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CLARKE HUDSON (2005)

BUDDHIST PHILOSOPHY. When Buddhism first became known in the West, many historians of philosophy were reluctant to call it "philosophy." Philosophy in the strict sense was viewed as a legacy of the Greeks, who learned to cultivate a critical and theoretical attitude that was free from the limitations of tradition, mythology, and dogma. By the end of the twentieth century, this restrictive approach has begun to change. We now know much more about the critical precision of Buddhist philosophy, and Western philosophers are more favorably inclined toward the practical concerns that inspired Greek philosophy. As theoretical as Greek speculation may have been, it was never far from the practical challenge of living a good or happy life. The same is true of Buddhist philosophy. Even the most rarefied and theoretical analysis is related to a process of moral discipline and liberation from suffering.

In India the word most often translated as "philosophy" is *darśana*, whose root meaning is simply "to see." As a metaphor, *darśana* is close to the Greek word *theoria*, which is the source of our word *theoretical* and also means "to see." *Darśana* can be used to name a system or school of Indian philosophy, as in the title of Mādhava's famous *Sarva-darśanasamuccaya* (Compendium of all systems), or it can be used to name philosophy itself. Some Indian philosophers play on the metaphorical associations of the word to picture philosophy as way of ascending a mountain to get a clear vision of the world. Bhāvaviveka (also known as Bhavya or Bhāviveka) described the practitioner of philosophy as someone "who climbs the mountain peak of wisdom and is free from grief, but looks with compassion on people who are burned by grief." This verse echoes an earlier Buddhist verse about a wise person who ascends the "palace of wisdom" and,

without grief or sorrow, sees the suffering of life spread out below. Hans Jonas has pointed out that the metaphor of vision plays a crucial role in Western philosophy, because it suggests distance, detachment, and the ability to perceive all of reality in a single, inclusive act of understanding. Jonas's point applies equally well to Buddhist philosophy. Whether it involves an Indian scholar climbing a mountain, a Chinese master polishing the mirror of the mind, or a Japanese philosopher gazing at the moon reflected in a dewdrop, Buddhist philosophy functions metaphorically as a form of vision.

The idea of vision suggests another important metaphor for the practice of Buddhist philosophy. To get to the top of the mountain, a philosopher has to follow a path. At a crucial moment in his life, Siddhārtha Gautama, the man who became the Buddha, realized that fasting and self-denial were not leading him where he wanted to go. He accepted a gift of food and took up a mode of discipline that is known in Buddhist tradition as a Middle Way, avoiding the extremes of self-denial and self-indulgence. Once he had found the Middle Way, he began to make progress toward the awakening (*bodhi*) that made him a buddha. For Buddhist philosophers, the Middle Way is more an intellectual discipline than a discipline of desire, but it is equally fundamental to their practice: their philosophical practice charts a Middle Way between the extremes of affirmation (in which things are treated as permanent entities) and negation (in which they are treated as utterly nonexistent).

The most fundamental way of understanding Buddhist philosophy, however, is simply as a pursuit of knowledge. From the earliest stages of Buddhist tradition, wisdom (*prajñā*) played a central role in Buddhist practice. Wisdom involved an ability to see through appearances of things and understand them correctly. By a grammatical accident that had enormous influence on the development of Buddhist thought, it also involved a certain way of "going." The word *way* (*pratipad*), in one of its forms, functions as a verbal noun that means "to go." For the philosophers of classical India, "to go" can always mean "to know." This means that the philosophy of the Middle Way is a way of knowing the world without illusion, grief, or suffering. While the metaphors of vision and the path have become attenuated in the long history of Western philosophy, the Buddhist view of the philosopher's path is not far from Plato's parable of the cave, where the challenge is to ascend from the dark world of mere appearances to the bright light of truth.

EARLY BUDDHIST THOUGHT. It is difficult to separate the teachings of the historical Buddha from the complex layers of oral tradition about his life, but several fundamental themes seem to have been established early in Buddhist history and have given decisive shape to the rest of Buddhist thought.

Early canonical literature tells a story about an encounter between the Buddha and a man named Mālunkya-putta. According to the story, Mālunkya-putta asked the Buddha a

series of questions: Is the universe eternal or not? Is it finite or infinite? Is the soul identical to the body or not? Does the Buddha exist after death or not? Does he both exist and not exist after death? Does he neither exist nor not exist? Mālunkya-putta said that, if he did not get answers to these questions, he would leave the order. The Buddha responded with a story about a man who was wounded by a poisoned arrow. When someone tried to take out the arrow, the man said: "Wait! Until you tell me who shot the arrow, what kind of person he was, what the bow and arrow were made of, and so forth, I will not let you remove the arrow." The Buddha said that Mālunkya-putta was like the man shot by the arrow. His speculative questions did not have anything to do with the practical challenge of removing suffering. Buddhists interpret this story as meaning that the Buddha's teaching has a practical goal. Buddhist philosophy is not averse to questions about the nature of reality, even questions that are quite abstruse, but in the end their purpose is to remove suffering.

