A COMPARATIVE SURVEY OF BUDDHIST AND WESTERN CRITIQUES OF METAPHYSICS

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SUMMARY

Metaphysics of stasis affirms the existence of unchangeable independent entities. In this sense of metaphysics, early Buddhist philosophy is anti-metaphysical. It does not affirm the existence of metaphysical entities like God, the soul and substance that underlie the world. This negative attitude towards metaphysics of stasis can be explained within the larger context of the goal of Buddhism. The major aim of Buddhism is to eliminate suffering in all its shades and to enable individuals attain nirvana. This attempt to eliminate suffering goes a long way towards eliminating metaphysical thinking pertaining to unchangeable entities, since such reasoning, on its own, can open a path that leads to suffering. Suffering must be averted both in theory and practice. Buddhism in furtherance of this mission to eliminate suffering advocates a certification attitude to knowledge. Such attitude leads it to empiricism.

Buddhism also teaches an ethical theory and a doctrine of change which are all geared towards achieving its goal. These concepts of change and ethics give Buddhism a framework to argue against unchangeable metaphysical concepts; it also attributes the adherence to such concepts to ignorance, which in turn serves as a hindrance to the ethical life.

A review of western philosophy also shows that metaphysics of stasis has many critics. Prominent among the critics are David Hume, Immanuel Kant and a group of philosophers called Logical Positivists of which A.J.Ayer is one. David Hume, a strong

adherent of the empiricist school, criticized metaphysics of stasis from his empirical perspective, while Immanuel Kant, whose philosophy emerged as an attempt to reconcile rationalism and empiricism, excluded it based on apriori categories of sensibility. Metaphysical conclusions pertaining to unchangeable entities, in his perspective, are products of erroneous judgements of reason. Ayer and the logical positivists with their insistence on verification, both in principle and actuality, exclude such reasoning as nonsensical.

A comparative survey of both Buddhist critiques and western critiques of metaphysics, with reference to God, the world and the soul shows that there are similarities and differences in both thoughts. Their similarities go a long way to show that they can dialogue with each other and such similarities provide a strong avenue for a continuous philosophical dialogue between the East and West.

CHAPTER ONE

1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 METAPHYSICS: TOWARDS A DEFINITION

According to an often repeated story, which apparently first arose in the sixteen century, Andronicus of Rhodes, who edited the works of Aristotle in the first century BC, was the first to use the word "metaphysics." He coined the term to describe his placement of Aristotle's work on first philosophy "after the physics." Aristotle himself described the subject of his treatise as the science of Being as such, a supremely general study of existence or reality distinct from any of the special sciences and more fundamental than them. He argued that there must be such a science, since each of the special sciences, besides having its own peculiar subject matter, made use in common with all others of certain quite general notions, such as those of identity and difference, unity and plurality. Such common notions as these would provide the topics of the general science of being, while various different kinds of existence or reality, each with its own peculiar features provide the subject matter of the more departmental studies.[1]

Many authors follow this Aristotelian step of defining metaphysics as the science of Being. However, as Blackburn pointed out, this can be misleading, for there may be nothing or little to be said about Being as such. "But what is right in the idea that

[1] H.P Grice et al "Metaphysics" in *The Nature of Metaphysics*, (London: Macmillan, New York: St Martin's, 1957) p.1-2.

metaphysics is the science of Being is that most abstract study in this abstract discipline concerns the broad nature of reality, and the possibility of its objective representation."[2] Other thinkers have also tried to define metaphysics in their own words. Alexander Baumgarten's *Metaphysics*, a popular text book, which Kant used in his courses, defined metaphysics as "the science of the first principles in human cognition."[3] Bradley on his own holds that "Metaphysics[is] an attempt to know reality as against mere appearance, or the study of first principles or ultimate truths, or again the effort to comprehend the universe, not simply piecemeal or by fragments, but somehow as a whole."[4] William Carter defines it from a narrow sense as "a field of inquiry that focuses attention upon philosophical issues concerning the general nature and structure of the world we inhabit."[5]

From the foregoing, it should be noted that metaphysics, in its minimal form, is the act of categorical description. Its subject matter is the most fundamental aspects of the way we talk and think about reality, the most fundamental features of reality as it presents itself to us. Reality then can be thought of or talked about in different ways. However, in this thesis, I will talk about reality from a transcendental perspective.

Transcendental, here, refers to unobservable principles or entities. For instance, when we say that something is green or bitter or hard, we can point to certain definite types of

[2] Simon Blackburn, ibid.

[3] Cf. Kant, *Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997) p.xvii

[4] Cf. H.P Grice et al, op.cit. ,p.2.

[5] William R. Carter, *The Elements of Metaphysics*, (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1990) p.2.

experience to which we refer by these words. If one does not know the meaning of *black*, I can always point, for instance, to a cup and say that it is of the colour that I mean. But to what, people ask, can we point to identify God or the soul? Therefore, the term metaphysics in this thesis refers to transcendental metaphysics. Transcendental metaphysics in itself refers to many concepts, like that of evil, time, space etc. However, for this thesis, I will focus on the transcendental metaphysics of stasis, that is, metaphysics with regard to unchangeable entities like the soul, the world (origin and substance) and God. Metaphysics in this thesis will therefore be construed as the metaphysics of stasis. However, this does not exhaust the idea of transcendental metaphysics or metaphysics in general.

Metaphysicians do not just assert their positions. They attempt to support them by arguments and give proofs of their conclusions. Some consideration of these proofs must form part of any enquiry into the nature of metaphysics; for it is the attempt to give a proof for his conclusion, to show by logical argument that such-and-such must be so, that chiefly distinguishes the philosophical metaphysician from the mystic, the moralist and others who express or try to express a comprehensive view of how things are or ought to be.

All theorists employ arguments and make inferences, for all are concerned to get from one place to another, move from a set of premises or collection of facts to a conclusion. However, not all theorists make the same kind of inferences, and a movement from premises to conclusion can be made according to very different sorts of rules. For

instance, while some theorists may prefer inductive arguments, others use deductive ones. These theorists can be found in the whole era of western philosophy ranging from the ancient era down to the modern and contemporary period.

In the ancient era, Plato and Aristotle can be seen as the great champions of metaphysics. Plato, on the one hand, advanced a doctrine of forms. In this doctrine, the eternal form is seen as the archetype of things in this created word. Aristotle, on the other hand, championed the idea of being qua being, substance and uncaused cause. The medieval era on its own saw philosophers like Augustine and Aquinas championing the idea of metaphysics. Being Christians, they promoted a metaphysics based on the transcendental idea of God. The modern history of metaphysics had some metaphysicians too. Prominent among them were Spinoza and Leibniz. Spinoza promoted the idea of substance while Leibniz that of monads.

1.2 AIM OF RESEARCH

All in all, these philosophers and some others following them accepted the idea of metaphysics without questioning it. They sought to build their philosophy based on these assumed and accepted metaphysical groundings. However, during the seventeenth century, metaphysics came under heavy attack from some notable philosophers. It is here that the major aim of this thesis comes into play. The major aim of this thesis then is to review the major criticisms of these philosophers against metaphysics, as construed in this research, with special reference to the world, God and the soul, with the aim of

making a comparative study of them with the Early-Buddhist anti-stand of transcendental metaphysics.[6]

Buddhist philosophy, though not a direct attack on some western metaphysical philosophers I mentioned earlier, in its teaching can be said to be anti metaphysics, akin to that of the western critics. I am seeking, therefore, to review, on the one hand, the criticisms of the western philosophers, and, on the other hand, arguments and positions of Buddhism which bear the same criticism on metaphysics. The whole aim is then to know if there can be a convergence and at the same time a divergence. From this perspective, then, the extent to which Buddhism is anti metaphysics akin to the western critics will be brought out, and the extent which it is not will also be shown.

In making a comparative study, I understand that Hume and Ayer do not subscribe to Metaphysics in the general sense of it as compared to either Kant or Buddhism, who may have shades of metaphysics in their thoughts. Therefore, my comparison does not aim to say whether the western critics are metaphysicians or not in their own right, or to claim that Buddhism does not subscribe to any kind of metaphysics. rather, the aim as I stated earlier is to compare their criticisms on a particular kind of metaphysics, namely that of stasis.

[6] Early Buddhism is also referred to by many scholars as Pali or Theravada Buddhism. Henceforth, all reference to Buddhism must be construed as Early or Pali Buddhism.

1.3 SIGNIFICANCE OF RESEARCH

The significance of this research is to promote an inter-philosophical dialogue between the east and west, by bringing out common grounds on which such a dialogue can begin. This research provides both a unity and diversity of thoughts. This thesis will help identify the strength and weakness of the other and thus open a way for complementarities of ideas.

1.4 STRUCTURE AND DESCRIPTION OF RESEARCH

This research work is structured into four chapters. The first chapter takes a clarificatory role. Here, I try to unpack the concept of metaphysics, its use and purpose. I have therefore brought up some definitions by different authors to make clear the general sense of metaphysics. I have also indicated the construal of metaphysics in this research as that of unchangeable realities with independent existence (metaphysics of stasis).

Chapter two takes up a historical review of the notable critics of western metaphysics. In this chapter I discuss the ideas of David Hume, Immanuel Kant and A.J Ayer, a Logical Positivist. I start off with Hume, who criticized metaphysics from an epistemological and psychological stand. Hume is notably an empiricist and having an empiricist world view. He asserted that objects of human reasoning can either be that of matters of facts or relations of ideas. The world is made up of matters of facts and relations of ideas. Therefore, either reasoning is about a matter of fact or it is a relation of an idea based on matters of fact. If any concept or idea does not correspond to any of these, then it cannot said to be alluding to reality, rather an act of the imagination. Hume used this empiricist

stand point to criticize all ideas about substance and primordial forms. He went further to deny any idea that connects matters of fact with an unseen cause. Causal connection then is nothing but a matter of association between ideas of the mind.

Hume also denies the existence of God. He however cited human reason and its pattern of association of ideas as the cause for the postulation of the idea of God. Hume also thinks that the soul is a psychological postulate, a bundle of perceptions. Man's delusion in accepting the claim that some perceptions endure leads him to affirm the existence of a soul which is perpetual. Hume says that the affirmation of a soul makes no sense since when perception temporarily ceases man is said to be temporarily dead such as when he or she is asleep.

After reviewing David Hume, I move on to Immanuel Kant. Kantian criticism came from his understanding of human knowledge and how it comes about. Human knowledge, Kant holds, is a product of the mind; however, it is not formed by the mind alone independent of the external world. The external world supplies the content while the mind supplies the categories through which the external world is known. It follows that the external world can only be known based on the structure of the mind which provides the adequate tools for knowledge. Kant, along this line of reasoning, holds that the mind, in its first power of sensibility—where knowledge begins, has the categories of time and space. These categories, coupled with those of the understanding, are applied on objects of the external world in churning out knowledge. Since real knowledge must conform to the categories of the mind, any purported knowledge which does not conform, at least, to

the categories of sensibility namely time and space cannot be said to be knowledge in the actual sense.

Following this kind of reasoning then, all knowledge claims to the transcendent metaphysics of stasis, namely God, the soul and substance which are not within time and space cannot pass for genuine or real knowledge. Kant holds that they cannot be known. However, he sets them aside as the erroneous judgments of reason. Reason can make erroneous judgements based on the deception of the imagination when it wanders on its own to the timeless and spaceless domains and encounter the idea of God, the soul and of substance.

After reviewing Kant, I went on to look at A.J Ayer, a member of the Logical Positivist's movement and his arguments against metaphysics, with which I conclude chapter two. Ayer and the logical positivists can be said to be the people who gave metaphysics a heavy blow. Their philosophy hinges on their verification principle. The verification principle is a principle that upholds as knowledge anything or idea that can be experimented or falls under a system whose rules are conventionally formulated. With the verification principle, all metaphysical concepts fall out of the realm of knowledge since they cannot be experimentally verified even in theory. The Logical Positivists specifically described metaphysical concepts as nonsensical.

Chapter three is a comprehensive review of the Buddhist view on metaphysics. I start with a brief historical excursus on the origin of Buddhism, namely from the history of the

Buddha. For the purpose of this research, I specifically discuss the Buddhist conception of the world, God and the soul. These conceptions are anti-metaphysical in the sense that they do not accept any higher or non-empirical existence of the world, God and the soul.

Concerning the world, Buddhism is mute on its ultimate beginning or its teleology. The idea of substance is not accepted in the Buddhist's conception of the world. Buddhism sees the world as something in a state of flux, the arising and falling away of the *Paramattha dhammas. Nama* and *Rupa* are the major *Paramattha dhammas* that arise and at the same time fall.

On the issue of God, Buddhism does not possess any theology and hence does not conceive of any absolute being or a metaphysical deity who is the cause of the universe. It also rejects the idea of an imagined God who can be used to regulate men's conduct. However, as I point out, Buddhism makes mention of gods, not in the sense of unchangeable supernatural entities, but in the sense of their physical qualities.

Having discussed the issue of God and the world, I focus on the metaphysical concept of the soul. Buddhism explicitly denies the idea of the soul in the concept of *Annata*. Buddhism and its cosmology being empirical in nature, examines the human person from the empirical perspective. From this perspective, the idea of the soul does not fit any part of the human person. Buddhism holds that if there is a soul, it should be autonomous, but since there is nothing in the human person that is so autonomous, then the soul does not exist.

In chapter four, which is the last chapter of this thesis, I delve into the comparison of the previous reviews made in chapters two and three, namely the western critics of metaphysics and the Buddhist critiques of metaphysics. In comparing them, I brought out their convergence where they exist and their divergence too. In this comparison, I start with David Hume. After the comparison of Buddhism and Hume, I also compare Buddhism and Kant. Finally, I compare Buddhism with A. J. Ayer and the logical positivists. I then sum up the thesis with a brief conclusion.

CHAPTER TWO

2.0 WESTERN CRITICS OF METAPHYSICS

As I mentioned earlier, Metaphysics, as construed in this research, has never gone unchallenged from western philosophers, its strongest critics coming from the seventeenth century down to the contemporary era. There are many critics of metaphysics. However, for the purpose of this thesis I will limit myself to three philosophers, namely, David Hume, Immanuel Kant and A. J. Ayer. I will take a closer look at their criticisms and the arguments against metaphysics with reference to the idea of God, the world and the soul.

2.1 HUME'S CRITICISM OF METAPHYSICS

David Hume (1711-76) is without doubt one of the greatest philosophers to write in English. The range of his work is wide, but he is best known today for his views on causation, induction, perception, personal identity and on the nature of morality. His major works include: *A Treatise on Human Nature*, *Essays*, *Moral*, *Political and Literary*, *Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, and *Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals*. Hume's criticism of metaphysics stems from his empiricist background. Therefore, to understand his criticism, one must look at it from the point of view of his empiricism. The basic thesis of empiricism is that legitimate human knowledge arises from what is provided to the mind by the senses. It is distinguished from the philosophical tradition of rationalism, which holds that human reason apart from

experience is a basis for some kinds of knowledge. In other words, empiricism is the doctrine that all our knowledge is derived from experience.

Hume affirmed that all the objects of human reason or enquiry may be divided into two, namely relations of ideas and matters of facts. Of the first kind are the sciences of geometry, Algebra and Arithmetic and in short, every affirmation that is either intuitively or demonstratively certain. Matters of facts, which are the second objects of human reason, are not ascertained in the same manner, nor is our evidence of their truth.[7] Hume did not deem it fit to question the judgements that uphold the existence of matters of facts; rather he took it for granted that there exist matters of facts and went on to question why we believed in the existence of bodies. In the *Treatise*, he wrote "we may ask, *what causes induce us to believe in the existence of body? But' tis in vain to ask, whether there be a body or not?* That is a point, which we must take for granted in all our reasonings."[8]

In what sense then, we may ask Hume, is it in vain to ask whether there be body or not? The obvious interpretation is that whether we like it or not, we all do as a matter of fact believe that there is a material world, even though we can give no good reason for our belief. An earlier remark by Hume in the *Treatise* supports this belief. He said that "nature has not left this to his [the sceptic's] choice, and has doubtless esteem'd it an affair of too great importance to be trusted to our uncertain reasonings and speculations."[9]

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[7] David Hume, *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, (New York: Dover Publications, 2004) p.14.

[8] David Hume, *A Treatise on Human Nature* Bk 1, (Oxford: Claredon, 1951) p.187.

[9] Ibid.

Hume maintained that our reasoning on matters of fact seems to be based on our idea of causation. And from there we deduce all other arguments that justify the existence of other realities that are not within the purview of our senses. He said:

> All reasonings concerning matter of fact seem to be founded on the relation of *Cause* and *Effect*. By means of that relation alone we can go beyond the evidence of our memory and senses. If you were to ask a man why he believes any matter of fact, which is absent; for instance that his friend is in the country, or in France; he would give you a reason; and this reason will be some other fact; as a letter received from him, or the knowledge of his former resolutions and promises. A man finding a watch or any other machine in a desert island would conclude that there had once been men in that island. All our reasonings concerning fact are of the same nature.[10]

However, Hume maintained that our seeming causal reason is a part of human nature and was acquired through experience. He said that "as a general proposition, which admits of no exception, that the knowledge of this relation is not, in any instance, attained by reasonings a priori; but arises entirely from experience."[11] With these sentences, Hume dealt a heavy blow to all the causal arguments from ancient, medieval and modern era

[10] Hume, *An Enquiry*, op.cit., p. 15.

