Advayavada Buddhism

PERTINENT EXCERPTS

Prof Masao Abe

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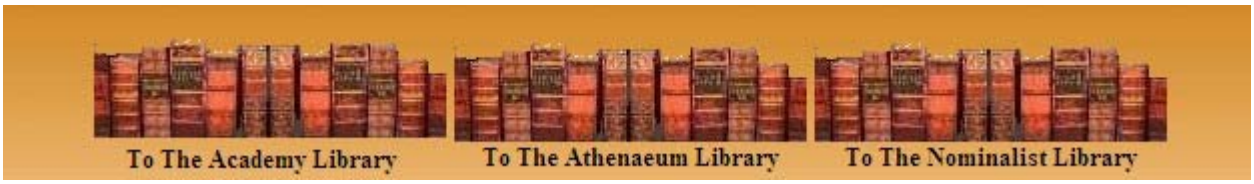

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Advayavada Buddhism is a non-dual philosophy and non-comparative way of life derived from Nagarjuna's Madhyamaka, or philosophy of the Middle Way. Its most important tenet is that there is a fourth sign (or mark) of being implicit in the Buddha's teaching, namely that, expressed purely in terms of human perception and experience, reality is sequential and dynamic in the sense of ever becoming better than before. What human beings experience as good, right or beneficial, indeed as progress (pratipada, patipada), is, in fact, that which takes place in the otherwise indifferent direction that overall existence flows in of its own accord.

The Philosophy of Emptiness

(adapted from ***Zen and Western Thought***,
by **Prof. Masao Abe**,
edited by **Prof. William R. LaFleur**,
1985, Honolulu 1989)

In early Buddhism the theory of dependent origination and the philosophy of emptiness were still naively undifferentiated. It was Abhidharma Buddhism which awakened to a kind of philosophy of emptiness and set it up in the heart of Buddhism. But the method of its process of realization was to get rid of concepts of substantiality by analysing phenomenal things into diverse elements and thus advocating that everything is empty. Accordingly, Abhidharma Buddhism's philosophy of emptiness was based solely on analytic observation - hence it was later called the 'analytic view of emptiness'. It did not have a total realization of emptiness of the phenomenal things. Thus the overcoming of the concept of substantial nature or 'being' was still not thoroughly carried through. Abhidharma fails to overcome the substantiality of the analysed elements.

Beginning with the Prajñaparamita-sutra, Mahayana Buddhist thinkers transcended Abhidharma Buddhism's analytic view of emptiness, erecting the standpoint which was later called the 'view of substantial emptiness'. This was a position which did not clarify the emptiness of phenomena by analysing them into elements. Rather, it insisted that all phenomena were themselves empty in principle, and insisted on the nature of the emptiness of existence itself. The Prajñaparamita-sutra emphasizes 'not being, and not not being'. It clarified not only the negation of being, but also the position of the double negation - the negation of non-being as the denial of being - or the negation of the negation. It thereby disclosed 'Emptiness' as free from both being and non-being, i. e. it revealed prajña-wisdom.

But it was Nagarjuna who gave this standpoint of Emptiness found in the Prajñaparamita-sutra a thorough philosophical foundation by drawing out the implications of the mystical intuition seen therein and developing them into a complete philosophical realization. Nagarjuna criticized the proponents of substantial essence of his day who held that things really exist corresponding to concepts. He said that they had lapsed into an illusory view which misconceived the real state of the phenomenal world. He insisted that with the transcendence of the illusory view of concepts, true Reality appears as animitta (no-form, or non-determinate entity). But Nagarjuna rejected as illusory, not only the 'eternalist' view, which took phenomena to be real just as they are, but also the opposite 'nihilistic' view that emptiness and non-being are true reality. He took as the standpoint of Mahayana Emptiness an independent stand liberated from every illusory point of view connected with either affirmation or negation, being or non-being, and called that standpoint the 'Middle Way'.

The Thought of Hinduism (adapted from History and Future of Religious Thought, by Prof. Philip H. Ashby, Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey 1963) We have noted that very early, Indian thought was concerned with the question of order in the structure of existence. In their perception of the environment and their sensitivity to that which lay behind it, the early thinkers

discerned a uniformity and pattern despite the sometimes chaotic external appearance of existence and events. There is a power, a law or unity of laws which constitutes the Order (rita) of empirical existence. Like the Tao of Chinese thought, it is that Power which works in and through the universe of being, directing the individual powers and entities toward symmetry and meaning in their collective activities. And, while its working or movement may possibily be discernible to man, its purposes, or lack of them, are beyond man's ultimate understanding.

In conjunction with the emergence of such thinking, there was a growing conviction that, behind all that is, is a Unity which includes within Itself that which appears, from the perspective of man, to be disparate and non-cohesive. In the early periods of beginning speculation this was limited mainly to a unification of the separate deities and their powers, but even at this early stage the unification was more in the nature of an identification wherein the individual deities were coming to be conceived not so much as distinct entities gathered together into a greater whole, but rather as one undivided Unity perceived by man in different aspects or functions.

With the coalescence of the conception of Order (rita) with the conviction of a Unity (Brahman), there was a resultant flowering of the belief in a divine order and propriety of things, a Dharma which extends to all existence and beings. And while the word Dharma has many meanings and usages, each of them conveys, at least in part, the thought of a transcendental, yet imminent and all encompassing imperative norm inherent in the structure of existence. The empirical realm has its Dharma, all sentient life has its Dharma, and man in particular has his Dharma as an individual and as a member of society. This Dharma flows from the absolute Unity which is at the beginning, middle, and end of all things. It is a norm which is integrally inherent in its Source (Brahman) and is not to be conceived as separate from It. It is of the nature of the Unity behind the apparent diversity of existence that It, in Itself, gives to the universe of being a structure, a pattern, a telos.

We must be careful to note here that such Order is not to be considered as necessarily meaningful or conformable to human

standards. Human perceptions of order are derivable from this inherent structure, but the structure is not to be appraised by anything other than itself. The value of the Order, therefore, its goodness or its evil, is not a legitimate matter for speculation or question. The Order is what It is, and because of It, there is that which is proper and improper, valuable and non-valuable. The given is good, in a metaphysical sense, simply because it is given. There is nothing else that is possible since all potentiality is embodied in the given.

The Path Understood Dialectically (adapted from Philosophy of the Buddha, by Prof. A. J. Bahm, 1958, New York 1962) Every concept capable of being interpreted as in some sense completely general entails dialectic. The concept of jhanas, as increasingly general degrees or stages of accepting things as they are, is just such a concept. One must, eventually, become jhanic about jhanas, i. e. be willing to accept jhanas as jhanas, the number of jhanas, whatever it is, for what it is, and the difficulties involved in achieving such willingness for what they are. The difficulties involved in ascending jhanas are in part dialectical difficulties, and he who has achieved a willingness to accept life as paradoxical and as dialectical has already prepared himself for more rapid ascent.

In how far Gotama was aware of the intricacies of dialectic is not an issue which will be settled here. But that dialectic was involved in his predicament, that he was aware of dialectical difficulties, and that his principle, including its extension to the middle way, is able to meet the difficulties, need not be doubted. What is the evidence? The very setting in which Gotama's enlightenment occured and the first, and later, sermons about its central principle reveal his solution as dialectical. "Let a man neither give himself over to pleasures... nor yet let him give himself over to self-mortification... to the exclusion of both these extremes, the Truth-Finder has discovered a middle course..."
(Further Dialogues of the Buddha). Here one is already involved in dialectic, for in seeking a middle way between desiring and desiring to stop desiring, one then desires to achieve this middle more than he will; hence he needs to stop this dialectical desire and to seek a new middle way between

this new level of desiring and desiring to stop desiring.

The eight-fold path may be seen as eight areas in which the dialectical principle is to be applied. Right view entails, dialectically, right view of right view. The seeming clumsiness and redundancy of the usual formula may be explained as, and taken as evidence for, dialectical intention. The four truths include the eight-fold path, and the eight-fold path, in its first step explicitly and in each step implicitly, includes the four truths. Right resolve entails resolving rightly to rightly resolve. Or equanimous resolve involves equanimously resolving to resolve equanimously. One has to be willing to accept the truth for what it is or he will be having a false view of truth. Right speech must be spoken about rightly or error will result; one should speak equanimously about equaninous speech or he will be refuting himself. Right action is accepting things as they are and, dialectically, to act rightly, one has to accept 'right action as accepting things as they are'. Not only are injury, assault and theft wrong, but there are wrong ways of injuring, assaulting and thieving. "There is non-harming for a harmful individual to go by; there is restraint from onslaught for an individual to go by who makes onslaught on creatures; there is restraint from taken what is not given for an individual who is a taker of what is not given" (The Middle Length Sayings). A discontented murderer, one who wishes he had killed more violently, is worse than one who accepts the violence actually done as just what he wanted. Right livelihood is life living itself, for itself, not for something else; the more you search for the purpose of life, the more you find it in the way life lives itself (including living itself as a search for its own purpose in living). Right endeavour entails endeavouring rightly to right endeavour; the endeavour to be freed from anxiety to rightly endeavour; the endeavour to be freed from anxiety itself needs to be unanxious endeavour. Right mindfulness entails right mindfulness about right mindfulness; it is awareness of things (phenomena) as they really are, including awareness of mindfulness as it really is.

The eighth fold, samma-samadhi, is the most obviously dialectical of all. Not only is a-dhi modified by sam, togetherness conditioned by equanimity, but sam-adhi is

modified by samma; equanimity of togetherness is itself conditioned by equanimity, a higher or deeper or more equanimous equanimity. The usual exposition of samadhi reveals it to be not so much a terminus to the eight-fold path, an absolute finality, as the beginning of a new series, or a new dimension of dialectical levels. It appears, thus, as a terminus which is not a terminus. And its new series of jhanas, dialectical levels in themselves, terminates in a fourth or fifth jhana which is also a terminus which is not a terminus, but a transtition to a new dimension described in terms of awareness of "the sphere of infinite space of... of infinite consciousness... of nothingness... of neither perception nor non-perception..." (The Book of Gradual Sayings).

The Heart and Soul of Awakening (adapted from Buddhism without Beliefs, by Stephen Batchelor, London 1997) Insight into emptiness and compassion for the world are two sides of the same coin. To experience ourselves and the world as interactive processes rather than aggregates of discrete things undermines both habitual ways of perceiving the world as well as habitual feelings about it. Meditative discipline is vital to dharma practice precisely because it leads us beyond the realm of ideas to that of felt-experience. Understanding the philosophy of emptiness is not enough. The ideas need to be translated through meditation into the wordless language of feeling in order to loosen those emotional knots that keep us locked in a spasm of self-preocupation.

As we are released into the opening left by the absence of self-centered craving, we experience the vulnerability of exposure to the anguish and suffering of the world. The track on which we find ourselves in moments of centered experience includes both clarity of mind and warmth of heart. Just as a lamp simultaneously generates light and heat, so the central path is illuminated by wisdom and nurtured by compassion.

The selfless vulnerability of compassion requires the vigilant protection of mindful awareness. It is not enough to want to feel this way towards others. We need to be alert at all times to the invasion of thoughts and emotions that threaten to break in and steal this open and caring resolve. A compassionate heart still

feels anger, greed, jealousy, and other such emotions. But it accepts them for what they are with equanimity, and cultivates the strength of mind to let them arise and pass without identifying with or acting upon them.

Compassion is not devoid of discernment and courage. Just as we need the courage to respond to the anguish of others, so we need the discernment to know our limitations and the ability to say 'no'. A compassionate life is one in which our resources are used to optimum effect. Just as we need to know when and how to give ourselves fully to a task, so we need to know when and how to stop and rest.

The greatest threat to compassion is the temptation to succumb to fantasies of moral superiority. Exhilarated by the outpouring of selfless altruism toward others, we may come to believe that we are their savior. We find ourself humbly assuming the identity of one who has been singled out by destiny to heal the sorrows of the world and show the way to reconciliation, peace, and Enlightenment. Our words of advice to those in distress imperceptibly change into exhortations to humanity. Our suggestions of a course of action for a friend are converted into a moral crusade.

When subverted in this way, compassion exposes us to the danger of messianic and narcissistic inflation. Exaggerated rejection of self-centeredness can detach us from the sanity of ironic self-regard. Once inflation has taken hold - particularly when endorsed by supporters and admirers - it becomes notoriously difficult to see through it.

[True] compassion is the very heart and soul of awakening. While meditation and reflection can make us more receptive to it, it cannot be contrived or manufactured. When it erups within us, it feels as though we have stumbled across it by chance. And it can vanish just as suddenly as it appeared. It is glimpsed in those moments when the barrier of self is lifted and individual existence is surrendered to the well-being of existence as a whole. It becomes abundantly clear that we cannot attain awakening for ourselves: we can only participate in the awakening of life.

The Ethics of Fundamental Consciousness (adapted from The Enlightenment Process, by Judith Blackstone, Rockport, Mass. 1997) Our true relationship with the universe contains an inherent ethical perspective. As we realize that our own essential being is a dimension of consciousness that is also the esssential being of all other life, we feel an underlying kinship with everyone we meet. We can use the metaphor of a musical instrument. If we are all basically pianos, even if we meet a piano playing a tune quite different than our own, we can feel in our being the potential to play his tune also. When we know our self as the pervasive ground of life, we have learned the basic language of all beings, including animals and plants. In this shared field of fundamental consciousness, we do not need to adopt a static attitude of goodwill that obscures the richness of our feelings and the directness of our contact with our self and others. To actually experience the heart of a bird, or the subtle awareness of a tree, or the complex emotions in another person, evokes a spontaneous response of empathy and compassion.

There is also a more subtle manifestation of ethics in fundamental consciousness. This is expressed in the Sanskrit word dharma. In Buddhist tradition, this word has several connotations. It means the Buddhist metaphysical understanding of the universe and enlightenment, the teaching of this understanding, and the living of this understanding. The direct translation of 'dharma' is 'justice'. To live dharmically is to practice the justice of enlightenment. But this practice is not a preconceived set of behaviours. It is the alignment of oneself with the metaphysical laws of the universe and the great benevolence inherent in those laws. To the extent that we have realized fundamental consciousness, we are unified with the wisdom and love of the whole, and with the spontaneous unwinding towards enlightenment of all forms in creation. In this dimension, our own choices of action are the choices of the universe, and all our actions serve the progression towards enlightenment of all life, including our own. We do not have to shame ourselves into doing good works. Our own truth will benefit the truth of the life around us.

The idea that we can be aligned with the will of God also exists in Western religion. In Judaism, there is the concept of the mitzvah, which has a range of meaning from a good deed to a general attitude of justness and benevolence towards others. Jewish scholar Abraham J. Heschel writes: "Every act done in agreement with the will of God is a mitzvah". Hassidic writer Reb Zalman Schachter defines mitzvah as "the divine will doing itself through the vehicle of the now egoless devotee". Christian interpreter Maurice Nicoll writes: "When Good comes first, a man acts from mercy and grace. Then he is made Whole. When he is Whole, he no longer misses the mark". In this quote we have the idea that the individual becomes whole by being good. And we have the more subtle idea, very similar to the Buddhist idea of dharma, that he is now right on target, that he does not 'miss the mark'. That mark is the action that benefits everyone involved.