Another story compares the Buddha's teaching to a raft. The Buddha explains that his teaching should help people cross the river of suffering and should not be treated as a source of attachment. Someone who becomes attached to the words of the teaching is like a man who builds a raft to cross a river, gets to the other side, and is so fond of the raft that he puts it on his back and carries it wherever he goes. The right attitude toward the raft is to use it to cross a river then let it go. Once again, the teaching has a practical function, but out if its practicality grows a critical principle. This story challenges anyone who reveres tradition for its own sake, even when that tradition is the teaching of the Buddha. When the Buddha's teaching is no longer useful, or when it is not effective in removing suffering, it should be left behind. If "philosophy," in the strict sense of term, requires a critical spirit toward dogma, myth, and other forms of tradition, as it often does in the Western tradition, then a distinguishable Buddhist "philosophy" is beginning to stir in these early stories.

One of the most important systematic accounts of early Buddhist thought is found in the *Dhammacakkapavattana Sutta* (Discourse on the turning of the wheel of the teaching). According to Buddhist tradition, this discourse contains the Buddha's first sermon and summarizes the content of his awakening. It begins with the Middle Path, then presents a teaching about four noble truths: the truths of suffering (Skt., *duḥkha*; Pali, *dukkha*), the arising of suffering (*samudaya*), the cessation of suffering (*nirodha*), and the path to the cessation of suffering (Skt. *mārga*; Pali, *magga*). Although these truths need to be elaborated before their significance can become clear, they contain an outline of the major topics of Buddhist thought.

The truth of suffering is related to two other important aspects of Buddhist thought: the doctrines of impermanence (Skt., *anitya*; Pali, *anicca*) and no-self (Skt., *nairātmyam*; Pali, *anattā*). Buddhists argue that, while some things are painful in an obvious sense, other things become painful

when they change and pass away, and eventually everything changes and passes away. Someone who holds onto changeable things will eventually experience them as suffering. Buddhists carry this point further and argue that, because things change, they lack the permanent identity or “self” that we normally attribute to them. They are nothing but a series of “aggregates” (Skt., *skandha*; Pali, *khandha*) or momentary phenomena that give the illusion of continuity, like momentary flickers in a flame or moments in the flow of a river. The doctrine of impermanence became a major point of controversy between Buddhist and Hindu philosophers, and the doctrine of no-self produced some of the most important debates within the Buddhist tradition itself.

According to the second noble truth, suffering comes from desire, and desire comes from ignorance through a causal sequence known as “dependent co-arising” (Skt., *pratītya-samutpāda*; Pali, *paṭicca-samuppāda*). The most fundamental form of ignorance is the misconception that there is a self. When someone realizes that nothing has any permanent identity, the chain of dependent co-arising unravels, and suffering begins to cease. The third noble truth, the cessation of suffering, is also known as *nirvāṇa* (Pali, *nibbāna*), a word that means simply to “blow out” the fire of ignorance and craving. In its traditional form, the concept of *nirvāṇa* has a negative flavor that sometimes puzzles Western interpreters, but it is not difficult to understand if it is read against the background of Indian views of reincarnation. Like their Hindu and Jain counterparts, Buddhists assume that a person’s life follows a cycle of death and rebirth, known in Indian tradition as *saṃsāra* (literally, “wandering”). The goal of the Buddhist path is to bring this cycle to an end. *Nirvāṇa* is not merely the cessation of desire and ignorance; it is liberation from the cycle of reincarnation.

Traditional outlines of the path to *nirvāṇa*, the fourth noble truth, divide it into eight parts, beginning with “right understanding” and ending with “right concentration.” In a formula attributed to the nun Dhammānā, the eight parts of the eightfold path can be grouped into three: moral conduct (Skt., *śīla*; Pali, *sīla*), concentration (*samādhi*), and wisdom (Skt., *prajñā*; Pali, *paññā*). Moral precepts for laypeople include no killing, no stealing, no lying, no abusing sex, and no taking of intoxicants. The practice of concentration involves a variety of disciplines that often are referred to in the general category of “meditation.” Of these the most basic is to sit in a stable posture and concentrate on the movement of the breath. This practice is meant to let the negative tendencies of the mind pass away so that the mind can be clearly aware of the flow of experience. Finally this clear mind should be infused with the wisdom, or the understanding of no-self, that unravels the chain of suffering. It is here, in the cultivation and practice of wisdom, that philosophy finds its place in the path to *nirvāṇa*.

BUDDHIST SECTARIANISM. According to Buddhist literature, the leaders of the early community convened a council about a hundred years after the Buddha’s death. While the sources

do not agree about the exact nature of the disputes that led to this council, they do show that the community began to divide into different sects or schools (*nikāya*) at a relatively early date. A close study of the sources shows that these divisions initially involved questions of discipline in the Vinaya Piṭaka or “Basket of Discipline” in the Buddhist canon. Later disputes focused on doctrinal questions found in the Sutta Piṭaka and the Abhidhamma Piṭaka. Eventually these disputes produced eighteen separate schools.

