

# **REBIRTH**

## **AS DOCTRINE AND EXPERIENCE**

**Essays and Case Studies**

**Collected Writings  
Volume II**

**FRANCIS STORY**  
**The Anagārika Sugatānanda**

Introduction by  
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## IX

### THE BUDDHIST DOCTRINE OF REBIRTH IN SUBHUMAN REALMS

*A Reply to Dr. Willem B. Roos*

The question of whether a human being after death can take rebirth on a lower biological level has been debated for many years by Western Buddhists, particularly by those whose approach to Buddhism has been via theosophy, and whose interpretation of it has remained syncretic in spirit. The latest contribution to the subject is an article by Dr. Willem B. Roos of Sacramento, California, entitled 'Is Rebirth in a Subhuman Kingdom possible?' ('The Maha Bodhi,' July 1967).

Dr. Roos begins by quoting His Holiness the 14th Dalai Lama, who in Appendix I of his book 'My Land and My People' makes the following statements:

'Meritorious Karma causes beings to take rebirth in the realms of gods, demi-gods, and men. Demeritorious Karma causes rebirth in the lower realms of animals, *Pretas* and hells. Thirdly, Acala Karma, Invariable Karma, causes beings to take rebirth in the upper worlds, *Rūpa* and *Arūpa Dhātu*, a world of form and a formless world.....'

The first comment Dr. Roos makes is that 'these statements, short as they are, can be interpreted in different ways and it is not possible to know... what His Holiness exactly meant to convey. It will be noted that he does not specify the term "beings", and also that he speaks of rebirth in different *realms* but not of rebirth in the different classes of beings themselves. The term "realms" could mean *states of consciousness*, though it is also possible that His Holiness wanted to express the popular beliefs of the Tibetans, that a *human* being could be reborn on *earth* in an *animal* body. This popular belief can be traced back to some of the Jātaka tales...'

Now the word 'realm' is standard Buddhist terminology to express the meaning of the Pāli and Sanskrit words *loka* (world or sphere) and *yonī* (literally, 'womb'). In the Pāli and Buddhist

Sanskrit texts the animal realm is called *Tiracchāna-yonī*, signifying, literally, (birth in the) animal-womb. But the same idea is sometimes expressed without the use of the word *yonī*, as in *Tiracchāna-gāminī paṭipadā*, a phrase used to denote Karma 'leading to rebirth as an animal'. A being that is reborn in an animal womb will naturally have an animal body.

In the Pāli of the Anguttara Nikāya the Buddha is recorded as saying; 'There is Karma, O monks, that ripens in hell... Karma that ripens in the animal realm..... Karma that ripens in the world of men... Karma that ripens in heavenly realms.' (Anguttara, VI. 63)

Here, the ripening of Karma is again Buddhist terminology, its meaning being simply the fruition of Karma which causes renewed existence as an inhabitant of one or other of the realms in question; as a being in a realm of torment, as an animal, as a human being or as a Deva or Brahma. Each of these realms has its own distinct life-forms, which the reborn being assumes upon entering it. That, of course, is expressing the situation in conventional terms (*voḥāra-kathā*); a more exact description of what happens would be to say that the Karma of the human being who has died produces another form, appropriate to its particular realm, to carry on the world-line of cause and effect belonging to that specific current of existence (*bhavanga-sota*).

Again, it is said: 'Greed, O monks, is a condition for the arising of Karma... Hatred... Delusion is a condition for the arising of Karma,' and regarding the miserable destinies resulting from bad Karma, the Buddha in the same discourse says: 'Killing... stealing...unlawful intercourse with the other sex...lying...slandering...rude speech...foolish babble, practised, carried on and frequently cultivated, leads to rebirth in hell, or amongst the animals, or amongst the *pretas* (unhappy ghosts).' (Anguttara, III. 40).

Another discourse of the Anguttara-Nikāya states: 'There are five Courses of Existence: hell, the animal realm, the ghost realm, the human world and the heavenly world.' (Anguttara, XI. 68). A similar statement is made in the Dīgha-Nikāya, 33.

Allusions to rebirth in the animal realm are also found in the Dīgha-Nikāya, I. 228; III. 234; Samyutta, I. 34; III. 225; IV.

168, 307; Petavatthu, IV. 11; and other canonical texts, as well as in the Visuddhi-Magga (XIII. 93; XIV. 207; XVII. 154).

In all of these references, rebirth in the animal realm is treated in exactly the same way as rebirth in the human or any other world: it means rebirth as a being belonging to one of those realms. There is thus no ambiguity in the Dalai Lama's use of the word 'realm' and his statement is fully in accordance with the Pāli texts of the Theravāda. Rebirth as an animal in consequence of demeritorious Karma is one of the 'unhappy destinies' (*duggati*). Its meaning is precisely that of 'rebirth in the different classes of beings according to their nature'.

Dr. Roos' comment that the term "realms" could mean 'states of consciousness' is worthy of remark. In the Buddhist view, every state of being is primarily a state of consciousness. The world in which the animal lives is a world of apperception conditioned by its characteristic sensory equipment, just as the human world is the world as it is perceived by a human being. The same principle applies to all other states of existence, from lowest to highest: they are all states of consciousness. The animal inhabits the same external world as ourselves, but its perception of that world is different from ours to the extent that its sensory (and in Buddhism sensory includes 'mental') organization differs from the human. It is precisely because the animal has a different kind of *body* that its world is not the same as ours although it exists on the same physical plane. The Buddha's use of the term 'world' (in this case *samsāra*, the round of existences and their locale) is shown in his words: 'Within this fathom-long body, equipped with mental faculties, O monks, I declare to you is the world, the arising of the world, its cessation and the way to its cessation.' (Anguttara, II. 48). The world is therefore the individual's own state of consciousness, the particular interpretation he places upon the objects and events presented to his senses, and his reactions to them.

Mme Alexandra David-Neel, in *Les enseignements secrets dans les sectes Bouddhistes Tibétaines*, describes a meditational exercise by which novices are trained to create around themselves, mentally, an environment which is very different from that considered to be real in the usual sense. Seated in his chamber, the meditator evokes a forest and experiences all the sensations of one who is walking among trees. 'The utility attributed to this kind of

exercise,' she writes, 'is to lead the novice to realize the superficial nature of our sensations and perceptions, since they can be provoked by objects whose character of reality we deny. According to the secret teachings we are perhaps wrong in denying their reality, for every mental creation possesses a kind of reality which is proper to itself, since it is capable of showing itself efficient.'

Whatever presents itself to the consciousness of a sentient being, and is efficient in that it produces reactions and stimulates activities, must be considered real; but not in any absolute sense. Its reality is that of a certain state of consciousness at a certain time, its specific nature being derived from the sum of awarenesses possible on the level at which the being's consciousness functions. It must be remembered that the only world an individual knows is the world of his own consciousness. The Buddha said:

'What Bhikkhus, is Everything? The eye and forms, the ear and sounds, the nose and smells, the tongue and tastes, the body and touch, the mind and objects of mind. This Bhikkhus, is called Everything. And, Bhikkhus, whosoever should say: "Rejecting this Everything, I will proclaim another Everything," — that would be mere talk on his part, and when questioned he could not make good his boast, and further, would come to a sorry pass. Why so? Because, Bhikkhus, it would be beyond his capacity to do so.'

(Samyutta-Nikāya IV, 15).

There is no reason to suppose that this must lead to solipsism. The external world has a real existence on one particular level, although it is not altogether what it appears to us through our senses. It is constituted of events that are common experiences to men and animals; but a human being and an animal may see the same object differently, may interpret it differently or, as is most often the case, simply respond to it differently.

Neither should the conceptual view of the world be confused with epiphenomenalism. Although consciousness is conditioned by the senses it is not created by them or absolutely determined by them. In the words of the Dhammapada, 'Mind is the forerunner of all states (*dhamma*).' The word used here for mind (*mano*) implies volition (*cetanā*) as one of its functions. But it is in this respect that the animal differs most characteristically from the

human being, for the animal's responses and the entire realm of its activities are to a far greater extent dominated by its physical organization. We shall return to this point when dealing with one of Dr. Roos' later arguments.

It is not my purpose in this article to prove that rebirth as an animal is possible, but to state the logic of the Buddhist position in the debate. For this it will be necessary to examine each of Dr. Roos' points in the order in which he presents them. Referring to the Tittira Jātaka, the story of the four virtuous animals, in which the Buddha identified himself with the partridge, Sāriputta with the hare, Maudgalyāyana (Moggallāna) with the monkey and Ānanda with the elephant, Dr. Roos says:

'It would be an error to use this Jātaka tale as a proof that the Buddha taught the possibility of rebirth on earth in a sub-human kingdom. It was obviously intended to illustrate the effect of the fivefold vow. Because otherwise the question would arise: If rebirth in an animal is the outcome of demeritorious karma, what evil deeds were done by the Buddha and his companions previous to being born as a partridge, etc.? which would show the unsuitability of the Jātaka tales as a support for the thesis of rebirth into an animal to expiate sins.'