What the Heart Sutra tells us (adapted from Zen Therapy, by David Brazier, London 1995) A Buddhist word for wisdom is prajña. Etymologically this word is quite close to our own word 'diagnosis'. Prajña refers to the ability to see into the heart of the matter, not as a result of erudition, but as a consequence of having given up all that obscures clear perception. The obscurations we have already discussed. They are called kleshas. Clear perception we have also discussed. It is called vidya and is the opposite of delusion (avidya). Another term we have also considered is the word paramita. Paramita means perfect or boundless. Prajñaparamita is the term for seeing into the heart of things without any constraint or conditioning getting in the way. The Buddha gave a series of teachings upon prajñaparamita and these are used extensively in the Zen approach.

The most commonly used prajñaparamita text nowadays is the Heart Sutra. This is a very short series of statements which deny all the things which one might cling to as a basis for constructing the kind of story which might provide a Buddhist identity for oneself.. When the Heart Sutra says 'not born, not disappearing, not defiled, not pure, not gaining anything, not losing anything' it is demolishing the components out of which our stories are constructed. We think that we live a life which is

born somewhere and will die somewhere else, which, along the way, does some good and some bad, makes some profits and some losses. This kind of story is the stuff out of which we create an identity for ourselves. Much therapy is commonly concerned with helping a person refine their story, helping to make it fit better the evidence of their real life. Real Zen, however, brings the realization that however good a story we concoct it will never be the real truth. The Heart Sutra is telling us that all stories of this kind are just 'cover stories'. They are never satisfactory in anything more than a very makeshift fashion. All of us go through life under false pretences. Only when we become bodhisattvas, like Avalokita, actually practising boundless wisdom, do we see that all the component parts of our life as we identify it, the skandhas, are empty. Only then can we find real freedom and boundless wisdom.

Not only are all our worldly stories about ourselves meaningless in the last analysis, but it is also worse than useless to start thinking that we can escape from their clutches by constructing a spiritual identity for ourselves. The Sutra, therefore, goes on to pull the rug out from all the elements of Buddhism itself which people quite commonly use to construct a spiritual ego story. Even clinging to Nirvana and the Path is taken away from us. In an earlier chapter, we saw that the idea of a Path is the final form of self-conditioning. Nirvana, the Sutra says, is not something we can have, it is only something we can do. And we can only do it when we leave all our troublesome opinions aside. Only then do we practise real understanding.

The Santiago Theory of Cognition (adapted from The Web of Life, by Fritjof Capra, New York 1996) In the emerging theory of living systems mind is not a thing, but a process. It is cognition, the process of knowing, and it is identified with the process of life itself. This is the essence of the Santiago theory of cognition, proposed by Humberto Maturana and Francisco Varela.

The identification of mind, or cognition, with the process of life is a radically new idea in science, but it is also one of the deepest and most archaic intuitions of humanity. In ancient

times the rational human mind was seen as merely one aspect of the immaterial soul, or spirit. The basic distinction was not between body and mind, but between body and soul, or body and spirit. While the differentiation between soul and spirit was fluid and fluctuated over time, both originally unified in themselves two concepts: that of the force of life and that of the activity of consciousness..

The Santiago theory of cognition originated in the study of neural networks and, from the very beginning, has been linked to Maturana's concept of autopoiesis [self-making]. Cognition, according to Maturana, is the activity involved in the self-generation and self-perpetuation of autopoietic networks. In other words, cognition is the very process of life. "Living systems are cognitive systems," writes Maturana, "and living as a process is a process of cognition." In terms of our three key criteria of living systems - structure, pattern, and process - we can say that the life process consists of all activities involved in the continual embodiment of the system's (autopoietic) pattern of organization in a physical (dissipative) structure.

Since cognition traditionally is defined as the process of knowing, we must be able to describe it in terms of an organism's interactions with its environment. Indeed, this is what the Santiago theory does. The specific phenomenon underlying the process of cognition is structural coupling. As we have seen, an autopoietic system undergoes continual structural changes while preserving its weblike pattern of organization. It couples to its environment structurally in other words, through recurrent interactions, each of which triggers structural changes in the system. The living system is autonomous, however. The environment only triggers the structural changes; it does not specify or direct them.

The Madhyamika School (adapted from Buddhism in China, by Prof. Kenneth K. S. Ch'en, Princeton 1964) The Hinayana doctrine of dependent origination, that all things depend on causes and conditions for their origination, provides the starting point for the Madhyamika viewpoint that 'what is produced by causes is not produced in itself, and does not exist in itself'. Because all things are produced by causes and conditions,

they do not have any independent reality; they do not possess any self-nature. When these causes and conditions disappear, these things also disappear. Hence they are said to be shunya or empty..

Thorough comprehension of the empty, unreal, or relative nature of all phenomena leads to prajña (intuitive wisdom or non-dual knowledge). When we achieve prajña, we reach the state of absolute truth which is beyond thought and conception, unconditioned, indeterminate. This absolute truth cannot be preached in words, but, in order to indicate it, it is called shunyata. "Shunyata is the synonym of that which has no cause, that which is beyond thought or conception, that which is not produced, that which is not born, that which is without measure" (Zimmer). This absolute truth contains nothing concrete or individual that can make it an object of particularization.

Nagarjuna is careful to point out, however, that this absolute truth can be realized only by going through the relative or worldly level of truth. Here we have the double level of truth of the Madhyamika. The relative level consists of man's reasoning and its products. It causes man to see the universe and its manifold phenomena, and to consider them as real. He cannot dispose of this relative truth by his arguments, just as a person in a dream cannot deny his dream by any argument. Only when he wakens can he prove the falsity of the objects in the dream. In this relative level one sees the distinctions between subject and object, truth and error, Samsara and Nirvana. This relative level is necessary, according to Nagarjuna, because the absolute level can be understood and realized only negatively by the removal of relative truths. The removal of the relative truths must therefore precede the realization of the absolute truth. The truths attained through reasoning and the intellect are not to be discarded even though they are not final. Acceptance of the doctrine of shunyata, or the unreality of all phenomena, does not mean that we have to devaluate all human experience..

Emptiness of Intrinsic Nature (adapted from Entry into the Inconceivable, by Thomas Cleary, 1983, Honolulu 1994) A very

simple and useful way to glimpse emptiness - usually defined in Hua-yen scripture as emptiness of intrinsic nature or own being - is by considering things from different points of view. What for one form of life is a waste product is for another form of life an essential nutrient; what is a predator for one species is prey to another. In this sense it can be seen that things do not have fixed, self-defined nature of their own; what they 'are' depends upon the relationships in terms of which they are considered. Even if we say that something is the sum total of its possibilities, still we cannot point to a unique, intrinsic, self-defined nature that characterizes the thing in its very essence.

The same argument can be applied to space and time. In terms of our everyday perceptions, an atom is small; but in terms of the space between subatomic particles relative to the size of the particles, we can say the atom is indeed enormous. In ordinary human terms, a day is short; but from the point of view of an insect that lives only a day it is seventy years to a human or centuries to a tree. This perception of the relativity or nonabsoluteness of measurements of time and space is frequently represented in the Hua-yen scripture and is a key to unlocking the message of its 'inconceivable' metaphors.

The point of all this is not, of course, confined to abstract philosophy. The obvious drawback to considering things to be just what we conceive them to be is that it can easily blind us to possibilities we have never thought of; moreover, it can foster prejudices in dealings with the world, leading to unhealthy conditions due to failure to consider things in a broad perspective.

We can therefore say that what a thing 'is', being dependent on the context which defines it, may be considered to have as many aspects as there are things in the universe, since somethinng 'exists' in a certain way vis-à-vis every other thing. What a thing 'is' in terms of the practical, everyday world of an individual or group, therefore, depends upon, or exists in terms of, an assigned definition which focuses on the possibilities considered relevant to the needs or interests or conditioning of the individual or group - thus narrowing down a virtually infinite range into a manageable, thinkable set. When Buddhist

teaching says that things are empty or do not exist as such, what is often meant by 'things' or 'phenomena' in such statements is things as they are conceived of - the point is then that a name or definition does not encompass or capture a thing, either in its essence or in the totality of possibilities of its conditional existence.

The Perfection of Wisdom (adapted from Selected Sayings from the Perfection of Wisdom, by Prof. Edward Conze, London 1955) The Abhidharma had cultivated wisdom as the virtue which permits one to see the 'own being' of dharmas. Now the perfection of wisdom in its turn regards the separateness of these dharmas as merely a provisional construction, and it is cultivated as the virtue which permits us to see everywhere just one emptiness. All forms of multiplicity are condemned as the arch enemies of the higher spiritual vision and insight. When duality is hunted out of all its hiding places, the results are bound to be surprising. Not only are the multiple objects of thought identified with one mysterious emptiness, but the very instruments of thought take on a radically new character when affirmation and negation are treated as non-different, as one and the same. Once we jump out of our intellectual habits, emptiness is revealed as the concrete fullness; no longer remote, but quite near; no longer a dead nothingness beyond, but the life-giving womb of the Buddha within us.

This doctrine of emptiness has baffled more than one enquirer, and one must indeed despair of explaining it if it is treated as a mere theoretical proposition, on a level with other theoretical statements. And yet, everything is really quite simple, as soon as one pays attention to the spiritual intention behind this doctrine. In teaching 'emptiness' the Prajñaparamita does not propound the view that only the Void exists. The bare statement that "everything is really emptiness" is quite meaningless. It is even false, because the rules of this particular logic demand that the emptiness must be as well denied as affirmed. Among the eighteen kinds of emptiness, the Large Sutra on Perfect Wisdom distinguishes as the fourth the 'emptiness of emptiness', which is defined by saying that "the emptiness of all dharmas is empty of that emptiness".

In its function, shunyata, or emptiness, has been likened to salt. It should pervade the religious life, and give flavour to it, as salt does with food. By itself, eaten in lumps, salt is not particularly palatable, and neither is 'emptiness'. When one insists on emptiness one aims at revealing the Infinite by removing that which obscures it. One denies the finite, onesided, partial nature of affirmative propositions, not in order to then replace them by just another affirmative proposition, but with an eye to transcending and eliminating all affirmation, which is but a hidden form of self-assertion. The Void is brought in not for its own sake, but as a method which leads to the penetration into true reality. It opens the way to a direct approach to the true nature of things (dharmata) by removing all adherence to words which abstract from reality instead of disclosing it.

Identity in Hua-yen Buddhism (adapted from Hua-yen Buddhism, by Francis H. Cook, 1977, London 1991) .. The uniqueness of Hua-yen lies in its portrayal of a universe in which the distinct things that constitute it are fundamentally identical and exist only through a complex web of interdependency. It was the mission of Fa-tsang and his line to construct a rational basis for this view, which in the final analysis is an intuition growing out of meditative practices.. But before Fa-tsang's arguments in favor of the identity of things are discussed, there must be some analysis of a preliminary phase in his discussion, the identity of phenomena with the absolute..

The first step in the argument, showing the identity of the phenomenal and the absolute - or shih and li, to use Fa-tsang's usual terminology - is a necessary step in the construction of the system, and it shows how certain common doctrines of Buddhism were used as 'bricks' to construct the system.. Three important doctrines or devices are used in this first phase: there is a basic and extensive use of the doctrine of pratitya-samutpada, which is indeed the foundation of the system, this in turn is discussed within the framework of the [Yogacara] doctrine of the three natures (trisvabhava), and the proper way of viewing the three natures is discussed by means of the application of the Madhyamika tetralemma..

It will be recalled that the three natures are the dependent nature (paratantra-svabhava), the discriminated nature (parikalpita-svabhava), and the perfected nature (parinishpanna-svabhava). In Fa-tsang's system, the dependent nature is the nature that an object possesses consisting of its existence in total dependence on exterior conditions. The discriminated nature of the same thing consists of the way in which it appears erroneously to the human mind as distinct from the subject and as further endowed with a real self-existence. The perfected nature is the real nature of this object as it is apart from our suppositions. We may say that this is its suchness (tathata), divorced from concepts superimposed on it because of our naive belief that words have real referents. All three natures belong to any given thing, and a common interpretation of the doctrine is that if the discriminated nature is expunged from the dependent nature, the dependent nature (thus) perceived in its real state is itself its perfected nature.

Emptiness or the Void (adapted from Religion and the One, by Prof. Frederick Copleston, London 1982) Denial of the existence of a permanent substantial self, underlying all passing psychical states or mental phenomena, goes back to the beginning of Buddhism. The adherents of the Madhyamika school insisted that all things, both mind and external things, were insubstantial, not in the sense that they were absolutely non-existent or unreal, but in the sense that there was no abiding substance or core in any of them. In other words, they applied a phenomenalistic analysis to all things. This view was expressed by saying that all things, including selves or minds, were 'empty'. They were not only causally dependent but also essentiallly changing and transient, devoid of any permanent substantial core or self-nature. They were all manifestations of emptiness.

This view, taken by itself, did not of course entail the hypostatization of Emptiness or the Void as an all-pervasive reality. One might assert that all things are causally dependent, changing and transient, and at the same time deny that there is any reality beyond these causally dependent and changing things. But Buddhism is essentially a spiritual path, a path to Nirvana. And if Emptiness or the Void is simply a collective

name for the changing Many, considered in regard to certain characteristics, it seems to follow that Nirvana, which involves transcending the world of time and change, is equivalent to annihilation. This was indeed what some Buddhists believed that it was. Others, however, regarded Nirvana as a positive state of bliss, not indeed describable or even conceivable, but none the less not equivalent in an absolute sense to non-existence. Given this point of view, there was naturally a tendency in the Madhyamika school to refer to Emptiness or the Void as though it were the Absolute, the One.

For Nagarjuna, the great Madhyamika philosopher, it was incorrect to say that Emptiness did not exist. It was equally incorrect to say that it existed. It was also incorrect to say both that it existed and that it did not exist. Finally, it was incorrect to say that it neither existed nor did not exist. In other words, one could really say nothing at all.. Nagarjuna developed an elaborate dialectic to expose the fallacies in all positive metaphysical systems and made no claim to expound a metaphysical system of his own. This clearing away, so to speak, of metaphysics was thought of as facilitating or preparing the way for an intuitive apprehension of Emptiness. This intuition can hardly be interpreted simply as an assent to the conclusion of an agreement, namely the conclusion that all things are insubstantial. For this conclusion can be established philosophically, according to Buddhist thinkers. The intuition might perhaps be interpreted as a more lively awareness of what is already known, as a personal realization of the emptiness of all things which goes beyond mere intellectual assent to the conclusion of an argument and which influences conduct, promoting detachment for an example.

At the same time the idea of philosophical reasoning as a preparation for an intuition of Emptiness naturally tends to suggest that Emptiness or the Void is the Absolute, the ultimate reality which is called 'Emptiness' because it transcends conceptual thought and all description.. Some scholars are sharply opposed to any such interpretation. In their opinion terms as 'Emptiness' and the 'Void' do not refer to any ultimate reality. They do not refer even to the inner reality of phenomena. They have no inner reality. We should not allow

ourselves to be misled by the use of nouns and proceed to assimilate the philosophy of Nagarjuna to that of Shankara. The Madhyamika system is simply a faithful development of the teaching of the Buddha, who did not postulate any metaphysical reality.

The Origins of the Madhyamaka Philosophy (adapted from Madhyamaka Schools in India - A Study of the Madhyamaka Philosophy and of the Division of the System into the Prasangika and Svatantrika Schools, by Peter Della Santina, 1986, Delhi 1995) We have suggested that the Madhyamaka philosophy is founded upon an interpretation of the fundamental Buddhist doctrine of interdependent origination. While the Abhidharmika schools, the Vaibhasikas and the Sautrantikas understood the doctrine of interdependent origination propounded by the Buddha Shakyamuni to mean the temporal succession of momentary and discrete existences which were in themselves real, the Madhyamika interpreted the doctrine of interdependent origination to signify the universal relativity and unreality of all phenomena. According to the Madhyamika, the doctrine of interdependent origination is meant to indicate the dependence of all entities upon other entities. This is equivalent to their lack of self-existence (svabhava) and emptiness (shunyata).