[11] Ibid.

that opine the existence of God or a substance that cannot be experienced from the existence of matters of facts. It then means that without experiencing substance or God, their existence is nothing but an arbitrary conjecture. Hume actually affirmed this saying:

> In a word, then, every effect is a distinct event from its cause. It could not, therefore, be discovered in the cause, and the first invention or conception of it, a priori, must be entirely arbitrary. And even after it is suggested, the conjunction of it with the cause must appear equally arbitrary ….In vain, therefore, should we pretend to determine any single event, or infer any cause or effect, without the assistance of observation and experience.[12]

Hume believed that human reason has the capacity to reduce the principles productive of natural phenomena to a greater simplicity, and to resolve the many particular effects into a few general causes, by means of reasoning from analogy, experiences and observation. He asserted that "the causes of these general causes, we should in vain attempt their discovery; nor shall we be able to satisfy ourselves, by any particular explication of them."[13] From this assertion then all a priori reasoning on the immutable foundations of the world, be it the Platonic forms, or the Aristotelian Being *qua* being or the monads of Leibnitz, becomes mere acts of the imagination. Hume actually said that nothing is more free than the imagination, though it cannot exceed the original ideas

[12] Ibid., p. 17.

[13] Ibid.

furnished by sensation, either from the internal or external senses. It has unlimited power of mixing and compounding ideas in all varieties of fiction and vision.[14]

Having denied the idea of causation, Hume renders superfluous all the arguments that prove the existence of God through a causal link from God the creator to the world. He believes that humanity always look for ways to account for the more common operations of nature like the descent of heavy bodies, the growth of plants, the generation of animals, or the nourishment of bodies by food. He holds that by this act of humanity, we tend to acquire, by long habit, such turn of mind, that upon the appearance of the cause, there is an assurance of a corresponding effect, and it is hardly to be conceived that any other event could result from the said cause.[15]

However, he says:

> It is only on discovery of extraordinary phenomena, such as earthquake, pestilence, and prodigies of any kind, that they find themselves, at a loss to assign a proper cause, and to explain the manner in which the effect is produced by it. It is usual for men, in such difficulties, to have recourse to some invisible intelligent principle as the immediate cause of that event which surprises

[14] Ibid., p.8-9.

[15] Ibid., p.44.

> them, and which, they think, cannot be accounted for from the common powers of nature.[16]

Hume here argues that the sense of awe and our ignorance makes us attribute the cause of certain things to God—God being our refuge and our acknowledgement of helplessness in the face of certain events. God becomes the augmentation of our mind and capacity. He asserts that "the idea of God, as meaning an infinitely intelligent, wise, and good Being, arises from reflecting on the operations of our mind, and augmenting, without limit, those qualities of goodness and wisdom."[17] This augmentation, according to Hume, can sometimes be extended to the internal operations of the mind itself, whereby we now think that our mental vision or conception of ideas is nothing but a revelation made to us by our maker.

By describing our thoughts as the work of the creator then, when we turn our thoughts to any object and construct its image in our fancy, we then attribute the idea to a universal creator who discovers it and renders it to the mind. By doing this, we render the universe full of God and every act an act of God. In a critique specifically turned to Spinoza and pantheistic philosophers of his kind, Hume says:

> Thus according to these philosophers, every thing is full of God. Not content with the principle that nothing exists but by his will, that nothing possesses any power but by his concession: they rob

[16] Ibid., p. 44.

[17] Ibid., p.10.

> nature, and all created beings, of every power, in order to render their dependence on the Deity still more sensible and immediate. They consider not that, by this theory, they diminish, instead of magnifying, the grandeur of those attributes, which they affect so much to celebrate. It argues surely more power in the Deity to delegate a certain degree of power to inferior creatures than to produce everything by his own immediate volition. It argues more wisdom to contrive at first the fabric of the world with such perfect foresight that,of itself, and by its proper operation, it may serve all the puposes of providence, than if the great Creator were obliged every moment to adjust its parts, and animate by his breath all the wheels of that stupendous machine.[18]

Hume argues that this pantheistic view and the attribution of universal energy and operation to a supreme being are too bold to carry any conviction with them. Our human reason being narrow and limited will suspect that the arguments for the Supreme Being have stretched us beyond the limits of our faculties, despite the fact that the arguments may be logical. In the argument for the existence of the Supreme Being, the intellect has wandered into a fairy land where it leads to conclusions so extraordinary and so remote from common life and experience. Hume, therefore, concludes that we have no idea of the Supreme Being but what we learnt from reflection of our own faculties.

[18] Ibid., p.45

In the *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*, Hume proffers another argument against the existence of God, namely from the existence of evil. Hume's character, Philo, argues that the enormous amount of human and animal suffering provides good reason for believing that God does not exist. In his reply to Demea who suggested that each man feels the truth of religion within his own breast, Philo said "I am indeed persuaded that the best and indeed the only method of bringing every one to a due sense of religion, is by just representation of the misery and wickedness of men."[19] As the discussion went on, Philo said:

> Observe too the curios artifice of nature, in order to [e]mbitter the life of every living being. The stronger prey upon the weaker, and keep them in perpetual terror and anxiety. The weaker too, in their turn, often prey upon the stronger, and vex and molest them without relaxation. Consider that innumerable race of insects, which either are bred on the body of each animal, or flying about inflix their stings in him. These insects still have others still less than themselves which torment them. And thus on each hand, before and behind, above and below, every animal is surrounded with enemies, which incessantly seek his misery and d[e]struction.[20]

[19] Hume, *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*, in the *Treatise,* op.cit., p. 435.

[20] Ibid.,p.436.

Demea, however, sought to call Philo's attention that Man is the animal that is an exception, since by combination in society, he can easily master lions, tigers, and bears whose greater strength and agility naturally enable them to prey upon him. But Philo refuted him, saying that:

> On the contrary, it is here that the uniform and equal maxims of nature are most apparent. Man, it is true, by combination, surmount all his real enemies, and become master of the whole animal creation: but does he not immediately raise up to himself *imaginary* enemies, the demons of his fancy, who haunt him with superstitious terrors, becomes in their eyes, a crime: his food and repose give them umbrage and offence: his very sleep and dreams furnish new materials to anxious fear: and even death, his refuge from every other ill, presents only the dread of endless and innumerable woes. Nor does the wolf molest more the timid flock, than superstition does the anxious breast of wretched mortals.[21]

Beside the evil of superstition, Hume also mentioned that man is the greatest enemy of his own kind. He uses oppression, injustice, contempt, violence, sedition, war and a host of other evil to torment one another. Cleanthes, another interlocutor, drew Philo's attention to the fact that there are opposite phenomena of greater importance to all the evil he mentioned. Pleasures also abound in the universe. But Philo will not be persuaded. He maintained that it is never possible to prove that animal or at least human happiness in this life exceeds its misery. He also emphasized that an intermixture of good

[21] Ibid.,p. 437.

and evil is not what is expected from a God who is infinite in goodness, wisdom and power. "Why is there any misery at all in the world?" Philo questioned. "Is it from the intention of the Deity?, but he is perfectly benevolent?"[22] Philo concluded that, even if pain and misery should be compatible with the existence of a supreme being, it is not enough. Only a proof of the pure attributes of God from the mixed and confused phenomena can suffice. But meanwhile there is none.

On the issue of the soul or the self, Hume criticized the claim that posits a self or soul that endures throughout the life time. Many philosophers posit the soul as an enduring substance in which matter, the body, inheres and which survives death. Hume, however, says that we have no idea of anything except perception, and perceptions are different from each other, and since a substance, the soul, is different from perception, then we have no idea of any substance and the question as to whether the soul is material or immaterial makes no sense.[23] Hume maintained that the question on whether we have the idea of self as an unchanging reality is impossible to answer without contradiction, since there are multiple impressions. If we would have any idea of the unchangeable self, it must be one impression that gives rise to the idea. He emphasized that:

> If any impression gives rise to the idea of self, that impression must continue invariably the same, through the whole course of

[22] Ibid., p. 443.

[23] Hume, *A Treatise,* op.cit., p.234.

> our lives; since self is supposed to exist after that manner. But there is no impression constant and invariable. Pain and pleasure, grief and joy, passions and sensations succeed each other, and never all exist at the same time. It cannot, therefore, be from any of these impressions, or from any other, that the idea of self is derived; and consequently there is no such idea.[24]

Hume having disposed of any idea of self that endures argues that what ever we call self is nothing but series of perceptions that cease to exist in a state of unconsciousness such as sleep or death. He maintained that when he enters most intimately into what he calls himself, he always stumbles on some particular perception, of heat or cold, light or shade, love or hatred, pain or pleasure. He said, "I never catch myself at anytime without a perception, and never can observe anything but the perception." He therefore insists that "when my perceptions are removed for any time, as by sound sleep; so long am I insensible of myself, and may truly be said not to exist. And were all my perceptions removed by death… I should be entirely annihilated."[25]

Hume therefore concludes that what people refer to as the unchanging self is nothing but a series of perceptions united by the imagination and whenever we feign the continuous existence of the perception of our senses, to remove the interruptions or variations, we run into the notion of the self, soul or substance. Hume's conception of the self, on its

[24] Ibid., p. 251-252.

[25] Ibid.

own, has not gone without criticisms I am not going to delve into such the criticism. However, it may be pertinent to point out that some people think that Hume is wrong about the self. Among them is Roderick M. Chisholm, who writes:

> Our idea of "a mind" (if by "a mind" we mean, as Hume usually does, a person or a self [or soul]) is not an idea only of "particular perceptions." It is not the idea of the perception of love or hate and of heat or cold. It is an idea of that which loves or hates, and of that which feels cold or warm (and, of course, of much more besides). That is to say, it is an idea of an *x* such that *x* loves or *x* hates and such that *x* feels cold and *x* feels warm, and so forth.[26]

I personally think that this kind of criticism may not hold against Hume with reference to the unchangeable realities since accepting a person or self who feels will confer on him or her that status of unchangeabilitiy, unless the self who perceives I itself is also changeable.

Conclusively then, it can be said that Hume is totally anti metaphysics, as construed here. Nothing portrays this more than the remark he made in the concluding part of *An Enquiry*, he said:

> When we run over libraries, persuaded of these principles, what havoc must we make? If we take in our hand any volume; of

[26] Roderick M. Chisholm, " On the Observability of the Self," *Philosophy and Phenomenological* Research, Vol.XXX (September 1969), p.9. Quoted in William R Carter, op. cit., p.115.

> divinity or school metaphysics, for instance; let us ask, does it contain any abstract reasoning concerning quantity or number? No. Does it contain any experimental reasoning concerning matter of fact and existence? No. Commit it then to the flames: for it can contain nothing but sophistry and illusion.[27]

2.2 KANTIAN CRITICISM OF METAPHYSICS

Kant, the philosopher of Könisgsberg, is one of the greatest philosophers of the eighteenth century. There is hardly an area in philosophy which he did not make massive and profound contributions, including metaphysics, philosophy of mind, epistemology, ethics and aesthetics. His major works include *Critique of Pure Reason*, *Critique of Practical Reason*, *Critique of Judgement* and *Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics*.

Kant's critique of metaphysics cannot be fully understood without understanding the starting point of his philosophy. Kant's philosophy came at a time when rationalists and empiricists were arguing about the source of knowledge. It is on this note that he sought to clarify the actual source of knowledge. The fundamental problem for Kant, then, became the problem of knowledge. What is knowledge and how is it possible? What are the boundaries of human reason?

Knowledge always appears in the form of judgements in which something is affirmed or denied. But judgements according to Kant:

[27] Hume, *An Enquiry*, op. cit., p. 107.

> May have any origin whatsoever, or be constituted in whatever manner according to their logical form, and yet there is nonetheless a distinction between them according to their content, by dint of which they are either merely *explicative* and add nothing to the content of the cognition, or *ampliative* and augment the given cognition; the first may be called *analytic* judgements, the second *synthetic*.[28]

In an analytical judgement, the predicate merely elucidates what is already contained in the subject: eg, body is an extended thing. However, Kant does not consider analytic judgements as knowledge. If any judgement is to qualify as knowledge, it must be synthetic, that is, it must add something to the predicate, extend our prior knowledge, not merely elucidating it. Eg., all bodies have specific gravity. In effect, analytic judgement does not extend our knowledge; it merely elucidates what is already known in the subject or sentence.

Also not all synthetic judgements give us knowledge: some are derived from experience and are not apodictic. They inform us, for example, that an object has such and such qualities and such and such properties or behaves in a certain manner, but not that it must have these qualities or behave so.

[28] Kant I, *Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics*, trans and ed by Gary Hatfield, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997) p.16.

In other words, such judgements are lacking in necessity: reason does not compel their acceptance, as it compels the acceptance of mathematical propositions. Again, they are lacking in universality: we cannot say because some objects of a class have certain qualities, that all have them. Judgements lacking in universality and necessity, or a posteriori judgements are not knowledge. To be knowledge, a synthetic judgement must be necessary, and it must be universal and apriori.

Kant's claim, then, is that knowledge consists of synthetic a priori judgements. This is so because synthetic a priori judgements are always universal and certain. Analytic judgements are always a priori; we know without going to experience that all extended things are extended; such judgements are based on the principle of contradiction alone.[30] Synthetic a posteriori judgements add to our prior knowledge, but are not certain, the information they yield is uncertain and problematic. Examples of synthetic judgement are "cats are black," "cars move fast." Kant holds that we demand apodictic certainty in our sciences, and such certainty is possessed only by synthetic a priori judgements. He located such judgements in the studies like mathematics and basic principles of physics. The problem then is how are synthetic a priori judgements possible?

Knowledge presupposes a mind, and the overall structure of Kant's critical philosophy, as seen in the *Critique of Pure Reason* and *The Prolegomena*, depends upon his distinction between three fundamental irreducible powers of the mind. Firstly, we have the capacity to receive or register sensory items such as sensations, impressions and sense data.

[30] Ibid.

Kant's term for such sensory item is "intuitions", and he calls the capacity to register them "sensibility." Secondly, we have capacities of an essentially intellectual kind, involving the power to conceptualize, to think and to judge. Kant assigns such abilities to what he calls "the understanding", a faculty which is responsible for our ability to use concepts. Thirdly, we have the capacity of reasoning by which we are able to infer logically, to draw valid conclusions. Sensibility, according to Kant, is largely passive: sensations and intuitions are things we undergo or that happen to us. However, understanding and reason are essentially active: concepts are things we use, and of course thinking and reasoning are things we do.

Kant is adamant about two claims. The first is that sensibility and understanding are quite distinct. They have their own operations, principles and functions. The second is that in all knowledge whatsoever that is available to us, both sensibility and understanding – both intuitions and concepts - must be involved. Kant categorically denies, in other words, that we can have any knowledge that is purely sensory or exclusively conceptual. As he puts it "thoughts without content are empty, intuitions without concepts are blind."[31] Knowledge would be impossible without the cooperation of sensation and perception on the one hand, and thinking and understanding on the other hand. However, despite the fact that both the understanding and sensibility cooperate to give us knowledge, knowledge itself begins from the senses. Kant says that "everything that is to

[31] Kant I, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans by Norman Kemp Smith, (New York: St Martin's, 1965) p.93.

be given to us as object must be given in intuition. But all our intuition happens only by means of the senses; the understanding intuits nothing, but only reflects."[32]

Since everything that is given must be through the senses, the senses then serve as the main conduit for the raw materials of what will be regarded as knowledge. Kant however said that every sensation must be rooted in space and time; it must have a definite place in space and date in time. In relation to other sensations, it must be apprehended in definite spatial order and arrangement and come before, after, or at the same time as other sensations. Time and space then become the mode in which sensibility takes place. Kant says:

> During an investigation of the pure elements of human cognition (containing nothing empirical), after long reflection I succeeded first of all in reliably distinguishing and separating the pure elementary concepts of sensibility (space and time) from those of the understanding.[34]

With the sensibility having the pure concepts of space and time, it then means that we must experience things in no other way than in the mode of space and time. Kant argued then that since we can only experience things in this order, we cannot know things as they are but as they appear to us, namely in the order of space and time. "Because the

[32] Kant, *Prolegomena*, op.cit.,p. 40.

[34] Ibid., p. 77.

senses, in accordance with what has just been proven, never in no single instance enable us to cognize things in themselves, but only in their appearances, and as these are mere representations of sensibility."[35] Through his emphasis on the categories of sensibility, Kant, like Hume, dealt a heavy blow on the subject of metaphysics of stasis, since the objects of such metaphysical cognition are not empirical. It also follows that since the understanding cannot function on its own without the data from the senses, it cannot provide metaphysical knowledge.

Kant also emphasized this when he said:

> Consequently, even the pure concepts of understanding have no meaning at all if they should depart from objects of experience and be referred to things in themselves (noumena). They serve as it were only to spell out appearances, so that they can be read as experience; the principles that arise from their relation to the sensible world serve our understanding for use in experience only; beyond this there are arbitrary connections without objective reality whose possibility cannot be cognized a priori and whose relation to objects cannot, through any example, be confirmed or even made intelligible, since all examples can be taken only from some possible experience or other and hence the objects of these concepts can be found nowhere else but in a possible experience.[36]

[35] Ibid., p. 40.

[36] Ibid.,p.66.

Therefore, without a mind that perceives in a certain way (space and time) and thinks in certain ways (the categories of the understanding), there will not be a universal and necessary knowledge of objects of experience. Knowledge then becomes the application of pure concepts of the understanding, or categories, to objects furnished us by the senses which are perceived as spatial and temporal. Metaphysics does not fall into this category and is therefore not knowledge.