It is generally acknowledged today that many, if not all, of the Jātakas were in existence as folk tales before the time of the Buddha. The suggestion has been made that the Buddha used them as popular forms of teaching by way of parable. This may be so, but they are in no way inconsistent with the general principles he taught. He does not figure in the Jātakas as a Buddha, but as a Bodhisattva, and moreover a Bodhisattva at different stages of development. The characters in which he is portrayed are therefore not always ideal; in one Jātaka, for example he figures as a robber chief. In both Theravāda and Mahāyāna the Bodhisattva is acknowledged to be still in the state of a *Puthujjana*, or 'worldling' as distinct from any of the four classes of *Ariya-puggala*. By reason of his vows he may not even attain the state of *Sotāpanna*, the first stage of sainthood, for if he did so his career as a Bodhisattva would be curtailed. He has elected to remain in Saṃsāra for an indefinite period of many aeons in order to benefit other beings, and in any of the lower stages (*bhūmi*) of his progress, which is

very gradual, he may fall away from his attainment. So while a Buddha could not commit evil deeds that would cause him to be reborn in the animal world, a Bodhisattva may do so. It is in fact believed that a Bodhisattva does not take rebirth as an animal smaller than a quail or larger than an elephant.

This is the Theravāda interpretation; Mahāyāna adds the belief that a Bodhisattva may deliberately choose to be born in the animal realm as part of his total identification in sympathy with all forms of life. Whichever view may be taken, his appearance in lower forms in the Jātakas is easily accounted for.

Dr. Roos goes on to say: 'The six realms mentioned by the Dalai Lama are always depicted between the spokes of the Wheel of Life ... The wheel's broad tire is divided into 12 parts, representing the 12 *nidānas*, known as Dependent Origination, *pratītya samutpāda* ..... but there is no obvious relationship between these 12 *nidānas* and the six realms. It is important to note that only two of the six realms could possibly refer to an objective existence on earth, viz., the realms of men and animals. The other four cannot be interpreted as localities of *physical* existence and "rebirth" in these realms does not mean, therefore, reincarnation in the sense of a return to life on earth. Since logic and reason compel us to give a consistent interpretation to all six realms we must conclude that "rebirth in the realm of animals", does not refer to a physical existence in an animal body.'

This is a good example of the need to differentiate between rebirth and 'reincarnation', with its decidedly physical implications. Any continuation of the current of becoming, be it in a material, fine-material or immaterial realm, is rebirth in the Buddhist sense. The earth on which we live is just one of many *bhūmis* (planes), and the fact that it happens to accommodate both the human and animal states of existence does not in any way distinguish it from other planes as a possible milieu for sentient life. In fact, besides humans and animals it harbours various classes of *devas* (deities), *pretas* (spirits) and other non-human beings. The 12 *nidānas* refer specifically to the current of interdependent causal and conditioning factors in *human* life : but the relationship between the *nidānas* and the six realms lies in the fact that at the stage of *Jāti* (arising, or rebirth) the Karma of the individual can produce rebirth in any one of

them as well as in the human world. The interpretation of the Wheel of Life is therefore logical, reasonable and consistent. The conclusion that rebirth in the realm of animals does not refer to a physical existence in an animal body has no justification. It is contrary to all that the pictorial representation of *Pratītya samutpāda* is designed to teach.

The discussion next turns to 'the important question: "Is reincarnation in a subhuman kingdom possible?" and more specifically: "Can a human Ego return to life on earth in an animal body?"'

This is stating the problem in terms which seem to require that it shall be solved in one particular way and not any other. Before following Dr. Roos further it should be noted that he again uses the word 'reincarnation', and makes it the basic assumption of his next question, 'Can a human *Ego* return to life ..... in an animal body?' It has often been pointed out that the Buddhist doctrine of *Anattā* disallows any persisting entity that can be called an Ego or Soul. But the animistic concept of an Ego being reincarnated brings us right back to the impassioned speech in 'The Merchant of Venice':

'Almost thou mak'st me waver in my faith  
To hold opinion with Pythagoras  
That souls of animals infuse themselves  
Into the bodies of men ...'

In thus being coerced into holding opinion with Pythagoras we are tricked into accepting reincarnation, transmigration, and metempsychosis (if not actual metamorphosis) all welded into a single, obviously impossible, hybrid of the imagination. If there were indeed a human Ego that could never be anything but an Ego, i.e., an unchanging entity with all human characteristics, the answer to Dr. Roos' question would have to be 'No'. It would not be going too far, indeed, to say that in such a case *any* kind of rebirth would be impossible. Because clearly the Ego of, let us say, an elderly university professor could not be the Ego of a newly-born child, whimpering in its cradle. But what Buddhism most emphatically does *not* claim is that the Ego of a dead university professor passes into the body of a helpless infant, or that the Ego of an executed criminal passes into the body of an animal,

even though the latter may be no more inconceivable than the former.

Yet, from a subjectivist point of view, we are entitled to ask ourselves: Are there not times when the consciousness of an elderly man, however intellectual he may be, is temporarily that of a child? And is not the consciousness of a man given up to bestial desires sometimes on the same level as that of an animal? And if the answer is Yes, as I think it is bound to be, we are faced with facts concerning the supposed 'Ego' which are highly disconcerting. The truth is that the stream of consciousness which is human personality is not an entity with stable characteristics; it can touch the heights of divinity and it can sink to depths below the amoral level of the beast. In either of these its continuity can be resumed after death as well as on the human plane. It cannot be too often stated that the Buddhist doctrine is simply this: that as the result of a man's actions another being comes into existence after the dissolution of his phenomenal personality — a being which is 'not the same, yet not another' (*na ca so, nā ca añño*). The new being, be it man, deva or animal, is the inheritor of the past being's Karma; it carries on the world-line of identity to which he and all his predecessors belonged; it is the product of his thoughts, intentions and desires, and most particularly the direct result of his final thought moment before death. Instead of an Ego, Buddhism speaks of a current of becoming (*bhava*), which can turn in any direction and give rise to any and every kind of formed or formless (*arūpa*) being. The reason why the Buddha laid such repeated emphasis on the *Anattā* (*anātman*) doctrine is because his Dharma cannot be understood, even on the most elementary level, so long as there is a mental clinging to the concept of a persisting Ego entity. In the list of the Ten Fetters (*samyojana*), the first to be broken is the erroneous belief in an essence of Selfhood (*Sakkāyadiṭṭhi*). Phenomenal personality exists — phenomenally — but it has no abiding essence.

As a preliminary to discussing the 'technical' aspects of the two questions quoted above, Dr. Roos mentions a short article by Mrs. Rhys Davids, 'Animal Rebirth', in 'Wayfarer's Words', Vol. III, pp. 1093/1096, in which she writes:

'Very significant for me is the silence of the Pāli Sutta on rebirth as an animal as compared with the Jātaka chatter about

the dog of the Pāli Commentary. It is a silence almost total, that runs throughout the Piṭakas, once we omit the latter Jātaka Commentary...<sup>1</sup>

Dr. Roos approves of this, commenting that it is her best argument, her approach otherwise being 'rather emotional, without any sustained attempt at proving her point'.

Now it is a fact, demonstrable from her writings, that Mrs. Rhys David's interpretation of Buddhism, especially of all aspects of it concerned with *Anattā* and questions touching upon human survival, underwent a significant change after the death of her husband and son. The psychological causes of such a change need hardly be discussed here: we are more concerned with Dr. Roos' verdict that the passage quoted is her 'best argument'.

It is hardly possible to agree with this. In the first place, if what Mrs. Rhys Davids wrote at that time is true, it raises the question: How did a doctrine so unattractive, so wounding to human pride, come to be adopted by the early Buddhists if it had no more support than an 'almost total silence' on the part of the Master? People are inclined to believe what they wish to believe, and can be persuaded to accept unpleasant truths only with the greatest difficulty, if at all. Secondly, if the belief existed before the time of the Buddha, and he considered it to be false, he would surely have spoken against it, as he did against other errors, rather than preserve even a partial silence, much less a total one.

But the fact is that where Mrs. Rhys Davids professed to find almost total silence an objective scrutiny of the Sutta-Piṭaka discloses references to animal rebirth wherever the courses of future existence open to a human being are mentioned. The passages quoted above do not by any means exhaust the list. The Anguttara-Nikāya X. 205 records the Buddha as saying:

'Owners of their deeds (*karma*) are the beings, heirs of their deeds, their deeds are the womb from which they sprang, with their deeds they are bound up, their deeds are their refuge .....

1. It is worth noting that Mrs. Rhys Davids did not go so far towards the Pythagorean misunderstanding of the situation as to write of rebirth in an animal.

'There is one who destroys living beings, takes what belongs to others, has unlawful intercourse with the other sex, speaks untruth ... is covetous, cruel-minded, follows evil views. And he is creeping in his actions by body, speech and mind. Hidden are his works, words and thoughts, hidden his ways and objects. But I tell you: whoever pursues hidden ways and objects, will have to expect one of these two results: either the torments of hell, or birth amongst the creeping animals.'

In case there should be any doubt as to the literal meaning of this, the formula explaining what is meant by 'rebirth' given in the exposition of Dependent Origination is as follows:

'But what, O Monks, is rebirth? The birth of beings belonging to this or that order of beings, their being born, their conception and springing into existence, the manifestation of the groups of existence (the Five Khandas), the arising of sense-activity: this is called rebirth.....'

This formulation is found in the Samyutta-Nikāya XII 2. and repeated again and again in other Suttas. It leaves no margin for doubt that what is meant is literally the birth of living organisms of every kind according to their nature.