The disputes that separated the eighteen schools are too complex and often too obscure to summarize, but one particular dispute had wide influence in later Buddhist thought. This is the “Personalist Controversy.” Some of the early schools, such as the Vātsīputrīyas and Sammitīyas, affirmed the existence of a “person” (*pudgala*) that continued from one moment to the next and gave continuity to the personality. These schools said that the “person” was neither identical to nor different from the “aggregates” (*skandha*) that constitute the personality as it was understood by other Buddhist schools. The doctrine of the person (*pudgala-vāda*) was eventually rejected by the majority of Buddhist schools, but not without considerable controversy.

Judging from an account of the personalist doctrine in Vasubandhu’s *Abhidharmakośa* (Treasury of the *abhidharma*), there were two reasons for the personalists’ position. One was a scriptural text (the *Burden Sūtra*) that spoke of a “person” who took up and laid down the burden of *karma*. The other was that the personalists felt that a “person” was necessary to guarantee moral accountability. They seem to have understood the “person” as the shape or configuration (*saṃsthāna*) of the aggregates. While the shape of the aggregates is not different from the aggregates themselves, it continues while the aggregates themselves come and go. Vasubandhu’s criticism of this position takes the form of a dilemma. If the “person” is just a conventional way of speaking about the aggregates, then it is not ultimately real. If it is ultimately real, then it cannot change and cannot be related to the aggregates. This dilemma is common in Buddhist philosophy and plays a crucial role in the Madhyamaka view of the two truths to be discussed below.

THE ABHIDHARMA. The systematic elaboration of Buddhist thought took a major step forward with the development of the *abhidharma* (Pali, *abidhamma*). The *abhidharma* tradition began as lists, known as *mātrikās* (“matrices”), of the fundamental constituents (*dharma*s) of reality. As Vasubandhu explained in his *Abhidharmakośa*, *abhidharma* has to do with cultivating pure wisdom through the discrimination of these fundamental constituents. Eventually these lists of fundamental constituents were developed into a third “basket” of scripture. The *abhidharma* schools attributed these lists to the Buddha himself, although their attribution was not universally shared. An important early school known as the Sautrāntikas (“those who follow the discourses”) challenged the claim that the *abhidharma* could be traced to the Buddha. This school based its doctrine solely on the Buddha’s discourses (*sūtrānta*).

A good way to become acquainted with the questions that occupied the *abhidharma*, without having to deal with the complexity of the matrices, is to read the *Milindapañha* (The questions of King Milinda). This text presents a discussion between the monk Nāgasena and King Milinda, who is identified as Menander, an Indo-Greek king who ruled in northern India around 150–130 BCE. In one of its best known chapters, Milinda asks Nāgasena about the idea of “no-self.” Does it mean that Nāgasena himself does not exist? Nāgasena responds by asking the king about his chariot. Does the word *chariot* refer to the wheel, the axle, the pole, or some other part of the chariot? The king says: No, the word *chariot* is just a conventional designation that depends for its meaning on these separate parts. Nāgasena then says that the word *Nāgasena* functions in the same way. It is just a conventional designation that depends on the momentary constituents of the personality. This comparison shows what Vasubandhu meant when he said that *abhidharma* is “the discrimination of fundamental constituents.” The process of discrimination implies not only a theory of language but an epistemology: the knowledge of reality has to penetrate beneath the level of conventional designations to the momentary constituents in the flow of experience.

The most influential of the *abhidharma* schools belonged to the Sarvāstivādins (“who hold the doctrine that everything exists”), also known as the Vaibhāsikas after the title of their greatest work, the *Mahāvibhāṣā* (Great commentary). The school began in the central region of the Ganges basin and eventually migrated to Kashmir where it flourished for several centuries and had wide impact on the transmission of Buddhism to Central and East Asia. Its influence was so great in China that the *Mahāvibhāṣā* has been preserved in several different recensions in the Chinese canon, including a translation made in 659 by the renowned Chinese scholar Xuanzang.

The most distinctive Sarvāstivādin theory, and the one from which the school gets its name, is the idea that “everything exists” not merely in the present, but in the past and future. This position was first developed in the first century CE in a text known as the *Vijñānakāya* (The body of consciousness) and seems to have responded to two problems associated with the concept of impermanence: How can an act of cognition “know” something in the past or future if that object does not exist, and how can past actions have any effect in the present, if the actions have ceased to exist? In the *Mahāvibhāṣā* there is an elaborate discussion of the mental factors that lead to awakening, along with the factors that hold a person back. As is often the case throughout Buddhist philosophy, epistemology plays a key part in the process of liberation.