Kant, like Hume, holds that the imagination can sometimes engage itself in daydreaming, every now and then, and lands itself in metaphysical thinking that has no root in experience. The imagination, he says, can be excused if it daydreams. However, the understanding can never be forgiven when it daydreams, since it should engage in thinking rather than daydreaming which leads to the wrong conclusion of reason, when it affirms the existence of the objects of metaphysics. The understanding, Kant says, begins all this daydreaming—not cautiously holding itself inside the limits of experience—very innocently and chastely. First, it puts in order the elementary cognitions that belong to it before all experience but that must nonetheless always have their application in experience. Gradually, it removes these constraints, and now reference is made to newly invented forces in nature, soon thereafter to beings outside nature.[37] This erroneous act of the understanding in day dreams, Kant says, lures young thinkers to Metaphysics.

In his discussion on the transcendental dialectic, Kant points out that the faculty only have an inference from the union of the ideas that come from the senses and the

[37] Ibid., p. 71.

understanding. But its judgment will be erroneous when the understanding has been erroneously influenced by sensibility. As he puts it:

> Now since we have no source of knowledge besides these two [senses and understanding], it follows that error is brought about solely by the unobserved influence of sensibility on the understanding, through which it happens that the subjective grounds of the judgement enter into union with the objective grounds and make the latter deviate from their true function….[38]

Such erroneous judgements that obscure the true functions of the senses and understanding, Kant refers to as transcendental illusions.[39] These transcendental illusions are not intended for any use in experience. However, such judgements refuse to be discarded even after they have been detected as invalid in the experiential world. This obduracy is due to the fact that they obeyed all the "fundamental rules and maxims for the employment of our reason."[40] There is no longer the possibility of eliminating transcendental illusions at the level of reasoning; this is because reason only makes a logical deduction from what has been presented to it by the senses and the understanding.

Transcendental illusions Kant says rest on subjective principles which foist themselves upon us as objective and reason has no option to make an inference from these

[38] I Kant, *Critique* op. cit p.298.

[39] Ibid.

[40] Ibid., p.299.

transmuted subjective principles—a transmutation from subjectivity to objectivity, what can thus be referred to as pseudo objective principles. In making judgements from these transmuted principles, reason lands itself in either of these three deceptive pseudo-rational conclusions, namely, (a) paralogism, which refers to the idea of the soul as substance, spiritual, immortal etc or (b) antinomy, which refers to a judgement that can be affirmed in either way, positive or negative, a thesis and an anti-thesis, examples are the origin of the world in time, every composite substance being composed of simple parts or (c) an *ens entium* that is a being of all beings, say, God.[41]

We experience reality as it appears to us, namely through the categories of sensibility (space and time) and those of the understanding, Kant did not deny that how reality appears to us may not be how it is in itself. He says that, in fact, "if we view the objects of the senses as mere appearances, as is fitting, then we thereby admit at the very same time that a thing in itself underlies them, although we are not acquainted with this thing as it may be constituted in itself, but only with its appearances."[42] Kant therefore toes the platonic line by dividing the world into two, namely the knowable world (phenomena) which is the world of appearances and the unknowable world (noumena) which is the world of things as they are. Objects of metaphysics belong to the unknowable world.

It is on this note that Kant emphasized that we can be completely indifferent whether the soul is a simple substance or not, for we are unable through any possible experience to

[41] Ibid., p.328ff.

[42] Kant, *Prolegomena*, op.cit., p. 8.

make the concept of a simple being sensorily intelligible. Therefore, the concept itself is completely empty. This also goes for all the concepts with regard to the beginning of the world or its eternity. However, the concept of the soul can only be intelligible in the context of appearances, and temporality and nothing beyond that. As Kant argues:

> If, therefore, we want to infer the persistence of the soul from the concept of soul as substance, this can be valid of the soul only for the purpose of possible experience, and not of the soul as a thing in itself and beyond all possible experience. But life is the subjective condition of all possible experience: consequently, only the persistence of the soul during life can be inferred, for the death of a human being is the end of all experience as far as the soul as an object of experience is concerned (provided that the opposite has not been proven, which is the very matter in question). Therefore the persistence of the soul can be proven only during the life of a human being (which proof will be granted us), but not after death.[43]

As it goes for the soul, so it also goes for the concept of God. In the first instance, Kant warns that we should refrain from all explanations of the organization of nature drawn from the will of a supreme being, because this will no longer be natural philosophy but an

[43] Ibid., p. 90-91.

admission that we have come to the end of it.[44] From this point of view , Kant buried any cosmological argument for the existence of God, that is, arguments that tend to draw the existence of God from the nature of the world, especially that of Aquinas from the design of the world. What happens in our conception of God is nothing but a hypostatization of the experiential human qualities.

The *deistic* concept, Kant says, is a wholly pure concept of reason, which however represents only a thing that contains every reality, that is, an attempt to proffer a unity of all things, without being able to determine a single one of those realities, because for that an example would have to be borrowed from the sensible world, in which case we will always have to do only with an object of the senses, and not with something completely heterogeneous which cannot be an object of the senses at all. For instance, we will attribute understanding to it, but we have no concept of understanding except the one like our own, that is, one such that intuitions must be given to it through the senses and that busies itself with bringing those intuitions under rules for the unity of consciousness. However, we tend to avoid anthropomorphism by not transposing reason to the deity as a property onto itself, but only onto the relation of that being to the sensible world.[45]

From the foregoing, it will be right to say that Kant is arguing that all meaningful uses of language, and all thought, presupposes a certain constant background or context, and they

[44] Ibid., p. 85.

[45] Ibid., p. 112.

lose all sense and meaning when they are extended outside this context. It is on this note that he warned:

> We will thereby avoid using the property of reason in order to think God…. We thereby admit that the supreme being, as to what it may be in itself, is for us wholly inscrutable and that it cannot at all be thought by us in a determinate manner; and we are thereby prevented from making any transcendent use of the concepts that we have of reason as an efficient cause (by means of willing) in order to determine the divine nature through properties that are in any case always borrowed only from human nature, and so from losing ourselves in crude or fanatical concepts, and, on the other hand, we are prevented from swamping the contemplation of the world with hyperphysical modes of explanation according to concepts of human reason that we have transposed onto God….[46]

All said, it is pertinent to point out that Kant is not an atheist nor totally skeptical on the issue of God or the immortality of the soul like Hume. We can never have knowledge, in the scientific sense, of the existence of God or the immortality of the soul. However, Kant opines that these concepts have real or practical values. Our reason commands moral laws, that is, laws that have no other motives other than worthiness of being happy and not just happiness, which is the satisfaction of all our desires in respect of their

[46] Ibid., 113.

manifoldness, their degree and duration.[47] These moral laws, Kant says, are necessary. The necessity of the moral laws has certain implications for God and morality. The laws tell us to act, so that we will deserve some happiness; this is a necessary practical law—law of freedom. Since reason commands this, it follows that we may hope for happiness.

Morality and happiness are inseparably connected, but they are connected in idea only. Now, if God is the author of the natural order, it is legitimate to hope that this natural order is a moral order, or rather, that in such a natural order happiness will accompany morality. Our reason compels us to regard ourselves as belonging to a moral world-order in which happiness and morality are connected. But in the world of the sense which shows nothing but phenomena, a connection between morality and happiness is not revealed, and therefore, we shall have to assume a future world in which the connection does exist. God, therefore, and a future life are two presuppositions which, according to the principles of pure reason, cannot be separated from the moral law, which reason imposes upon us.

Kant offers what may be regarded as a moral proof of God's existence. The moral proof of God's existence starts from the practical moral situation in which an individual feels the force of moral obligation and acknowledges the authority of the moral law. This is not a fact, but something personally experienced. The person concerned is in a special kind of predicament, one in which he finds himself constrained to admit that he ought to take a certain kind of action whether he wants to or not. He knows that he should obey the injunctions of morality; the problem is whether by doing so he will produce a better

[47] Kant I, *Critique*, op.cit., p.636.

world? Following the will is wholly within his power, altering the actual state of affairs so that things are more as they should be is not.

The moral agent acts in circumstances which are not generally of his own choosing and over which he can at best exercise a very limited control. He is forced to rely on the cooperation of others if he is to carry out his aim successfully; he acts in a natural setting which he does not fully understand and whose vagaries he can only partially anticipate. At any moment, an unkind fate can bring it about that his best and most carefully thought-out efforts produce results the opposite of those he intended. What guarantee has he that this kind of thing will not happen regularly? It is at this point that Kant suggests that he needs to assume the existence of a moral God, one who, as it were, harmonizes the sphere of facts and values, and so assures the moral man that if he follows the dictates of conscience, the results produced will be for the best in the long run.

Such a God, it should be noted, has no relevance to the state of being under obligation, or it could not be claimed that morals are autonomous. But the thought that he exists may even so play an important, indeed an indispensable, part when it comes to carrying out obligations; without it the moral agent might be so discouraged in the face of an uncontrollable event and with the sight of the wicked flourishing to persist in his moral endeavours. This proof, if it is to be called a proof, is a piece of practical thinking. It originates within a practical situation and is undertaken in response to a practical difficulty. This act of practical thinking cannot begin without the moral agent being in a

practical situation, unlike the other proofs of the existence of God which start from a universally acknowledged premise to a conclusion.

This moral belief in God is not something that can be acquired second-hand; it is a conviction which has to be achieved on a personal basis and retains an irremovable personal dimension. It is highly subjective. As Kant himself puts it, we must not say "it is morally certain that there is a God", but "I am certain that there is a God."[48]

In this life, the wicked flourish, or at any rate are liable to do so, while the righteous, though they deserve to be happy, do not often find happiness. But all this could be changed if there is a life after death: evil men may then finally pay for their misdeeds, and good men be rewarded for theirs. Therefore, the hope that morality will eventually bring happiness can be counted on only if a Supreme Reason that governs according to moral rules be posited as the underlying nature as its cause.[49] This Supreme Reason, who is God, as Kant says, determines the appropriate outcome for moral conduct, either in this life or in another life.[50]

God, therefore, must adjust the balance between just and unjust in another life. Here, there is a close connection between postulating the existence of God and immortality of

[48] Kant, *Critique*, op.cit., 650.

[49] Ibid., 641.

[50] Ibid., 651.

the soul. For what Kant says about moral belief in God to make sense, he needs at least an after life, since it is only then that God could fulfill the moral man's hope.

2.3 LOGICAL POSITIVISM AND METAPHYSICS

Logical positivism is a forceful and elegant formulation of one of the most archetypal, so to speak, and most fundamental possible outlooks on man. Logical positivism is radical empiricism formulated as a doctrine about language and meaning. Logical positivism started in Vienna. In 1895, Mach was appointed to a newly created professorship in the philosophy of the inductive sciences at the University of Vienna, an appointment which was at once a testimony to the strength of the empirical tradition at Vienna and the means by which that tradition was confirmed and strengthened. In 1922, the same chair was offered to Moritz Schlick, who had already made a name for himself as a philosopher-scientist—in particular as an interpreter of Einstein. Around Schlick as nucleus, the Vienna circle rapidly took shape. [51] For the most part, its members were scientists or mathematicians, already anti-metaphysical Machians.[52]

Meanwhile, in Berlin, a smaller group around Hans Reichenbach came to a similar philosophical orientation and concentrated on probing the foundations of Physics. In Poland, an eminent group of logicians, with Alfred Tarski as the central figure, began equally important investigations of logical notions. However, because of its immigration

[51] The best known members of the group were M.Schlick, R. Carnap, F. Waismann, O.Neurath, H.Feigl, B.von Juhos, F. Kaufmann, H.Hahn, K. Menger, K.Godel. Cf., *Wikipedia, the Free Encyclopedia*, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vienna_Circle, 15/03/2007.

[52] John Passmore, *A Hundred Years of Philosophy*, (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin, 1970,) p.367.

to the U.S, logical positivism became part of the Anglo-American tradition in philosophy, inspite of its European origins.[53] In Britain, Ayer championed and promoted logical positivism. There is a host of writings by the logical positivists, which include; (Hann. H), *Empiricism, Logic and Mathematics*, (Carnap, R) *The Logical Syntax of Language*, (Ayer, J), *Language, Truth and Logic*.

Logical positivism is an overwhelmingly simple doctrine. It consists of the claim that all knowledge, or, in the linguistic formulation, all meaningful discourse, consists of two kinds: first, reports of experiential facts, whose claim to truth resides exclusively in that the facts bear them out; and secondly, logic, interpreted as consequences of calculations within systems whose rules are conventionally established.[54] It is a philosophy which seems to do justice to the immense and conspicuous successes of natural science and at the same time gave a brutal diagnosis of the sterility of traditional philosophy, of religion, and so forth. What matters most about it is its denial of ethics, religion, aesthetics and other parts of human discourse. It expunged all that kind of talk from the realm of determinate meaning.

The doctrine of logical positivism is contained in the famous verification principle which holds that a statement can have meaning either in virtue of saying something verifiable about the world, or in virtue of following from the meaning of the words occurring in it. There is no third possibility. It is probably fair to say that all its other tenets are corollaries of this principle. A formula which can be checked neither by observation of

[53] Sahotra Sarkar (ed.), *Science and Philosophy in the Twentieth Century*, (New York: Garland, 1996,) p.ix.

[54] Ernest Gellner, *Words and Things*, (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin, 1968) p.87.

the world, nor by deduction from our definitions, have no meaning. In *Language Truth and Logic*, Ayer holds that "a simple way to formulate it would be to say that a sentence had literal meaning if and only if the proposition it expressed was either analytic or empirically verifiable."[55] Logical positivists saw in this principle of verification a way of eliminating, as meaningless, all references to entities which are not accessible to observation. Metaphysics, then, could be dismissed out of hand as nonsense.

To argue against metaphysics in detail, they concluded, was a complete waste of time: If one metaphysician says "reality is the absolute", and another that "reality is plurality of spirits", the empiricist need not trouble himself to reply to their argument. He need only say to them—"what possible experience could settle the issue between you?" To this question, metaphysicians have no answer; and from this it follows, according to the verifiability principle, that their assertions are quite without meaning. It is as senseless, on this view, to say that "reality is not the absolute" as to say "reality is the absolute"; for neither assertion can be verified. Thus metaphysical disputes are wholly pointless.

Carnap, in his most influential book, *The Logical Syntax of Language* holds that philosophy, especially metaphysics, does not give us information about transcendental entities, since all sentences containing what purports to be a reference to such entities are senseless; most of its propositions express and stimulate feelings but say nothing whatsoever about the world.[56] In another essay, he says:

[55] Ayer J, *Language, Truth and Logic*, (London: Victor Gollancz, 1956) p.5.

[56] Cf. John Passmore, op.cit., p. 379.

> The metaphysicians wish to seek their object behind the objects of empirical science; they wish to enquire after the essence, the ultimate cause of things. But the logical analysis of the pretended propositions of metaphysics has shown that they are not propositions at all, but empty word arrays, which on account of notional and emotional connections arouse the false appearance of being propositions.[57]

2.3.1 A.J AYER

Ayer, the British champion of logical positivism, sets out to show that metaphysics has its roots in logical errors. He held that the metaphysical utterances are due to commission of logical errors, rather than to a conscious desire on the part of their authors to go beyond the limits of experience. Metaphysics thus becomes a product of a mistake, an unintentional act on the part of the authors. This error is rooted in the premises for the deduction of metaphysical proofs.

Ayer opines that one way of attacking a metaphysician who claimed to have the knowledge of a reality which transcends the phenomenal world would be to enquire from what premises his propositions were deduced. "Must he not begin, as other men do with the evidence of the senses? And if so, what valid process of reasoning can possibly lead him to the conception of a transcendent reality?" He further concludes that, surely, it will

[57] Rudolf Carnap, "On the Character of Philosophic Problems" in Sahotra Sarkar (ed.), op. cit., p.59.

be from empirical premises. Since nothing whatsoever concerning the properties, or even the existence, of anything super empirical can legitimately be inferred.[58]

Ayer assumes here that the metaphysician's conclusion is ultimately based on empirical realities. By contrast, the metaphysician will object to this and affirm that his conclusion is a product of the intellect which may not necessarily refer to empirical matters. He will assert that he has been endowed with a faculty of intellectual intuition which enables him to know facts that could not be known through sense experience. Again even if the premises of his argument rely on empirical facts, it does not mean that the conclusion is wrong. The fact that a conclusion does not follow from its putative premise is not sufficient to show that it is false. Ayer objects to this kind of argument. He says:

> For we shall maintain that no statement which refers to a "reality" transcending the limits of all possible sense-experience can possibly have any literal significance; from which it must follow that the labours of those who have striven to describe such a reality have all been devoted to the production of nonsense.[59]

From the above statement, the difference between Ayer and Kant becomes clear. While in Kant, even though the categories of sensibility are limited to space and time which limit our knowledge, metaphysical utterances may make sense by either serving as a

[58] Ayer, op.cit., p. 33.

[59] Ibid., p.34.

regulative ideal or influencing actions. Ayer regards them as nonsensical. They do not make sense at all. Ayer, as a logical positivist, is influenced by the verification principle. He holds that it is the only criterion which must be used to test the genuineness of apparent statements of fact. Therefore, as he puts it:

> We say that a sentence is factually significant to any given person, if, and only if, he knows how to verify the proposition which it purports to express—that is , if he knows what observations would lead him, under certain conditions, to accept the proposition as being true, or reject it as being false. If, on the other hand, the putative proposition is of such a character that the assumption of its truth, or falsehood, is consistent with any assumption whatsoever concerning the nature of his future experience, then as far as he is concerned, it is, if not a tautology, a mere pseudo-proposition.[60]

In a further attempt to show that metaphysical utterances are nonsensical, Ayer, on one hand, made a distinction between verifiability in principle and practical verifiability, and on the other hand, between a strong sense of verifiability and a weak sense of it. There are, in many cases, propositions which people have not taken the trouble or steps to verify. Many of these propositions could be verified if people take the challenge to do it. But there remain a number of significant ones, concerning matters of fact, which we

[60] Ibid., p. 35.

could not verify even if we chose, simply because we lack the practical means of placing ourselves in the situation where the relevant observations could be made.