The interpretation advocated by the Madhyamika is in complete agreement with some of the utterances of the Buddha recorded in the Pali canon. The following passage from the Majjhima Nikaya may be offered as evidence of this fact. The Buddha declared that form, feeling and the like are illusory, mere bubbles: "Dependent on the oil and the wick does light in the lamp burn; it is neither in the one nor in the other, nor anything in itself; phenomena are, likewise, nothing in themselves. All things are unreal, they are deceptions; Nibbana is the only truth."

In the Shunyatasaptati Nagarjuna writes: "Since the own-being of all entities is not in (the individual) causes and conditions, nor in the aggregation of causes and conditions, nor in any entity whatsoever, i. e. not in all (of these), therefore all entities are empty in their own being." In the Ratnavali it is also stated:

"When this exists that arises, like short when there is long. When this is produced, so is that, like light from a flame. When there is long there must be short; they exist not through their own nature, just as without a flame light too does not arise." Again Nagarjuna points out that the Buddha declared that elements are deceptive and unreal. Therefore he says: "The Buddha simply expounded the significance of emptiness (shunyata)." He has also said in the Shunyatasaptati that whatever originates dependently as well as that upon which it depends for its origination does not exist. Nagarjuna precisely indicates the standpoint of the Madhyamika in the following stanza found in the Mulamadhyamakakarika: "We declare that whatever is interdependently originated is emptiness (shunyata). It is a conceptual designation of the relativity of existence and is indeed the middle path." "No element can exist," he writes, "which does not participate in interdependence. Therefore no element which is not of the nature of emptiness can exist."

Perfect Wisdom (adapted from Zen Buddhism: A History, volume 1, by Prof. Heinrich Dumoulin S. J., translated by James W. Heisig and Paul Knitter, New York 1988) In the Prajñaparamita sutras the significance of wisdom for the pursuit of salvation is evident. It is wisdom that sets the wheel of doctrine in motion. The new doctrine of the Wisdom school is thus considered by Mahayana to be the 'second turning of the Dharma wheel', second in importance only to the first teachings preached by Shakyamuni.

The Prajñaparamita sutras also set forth the evangel of the Buddha by claiming silence as their highest and most valid expression. Wisdom, all-knowing and all-penetrating, is deep, inconceivable and ineffable, transcending all concepts and words. Most important, wisdom sees through the 'emptiness' (shunyata) of all things (dharma). Everything existing is always 'empty'. The broad horizon of meaning enveloping this word, which occurs throughout the sutras, suggests that, in the attempt to grasp its content, feeling must take precedence over definition. In the Heart Sutra, the shortest of the Prajñaparamita texts, wisdom is related to the five 'skandhas', the constitutive elements of human beings, and to all things contained in them.

The sutra is recited daily in both Zen and other Mahayana temples, often repeated three times, seven times, or even more. In drawn out, resounding tones the endless chanting echoes through the semidark halls..

In the Wisdom sutras the stress is put on demonstrating the doctrine of the emptiness of 'inherent nature' (svabhava). Free of all inherent nature and lacking any quality or form, things are 'as they are' - they are 'empty'. Hence, emptiness is the same as 'thusness' (tathata), and because all things are empty, they are also the same. Whatever can be named with words is empty and equal. Sameness (samata) embraces all material and psychic things as part of the whole world of becoming that stands in opposition to undefinable Nirvana. In emptiness, Nirvana and Samsara are seen to be the same. The identity of emptiness, thusness, and sameness embraces the entire Dharma realm (dharmadhatu). Like the Dharma realm, Perfect Wisdom is unfathomable and indestructible. Here the doctrine on wisdom reaches its culmination.

Of special importance for Zen is the fact that Perfect Wisdom reveals the essence of enlightenment. As a synonym for emptiness and thusness, enlightenment is neither existence nor nonexistence; it cannot be described or explained. "Just the path is enlightenment; just enlightenment is the path" (Conze, Selected Sayings).

Nothingness cannot be affirmed or negated (adapted from The Philosophy of Nagarjuna, by Prof. Vicente Fatone, 1962, translated by K. D. Prithipaul, Delhi 1982) Here we find ourselves in the attitude, so familiar to us in the West, according to which nothingness can neither be affirmed nor thought of nor can it contain something more than the concept of something (the latter and its negation). Strictly speaking, we cannot refer to nothingness either affirmatively or negatively. In the face of nothingness the quality of the copula is disssolved. Every judgement is either affirmative or negative, and affirmation, as well as negation, is incompatible with nothingness. Nothingness cannot be affirmed, nothingness cannot be negated. Indian thought has laid emphasis on the second aspect, for the negative judgement has in it an

importance greater than what obtains in the Western tradition. Nagarjuna concedes that what is not cannot be negated. Affirmation and negation only make sense insofar as they refer to that which is. The Buddhist texts abound in the formulation, in a variety of forms, of this principle: that which is not is neither affirmed nor is it negated. The affirmation, as well as the negation, of that which is not implies contradiction.

What does Nagarjuna affirm, if indeed he affirms something? Shunyata. Thus, to negate shunyata would mean, according to this principle, to acknowledge it. "All the dharmas are deprived of essence, they are void." Is this negated? By being negated shunyata is acknowledged and admitted as existent. Shunyata is affirmed by Nagarjuna and negated by the adversary. How can one claim to negate shunyata, if it is affirmed and negated, and if it has been said that what is not can neither be affirmed nor negated? One may insist by saying that shunyata is negated de facto in reality 'just as cold is negated in the flame'. Shunyata cannot be affirmed, because it is not. And it would not need to be negated, precisely because its negation is given in fact. Judgement always affirms. If the essence of the dharmas did not exist, what would be negated by the judgement which claims to negate the self-essence of the dharmas? Nothingness, and nothingness cannot negate itself. Negation is always negation of something..

All this discussion is a process in which the concept of shunyata and the negation of the reality of the dharmas becomes clearer. Once the discussion has begun in agreement with the interpretation which the adversary makes of the doctrine of Nagarjuna, the latter seems to affirm that the dharmas lack their own essence. Immediately, with the first objections, it is made clear that such an affirmation does not exist: "There can be no error in my thesis, because I do not have a thesis". Nagarjuna's position then must be negative. Once the statements necessary to the problem of negation have been made, Nagarjuna hastens to observe: "I do not negate", just as before he had said: "I do not affirm". The affirmation would have led to a recognition of the thesis of the adversary. Negation would lead to the same. If one affirms, if one negates, one falls into contradiction. The essence of the

dharmas cannot be affirmed, because the essence of the dharmas does not exist, Nagarjuna said. Now he says that he does not affirm the void of the dharmas, for he knows that affirmation demonstrates the essence of something. He adds that, as the essence of the dharmas does not exist, it cannot be negated, for its negation cannot refer itself to a non-existent object. There are no negatable objects; there is no negation. What sense is there in refuting Nagarjuna who neither affirms nor negates?

The Theory of Double Truth (adapted from A Short History of Chinese Philosophy, by Prof. Fung Yu-lan, New York 1948) The K'ung tsung or School of Emptiness, also known as the School of the Middle Path, proposed what is called the theory of double truth: truth in the common sense and truth in the higher sense. Furthermore, it maintained, not only are there these two kinds of truth, but they both exist on varying levels. Thus what, on the lower level, is truth in the higher sense, becomes, on the higher level, merely truth in the common sense. One of the great Chinese Masters of this school, Chi-tsang (549-623), describes this theory as including the three following levels of double truth:

1) The common people take all things as really yu (having being, existent) and know nothing about wu (having no being, non-existent). Therefore the Buddhas [i. e. the Buddhist sages] have told them that actually all things are wu and empty. On this level, to say that all things are yu is the common sense truth, and to say that all things are wu is the higher sense truth.

2) To say that all things are yu is one-sided, but to say that all things are wu is also one-sided. They are both one-sided, because they give people the wrong impression that wu or non-existence only results from the absence or removal of yu or existence. Yet in actual fact, what is yu is simultaneously what is wu. For instance, the table standing before us need not be destroyed in order to show that it is ceasing to exist. In actual fact it is ceasing to exist all the time. The reason for this is that when one starts to destroy the table, the table which one thus intends to destroy has already ceased to exist. The table of this actual moment is no longer the table of the preceding moment.

It only looks like that of the preceding moment. Therefore on the second level of truth, to say that all things are yu and to say that all things are wu are both equally common sense truth. What one ought to say is that the 'not-one-sided middle path' consists in understanding that things are neither yu nor wu. This is the higher sense truth [on the second level].

3) But to say that the middle path consists in what is not one-sided (i. e. what is neither yu nor wu), means to make distinctions. And all distinctions are themselves one-sided. Therefore on the third level, to say that things are neither yu nor wu, and that herein lies the not-one-sided middle path, is merely common sense truth. The higher truth consists in saying that things are neither yu nor wu, neither not-yu nor not-wu, and that the middle path is neither one-sided nor not-one-sided (Erh-ti Chang, sec. 1)..

When all is denied, including the denial of the denial of all, one arrives at the same situation as found in the philosophy of Chuang Tzu, in which all is forgotten, including the fact that one has forgotten all. This state is described by Chuang Tzu as 'sitting in forgetfulness', and by the Buddhists as Nirvana. One cannot ask this school of Buddhism what, exactly, the state of Nirvana is, because, according to it, when one reaches the third level of truth, one cannot affirm anything.

The Conventional Reality of Phenomena (adapted from The Fundamental Wisdom of the Middle Way, by Prof. Jay L. Garfield, New York 1995) The central topic of Mulamadhyamakakarika (literally Fundamental Verses on the Middle Way) is 'emptiness' - the Buddhist technical term for the lack of independent existence, inherent existence, or essence in things. Nagarjuna relentlessly analyzes phenomena or processes that appear to exist independently and argues that they cannot so exist, and yet, though lacking the inherent existence imputed to them either by naive common sense or by sophisticated realistic philosophical theory, these phenomena are not nonexistent - they are, he argues, conventionally real.

This dual thesis of the conventional reality of phenomena together with their lack of inherent existence depends upon the

complex doctrine of the two truths or two realities - a conventional or nominal truth and an ultimate truth - and upon a subtle and surprising doctrine regarding their relation. It is, in fact, this sophisticated development of the doctrine of the two truths as a vehicle for understanding Buddhist metaphysics and epistemology that is Nagarjuna's greatest philosophical contribution. If the analysis in terms of emptiness is the substantive heart of Mulamadhyamakakarika, the method of reductio ad absurdum is the methodological core. Nagarjuna, like Western sceptics, systematically eschews the defense of positive metaphysical doctrines regarding the nature of things, arguing rather that any such positive thesis is incoherent and that, in the end, our conventions and our conceptual framework can never be justified by demonstrating their correspondence to an independent reality. Rather, he suggests, what counts as real depends precisely on our conventions (though in the end, as we shall see, ultimate reality depends on our conventions in a way, it depends on our conventions in a very different way from that in which conventional reality does; despite this difference in the structure of the relation between convention and reality in the two cases, however, it remains a distinctive feature of Nagarjuna's system that it is impossible to speak coherently of reality independent of conventions).

For Nagarjuna and his followers this point [that what counts as real depends on our conventions] is connected deeply and directly with the emptiness of phenomena. That is, for instance, when a Madhyamika philosopher says of a table that it is empty, that assertion by itself is incomplete. It invites the question: empty of what? And the answer is: empty of inherent existence, or self-nature, or, in more Western terms, essence. Now, to say that the table is empty is hence simply to say that it lacks essence and importantly not to say that it is completely nonexistent. To say that it lacks essence, the Madhyamika philosopher will explain, is to say, as the Tibetans like to put it, that is does not exist 'from its own side' - that its existence as the object that it is - as a table - depends not on it, nor on any purely nonrelational characteristics, but depends on us as well. That is, if our culture had not evolved this manner of furniture, what appears to us to be an obviously unitary object might instead be correctly described as five objects: four quite useful

sticks absurdly surmounted by a pointless slab of stick-wood waiting to be carved!

The Buddhism of the Nikayas (adapted from The Buddhist Path to Awakening, by Rupert M. L. Gethin, Leiden 1992) How does one begin to answer the question: "What does the Buddhism of the Nikayas teach?" One way is to ask why the Nikayas were written at all. Why do they regard what they have to say as significant? What is their raison d'être? The answer is surely not hard to find. The Nikayas understand themselves as pointing towards the solution of a problem. This problem is stated in the texts in a variety of ways. Suffering, the ultimately unsatisfactory nature of life, dukkha (the first of the noble truths) is perhaps the most familiar. A rather more informal statement of the matter can perhaps better bring out what dukkha is to the Nikayas: the problem is that many people find life a problem. But the significance of even this basic premise of the Nikaya thought-world is, I think, sometimes misconstrued or not adequately set forth. For the Nikayas are not seeking to persuade a world of otherwise perfectly content beings that life is in fact unpleasant; rather they address something that is, as the Nikayas see it, universally found to exist and will sooner or later confront us all. In other words, understanding the first noble truth involves not so much the revelation that dukkha exists, as the realization of what dukkha is, or the knowledge of the true nature of dukkha. In their own terms, the Nikayas teach but two things: dukkha and the cessation of dukkha. In other words, they postulate a situation where there is a problem and a situation where there is no longer a problem, and are concerned with the processes and means involved in passing from the former to the latter. If this is the Nikayas' ultimate concern, then everything in them might be viewed as at least intended to be subordinate to that aim.

In the Nikayas the processes and means that bring about the cessation of dukkha are conceived primarily in terms of spiritual practice and development. What in particular seems to interest the compilers of the Nikayas is the nature of spiritual practice and development, how spiritual practice effects and affects spiritual development, how what one does, says and thinks might be related to progress towards the cessation of dukkha.

In other words, we might say that Buddhist thought is about the Buddhist path - a path that is seen as leading gradually away from dukkha towards its cessation, and as culminating in the awakening from a restless and troubled sleep.

For Prasangika Nothing Exists Objectively (adapted from Meditation on Emptiness, by Prof. Jeffrey Hopkins, London 1983) For Prasangika nothing exists objectively, that is to say, as if of its own will right with its basis of imputation. Prasangika philosophy, though emphasizing the subjective element, is still not a turn to utter subjectivity in which what exists for the individual is what exists. There are standards and criteria for valid establishment, and in this sense both suchness and the phenomena qualified by it are objective. The division into two truths on epistemological grounds is a call to eradicate ignorance and to attain the highest wisdom. It is a call to recognition that a conventional cognizer, even if valid with respect to the existence or non-existence of objects, is not valid with respect to their suchness. It is a call to a new mode of perception, to a cognition of a reality that has been ever-present.

The two truths are not vague realms of misty truth as suggested by translations which use the singular, such as 'absolute truth' and 'conventional truth'. In Sanskrit and Tibetan the singular is used for a class name whereas in common English usage a general term is most often either in the plural, or in the singular with the indefinite article 'a'. It would be correct to refer to conventional truths as 'conventional truth' only if it were suitable to refer to tables as table, e. g. 'table is object', rather than 'tables are objects'.