THE MAHĀYĀNA. The appearance of the Mahāyāna (Great Vehicle), near the beginning of the Common Era, led to a reinterpretation of many of the basic values of Buddhist thought. Mahāyāna texts refer to the teachings of earlier schools as Hīnayāna (Lesser Vehicle) and claim that the

Mahāyāna represents a transmission of the Buddha’s most profound teaching. For modern scholars, the origins of the Mahāyāna are quite obscure. What is certain is that by the second century of the Common Era, when the first Buddhist translations appeared in China, Mahāyāna texts were actively circulating through the Indian Buddhist community. As the Mahāyāna movement gathered momentum, it transformed the Buddhism of India and became the dominant tradition in China, Korea, Japan, Tibet, and Vietnam.

Early Mahāyāna literature, particularly the *Prajñāpāramitā* (Perfection of Wisdom) *Sūtras*, introduced two key new ideas into the tradition of Buddhist thought. The first of these, the doctrine of emptiness, presented a bold and radical application of the traditional doctrine of no-self. The second, the ideal of the *bodhisattva*, placed this view of reality in a distinctive system of ethical practice and reflection. Neither of these two ideas was unprecedented in Buddhist tradition, but they were presented in such new ways that they precipitated a major reconsideration of the fundamental concepts of Buddhist thought.

According to the *bodhisattva* ideal, the goal of Buddhist life is not to achieve *nirvāṇa* in this life, as it had been in earlier tradition; it is to return in the cycle of reincarnation to help others on the path. While the *bodhisattva* ideal does not exclude monks and nuns, Mahāyāna texts like the *Vimalakīrtinirdeśa* (The teaching of Vimalakīrti) *Sūtra* speak positively about the lay life and draw lay people into the center of the teaching. *Bodhisattvas* are encouraged to practice the active virtue of compassion (*karuṇā*), along with the traditional virtue of wisdom (*prajñā*). This practice involves the cultivation of six “perfections” (*pāramitā*)—generosity, moral conduct, patience, fortitude, concentration, and wisdom (a list that was later expanded to ten)—and proceeds through a process of ten stages (*bhūmi*). In the last stages of this process, *bodhisattvas* acquire such extraordinary powers from their practice of merit and wisdom that they function almost like the Hindu gods.

While the *abhidharma* focused on the discrimination of *dharma*s as the momentary but real constituents of reality, the early Mahāyāna sūtras called the reality of these *dharma*s into question. In the first chapter of *The Perfection of Wisdom in Eight Thousand Lines*, for example, Śāriputra poses a question: “What *dharma* does the word *bodhisattva* refer to?” The answer is that he cannot “find, apprehend, or see” any *dharma* corresponding to the word *bodhisattva*. The sūtra extends the same analysis to all of the categories of Buddhist thought: no matter what the word, no *dharma* can be “apprehended” that corresponds to it. This view of reality can be distilled into the claim that all *dharma*s are “empty” of identity. In other words, the nature of all things is their emptiness.

While the Mahāyāna doctrine of emptiness is easy to state, its implications are complex. One obvious consequence is the concept of nonduality: no matter how different two things may seem, in the end there is no distinction between them. There is no difference between one moment and the

next, between one person and another, and between *nirvāṇa* and *saṃsāra*. To the critics of the Mahāyāna, this view often seems to be a form of nihilism, but it has important positive implications. The *bodhisattva* ideal, for example, is not based merely on a sense of altruism or compassion. While the *bodhisattva* may wish to help others, and this desire may be an important motivation for starting out on the *bodhisattva* path, the *bodhisattva* also realizes that there is no way to separate his or her fate from the fate of others, and there is no way to escape into *nirvāṇa* apart from *saṃsāra* itself. The doctrine of emptiness leads inevitably to the *bodhisattva* practice. Emptiness may seem negative, but it leads to an expansive and affirmative philosophy of Buddhist practice.

THE MADHYAMAKA. The first systematic attempt to organize Mahāyāna thought is associated with the philosopher Nāgārjuna. Reliable historical information about Indian philosophers is rare, and the figure of Nāgārjuna is even more elusive than most. Scholars generally agree that he lived in south-central India sometime in the second or third century of the Common Era. Otherwise what we know of him comes only through his works. Of these, the most important is the *Mūlamadhyamaka-kārikā* (Root verses on the Middle Way), the text that served as the source of the Madhyamaka (“Middle Way”) school. Nāgārjuna also was the author of a number of independent treatises on problems in logic and the philosophy of language, including the *Vigrahavyāvartanī* (Avoidance of disputes), a work on the *bodhisattva* path (the *Ratnāvalī* [Jewel Garland]), and several well-known hymns.

Nāgārjuna makes the direction of his argument clear in the first verse of the *Mūlamadhyamaka-kārikā*: “Nothing ever arises anywhere from itself, from something else, from both, or from nothing at all.” To say that nothing arises by any possible causal mechanism depends on a particular assumption about the nature of identity: if something has an “own-being” or “identity of its own” (*svabhāva*), then it cannot be produced by anything else and cannot give rise to itself. The only way something can “arise” is to be empty of any identity. In other words, for Nāgārjuna, the Buddhist view of impermanence expressed in the doctrine of dependent co-arising required that everything be empty of identity. Nāgārjuna expressed this point in two key verses in the *Mūlamadhyamaka-kārikā*: “We call dependent co-arising emptiness; it is a metaphorical designation, and it is the Middle Path”; and “Everything is possible for someone for whom emptiness is possible, and nothing is possible for someone for whom emptiness is not possible.”

