

## CHAPTER 4

### BUDDHIST LOGIC

#### 1. *The dialectical logic of the early Mahāyāna*

'Dialectics' is that form of logic which, without denying the validity of the principle of contradiction,\* maintains that all truth must be expressed in the form of self-contradictory statements. Although it is the admitted standard of all true statements about what is, the principle of contradiction can never be actually observed in propositions which concern true reality itself (as distinct from the world which we have manufactured around us as a kind of environment to suit our biological and social needs). The presence of contradictions indicates a radical flaw in whatever may contain them. They show that something is either completely unreal and false (as movement when subjected to the paradoxes of Zeno of Elea), or only partially true (as in the dialectics of Hegel), or in the process of annihilating itself (as in Marxism when applied to the 'contradictions' of capitalism). In the Mahāyāna, where everything apart from the Absolute is false and unable to maintain itself, all non-absolute events will be shot through with contradictions which are the tokens of their ultimate irreality. The Absolute itself, again, will also have to be defined in contradictory terms, because only a 'superlogic'† can do justice to it.

\* Nāgārjuna twice explicitly invokes the principle of contradiction (MMK 7.30 and 8.7) and the law of excluded middle (MMK 2.8 and 2.15). Likewise his treatment of the principle of identity 'is not a denial of the concept of identity, but simply a denial that identity to the exclusion of difference, or vice versa, can be attributed to anything existential' (Robinson, 76).

† So D. T. Suzuki. 'One may ask, why these contradictions? The answer is, They are so because of *tathatā*. They are so just because they are so, and for no other reason. Hence, no logic, no analysis, and no contradictions. Things, including all possible forms of contradictions, are eternally of *tathatā*. "A" cannot be itself unless it stands against what is not "A"; "not-A" is needed to make "A" "A" which means that "not-A" is in "A". When "A" wants to be itself, it is already outside itself, that is, "not-A". If "A" did not contain in itself what is not itself, "not-A" would not come out of "A" so as to make "A" what it is. "A" is "A" because of this contradiction, and this contradiction comes out

When talking of the Absolute the Mahāyānists do not speak like men who 'are full of new wine', in a state of ecstatic inebriation forgetful of reason. Their 'anti-rational intuitionism' prefers lucid paradoxes which always remain mindful of logic and deliberately defy it. For they do not mind contradicting themselves.\* It is at this point that Westerners with their 'mixture of childlike innocence and adolescent arrogance'<sup>1</sup> have the greatest difficulty in appreciating the position of their Oriental colleagues. When confronted with a radical criticism of the laws of thought 'most philosophers have felt uncomfortable in their presence until it has been shown that these ideas can be so interpreted that these ancient laws of logic—at least the principle of non-contradiction—are not violated after all'.<sup>†2</sup> In 'Buddhist philosophy the situation is different. Their thinkers have shown themselves quite capable of respecting these laws in circumstances where such respect is necessary in the interest of clarity and consistency. In fact, Buddhism is the one great religion of the world that is founded on a coherent systematic logical analysis of the problem of life.'<sup>3</sup> But as soon as the transcendental is brought in, formal logic is replaced by the dialectics.

Each single statement as such is ultimately false, because it violates the Dharma by implying duality and discrimination. In consequence the logical structure of those statements is a dialectical one. Discrimination (*vikalpa*) is the core of the ignorance which begets this whole world of suffering. The empirical world, with all the ills that attend it, is a thought-construction derived from false discrimination. The Tathāgata, however, is one who has 'forsaken all thought-constructions and discriminations'.<sup>4</sup> Imitating the Tathāgata a

only when we logicize. As long as we are in *tathatā*, there is no contradiction whatever. Zen knows no contradictions; it is the logician who encounters them, forgetting that they are of his own making.' *Existentialism, Pragmatism and Zen*, 268-9.

\* R. Otto (*Mysticism East and West*, 45) speaks of the 'peculiar logic of mysticism, which discounts the two fundamental laws of natural logic: the law of contradiction, and of the excluded middle. As non-Euclidean geometry sets aside the axiom of parallels, so mystical logic disregards these two axioms; and thence the "coincidentia oppositorum", the "identity of opposites" and the "dialectic conceptions" arise'. The fullest and best-documented survey of dialectical systems is still my *Der Satz vom Widerspruch*, 1932.