However, translating paramarthasatya in the singular as 'ultimate truth' even without an article can be considered a matter of choice depending on the context, because though there are many types of emptinesses, they are only enumerated as such in accordance with the various types of phenomena that are bases of the quality emptiness. Still, at least in the Ge-luk-ba [Gelugpa] interpretation of emptiness the one thing is not the emptiness of another in the sense of exact identity, and from this viewpoint the term has often been

translated here either in the singular with the article 'an' as 'an ultimate truth' or in the plural as 'ultimate truths'. Despite this, when referring to a direct cognition in which all emptinesses are simultaneously realized, it seems cumbersome to say 'a yogi directly cognizes ultimate truths', because it seems to imply that only some ultimate truths are being cognized. Rather, usage of the singular as in 'a yogi direcly cognizes ultimate truth in a totally non-dualistic manner', or 'a yogi directly cognizes emptiness after having become accustomed to an inferential realization', at least suggests that there is no ultimate truth which at that point is not being cognized. The meaning, nevertheless, is not amorphous, but specific; an emptiness is a phenomenon's lack of inherent existence. Thus, one 'reflects on an emptiness' or 'generates an inferential cognition of an emptiness' because it is the emptiness of a specific phenomenon that is being reflected upon and realized.

Also, for paramartha, 'ultimate' is a better translation than 'absolute' because 'absolute' suggests something that exists in and of itself, independently, whereas nothing is independent in the Madhyamika system, even an emptiness.

Two Types of Negation (adapted from The Emptiness of Emptiness, by Prof. C. W. Huntington Jr., with Geshe Namgyal Wangchen, 1989, Delhi 1992) Within the Madhyamika system, soteriology plays an integral role as the practical application of philosophical reflection. Although things do not bear their individual existence within themselves, as they appear to do, they are nevertheless quite real insofar as they are efficacious. The eminent Tibetan scholar Tsong kha pa has referred to the concept of causal efficacy - the sole determining criterion for conventional truth and reality - as "the most profound and subtle matter within the Madhyamika philosophy". One needs, then, to appreciate the interdependent nature of appearances and to adjust attitudes accordingly in order to avoid a considerable amount of suffering.

Indian philosophers traditionally define two distinct types of negation:
(i) Negation which indirectly affirms the existence of something else (paryudasa); and

(ii) Negation which leaves nothing in its place (prasajya). The Madhyamika has assigned a particular significance to each of these. The first type of negation is "relative", "implicative", or "presuppositional" negation. Taken as a philosophical principle, it leads to the opposed ontological positions of nihilism and absolutism. The second type, "nonimplicative" or "nonpresuppositional" negation, is used by the Madhyamika to express the radical, deconstructive negation effected through application of the concept of emptiness. When one negates the reality of a reflection he necessarily affirms the reality of the reflected entity, but when the Madhyamika philosopher negates the reality of the world, he affirms neither a "something" nor a "nothing" in its place. In other words, he does not supply the old, reified concept "reality" with a new, more refined and abstract referent, a metaphysical substrate of some novel and convincing variety. On the contrary, in order to know and accept the world as it is both in its everyday appearance and in the paradox and mystery of this appearance, he steps entirely outside the language game that can be played only by holding onto propositions (pratijñas) and views (dristis). In taking this step he makes the first critical move away from a form of life caught up in the anxious and generally manipulative attitude associated with this way of thinking and acting.

This is a very subtle point, and it lies at the heart of the Madhyamika philosophy for, as Candrakirti and others have often indicated, no matter what ingenious things may be written or said about emptiness by the cleverest philosopher, ultimately it must be "seen by nonseeing" and "realized by nonrealization". It is not an epistemic or ontic fact dissociated from everyday life, ensconced "out there" somewhere waiting to be discovered and possessed through the power of critical rationalism. "Emptiness" is a conventional designation (prajñapti), an ordinary word used, like all words, to accomplish a specific purpose registered in the intention of the speaker. In accordance with what the texts say, it is perhaps best understood as a way of being, a way of existing, knowing, and acting with complete freedom from clinging and antipathy. In the direct
(noninferential) realization of emptiness, the claims of the part or individual are immediately experienced as harmonious with

the claims of the whole world of sentient and insentient being. The direct realization of emptiness, what I call the "actualization" of emptiness, is the source of the bodhisattvas's universal compassion.

The Nirvanic Realm, Here and Now (adapted from Nagarjuna, A Translation of his Mulamadhyamakakarika, by Prof. Kenneth K. Inada, 1970, Delhi 1993) It is sometimes said that Nagarjuna appeared at the right moment and at the right place in Buddhist history to provide the necessary corrective measures to Buddhist philosophical analysis of man's nature and thereby initiated a 'new' movement within the Mahayana tradition. First of all, however, it must be remembered that he did not appear out of a vacuum but rather that he came after a long period of Buddhist activity in India proper. At least six or seven centuries had transpired between the historical Buddha (6th century B. C.) and Nagarjuna (circa 2nd-3rd centuries A. D.), a time in which Buddhists actively explored, criticized, and propagated the Buddhist truth. This is the period which produced the eighteen contending schools of the Abhidharmika system discussed earlier and also the time which saw the germs of the break in the interpretation of the nature of the summum bonum (Nirvana) between the Hinayana (inclusive of modern Theravada) and Mahayana traditions.

At the same time, secondly, it should be noted that the Mahayana tradition in its earliest phase, i. e. pre-Christian period, had already produced some of the most attractive and arresting thoughts in Buddhist history, thoughts which are considered most fundamental to all subsequent developments in the tradition. Sutras relative to this period concentrate on the universal and extensive sameness (samata, tathata) in the nature of man, his supreme wisdom (prajña) and compassion (karuna), all of which describe the concept of a bodhisattva or enlightened being. They expound ad infinitum the purity, beauty and ultimate rewards of the realization of this supreme realm of being in language which is at once esthetic, poetic and dramatic but which at times are painfully frustrating to the searching rational mind.

For example, the empirically oriented mind would not be able to

accept and adapt simple identities of the order (or realm) of wordly (mundane) and unworldly
(supermundane), empirical and nonempirical, common everyday life (Samsara) and uncommon enlightened life (Nirvana), pure (sukha) and impure (asukha), and finally, form
(rupa) and emptiness (shunyata). In the final identity of form and emptiness, a climax in the ideological development is reached where the sutras, in particular the whole Prajñaparamita Sutras, elaborate on the point that all forms are in the nature of void (shunya). Thus, such forms in the nature of a sentient creature or being (sattva), a soul or vital force (jiva), a self (atman), a personal identity (pudgala) and separate 'elements' (dharmas) are all essentially devoid of any characterization (animitta, alaksana). The quest for voidness or emptiness is thoroughgoing with the aim being the nongrasping (agrahya) and at once the emptiness of the personal experiential components
(pudgala-shunyata) and of the personal ideational components (dharma-shunyata). This is the final goal of the Nirvanic realm, here and now, without residues
(anupadhishesa-nirvana-dhatu) and achievable to all.

Needless to say, the understanding of the above identities is the constant challenge and the most profound feature of the Mahayana, if not the whole Buddhist philosophy. Unquestionably, Nagarjuna was faithful to this lineage of ideas and he tried his hand in cristalizing the prevailing ideas. He came to bundle up the loosely spread ideas, so to speak, and gave a definite direction in the quest of man.

Nirvana truly realized is Samsara properly understood (adapted from Buddha and the Path to Enlightenment, by Raghavan Iyer, Theosophy Library Online, Internet 1986) The Madhyamika school traces its origin to Nagarjuna, the brilliant philosopher and formidable dialectician who flourished in the late second century A. D. Taking Buddha's advocacy of the Middle Way between harmful extremes, between avid indulgence and austere asceticism, and between sterile intellectualization and suffocating mental torpor, Nagarjuna developed a rigorous dialectical logic by which he reduced every philosophical standpoint to an explosive set of contradictions. This did not

lead to the closure of scepticism, as the less vigorously pursued pre-Socratic philosophies did, but rather to the elusive standpoint that neither existence nor non-existence can be asserted of the world and of everything in it. The Madhyamikas, therefore, refused to affirm or deny any philosophical proposition. Nagarjuna sought to liberate the mind from its tendencies to cling to tidy or clever formulations of truth, because any truth short of shunyata, the voidness of reality, is inherently misleading. Relative truths are not like pieces of a puzzle, each of which incrementally adds to the complete design. They are plausible distortions of the truth and can seriously mislead the aspirant. They cannot be lightly or wholly repudiated, however, for they are all the seeker has, and so he must learn to use them as aids whilst remembering that they are neither accurate nor complete in themselves.

By the fifth century two views of Nagarjuna's work had emerged. The followers of Bhavaviveka thought that Madhyamika philosophy had a positive content, whilst those who subscribed to Buddhapalita's more severe interpretation said that every standpoint, including their own, could be reduced to absurdity, which fact alone, far more than any positively asserted doctrine, could lead to intuitive insight (Prajña) and Enlightenment. Chandrakirti's remarkable defence of this latter standpoint deeply influenced Tibetan Buddhist traditions as well as those schools of thought that eventually culminated in Japan in Zen. Nagarjuna's dialectic revealed the shunya or emptiness of all discursive, worldly thought and its proliferating categories.

For the Madhyamikas, whatever can be conceptualized is therefore relative, and whatever is relative is shunya, empty. Since absolute inconceivable truth is also shunya, shunyata or the void is shared by both Samsara and Nirvana. Ultimately, Nirvana truly realized is Samsara properly understood. The fully realized Bodhisattva, the enlightened Buddha who renounces the Dharmakaya vesture to remain at the service of suffering beings, recognizes this radical transcendental equivalence. The Arhant and the Pratyeka Buddha, who look to their own redemption and realization, are elevated beyond any conventional description, but nonetheless do not fully realize or

freely embody this highest truth. Thus for the Madhyamikas, the Bodhisattva ideal is the supreme wisdom, showing the unqualified unity of unfettered metaphysics and transcendent ethics, theoria and praxis, at the highest conceivable level.

Order for Free (adapted from At Home in the Universe, by Stuart Kauffman, New York 1995) The living world is graced with a bounty of order. Each bacterium orchestrates the synthesis and distribution of thousands of proteins and other molecules. Each cell in your body coordinates the activities of about 100,000 genes and the enzymes and other proteins they produce. Each fertilized egg unfolds through a sequence of steps into a well-formed whole called, appropiately enough, an organism. If the sole source of this order is what Jacques Monod called "chance caught on the wing", the fruit of one fortuitous accident after another and selection sifting, then we are indeed improbable. Our lapse from paradise - Copernicus to Newton in celestial mechanics, to Darwin in biology, and to Carnot and the second law of thermodynamics - leaves us spinning around an average star at the edge of a humdrum galaxy, lucky beyond reckoning to have emerged as living forms.

How different is humanity's stance, if it proves true that life crystallizes almost inevitably in sufficiently complex mixtures of molecules, that life may be an expected emergent property of matter and energy. We start to find hints of a natural home for ourselves in the cosmos.

But we have only begun to tell the story of emergent order. For spontaneous order, I hope to show you, has been as potent as natural selection in the creation of the living world. We are the children of twin sources of order, not a singular source. So far we have showed how autocatalytic sets might spring up naturally in a variegated chemical soup. We have seen that the origin of collective autocatalysis, the origin of life itself, comes because of what I call 'order for free' - self-organization that arises naturally. But I believe that this order for free, which has undergirded the origin of life itself, has also undergirded the order in organisms as they have evolved and has even undergirded the very capacity to evolve itself.

Existential Thinking is Subjective (adapted from The Mind of Kierkegaard, by Prof. James Collins, 1953, 1965, Princeton 1983) Men cannot help asking questions about the meaning of existence, the nature of the human person, and the uses of freedom. These questions fall within the region of what Kierkegaard terms 'subjective reflection' or 'existential thinking'. The most important human issues lie in this latter field, rather than in that of objective reflection. Kierkegaard's thesis that existential thinking is subjective, is open to misconception, unless it be interpreted in the light of his preoccupation with idealism and naturalism. His opposition to idealism is sufficient indication that by 'subjetive' is not meant a priority of thought over being, in any absolutist sense, let alone a glorification of personal whim or private fancy.

In attempting to go beyond the epistemological dilemma between idealism and empiricism, he gave a moral and religious meaning to subjectivity. His thought should rather be assigned to the Augustinian tradition, for he would approve the custom of addressing God as magister interior and of declaring that, in all that matters most to men: in interiore homine habitat veritas, truth dwells in the inner man. For Kierkegaard, subjectivity means inwardness or the existential attitude of the individual soul. His youthful resolve to dedicate himself to a discovery and propagation of 'edifying truths' is in comformity with this defense of a kind of truth which does indeed build up homo interior. Since he also believed, with Augustine, that man is most truly man when considered in relation to God, Kierkegaard concluded that humanly significant truth is primarily ethico-religious truth. A man's subjectivity is his personal, inward condition in respect to the moral law and religious life, a phase of human reality which is not open to scientific inspection. In this sense, existential knowledge must be both subjective and edifying.

It is well to observe that Kierkegaard's solution of the truth-problem cannot be a complete one. He recognized the inadequacy of the report of the particular sciences, without being able to provide a full supplementary explanation. While it is true that there are aspects of reality not accessible to the

scientific method, it does not follow that all of these aspects lie in a subjective and human direction. There are truths about the realm of nature and quantity which can be reached philosophically, without calling upon idealism, but Kierkegaard does not discuss philosophical truth of the cosmological and mathematical orders. Moreover, there is a way of regarding man and nature together, metaphysically, without falling into either idealistic monism or naturalism. What is missing from Kierkegaard, is a treatment of existential truth along speculative and metaphysical lines. He has not supplied a metaphysical analysis of truth and existence, and this failure has forced later thinkers in the existentialistic line to choose between an idealistic and a naturalistic metaphysics. For this same reason, his insistence upon practical considerations of a religious and moral sort appears to be as narrow, in its own way, as the pragmatic concentration upon practical results of scientific research. It would be misleading to accept his teaching as a rounded, theoretical study of truth.

Nagarjuna and the Madhyamika school (adapted from A History of Religion East and West, by Prof. Trevor Ling, 1968, Basingstoke 1988) We have seen that one of the earliest developments in Buddhist thought in the Mahayana direction was the idea that even dhammas (regarded by the Theravadins as the indivisible ultimate events of which all existence is composed) are in fact substanceless; all things, even dhammas, are void of substance, or shunya. This idea is first found in a Mahayana text which was translated into Chinese at the end of the second century C. E. and which may therefore be regarded as having had its origin somewhere in north-west India in the first century C. E.

Those who assert (vadin) this doctrine of the voidness of substance (shunya) even in dhammas, are called shunyavadins. Another name for this school of thought is the Madhyamika school, or school of the 'middle position' (madhya is cognate with Latin media). The middle position referred to was not that of the earlier period of Buddhism, when the Buddha's teaching was known as 'the Middle Way', that is, between self-mortification and sensuality, but between the complete realism of the Sarvastivadins who asserted that all

dhammas, past, present and future, were real; and the absolute idealism of the Yogacharin school.

The Madhyamika school is generally regarded as having been founded by Nagarjuna in the second century C. E. It is significant that Nagarjuna was a brahman from south central India (Andhra) who had thrown in his lot with Buddhism. The school of thought which he developed certainly has affinities with brahman philosophical thought; although it was developed in opposition to certain of the orthodox brahman philosophies (Sankhya and Vaishesika), it was generally more akin to these schools than to the early Abhidhamma of Pali Buddhism. An excellent account of the Madhyamika school has been provided by T. R. V. Murti (1955). His view of the development of this school is that it may be described in terms of a dialectic. The original thesis was the atma-affirming doctrine of the Upanishads; the antithesis to this was the denial of any enduring atta (atma) in early Buddhism, formalised in the Abhidhamma; the synthesis is found in the Madhyamika.