How can something be possible, if it has no identity? Is the doctrine of emptiness any different from saying that nothing exists at all? The answer to these questions requires another key Madhyamaka concept: the distinction between the two truths. Nāgārjuna said: “When buddhas teach the *dharma*, they depend on two truths: ordinary relative truth and ultimate truth. . . . It is impossible to teach the ultimate without depending on the conventional, and it is impossible to understand *nirvāṇa* without understanding the

ultimate.” The distinction between the two truths begins with a particular truth about language: a person has to depend on the distinctions of ordinary language in order to show that ordinary language does not apply. But the distinction has important metaphysical and epistemological implications: a person has to depend on an ordinary understanding of things in order to seek *nirvāṇa*. From the ultimate point of view distinctions fall away, but any action or thought that is directed toward ultimate truth gains its meaning by its dependence on relative (*samvṛti*) or conventional (*vyaavahāra*) truth. The combination of the two truths—a conventional affirmation and an ultimate negation—constitutes the “middle way” that gives the school its name. It also allows Nāgārjuna to appropriate the basic categories of Buddhist life in a positive way without treating them as ultimately real.

The distinction between the two truths was fundamental to Madhyamaka thought, but it posed troubling philosophical problems for Nāgārjuna’s followers. These problems emerged in a series of commentaries on the *Mūlamadhyamaka-kārikā*, written two or three centuries after the time of Nāgārjuna and focused on a disagreement about the logical form of Nāgārjuna’s arguments. The commentator Buddhapālita (c. 470–540) interpreted Nāgārjuna’s arguments as a *prasaṅga* or *reductio ad absurdum* in which the opponent’s position is shown to lead to absurd conclusions. Buddhapālita formulated the argument against arising from self and other as two separate claims: If someone says that things cannot arise from themselves, this is impossible, because their arising would be useless, and if someone says that things cannot arise from something else, this too is impossible, because then anything could be produced by anything else. This interpretation of Nāgārjuna is known as *Prāsaṅgika* from its style of reasoning. Bhāvaviveka (c. 500–570) argued that the rules of Indian logic require Mādhyamikas not merely to defeat their opponent’s position but to establish a position of their own. He restated the first part of Nāgārjuna’s argument as an “independent syllogism” (*svatantra anumāna*) with his own independent assertion and reason: “Things do not arise from themselves, because they already exist.” Because of his fondness for independent (*svatantra*) arguments, Bhāvaviveka’s position is known as *Svātantrika*. Candrakīrti (c. 600–650) came to Buddhapālita’s defense and provided the classic statement of the *Prāsaṅgika* approach. For Tibetan tradition and for modern scholars, Bhāvaviveka’s *Svātantrika* and Candrakīrti’s *Prāsaṅgika* represent the two major, competing options in the interpretation of Madhyamaka thought.

This dispute about logical procedure gives a glimpse of the problems that occupied Buddhist philosophers in what might be called the classical period of Buddhist philosophy in India. By the fourth and fifth centuries Buddhist monasteries had become sophisticated centers of learning and were drawn into debate not only with other Buddhists but with competing schools of Hindus and Jains. Bhāvaviveka himself

played a crucial role in this inter-traditional dialogue by producing the *Tarkajvālā* (Flame of reason), the first systematic chapter-by-chapter account of the doctrines of competing Indian schools. It was natural for him to insist that Buddhists play by the accepted rules of debate and defend their own positions. It fell to Candrakīrti to reassert the austerity and simplicity of Nāgārjuna's vision of ultimate truth. Behind the argument about the procedure for debate, however, lay an argument about the nature of conventional truth. Bhāvaviveka felt that it was necessary to "accept" (*siddha*) conventional things before analyzing them from the ultimate perspective; Candrakīrti refused to attribute such independent reality to the subject of his arguments.

In addition to commentaries on Nāgārjuna, Bhāvaviveka and Candrakīrti wrote major works on the *bodhisattva* path. Both works, Candrakīrti's *Madhyamakāvatāra* (Introduction to the Middle Way) and the first three chapters of Bhāvaviveka's *Tarkajvālā*, present their analysis of Madhyamaka philosophy as part of the path to buddhahood. The same is true of the *Bodhicaryāvatāra* (Introduction to the practice of awakening) by Śāntideva (eighth century). In a widely-quoted scriptural text, wisdom (*prajñā*) is pictured as a way of giving sight to the other perfections and leading them to the city of *nirvāṇa*. While the practice of Buddhist philosophy became more and more concerned with issues of logic and epistemology, it did not lose its intimate relationship to the discipline of Buddhist life.