Ayer gave an example of the proposition "there are mountains in the farther side of the moon." Since no rocket has yet been invented which will enable one to go and actually verify this proposition, one is unable to decide the matter by actual observation. However, he says that we do know what observations would decide it for us. This means that the proposition, though not actually verifiable, is verifiable in principle. Metaphysical proposition are not only practically unverifiable, they are also unverifiable in principle.[61]

On the other hand, a proposition, says Ayer, is said to be verifiable in the strong sense of the term, if and only if, its truth could be conclusively established in experience. But it is verifiable in the weak sense if it is possible for experience to render it probable. For instance, the proposition "All men are mortal" cannot be conclusively verified by experience, since for it to be verified, it will take infinity to do so. And then, if we adopt conclusive verifiability as our criterion of significance, we are logically obliged to treat the proposition in the same fashion as we treat the statements of the metaphysician. Ayer, therefore, suggests that verifiability must be taken in the weaker sense. It then means that "the question that must be asked about putative statement of fact is not, would any observation make its truth or falsehood logically certain? But simply, would any observations be relevant to the determination of its truth or falsehood?" Any negative

[61] Ibid., p. 36.

answer to this second question will render the statement under consideration as nonsensical.[62]

The above verifiability principle as stated by Ayer again rules out any putative metaphysical assertion as meaningful. It rules out the debate whether the world of sense experience is real or unreal. It further rules out any question of substance, either it being a unity or plurality. He says:

> An example of controversy which the application of our criterion obliges us to condemn as fictitious is provided by those who dispute concerning the number of substances that there are in the world. For it is admitted both by monist, who maintain that reality is one substance, and by pluralists, who maintain that reality is many, that it is impossible to imagine any empirical situation which would be relevant to the solution of their dispute. But if we are told that no possible observation could give any probability either to the assertion that reality was one substance or to the assertion that it was many, then we must conclude that neither assertion is significant….The metaphysical question concerning "substance" is ruled out by our criterion as spurious.[63]

[62] Ibid., p. 38.

[63] Ibid., p. 40.

Metaphysical language does not fall in the category of meaningful languages. Ayer tries to equate the metaphysician with a poet, saying that the metaphysician is a misplaced poet, in the sense that his words are only meant to arouse or express emotions. However, unlike the poet who sometimes makes literal sense, the metaphysician does not. Ayer says that "the view that the metaphysician is to be reckoned among the poets appears to rest on the assumption that both talk nonsense. But this assumption is false. In the vast majority of the cases the sentences which are produced by poets do have literal meaning."[64]

The poet, whenever he writes nonsense, chooses the words and intentionally does so in order to produce the effects for which his writings are designed. But the metaphysician does not intend to write nonsense. "He lapses into it through being deceived by grammar, or through committing errors of reasoning."[65] Metaphysical languages, according to Ayer, are equal to those of ethics and aesthetics.[66] The only information they give us is the information about our own mental and physical make up. They only provide data for our psychological and sociological generalizations.

It follows that any attempt to make our use of ethical or aesthetical concepts the basis of a metaphysical theory concerning the existence of world of values, as distinct from world

[64] Ibid., p. 44.

[65] Ibid., p. 45.

[66] Ayer is an emotivist when it comes to ethics and aesthetics. He holds that ethical and aesthetical judgements are nothing but the expressions of emotions. For instance to say that "stealing money is wrong", is just the same thing as saying stealing!!!—where the shape and thickness of the exclamation marks show, by a suitable convention, that a special sort of moral disapproval is the feeling which is being expressed. Cf., *Language, Truth and Logic*, op.cit, p.107.

of facts, involves a false analysis of this concepts. Moral experience, as in Kant, therefore cannot prove the existence of a transcendent God. The possibility of the existence of a transcendent God is ruled out by Ayer. He holds that:

> It is now generally admitted, at any rate by philosophers, that the existence of a being having the attributes which define the god of any non-animistic religion cannot be demonstratively proved. To see that this is so, we have only to ask ourselves what are the premises from which the existence of such a god could be deduced. If the conclusion that a god exists is to be demonstratively certain, then these premises must be certain; for, as the conclusion of a deductive argument is already contained in the premises, any uncertainty that may be about the truth of the premises is necessarily shared by it. But we know that no empirical proposition can ever be anything more than probable. It is only a priori propositions that are logically certain. But we cannot deduce the existence of god from an apriori proposition. For we know that the reason why a priori propositions are certain is that they are tautologies. And from a set of tautologies nothing but a further tautology can be validly deduced. It follows that there is no possibility of demonstrating the existence of god.[67]

The existence of God is, therefore, no probable proposition, since it cannot be empirical. It is sometimes claimed, as Ayer pointed out, that the existence of certain regularity in nature constitutes sufficient evidence for the existence of God. But if the sentence "God

[67] Ibid., p.114-115.

exists" entails no more than that certain types of phenomena occur in certain sequences, then to assert the existence of God will be simply equivalent to asserting that there is requisite regularity in nature. However, Ayer argued that no religious man would admit that this was all he intended to assert in asserting that God exists. He will refer to a transcendent being that might be known through the empirical manifestations, but certainly could not be defined in terms of those manifestations. In that case then, the term "God" becomes a metaphysical term which is nonsensical.

However, it should be pointed out that asserting that the metaphysical word God is nonsensical does not amount to atheism or agnosticism or theism either.[68] Again, many theists refer to God as a mystery that transcends human understanding. But to say that something transcends human understanding is to say that it is unintelligible. And what is unintelligible cannot be significantly described.

Since the postulation of a transcendent being is often conjoined with that of an after life, Ayer denies that such a thing can be meaningful. He says that "to say that something is imperceptible inside a man, which is his soul or his real self, and that it goes on living after he is dead, is to make a metaphysical assertion which has no more factual content than the assertion that there is a transcendent god." Ayer follows Hume to deny the existence of the unchangeable self.

[68] Ibid.,p.115.

The self is not more than the aggregate of sense perceptions. It is nothing but "a logical construction of sense experiences." All the sense experiences are united in a presumed self because they all belong to one body. Ayer holds that "it is logically impossible for any organic sense-content to be an element of more than one body."[69] With this statement, Ayer distinguishes himself from Hume. Whereas in Hume, it is the memory that produces self identity, in Ayer, it becomes the body. "For we have solved Hume's problem by defining personal identity in terms of bodily identity, and bodily identity is to be defined in terms of the resemblance and contiguity of sense contents."[70]

2.4 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS OF THE WESTERN CRITICS

Having exposed the criticisms of the western philosophers on metaphysics, the question then is whether there are some theoretical or conceptual frameworks that underlie the whole criticism, starting from the criticism of the idea of God, to that of the soul and the world. A careful look at the whole criticism will show that such frameworks exist. In the whole criticism, one can discern, on the one hand, a philosophy based on the epistemological school of empiricism, and, on the other hand, a theoretical conception of the limits of the senses, as can be seen in Kant.

Empiricism is a theory of knowledge emphasizing the role of experience, especially sensory perception, in the formation of ideas, while discounting the notion of innate ideas. Empiricism emphasizes the need of perception, be it in sight, touch, sound or internal feeling. It is based on this background that western philosophers sought to

[69] Ibid., p.125.

[70] Ibid., p. 127.

understand the concept of metaphysics. They sought to force any idea that wants to pass itself as knowledge to undergo and pass this empirical test before it can qualify as knowledge.

Any idea should pass the empirical test of knowledge for it to be accepted as knowledge. This can be seen in the Humean affirmation that all the propositions of human reason or enquiry may be divided into two, namely relations of ideas and matters of facts, and by relations of ideas he means things that are demonstratively certain, like the propositions of Algebra. Kant also insists that knowledge starts from the power of sensibility; however, it will be pertinent to point out that Kant is not a full empiricist as opposed to the rationalist. Even though Kant believes that knowledge starts from the senses, he also affirms that there are apriori categories of both the sensibility and the understanding. Therefore, he is regarded as an idealist or transcendental empiricist. The Logical Positivists insistence on their verification principle also points of empiricism.

Given the empirical search light then, all metaphysical objects like the soul, the world as substance and God fail the required test and therefore, they are rightly disregarded as objects of knowledge, even though they can be objects of for the craving of the imagination.

Another conceptual framework is that of the limits of knowledge itself, or say, the capacity for knowledge. This framework underlies all the criticisms of the western philosophers I mentioned earlier; however, it is more manifest in Kant. It was Kant who

said that the thing in itself cannot be known. By this statement, he implies that even though the thing, say substance, exists, we have no mental capacity to know it. We are naturally limited by the categories of sensibility namely, space and time. Anything we do then is also limited by space and time. Knowledge being our own act is also limited. Therefore, aspiring to acquire the knowledge of that which is not within time and space becomes an impossibility.

This framework is also discernable in Hume and the Logical Positivists but that is only by a careful observation of their philosophy. The Humean understanding of the objects of knowledge, as I mentioned earlier, can only be seen or deduced in time and space. Logically then time and space throw up the limits of human conception. Matters of facts are only facts because they are seen or touched etc. These activities are only done in time and within a given space. The Logical Positivists idea of verification on its own is a concept that is limited by the limits of the human capacity to know. We can only verify that which we are capable of verifying. Here, capability is not limited to the tools of verification, say, using a microscope to verify an organism that cannot be seen by the naked eyes, where the capability refers to the ability of the microscope to capture the object in question. Rather, capability refers to the human power, say how far the senses can sense objects even with the aid of scientific instruments. If we establish that there is a limit to such a theoretical or practical capability of the senses, then human knowledge from the perspective of the verification principle is also limited.

Apart from the frameworks of empiricism and limits of knowledge, one can discern other theoretical or conceptual frameworks of scientism and logic. Scientism is a theory which claims that science alone can render truth about the world and reality. Scientism has a strict adherence to only the empirical, or testable. Scientific method is seen as the only mode of reaching knowledge. Scientism deems it necessary to do away with most, if not all, metaphysical, philosophical, and religious claims, as the truths they proclaim cannot be apprehended by the scientific method. In essence, scientism sees science as the absolute and only justifiable access to truth.

Kant, Hume and the Logical Positivists mirror this claim of scientism in their criticisms. However, it is more manifest in the Logical Positivists. By insisting on their verification principle, all claims of knowledge are forced to be tested, testability being central to scientism.

The other conception that plays a major part in the criticisms of the western philosophers is the conception of logic or language. These philosophers believe that a people's language reflects their world and reality. Language articulates all human reality and truth. For this reason then, the Logical Positivists insist that any thing or idea that is not part of a conventionally accepted rules of logic and language cannot qualify as knowledge. In other words, we cannot know that which is beyond the reach of language. Since there is no consensus on metaphysical entities and they, also, do not pass the rules of logic inherent in language, they cannot qualify as knowledge. Hume, on his own, affirms that causality is only an association of ideas. This means that human language

and mode of articulating reality is what people mistake as cause and effect; but there is nothing like that, just that this is the way human reason articulates reality.

Conclusively then, I can authoritatively say that there are uniting conceptions or schemes to the criticisms of the western philosophers on metaphysics. It is these schemes that rightly put the objects of metaphysics out of the purview of what these critics refer to as objects of knowledge.

CHAPTER THREE

3.0 BUDDHISM AND METAPHYSICS

Buddhism was founded by Siddhartha Gautama (566-486 B.C), who was an Indian prince born in Lumbini (a town situated in what is now Nepal), destined for a privileged life. During the birth celebrations, a seer announced that this baby would either become a great king or a great holy man. His father, wishing for Gautama to be a great king, shielded his son from religious teachings or knowledge of human suffering. Although his father ensured that Gautama was provided with everything he could want or need, he was troubled and dissatisfied.

At the age of twenty nine, he was escorted on four successive visits outside the palace. Here, he came across an old crippled man, a sick man, a dead body, and an ascetic. This is known as the four passing sights which lead Siddhartha to recognize the reality of death and suffering and the cynical nature of existence. He then left the palace, abandoned his inheritance and became a wandering monk, seeking a solution to the problem of suffering. He began with the yogic path and although he reached high levels of meditative consciousness, he was not satisfied.

He abandoned ascetism and realized the importance of the middle way (*Majhimā padapada*) in the understanding of reality. [71] At the age of thirty five, meditating under a *Bodhi* tree, Siddhartha reached enlightenment, awakening to the true nature of reality,

[71] This is a fundamental idea in Buddhist thought and practice. It means to seek moderation and avoid extremes of self indulgence and self mortification.

which is Nirvana. Thus, Siddhartha Gautama became known as the Buddha.[72] The Buddha having attained enlightenment became a kind of peripatetic teacher. He taught many doctrines ranging from those about reality down to knowledge and ethics till his death. Three months after his death, in the eighth year of king Ajatasattu's reign, five hundred pre-eminent *Arahants* convened at Rajagaha to study his doctrines .[73] This first council compiled and arranged in its present form the *Pali Tipitaka* , which represents the entire body of the Buddha's teachings and was later put to writing.[74]

Buddhism, therefore, teaches these doctrines of the Buddha. However, during the course of history, Buddhism underwent different changes and branched into different schools like the Mahayana and Hinayana. These schools have different teachings but though they are together referred to as Buddhism. I will however base my discussion of the Buddhist doctrines on what is regarded as Pali Buddhism or Therevada. Pali Buddhism is that version of Buddhism that draws its scriptural inspiration from the *Tipitaka,* or Pali canon, which scholars generally agree contains the earliest surviving record of the Buddha's teachings.

For the purpose of this thesis, I will limit the discussion of the doctrines on the concept of the world as it pertains to substance or reality, the self and that of God. The Buddhist

[72] The word "Buddha' comes from the ancient Indian languages of Pali and Sanskrit meaning "one who has awakened." It is derived from the verbal root 'budh' meaning to awaken or to be enlightened and to comprehend.

[73] An *Arahant* , in Buddhism, is one who has perfected himself by the practice of moral conduct, meditation, penetrative wisdom and so experienced Nirvana.

[74] Cf., Narada Maha Thera, *The Buddha and His Teachings*, (Singapore:Stamford, 1980) p.149.

teachings on these concepts can be said to be a critique of the metaphysical conception of the western philosophers.

3.1 BUDDHIST ATTITUDE TOWARDS METAPHYSICS IN GENERAL

The Buddhist attitude to metaphysics must be viewed from the larger context of the Buddha's aim. The Buddha's main concern was to eliminate suffering, both physical and mental, to find a cure for the pain of human existence. In this respect he has been compared to a physician, and his teaching has been compared to a medical or psychological prescription. Like a physician, he observed the symptoms—the disease that human kind was suffering from; next he gave a diagnosis - the cause of the disease; then he gave the prognosis -- it could be cured; finally he gave the prescription—the method by which the condition could be cured.

If we use the analogy of the physician then, no physician will like to aggravate a pain or suffering which he or she wants to end. This analogy then points to the reason why the Buddha adopted a negative attitude to metaphysics of stasis in general. Metaphysics of stasis will only worsen a situation that is bad. Metaphysics will lead to a state of mental worry, that is, mental suffering. This can be seen in the Buddha's response to Malunkyaputta, a disciple of his, in the *Cula-Malunkya Sutta* 427. This disciple has approached the Buddha with a list of metaphysical questions expecting an answer, namely (1) is the universe eternal or (2) is it not eternal, (3) is the universe finite or (4) is it infinite, (5) is soul the same as body or (6) is soul one thing and body another thing, (7)

does *Tathagata* exist after death, [75] or (8) does he not exist after death, or(9) does he both(at the same time) exist and not exist after death, or (10) does he both at the same time not exist and not not-exist?

The Buddha refused to answer these metaphysical questions. The major reason that can be deduced from his refusal is that such questions will only increase the suffering of human beings. Suffering therefore must be averted both in theory and in practice. The Buddha being an enlightened one knows the practical consequences of such theoretical questions. It is better then to avert the practical suffering that will follow such theoretical questions at the level of theory itself. The Buddhist should pursue that which is the opposite of suffering namely nirvana. For in it, he experiences a state of equanimity, a state which has its foreshadow in the nirvana of meditation. As Kaluhapana writes:

> [w]hen the *yogi* attains to the highest stage of meditation, characterized by the cessation of perception and feeling, it cannot be said that he perceives anything; he merely remains in that state enjoying a spell of peace and tranquility, for he is not troubled by impressions flowing into him through the senses.[76]

With this major aim of overcoming suffering and moving towards a state of earthly nirvana of happiness and tranquility, the Buddha taught ways of arriving to such a

[75] *Tathagata* refers to the Buddha, the enlightened one.

[76] David Kalupahana, *Buddhist Philosophy: A Historical Analysis,* (Honolulu: The University of Hawaii, 197) p.70.

destination. These ways include both theory and practice. In these ways, everything possible must be done to ensure that suffering will be eliminated.