According to Murti is was the inadequacy and inconsistency of the Abhidhamma system, especially the Sarvastivadin Abhidhamma, which led to the development of the Madhyamika. The essential concern of the Madhyamika is with the relation between the empirical world of the senses, which in Buddhist thought generally is known as Samsara (the continued round of existence), and the transcendental reality Nirvana. According to the Madhyamika, Nirvana is present in Samsara, but men are prevented from recognising this and entering into it because of the false constructions they put upon the world. The removal of these false constructions (the negation of the negation) and the attainment of Nirvana is the religious goal, in the Madhyamika Buddhist view. The way to do this is by cultivating a view of the substanceless nature of things. To accomplish this, they hold, needs a long course of meditational training.

The Idea of Emptiness in the Prajñaparamita-sutras (adapted from Madhyamaka Thought in China, by Ming-Wood Liu, Leiden 1994) Besides the idea of 'non-attachment' and 'non-discrimination', and their associate notions of 'non-duality' and

the 'sameness of all dharmas', the idea of 'emptiness' is also an important component of the accounts of the perfection of wisdom found in the Prajñaparamita-sutras. So the Large Sutra observes that "a bodhisattva, who courses in perfect wisdom, should investigate all dharmas as empty in their essential original nature". It further observes that it is through standing in emptiness that a bodhisattva stands in the perfection of wisdom. The Sanskrit original of the term 'emptiness' is shunyata. Derived from the root shvi which means 'to swell', shunya literally means 'being related to the swollen'. Now, a swollen object usually does not last long and is hollow inside. Thus, to say that something is shunya is to judge it to be, among other things, impermanent and without real substance. To bring out the sense of 'without real substance' which underlies the concept of 'emptiness', the Large Sutra brings in the idea of causality dear to the Buddhists: "It has no own-being acting in causal connection. And that which has no own-being acting in causal connection, that is nonexistence. It is by this method that all dharmas have nonexistence for own-being." According to this passage, things are without self-being (svabhava) because they are produced by causes, and the state of absence of self-being is what the term 'emptiness' ('nonexistence') indicates.

The teaching of emptiness has a long history in Buddhism. Already in early Buddhist sources, emptiness was mentioned, together with suffering, non-self, impermanence, etc., as a characteristic trait of Samsaric existence. The idea of emptiness also appeared in Abhidharma texts.. However, the Prajñaparamita-sutras are the earliest extant body of Buddhist literature in which the idea of emptiness appears as a central theme. The Prajñaparamita-sutras pronounce emphatically the emptiness of all dharmas, whether conditioned or non-conditioned: "What is the emptiness of all dharmas? All dharmas means the five skandhas, the twelve sense fields, the six kinds of consciousness, the six kinds of contact, the six kinds of feeling conditioned by contact. Conditioned and unconditioned dharmas, these are called 'all-dharmas'. Therein all dharmas are empty of all-dharmas, on account of their being neither unmoved nor destroyed. For such is their essential nature." According to the Prajñaparamita-sutras, no object and

no mode of existence falls outside the governance of the law of emptiness, not even the bodhisattva, the Buddha and enlightenment..

Madhyamaka is advayavada (adapted from Nonduality, A Study in Comparative Philosophy, by Prof. David R. Loy, 1988, Amherst 1998) Advaita Vedanta clearly asserts nonduality in our third sense [the nondifference of subject and object], to the extent of making it the central tenet. The case of Buddhism is more complicated. Ontologically, Pali Buddhism, which bases itself on what are understood to be the original teachings of the Buddha, seems pluralistic. Reality is understood to consist of a multitude of discrete particulars (dharmas). The self is analyzed away into five 'heaps' (skandhas) which the Abhidharma (the 'higher dharma', a philosophical abstract of the Buddha's teachings) classifies and systematizes. So early Buddhism, while critical of dualistic thinking, is not nondual in the second, monistic [the nonplurality of the world], sense. Regarding the nondifference of subject and object, the issue is less clear. While the second sense of nonduality [the nonplurality of the world] logically implies some version of the third [the nondifference of subject and object], it is not true that a denial of the second sense implies a denial of the third. The world might be a composite of discrete experiences which are nondual in the third sense.

I am not acquainted with any passage in the Pali Canon that clearly asserts the nonduality of subject and object, as one finds in so many Mahayana texts. But I have also found no denial of such nonduality. One may view the no-self (anatman) doctrine of early Buddhism as another way of making the same point; instead of asserting that subject and object are one, the Buddha simply denies that there is a subject. These two formulations may well amount to the same thing, although the latter may be criticized as ontologically lopsided: since subject and object are interdependent, the subject cannot be eliminated without transforming the nature of the object (and vice-versa, as Advaita Vedanta was aware)..

Mahayana Buddhism abounds in assertions of subject-object nonduality, despite the fact that the most important Mahayana

philosophy, Madhyamaka, cannot be said to assert nonduality at all, since it makes few (if any) positive claims but confines itself to refuting all philosophical positions. Madhyamaka is advayavada (the theory of not-two, here meaning neither of two alternative views, our first sense of nonduality [the negation of dualistic thinking]), rather than advaitavada (the theory of nondifference between subject and object, our third sense). Prajña is understood to be nondual knowledge, but this again is advaya, knowledge devoid of views. Nagarjuna neither asserts nor denies the experience of nonduality in the third sense, despite the fact that Madhyamika dialectic criticizes the self-existence of both subject and object, since relative to each other they must both be unreal: "Nagarjuna holds that dependent origination is nothing else but the coming to rest of the manifold of named things
(prapañcopashama). When the everyday mind and its contents are no longer active, the subject and object of everyday transactions having faded out because the turmoil of origination, decay, and death has been left behind completely, that is final beatitude." (Chandrakirti, Prasannapada)

The Distinction between Problem and Mystery (adapted from Existentialist Thought: Gabriel Marcel, by Ronald Grimsley, 1955, Cardiff 1967) To raise the question of Being is to reveal the limitations of all pure 'problems'. A problem is in some way outside us, something apart from our intimate experience and something towards which we adopt a merely impersonal attitude. Hence it can become an object of general knowledge and public inquiry. As 'ob-jective' a problem confronts me in the manner of an obstacle which has to be overcome. In scientific investigation it seems possible to make a clear-cut distinction between the subject which interrogates and the object which is being examined, between what is in me and what is before me. In this way a problem emerges as something definite and specific and of a fixed pattern. This is revealed through the way in which we believe that a given problem may be resolved in terms of a 'solution' which can be tested and verified in experience. There is a 'universal reason' or 'thought in general' capable of laying down certain conditions necessary for the acceptance of any particular solution as valid. When those conditions have been satisfactorily fulfilled, we say that the

solution has been 'verified'. It is normal to suppose that such verification is carried out by a mind of a 'depersonalized subject' and that one investigator ought to be able to reach exactly the same conclusion as another. This is an essential condition for the establishment of any kind of objective knowledge, the search for which always entails, says Gabriel Marcel, a certain form of concupiscence by which the world is brought to myself and compelled to submit to a set of techniques considered suitable for dominating it.

As soon as we begin to inquire about Being we are faced by a different situation. Whereas the objective problem is conveniently located in a region which is apart from us, questions about Being immediately make us realize that in some intimate and perhaps perplexing way we are implicated in it from the very outset. In fact I cannot separate the question: What is Being? from the further question: Who or what am I? Whenever I interrogate Being I also have to ask: Who am I who ask this question concerning Being? Since questions concerning the totality of Being always involve my own existence and since questions about myself also involve an interrogation of Being, we are forced to admit the insufficiency of the distinction between the 'subjective' and the 'objective' as it emerges in questions concerning limited aspects of the physical world and man in his natural aspects. The conventional distinction must be transcended. It is this general consideration which prevents Marcel from speaking of the 'problem' of Being. We are here dealing not with a problem but with a 'mystery'.

The 'mystery' of Being brings us to the region of the 'metaproblematical' where it is necessary 'to transcend the opposition of a subject which would affirm Being and of Being which is affirmed by this subject'. The very antithesis involved in the subject-object relationship is only possible, in the first place, through the existence of a 'metaproblematical' sphere which gives priority to Being over knowledge. A cognition is always enveloped by Being and therefore in some sense 'within' Being. A mere theory of knowledge and an epistemological distinction between subject and object can never account for the full depth of a mystery which springs directly from Being itself. A mystery

is really a 'problem which encroaches upon its own data' - and therefore 'transcends itself as problem'. In whichever way the polarity of the questioner and the object of his question be conceived in the case of a mystery, we are forced to recognize the existence of a kind of reciprocal penetration of the inquiring self and the ontological reality to which it is related. This interpenetration makes it quite impossible to reduce the question to the level of those usually treated in terms of rational categories.

The Distinction between Advaya and Advaita (adapted from The Central Philosophy of Buddhism, by Prof. T. R. V. Murti, 1955, 1960, London 1968) In all the three absolutisms [Madhyamaka, Vijñanavada and Vedanta] the highest knowledge is conceived as Intuition, beyond all traces of duality. A distinction must, however, be made between the advaya of the Madhyamaka and the advaita of the Vedanta, although in the end it may turn out be one of emphasis of approach. Advaya is knowledge free from the duality of the extremes (antas or dristis) of 'is' and 'is not', 'being' and 'becoming' etc. It is knowledge freed of conceptual distinctions. Advaita is knowledge of a differenceless entity: Brahman (Pure Being) or Vijñana (Pure consciousness). The Vijñanavada, although it uses the term advaya for its absolute, is really an advaita system.

Advaya is purely an epistemological approach; the advaita is ontological. The sole concern of the Madhyamaka advaya-vada is the purification of the faculty of knowing. The primordial error consists in the intellect being infected by the inveterate tendency to view Reality as identity or difference, permanent or momentary, one or many etc. These views falsify Reality, and the dialectic administers a cathartic corrective. With the purification of the intellect, Intuition (prajña) emerges; the Real is known as it is, as Tathata or bhutakoti. The emphasis is on the correct attitude of our knowing and not on the known..

The Madhyamika has no doctrine of existence, ontology. This would be, according to him, to indulge in dogmatic speculation (dristivada). To the Vedanta and Vijñanavada, the Madhyamika, with his purely epistemological approach and lack of a doctrine

of reality, cannot but appear as nihilistic (sarva-vainashika, shunya-vada). The 'no-doctrine' attitude of the Madhyamika is construed by Vedanta and Vijñanavada as a 'no-reality' doctrine; they accuse the Madhyamika, unjustifiably, of denying the real altogether and as admitting a theory of appearance without any reality as its ground. In fact, the Madhyamika does not deny the real; he only denies doctrines about the real. For him, the real as transcendent to thought can be reached only by the denial of the determinations which systems of philosophy ascribe to it. When the entire conceptual activity of Reason is dissolved by criticism, there is Prajña-Paramita.

Dharmakaya (adapted from The Essence of Buddhism, by Prof. P. Lakshmi Narasu, 1911, 1948, Delhi 1976) All that man aspires and desires to attain through religion might in its essentials be reduced to three points: peace and tranquility of mind, fortitude and consolation in adversity, and hope in death. In Buddhism all these are attained through Nirvana. The ordinary man seeks his rest and peace in God. For him all questions find their answer in God. But it is entirely different with the Buddhist. Buddhism denies an Ishvara, and the latter cannot, therefore, be its goal and resting point. The Buddhist's goal is Buddhahood, and the essence of Buddhahood is Dharmakaya, the totality of all those laws which pervade the facts of life, and whose living recognition constitutes enlightenment. Dharmakaya is the most comprehensive name with which the Buddhist sums up his understanding and also his feeling about the universe. Dharmakaya signifies that the universe does not appear to the Buddhist as a mere mechanism, but as pulsating with life. Further, it means that the most striking fact about the universe is its intellectual aspect and its ethical order, specially in its higher reaches. Nay more, it implies that the universe is one in essence, and nowhere chaotic or dualistic..

Dharmakaya is no pitiable abstraction, but that aspect of existence which makes the world intelligible, which shows itself in cause and effect, in the blessedness that follows righteousness, and in the cussedness that comes from evil-doing. Dharmakaya is that ideal tendency in things which reveals itself most completely in man's rational will and moral

aspirations. Though not an individual person like man, though not a limited being of a particular cast of mind, Dharmakaya is the condition of all personality. Being niralamba anasrava dharmasantana, Dharmakaya does not exist apart from man; nay, it draws vital strength and increase from man's fidelity to it. It is all that the human personality is capable of becoming. It is what every human being, as a moral agent, is seeking, most often blindly, to become. It is the impersonated inspiring type of every perfected rational mind. Without Dharmakaya there would be nothing that constitutes personality, no reason, no science, no moral aspiration, no ideal, no aim and purpose in man's life..

Dharmakaya is the norm of all existence, the standard of truth, the measure of righteousness, the good law; it is that in the constitution of things which makes certain modes of conduct beneficial and certain other modes detrimental. Owing to the limitations of our knowledge and the imperfection of our goodness we may not yet know all about Dharmakaya. But we know enough about it to make it our guide in life. Like a cloud shedding its waters without distinction, Dharmakaya encompasses all with the light of comprehension.

Pure Experience (adapted from An Inquiry into the Good, by Prof. Kitaro Nishida, with an introduction by Prof. Masao Abe, New Haven 198..) To experience means to know facts just as they are, to know in accordance with facts by completely relinquishing one's own fabrications. What we usually refer to as experience is adulterated with some sort of thought, so by pure I am referring to the state of experience just as it is without the least addition of deliberative discrimination. The moment of seeing a color or hearing a sound, for example, is prior not only to the thought that the color or sound is the activity of an external object or that one is sensing it, but also to the judgement of what the color or sound might be. In this regard, pure experience is identical with direct experience. When one directly experiences one's own state of consciousness, there is not yet a subject or an object, and knowing and its object are completely unified. This is the most refined type of experience.

Usually, of course, the meaning of the term experience is not clearly fixed. Wilhelm Wundt refers to knowledge that is

reasoned out discursively on the basis of experience as mediate experience, and he calls disciplines like physics and chemistry sciences of mediate experience. Such kinds of knowledge, however, cannot be called experience in the proper sense of the term. Further, given the nature of consciousness, we cannot experience someone else's consciousness. And even with one's own consciousness, whether consciousness of some present occurrence or a recollection of the past, when one makes judgements about it, it ceases to be pure experience. A truly pure experience has no meaning whatsoever: it is simply a present consciousness of facts just as they are.

What kinds of mental phenomena are pure experience in this sense? Surely no one would object to including sensations and perceptions. I believe, though, that all mental phenomena appear in the form of pure experience. In the phenomena of memory, past consciousness does not arise in us directly, so we do not intuit the past; to feel something as past is a feeling in the present. An abstract concept is never something that transcends experience, for it is always a form of present consciousness.. And if we consider the so-called fringe of consciousness a fact of direct experience, then even consciousness of the various relations between experiential facts is - like sensation and perception - a kind of pure experience. Granting this, what is the state of the phenomena of feeling and will? Obviously, feelings of pleasure and displeasure are present consciousness; and the will, though oriented toward a goal in the future, is always felt as desire in the present.