Turning to Mahāyāna we find an equal abundance of references to the five (or six) courses of existence (*gati*). A typical example is in the description of the Buddha Amitāyus given in the Amitāyur-Dhyāna Sūtra: 'Within the circle of light emanating from his whole body, appear illuminated the various forms and marks of all beings that live in the five paths of existence.'<sup>2</sup>

In 'A Manual of Buddhist Philosophy' (Vol. 1, 73), William Montgomery McGovern writes as follows:

'The Five or Six Gatis. — This is the most important of all Buddhist classifications of sentient beings, and is the basis of the various Buddhist wheels of life or charts of existence. The fivefold division is made by most branches of Hinayāna, the sixfold division by a few branches of Hinayāna and most branches of Mahāyāna. The five *gatis* are :

2. *Amitāyur-dhyāna Sūtra*, trns. by J. Takakusu, 'Sacred Books of the East' Vol. XLIX, p. 182.

1. The inhabitants of the *Narakas* or hells.
2. *Preta*, ghosts, goblins, or demons.
3. Animals.
4. Mankind.
5. *Devas* or gods.

'Where a sixth *gati* is added, it consists of the *Asuras* — titanic, demoniac monsters...'

It might be argued that all these allusions to animal rebirth in Theravāda and Mahāyāna texts are spurious interpolations. But if they are, it is difficult to conceive how they could have become so closely interwoven with the entire fabric of Buddhist thought, with the total Buddhist picture of the world and with the pattern of moral causality embracing all sentient life that it presents, as we see them to be. It has become something of a fashion to decry the Pāli Commentaries for what Mrs. Rhys Davids called their 'chatter', in spite of the fact that they contain much valuable material and that without them the correct meaning of many Buddhist technical terms would have remained in doubt. But in this instance it is not later exegetical literature, suspect or not, that we are dealing with. The question concerns the oldest Buddhist texts available to us, the sole source of our knowledge of what the Buddha taught. Moreover, it is a question of the integrity of the Buddhist world-view that is involved: that is to say, the place in the scheme allotted to every form of life, and the validity of its existence within the framework of a cosmic moral order. To this we shall return later, when discussing Dr. Roos' principal arguments.

The next authority to be introduced is Dr. W. Y. Evans-Wentz, with a passage from Ch. X, *The Rebirth Doctrine*, of his Introduction to *Tibetan Book of the Dead*, which in Dr. Roos' abridgement is quoted thus:

'..... the esoteric interpretation may be stated ... as follows:

'The human form (but not the divine nature in man) is a direct inheritance from the sub-human kingdoms; ... the psychical seed of the life-flux which the eye cannot see — if of a human being it cannot incarnate in, or overshadow, or be intimately bound up with a body foreign to its evolved characteristics, either in this world, in *Bardo*, or in any realm or world of *sangsāric* existence.

'For a human life-flux to flow into the physical form of a dog or fowl, or insect, or worm is, therefore, held to be as impossible as putting into the bed of the Ganges River the waters of the Indian Ocean.'

Dr. Roos writes with justice that he does not think the approaches of Mrs. Rhys Davids and of Dr. Evans-Wentz are wholly convincing, and that therefore he will 'attempt to discuss the subject by using an entirely different approach'. But before following him any further, the concepts and the terminology employed by Evans-Wentz should be examined in the light of what has already been said regarding *Anattā* and the rebirth-continuum. In the quotation given above, Evans-Wentz speaks of 'the divine nature in man' in just the same way as might a Christian theologian or a Vedantist. This 'divine nature' has, it seems, the peculiar property of being able to incarnate in human bodies or in higher forms, but not to take any other direction. It can evolve, but cannot regress, so that its nature is capable of only one kind of change, which means, in effect, that its upward progress is inevitable. If the human sphere is a testing-ground of moral worth, it is then like an examination in which the candidate cannot fail. This may be a very comforting view, but it postulates a principle of evolution that is contrary to any of the natural laws known to us; an irreversible process which can only go from good to better, and from better to some unguessable 'best'. But this is not the Buddhist view. In Buddhism, the divine nature of man is a *potentiality*, something not yet realised, and which can be achieved only by strenuous effort, with dangers of retrogression all along the way. What Evans-Wentz calls the 'human life-flux' is really human only so long as it is associated with a human psychophysical organism. It has no unchanging characteristic, human, divine or otherwise, but is wholly a transforming process, capable of giving rise to any kind of organic manifestation according to its Karmic propensities. And each phenomenal manifestation altogether ceases to be, when its immediate successor arises. The teaching of the so-called esoteric school of Northern Buddhism is in this respect no different from that of Theravada. As Mme. David-Neel writes:

'In truth, the perpetual flow alone exists, at once continuous (it never halts) and discontinuous (it consists of distinct moments) of bursts of energy: causes and effects are engendered without the generating cause ever being able to know its progeniture-effect,



since it disappears when the latter arises; or, rather, it is the disappearance itself which constitutes its effect — the new phenomenon.'

Evans-Wentz wrote a great deal on the subject of rebirth, in which he was a firm believer. His first important contribution to the study of it was a book, published in Ceylon, called 'The Science of Rebirth.' Later, in collaboration with the Ven. Lama Kazi Dawa Samdup he produced a translation of the *Bardo Thodol*, the 'Tibetan Book of the Dead' from which Dr. Roos' quotation is taken. In 'The Science of Rebirth' Evans-Wentz wrote: 'I have no doubt that plants and trees have souls and are subject to the Law of Re-embodiment', (p. 210). But he rejected the idea that a human being could be reborn as an animal through the effect of bad Karma. 'To me,' he wrote, 'it is neither reasonable nor logical, nor in accord with evolution, to believe that ..... a human being may descend from the human plane to that of the lowest animal, worm or even insect.' (p. 82)<sup>3</sup>

In support of this view he appealed to what he called the 'little known School of Esoteric Buddhism in Tibet' in which, according to him when 'a man is said to be born as a cock, for example, the meaning intended is not that the man shall be born as a cock in reality, but that he shall be reborn as a man full of lust, since the cock, in the symbolism of the Wheel of Life, of the Mahāyāna School, in Sikkim and in Tibet, represents lust.' (p. 82)

#### 'Esoteric Buddhism'

At this point it is necessary to take a glance at the widely-held belief that there is an 'esoteric' and an 'exoteric' Buddhism. The 'esoteric' form is supposed to be found in Mahāyāna, while the Theravāda is exclusively 'exoteric'. Whether any such distinction ever existed outside the syncretic beliefs of those whose approach to Buddhism has been via Vedānta and theosophy is extremely doubtful, and in any case it seems to be based upon a confusion of thought. The term Mahāyāna embraces a vast complex of schools, some of them diverging from others in several important respects, while the Theravāda has remained a homogeneous body of teaching.

3. This was written over forty years ago, when a more optimistic view was taken of evolution than is held today. We now know that evolutionary processes are reversible.

The Mahāyāna schools, however, have one characteristic in common with one another: in most of them it is possible to discern the features that usually appear when the need has been felt to institutionalize a religion in order to bring it within the scope and understanding of the masses. In the religions which have undergone this process of popularisation we usually find an emphasis on ritualism, the establishment of a formal church hierarchy, a marked increase of the supernatural element and, most significant as an indication of the wish to appeal to the average man and woman, the introduction of doctrines promising salvation by faith.

All of these items are present to some degree in Mahāyāna, the outstanding example being the faith doctrine of the Pure Land (Sukhāvatī) school, wherein the recitation of *mantras* takes the place of self-purification by personal effort.<sup>4</sup> The same tendency is also evident in the more world-regarding doctrines which substitute the Bodhisattva ideal for that of the Arahāt and erase the distinction the Buddha made between Nirvāṇa and Samsāra. These articles of faith, if not consciously designed to modify the teaching of renunciation taught by the Buddha had the result, whether calculated or not, of making Buddhism easier for the ordinary man who was not ready to relinquish his hold on the world or loosen its hold upon him. Historical evidence, as well as present observation seems to be the basis of the view expressed by

4. The Nembutsu school in Japan arose from the belief that the Buddha Sāsana came to an end 2,000 years after the Buddha's Parinibbāna. In the succeeding period, the age of mappo, it would be impossible for anyone to attain Nirvāṇa by his own efforts. Honen (1133-1212) and Shinran Shōnen (1173-1262) then popularized the credo that rebirth in the Western Paradise of Amida Buddha could be obtained by repeating his name, as taught in the Sukhāvatī Vyūha. Hence Shinran's famous dictum: 'If even a good man can be reborn in Sukhāvatī, how much more so a sinner!' In China the teaching was propagated by Shan-tao (613-681).

'Nembutsu is the most basic thought of the Pure Land School...the utterance of the name of Amida Buddha..... is believed to be the practice of the highest value. Nembutsu had gradually been popularized...with the significance that the utterance of Amida's Name was the most excellent and the easiest way to be born in the Pure Land and attain Enlightenment for those who were not qualified to practise the Buddhist doctrine perfectly'. — The Practice of the Development of Nembutsu, by Ryōsetsu Fujiwara, Jodo Shinshu Series No. 1., Bureau of Buddhist Education, San Francisco, Calif., U. S. A., 1962.

Here we have a clear declaration of an exoteric teaching, similar to that found in the Lamaism of Tibet. To these schools it is the doctrine of Sūnyatā and Anātman that are considered 'esoteric' teachings for the elite. The sexual-magical practices of Vajrayāna (Tānta) are also esoteric, but as they form no part of original Buddhism they may be excluded from this discussion.