The Buddhist life then is a life that aims at liberation, liberation in theory and practice. The theoretical liberation, that is, the Buddhist epistemology, excludes metaphysics—of the kind that involves unchanging objects—which is a source of worry. The Buddhist epistemology then becomes empirical in nature. In empiricism, Buddhism eliminates all epistemological source of worry that arises from unverified claims that will disturb the equanimity of the mind. The emphasis is then on a verified and personal knowledge. Such knowledge at the first level eliminates all theoretical worries that lead to practical suffering. Therefore, "[t]his emphasis on personal and direct knowledge is found throughout the Nikāyas and in trying to determine the ways of knowing recognized in the Canon…."[77]

On the practical level, all actions both in thought and deed must emphasize the need to avoid suffering and the need to be on the way to nirvana. The Buddhist life then becomes a life that requires discipline and a clear commitment to liberation. The Buddha laid out a clear path to the goal and also observations on how to live life wisely. The core of this teaching is contained in the Noble Eightfold Path, which covers the three essential areas of Buddhist practice: ethical conduct, mental discipline (concentration or meditation), and wisdom. The goals are to cultivate both wisdom and compassion. These qualities together will enable one ultimately to attain enlightenment

[77] K.N Jayatileke, *Early Buddhist Theory of Knowledge*, (London:George Allen &Unwin Ltd,1963) p.416.

> And this, monks, is the noble truth of the way of practice leading to the cessation of suffering -- precisely this Noble Eightfold Path -- right view, right resolve, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, [and]right concentration.[78]

These practical ways of avoiding suffering is not devoid of the epistemology of empiricism. The practical life must be based on a verified doctrine and theory. As the Buddha said, according to the canonical scriptures:

> Do not accept anything by mere tradition ... Do not accept anything just because it accords with your scriptures ... Do not accept anything merely because it agrees with your pre-conceived notions ... But when you know [by] yourselves — these things are moral, these things are blameless, these things are praised by the wise, these things, when performed and undertaken, conduce to well-being and happiness — then [will] you live acting accordingly. [79]

Suffering must be overcome by the ethical life. However, in the view of the Buddha, human life is essentially ethically conditioned and the greater part of his teaching is

[78] *Samyutta Nikāya* LVI.11

[79] *The Kalama Sutta, Anguttara Nikāya* III.65

therefore devoted to the betterment and perfection of human life, both individual and social, in its manifold aspects. Betterment and perfection are possible only through change. This underscores the constancy of the concept of change in the Buddhist philosophy. Change becomes a constant. By affirming this concept of change, metaphysics is inevitably excluded insofar as metaphysics deals with unchangeable entities.

If the soul which is a concept without change is affirmed, then suffering will not be eliminated. If a person's soul is a suffering soul and it is meant not to change then his or her suffering will be permanent. If the world is made up of substance that cannot change and given the fact that evil and suffering persist in the world, it will be futile to overcome suffering when its cause is unchangeable. Change is therefore necessary for suffering to be averted.

3.2 BUDDHISM ON THE WORLD

Before discussing the Buddhist conception of the world, it is pertinent to reiterate that the concept of change is fundamental to the Buddhist understanding and articulation of the world. Change in its widest signification describes variation, evolution, alteration, modification and mutation in form, state, quality or essence of any existing object, animate and inanimate, conscious and unconscious. Buddhism, which recognizes the objective fact of change as the universal feature of all nature, provides us with a most illuminating exposition which establishes a causal connection and a positive correlation between freedom and the total awareness of the truth of change.

Buddhism, as a philosophy of change, posits neither an ultimate beginning nor a final end to the universe, but sees the universe as something in flux, passing in and out of existence, parallel to an infinite number of other universes doing the same thing. What exists as the universe is an aggregate of *Paramattha dhammas*.[80] The *Paramattha dhammas* that arise are only *citta*, *cetasika*, and *rupa*,[81] with each having its own characteristics, its own nature. They arise because of enabling conditions and fall away again very rapidly. These constituents of reality, namely *nama* and *rupa*, are in perpetual flux. However, owing to our ignorance, we cling to *nama* and *rupa* when they appear and think that there is something that lasts or that is behind their appearance, while not knowing that they are in continuous flux. There is no unmoved mover behind the movement. It is only movement.[82] According to Buddhism, all *dhammas* are momentary.

As Y.Karunadasa observes:

> Each *dhamma* has three moments, namely *uppadakkhana*: the moment of origination; *thitikkhana*, the moment of subsistence; *bhangakkhana*, the moment of cessation. The three moments do not correspond to three different *dhammas*. On the contrary they represent three phases (*avatthā*) - the nascent, the static and the cessant of one 'momentary' *dhamma*. Hence the statement,

[80] *Paramattha dhammas*: usually translated as ultimate, absolute or fundamental realities.

[81] *Citta*, *cetasika*, and *rupa*: *citta* is a moment of consciousness which cognizes an object, there is one *citta* at a time and it is accompanied by several *cetasikas*, mental factors, with each performing its function. *Citta* and *cetasika* are together referred to as *nama* (mental phenomena). *Rupa*, physical phenomena (materiality, matter), do not cognize anything.

[82] Cf. www.buddhanet.net/bvk_study. 18/03/2007.

> namely, *dhammas* are momentary means that a given *dhamma* has three momentary phases or stages. It arises in the first moment, subsists in the second moment and perishes in the third moment.[83]

Buddhism sees reality as comprising of *nama* (mind) and *rupa* (matter). While *nama* is present with regard to the beings who cognize, *rupa* is present in all realities whether animate or inanimate. Matter therefore is the world around us; it is everything we see and feel and touch. Buddhism can also be said to have an atomistic view of reality. Matter can be classified into three categories. First, there is the category of matter or material qualities that are visible *(sanidassanam*) and can be apprehended by the senses (*sappatigham*)—such as colours and shapes. Secondly, there is matter which is not visible (*anidassana*) but reacts to stimuli (such as the five senses) as well as the objects of sense which can come into contact with the appropriate sense organs.

Thirdly, there is matter which is neither visible to the naked eye nor apprehensive by the external senses but whose existence can either be inferred or observed by paranormal vision, example is the essences (*ojā*) of edible food which are absorbed by our bodies and sustain it. We call them proteins, carbohydrates, vitamins etc. In this category, one would also have to include the atom (*paramānu*), which is said to be so small that it occupies only a minute portion of space. The sub commentary of the *Vibhanga* observes that the atom "cannot be observed by the naked eye but only comes within the range of

[83] Y. Karunadasa, *Buddhist Analysis of Matter*, (Colombo: Dept. of Cultural Affairs, 1967) pp.84,85. quoted in G.D Sumanapala, *An Introduction to Theravada Abhidhamma*, (Singapore: Buddhist Research Society, 1998) p.95.

clairvoyant vision."[84] If this is so, then, the Buddhist atomic theory is not the product of pure rational speculation (like those of the Greeks) but partly the result of extra-sensory perception as well.

Rupa can be seen to fashion itself in five aggregates which constitute all inanimate objects. The five aggregates are

(1) the element of solidity (*Pathav*i).

(2) the element of fluidity (*Apo*).

(3) the element of heat (*Tejo*).

(4) the element of vibration (*Vaya*).

(5) the element of space (*Akasa*).

In the case of animate objects, all living beings are also aggregates of the above elements including mind (*viññāna*).

Matter exists in the element of hardness or softness, in whatever there is in the universe, including the human being, such as hairs, teeth, spoons, skin, etc, which are just reflections of *rupa* in the fashion of solidity. Objects such as blood, sweat, oil, tears represent the fluid element. In the world, there exists hotness—state of a body—and heat—element—which are also manifestations of *rupa*. There exists also wind or vibration, such as the upward going and down ward going of winds, the winds of stomach and intestines, in breathing in and out and so on. These are the vibrating elements. There

[84] Cf., K.N. Jayatilleke, *Facets of Buddhist Thought*, (Ceylon: Buddhist Publications Society, 1971) p.63.

is, of course, the space between any two phenomena or elements, such as a bone and flesh, of two people walking, of objects lying side by side an so on.

By viewing the totality of the physical phenomena as one, one should understand, discern and realize that bodies composed of hairs, bones, teeth, etc are nothing but the particles or atoms of *rupa* in the above named elements, which are forever arising and passing away without any stop even for a very short moment. Realities appear as if they do not arise and fall away. It seems that we see things, people, and beings. We may touch a cup, a plate, a spoon or fork, but in reality it is just the element of solidity or earth that is touched. We have the feeling of touching a spoon or a fork. Since realities arise and fall away and succeed one another very rapidly, we cling to the shape and form of things, to a conglomeration or mass. It seems that the plate is hard, the cup is hard, the spoon is hard. But in reality what is being touched is only the *rupa* (matter). Since we remember the shapes of things, we can then differentiate. We know that a cup is not a dish, a spoon is not a fork. As Prof G.D Sumanapala puts it:

> The senses, eye, etc. come into contact with the visible *(rūpa*) etc. and as a result there arise various perception such as being, woman, chariot in the consciousness. They are variously designated according to those various perceptions. But apart from those eye[s] and the visible etc. there does not exist anything such as being, chariot and hence their designation….[85]

[85] G.D Sumanapala, *Reality and Expression*, (Kadugannawa, Sri Lanka: Paramita International Buddhist Society, 1999) p.62.

This Buddhist articulation of *rupa* is much the same like that of the Aristotelian conception of matter. Here, form or shape becomes the principle of individuation or differentiation whereby the major component is the same, namely matter (*rupa*).

It is pertinent to mention then that the major laws governing the *dhammas* (*nama and rupa*) are the laws of change and becoming. There is no *dhamma* that is immutable or eternal as has been conceived by the majority of western philosophers like Plato and Aristotle. There is no substance. Everything is governed by the law of change and becoming. On one occasion, a monk asked the Buddha as to whether there is any form or kind of matter which is eternal, stable, lasting, not subject to constant change and everlasting. The Buddha replied that there is no such matter. He then took a speck of sand onto the tip of his nail and said "even such a minute bit of matter is not eternal, stable or lasting, is subject to constant change and is not everlasting."[86] In other words, everything is subject to change. Trees and shrubs, flowers and fruits, goods and other belongings, buildings and lands, men and animals—in short, everything imaginable is subject to this ceaseless universal law of change.

In some existential entities, this change takes place visibly and within a short space of time, while in other cases it takes place so gradually and slowly that the process of change is not visible at all. To the latter category belong not only rivers, and mountains but even the sun, moon and stars where the process of change, as science holds, extends

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[86] Ibid.,67.

through millions of years. Indeed the various operations of the cosmos in their totality are one continuous change.

One may ask what is this change , this falling away? It has various aspects and manifests itself in various ways. Growth and decay, rise and fall, increase and decrease, integration and disintegration, extension and contraction, unification and diversification, modification and amplification, progression and retrogression are some common forms of change.[87] Whichever the aspect of change, the change from one condition or state to another is the essence of all things. Changes rule the world. There is no stability or permanence anywhere. Time moves everything. Time moves us also whether we like it or not. We live in a changing world while we ourselves are changing. This is the relentless law. "*Sabbe sankharā aniccā*"—"all compound things are impermanent."[88]

Another important feature of change is that there is no distinct and separate line of demarcation between a condition or state and the succeeding condition or state. These conditions or state are not in watertight compartments. Each merges into the next. It is like the waves of the ocean, each rising wave falls to give rise to another such wave. There is no boundary line between one wave and the next. So it is with all changing conditions and things in this world. A changing process would also mean that everything is in the process of becoming something else. This is in short the law of becoming (*Bhava*). While the law of change states that nothing is permanent but is always

[87] V.F Gunaratna, *Rebirth Explained*, (Ceylon: Buddhist Publication Society, 1971) p.2.

[88] Ibid.

changing, the law of becoming states that everything is every moment in the process of becoming another thing. The law of becoming is thus a corollary of the law of change.

There is no time something is not in the process of becoming something else. A ceaseless becoming is the feature of all things. A seed is in every moment the process of becoming a seedling and a seedling is in every moment in the process of becoming a tree. A bud is every moment in the process of becoming a flower while an infant is every moment in the process of becoming a youth and then an old man. It is the ever present feature underlying all changes. In a sense, becoming is the only process in the world since everything is in the process of becoming another thing. Nothing is static. Everything is dynamic. One may ask, "suppose a seed is not planted or a seedling is uprooted, can one still say that the seed or seedling is in the process of becoming a tree?" The plant, here, is not in the process of becoming a tree. However, there is still a process of becoming but in another direction, this time, in the direction of decay and disintegration. The tree and seed will decay and become manure for the soil and continue changing.

From the Buddhist conception of the world, it can then be said that there is no idea of substance or immutable forms as can be found in Aristotle and Plato. There is also no idea of an immutable monad as in Leibniz or a reality that is synonymous with God as in Spinoza. Reality cannot be said to have a beginning or an end.

3.3 BUDDHISM ON GOD

The concept of God in non-Buddhist philosophy emanates from the attempt to understand the universe and how it comes to exist. It also comes as a result of an attempt to make sense of unchanging things and substances. As I pointed out earlier, the Buddhist conception of the universe points to no origin or substance and its position on the issue of God logically follows from there. Since the Buddhist conception of the universe leaves no room whatever for the idea of a supreme deity in the role of creator or ruler, it is not necessary for Buddhism to deny the existence of a creator-God. Its philosophy automatically excludes the theory.

> No God, no Brahma can be found
> Creator of samsara's round,[89]
> Empty phenomena roll on,
> Subject to cause and condition.[90]

Therefore, Buddhism is generally viewed as a religion without a Supreme Being in the sense of a Creator God. Buddhism is not strictly a religion in the sense in which the word religion is commonly understood, for it is not "a system of faith and worship, owing allegiance to a supernatural God."[91] In Buddhism, unlike in other religions, there is no conception of God, an almighty to be obeyed and feared. Buddhism denies the existence

[89] *Samsara* –the circle of rebirths, the world.

[90] *Visuddhimagga* XIX, cf., Francis Story, *Gods and the Universe in Buddhist Perspective*, (Kandy, Sri Lanka: Buddhist Publication Society, 1983) p.2.

[91] Narada, op.cit p.155.

of supernatural power, conceived as an almighty being or a causeless force. There are no divine revelations, no divine messengers or prophets. Buddhism cannot, therefore, be strictly called a religion, because it is neither a system of faith and worship, nor as defined by Webster's Dictionary "the outward act or form by which men indicate their recognition of the existence of a God or Gods having power over their own destiny to whom obedience, service and honour are due." T.R.V Murti also pointed out that:

> Religion is the consciousness of the Super-mundane Prescence immanent in things, the consciousness of what Otto happily calls the 'mysterium tremendum'. Early Buddhism (Theravāda) was not a religion in this sense. It was an order of monks held together by certain rules of discipline (*vinaya*) and reverence for the human teacher…but there was no element of worship, no religious fervour, no devotion to a transcendent being. No cosmic function was assigned to Buddha; he was just an exalted person and no more.[92]

However, if by religion is meant a teaching which takes a view of life that is more than superficial, a teaching which looks into life and not merely at it, a teaching which furnishes men with a guide to conduct that is in accord with this view, a teaching which

[92] T.R.V Murti, *The Central Philosophy of Buddhism*, (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1980) p.6.

enables those who give heed to it to face life with fortitude and death with serenity, or a system of deliverance from the ills of life, then certainly Buddhism is a religion.[93]

Just as Buddhism rejects the notion of a Supreme God, it also rejects the notion of an abstract God-principle operating in the universe. The notion of Brahman (in the neuter) is not discussed at all in the Buddhist texts, and even in India it may well be a post-Buddhist development resulting from the attempt to reconcile the belief in God(s) with the powerful critique of the Buddha.[94] The idea of a God-principle will require, even in principle or imagination, an idea or a belief in a lasting substance. This is exactly what Buddhism negates. Therefore, its rejection of the idea of a God-principle also follows from its comprehensive philosophy of change.

Buddhism, however, speaks of the existence of a category of beings called *deva*. This term is generally translated as "gods" (with a simple `g' and in the plural). The term *deva* literally means a shining or radiant being, and describes their physical appearance rather than their supernatural powers (as the translation "gods" seems to imply). To prevent confusion with the notion of a supreme personal God, I shall refer to these beings of Buddhist cosmology as *devas*. Many other religions also postulate the existence of non-human beings who are referred to as `gods' or `angels' if they are considered to be in a better position than humans (with respect to their material conditions of existence).

[93] Naranda, op.cit., p.159.

[94] Cf. V. A. Gunasekara, "The Buddhist Attitiude to God" in www.buddhistinformation.com/buddhist/attitude_to_god.htm.20/07/2007

The idea of *devas* may seem to undermine the Buddhist empiricist claim, however, since Buddhism upholds the idea of paranormal experiences, this idea does not affect its empiricist position. Therefore, the idea of *devas* can be easily disposed of in the context of the Buddhist notion of God because they are essentially irrelevant to the human situation. Beings are born in the *deva*-worlds because of particular karmic factors they have accumulated, and after these karmic factors are exhausted they could revert to any of the other planes of existence depending on their unexpended karma. The *devas* are not particularly endowed with special powers to influence others, and far from saving anyone else, as can be seen or believed in other theistic religions, they themselves are not "saved".

Salvation in Buddhism comes only from full enlightenment, which could be best accomplished from the human plane of existence. Often as the *devas* figure in early Buddhist stories, the significance of their appearance nearly always lie in their relations with the Buddha or his disciples. Their story is of mere mythology, such as the dealings of Brahma and Indra with other gods. In fact the gods, though freely invoked as accessories, are not taken seriously.