Circuminsessional Interpenetration (adapted from Religion and Nothingness, by Prof. Keiji Nishitani, translated with an introduction by Prof. Jan van Bragt, and with a foreword by Prof. Winston L. King, 1982, Berkeley 1983) All things that are in the world are linked together, one way or the other. Not a single thing comes into being without some relationship to every other thing. Scientific intellect thinks here in terms of natural laws of necessary causality; mythico-poetic imagination perceives an organic, living connection; philosophic reason contemplates an absolute One. But on a more essential level, a

system of circuminsession has to be seen here, according to which, on the field of shunyata, all things are in a process of becoming master and servant to one another. In this system, each thing is itself in not being itself, and is not itself in being itself. Its being is illusion in its truth and truth in its illusion. This may sound strange the first time one hears it, but in fact it enables us for the first time to conceive of a force by virtue of which all things are gathered together and brought into relationship with one another, a force which, since ancient times, has gone by the name of 'nature'
(physis).

To say that a thing is not itself means that, while continuing to be itself, it is in the home-ground of everything else. Figuratively speaking, its roots reach across into the ground of all other things and helps to hold them up and keep them standing. It serves as a constitutive element of their being so that they can be what they are, and thus provides an ingredient of their being. That a thing is itself means that all other things, while continuing to be themselves, are in the home-ground of that thing; that precisely when a thing is on its own home-ground, everything else is there too; that the roots of every other thing spread across into its home-ground. This way that everything has of being on the home-ground of everything else, without ceasing to be on its own home-ground, means that the being of each thing is held up, kept standing, and made to be what it is by means of the being of all other things; or, put the other way around, that each thing holds up the being of every other thing, keeps it standing, and makes it what it is. In a word, it means that all things 'are' in the 'world'.

To imply that when a thing is 'on its own home-ground, it must at the same time be on the home-ground of all other things' sounds absurd; but in fact it constitutes the 'essence' of the existence of things. The being of things in themselves is essentially circuminsessional. This is what we mean by speaking of beings as 'being that is in unison with emptiness', and 'being on the field of emptiness'. For this circuminsessional system is only possible on the field of emptiness or shunyata.

Nagarjuna and Madhyamika Buddhism (adapted from

Presuppositions of India's Philosophies, by Prof. Karl H. Potter, 1963, Westport, Conn. 1976) Nagarjuna, the most famous exponent of the Madhyamika school of Buddhism, contends that there is no basis on which one can posit a dependence relation of the asymmmetrical sort sought by Vasubhandu and Dharmakirti. When the Buddha said that everything was interdependent he meant just what he said. He did not mean that some things depended on other things which were themselves independent, a theory which other philosophers, both Buddhist and Hindu, have espoused; he meant that all things are on a par, dependent on one another. Nagarjuna develops a rather unusual terminology for the status of all things. Since they are interdependent, he says, and since to depend on something else is to have no nature of one's own (no svabhava, to use the technical Buddhist term), they must be without any nature, that is to say 'void' (shunya)..

Nagarjuna harps upon the concept of dependence. That which depends upon something else is less real than something else. This, argues Nagarjuna, is accepted by all philosophers. But all the other philosophers conclude that there must be some positive reality upon which other things depend but which does not depend on anything else.. Even among the Buddhists, the logicians think there are elements which do not depend on others but are depended on, and the idealist Yogacaras suppose that everything else depends on consciousness but not vice-versa. But these theories are all wrong, says Nagarjuna, and proceeds to show by a masterly dialectic that they are.

Is Nagarjuna a skeptic? No, since he allows that causality has a limited play: that is what the dialectic itself shows. Causality is what the dialectic demonstrates, since causality is interdependence. The skeptic, such as the materialistic Charvaka, does not even go so far as to admit the interdependence of things. Nagarjuna may with reason claim that if the empirical world were not ordered by the principle of dependent origination even the dialectic would fail. Nagarjuna is not anti-rational; in fact, he elevates reason to the position of the prime means of attaining freedom. Unlike skepticism, his is a philosophy of hope: we can achieve freedom by our own

efforts, through remorseless application of the dialectic.

Yet freedom is release from the conceptual, for Nagarjuna as for all Buddhists. This seems to be an insoluble paradox. How can we free ourselves from the conceptual by indulging in a dialectical play which is conceptual through-and-through? The answer is that through application of the dialectical method we convince ourselves that everything is interdependent, and we develop a special kind of insight (prajña) into the void itself. This insight has no content, i. e. its content is the void. It is nonsensuous and nonconceptual, although it is rational in the sense that it is developed through a rational procedure.

Gaudapada and Buddhism (adapted from Indian Philosophy, by Prof. Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan, 1923, 1929, London 1971) The general idea pervading Gaudapada's work, that bondage and liberation, the individual soul and the world, are all unreal, makes the caustic critic observe that the theory which has nothing better to say than that an unreal soul is trying to escape from an unreal bondage in an unreal world to accomplish an unreal supreme good, may itself be an unreality. It is one thing to say that the secret of existence, how the unchageable reality expresses itself in the changing universe without forfeiting its nature, is a mystery, and another to dismiss the whole changing universe as a mere mirage. If we have to play the game of life, we cannot do so with the conviction that the play is a show and all the prizes in it mere blanks. No philosophy can consistently hold such a view and rest with itself. The greatest condemnation of such a theory is that we are obliged to occupy ourselves with objects, the existence and value of which we are continually denying in theory. The fact of the world may be mysterious and inexplicable. It only shows that there is something else which includes and transcends the world; but it does not imply that the world is a dream. Later Buddhism is responsible for this exaggeration in Gaudapada's theory. He seems to have been conscious of the similarity of his system to some phases of Buddhist thought. He therefore protests - rather overmuch - that his view is not Buddhism. Towards the end of his book [his Karika (commentary) on the Mandukya-Upanishad] he says: "This was not spoken by the Buddha". Commenting on this, Shankara writes: "The theory (of

Buddhism) wears a semblance to the Advaita, but is not the absolutism which is the pivot of the Vedanta philosophy".

Gaudapada's work bears traces of Buddhist influence, especially of the Vijñanavada [Yogacara] and the Madhyamaka schools. Gaudapada uses the very same arguments as the Vijñanavadins do to prove the unreality of the external objects of perception. Both Badarayana and Shankara strongly urge that there is a genuine difference between dream impressions and waking ones, and that the latter are not independent of existing objects. Gaudapada, however, links the two, waking and dreaming, experiences together. While Shankara is anxious to free his system from the subjectivism associated with Vijñanavada, Gaudapada welcomes it. Unwilling to accept the Vijñanavada as final, he declares that even the subject is as unreal as the object, and thus comes perilously near the nihilist position. In common with Nagarjuna, he denies the validity of causation and the possibility of change: "There is no destruction, no creation, none in bondage, none endeavouring (for release), non desirous of liberation, none liberated; this the absolute truth". The empirical world is traced to avidya or, in Nagarjuna's phrase, samvriti: "From a magical seed is born a magical sprout; this sprout is neither permanent nor perishing. Such are things and for the same reason". The highest state beyond the distinctions of knowledge cannot be characterised by the predicates of existence, non-existence, both or neither. Gaudapada and Nagarjuna regard it as something which transcends the phenomenal. In addition to these points of doctrine, there are affinities in phraseology which point unmistakably to the influence of Buddhism.. The Karika of Gaudapada is an attempt to combine in one whole the negative logic of the Madhyamikas with the positive idealism of the Upanishads. In Gaudapada the negative tendency is more prominent than the positive. In Shankara we have a more balanced outlook.. That Gaudapada gives us a Vedantic adaptation of the Buddhist shunyavada is supported by many scholars.

The Mundane and the Ultimate Nature (adapted from Nagarjuna's Philosophy, by Prof. Krishniah Venkata Ramanan, 1960, Varanasi 1971) With regard to the life of the human

individual, 'conditioned origination' bears the import that whatever is one's state of life is what one has worked out for oneself as one's self-expression. Impelled by thirst and conditioned by one's understanding, one does deeds which bear their results. Shrouded by ignorance and impelled by desire one does deeds that bind one to the life of conflict and suffering. The way out of these is to eradicate their roots, viz. ignorance and passion. Free from ignorance and passion one may yet do deeds and not be subjected to suffering. Extinction of the root of suffering is the meaning of Nirvana; it is also the eternal joy that one realizes with the extinction of passion. Nirvana is the ultimate goal towards which all beings move seeking fulfillment. The Buddha drew the attention of the monks to the log of wood being carried along the stream of the river Ganges and told them that if they, like the log, do not ground on this bank or on the other bank and also do not sink down in midstream, then they will "float down to Nirvana, glide down to Nirvana, gravitate towards Nirvana" because "right view floats, glides, gravitates towards Nirvana."

The Nikayas make out that becoming, the course of birth and death, itself is not anything unconditioned; there is the need to recognize there is the unmade, the not becoming, which is the ultimate truth, the Nirvana. The Buddha declares that those who say that 'from becoming there is release' are unreleased of becoming. But if this should mean a literal abandoning of becoming, an absolute separation of the becoming from the not becoming, that again would be another extreme. The Buddha declares that even those who say that 'by the abandoning of becoming there is release from becoming' are not free from it. But if this should be taken to mean that the impermanent is as such permanent, even that would be to miss the distinction between the ultimate truth and the mundane truth; that would be to confuse the one with the other, which is clearly an illusion. There is becoming and there is the release from becoming, there is Samsara (the course of mundane existence, conditioned becoming) and there is Nirvana (the unconditioned reality); but Samsara is not as such Nirvana and Nirvana is not another entity apart from Samsara. And the being of Samsara is not of the same kind as Nirvana. It is not difficult to see that we have here the basic truth about the course of mundane

existence which the Madhyamika expresses when he says that that which is contingent in its conditioned nature is itself Nirvana in its unconditioned nature.

Language in Nagarjuna's System (adapted from Early Madhyamika in India and China, by Richard H. Robinson, 1967, Delhi 1978) Worldly, conventional, or expressional truth means language and verbal thought. The absolute truth is said to be inexpressible and inconceivable. Yet realization of this fact depends on comprehension of expressional truth. All the doctrines taught by the Buddhas are compatible with emptiness - emptiness characterizes every term in the system of expressional truths.

That an entity is empty means that own-being is absent from it. When the entities are pieces of language, it means that they are symbols empty of object-content. Verbal thought and expression are 'constructed' or 'imagined' (vikalpyate). They express only metaphorically, and there is no such thing as a literal statement, because there is no intrinsic relation of expressions to mystical experience and to worldly experience, since all alike are only figured but not represented by discursive symbols. Once this is granted, the functional value of language is admitted by the Madhyamika..

Emptiness is not a term outside the expressional system, but is simply a key term within it. Those who would hypostatize emptiness are confusing the symbol system with the fact system. No metaphysical fact whatever can be established from the facts of language. The question arises as to the relation between worldly truth and absolute truth. The term 'absolute truth' is part of the descriptive order, not part of the factual order. Like all other expressions, it is empty, but it has a peculiar relation within the system of designations. It symbolizes non-system, a surd within the system of constructs. The quandaries into which the opponents are driven spring from the incommensurability of the descriptive order and the factual order.

The Highest Wisdom (adapted from A Survey of Buddhist Thought, by Dr. Alfred R. Scheepers, Amsterdam 1994) It was

contended before, that the Madhyamaka is the criticism of all speculation and dogmatism. Its purpose is to free the mind from its presuppositions, which at the same time are the conditions of the normal way of life. The mind must be emptied of concepts and ideas. Only then the highest wisdom will arise, from which things can be seen in their own nature, and not in that which we have imposed on it by our own imagination. To see things as they really are, we do not need acquisition of information, but a purification of the intellect. It is a negative method to reach universality, the abolition of the restrictions which conceptual patterns impose.

The truth, reality, is covered by the veil of our conceptions, which in their tentative character must always be wrong in an ultimate sense. It is called 'the veil of knowables' (jñeyavarana). It is caused by the working of ignorance (avidya), which may be identified with the projective activity of the mind. Instead of being open to reality, the mind projects upon it its own fancies, and thus creates a 'shadow-world' of its own making, which hides the real truth from us. This shadow-world, this covering of the real, can be removed by disposing of the ideas which are at the base of it. Then the intellect (buddhi) becomes so pure (amala) and transparent (bhasvara), that no distinction can exist between the real and the intellect which apprehends it. Because of this lack of distinction between the truth and its apprehension, the absolute unity of them may be denoted by names indicating its objective or its subjective aspect, such as 'dharmahood' or 'highest wisdom' (prajñaparamita), but really it is non-dual (advaya).

The absolute as devoid of all determinations is the inexpressible ground of all phenomena; it is devoid of the two extremes of 'is' and 'is not'. In the Madhyamaka the absolute is mostly denoted as 'highest wisdom'. This wisdom is the mind freed from conceptual restrictions, it is the mind-essence, the precondition of all conscious functioning. The discovery of this essence at the same time frees man from suffering, since it destroys ignorance, the basis of the affects (klesha) of desire and aversion, which form the direct cause of suffering.

Shunyavada (adapted from A Critical Survey of Indian

Philosophy, by Prof. Chandradhar Sharma, London 1960) Shunyavada is one of the most important schools of Buddhism. Nagarjuna is its first systematic expounder. Shunyavadins call themselves Madhyamikas or the followers of the Middle Path realized by the Buddha during his enlightenment. Shunya (literally 'empty' or 'void') means, according to the Madhyamika, 'indescribable' as Reality is beyond the four categories of intellect. It is Reality which ultimately transcends existence, non-existence, both or neither. It is neither affirmation nor negation nor both nor neither. Empirically it means Relativity (pratitya-samutpada) which is phenomena (Samsara); absolutely it means Reality (tattva) which is release from plurality (Nirvana). The world is indescribable because it is neither existent nor non-existent; the Absolute is indescribable because it is transcendental and no category of intellect can adequately describe it. Everything is shunya: phenomena or appearances (dharmas) are devoid of ultimate reality and Reality is devoid of plurality. Shunya means Relativity as well as Reality, Samsara as well as Nirvana. Appearances being relative, have no real origination and are therefore devoid of ultimate reality. But they are not absolutely unreal. They must belong to Reality. It is the Real itself which appears. And this Real is the Absolute, the non-dual harmonious whole in which all plurality is merged (advaya tattva). Shunya therefore does not mean 'void'; it means, on the other hand, 'devoid', so far as appearances are concerned 'of ultimate reality', so far as Reality is concerned, 'of plurality'.

Prajñaparamita Literature (adapted from the Introduction by Prof. Jaideva Singh to The Conception of Buddhist Nirvana, by Prof. Th. Stcherbatsky, Delhi 1977) The Madhyamaka system was developed on the basis of the doctrines of the Mahasanghikas and the Mahayana sutras known as Prajñaparamita sutras. The principal theme of the Prajñaparamita literature is the doctrine of shunyata. The Hinayanists believed only in pudgala-nairatmya or the unsubstantiality of the individual. They classified Reality into certain dharmas or elements of existence and thought that the dharmas were substantially real. Prajñaparamita gives a knock-out to this belief. It teaches sarvadharma-shunyata, the unsubstantiality of all dharmas. Phenomena are dependent on

conditions. Being so dependent, they are devoid of substantial reality. Hence they are shunya (empty). Nirvana being transcendent to all categories of thought is Shunyata (emptiness) itself. Both Samsara and Nirvana, the conditioned and unconditioned, are mere thought-constructions and are so devoid of reality. Ultimate Reality may be called Shunyata in the sense that it transcends all empirical determinations and thought-constructions. Prajña or transcedent insight consists in ceasing to indulge in thought-constructions. So Prajña becomes synonymous with Shunyata.