† Burtt quotes in support of his statement the remark of C. I. Lewis who says: 'anything which could appropriately be called a "world" must be such that one or the other of every pair of contradictory propositions would apply to or be true of it, and such that all the propositions thus holding of it will be mutually consistent'.

Bodhisattva should therefore 'course in non-duality'.<sup>5</sup> But if the assumption of anything apart from the non-dual Dharma 'upsets' the Dharma-element,<sup>6</sup> how can any true statement ever be made at all?

Affirmation and negation, existence and non-existence, should not be held apart as if they were two. It is the same to be as not to be. If existence and non-existence are equalized, if yes and no are identified, then the disorder of the mind is said to disappear. This step abolishes the principle of contradiction in the sense that it is abrogated in emptiness. For, where true reality is concerned, logical asserting and denying are not ultimately valid operations. It is obvious that to say 'A is empty of the own-being of A' amounts to identifying a dharma with its own negation. In a bold and direct manner the *Prajñāpāramitā Sūtras* explicitly proclaim the identity of contradictory opposites, and make no attempt to mitigate their paradoxes. What is essential nature is no essential nature,<sup>7</sup> what is practice is no practice,<sup>8</sup> and so on. In a celebrated passage<sup>9</sup> the absolute thought, which is 'without modification or discrimination' and to which one should aspire, is identified with no-thought. But 'that thought which is no-thought is not something which is, because one cannot find in it either a "there is" or a "there is not"'. The 'self', which is the epitome of all that is unreal and false, deceptive and undesirable, is identified with perfect wisdom and with the Tathāgata.<sup>10</sup> Some of the great prestige of the *Diamond Sūtra* derives from the fact that throughout it makes a point of observing that each one of the chief Buddhist concepts is equivalent to its contradictory opposite, and employs a special formula to express this thought, i.e. 'a mass of merit, a mass of merit, as a no-mass has that been taught by the Tathāgata. In that sense has He spoken of it as a "mass of merit"'.<sup>11</sup> Or, as Seng-chao put it,<sup>12</sup> "Having attainment" is the counterfeit name for "having no attainment"; "having no attainment" is the absolute name for "having attainment"'.<sup>13</sup>

As in the case of other dialectical systems, it is, of course, the introduction of the Absolute which plays havoc with the rules of formal logic. The Absolute has about the same kind of effect on logical reasoning as a vast subterranean mass of iron would have on the magnetic needle of a compass. In its apparent illogicality the Mahāyāna aims at working out the principles of a logic of the Absolute. Our traditional logic is adapted to a world of relatives. It must lose its bearings where the relations between the relative and the Absolute are considered, between the conditioned and the unconditioned, between the world of becoming and Nirvana. Any relation into which the

Absolute enters must *ipso facto* become an 'absolute relation', a contradiction in terms, a thing not easy to recognize, quite different in its behaviour from what is usually called a 'relation'. There is room for surprise in this field of 'absolute relations'. The Mahāyāna teaches that Nirvana is the same as this world of birth-and-death, that 'the very defilements are Nirvana'. The unconditioned is identified with the conditioned, the ever-changeless with the ever-changing, the pure with the defiled, the complete with the deficient. But, and this must be borne in mind, the identity thus postulated is an *absolute* identity and does not exclude an absolute difference. In a logic which identifies yes and no it is only logical that the identity of the world and of emptiness should lead to their complete separateness, and vice versa. It is fairly easy to understand why an absolute difference should be equivalent to an absolute identity; as follows: Nirvana and I are absolutely different. I cannot get it, and it cannot get me. I can never find it, because I am no longer there when it is found. It cannot find me, because I am not there to be found. But Nirvana, the everlasting, is there all the time. 'Suchness is everywhere the same, since all dharmas have already attained Nirvana.'<sup>13</sup> What keeps me apart from it, now, in me? Nothing real at all, since the self is a mere invention. So even now, in truth, there is no real difference at all between me and Nirvana. The two are identical.