Since Buddhism rejects the idea of God, either in reality or in principle, it rejects any attempt at impersonation. Any being or person claiming to be God is derided as being deluded by ignorance. In the Buddhist texts, *Mahā Brahmā* is represented as claiming the following attributes for himself: “I am Brahma, the Great Brahma, the Supreme One, the Mighty, the All-seeing, the Ruler, the Lord of all, the Maker, the Creator, the Chief of all

appointing to each his place, the Ancient of days, the Father of all that is and will be."[95] The Buddha dismisses all these claims of *Mahā Brahmā* as being due to his own delusions brought about by ignorance. He argues that *Mahā-Brahmā* is simply another *deva*, perhaps with greater karmic force than the other gods, but nonetheless a *deva* and therefore unenlightened and subject to the samsaric process as determined by his karma.

In such Suttas as the *Brahmajāla sutta* and the *Aggañña Sutta*, the Buddha refutes the claims of *Mahā Brahmā* and shows him to be subject to karmic law (i.e. cosmic law). In the *Khevadda Sutta*, *Mahā Brahmā* is forced to admit to an enquiring monk that he is unable to answer a question that is posed to him, and advises the monk to consult the Buddha.

The Buddhist view is that gods (*devas*) may lead more comfortable lives and be addicted to all the sense pleasures, but in terms of wisdom might be inferior to humans. They are even represented as coming to receive instruction from monks and even lay persons. Later on, with the Hindu revival and proliferation of God-cults, the Buddhists were increasingly vocal against the pretensions of God and his retinue of lesser gods. Nargarjuna, the Indian Buddhist philosopher of the 2nd century CE, though a Mahayana Buddhist, expressed a commonly shared Buddhist view when he wrote:

> The gods are all eternal scoundrels
> Incapable of dissolving the suffering of impermanence.
> Those who serve them and venerate them
> May even in this world sink into a sea of sorrow.

[95] Cf. *Dîgha Nikáya*, II, 263.

We know the gods are false and have no concrete being;

Therefore the wise man believes them not

The fate of the world depends on causes and conditions

Therefore the wise man may not rely on gods.[96]

Many western philosophers have presented a number of arguments to prove the existence of God. Some of these were anticipated by the Buddha. One of the most popular is the "first cause" argument according to which everything must have a cause, and God is considered the first cause of the Universe. The Buddhist theory of causation says that every thing must have preconditions for its existence, and this law must also extend to "God" should such an entity exist. But while the "first cause" claims that God creates everything, it exempts God from the ambit of this law. However, if exemptions are mad e with respect to God, such exemptions could be made with respect to other beings also, since there is nothing that prevents one from conjuring up the idea of another entity like that of God, thereby contradicting the principle of the first cause. *Avidya* or ignorance is the reason why the argument of first cause seems to be plausible. By removal of this ignorance with wisdom or *paññ*a, we understand things as they really are and thus attain nirvana.

But the argument which the Buddha most frequently uses is what is now called the "argument from evil" which in the Buddhist sense could be stated as the argument from *dukkha* (suffering or un-satisfactoriness). This states that the empirical fact of the

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[96] *Mahapajnaparamitasutra*, Cf. V. A. Gunasekara, op.cit.

existence of *dukkha* cannot be reconciled with the existence of an omnipotent and omniscient being who is also all good. The following verses from the *Bhuridatta Jataka* bring this out clearly: [97]

If the creator of the world entire
They call God, of every being be the Lord
Why does he order such misfortune
And not create concord?

If the creator of the world entire
They call God, of every being be the Lord
Why prevail deceit, lies and ignorance
And he such inequity and injustice create?

If the creator of the world entire
They call God, of every being be the Lord
Then an evil master is he, (O Aritta)
Knowing what's right did let wrong prevail!

The Buddha argues that the three most commonly given attributes of God, viz. omnipotence, omniscience and benevolence towards humanity cannot all be mutually compatible with the existential fact of *dukkha*.

Apart from explicit statements refuting the God-idea, there is a fundamental incompatibility between the notion of God and basic Buddhist principles. A fundamental

[97] Translated by V.A Gunasekara.

Buddhist belief is that all phenomena without exemption (including all animate beings) have three essential characteristics *(tilakkhana)*. These are *anicca* (impermanence), *dukkha* and *anatta* (insubstantiality, "no-soul"). The attributes of God are not consistent with these universal marks of existence. Thus God must be free from *dukkha*; he must be eternal (and hence not subject to *anicca*); finally he must have a distinct unchanging identity (and therefore lack the characteristic of *anatta*).

Another concomitant of the God-idea that is fundamentally incompatible with Buddhism is the belief that God acts as the final judge and could determine if individuals go to heaven or hell. According to Buddhism the destination of individuals is determined by the karmic law, which cannot be interfered by any external process. Only individuals can affect their karmic destinies; even a Buddha cannot "pardon" or otherwise interfere with the karmic process. In Buddhism there is simply no place for a God even if one were to exist. According to Buddhism no one (and this includes gods or God) can save another (in the sense of salvation). This is a cardinal principle of the Buddha, which cannot be reconciled with the declared attributes and actions of God.

A test that Buddhism applies in gauging the validity of a belief is the “fruit test” or the attempt to see what consequences a belief or set of beliefs, when acted upon, will lead to. With regard to the belief in God, it may be held that it has given people a sense of security and inspired them to various kinds of activity. This does not prove that the belief is true but suggests that it may be useful. A realistic survey would show that while the

belief in God has done some good, they have brought much evil in their train as well. Wars have been fought in the name of God. In contrast Buddhism preaches non violence.

3.4 BUDDHISM ON THE SOUL

Many western philosophers grappled with the question of the soul. Some see the soul as something that contains the principle of thought and action in man or that which generates thinking, wills and feels, knows and sees and also that which appropriates and owns. It is that which both acts and initiates action. Generally speaking, it is conceived as a perdurable entity, the permanent unchanging factor within the concrete personality which somehow unites and maintains its successive activities. It is also the subject of conscious spiritual experience. What has been said above regarding western philosophers can also be found in history of Indian philosophy. The Sanskrit word *ātman*, of which *atta* is the Pali counterpart, can be found in the earliest Vedic hymns. It is sometimes held to have meant "breath", but breath in the sense of life, or what might be called self or soul.[98]

Buddhist doctrine on the soul is referred to as *Annata*, which literally means no-soul (no eternal, everlasting, unchanging, constant soul). It is natural that having denied the existence of God, Buddhism will also deny the existence of the soul, since there is a close connection between postulating the idea of God and that of the soul. This doctrine is a natural corollary to the analysis of the five aggregates and the doctrine of impermanence. As I explained earlier, what we call being is composed of five aggregates, and when they

[98] Cf. G. P Malalasekera, *The Truth of Anatta*, (Ceylon: Buddhist Publication Society, 1966) p.3.

are analysed and examined, there is nothing behind them which can be taken as an "I", *ātman* or self, or any unchanging abiding substance. In the words of Walpola Rahula:

> It must be repeated here that according to Buddhist philosophy there is no permanent, unchanging spirit which can be considered 'Self', or 'Soul',or 'Ego', as opposed to matter, and that consciousness(*viññāna*) should not be taken as 'spirit' in opposition to matter. This point has to be particularly emphasized, because a wrong notion that consciousness is a sort of self or soul that continues as a permanent substance through life, has persisted from the earliest time to the present day.[99]

The Buddhist argument against the doctrine of the soul is twofold. In the first place the Buddha takes various aspects of the individual and contends that none of them can be identified with the soul, since they do not have the characteristics of the soul. In the first discourse, the *Dhammacakkappavattana Suta*, given after his Enlightenment, the Buddha set out the Four Noble Truths. In the second, the *Anattalakkhana Suta*, he stated the characteristics of his doctrine of the not-self. Here, he begins by emphasizing that if there is a self, it should be autonomous, but no such thing is to be found. The question is asked: is the body permanent or impermanent? The answer is it is impermanent. Is the impermanent sorrowful or happy? Sorrowful.

[99] Walpola Rahula, *What the Buddha Taught*, (New York: Grove Press, 1974) pp.23,24.

Therefore, since the body is sorrowful and liable to change, it is not proper to regard it as "this is mine", this I am, "this is my soul."[100] The same argument is repeated for the other aspects of personality and mental factors such as feeling (*vedanā*), perception or ideation (*saññā*), dispositions or tendencies (*sankhāra*) and consciousness (*viññāna*).

One of the Buddha's own disciples, Sati, held that the master taught: "it is the same consciousness that transmigrates and wanders about." The Buddha asked him what he meant by consciousness. Sati's reply was classical: "it is that which expresses, which feels, which experiences the result of good and bad deeds here and there"; " to whomever, you stupid one", remonstrated the Master, " have you heard me expounding the doctrine in this manner? Haven't I in many ways explained consciousness as arising out of conditions: that there is no arising of consciousness without conditions." Then, the Buddha went on to explain consciousness in detail:

> Consciousness is named according to whatever condition through which it arises: on account of the eye and visible forms arises a consciousness, and it is called visual consciousness; on account of the ear and sounds arises a consciousness; and it is called auditory consciousness; on account of the nose and odours arises a consciousness, and it is called olfactory consciousness, on account of the tongue and taste arises a consciousness, and it is called gustatory consciousness; on account of the body and tangible objects arises a consciousness; and it is called tactile

[100] *Majjhima Nikāya I,* 232ff.

> consciousness; on account of the mind and mind-objects (ideas and thoughts) arises a consciousness, and it is called mental consciousness.[101]

The Buddha explained further by an illustration with fire, saying that a fire is named according to the material on account of which it burns. A fire may burn on account of wood, and it is called wood fire. It may burn on account of straw, and then it is called straw fire. So consciousness is named according to the condition from which it arises. In effect, the Buddhist perspective opposes any concept of pure consciousness. Consciousness must be the consciousness of something depending on the organ of sense through which it comes. This raises another question as pointed out by Roderick M. Chisholm earlier. Who feels? In this case, whose consciousness? Whose organ feels?

The Buddha will not regard these kind of questions as questions. When asked "who, lord, is it who feels?" the Buddha replied:

> It is not a fit question. I am not saying (someone) feels. If I were saying so, the question would be a fit one. But I am not saying that. If you were to ask thus: 'conditioned now by what, Lord is feeling? This [is] a fit question. And the fit answer would be: 'feeling is conditioned by (sense) contact'.[102]

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[101] *Majjhima Nikāya I,* 256. Cf., Walpola Rahula, op.cit., p.24.

[102] *Samyutta Nikāya* II, 13. Cf., Douglas M. Burns, *Nirvana Nihilism and Satori,* (Ceylon: Buddhist Publication Society, 1968) p.3.

Having rejected and disregarded the question of "Who feels?" as an unfit question, Buddhism will have to grapple with the question of self identity. How does one identify himself if there is no soul or person behind the feeling? Buddhism has an answer to the question of self identity. As Francis Story puts it:

> Personality is seen as a series of events; it is a process in time, wherein the subjective notion of self-identity depends upon the ability to recall past states, and objective identity between one state and another state that succeeds it lies in the temporal relationship of causality subsisting between them.[103]

It then means that memory is central to the Buddhist anthropology and any loss in memory signifies a loss in self-identity, even though others may identify such a person with his or her former deeds. Such a person has lost his or her self identity, and what remains would be nothing but the unself-conscious stream of causality left to identify him with the personalities of his infancy, youth and maturity.

The absence in the human being of a soul—an unchanging, undying essence—does not mean that the Buddha taught the annihilation of the body and mind at death. For besides all the doctrines mentioned earlier, the Buddha also taught the doctrine of *karma*—the doctrine of the transmitted force of the act, both physical and mental. When it comes to the human realm, the mind and body are interdependent; neither can come about nor endure without the other. When the body dies the mental states which preceded death

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[103] Francis Story*, Rebirth as Doctrine and Experience*, (Kandy: Buddhist Publication Society, 1975) p.18.

become the causes of new mental conditions that occur with the birth of a new body. This is the Buddhist concept of postmortem survival and it is termed "rebirth."[104] Those psychological factors preceding death which determine the time, place and form of the new birth are known as *karma*.

However, karma (*kamma-vipāka*) is not confined to the process of rebirth.[105] Rather it is an ever present principle of psychological cause and effect, and it can be explained by saying that each state of mind is a condition which becomes the cause of other states of mind that will arise in the future. Karma may be classified as good, bad and neutral, which means that a given mental state is of such a nature that its results will either be pleasant, unpleasant or neutral respectively. Greed, hatred and illusion lead to bad karma, while their opposite, namely, compassion, kindness and disillusion lead to good karma.

A man is a compound of body and its organs of sense, of feelings and perceptions, by which he is in constant contact with the external world, of dispositions, aptitudes and abilities, and summing them all up, of thought, covering the whole group of mental activities. When he began his present life, he brought as his inheritance the karma of his many previous lives. During the course of his existence in this world, he is always accumulating fresh karma through his actions, his thoughts and desires, his affections and passions, and these affect every moment of his life, constantly changing its character. At

[104] The doctrine of rebirth is not only a theoretical doctrine, it is also a doctrine that is rooted in the Buddhist verification attitude. Rebirth is rooted in experience as has been testified by the Buddha and other authors. Cf., Francis Story, Ibid.

[105] In proper Pali usage *kamma* refers only to volitional actions, i.e, causes, while the effects of such actions are termed *vipāka*. However, in Hindu and recent popular Buddhist writings *karma* has widely come to mean the whole universal law of cause and effect.

death, when the corporeal bond which held him together falls away, he undergoes a relatively deeper change.

The unseen potencies of his karma beget a new person. His new body, determined by his karma, becomes one fitted to that sphere in which he is born. When a new life is thus produced, its component elements are present from its very inception, although in an underdeveloped condition. The body thus contains all the prenatal forces which are the resultant of all the impressions made in the particular flux of elements conventionally called an individual, in the whole course of its repeated births and deaths, its faring through life.

The new person, psychologically, if not physically, is continuous with the deceased and suffers or enjoys what his "predecessor" had prepared for him by his behaviour. Through this teaching of rebirth, Buddhism in conjunction with the denial of annihilation also denies eternalism. This issue of rebirth raises another question, as was also posed to the Buddha. If there is no permanent self or soul, then, who is affected by the acts which the not-self has performed? In other words, who experiences the karma of past life of the "predecessor?" The Buddha was said to have reproved a questioner who posed the same question saying: "shall one who is under the dominion of desire, think to go beyond the mind of the master?" meaning thereby, perhaps, that the question was wrongly put because there is an assumption in it of a permanent self.[106]

[106] Cf., G. P Malalasekera, op.cit., pp.18,19.

The second argument of the Buddha against the idea of the self or soul is that the belief in a permanent self would endanger the usefulness of moral life; morality itself being a path or a *sine qua non* in attending the Buddhist goal, namely nirvana. Since the body is changing, one will not be able to say, "let my body be this." When man realizes this ever changing nature of the body, he turns away from the feelings of the body and by the extinction of desire he attains release. Here, we find the purpose of the Buddha in enunciating this doctrine of the non-self. All misery, in his view, arises from the delusion of self which causes man to strive to profit himself and to injure others.

The most effective remedy to this folly of seeking to satisfy desires is the realization that there is no truth in the doctrine of the permanent self. In the *Mahānidāna Sutta* of the *Digha Nikāya*, the Buddha was discussing with Ananda, he asked him "in what ways, do people regard the self?" Ananda replied that "they equate the self with feeling: feeling is myself" or "feeling is not myself, my self is impercipient" or "feeling is not my self, but my self is not impercipient, it is of a nature to feel." The Buddha went on to correct these views, saying:

> Now, Ananda, one who says: "feeling is my self" should be told: "there are three kinds of feeling, friend: pleasant, painful, and neutral. Which of the three do you consider to be yourself?" when a pleasant feeling is felt, no painful or neutral feeling is felt, but only pleasant feeling. When a painful feeling is felt, no pleasant or neutral feeling, but only painful feeling. And when a neutral

> feeling is felt, no pleasant or painful feeling is felt, but only neutral feeling….So any one who, on experiencing a pleasant feeling, thinks; "this is my self", must, at the cessation of that pleasant feeling think: "my self has gone!" and the same with painful and neutral feelings.[107]

As the discussion continued, the Buddha addresses Ananda saying:

> From the time, Ananda, when a monk no longer regards feeling as the self, or the self as being impercipient , or as being percipient and of a nature to feel, by not so regarding, he clings to nothing in the world; not clinging, he is not excited by anything, and not being excited he gains personal liberation, and he knows: "birth is finished, the holy life has been led, done was what had to be done, there is nothing more here."[108]

In addressing "monks", the Buddha, in extension, addresses the whole human kind on the necessity of quenching desire and being liberated. The realization of the non existence of the self is a prelude to a holy life; it is the first step to moral life, a knowledge which helps one to appreciate others rather than antagonizing them and becoming hostile in the bid to preserve the self. The doctrine of non-self is thus a doctrine that promotes mutual co-operation and unity.

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[107] *Digha Nikāya II*, 66,67.

[108] Ibid., 68.

3.5 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS OF BUDDHIST ANTI-METAPHYSICAL TEACHINGS

Like the western critics, Buddhism has an empirical framework or background through which it views the issue of God, the world and the soul. This empirical background rules out these metaphysical concepts as reality insofar as they cannot be sensed, both internally and externally. However, it is also germane to point out that Buddhist empiricism is transcendental in the sense that it does not affirm the annihilation of the sensing states upon death. Rather it re-appropriates them in a new form in rebirth.