Dr. André Migot who, writing of the Northern schools, says that some centuries after the Buddha there came to birth 'a new Buddhism, the Mahāyāna, which had already been founded in North India under Kanishka, the inheritor of the primitive mentality closer to the people'.<sup>5</sup> It can scarcely be denied that there is a dual aspect to Mahāyāna: the religion of the masses and the transcendental philosophy of the instructed. But apart from such metaphysical doctrines as those of the Trikāya, the Dhyāni Buddhas, the Ādi-Buddha and the sakti cults derived from the Tantras, the inner aspect of Mahāyāna does not contain anything that is not overtly present in Theravāda, or that is an essential factor in the Buddhist view of life.

If there is a teaching which may be called too subtle for the generality of mankind to understand, it is precisely the doctrine of *Anattā* (*Anātman*). This teaching is the common property of both Theravāda and Mahāyāna, but is more consistently held in the Pāli tradition than it is in the popular forms of Mahāyāna. A comparison of the two schools leaves little room for doubt that if either of them should be classified as 'exoteric' it is the Mahāyāna, if only by reason of its infinity of gods and minor deities, its modes of worship, its docetic and supernatural view of the Buddha and its teaching that Nirvāna and Saṃsāra are one — a formulation clearly intended to shift the ultimate goal from the state beyond all conditioned phenomena, where Theravāda places it, back to the familiar world.

This is not to say that Theravāda is 'esoteric'; it is nothing of the sort. Its teachings are open to all, as the Buddha intended them to be. With solemn emphasis he told his disciples, on the eve of his passing away, that he had never had the closed fist of a teacher who held some things back. He taught his doctrine of deliverance without making any distinction between 'esoteric' and 'exoteric' form, and with no discrimination as to persons.<sup>6</sup> To lay claim to a secret doctrine in the face of that clear statement would be to betray the Buddha's intention, and never at any time has the Theravāda done so.

On what grounds, then, has a secret tradition of teaching been attributed to Mahāyāna? It may well have arisen because of the manifest difference between the popular Buddhism of the masses, especially where Mahāyāna has been corrupted by admixture with indigenous beliefs, and the highly metaphysical teachings of Nāgārjuna, Vasubandhu, Asaṅga and other founders of schools within the main body. But in this connection it should be remembered that the systems they erected are in actual fact reinterpretations and elaborations of the essential doctrines found in Theravāda, namely *Anattā* and *Suññatā* (Void). To the Theravāda these ideas are not 'esoteric' but are treated as truths available to all, the understanding of them being limited only by the capacity of the hearer. To the Lamaism of Tibet, in which they appear in the trappings of imagery and personification, the Prajñāpāramitā teachings may have taken on the character of a secret instruction, but the *Sūnyatā* concept which underlies them is only an extremely idealised form of the world-view that can be traced back to the *Anattā* and *Suññatā* of Theravāda.

The chief difference between the historical Buddha, Gotama, and e.g., the Madhyamika philosophers who spoke in his name, is that the Buddha eschewed metaphysical constructions which lead nowhere but to the annihilation of logic (as they did with Nāgārjuna), and preferred to teach a direct and practical method of truth-realisation. The Buddha made use of philosophy just to the extent that was necessary to communicate in words the basic principles he had discovered. Beyond that, knowing that there is a point at which all logical constructs become self-contradictory and all verbal communication fails, he preserved the Ariyan silence, leaving the disciple to make the final break-through in the only way possible, by his own effort.

Evens-Wentz admits, in the 'Tibetan Book of the Dead', that 'without any doubt, the *Bardo Thodol*, if read literally', (my italics) conveys 'the exoteric interpretation'.<sup>7</sup> In this he is being no more than just: there is nothing whatever in the text to suggest that it is meant to be read symbolically. The same may certainly be said of the canonical references to the *Tiracchāna-yoni* quoted above. The Pāli texts are notable, among the religious books of the world,

5. *Le Bouddhisme en Chine*, 'Presence du Bouddhisme', p. 698.

6. *Mahāparinibbāna Sutta*, *Dīgha Nikāya* 16. (Trns. 'The Wheel' 67-9, Buddhist Publication Society, Ceylon.

7. 'Tib. Bk. of the Dead', p. 42.

for their literal and even prosaic character in the presentation of doctrine. It is a feature that has made them seem uninteresting to many people who expect to find in sacred teachings a cloudy mysticism clothed in allegory and poetic hyperbole. When the Suttas do resort to simile and imagery it is expressly stated that a simile or an image is being used. This is so often the case that it practically constitutes a rule, with a set form of words, '*Seyyathā pi bhikkhave...evam eva kho bhikkhave*' — 'Just as, O bhikkhus...even so, O bhikkhus' — being used. The Buddha seems to have had a profound distrust of language that could be misunderstood, and to have deliberately curbed all tendency to express himself oracularly. The texts themselves, apart from pseudo-biographical matter which has no bearing upon doctrine, for the most part follow his lead, and a sober, matter-of-fact tone prevails. That being so, it is permissible to ask: If the situation is as Evans-Wentz represents it, why should a doctrine that can be stated clearly and simply be hidden in a symbolism that was certain to be misunderstood? Such a course is completely foreign to the Buddha's method of teaching. Symbolism may legitimately be used when attempting to express the unexpressible, but never for the sake of mere mystification. Secrecy, the Buddha declared, is the characteristic of priests (the Brahmanical teachers) and certain other classes of people; for his own part he did not practise it.<sup>8</sup>

Before leaving this side of the question I feel it necessary to point out that the indiscriminate reduction of ancient religious teachings to symbolism is one that can have no end, once it is started. To interpret symbolically statements which the ancients meant to be taken simply and literally is the last refuge of a theology driven to desperation. There is at least one of the great world-religions which has had to be interpreted symbolically to the point where in fact nothing remains of it but the name. In contrast to this extreme case, the allegories and symbols of Buddhism, where they are found, belong to a later date than the original teaching of the Buddha, and add nothing to it of any value. They are interesting as products of the mythopoeic mind, but nothing more. A Buddha whose feet never touched the ground does not help us at all to realise the truths of Buddhism, which are securely grounded in human experience.

8. *Ang. Nikāya*, 129.

I shall not attempt to launch a full-scale inquiry into the origin of the belief in an esoteric school of Northern Buddhism, since to do so would necessitate delving into the obscurity that surrounds the origin of Buddhist and Hindu Tantra. But it is pertinent to say a few words concerning its influence on the thought and writings of Evans-Wentz if only because his arguments lean so heavily upon it. Where did he get the idea that there is an 'esoteric' school which teaches that rebirth as an animal is to be taken symbolically? The answer is given in his own words, page 42 of the 'Tibetan Book of the Dead', where he states that he had it 'on the authority of the various philosophers, both Hindu and Buddhist', from whom he received his instruction. Unfortunately, the only authority directly named is the Ven. Lama Kazi Dawa-Samdup. On page 44 of the same work the Lama is quoted thus:

'The doctrine of the transmigration of the human to the sub-human may apply solely to the lower or purely brutish constituents of the human principle of consciousness: for the knower itself neither incarnates nor re-incarnates — it is the Spectator.'

Now this statement, whether one accepts it as truth or not, is simply not Buddhism, either Mahāyāna or Theravāda. The 'Knower' or 'Spectator' is the Ātman of Vedānta, the same 'immutable, unchanging soul' which all schools of Buddhism deny. What, then, is the explanation of such a statement coming from a Tibetan Lama?

It is not difficult to find, I think, The Venerable Lama Dawa-Samdup was anything but a typical member of the Tibetan priesthood. He was English-educated and had been exposed to the syncretic influences of Indian and Western philosophy. If we add to that the amiable characteristic of wishing to please the person to whom one is speaking, it needs no great effort of the imagination to understand how ready he was to accommodate himself to the ideas of his distinguished friend and collaborator. Two instances of this among many in my own experience, come to my mind. In one, a Buddhist monk wrote to a foreign inquirer who had previously made it clear that he refused to believe in rebirth, telling him that the Buddha taught no such doctrine, and that it was a 'popular misconception'. The other case concerned a European who did not wish to believe in human free-will. The Buddhist monk with whom he was in correspondence obligingly

told him that there is no free will in Buddhism. This kindly readiness to fall in with other people's opinions, by which, incidentally, Asian Buddhists sometimes hope to make the Dharma acceptable to Westerners, is quite sufficient to explain the encouragement that Evans-Wentz encountered in his efforts to inject the Vedantic Ātman and theosophical modifications into 'esoteric' Buddhism. All that need be added on this score is that if such an esoteric school really exists, it appears that His Holiness the 14th Dalai Lama does not belong to it.

But before taking final leave of Dr. Evans-Wentz, the use he made of science in his debates is worthy of notice. In 'The Science of Rebirth' (p. 312) he wrote as follows:

'Men of science see no possibility of accepting the Doctrine of the Resurrection of the physical body ... but the Doctrine is the exoteric interpretation of a long-hidden esoteric truth, namely, that the "soul" may be resurrected in a newly-constituted physical body ... and this is scientifically possible. On the contrary, any form of a doctrine of the transmigration of a human "soul" or of any of the human *skandha* (*khandhā*) to the body of a sub-human creature, animal or plant, is scientifically impossible.'