One, however, acquires insight into Shunyata not merely by avowing it enthusiastically, nor by logomachy, but by meditation on Shunyata. One has to meditate on Shunyata as the absence of selfhood, on the absence of substantiality in all the dharmas, on Shunyata as even the emptiness of the unconditioned. Finally one has to abandon Shunyata itself as a mere raft to cross the ocean of ignorance. This meditation will, however, be ineffective unless one has cultivated certain moral virtues.

Nirvana and the Empirical World are Identical (adapted from Doctrine and Argument in Indian Philosophy, by Prof. Ninian Smart, 1964, Leiden 1992) There is a further equation in the Void doctrine [Shunyavada], and sometimes elsewhere in the Greater Vehicle, an equation which at first sight causes extreme puzzlement. It is this: that Nirvana equals the cycle of existence. Nirvana and the empirical world are identical. This should indeed cause puzzlement, since in the Elder doctrine and elsewhere Nirvana is a transcendent state, and this means that it is distinct from the empirical world. And does not Nirvana consist in release from the cycle of existence and from the process of rebirth? It therefore must seem an extraordinary paradox to affirm that after all Nirvana and the empirical world are identical. But the paradox follows from the main position of Voidism. For the distinction between the Absolute and empirical phenomena is not an ontological one, but epistemological. That is, the common-sense viewpoint takes the world to be real and substantial, whereas in its 'inner nature' it is void. In other words, the Absolute is phenomena seen from a higher point of view. It follows that Nirvana, identified with the Absolute, and the cycle of existence are one. This leads to the further paradox

that there is no real release, but merely a change in the saint's experience and attitudes.

The mention of a 'higher point of view' reveals a feature of Voidist absolutism which indeed is clearly necessary, namely a doctrine of two level of truth. Thus ordinary
(vyavaharika) truth, covering the facts which are yielded by perception, etc., is distinguished from higher (paramartha) truth, which is discovered in spiritual experience as accruing upon going through the Voidist dialectic. Consequently, though phenomena are in their inner essence regarded from the standpoint of higher truth as contradictory, it is legitimate to assert ordinary facts about the world from the standpoint of ordinary truth. Thus from one standpoint states of affairs are illusory, but from the other they are not. Indeed, and to avoid the kind of vacuity which statements like 'all perceptions are illusory' risk, since 'illusory' needs its contrast with 'veridical', the Voidist system distinguishes between ordinary facts and perceptual and other illusions, all within the realm of ordinary truth and falsity. Thus the notion that all phenomena are illusory does not entail a confusion between true and false propositions at the level of ordinary truth, but must be understood by reference to the standpoint of higher truth.

It may be noted that the Voidist dialectic sets great emphasis [ ] on intellectual processes as a means of spiritual enlightenment. For the process of the dialectic, whereby through intellectual operations we come to see the bankruptcy of reason, prepares the way for the non-dual (advaya) experience of the Void. Thus Voidism represents a kind of intellectual yoga. In many phases of Indian religion, there is some contrast drawn between intellectual and experiential self-training, between spiritual enlightenment through knowledge and that which comes through yoga and direct experience. But further investigation of the contrast shows that it is an expression merely of different emphases. That is, there are two sides to mystical experience: the theoretical or doctrinal structure built round the contemplative path and the inner experience accruing upon treading of the path which verifies the doctrinal scheme. For example, in the case of Buddhist Nirvana, insight involves not only seeing [intellectually] that the Buddhist view of reality is

true, but also seeing this in inner experience.

Appearances and Absolute Reality (adapted from The Life of the Cosmos, by Prof. Lee Smolin, London 1997) In the history of philosophy, many have argued against the idea that science can lead to knowledge of the absolute reality behind appearances. I do not want to begin this argument again. There is no way to climb the ladder of empirical knowledge, or fly on the wings of logic, to ascend to the absolute world of what really is. But I think that the situation I've just described makes it possible to confront a different and more difficult question. This is whether there might not be something wrong with the whole conception of an absolute and timeless reality lying behind the appearances. If possible knowledge is knowledge of the world of appearances that we live in and interact with, why is it necessary - or even desirable - to believe that the reality of the world is somehow behind the appearances, in a permanent and transcendently absolute realm?

Is there any reason we might not conceive of the world as made up as a network of relationships, of which our appearances are true examples, rather than as made up of some imagined absolute existing things, of which our appearances are mere shadows? Why should there be any 'things in themselves', besides the effects that all things have on each other? This is related to another question: If the laws of nature are only the working out of principles of logic and probability by processes of self-organization, must there still not be some fundamental particles, on which those processes act? And must they not obey some universal laws? Perhaps a principle such as natural selection, self-organization, or random dynamics might explain why the parameters of the standard model come to be what they are, but just as biology requires molecules on whose combinations the principles of self-organization and natural selection can act, does not physics still require some fundamental substance for the laws to act on? Must not the world consist of something beyond organization and relations?

I do not know the answer to these questions. They are in the class of really hard questions, such as the problem of

consciousness or the problem of why there is in the world anything at all, rather than nothing. What in the end is the reason the world is called into being? I do not see, really, how science, however much it progresses, could lead us to an understanding of these questions. In the end, perhaps there must remain a place for mysticism. But mysticism is not metaphysics, and it is only that I seek to eliminate. Wittgenstein said, in his Tractatus, "Not how the world is, is the mystical, but that it is". Perhaps in science, as in philosophy, by eschewing the metaphysical fantasy, the dream of an absolute being forever unknowable behind the veil of appearances, we bring ourselves in closer proximity to the genuinely mysterious.

Dependent Origination as Shunyata (adapted from The Essential Chapters from the Prasannapada of Chandrakirti, by Prof. Mervyn Sprung, London 1979) The hinge of Nagarjuna's revolution is his re-thinking of the original root concept of Buddhism - dependent origination - as shunyata. Early Buddhism, after rejecting the theories of causation current at the time, gave an account of the everyday in terms of the dependence of one thing or event on a preceding one: the sprout is not caused by the seed, but does depend on the previous existence of the seed for its own arising. This understanding makes sense only so long as its terms, 'seed' and 'sprout', are taken as real, as something between which the relation of dependence could be supposed. Nagarjuna retains the expression dependent origination, but, having denied both seed and sprout self-existence, he must hold that the dependence of the one on the other can no longer be understood in the traditional realistic sense. It becomes rather the non-dependence of non-existents; there is no longer a real origination of anything in dependence on anything else. Chandrakirti comments bluntly: "We interpret dependent origination as shunyata." If, in the world which each of us holds together for himself, the causal account is delusory, if, that is, all things inner and outer which make up the world neither arise nor exist in the realistic, entitative way we naively suppose, then the events and sequences which compose life are analogous to a magician's deception: what truly goes on is made to appear like a series of causally dependent events, but is not.

The frequently recurring use of the analogy of magic (maya) can be misleading. It does not mean that Nagarjuna and Chandrakirti are hallucinationists, that a magic wand will serve to conjure up and to spirit away the everyday world. Their insistence, repeated impressively often, that they are not nihilists, that the dogma of non-existence is as much a heresy as the dogma that everyday things as such are in being, should warn us to look for another understanding of the analogy of the magician's trick. This is a subtle and difficult point. It may suffice at this juncture to remind that the indispensable factor in a magician's trick is the false interpretation placed on the evidence of the senses by the spectator. Coins, cigarettes and rabbits are manipulated by the magician strictly in accord with the laws of motion and gravity that govern all objects. It is the spectator who, due to the shallowness of his imagination, penetrates no deeper than his eyesight and sees these objects passing bewilderingly in and out of nostrils, pockets and top hats. The events making up the trick, the palming of the coin or cigarettes, the colapse of a false bottom in the hat, are not dream, not hallucination, but run of the mill space-time sequences onto which the spectator projects his false expectations.

The Religious Significance of 'Emptiness' (adapted from Emptiness - A Study in Religious Meaning, by Prof. Frederick J. Streng, Nashville, Tenn. 1967) The religious significance of 'emptiness' is comparable to that of 'anatma', for both are expressions of dependent co-origination. They delineate the existential situation in which man attains release. That is to say that man is released from bonds made by man himself; for there are no eternally established situations or absolute elements which man must accept as part of existence. The person who accepts the emptiness-teaching regards life's sorrows as his own construction and knows that he must desist from constructing them in order to be released from sorrow. It is very important to understand that the apprehension of emptiness does not assert the annihilation of things. At the other extreme, it is just as important to recognize that there is no substantive entity which might be considered eternal or the 'first cause'. Even 'emptiness' is not such an absolute. The

grammatical character of Nagarjuna's use of 'emptiness' is revealing in that it is always used adjectivally. 'Emptiness' is always the emptiness of something; or 'emptiness' is always the predicate of something, e. g. co-dependent origination of existence or the highest knowledge of no-self-existence. As we indicated earlier, however, 'emptiness' as a designation is not regarded as an ultimate qualifier, since the relation between the 'subject' and its 'qualifier' is only an artificial one.

Emptiness not only expresses the situation of existence which makes release possible, but also expresses that man should not be unconsciously bound by his means of knowledge. Thus 'emptiness', as a means of knowing, denies that one can intuit the absolute nature of things (for there is no such thing from the highest perspective) and denies that logic, as an immutable law of inference, can provide more than practical knowledge. Logic is only a crude rule-of-thumb method of perceiving some of the causes and conditions which converge in the formation of even the simplest phenomenon. In fact, only when the awareness of 'emptiness' is dominant can logic itself be useful for apprehending truth, for then one is aware that logic is dependent and not absolute. Emptiness, the state and awareness of infinite relatedness, becomes the broad context in which logic, as one mental activity, has some validity.

The faculty of religious knowledge which transcends both logic and mysticism is wisdom (prajña); at the same time, wisdom uses discursive mental structures together with a mystical awareness of the inadequacy of logical and empirical knowledge. The soteriological significance of using both logic and an intuitive ascension into 'higher' realms of thoughts as practical techniques is that salvation is immediately at hand but not identical to the present situation. Spiritual life is lived in practical life, within the structure of existence, but without the bondage of these structures. The awareness of 'emptiness' is not a blank loss of consciousness, an inanimate empty space; rather it is the cognition of daily life without the attachment to it. It is an awareness of distinct entities, of the self, of 'good' and 'bad' and other practical determinations; but it is aware of these as empty structures. Wisdom is not to be equated with mystical ecstasy; it is, rather, the joy of freedom in everyday existence.

Prajña of Another Order than our Usual Life (adapted from The Zen Doctrine of No-Mind, by Prof. D. T. Suzuki, London 1949) Prajña is really a dialectical term denoting that this special process of knowing, known as 'abruptly seeing', or 'seeing at once', does not follow general laws of logic; for when Prajña functions one finds oneself all of a sudden, as is by a miracle, facing Sunyata, the emptiness of all things. This does not take place as the result of reasoning, but when reasoning has been abandoned as futile, and psychologically when the will-power is brought to a finish.

Prajña contradicts everything that we may conceive of things worldly; it is altogether of another order than our usual life. But this does not mean that Prajña is something altogether disconnected with our life and thought, something that is to be given to us by a miracle from some unknown and unknowable source. If this were the case, Prajña would be of no possible use to us, and there would be no emancipation for us. It is true that the functioning of Prajña is discrete, and interrupting to the progress of logical reasoning, but all the time it underlies it, and without Prajña we cannot have any reasoning whatever. Prajña is at once above and in the process of reasoning. This is a contradiction, formally considered, but in truth this contradiction itself is made possible because of Prajña.

That almost all religious literature is filled with contradictions, absurdities, paradoxes, and impossibilities, and demands to believe them, to accept them, as revealed truths, is due to the fact that religious knowledge is based on the working of Prajña. Once this viewpoint of Prajña is gained, all the essential irrationalities found in religion become intelligible. It is like appreciating a fine piece of brocade. On the surface there is an almost bewildering confusion of beauty, and the connoisseur fails to trace the intricacies of the threads. But as soon as it is turned over all the intricate beauty and skill is revealed. Prajña consists in this turning-over. The eye has hitherto followed the surface of the cloth, which is indeed the only side ordinarily allowed us to survey. Now, the cloth is abruptly turned over; the course of the eyesight is suddenly interrupted; no continuous gazing is possible. Yet by this interruption, or rather disruption,

the whole scheme of life is suddenly grasped; there is the 'seeing into one's self-nature'.

The point I wish to make here is that the reason side has been there all the time, and that it is because of this unseen side that the visible side has been able to display its multiple beauty. This is the meaning of discriminative reasoning being always based on non-discriminating Prajña; this is the meaning of the statement that the mirror-nature of emptiness (sunyata) retains all the time its original brightness, and is never once beclouded by anything outside which is reflected on it; this is again the meaning of all things being such as they are in spite of their being arranged in time and space and subject to the so-called laws of nature.

The First Principle and the Second Principle (adapted from Crooked Cucumber: Reflections on the Life of Zen Master Shunryu Suzuki, by David Chadwick, in Tricycle Magazine, New York 1999) Suzuki Roshi (1905-1971) talked about the first principle and the second principle from his early days in San Francisco. He said the first principle had many names: Buddha-nature, emptiness, reality, truth, the Tao, the absolute, God. The second principle is what is said about the first principle and the way to realize it: rules, teaching, morality, forms. All those things change according to the person, time and place, and they are not always so. Suzuki said that talking about Buddhism was not truth, but mercy, skillful means, encouragement. "There is no particular teaching or way, but the Buddha-nature of all is the same, what we find is the same."

The first principle is not something that the Buddha or other people came up with. Suzuki spoke about the Buddha's sermons in the woods, where he "proclaimed the first principle, the Royal Law". And he added, "If you think what the Buddha proclaimed is the Royal Law, that is not right. The Royal Law was already there before he was on the pulpit".

Suzuki taught that Buddhism is not the first principle, but is a way to know and express the first principle. The Buddha's teaching can only be thought of as the first principle in "its pure and formless form".. "If you have a preconceived idea of the

first principle, that idea is topsy-turvy, and as long as you see a first principle which is something that can be applied in one way to every occasion, you will have topsy-turvy ideas. Such ideas are not necessary. The Buddha's great light shines forth from everything, each moment."

Suzuki always made clear that the first principle is beyond discrimination or knowing in the ordinary sense, in the way that relative truth is known. "Bodhiddharma said, 'I don't know'. 'I don't know' is the first principle. Do you understand? The first principle cannot be known in terms of good or bad, right or wrong, because it is both right and wrong."

Pratitya-Samutpada (adapted from An Introduction to the Philosophy of Nagarjuna, by Prof. Musashi Tachikawa, 1986, Delhi 1997) In the doctrine of dependent co-arising (pratitya-samutpada) belonging to the period of Primitive (or Early) Buddhism, the question of whether or not the individual members of the causal nexus posses any perduring and immutable reality (svabhava) hardly arose. This was because when considered from the viewpoint of the early doctrine of dependent co-arising, maintaining as it did that the 'world' had not been created by some eternal and imperishable god or similar entity, it was only natural that human ignorance, cognition and action, all pertaining to the world of transmigration, should be impermanent and without intrinsic reality.