The *Heart Sūtra* conveys the same message by first identifying Emptiness with what it is not, i.e. the five skandhas, and then proclaiming that it is not empty of that which it excludes, but that it includes it, is identical with it, is full of it; and immediately afterwards asserts that Emptiness is without those skandhas. This is not at all strange when one remembers that Emptiness is a self-contradictory unity of yes and no, and that where it is the subject of a proposition, the 'is' is as well an 'is not', and the 'is not' as well an 'is'.<sup>14</sup>

## 2. *The later logicians*

Both because of their historical importance, and the current interest in logic, we must briefly allude to the principles of Buddhist logic<sup>1</sup> as developed by the school of Dignāga, Dharmakīrti and Dharmottara in extensive works from AD 450 (930 BE) onwards.<sup>2</sup> The Buddhist logicians were occupied with four fairly distinct, though related, topics: (1) In the field of 'logic' in its proper sense they tried to elaborate the rules of debate, and to distinguish valid from invalid inferences;<sup>3</sup> (2) they also treated of 'epistemological' problems,



principally the sources of valid knowledge, or 'means of proof', and the meaning of words; (3) in favour of Buddhist tenets, particularly those pertaining to ontology, they elaborated arguments which relied on reasoning alone; and (4) they refuted by reasoning the views of their opponents, e.g. the belief in the existence of God, of permanent entities, of a continuum outside the mind, etc., as well as their objections to Buddhist views.

Buddhist logic, studied only by one section of the Yogācārins, failed to win approval elsewhere, and aroused the misgivings of many who condemned it as an utterly profane science.\* At variance with the spirit of Buddhism, it can indeed be tolerated only as a manifestation of 'skill in means'. Logic was studied 'in order to vanquish one's adversaries in controversy',<sup>4</sup> and thereby to increase the monetary resources of the Order.<sup>5</sup> Its methods implied a radical departure from the spirit of *ahimsā* and tolerance which was so characteristic of Buddhism in its heyday (cf. pp. 212 *sq.*). Būston<sup>6</sup> quotes two passages<sup>7</sup> which give a just estimate of the relation of this 'logic' to traditional Buddhist thought. Disposed to argue interminably logicians dispense with the realization, or intuition, of the absolute truth as it is vouchsafed to the saints alone, and are content with the endowments of ordinary worldlings. Dignāga's *Pramāṇasamuccaya* admits that 'the Dharma is not an object of logical reasoning', and adds, 'he that leads to the absolute truth by way of logical reasoning will be very far from the teaching of the Buddha, and fail'. Moreover logic is 'uncertain' (*anīyata*), merely empirical and confined within the limitations of conventional truth (*sāṃvṛta*), of interest only to foolish people (*bālāśrayo*) and 'tiresome' or 'tedious' (*khedavān*). Not only is the style of the logical treatises dull, dry and scholastic, but the refutations very often<sup>8</sup> consist in nothing more than the bald assertion that the second member (*hetu*) of the syllogism has been used wrongly, thus trying to give an appearance of cogency which was not always felt by the opponents to whom these arguments were addressed. The treatises on Abhidharma also had been dull, dry and scholastic, but at least they had furthered the realization of the truth by men engaged in silent meditation. Here the whole effort is put into wrangling with others, an activity often condemned as particularly pernicious in the older scriptures.

\* These misgivings must have been further increased when, observing the behaviour of people like Dharmakīrti (BL I 36, Gnoli, p. xxxvi), one could not fail to notice that this branch of studies produces people who are boastful and inclined to push themselves forward.