In passing it may be observed that it is the doctrine of rebirth itself which here becomes 'esoteric'. One can only wish that all scientists were as prepared to admit the scientific possibility of rebirth as Dr. Evans-Wentz naively supposed them to be, forty years ago. But whether they would even then claim that rebirth as an animal is less possible 'scientifically' than rebirth as a human being, is open to serious doubt. There might well be some who would consider that the homocentric idea of a "soul" that can reincarnate only in a human body was less scientific than the Buddhist concept of an impersonal life-continuum which is capable of giving rise to different kinds of organism according to the direction in which it has been channelled. The tendency of science today is to see even less difference between the human and sub-human species than Buddhism itself admits. But much depends, as the late Prof. C. E. M. Joad might have said, on what one means by 'science'.

### The Kingdoms of Nature

It is something of a relief to turn from these loosely-formulated and not very coherent ideas to the arguments of Dr. Roos, which we shall now take up again.

To begin with, he points out that 'the various kingdoms of nature differ principally in the kind and extent of their powers and their knowledge. The higher kingdoms appear as compounds of the lower kingdoms, in the sense that the members, say of the animal kingdom, are *co-operative organizations* of members of the vegetable and mineral kingdoms'. The power of cohesion enables plants to form roots, stems, leaves and other organs for a variety of specialised functions, just as in the mineral kingdom it produces a great variety of crystals. 'As a result, plants have a wider range of perception, hence a greater degree of consciousness than the individual members of the mineral kingdom of which they are composed. At the same time there is for each plant an animating something which keeps the various parts functioning together in harmony, to achieve a common aim, viz., the preservation of the individual plant in the first instance, and the propagation of the species as the next important aim.'

This is perfectly true: the compounded (*sankhata*) nature of all phenomena is a consistent principle that runs throughout the universe, every higher and more complex organism being composed of aggregates drawn from the lower and simpler structures. The 'animating something' is *Jivitindriya*, the life-force, which is sometimes, and rather misleadingly, shortened to *Jīva*, when in popular usage it takes the place of 'soul'.<sup>9</sup>

9. In Jaina philosophy, *Jīva* means 'soul' in the sense of a homunculus which leaves the body at death and transmigrates. The Buddha repudiated this doctrine. But the word occurs in the *Pāyāsi Sutta* (*Dīgha Nikāya XXIII*), where Prince *Pāyāsi*, a sceptic, objects that when a thief is thrown alive into a jar, sealed down with leather and clay, and then roasted on a furnace, the *jīva* of the dead man cannot be seen coming out when the jar is opened. ('*Appeva nāmuṣsa jīvaṃ nikkhamantaṃ passeyyāmāti.*' 'N'ev'assa mayam jīvaṃ nikkhamantaṃ passāma.'). To this the Ven. *Kumāra Kassapa* replies with a simile of the Prince dreaming himself in another place, and asks whether those around can see his 'soul' entering or leaving him. ('*Api nu tā tuyhaṃ jīvaṃ passanti pavisantaṃ?*') The answer is of course No ('*No h'idaṃ bho Kassapa.*'). 'If the living do not see the soul of you who are living, entering or leaving you, how will you see the soul of a dead man entering or leaving him?' ('*Tā hi nāma Rājāṇa tuyhaṃ jīvantaṃ jīvantiyo jīvaṃ na passissanti pavisantaṃ vā nikkhamantaṃ vā. Kim paṇa tvam kālakatassa jīvaṃ passissanti pavisantaṃ vā nikkhamantaṃ vā?*'). *Kumāra Kassapa* does not assert that there is a *jīva* in the sense of 'soul', but that rebirth in other spheres can take place without it. ('*Iti pi atthi-paraloko atthi sattā opapātikā, atthi sukha-dukkhaṭṭhānaṃ kammānaṃ phalaṃ vipāko ti*'), as the fruit of *Karma*.

But Dr. Roos continues: 'This "animating something" could be called the "soul of the plant" for lack of a better term.' It is here that we encounter some difficulties. The first concerns the idea of purposeful organization which seems to be implicit in the argument. Biologists in the main are reluctant to admit any kind of entelechy in their picture of the life-process, and theories of a teleological kind are looked upon with suspicion. Only in the Vitalism of Hans Driesch do we find any strong scientific support for the theory of purpose in living structures. Buddhism, however, maintains that there is such a purpose although it is not fully realized as a conscious one. Rather it is an unconscious drive that is inherent in natural processes themselves. It is not drawn from any external source nor is it projected into them from a higher level of their own being. It is the blind urge towards the gratification of sensory desires, which on the plant level is a purely mechanical functioning. This more or less cybernetic response to stimuli shows itself as phototropism and the tendency of creeping plants to wind their tendrils around any object with which they come into contact. In Buddhism plants are classified as 'one-facultied' (*ek-indriya*), and the one faculty they possess is that of life. Again the question of a 'soul' does not enter the picture.

Another and more formidable obstacle is the seeming impossibility of attributing an individual *ens* to organisms which propagate, or survive, by division. Not only plants but various forms of animal life such as the flatworm, multiply in this way, thus presenting a challenge to the accepted concept of individuality. When the parts of an organism can become detached from the parent body and each continue to live on as a separate animal, to become themselves the progenitors of more offshoots in their turn, they confront us with this problem in its most acute form. It is a difficulty which can be resolved only by discarding the notion of an individual entity and taking an altogether different view of what it is that survives in these proliferations. If we equate 'identity' with serial continuity *alone*, we are not driven to conclude, with the zoologist Weisman, that organisms such as the Protozoa are immortal. Dr. Roos therefore is well advised to qualify his use of the word 'soul' by offering it only for lack of a better term. Unfortunately its implications are such, and are so inseparably bound up with the word itself, apart from its theological overtones, that it cannot fail to infect any process of reasoning in which it features as an

essential point of reference. To talk of the 'soul' of a plant at once exposes the weakness of the theory.

Going a step higher in the evolutionary scale, Dr. Roos observes that the members of the animal kingdom 'have a still wider range of powers than that possessed by plants. With the power of locomotion added to the increased powers of sense perception an even greater demand for cooperation between the separate parts of an animal is required. Its "soul" has to make a wide variety of decisions during the course of the animal's existence. But these decisions are not based upon reasoning processes nor upon reflective thinking, but solely upon impulses in accordance with its innate character. This means that the actions of an animal are determined by *desire* and *fear*, both of which are stimulated by the power of memory. In the higher animals this power is greatly developed, though it can *only* be activated by *association* with sense perceptions, while in the human kingdom memory is also activated by mental processes, wherefore a man can deliberately recall events of the past and consult his store of knowledge which animals cannot do'.

This brings us onto highly debatable ground. The behaviourists would say that man is also an organism activated by conditioned responses, and that the difference between his performance in relation to external stimuli and that of the lower animals is only in the possession of a wider range of possible reflexes. On the other hand, many naturalists have not hesitated to credit the higher animals with feelings of affection and impulses of self-sacrifice that go far beyond the mere gratification of the pleasure principle and the instinct of self-preservation. In man himself it is chiefly these two urges that motivate action, as Buddhism and modern psychology both recognise. Dr. Roos, moreover, is inclined to over-stress the difference between humans and animals in the matter of memory. All organisms, at whatever level of consciousness, learn by remembering, and there is even a kind of memory in inorganic life. In many situations the higher animals show that they are capable of making the transition from remembering to reasoning, as has been proved by experiments with chimpanzees. The more our knowledge of human and animal psychology advances the more difficult it becomes to draw any firm line of demarcation between them.

Again, Dr. Roos makes a distinction not recognised in Buddhist psychology when he asserts that in animals memory can only be activated by association with sense perceptions, while in the human kingdom it is also activated by mental processes. In Buddhist psychology the mind itself is classed as the sixth sense, and every kind of memory is associated with sense perceptions. Thus a specific memory may be provoked by an event in the external world entering consciousness through one of the five physical sense channels, or it may present itself spontaneously at the mind-door (*mano-dvāra*) as an idea. Ideas themselves are considered as being the sense-objects of the mind, whether they arise in dream or in the waking state. That animals dream has been proved by tracing the activity of their brain cells while sleeping, so that it is clear that they share with human beings the faculty of ideation, together with its concomitants, memory and a form of mental activity independent of immediate external stimuli.

Dr. Roos continues: 'The animal, therefore, is not responsible for its actions, since it has no choice but to follow the dictates of its nature. This means that an animal can neither make nor dissipate individual karma, i.e. there is no merit nor demerit possible in the subhuman kingdoms.'

In general this is true; but there are possible exceptions among the higher animals. To give just one example of many, the English national newspapers of January 1960 reported the case of a blind man and his mongrel dog, both found dead in a burnt-out bungalow in Laindon, Essex. 'The man, who lived alone with his dog,' the report states, 'had apparently collapsed as he tried to escape and his dog refused to leave him in spite of the intense heat and smoke.'

This was simply the result of conditioning, of course; any disciple of Pavlov knows that perfectly well. And in that case, so also is the behaviour of a soldier who stays to help a wounded comrade under heavy gunfire. If we are going to accept the behaviourist explanation it would be better to do so *in toto*, and at least be able to claim the merit of consistency. If a choice had to be made between the theories of the scientific materialist and those of the believer in a personal 'soul' or 'Ego principle', any clear-thinking person would choose the former without hesitation. Fortunately, the choice is not so limited.

