . . . , and occupy the greatest part of the Mind . . . , and affect it extensively" (E. V, Prop. 20, Schol.).

Like Nirvana, the intellectual love of God, wherein consists salvation and freedom, transcends time (duration) and is not subject to extinction. In Proposition 23, Part V, of the *Ethics* Spinoza affirms that "The human Mind cannot be absolutely destroyed with the Body, but something of it remains which is eternal." Here, Spinoza understands by eternity "existence itself, insofar as it is conceived to follow necessarily from the definition alone of the eternal thing" (E. I, Def. 8). "Such existence" is held by Spinoza as "an eternal truth," "like the essence of a thing," not explainable in terms of "duration or time, even if the duration is conceived to be without beginning or end" (E. I, Def. 8, Expl.). Minds do not completely perish with the death of the body in that they participate in the divine intellect and as modes of God under the attribute of thought possess the capacity to understand eternal truths. As Spinoza points out, for the mind to feel itself eternal it does not have to have the recollection of former existences. Although "we do not recollect that we existed before the body, we nevertheless feel that our mind, insofar as it involves the essence of the body, under a species of eternity, is eternal, and that this existence it has cannot be defined by time or explained through duration" (E. V, prop. 23, Schol.). As with the Buddha, who rejected the prevalent Hindu idea of a permanent enti-

ty transmigrating from body to body or any notion at all of an eternal soul underlying the empirical "self," continuity with Spinoza is not to be confused with personal immortality. "If we attend to the common opinion of men, we shall see that they are indeed conscious of the eternity of their Mind, but that they confuse it with duration, and attribute it to the imagination, or memory, which they believe remains after death" (E. V, Prop. 34, Schol.). For Spinoza, the finite mind is eternal only to the extent that it has adequate knowledge of the essence of God/Nature and is able to contemplate the world atemporally, that is, *sub specie aeternitatis*, in the conscious experience of oneness with God/Nature.[19] For both the Buddha and Spinoza enlightenment brings freedom from temporal preoccupation and the suffering it necessarily engenders. Like Nirvana, blessedness is a state of impervious serenity, wherein one no longer mourns the past, fears the future or discredits the present. Comparable to Buddhism's perfected individual in his freedom from all terms of duality, relativity, time and space, Spinoza's wise man "insofar as he is considered as such, is hardly troubled in spirit, but being, by a certain eternal necessity, conscious of himself, and of God, and of things, he never ceases to be, but always possesses true peace of mind" (E. V, Prop. 42, Schol.).

[19] For remarks on Spinoza's view of the mind's eternity as the conscious experience of atonement, "at-one-ment," with God, see Wienpahl, pp. 54, 150.

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