Following from this comment of re-appropriation of sensing or psychological states in rebirth, it is also pertinent to point out a framework that is seen in the Buddhist's anti-metaphysical doctrines, namely that of change of state. A conception of change of state holds that entities do undergo changes from one state to another. For instance the idea of light that comes from a hydro or mechanical state. Therefore, light energy acquires a new state other than that which it was in mechanical energy or hydro energy. Buddhism believes that rebirth is a change of state. A psychological state that was once in another body undergoes a change and continues in another one. This issue of change of state can also be seen in the Buddhist analysis of the human feelings in order to see if there is anything that is unchanging that can be referred to as the soul.

In this analysis, the Buddha found that a state gradually gives way to another. For instance a state of happiness gives way to that of sadness or to that of neutrality. It is this conception of change of state that allows Buddhism to affirm that the soul does not exist.

It really means that if the soul exists, then, it must be unchanging but there is nothing in the human being that does not change. Given this fact, Buddhism affirms the doctrine of *Annata* which refers to no soul. Also, the Buddhist idea that *nama* and *rupa* continue to come and fall away presupposes this idea or conception of change of state. This perpetual flux of *nama* and *rupa* can only be explained by the idea of change of state. Things are in continuous states of change, that is, from one state to another. A boy becomes a man and a tree becomes wood etc.

Another crucial conception that gives force to the doctrines of Buddhism which are anti-metaphysics is that of morality. Morality plays a powerful role in Buddhists doctrines. Buddhism denies the soul in order to teach monks and other adherents of Buddhism the need and necessity of detachment. The belief in a soul that endures will lead to an attachment to material things in order to secure one's soul and being. However, if there is no belief in the soul, monks and Buddhists in general will be disposed to morality, since there is no soul to which they should be attached. Again, the denial of the existence of God through the fruit test, that is, the violent consequences of the belief in God, makes Buddhists maintain the ideal morals of non-violence and harmony and communal living.

Buddhist morality that influences its philosophy also flows from a psycho-subjective conception of the good. The Buddha employed a subjectivist method of defining the good. The Buddha's definition of the good was determined by practical considerations. He had in view the average individual to whom a theoretical and metaphysical interpretation of 'good' would have had little appeal. As a religious and ethical teacher,

he had to give a practical definition of what was good and what was bad. Perhaps the most authoritative canonical passage bearing on the Buddha's definition of the good occurs in the *Ambalatthikā Rahulovāda Sutta,*[109] where Buddha tells Rahula what in his opinion constituted the good. The passage says:

"What do you think Rahula? What is a mirror for?"

"To reflect, Sir."

"In just the same way you must reflect again and again doing every act, in speaking every word and in thinking every thought. When you want to do anything, you must reflect whether it will conduce to your or other's harm or both and so is a wrong act, productive of woe and ripening unto woe. If reflection tells you this is the nature of that contemplated fact, assuredly you should not do it. But if reflection assures you there is no harm but good in it then you may do it."

A careful study of the above passage shows the importance of reflection in the matter of deciding what is good and bad. Here, one finds that the good has been decided in relation to its effects. Goodness is therefore seen from a consequentialist view. The good acts are those that are not harmful while those that harm are bad. It is given this psycho-subjective conception of the good that one will fully understand the teachings of Buddhism with regard to the world and the soul.

[109] *Majjhima Nikāya I,* 416ff, see also, W.S Karunaratne, *Buddhism: Its Religion and Philosophy*, (Singapore: The Buddhist Research Society, 1988) p.23.

CHAPTER FOUR

4.0 A COMPARISON OF WESTERN CRITIQUES WITH BUDDHISM

Having looked at the critics of metaphysics of stasis in western philosophy and the Buddhist stand on the same metaphysics, I wish to compare the views and thereby bringing out the similarities and differences. Though my comparison may cut across the views of the three philosophers I earlier discussed, I will compare Buddhism with each of them separately.

4.1 BUDDHISM AND HUME

The first similarity to be seen in the Buddhist view of metaphysics and the Humean criticism of it is that both reject the idea of the self and that of God. Hume, it can be said, rejected the idea of the self or soul based on his strong empiricist stand. The self or the soul was seen as neither eternal nor unchangeable. What is regarded as the self is nothing but an aggregate of perceptions united by memory. Hume insists that he never catches himself at anytime without a perception, and never can observe anything but the perception. In the same manner, Buddhism insists that consciousness is nothing but a condition, a condition that arises from the senses. In the analysis of the constituents of reality, namely the elements of solidity, fluidity, heat , etc, there is no one that corresponds to the self and therefore the idea of the self was rejected.

In a quotation cited earlier, Hume insists that perception is not bound or predicated to the self. In other words perceptions have no self behind them. If any impression purports to

give rise to the idea of the self, that impression must continue invariably the same, through the whole course of our lives, since self is supposed to exist after that manner. But according to Hume there is no impression constant and invariable. Pain and pleasure, grief and joy, passions and sensations succeed each other, and never all exist at the same time. Since these perceptions change, it cannot, therefore, be from any of these impressions, or from any other that the idea of self is derived, and consequently there is no such idea.

This similar line of argument is found in the conversation of the Buddha and Ananda as cited earlier. By analyzing the perceptions, Buddha found out that a perception can either be pleasant, unpleasant or neutral. Therefore, if the self or soul corresponds to any of these sensations, then the sensation must be capable of enduring, which is the main purported characteristic of the soul. However, since pleasantness often turns sour or becomes neutral and unpleasant perception also turns to pleasant feelings, it then means that there is no immutability in the sensations and therefore the idea of the soul or the self cannot be associated with any of the perceptions. In both Hume and Buddhism, then, self identity rests on the capability of the memory to continuously remember past events that are associated with the same body, whereas, in any case of memory loss, self identity will be lost.

In these similarities, however, there is a major difference in their views of sensation with regard to the self. I will call Hume a *strict sensationalist* for positing the idea of *strict sensationalism*. By these terms, I mean that Hume believes in the annihilation of

perceptions in death. Perceptions or impressions cease to exist with the cessation of life. As I quoted earlier, Hume said "when my perceptions are removed for any time, as by sound sleep; so long am I insensible of myself, and may truly be said not to exist. And were all my perceptions removed by death… I should be entirely annihilated." Again, Hume can be seen as a reductionist in terms of mind-body relationship. The mind is no separate entity as opposed to sensations. The mind is just sensations and ideas which copy them. The cessation of sensation and perception in death annihilates the mind, since consciousness ceases with the death of the person. Death, in Hume's conception, also puts an end to the ability to remember, that is memory. In death, a Person loses that which identifies him as a continuous receptor of perceptions.

On the other hand, Buddhism does not subscribe to the idea of total annihilation of perceptions in death. I will therefore refer to the Buddhist conception of the perceptions as *transcendental sensationalism* or in other words, Buddhists are *transcendental sensationalists*. By these words, I mean that Buddhism believes in the survival of perceptions after death. Sensations continue in rebirth. There is nothing like the total annihilation of sensations or impressions as in Hume. The consciousness that seems to be lost in death takes another form in rebirth. Sensations like energy or coming from matter obey the laws of conservation. They are not lost; rather they are transformed and take a new form in a new person after rebirth. This process of rebirth is explained as the combining of two factors, namely consciousness and the psycho-physical personality—referring to the beginning of a new life span by the formation of a foetus in the womb of

its mother. Consciousness surviving from the past is then infused in the new personality and thus continuity is maintained between the two lives.

The doctrine of rebirth also points to the fact that the power of memory is not totally obliterated in death. As I mentioned in the last chapter, rebirth is not just a theoretical claim but also a practical fact, whereby those who reincarnate can recall the events of their past existence. In that case , the memory can only be said to be dulled by death but not obliterated as in Hume.

It then means that unlike Hume, Buddhists are not reductionists in terms of mind-body relationship. The mind (*viññāna*) which is the seat of consciousness is not annihilated in death. The mind is therefore not equal to the body or sensation. However, it should be stressed that in Buddhism, the non reduction of the mind to the body does not imply the subscription to a mental substance that can be called a self or soul. States of consciousness are distinct both from their physical causes and from their physical manifestation, without the mind existing independent of the body.

Hume's theory of man as a bundle of perceptions went a long way to influence his concept of ethics. Humean ethics became a sentiment based ethics. Both in *A Treatise of Human Nature* and *An Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals*. Hume, instead of telling us how morality ought to operate, purports to tell us how we actually make moral judgments. After providing us with various examples, he comes to the conclusion that most, though not all, of the behaviours we approve of increase public utility. Apart from

self-interest, Hume maintains that we can be moved by our sympathy for others, which can provide a person with thoroughly non-selfish concerns and motivations, indeed, what contemporary theorists would call altruistic concern. Hume defends his sympathy-based moral sentimentalism by claiming that we could never make moral judgments based on reason alone. Our reason deals with facts and draws conclusions from them, but, all else being equal, it could not lead us to choose one option over the other; only our sentiments can do this. And our sympathy-based sentiments can motivate us towards the pursuit of non-selfish ends, like the utility of others. [110]

Hume's ethics then is a non-cognitivist ethics. Ethical non-cognitivism denies the possibility of the knowledge of ethical judgements as being true or false. As a strong empiricist, Hume believes that only matters of fact can be observed. Distinctively ethical judgements do not state facts: they are species of evaluative utterance. As Premasiri observes:

> Contemporary meta-ethics analysis draws a rigid distinction between factual and evaluative statements. While factual statements are said to be capable of being established by empirical observations, evaluative judgements are reduced to expression of emotion or to prescriptive utterances devoid of any truth value.[111]

[110] Cf. Wikepedia: The Free Encyclopedia. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/David_Hume, 9/12/2007

[111] P.D Premasiri, *Studies in Buddhist Philosophy and Religion*, (Kandy, Sri Lanka:Department of Pali and Buddhist Studies,University of Peradeniya, 2006) p.45.

Non-cognitivism reduces ethical judgements to varieties of non-rational discourse. "They take the position that any fundamental major premise can serve as a premise for a moral argument."[112] These analyses imply forms of relativism which deny the universal validity of moral judgements. In Hume's example, it leads to an ethics based on sympathy; however, moral responsibility will be eroded in a person who cannot be sympathetic. He or she will not be held liable for a moral wrong since he or she can easily plead not feeling an approbation or reprobation for the act in question.

On the other hand, Buddhism, though denying the existence of the soul like Hume, does not teach a sentiment-based ethics. Buddhism does not propagate a non-cognitivist ethics. It takes the position that although factual reasons are relevant to moral conclusions, any arbitrary fact cannot be adduced as a reason for moral judgement. Buddhism understands the need for a rational evaluation of human conduct, behaviour, goals, dispositions, intentions, ways of life and institutions. There must be a firm and secure foundation for morality that is not based only on sentiment or feelings, since morality is the sure way to escape from suffering and *samsara* and at the same time be a sure route to nirvana. Morality must be known and taught for it to execute this function of liberation.

In Buddhism, there are two main criteria that are used for restricting the range of facts that can be adduced for or against a moral judgement. They are (a) the tendency of what is morally evaluated to promote the general well-being and (2) a consideration of fairness or the application of the Golden Rule. The function of the moral agent is to balance these two criteria intelligently in some situations where they may seem to yield conflicting

[112] Ibid.

judgements. The implication of the Buddhist view is that rational men can achieve a high degree of moral consensus and discover a common core of moral values if they adhere to these two criteria.

Buddhism is obviously then a cognitivist theory in matters of ethics. Premasiri rightly points this out when he said:

> Buddhism asserts the view that we can know what is morally right and wrong, and good and bad. According to the Buddha, to have a right view is to understand the distinction between good and bad. "Killing is bad" is for Buddhism, a valid ethical judgement to which all rational people must give assent. A person is said to be ignorant and deluded if he or she does not know the difference between a right action and a wrong action.[113]

Buddhist moral cognitivism can give a better account of moral liability and responsibility than the sentimentalism of Hume. If rationality is accepted as a general quality of human beings, then one can be held liable if he or she does not differentiate a right from wrong. He can be held liable of intentional ignorance of such right or wrong when he or she should have made all the required effort to know it. Rationality here should be understood not as the capacity of non-experiential intuitions of right and wrong, but as the capacity to promote the well-being of human beings in what is being morally considered. This accounts for the refusal of courts to make someone non-culpable when he or she pleads ignorance if the case at hand is a case of an overcome-able ignorance.

[113] Ibid., p.44.

Ignorance of right and wrong is within the human capacity to eradicate, given that human beings are rational.

However, this cannot be said of sentiments. There is factual evidence which shows that people do not feel the same sentiment with regard to moral rights and wrongs. As I said earlier then, it will be a travesty to hold a person liable for a wrong which he cannot feel, given sentimental ethics. If ethical rights and wrongs are to be universalized, then ethical sentimentalism alone cannot be the basis for such universalization. Buddhism, as opposed to Hume's ethics, then offers a base for a universal ethics that will apply to all human beings and at the same time complement the sentiment-based ethics.

In the rejection of the idea of God, Hume in the *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion* argues from the presence of evil in the world. The omnipotence of God cannot be reconciled with the presence of evil in the world. God is omnipotent and banishes evil or he is incapable of banishing evil. However, since there is evil, he is not omnipotent and thus not God. Buddhism offers a similar argument. The presence of *dukkha* (evil, misfortune) also proves the non existence of a most powerful Being. If he actually exists, he is nothing but an evil master. Therefore, in the two views, there is the conception that God should be nothing less than good; he should reflect this goodness by making it prevail over the world. Even in his Dialogue, Hume insists that it is not enough that goodness also exists along side evil, rather what is required is total goodness. However, what is total goodness may be debatable but both views cite sickness and injustice as evils that must not co-exist with an infinite good God.

Hume in his criticism pointed out that the idea of God also comes from the sense of awe and fear. In order to explain evil or unknown phenomena like earthquake and famine, man posits the idea of God by sublimating that which he can do and making it superlative in order to explain the existence of such natural phenomena. Buddhism takes the existence of evil or such natural phenomena as part of the world and posits no argument that men sublimate their power to this idea of God. Conversely, it is the gods (*devas*) that are inferior to man, since they lead more comfortable lives and are addicted to all the sense pleasures.

The occurrences of natural phenomena like earthquakes or famine are part of the natural evils and sufferings that must be overcome by right attitudes. For instance, famine may be said to be a natural shortage of food due to lack of rains or other factors. However, if the right attitudes which give rise to morality are upheld, the consequences of such natural evil will be subdued. A moral life of charity, if adopted, will engender in people the spirit to share their resources or food with those that have been hit by a famine, and through this charitable attitude, famine will be overcome, and the solution to it will not be attributed to a supreme and enduring being. The right moral attitude is what is required.

The major disparity in Humean philosophy and that of Buddhism is in the denial of causality by Hume. Hume denied causality, saying that there is no justification in asserting that an event or phenomena can cause the being of another. Hume can be said to have offered two conceptions of causation, the first of which is in terms of pure regularity of nature, but the second of which introduces the notion of the natural passage of the

mind from the appearance of the cause to the idea of the effect (e.g. someone opens a tap and, having always experienced water rushing out, he or she anticipates water rushing out). This feeling stems from a natural association of the two events after persistent observations of them as constantly conjoined. And it is this feeling, or determination of the mind, which is the basis of our idea of necessity, i.e. that the cause necessitates its effect.

Secondly, this is the basis for our idea not in the sense that our concept of necessary connection can be analysed into, or is reducible to such feelings of anticipation, expectation, etc., but that we then come to see the world as structured by a certain predictability of order, and we attribute this predictability to the external objects themselves, i.e. we attribute to them a causal power which makes things fall out, or occur in the way they do, a property of necessary connection. So Hume's argument is that the mind synthesizes and then projects a concept of causal power when it observes similar events to occur together repeatedly. This is an example of what the philosopher Simon Blackburn has entitled "projectivism."[114] Hume argues that we project our feeling of predictability onto the objects, much as he argues that we project our moral attitudes onto situations or objects.

In contrast, Buddhism affirms the existence of causal connections, not just as an association of the mind but as a natural phenomenon. Although Buddhism does not posit a cause of the world like some philosophers mentioned earlier, it maintains that there is a

[114] Cf., http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/moral-anti-realism/projectivism, 09/12/2007.

causal connection between events in the world. The Buddha, in the discussions on causality, mentioned four characteristics of causality: (1) objectivity (*tathatā*), (2) necessity (*avitathatā*), (3) invariability (*anañña thatā*) and (4) conditionality (*idappaccayatā*).[115]

Objectivity of causality means that the idea of causality is not mere fabrication or a product of association as Hume maintained. Rather, it is a reality. In one of the discourses preserved in the Chinese *Āgamas*, the problem of the status of causation was raised, and the question was raised as to who fabricated the theory of causation. The Buddha's reply was that, "it is made neither by me nor by another. Whether the *Tathāgatas* were to arise in this world or not, this constitution of things is eternally existent. Concerning this the *Tathāgata* has insight, is fully enlightened."[116] He also further emphasized the objectivity of causality by comparing its discovery to that of a bygone kingdom.

The second and third characteristics of causality, namely necessity and invariability, stress the lack of exception or the existence of regularity. They indicate that it is a necessity that certain sets of conditions give rise to certain effects and not to something completely different. For instance, human beings give birth to human beings and not dogs and conversely dogs give birth to dogs and not human beings. There are no accidents or events that occur by chance.

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[115] Cf., David J. Kalupahana, *Buddhist Philosophy: A Historical Analysis,* (Honolulu: The University of Hawaii, 1976) p.27.

[116] *Samyutta Nikāya II,* 105-106, cf. David Kalupahana, ibid., p.28.