Madhyamaka continued to develop after the dispute between Candrakīrti and Bhāvaviveka. Bhāvaviveka's Svātantrika approach was taken up and extended by the eighth-century scholars Jñānagarbha, Śāntarakṣita, and Kamalaśīla, who shared the definition of conventional truth as "arising dependently, capable of effective action, and satisfying only when it is not analyzed." The concept of "effective action" (*artha-kriyā*) in this definition shows the influence of the Buddhist logician Dharmakīrti (seventh century). Both Śāntarakṣita and Kamalaśīla played important roles in the introduction of Buddhism to Tibet. On the Prāsaṅgika side, the philosopher Atīśa (eleventh century) helped reestablish the Buddhist intellectual tradition in Tibet after a period of persecution. His Prāsaṅgika convictions, along with his well-known work on the *bodhisattva* path, *Bodhipathapradīpa* (Lamp for the path to awakening), had immense influence on the shape of philosophy in Tibet. One of the least known areas of Madhyamaka thought in the last period of Indian Buddhist history has to do with the relationship between Madhyamaka and Tantra. Two works by the Tantric saint Vimalamitra are included in the Madhyamaka section of the Tibetan canon, and it is clear from later Tibetan history, as well as from the lives of Tantric saints, that Madhyamaka played an important role in developing the radical concept of nonduality on which Tantra was based.

THE YOGĀCĀRA. A century or two after the time of Nāgārjuna, a second school emerged to challenge its inter-

pretation of the Mahāyāna. This school is known by the name Yogācāra or "Practice of Discipline." The origin of the Yogācāra is obscured by an old tradition that attributes several of the school's fundamental texts to the celestial *bodhisattva* Maitreya. The school's most important early exponents, if not its actual founders, were Asaṅga and Vasubandhu (fourth or fifth century), two philosophers who were possibly brothers. Like the Madhyamaka, the Yogācāra grew from the interpretation of a distinctive body of Mahāyāna sūtras. These included not merely the *Perfection of Wisdom Sūtras*, but sūtras that spoke of a "third turning of the wheel of the teaching" intended to interpret and move beyond the teaching of the Perfection of Wisdom. The *Sandhinirmocana* (Releasing the hidden meaning) *Sūtra* describes the *Perfection of Wisdom Sūtras* as *neyārtha* (requiring further interpretation) as opposed to the *Sandhinirmocana* itself, which is *nītārtha* (its meaning is definitive and does not need further interpretation).

Instead of two truths, the Yogācāra tradition developed a doctrine of three natures (*svabhāva*): imagined (*parikalpita*) nature, dependent (*paratantra*) nature, and perfected (*pariṇipanna*) nature. The first of these natures has to do with distinctions between subject and object and between one object and another. When the mind distinguishes things and gives them names, the nature it attributes to them is "imagined": it is as unreal as a magic trick or a dream. The mind itself, in its imaginative capacity, constitutes "dependent nature." When it creates imaginative fantasies about the nature of the world, it is like the mind that creates a dream: its concepts are not real, but the mind itself is real. Perfected nature is defined as the absence of imagined nature in dependent nature. In this sense it is identical to emptiness itself, but it also can be equated with the mind when all its illusory concepts have been removed.

This Yogācāra picture of reality appears in different forms in different texts, including the *Madhyāntavibhāga* (Distinction between the middle and the extremes), the *Viṃśatikā* (Twenty verses) and the *Trīṃśikā* (Thirty verses), but the basic picture remains the same. In all these texts, the three natures function not only as an ontology, to distinguish real from unreal, but as an epistemology and a roadmap for meditation. The first step in the meditative process is to grasp the concept of "mind-only" (*citta-mātra*) in order to eliminate attachment to external objects. Once a person has understood that there is nothing but mind, it is possible to free the mind from the idea that it is a separate subject, different from its objects. The goal of this process is to develop the nondual awareness that constitutes the Buddha's awakening. The concept of "mind-only" is widely understood to mean that the Yogācāra is a form of Indian idealism. There is much in Yogācāra literature to support this view, particularly the sophisticated Yogācāra analysis of the transformations (*pariṇāma*) of consciousness. But it is important to note that the concept of "mind-only" is used to remove attachment not only to objects but also to the mind as a separate subject.

After the time of Asaṅga and Vasubandhu, the Yogācāra school developed a complex commentarial tradition like the tradition of the Madhyamaka. Philosophers like Sthiramati (510–570) and Dharmapāla (c. 530–561) developed distinctive and influential interpretations of the school in the monasteries of North India. This was the intellectual milieu that Xuanzang (c. 600–664) encountered when he traveled from China in the early decades of the seventh century. After studying in Yogācāra circles for several years, he returned to China and introduced the Yogācāra tradition to Chinese Buddhism. While the school did not maintain a separate identity in China long after the death of Xuanzang, its influence was felt throughout the history of Chinese Buddhist thought.