However, as I have discussed the question of merit and demerit in animal behaviour elsewhere,<sup>10</sup> we will follow the remainder of Dr. Roos' argument. He proceeds: 'This brings up the question how, in a Universe where Karma is supposed to provide JUSTICE for all beings, it is possible for animals to suffer physical pain, as they obviously do. To answer this question let us first have a close look at the nature of pain. Starting with physical pain, we see that this is merely a message telling the sufferer that something is wrong at the location where the message originated. It is intended to stimulate, or force, the sufferer to take the necessary steps to counteract whatever caused the pain. This shows that PAIN is beneficial, like a fire alarm, and that its purpose is to teach the sufferer certain important facts necessary to cope with the problems of physical life. Though all suffering is subject to the law of Causality, this does not mean that it is always a retribution as the outcome of a demeritorious act.'<sup>11</sup>

This is perfectly true; Suffering (*dukkha*) is an inseparable part of life, and there are some forms of pain which are merely the consequence of having been born, irrespective of past demeritorious action. Pain is a necessary part of the response of a living organism to undesirable features of its environment. But it is questionable whether a pain that cannot be remedied is beneficial, either to an animal or a human being. At the most it can be said to inform the sufferer that something is wrong, though the knowledge may not be of any help to him.

To do full justice to Dr. Roos' line of reasoning it is necessary to continue quoting him in full. He goes on to say that 'The members of the sub-human kingdoms suffer only as a result of physical circumstances and only so much as is useful to them for acquiring the skill necessary to avoid future suffering. There is no *mental* suffering in animals, and this fact alone should tell us that no comparison is possible between the sufferings of animals and men. The two belong to completely different orders of experience if we except the suffering of young children, of idiots, of lunatics and of certain savages. Both orders of suffering serve useful though very different purposes because it is a corollary of the law of Karma that NO SUFFERING IS IN VAIN.'

10. 'The Place of Animals in Buddhism', *Bodhi Leaves* series B 23, BPS, Ceylon.

11. The capitals in the quotations are those of Dr. Roos, wherever they occur.

These are rather large statements. In actual fact, we know very little about the mental aspect of an animal's experience of pain. Some facts, however, are clear from common observation: for example, we see that animals can remember pain, for if they could not, they would not be capable of learning to avoid its causes. We also know that domesticated animals can pine and even die in the absence of their masters. They are also capable of suffering *in expectation of pain*, as a dog when it knows it is going to be beaten. But Dr. Roos has already weakened his own argument in advance by bracketing the suffering of animals with that of 'young children, of idiots, of lunatics and of certain savages,' because if pain is to be interpreted either as serving a useful purpose biologically, or as a result of Karma, it is evident that these are classes of human beings to whom the interpretation has exactly the same applicability, and in the same degree, as it has to animals. In this view, if 'an animal can neither make nor dissipate individual karma' and therefore 'there is no merit nor demerit possible in the sub-human kingdoms,' the same must be true of the idiot and the lunatic, since they too are not morally-responsible individuals.

This point anticipates Dr. Roos' next argument, which is as follows: 'In man this kind of suffering is in the mind and is produced by the *knowledge* of *undesirable events*, which have already occurred or which are now happening or are threatening to take place. The fact that these events are undesirable means that they are in conflict with his desires and therefore produce painful images in his mind which are the direct cause of his suffering. And since there is no useless suffering we must expect something good to result from it. It stands to reason that the reaction of this class of suffering tends to produce a disgust for the desires which were frustrated by the "undesirable events". This disgust will have a weakening effect upon the corresponding desires and may gradually lead to their destruction, and eventually to liberation from the wheel of *saṃsāra*.'

This should indeed be so, but in practice it seldom happens that people learn from the experience of suffering alone; if they did, they would not have been revolving for countless world-cycles in *saṃsāra*. The individual may be perfectly aware of the direct cause of his present suffering, and may hope by using the knowledge to avoid it in future. What he does not know is the basic cause of it, which is the craving that has brought him to birth. But the yogin who has cultivated the *Jhānas* and has become able to review

his previous existences remembers the distress he experienced not only in human births but in his lives as various animals. He recalls the suffering, together with the karma that caused it, and in this way the experience of pain in the subhuman realms becomes of benefit to him. It contributes very powerfully to his feeling of disgust for conditioned existence, and hence to his liberation from it.

For the ordinary person, however, just as for the animal, there is much pain that is completely useless and unproductive because its cause has not yet been discerned. It is simply not true to say that 'no suffering is in vain'. All *saṃsāric* suffering is in vain until it is understood in its true nature by analytical knowledge. The universe observes its own laws of causality, which are not devised for man's particular benefit or with the intention of teaching him wisdom. 'Empty phenomena roll on', as Buddhaghosa aptly says, regardless of whether man comprehends them or not.

From what he has said up to this point, Dr. Roos concludes that 'animals cannot have emotional *suffering* because they are not ensouled "mind-beings"'. What to a human being would be an emotional disturbance, such as anger, fear, etc., would be a *natural* activity in an animal and could not be a source of suffering followed by a destruction of desires, as this would be the end of the animal itself'.

Here Dr. Roos opposes a '*natural* activity' to 'emotional disturbance', but on what grounds he does so is far from clear. It savours rather of the theistic religious idea of placing man outside of nature as a special creation; the Buddhist view is that all activities, emotional or otherwise, are natural. If by the phrase 'not ensouled mind-beings' he means that animals have no mental life, he is taking a narrower view of what constitutes mental activity than does Buddhism or science, insofar as the latter admits of mind at all. In the Buddhist analysis, mind exists wherever there is conscious mental response, although such mental activity may vary widely in extent and quality between one form of life and another. Science, which studies psychology through the behaviour of both humans and animals, does not make any such sharp distinction between them as Dr. Roos evidently wishes to do. It is not easy to distinguish between anger, fear, etc., as 'emotional disturbances' in a human being and 'natural activities' in an animal. Surely they



are equally 'natural' reactions in both cases. If, in the case of human beings, one wishes to dignify them by calling them 'emotions' the distinction is one of terminology more than anything else. The experience that makes a man angry may not excite a dog, but when the dog is infuriated its physiological reactions are much the same, and even the outward manifestations of its feelings are not very different from those of a man. It is therefore not at all clear what metaphysical distinction Dr. Roos means to indicate by placing 'emotional disturbances' and 'natural activities' in opposition, or by characterising animals as not being 'mind-ensouled' beings. No one would deny, least of all a Buddhist, that the human mind is vastly richer, incalculably wider in scope and capable of producing a far greater variety of thoughts and activities than that of an animal — and this we can assert with safety even though we know so little about the subjective life of animals that we cannot even be sure whether they experience colour-perception in the same way as ourselves. But it seems that there is simply a difference in the *quality* and *range* of the mental activity, while the basic processes and even the fundamental motivations are the same. Put in another way, we might say that the difference between the consciousness and responses of an animal and those of a human being is rather like the difference between a child's toy piano of one diatonic octave and a concert grand. Basically, they both produce sound by percussion.

The Western mind is deeply imbued with the idea that man is, if not a special creation, at least a being in some unique way distinguished from the rest of nature. This notion of his special place in the cosmos has persisted as a relic of anthropocentric thinking despite the fact that it receives no support from biology or any other branch of knowledge. Even though the behaviour patterns of a human infant and of a baby chimpanzee may be identical through several stages of their development, the human child has to be regarded as a 'mind-ensouled' being, animated by a human 'Ego-principle', which could not have 'entered' the body of the chimpanzee. Even though the mind of a congenital idiot may be less capable of dealing with situations in the external world than that of a well-trained sheepdog, still it has to be considered a *human* mind, the seat of a human 'soul', a metaphysical entity of some sort that could not have 'reincarnated' in any lower form of life. On the other hand, a dog may show more faithfulness,

courage and devotion than many men are capable of, but being an animal it is not worthy to harbour that mysterious and sublime entity, a human 'soul'.

This is one of the extreme views that the Buddha deplored. At the other end of the scale we have the materialist who believes that man's superiority is nothing but the result of possessing an opposable thumb. If we point out to him that the apes also have opposable thumbs, but this has not enabled them to paint Rembrandt's pictures or think out Spinoza's philosophy, his faith in his theory — which is no more than a reaction against supernaturalism — remains unshaken. Human superiority, for him, lies solely in the development of mental activity stimulated by the ability to manipulate objects. It is somewhere between these two extremes that we have to seek the truth.

The realms of existence are not clearly-defined areas separated by impassable barriers; they impinge upon one another and their borders are as indefinite and fluid as the political divisions on a map of Europe. The human and the sub-human worlds exist side by side physically, and there are points where they touch one another on the psychic level. But there is a pride in being human which may prevent us from acknowledging this, just as in some people there is pride in belonging to a particular nation or race, or having a skin of a different colour from that of other human beings. Under the influence of this pride, which is often quite unconscious, we tend to exaggerate the differences that we perceive and add to them totally imaginary ones. Man, the intelligent ape who has not yet succeeded in working out a plan for living without war, persecution, exploitation and oppression, wants to feel that there is an essential and unchanging difference in kind between himself and other creatures. And even when he asserts in capital letters that *ALL LIFE IS ONE*, he is not willing to believe that if a man through his own moral failure loses his human status his Karmic force can produce a being on a lower level more appropriate to it.

But as a Thai Bhikkhu to whom I put this question for his personal opinion just after writing the above, said: 'There are times when a man is an animal in his mind. If his thoughts are again and again on that low level, and if his last thought-moment at death is of the same kind, why should not its product in the new arising be



animal?' This sums up the Buddhist position better than many volumes of scholarly argument.