Of the four possible sources of knowledge (cf. pp. 28 *sq.*), or 'means of proof', the logicians admitted only two, i.e. perception and inference. They have no recourse to Scripture and appear to spurn the intuitions of the saints because of the context within which they operate. For when the Dharma is debated with outsiders, it must be detached from its spiritual background and the meditational practices which give it life and meaning, and be reduced to a series of bare propositions established by assumptions shared with the outsiders<sup>9</sup> for whom the Buddhist scriptures and the intuitions of Buddhist saints have no evidential value. In their desire to be all things to all men, the Mahāyānists would naturally vary their exposition of the Dharma to suit the audience they had in mind. Three levels of exposition can readily be distinguished:

(1). The first would be addressed to believers in the Mahāyāna, as in the *Prajñāpāramitā Sūtras*. It relies entirely on direct spiritual intuition, argumentations and scriptural quotations are rare, and sense-data conspicuous by their absence. The doctrine is here not distorted at all, under no constraint, and everybody is quite at his ease. If, however, (2) chiefly Hīnayānists are addressed, as according to Seng-jui<sup>10</sup> in the *Mādhyamakakārikā* of Nāgārjuna, there will be much appeal to scriptural passages common to the two trends, and otherwise the treatise will overwhelmingly rely on reasoning. A comparison of the 'Perfect Wisdom in 8,000 Lines' and the 'Middle Stanzas' 'shows that Nāgārjuna and the Sūtra were in fundamental agreement on all topics that they have in common'.<sup>11</sup> But 'they differ radically in style, though each is systematic in its own way'. Their vocabulary also shows some striking differences.<sup>12</sup> The Sūtra, for instance, never uses the 'logical operators' which play such a big part in the *Stanzas*, and which consist of words like *yujyate* (is admissible), *upapadyate* (occurs) or *sidhyate* (is proved). On the other hand, with an eye on his Sthavira audience Nāgārjuna in his *Stanzas* denies himself 'the use of words such as 'the thought of enlightenment', 'compassion', 'skill in means', 'Suchness', the 'Realm of Dharma', the 'Dharma-body', etc., which all have their distinctive Mahāyāna connotations, and even the word 'Bodhisattva' occurs only once,<sup>13</sup> and then in a sense in which it is also acceptable to Hīnayānists. In that it can take less for granted, the exposition of the *Stanzas* must therefore omit many topics particularly dear to the hearts of the Mahāyānists.

(3). Finally one may address outsiders (*bāhya*, or *tīrthika*) who belong to the tradition of Indian philosophy and use its traditional

concepts. A good example is Śāntarakṣita's *Tattvasamgraha* with Kamalaśīla's commentary, which is available in an adequate translation.<sup>14</sup> The common ground then consists only of perception and inference, as well as of assumptions taken for granted by Yogins, but rarely made explicit. There had, of course, always been contact with outsiders, and during the first millennium after the Nirvana Buddhists had occasionally rebutted and ridiculed them, defined their own position with regard to them, absorbed a certain amount of their teachings without acknowledgment of its source, or made even desultory attempts at reasoning with them, and both the *Kathāvatthu* and Nāgārjuna showed some interest in the rules of formal reasoning. The conversion of these outsiders to the Dharma was, however, always expected from their perceiving the spiritual fruits to be obtained from it, and not from logic-chopping or public debates in which *bhikshus* strutted about like so many resplendent peacocks. Now, when the social basis of Buddhism was disintegrating, attempts were made to coerce the outsider by argument, and to most Buddhists this naturally seemed most distasteful. The importance, validity and usefulness of Buddhist logic is circumscribed by its social purpose, and the works of the logicians can therefore exhibit the holy doctrine only in a distinctly truncated form.

If it were taken at its face value, the thesis that sense-perception and inference are the only sources of valid knowledge should endear these later logicians to our present generation of philosophers and prove utterly destructive of all spiritual teaching. In fact the candour of Dharmakīrti and Dharmottara is only apparent, and the intuition of the saints and the revelations of the Buddhas are smuggled in through the back door.

What, first of all, in this context is 'sense-perception' (*pratyakṣa*)? Its basic definition makes it about as unlike common-sense perception as anything can possibly be. It is<sup>15</sup> (1) direct, as distinct from all indirect knowledge which comprises thought-construction, conception, judgment and inference. It is pure sensibility, the very first moment in the process of apperception (cf. p. 187), which signalizes the presence of a concrete, particular and quite unique and undefinable object. It is the pure sensation which memory and productive imagination then build up into a perception. It is the indispensable condition of all real and consistent knowledge, but cannot by itself be got hold of.