BUDDHIST LOGIC. One of the most important legacies of the Yogācāra in India was the epistemological tradition known as Buddhist logic. Beginning in the sixth century in the works of Dignāga (c. 480–540), the tradition produced some of the greatest philosophers in the Indian tradition. There is a legend that the Hindu logician Udayana went to a temple one day and found the door locked. In frustration, he addressed God in the following words: “Drunk with the wine of your own divinity, you ignore me; but when the Buddhists are here, your existence depends on me.” The Buddhists he was referring to were not the Mādhyamikas or the early Yogācāras, but the philosophical heirs of Dignāga who kept up their controversies with their Hindu opponents until the Buddhist monasteries were destroyed at the end of the twelfth century.

In his major work, the *Pramāṇasamuccaya* (A compendium of the means of knowledge), Dignāga argued that there are only two acceptable ways to know: perception (*pratyakṣa*) and inference (*anumāna*). Perception gives access to momentary particulars (*svalakṣaṇa*), which are ultimately real, while inference gives access to universals (*sāmānya-lakṣaṇa*), which are only conventionally real. Absent from this list is knowledge based on scripture or verbal testimony. Verbal testimony played a crucial epistemic role in Hindu exegesis of the Vedas, but Dignāga cast verbal testimony aside in favor of perception and the logical analysis of experience based on perception. In this respect, he represented a more sophisticated version of the critical approach that animated the teaching of the Buddha himself.

With Dignāga’s austere two-part epistemology came not only a complex analysis of the types of perception but also a thorough study of the forms of inference and, with the theory of inference, a view of language as *anyāpoha* (“exclusion of the other”). Dignāga recognized that it was impossible for a word like *cow* to refer directly to the universal “cowness,” since such an entity was nothing more than an intellectual construct. Instead, he argued that the word gained its meaning by excluding particulars that did not belong to a cow, such as the distinguishing characteristics of a horse.

Dignāga’s successors included Dharmakīrti, who wrote the *Pramāṇavārttika*, the authoritative commentary on Dignāga’s major work, and two philosophers, Ratnakīrti and Jñānaśrīmitra, who carried the Buddhist-Hindu controversy into the tenth and eleventh centuries on such topics as the existence of God and the self and the doctrine of momentariness.

BUDDHIST PHILOSOPHY OUTSIDE INDIA. The history of Buddhist philosophy outside India is a complex topic in its own right and cannot be treated simply as an extension of controversies and schools borrowed from India. In the earliest stages of Buddhist philosophical activity in Tibet and East Asia, the challenge was to interpret and absorb the Indian traditions, but it was not long before scholars in both areas generated distinctive traditions of philosophical reasoning.

In Tibet, the Indian Buddhist philosophical tradition became part of the standard monastic curriculum in all the Tibetan schools. Students received the texts from their teachers, memorized them, and then debated their meaning with their peers. In the Dge lugs (Gelug) pa tradition that is represented by the lineage of the Dalai Lamas, the curriculum included Candrakīrti’s *Madhyamakāvatāra*, Dharmakīrti’s *Pramāṇavārttika*, a summary of the *Perfection of Wisdom Sūtras*, and a text on the monastic discipline. While Tibetan philosophers had a traditional focus, they were capable of impressive originality and creative insight, as anyone who has encountered the work of a scholar like Tsong kha pa (1357–1419) can attest. The study of Indian Buddhist philosophy today would not be the same without the insights generated by the Tibetan exegetical tradition.

The earliest attempts to formulate Buddhist thought in China began in the second and third centuries CE and were strongly influenced by indigenous Chinese traditions, particularly Daoism. The neo-Daoist concept of “original nonbeing” came tantalizingly close to the Mahāyāna concept of emptiness and helped give Chinese Buddhist philosophy a Daoist flavor that never entirely disappeared. One of the finest examples of the Daoist turn in early Chinese Buddhism was the brilliant fifth-century commentator Sengzhao. As a pupil of the influential translator Kumārajīva (c. 350–409/413), Sengzhao had access to the text of Nāgārjuna’s *Mūlamadhyamaka-kārikā* and understood its Indian characteristics, but he transformed its argument in a distinctively Chinese way, depicting the Buddhist sage in a way that would have been very much at home in Daoist circles in the same period.

In the sixth and seventh centuries, as Chinese thinkers became more adept at interpreting Indian texts in their original languages, Madhyamaka and Yogācāra went through a brief period of efflorescence. Jizang (549–623) made a bold attempt to articulate the Madhyamaka, while Xuandang (600–664) did the same for the Yogācāra. With the arrival of the Tang dynasty (618–907), however, Chinese Buddhism developed its own distinctive, indigenous philosophical schools. One of the most influential was the Tiantai,

founded by Zhiyi (538–597) on Mount Tiantai (“Heavenly Terrace”). Zhiyi’s thought can be summarized in three key doctrines: the nature of all *dharmas*, the harmony of three levels of truth, and the three thousand worlds immanent in an instant of thought. Tiantai had an inclusive, eirenic character that gave it great influence, not only in China but also in Japan where, as the Tendai school, it gave rise to the three major Buddhist movements of the Kamakura period (1185–1333): Pure Land Buddhism, the tradition of Nichiren, and Zen. Another key school associated with the Tang dynasty was the Huayan, founded by Fazang (643–712). The Huayan was based on the *Avataṃsaka Sūtra*, an Indian Mahāyāna text that compared the world to a network of jewels, with every individual jewel reflecting the light of every other jewel. This vision of the interconnectedness of the cosmos had important influence in Chinese philosophy, including neo-Confucianism, and in the philosophical literature of Japan.