For we see that there are great differences between men, which can be understood without the need of symbolism: between the mind of the great creative genius and the idiot the distance is great, as is that between the idiot and the ape. Where, then, is the barrier that cannot be crossed? Heinrich Heine wrote : '..... the disproportion between body and soul torments me somewhat ..... and metempsychosis often is the subject of my meditation. Who may know in what tailor now dwells the soul of Plato; in what school master the soul of Caesar! Who knows! Possibly the soul of Pythagoras occupies the poor candidate who failed in the examination due to his inability to prove the Pythagorean theory.'<sup>12</sup>

This difficulty of the nature of a 'soul' in relation to the total personality is one that cannot be resolved. The Upanishads attempt to dispose of it by asserting that the Ātman is completely independent of the phenomenal being, a something that remains unchanged and unaffected by all the thoughts, activities and transformations of the continuing process that we know as personality. But just how unsatisfactory this is becomes apparent when we ask ourselves: If that is the case, what ontological function does the 'soul' perform; or alternatively, what significance has the phenomenal personality in the order of moral values? A something that exists apart from my own existence, a 'Knower' or 'Spectator' that does not form any part of my personality-complex or participate in any of its vicissitudes or achievements has simply no connection with me at all. If it exists, it does so as part of the world that is Not-me, and to call it 'my soul' is like calling somebody else's head my own. A statement of that kind can be made, but it carries no meaning. The Vedantic view is therefore subject to the same philosophical objection as Plato's theory of Transcendence and Immanence: that it postulates a real world (of soul) utterly remote and aloof from the familiar world (of phenomenal personality), so that existence falls into two halves between which there is not, and cannot ever be, any connection.

But Dr. Roos continues: 'This great and fundamental difference between the members of the human and animal kingdoms makes it

impossible that an animal body could be occupied by a human soul, i.e., a mind-being, even if the latter were heavily loaded with the karmic effect (*vāsanā*)<sup>13</sup> of a long series of lives dedicated to evil actions. Reincarnations are governed by the need for dissipating the karmic *vāsanās*, which are stored in the mind (*ālaya vijñāna*) and it is the force of attraction exercised by all the *vāsanās* that selects a suitable vehicle for the next rebirth, a vehicle through which the greatest possible amount of karmic debts will be paid off and karmic credits will be collected. At the point in the rebirth cycle where the return to life on Earth becomes imperative the human Ego will be attracted to a family most suitable from the point of view of the karma of the Ego as well as of the future parents. But there would be no attraction between the Ego and members of a sub-human kingdom because there would not be a possibility for the elimination of *vāsanās*, which can only take place under laws and conditions similar to those under which *vāsanās* are deposited in the *ālaya vijñāna*. Therefore the fruits of acts committed in a human existence on earth must be harvested in a human existence on earth. This, then, is the principal factor why rebirth into sub-human kingdoms does not take place.'

To put this line of reasoning into its proper perspective it is necessary to observe, first of all, that the law of Karma (as cause) and Vipāka (effect) is the statement of a purely automatic process. In the psycho-ethical order of events it is the equivalent of physical laws such as that of thermo-dynamics, gravitation and all the other principles which operate automatically in the material universe as essentials of its structure. It is not a law designed by a benevolent but punitive Providence for the purpose of *teaching* mankind, any more than is the law of gravity. It belongs to the order of cosmic necessity and exists in itself, whether there are minds that can understand it and profit by it or not, or whether some are able to do so, while others cannot. Therefore the argument that the suffering of animals does not serve any useful purpose from the standpoint of Karma-Vipāka, because they cannot learn from it at the time of experiencing its action, is quite irrelevant. If the argument had the cogency that Dr. Roos attributes to it, it would be equally applicable to mentally-defective human beings, placing

12. 'The North Sea', quoted in 'Reincarnation; an East-West Anthology'.

13. Properly speaking, karmic effects are Vipāka. The word *vāsanā* means only an impression made upon the mind, a recollection from the past (*pubba-vāsanā*).

them also outside the realm in which Karma and its results are meaningful.

In the second place, and as a direct consequence of this, we have to recognise that some lives are, to employ the terminology of human values, merely 'expiatory' and nothing more. The animal, like the morally irresponsible human being, is simply a passive experiencer of the results of bad karma: it can neither learn from the experience nor can it originate fresh good karma, except perhaps in some of the rare cases among the higher animals that I have mentioned earlier. Even this slender possibility of originating fresh good karma does not exist for beings reborn in the realms of extreme suffering, the Nirayas. And since the law of 'as above, so below' is also valid, we see that at the other end of the scale the beings reborn in the Deva or Brahma-lokas are simply enjoying the kind of happiness that results from their particular good karmas, without being able to originate any fresh karma so long as they remain in those realms. In fact, the human sphere is the only one in which it is possible to act karmically, because it is in this world alone that beings have moral responsibility and moral choice. Just as an animal is unaware that it is suffering the results of past *akusala-karma*, so the Deva or Brahma may not be conscious that he is enjoying his exalted state because of his past good actions. In the Brahmajāla Sutta (Dīgha Nikāya, I) it is related that Mahā Brahma himself was not aware that he had arisen spontaneously in that state as the result of actions done in a previous life. And since he was the first to arise spontaneously (*opapātika*) at the beginning of the new world-cycle, he believed himself to be the creator of all who arose in it subsequently, a false theory which the other beings adopted in their turn. It was thus that ignorance of rebirth and of the law of Karma-vipāka led to the belief in a personal Creator.

The Buddhist analysis of Karma divides it into the following classes:

1. Weighty (*garuka*) Karma, and
2. Habitual (*āciṇṇaka*) Karma. Both of these produce their results earlier than does Karma of lesser moral significance or Karma that is more rarely performed;

3. Death-proximate (*marañāsanna*) Karma, which controls the last thought-moment at death and produces the reflex of some past good or bad Karma, giving way immediately to its result, the rebirth-linking consciousness (*paṭisandhi-viññāṇa*) of the next life;
4. Stored-up (*katattā*) Karma, which is an unexpended potential made up of good or bad Karma in a state of suspension, awaiting a favourable opportunity to produce its result. This is Karma which has been so far prevented from ripening by some Weighty or Habitual Karma that has taken precedence over it.

Every being possesses a residue of Stored-up Karma, which will come into effect and duly bear its results in the absence of any fresh karma. It is thus that a being whose last existence has been in the animal realm can, when the bad Karma producing that existence has become exhausted, take birth again in the human world. Rebirth as a human being once more does not depend upon the Karma of the animal, but upon the Stored-up good Karma of a previous human life, the ripening of which has been arrested by some weighty evil Karma which must have taken effect at the last thought moment of a human life and produced an animal rebirth.

Let us assume that a human being of mixed good and bad Karma has a last thought-moment in which unwholesome Karma predominates, because it is either Weighty or Habitual Karma. As the result of this, his rebirth-linking consciousness arises in an animal womb, as being the most appropriate level for its manifestation. What happens thereafter is that the resultant current of consciousness is carried on in the subhuman form until the karmic impulse that has been generated is exhausted. We will also assume that the animal is totally incapable of producing Karma, either good or bad, but that it is passively working out the results of the human being's bad Karma, and nothing more. For it must be granted that if the animal's lack of moral sense prevents it from originating good Karma, its acts of killing, for food and for self-protection, must also be karmically neutral.<sup>14</sup> If at the

14. This assumption is made solely for the purpose of covering Dr. Roos' argument. As I have suggested, there is reason to suppose that some animals do in fact have a marginal choice between good and bad actions. If this is indeed the case, the situation is modified in favour of the animals, but not fundamentally altered.

animal's death its sufferings have measured up to the karmic requirements, the debt has been paid, and the unexpended potential of Stored-up good Karma will bring about another rebirth in human form.

There is another Buddhist classification of Karma according to function, which helps us to understand this. It is as follows:

1. Regenerative (*janaka*) Karma. This is the Karma which produces the mental and corporeal aggregates at rebirth and keeps on producing them during the life-continuity.
2. Supportive (*upatthambhaka*) Karma. This is Karma which is not reproductive, but sustains Karma-results (*vipāka*) which have already been produced.
3. Counteractive (*upapīḷaka*) Karma. This is Karma which has the power to counteract or inhibit the results of other Karma.
4. Destructive (*upacchedaka*) Karma. This is Karma which takes complete ascendancy over weaker Karma, nullifying it and substituting its own results instead.

These classifications taken together show how a Weighty Karma may function as Destructive or Counteractive Karma in relation to weaker karmic impulses, and how it may furnish the Regenerative Karma for the rebirth. By this means it may produce a being on a lower or higher level than the human, until such time as its *Vipāka* is expended, when, if no new Karma has been produced, the Stored-up Karma comes into operation. Throughout this process there is no 'being' that transmigrates; instead, there is a series of mind-body aggregations which arise as the result of Karma in now one, now another of the Thirty-one Abodes which comprise the five (or six) realms of rebirth.

The metaphysical teachers of Mahāyāna were extremely careful to preserve the Sunyatā (Void) doctrine which distinguishes Buddhism from the Vedānta of the Upanishads. This is most evident in their treatment of the *Ālaya-vijñāna*, which must on no account be interpreted as a static entity. When they speak of *vāsanās* being deposited in the *Ālaya-vijñāna* the intention is always to give an account of memory, not to provide an equivalent

for the 'soul'. The usual rendering of *Ālaya-vijñāna* is 'Storehouse of Consciousness,' but 'Storehouse-consciousness' is closer to the meaning of the Sanskrit term. There is no entity in which consciousness is 'stored', but there is a mode of consciousness which makes memories accessible, and it is this that can be described as consciousness acting as a 'storehouse'. The Sunyatā of Mahāyāna was at first identical with the *suññatā* of the Theravāda texts; it is that aspect of *Anattā* which is summed up in the stanza.