But by the time of Nagarjuna the doctrine of dependent co-arising, with its denial of any eternal and immutable reality, was no longer fulfilling its purpose. This was because, as a result of the emphasis placed on the reality of the individual constituent elements of the world in the course of developments within Abhidharma philosophy in the period succeeding that of Early Buddhism, the doctrine of dependent co-arising, which ought to have been an expression of the negation of own-being (svabhava), had become instead an expression of the affirmation of own-being. According to Abhidharma philosophy, dependent co-arising means that a certain constituent element or combination of elements of the world (x) arises, or is arising, from another constituent element or combination of elements

(y) in accordance with a consistent relationship obtaining between cause and effect. In other words, dependent co-arising in Abhidharma philosophy represents the causal relationship obtaining among a limited number of constituent elements of the world. In this case, x is considered to act as the cause from which y is born, and this presupposes the fact that x and y must exist each with their separate own-being. In Abhidharma philosophy a certain thing possessing within itself its own existential base enters into a relationship with another thing, different from itself, also possessing within itself its own existential base. Thus the causal relationship posited by Abhidharma philosophy is a relationship between a certain thing endowed with own-being and another thing also endowed with own-being. On the basis of such ideas, Abhidharma philosophy further systematized and disseminated the doctrine of the twelvefold chain of dependent co-arising.

In the view of Nagarjuna, this interpretation of causal relationships in Abhidharma philosophy ran counter to the spirit of Early Buddhism.. Although Abhidharma philosophy had not abandoned the basic thesis of Buddhism which declared that "all things are impermanent", in the view of Abhidharma philosophy it was 'man' (pudgala, the centre of personality considered to reside within the individual) as a complex of constituent elements that was impermanent, but the individual elements constituting 'man' were eternal and unchanging. Nagarjuna, on the other hand, held not only 'man' but also the individual elements (dharma) of which he is composed to be impermanent. This is why Nagarjuna's standpoint has been defined as advocating that "both pudgala and dharma are without self". Seeking as he did to attain to emptiness through the radical negation of the profane, he could not admit the reality of the constituent elements.

Emptiness is a Mode of Perception (adapted from Emptiness, by Thanissaro Bhikkhu (Geoffrey DeGraff), Theravada Text Archives, Internet 1997, revised 1999) Emptiness is a mode of perception, a way of looking at experience. It adds nothing to and takes nothing away from the raw data of physical and mental events. You look at events in the mind and the senses with no thought of whether there is anything lying behind them.

This mode is called emptiness because it is empty of the presuppositions we usually add to experience to make sense of it: the stories and world views we fashion to explain who we are are and the world we live in. Although these stories and views have their uses, the Buddha found that some of the more abstract questions they raise - of our true identity and the reality of the world outside - pull attention away from a direct experience of how events influence one another in the immediate present. Thus they get in the way when we try to understand and solve the problem of suffering..

To master the emptiness mode of perception requires training in firm virtue, concentration and discernment. Without this training, the mind tends to stay in the mode that keeps creating stories and world views. And from the perspective of that mode, the teaching of emptiness sounds simply like another story or world view with new ground rules.. In terms of your views about the world, it seems to be saying either that the world does not really exist, or else that emptiness is the great undifferentiated ground of being from which we all came [and] to which someday we shall all return. These interpretations not only miss the meaning of emptiness but also keep the mind from getting into the proper mode..

Now, stories and world views do serve a purpose. The Buddha employed them when teaching people, but he never used the word emptiness when speaking in this mode. He recounted the stories of people's lives to show how suffering comes from the unskillful perceptions behind their actions, and how freedom from suffering can come from being more perceptive. And he described the basic principles that underlie the round of rebirth to show how bad intentional actions lead to pain within that round, good ones lead to pleasure, while really skillful actions can take you beyond the round altogether. In all these cases, the teachings were aimed at getting people to focus on the quality of the perceptions and intentions in their minds in the present - in other words, to get them into the emptiness mode. Once there, they can use the teachings on emptiness for their intended purpose: to loosen all attachments to views, stories, and assumptions, leaving the mind empty of all greed, anger, and delusion, and thus empty of suffering and stress.

The Middle Path between Dualism and Materialism (adapted from 'A Buddhist Response', by Prof. B. Alan Wallace, in Consciousness at the Crossroads, Conversations with the Dalai Lama on Brain Science and Buddhism, edited by B. Alan Wallace e. a., Ithaca, New York 1999) The Madhyamaka, or Centrist, view adopted by Tibetan Buddhism at large challenges the assumption that any phenomena that comprise the world of our experience exist as things in themselves. Thus, not only does this view reject the notion that the mind is an inherently existent substance, or thing, but it similarly denies that physical phenomena as we experience them are things in themselves. For this reason, the notion of an absolute, substantial dualism between mind and matter is never entertained. According to the Madhyamaka view, mental and physical phenomena, as we perceive and conceive them exist in relation to our perceptions and conceptions. What we perceive is inescapably related to our perceptual modes of observation, and the ways in which we conceive of phenomena are inescapably related to our concepts and languages..

In denying the independent self-existence of all the phenomena that make up the world of our experience, the Madhyamaka view departs from both the substantial dualism of Descartes and the substantial monism that seems to be characteristic of modern Materialism, or Physicalism. The Materialism propounded during this conference seems to assert that the real world is composed of physical things-in-themselves, while all mental phenomena are regarded as mere appearances, devoid of any reality. Much is made of this difference between appearances and reality. The Madhyamaka view also emphasizes the disparity between appearances and reality, but in a radically different way. All the mental and physical phenomena that we experience, it declares, appear as if they existed in and of themselves, utterly independent of our modes of perception and conception. They appear to be things in themselves, but in reality they exist as dependently related events. Their dependence is threefold: 1) phenomena arise in dependence upon preceding causal influences, 2) they exist in dependence upon their own parts and/or attributes, and 3) the phenomena that make up the world of our experience are

dependent upon our verbal and conceptual designation of them.

This threefold dependence is not intuitively obvious, for it is concealed by the appearance of phenomena as being self-sufficient and independent of conceptual designation. On the basis of these misleading appearances it is quite natural to think of, or conceptually apprehend, phenomena as self-defining things in themselves. This tendency is known as reification, and according to the Madhyamaka view, this is an inborn delusion that provides the basis for a host of mental afflictions. Reification decontextualizes. It views phenomena without regard to the causal nexus in which they arise, and without regard to the specific means of observation and conceptualization by which they are known. The Madhyamaka, or Centrist, view is so called because it seeks to avoid the two extremes of reifying phenomena on the one hand, and of denying the existence of phenomena on the other.

Tsongkhapa's View of Reality (adapted from The Bridge of Quiescence, by Prof. B. Alan Wallace, Chicago and La Salle 1998) To understand Tsongkhapa's view of reality, it is imperative to make the subtle, but crucial, distinction between mere figments of the imagination and conventionally existent phenomena. Let us begin with the subject of personal identity. On the basis of our awareness of our own bodies, behavior, memories, feelings, thoughts, fantasies, consciousness, possessions, friends, environment and so on, we develop a sense of personal identity. This self-concept is not static, but varies in accordance with the personal events that capture our attention from moment to moment and from day to day. Thus, a very high degree of editing goes into the selection of personal phenomena upon which we establish our identities. The self so designated is not identical with any of the phenomena upon which it is is imputed; rather, it is conceived as the person who possesses those aggregates of the personality and so on as its own attributes or affiliations. Thus, while this self does not exist independently of this conceptual designation, it is conventionally valid to speak of it as performing actions, experiencing the consequences of those deeds, and interacting with other people, the environment, and so forth. In this way the

self is said by Tsongkhapa to be conventionally existent.

There is a powerful, innate tendency, however, to hypostatize, or reify, this conceptually constructed self, grasping onto it as being inherently existent, independent of any conceptual designation. Such an intrinsic personal identity, Tsongkhapa claims, is totally a figment of the imagination, with no basis in reality whatsoever. A central task of contemplative inquiry is to establish experientially that such a self has no existence either among the constituents of one's personality or apart from them. Moreover, if the self is designated on the basis of non-existent attributes, or by means of a denial of existent attributes, even the conventionally designated self is a groundless fabrication, devoid of even conventional existence.

Even if one has a limited degree of insight into the conceptually designated status of one's identity, there remains the strong tendency to view one's body and other macro-objects of the physical environment as bearing their own intrinsic identities. Indeed, as we visually perceive the physical world, including our own bodies, it appears to exist purely objectively, from its own side. This mode of appearance, Tsongkhapa declares, is utterly deceptive. All that seems to appear purely from the side of perceived objects is in fact thoroughly structured by our conceptual frameworks.

Perceptual objects reified by the mind do not exist in nature, but are solely fabrications without even conventional existence. In addition, due to objective sources of illusion or psychological and physiological influences, we may apprehend objects that do not exist, misidentify objects that do exist, or fail to perceive objects that do exist and are otherwise accessible to our perceptions. All of these faulty perceptions constitute errors of apprehension apart from the tendency of reification.

The Buddha's Conception of the Universe (adapted from Outline of Indian Philosophy, by Prof. A. K. Warder, 1956, 1960, 1964, Delhi 1971) The Buddha's conception of the universe is thus of natural and impersonal forces and processes, of conditions and phenomena, transient, with no enduring substances. It is not correct to speak of persons 'who'

do things, but only of events which occur. It is enough to describe the 'qualities' (a possible translation of 'dharma', which we have otherwise translated 'phenomena') and the conditions under which they appear. There is no justification for assuming any substance, not definable apart from these qualities, in addition to the qualities we observe. This is a conception of the universe which is de-personified, de-anthropomorphised, a collection of natural forces and phenomena to be described without postulating any unnecessary entities, or in fact any entities at all, only the minimum of observable qualities. It is a thoroughly empiricist conception. It implies a whole critique, an analysis, of metaphysical concepts (such as 'soul'), worked out in detail by later Buddhist philosophers, and of metaphysical statements (such as 'the universe is eternal'). No doubt in many of the texts the language of the ordinary people of India is used, with its 'persons' and its popular conceptions of all kinds. But this is popular preaching for the sake of teaching moral precepts to ordinary people, in language they can understand; we are expressly told in the properly philosophical, or we might say scientific, texts, that to be accurate we must drop the personifications of everyday language: if taken literally, such personifications will lead to untenable metaphysical extremes such as an eternal, and therefore unchanging, soul, or the annihilation of a soul which persisted for a lifetime only. Nirvana, finally, is not the annihilation of a soul, or the release of a soul, it is simply the cessation of a process, of a sequence of events.

Nirvana is Acceptance of the Present Moment (adapted from The Meaning of Happiness, by Alan W. Watts, 1940, New York 1970) The Hinayanists looked upon Nirvana as an escape from the pains of life and death, a conception which to the Mahayanists with their Brahmanic background appeared as the old error of dualism. Thus the ideal man of the Hinayana was the arhat, one who simply attained Nirvana and ceased from rebirth, entering into the formless rest, bliss, and impersonality of the eternal. But the Mahayanists gave their philosophy of non-duality practical expression in the ideal of the bodhisattva, who attains liberation but remains in the world of birth and death to assist all other beings to enlightenment. In other words, they refused to make any absolute distinction between

Nirvana and Samsara; the two states are the same, seen, as it were, from different points of view. Therefore the Lankavatara Sutra (as translated by D. T. Suzuki) says: "False imagination teaches that such things as light and shade, long and short, black and white are different and are to be discriminated; but they are not independent of each other; they are only different aspects of the same thing, they are terms of relation, not of reality. Conditions of existence are not of a mutually exclusive character; in essence things are not two but one. Even Nirvana and Samsara's world of life and death are aspects of the same thing, for there is no Nirvana except where is Samsara, and no Samsara except where is Nirvana. All duality is falsely imagined."

In terms of practical psychology this means that there is no actual distinction between our ordinary, everyday experience and the experience of Nirvana or spiritual freedom. But for some people this experience is binding and for others liberating, and the problem is to achieve what the Lankavatara calls that "turning about in the deepest seat of consciousness" which effects the transformation.

Now the Mahayana was more thoroughgoing in its statement of this problem than even Vedanta. For what is our ordinary, everyday experience? It is not just our awareness of external circumstances or even such ordinary activities as walking, eating, sleeping, breathing, and speaking; it includes also our thinking and feeling: our ideas, moods, desires, passions, and fears. In its most concrete form ordinary, everyday experience is just how you feel at this moment. In a certain sense Buddhism is very much a philosophy and a psychology of the moment, for if we are asked what life is, and if our answer is to be a practical demonstration and not a theory, we can do no better than point to the moment Now! It is in the moment that we find reality and freedom, for acceptance of life is acceptance of the present moment now and at all times..

Acceptance of the moment is allowing the moment to live, which, indeed, is another way of saying that it is to allow life to live, to be what it is now (yathabhutam). Thus to allow this moment of experience and all that it contains freedom to be as

it is, to come in its own time and to go in its own time, this is to allow the moment, which is what we are now, to set us free; it is to realize that life, as expressed in the moment, has always been setting us free from the very beginning, whereas we have chosen to ignore it and tried to achieve that freedom by ourselves.

For this reason Mahayana Buddhism teaches that Nirvana or enlightenment cannot really be attained, because the moment we try to attain it by our own power we are using it as an escape from what is now, and we are also forgetting that Nirvana is unattainable in the sense that it already is.

The Term Shunyata (adapted from Philosophies of India, by Dr. Heinrich Zimmer, edited by Prof. Joseph Campbell, 1952, London 1967) The term shunyata, as applied to the metaphysical reality, insists on the fact that reason and language apply to only the finite world; nothing can be said of the infinite. But the term is applied also to all things of the phenomenal sphere, and here is the great stroke of Shunyavada. "As applied to the world of experience," writes Dr. Radakrishnan in his Indian Philosophy, "shunyata means the ever-changing state of the phenomenal world. In the dread waste of endlessness man loses all hope, but the moment he recognizes its unreality he transcends it and reaches after the abiding principle. He knows that the whole is a passing dream, where he may sit unconcerned with the issues, certain of victory."

In other words, the concept of emptiness, the void, vacuity, has been employed in the Madhyamika teaching as a convenient and effective pedagogical instrument to bring the mind beyond that sense of duality which infects all systems in which the absolute and the world of relativity are described in contrasting, or antagonistic terms. In the Vedanta Gitas, as we have seen, the non-duality of Nirvana and Samsara, release and bondage, is made known and celebrated in rhapsodic verses; but in this Buddhist formula, one word, shunyata, bears the entire message, and simultaneously projects the mind beyond any attempt to conceive of a synthesis. Philosophically, as a metaphysical doctrine, the formula conduces to a

thoroughgoing Docetism: the world, the Buddha, and Nirvana itself become no more than the figments of an absolutely empty dream. This is the point that has been attacked, always, in argument, and, of course, it is an easy point to make seem absurd if one takes absolutely the usual categories of reason. But the circumstance to be borne in mind is that this Buddhist philosophy is not primarily an instrument of reason but an instrument to convert reason into realization; one step beyond the term is the understanding of what it really means. And as a device to effect such a transformation of knowledge - first standing between all the contrarities of 'the world' and 'release from the world', then standing between the moment of preliminary comprehension and that of realized illumination - it would be difficult indeed to find a more apt and efficient term.

This is why the doctrine is called Madhyamika, the 'Middle Way'. And actually, it brings, as far as possible, into systematic philosophical statement the whole implication of the 'Middle Doctrine' of the Buddha himself. For as we read in the orthodox Pali Samyutta-Nikaya: "That things have being, O Kaccana, constitutes one extreme of doctrine; that things have no being is the other extreme. These extremes, O Kaccana, have been avoided by the Tathagata, and it is a middle doctrine that he teaches." The Buddha continually diverted the mind from its natural tendency to posit an abiding essence beyond, or underlying, the endless and meaningless dynamism of the concatenation of causes. And this is the effect also of Nagarjuna's metaphysical doctrine of the void.