In addition, three further kinds of 'direct knowledge' are distinguished. There is (2) 'mental sensation' (*mānasa-pratyakṣam*)<sup>16</sup>

#### BUDDHIST THOUGHT IN INDIA

which follows immediately on 'pure sensation' as an unreflecting mental (as distinct from sensory) reaction to the same object, and very roughly corresponds to the third stage of apperception (cf. p. 189). (3) 'Introspection' (*sva-saṃvedana*) is the act of self-consciousness which according to the logical school accompanies all consciousness, for every awareness of an external object is said to imply at the same time an awareness of that awareness.<sup>17</sup> And as no. (4) we then have the 'intuitions of the Yogins' (*yogi-pratyaksha*).<sup>18</sup> So in fact the intuitions of holy men are admitted as a separate source of knowledge, only that they are booked under direct perception. 'Mystic intuition is that faculty of the Buddhist saint (*ārya*) by which he is capable completely to change all ordinary habits of thought and contemplate directly, in a vivid image, that condition of the universe which has been established by the abstract constructions of the philosophers.' This intuition is mental, and not at all sensuous. But as direct knowledge it is non-constructive, non-illusory, not contradicted by the experience of the transcendental object, and much more vivid than abstract thought-constructions can be. 'The object is perceived just as clearly as though it were a small grain on the palm of one's hand.' In this way the four holy Truths, as well as Emptiness and the identity of Samsāra and Nirvana become objects of direct knowledge. This 'yogic intuition' is acquired when a man is changed completely into an *ārya* (cf. p. 57) and it is therefore a 'supramundane' faculty. It is the 'unperverted vision of an unlimited number of entities',<sup>19</sup> and reaches its perfection in the supreme Yogin, who is the Buddha whose intuition of the undifferentiated Absolute implies his knowledge of everything whatsoever.

Secondly, 'inference' also can establish the existence of an omniscient being, i.e. of the Buddha, and once this is done all His sayings automatically become authoritative. The second chapter of Dharmakīrti's *Pramāṇavarttika*, which is the fundamental treatise of the Buddhist logicians, treats of the Buddha as the 'embodiment of valid knowledge' (*pramāṇa-bhūta*) and shows that he is an absolute and omniscient being.<sup>20</sup> Likewise the last chapter of Śāntarakṣita's *Tattvasamgraha* is devoted to proving the omniscience of the Buddhas. The school of Prajñākaragupta<sup>21</sup> as well as the later tradition of Tibet<sup>22</sup> saw all the critical, logical and epistemological parts of Dharmakīrti's system as having no other aim than to clear the ground for a justification of the religious and metaphysical doctrines of Buddhism. This is, indeed, the true context of these works, and to represent these authors as agnostics, rationalists and empiricists in the sense in



#### BUDDHIST LOGIC

which the twentieth century understands these words must lead to a constant distortion of their meaning.

The sharp differentiation between direct and indirect knowledge led to an interesting theory concerning the import of words. Direct perception is directed on the unique particular. All formulated and conceptual knowledge concerns the universal. But words, in this theory,<sup>23</sup> do not signify an essence, or a universal, or anything positive, but the mere exclusion (*apoha*) of all other things, the negation of everything else. 'Every word or every conception is correlative with its counterpart and that is the only definition that can be given. Therefore all our definitions are concealed classifications, taken from some special point of view. The thing defined is characterized negatively. What the colour "blue" is, e.g. we cannot tell, but we may divide all colours into blue and non-blue. The definition of blue will be that it is not non-blue, and, *vice versa*, the definition of non-blue that it is not the blue.'<sup>24</sup> Or, as Dignāga<sup>25</sup> puts it, 'a word can express its own meaning only by repudiating the opposite meaning'. 'Language is not a separate source of knowledge and names are not the adequate or direct expressions of reality. Names correspond to images, or concepts, they express only Universals. As such they are in no way the direct reflex of Reality, since reality consists of particulars, not of universals.'<sup>26</sup> Direct knowledge is pure affirmation of a thing 'such as it is', but the indirect knowledge can cognize a thing only in relation to its own negation. In this way the logicians reformulate in their own way the old doctrine, first put forward by the Mahāsāṅghikas, that verbal knowledge has no direct relation to what really exists, and is essentially misleading.