No 'doer' of the deeds is found,  
No one who ever reaps their fruits;  
Empty phenomena roll on:  
This view alone is right and true.

Visuddhi Magga, XIX.

The Mahāyānasamgraha of Asaṅga says: 'The consciousness receptacle profound and subtle, like a violent current, proceeds with all its germs (*sarvabījo*). Fearing that fools (*bālāna*) should imagine it to be a "soul" (*ātmā*), I have not revealed it to them.' (1. 133b 28).<sup>15</sup> To which the commentary adds: 'I have not revealed it to fools: I have not revealed it to those who embrace the view of "Self" (*ātma-dṛṣṭi*).'<sup>16</sup> But in the same work it is stated that 'In the Vehicle of the Srāvakas, equally, the consciousness-receptacle is mentioned under synonyms (*paryāya*).'<sup>17</sup> The commentary explains: 'In the school (*nikāya*) of the Ārya Sthavira they also call that consciousness by the name of *Bhavaṅga*. It is by reason, be it of the *Bhavaṅga*, be it of the retrospective thought, that they (the six consciousnesses) die.' Prof. Etienne Lamotte comments on this: 'I understand: When the six consciousnesses die, it is by reason of the *Bhavaṅga* into which they subside, or of the retrospective thought which makes them subside into it.'

In Theravāda the *Bhavaṅga* is the subconscious life-continuum, of which Nyanatiloka Thera writes: '*Bhavaṅga* (*bhava-anga*) is in Abhidhamma-commentaries explained as the foundation or condition (*kāraṇa*) of existence (*bhava*), as the *sine qua non* of life, and that in the form of a process, lit. a "flux" or "stream" (*sota*), in which since time immemorial all impressions and experiences are as

15. From the French translation by Prof. Etienne Lamotte, *La somme du Grand Vehicule d'Asanga*, Louvain, 1938. Tome II, p. 14.

16. *Ibid.*

17. *Ibid.* p. 26.

it were, stored up or better said functioning, but as such concealed to full consciousness, from where however they as subconscious phenomena occasionally emerge and approach the threshold of full consciousness, or crossing it become fully conscious. This so-called "subconscious life stream" or undercurrent of life, is that by which might be explained the faculty of memory etc.<sup>18</sup>

The Ālaya-vijñāna, therefore, is nothing but the *Bhavaṅga* of the Theravāda Abhidhamma, and it is precisely in the same sense that it is understood by the philosophical schools of Mahāyāna, as we learn from no less authority than Asaṅga. It is in popular Mahāyāna Buddhism, to which Anātman is an 'esoteric' teaching, that this interpretation of *Bhavaṅga* under the name of Ālaya-vijñāna has become practically indistinguishable from the concept of 'Self' or 'Soul', a misunderstanding that has not taken root in Theravāda.

So much for what Dr. Roos hopefully describes as 'the principal factor why rebirth into sub-human kingdoms does not take place'. To a true understanding of Anātman the factor does not exist. It is a chimerical product of that universal obsession which Buddhism calls *Sakkāya-diṭṭhi*, the Delusion of Self.

'It may still be useful,' Dr. Roos continues, 'to point out that rebirth into an animal body *would not be a punishment* for one who, during his human existence, had led a purely animal life, dedicated to pleasures of the senses, because such a rebirth would furnish uninhibited brutish enjoyments without any feeling of remorse. A punishment must have a *redeeming* feature, as otherwise it would be merely an act of revenge.' This again underlines the basic misconception which distorts Dr. Roos' view. At every point his argument seeks to satisfy the human desire to find a system of rewards and punishments in the operations of Karma and Vipāka. There seems to be an unspoken assumption that the whole thing was designed by somebody 'to improve man and correct his morals'. No doubt, the results of Karma assume, in human eyes, the form of prizes and retributions, but Buddhism does not assert that the system has been devised to that end. There is no Celestial Schoolmaster who doles out justice to a humanity he is committed to educating and reforming. The experiences

18. *Nyanatiloka, Buddhist Dictionary.*

produced by Karma are the consequences of a purely automatic and impersonal law, which continues on its way, whether men learn anything from it or not. Furthermore, a situation that in one set of circumstances appears to be a punishment could well seem, in another context, to be a reward. Man becomes what he desires to be, and if his desires is to live as an animal, and he obtains it, his basic ignorance (*avijjā*) could make it seem to him that he had been rewarded — that is, of course, if as an animal he were capable of thinking about his situation. The fact that an animal cannot look back on its previous life as a human being and congratulate itself upon being released from moral restrictions, but instead, takes its present liberty for granted, surely removes the idea of reward from the situation as certainly as it does that of punishment. No man, however depraved, would wish to be an animal; but he might desire to enjoy an animal's licence *with a human consciousness*. Only then would it seem to him that he was being benefited.

Dr. Roos' line of thought also overlooks the important truth that 'rewards' and 'punishments' are relative concepts. Let us suppose, for example, that one were to see a man being mercilessly flogged. The natural conclusion would be that he was undergoing punishment for some grave crime. But in fact the supposed victim might be a masochist who had paid a substantial sum to obtain his peculiar form of enjoyment. The case of a man who derives pleasure from physical pain which a normal person would shrink from is not quite on all fours with that of the human being reborn as an animal, but at least it exposes the fallacy of thinking in terms of rewards and punishments where a law is concerned which is as indifferent to them as are the stars in their courses.

Therefore Buddhism speaks of painful results of unskilful actions (*akusala-kamma*) rather than of 'punishments' for them. As I have indicated, the idea of punishment implies a punisher, the Celestial Schoolmaster, or a personal Judge, with whose justice a certain amount of vengeance must always be mixed. 'Vengeance is mine, saith the Lord.' Thus it can be seen that all Dr. Roos' assumptions spring from the same source: a conflict between the Buddhist doctrine of Karma and unresolved theistic components which are alien to the structure of Buddhist thought.

The conclusion of his argument is an attempt to 'interpret the occasional statements found in Buddhist and Sanskrit literature

which seem to imply a rebirth in a sub-human entity'. These, he says, 'nearly always refer to the process of transmigration which should not be mistaken for reincarnation. Transmigration means the constant exchange of physical and psychic elements with the surrounding space... All this material transmigrates incessantly among the members of the various kingdoms and particles proceeding from the animal part of our nature will easily find a lodging in a corresponding beast because of the law of affinities which governs the process of transmigration'.

It would be pointless to reproduce all that Dr. Roos says on this subject, since it has no counterpart in any aspect of Buddhist philosophy or teaching. As part of a metaphysic of his own it may have some validity, but to connect it with Buddhism can only be misleading. Dr. Roos is entitled, as we all are, to work out his own system of thought. What none of us is entitled to do, however, is to attribute our own conjectures to great sages of the past who would be profoundly astonished by them. As I have pointed out elsewhere and often before, it is more honest (and less confusing to others) to disagree with the Buddha and his Teaching than to invent a system of one's own and call it Buddhism. This is in fact what the esoteric interpreters try to do in the matter of animal rebirth and the theory of transmigrating souls. To wind up the discussion of Dr. Roos' article I only wish to repeat that it has not been my intention to try to prove that animal rebirth actually takes place. The question of whether it does or not lies in a different area of inquiry and calls for other terms of reference for debate. In the absence of any possibility of obtaining empirical evidence there could be no profit in pursuing it. What I have tried to show is that rebirth in sub-human forms of life is a part of Buddhist doctrine, and that Buddhism is not in any way inconsistent in holding it. If, incidentally I have also shown that the idea of rebirth as an animal does not do violence to any genuinely philosophical view of human personality, I am content in having achieved rather more than I set out to do.

## X

### DID THE BUDDHA TEACH REBIRTH?

(Anattā and Rebirth)

Readers of English-language newspapers in Ceylon have recently been following with interest a controversy that has flared up in one of them, on the issue of whether the Buddha taught rebirth or not.

To a Buddhist it must be a matter of astonishment that such a dispute could arise — not because rebirth is a dogma of Buddhism but because without it Buddhism itself would have no meaning. The Buddha taught the Dhamma for the ending of suffering. If suffering automatically comes to an end with the dissolution of the physical body, it is pointless to commit oneself to a rigorous system of self-discipline and purification, such as Buddhism calls for, in order to free oneself from suffering. Such a course would serve no purpose but to add more suffering to life for it is nonsense to pretend that the Buddhist way of purification — or any religious system of self-improvement — is an easy path to follow. Much easier is the way of the world, which is *not* the way to Nibbāna. An argument might be made out for the social utility of the Five Precepts regardless of Kamma, but who would wish to inflict upon himself the pains of the first attempts at meditation if there were no higher goal in sight?

If everything ends with death, the entire teaching of Kamma and Vipāka, or actions and results, goes by the board. It is a matter of common observation that evil deeds do not always bring their retribution in the present life, nor good ones their reward. This, in fact, is the chief argument of Buddhism (as it is of the rationalist) against the belief in a just and benevolent God.

It is precisely this teaching of a moral law operating from life to life which forms the greater part of the Buddha's instruction both to Bhikkhus and laity. All the other doctrines of Buddhism revolve around it, even that of the means by which Nibbāna is attained. For what is Nibbāna but the cessation of the beginningless round of existence, linked with actions and their results?