Whether the Chan (“Meditation”) school (referred to in Japan as *Zen*) should be called “philosophical” in the strict sense of the word might be debated. It could just as well be called “anti-philosophical,” in the sense that it challenges discursive logic and favors direct experience over “words and letters,” but it had so much influence on the development of Buddhist thought that it cannot be excluded. One of the key documents in the history of Chan is *The Platform Sūtra of the Sixth Patriarch* by Huineng (638–713). In this text the master Hongren (601–674) asks his disciples to write verses expressing the basic point of the Buddha’s teaching. The master then uses the verses to decide who should carry on the mantle of his authority. One student writes a verse saying that the body is the tree of wisdom and the mind is the stand of a mirror: the purpose of meditation is to wipe the mirror and not allow it to become dusty. Huineng responds with a strict application of the concept of emptiness: “The mirror of the mind is always clear and pure. How can it be defiled by dust?” Out of Huineng’s teaching grew the Southern school of Chan, with an emphasis on sudden awakening. The Northern school, which traced its origin to Huineng’s rival, Shenxiu (c. 606–706), stressed a view of gradual awakening.

The intellectual strength of the Chan tradition shows itself vividly in the work of the Japanese Zen master and philosopher Dōgen (1200–1253). Dōgen was born in the family of an influential courtier but lost his family at an early age and entered the Tendai monastery on Mount Hiei in Kyoto to become a monk. Not satisfied with his studies, he traveled to China and received what he later called “the *dharm*a-gate of face-to-face transmission.” Returning to Japan, he founded the Sōtō school of Japanese Zen, a school that is known for its practice of “just sitting.” Dōgen’s major work, the *Shōbōgenzō* (Treasury of the true *dharm*a eye), crosses the line between poetry and philosophy with its eloquent and paradoxical explorations of the concept of emptiness. It is relentlessly analytical, while it constantly subverts the linear process of logical analysis; it also is intensely intellectual, while it dissolves the intellect in a quest for pure experience.

RECENT BUDDHIST PHILOSOPHY. The history of Buddhist philosophy since the mid-nineteenth century has been dominated in one form or another by the encounter with the West. The Theravāda tradition felt Western influence as early as the end of the nineteenth century, when the Theosophists Henry Steel Olcott (1832–1907) and H. P. Blavatsky (1831–1891) arrived in Sri Lanka, converted to Buddhism, and attempted to create a modern, rational Buddhism. They criticized practices that they considered corrupt or superstitious, like the worship of local deities, and they argued that Buddhists should return to the tradition’s pragmatic, down-to-earth, experiential roots. This interpretation of the Buddhist tradition continues to have enormous influence in contemporary accounts of the Buddha’s teaching.

One of the most influential attempts to bring Buddhism into dialogue with Western philosophy took place in the Kyoto school in Japan. The Kyoto school began in the departments of philosophy and religion at Kyoto State University under the influence of Nishida Kitarō (1870–1945). Nishida attempted to be loyal to Japanese traditions, especially Buddhism, and to synthesize Japanese traditions with the philosophical tradition of the West. Nishida’s project was taken up by his successor in Kyoto, Tanabe Hajime (1885–1962), and by his student Nishitani Keiji (1900–1990). Nishida felt a deep affinity between Japanese thought and certain currents of German idealism, especially its use of dialectical logic and its openness toward mysticism. His concept of absolute nothingness involved a dialectical relationship of being and nonbeing and yielded a view of the self in which the self is “made nothing” so that it can open up to its true identity. In *Religion and Nothingness* (English translation 1982), Nishitani related this process to the history of Western philosophy and argued that Western thought had to pass through a stage of nihilism to achieve a state of absolute nothingness, where it could embrace both being and nothingness. After the death of Nishitani, the Kyoto school has been less of a force in Japanese philosophy, but it remains one of the boldest attempts to cross the boundaries between philosophy and religion and between Buddhism and the tradition of Western philosophy.

SEE ALSO Dharma, article on Buddhist Dharma and Dharmas; Eightfold Path; Four Noble Truths; Mādhyamika; Nirvāṇa; Prajña; Pratītya-samutpāda; Soteriology; Soul, article on Buddhist Concepts; Tathāgata-garbha; Yogācāra.

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BUDDHIST RELIGIOUS YEAR. The Buddhist religious year celebrates seminal events in the life of the founder and the early religious community and sanctifies the annual changes of the seasons and the cyclical passage of time in which the life of the community is embedded. Particular cultural traditions adjust and amplify both dimensions of the Buddhist calendar according to their own histories and circumstances.