It is our ignorance that induces us to say that things and events happen by chance. Therefore, Buddhism will say that Hume was ignorant when he affirmed that there is no causal connection in things and events. The fourth characteristic of causation, namely conditionality, is the most significant in Buddhism. Through this characteristic, Buddhism steers clear of two extremes of unconditional necessity implied in strict determinism and the unconditional arbitrariness assumed by accidentalism. Therefore, causality is not just strictly necessary; rather it is dependent on certain conditions.

These conditions will then generate certain events as the effects of some causes. In Buddhism, this is called the doctrine of dependent-origination. As the Buddha articulated the doctrine, "When this is present, that comes to be; from the arising of this, that arises. When this is absent, that does not come to be; on the cessation of this, that ceases."[117] This statement points to the middle way between determinism and pure accidentalism. It is pertinent to reiterate that this conception of causality lacks the kind of metaphysical assumption which is found in the rationalists' theory of causation, like Descartes who believed that God is the cause of his ideas.

While it can be said that instances of causal happenings were verified on the basis of experience, the uniformity of the causal law was reached through inductive inference. On the basis of the present experiences of causal happenings, inductive inferences are made with regard to the past and the future. Hume and Buddhism therefore have their agreements and disagreements.

[117] *Majjhima Nikāya I*, 262ff, see also, Kalupahana, op.cit.,p.28

If one understands the Buddhist concept of dependent-origination, he or she will understand why Hume thinks that one cannot infer a cause from a putative effect. Hume seems to think that a cause and its effect can be sharply divided, for example if God is the cause of the world, then, God is distinct from the world, or if a stick moves a billiard ball then the stick is distinct from the moving ball. The Buddhist conception of dependent-origination does not make such sharp distinctions. A cause merges and conditions an effect. The movement of the ball depends on the moving condition of the stick, which also depends on the energy of the person who pushes the stick etc. So there exists no sharp distinction between a cause and effect. If one thinks of a sharp distinction, then, that may lead him or her to infer like Hume that there is no cause from the analysis of a putative effect.

4.2 BUDDHISM AND KANT

Kant's criticism of metaphysics, like that of Hume, came from an empirical background. Kant insists that what can be known are only the ideas that come from the senses. However, the senses are structured in such a way that they only perceive in space and time. Space and time become the a priori categories of sensibility. Knowledge therefore refers to that which is in time and also extended. The idea of God, the soul and substance is rejected by Kant as unknowable since they are not extended or temporal. Kant insists that how things appear to us may be quite different from how they are because of the limit placed on us by the a priori categories of sensibility. By this, he divides the world into two, namely the knowable world (phenomena) and the unknowable world, the world

of things in themselves (noumena); objects of metaphysics belonging to the noumenal world. It is therefore, a criticism that has, purely an epistemological grounding.

The Buddha, in refusing to answer some metaphysical questions, set up an unknowable world akin to the Kantian noumenal world. In the *Cula-Malunkya Sutta*, Malunkyaputta, as I mentioned earlier, a disciple of the Buddha, put to him ten metaphysical questions and demanded some answers. These questions points to the metaphysics of stasis, and any attempt to answer them will either commit one to eternalism or annihilationism. He lamented that Buddha does not explain these things to him and it does not please him. The Buddha later explained to Malunkyaputta that the holy life does not depend upon these views. Whatever opinion one may have about these problems, there is birth, old age, decay, death, sorrow, lamentation, pain, grief.[118]

The Buddhist should pursue nirvana, which is the cessation of sorrow and grief, rather than search for explanation of metaphysical questions. Through this kind of answer, the Buddha brings out the ethico-pragmatic substrate for which the Buddhist critique of metaphysics lies. According to the Buddha, clinging to any of these views (eternalism or annihilationism) is harmful to spiritual progress. The questions themselves are metaphysical ones and there is no conceivable way of checking the truth or falsity of a solution to them. The result is perpetual conflict among those who hold mutually contradictory position. The Buddha saw no practical advantage at all in holding such opinions. Any answer to these questions does not conduce to turning away from sense

[118] Cf., *Majjhima Nikāya I,* 431.

pleasures, to dispassion, to the cessation of suffering, to tranquility, to higher knowledge, to enlightenment and to nirvana.

The goal of the Buddhist life is the attainment of freedom from birth (*jāti*) and thus avoids decay and death. The Buddhist pragmatism then aims at solving this problem of suffering. Unlike Kant whose criticism is based on epistemology, the Buddhist criticism has an ethico-pragmatic undertone. This pragmatism of Buddhism is supported by Buddhist parable of the arrow. The parable of the arrow was narrated by the Buddha.

The Buddha says:

> Suppose a man was wounded by an arrow thickly smeared with poison, and his friends and companions, his kinsmen and relatives, brought a surgeon to treat him. The man would say 'I would not let the surgeon pull out this arrow until I know whether the man who shot me was a noble or a Brahmin or a merchant or a worker'. And he would say ' I will not let the surgeon pull out this arrow until I know the name and clan of the man who wounded me…until I know whether the man is tall or short or of middle height… until I know whether the man who wounded me was dark or brown or golden-skinned;…until I know whether the man who wounded me lives in such a village or town or city;… until I know whether the bow that wounded me was a long bow or a cross bow;… until I know whether the bowstring that wounded me was fiber or reed or

sinew or hemp or bark…..All this would not be known to the man

and meanwhile he would die.[119]

The moral of the parable is that people should only be interested in truths which have a practical influence on their lives. In the same vein, the Buddha did not answer Malunkyaputta questions because it was not useful to the cessation of suffering and the attainment of nirvana.

Buddhism therefore does not divorce knowledge from conduct, theory from practice. Philosophy is meaningful only if it provides an understanding of reality on which to regulate people's life. Epistemologically speaking then, in Kant, the noumenal exists due to the a priori categories of sensibility which limits knowledge, while in Buddhism, the noumenal exists due to the fact that any attempt to venture into it will destabilize the moral life. Therefore, it is not useful.

By emphasizing the dangers of pseudo-rational conclusions that will follow a subversion of perception, that is, when the understanding invents new forces through imagination and substitutes them in place of empirical facts, Kant invariably insists on a right judgement based on a right perception that will amount to knowledge. A departure from a right kind of perception will spiral into erroneous judgement which cannot be said to be knowledge. When one engages in such judgement, he or she can be said to merely wasting time since the product of such reasoning is not knowledge, and for knowledge to be gained the process of perception and judgement must be the right kind.

[119] Cf., *Majjhima Nikāya I,* 430ff.

In the same vein, Buddhism insists on right attitudes as articulated in the eightfold path. Among the right attitudes are right thought, right mindfulness and right concentration. Right thoughts are those thoughts that are free from lustful attachment or greed, thoughts associated with renunciation, thoughts free from malevolence or hatred and thoughts free from violent intention. (In Buddhism, malevolent thoughts must be substituted with benevolent moral thoughts.) Right mindfulness is the attention that keeps watch over the mind and prevents evil thoughts from entering it. It guides all aspects of mental, verbal and bodily behaviour, giving them the right moral direction. This may be seen as the alertness that is necessary to observe and check evil tendencies. Right concentration stands for the clear, composed and un-confounded mental condition which conduces to the dawning of wisdom resulting in final elimination of all evil dispositions and culminating in the perfection of moral character.

If these right attitudes are maintained, the individual will in the long run attain nirvana which is the end of suffering. However, if they are not maintained, the individual will have to do it again. This doing it again refers to rebirth, that state that will include bad karma due to the inability to develop those right attitudes.

Although, epistemologically, Kant refuted metaphysics concerning the knowledge of God and the soul, the positing of them can have a moral purpose. Therefore, the idea of God, though subjective, will regulate the actions of the moral man. Since positing of the idea of God has a close affinity with that of immortality, the moral man will require the idea of the soul, which is immortal, in order to consistently act in the right way. It is God who

will reward the moral man in after life and punish the immoral man; he will produce the balance of justice and injustice. Here, I will refer to Kant as having a positive ideas of God and the soul for the purpose of morality. Morality will be fostered if the moral man has these ideas of the soul and God.

However, Buddhism denies the ideas of God and the soul for the sake of morality. Buddha denied the soul because an affirmation of it will render both spiritual and moral life useless. Walpola Rahula summarizes this view thus:

> According to the teaching of the Buddha, the idea of self is an imaginary, false belief which has no corresponding reality, and it produces harmful thoughts of 'me' and 'mine', selfish desire, craving, attachment, hatred, ill-will, conceit, pride, egoism, and other defilements, impurities and problems. It is the source of all troubles in the world from personal conflicts to wars between nations. In short, to this false view can be traced all the evil in the world.[120]

The idea of the soul becomes a moral danger that is rooted in the strongest desire of man for personal immortality. This idea must therefore be expunged to avert immorality. Unlike the Kantian world where the moral man will assume the existence of God to do the right things, the Buddhist moral man will have non-attachment as his regulative principle. One way of deciding whether an action is right or wrong, good or bad is not by asking if God approves of it, but rather by asking if it leads to detachment (*virāga*) or

[120] Walpola Rahula, op.cit., p.51.

attachment (*rāga*). Actions that lead to non-attachment are considered right and good, while those that lead to attachment are considered wrong and bad. This is so since non-attachment will lead to nirvana and attachment leads to punishment and bondage. Again, punishment is not handed down by God but rather by the person on himself through the acquisition of bad karma.

In Kant, what the postulation of the soul, through the way of God, will initiate and sustain, namely the right and moral acts, its denial will achieve from the Buddhist perspective. Also, by positing the idea of God or the soul as being necessary for the moral life, Kant commits himself to a kind of eternalism, be it imaginative eternalism or regulative eternalism, which is a case by which the soul will survive the death of the body to either face judgement or face eternal bliss. However, Buddhism does not commit itself to eternalism, either imaginatively or regulative. The only thing Buddhism affirms is the continuous circle of birth and rebirth which culminates in nirvana. Nirvana, in itself, is a state that is not characterized by perpetual perdurance of the soul or self. It would have been more plausible if Kantian criticism, having established the un-knowability of objects of the noumenal world, avoided any positive idea of objects of the same world for moral regulation which can be observed. Here, Buddhism offers an alternative approach towards the fostering of morality via the criticisms of the idea of God and the soul.

4.3 BUDDHISM AND LOGICAL POSITIVISM

Logical Positivism places emphasis on testability and meaningfulness of statements. Meaningfulness of statements depends on the capacity of the person who utters them to verify them, on the one hand, and on another hand, if the statement in question is verifiable. The main question that comes to mind, here, is, whether Buddhism has shades of Logical Positivism in its critique of metaphysics? As I have pointed out, verification referred to in Logical Positivism is verification by means of observation or sense-perception; it has primarily to do with the activities of the sense-organs of the human bio-chemical system. Buddhism begins its understanding of samsara (world) on a strictly empirical basis, that is, one's immediate conscious experience. It rejects authoritarian thinking, or the acceptance of doctrines that were handed down by tradition without making any attempt to verify or falsify such traditional doctrines. This attitude promoted by Buddhism inevitably leads to empiricism.

The empiricist attitude of Buddhism is stated in no unmistakable terms in the *Sabba-sutta* of the *Samyutta Nikāya.* Here, the Buddha addresses the monks in the following manner:

> Monks, I will teach you 'everything'. Listen to it. What, monks, is 'everything'? Eye and material form, ear and sound, nose and odour, tongue and taste, body and tangible objects, mind and mental objects. These are called 'everything'. Monks, he who would say; "I will reject this everything and proclaim another everything", he may certainly have a theory [of his own]. But

> when questioned, he would not be able to answer and would, moreover, be subject to vexation. Why? Because it would not be within the range of experience (*avisaya*).[121]

The implication of the Buddha's statements is that our direct perception is based on the six spheres of experience and their corresponding objects. These are called the twelve "gateways" (*āyatana*). To speculate on the nature of reality by going beyond these twelve gateways would lead to conflict and disagreement, to vexation and worry, because one would then go beyond the limits of experience. In other words, from the Logical Positivists' perspective, it would lead to meaningless and nonsensical propositions. Even extra sensory perceptions are included in the twelve gateways. What is perceived by sensory perception is causality as it operates in all spheres—physical, psychological, moral and spiritual. There is no transcendent reality or Being or self that is given as the object of such direct perception.

Logical positivists also made reference to the correct use of language. A meaningful language will then be a language that refers to something which is verifiable or has the probability of being verified. The Buddha in the same vein attributed the belief in the self to a mistaken understanding of ordinary language. Once, when the Buddha made a very impersonal statement explaining the causality of the human personality with the words "there are four kinds of food or nutriment for the sustenance of beings who are born and for assisting those who are to be born, namely, gross material food, contact, volition, and

[121] *Samyutta Nikāya IV,* 15. Also quoted in David J. Kalupahana, op.cit., p.158.

consciousness," a monk named Moliya Phagguna raised the question: "Lord who feeds on consciousness?"[122]

Here, even when the Buddha's statement was a very impersonal, causal statement, Moliya Phagguna converted it into an ordinary linguistic expression, and, following the grammatical structure of that statement, implied the existence of a being, an agent in the ultimate sense. Moliya Phagguna can be seen as one who has been duped or deceived by grammar, hence a metaphysician.

On another occasion, when the Buddha explained that the causal process consists of twelve factors, a monk raised the question: "what o Lord is decay and death?" "Of whom is decay and death?"[123] Thereupon, the Buddha insisted that these were misleading questions, because "if one were to say 'what is decay and death?' and 'of whom is decay and death?' or if one were to say decay and death is one thing and this decay and death belongs to another, these [questions] are the same [in meaning], only the wording is different." What the Buddha means here is that, following the grammatical structure of a sentence, one should not assume the existence of an ontological being different from its attributes.

On several occasions too, the Buddha analyzed the nature of linguistic conventions and pointed out their uses and limits. In one of the famous passages of the *Samyutta-Nikāya,* an example of overstepping the limits of linguistic convention is described:

[122] Ibid., II, 13.

[123] Ibid., II, 61.

> There are these three linguistic conventions or usages of words or terms which are distinct, have been distinct in the past, are distinct in the present, and will be distinct in the future, and which are not ignored by the wise Brahmans and recluses. Which three? Whatever material form (*rupa*) there has been, which has ceased to be, which is past and has changed, is called reckoned, and termed 'has been' (*ahosi*) and it is not reckoned as 'it exists' (*atthi*) or as 'it will be' *(bhavissati*)….Whatever material form has not arisen, nor come to be, is called, reckoned, or termed 'it will be' (*bhavissati*), and it is not reckoned as 'it exists' (*atthi*) or as 'it has been' (*ahosi*)….Whatever material form has arisen and has manifested itself, is called, reckoned, or termed 'it exists' (*atthi*), and it is not reckoned as 'it has been' (*ahosi*) nor as 'it will be' (*bhavissati*).[124]

The Buddha was referring to the usage of words as either past, present or future. That is the usage of words with regard to time. In the analysis of word usage, then, there has not been in the ordinary usage of words anything that refers to things as continuous and out of time—eternal. One, therefore, should not neglect the conventional mode of speaking to formulate words that refer to things that endure like the self or soul, God or substance. In this sense then, Buddhism has something in common with Logical Positivism with regard to the critique of metaphysics.

[124] Ibid., III, 70ff.

However, in its insistence on the correct and rightful use of language, Buddhism unlike Ayer and the Logical Positivists does not commit itself to the assertion that moral language is just an expression of emotion. As I have already mentioned in discussing the Humean non-cognitivism as opposed to the Buddhist cognitivism, moral language expresses reality that can be cognized. This informs the Buddhist cognitivism and teaching of morals that are universal in nature. Logical positivism is wrong in dismissing moral language as mere expressions of emotions. Morality regulates society and helps in reducing suffering. Therefore, Buddhism offers a moral language that is not merely an emotional expression which can help regulate society and alleviate suffering. Buddhism shows that rejecting objects of metaphysics does not imply a rejection of moral language.

Logical Positivism, as expounded by Ayer, while rejecting the idea of rebirth, by holding to the view that no person can survive the annihilation of the body, still holds to the logical possibility of it. In *The Concept of a Person and Other Essays*, Ayer holds that:

> …even if someone could convince us that he ostensibly remembered the experiences of a person who is long since dead, and even if this were backed by an apparent continuity of character, I think that we should prefer to say that he had somehow picked up the dead man's memories and dispositions rather than that he was the same person in another body; the idea of a person's leading a discontinuous existence in time as well as in space is just that much more fantastic. Nevertheless, I think that it would be

> open to us to admit the logical possibility of reincarnation merely by laying down the rule that if a person who is physically identified as living at a later time does have the ostensible memories and character of a person who is physically identified as living at an earlier time, they are to be counted as one person and not two.[125]

However, unlike Buddhism that affirms its actuality, Ayer still considers it a possibility. By considering it a logical possibility, the concept of Buddhist rebirth cannot be dismissed as nonsensical and lacking verification. Buddhism transcends the mere possibility of rebirth to assert its actuality, both as a historical fact and a future possibility. Rebirth is part of the laws of change. Given the historical and empirical evidence that points to the reality of rebirth, Buddhism invites adherents of Logical Positivism to affirm the actuality of rebirth and not just accepting it as a mere possibility.

[125] A.J Ayer, *The Concept of a Person and Other Essays*, (London: Macmillan, 1963) p.127.

CONCLUSION

I started this thesis by introducing the concept of metaphysics in general and pointed out the specific construal of metaphysics in this thesis. I went a step further to articulate my aim and the significance of the research. I also presented the structure of the research. In the second chapter, I critically examined the western critics of the metaphysics of stasis, namely David Hume, Immanuel Kant and A.J Ayer—proponent of logical positivism. After analyzing them, I articulated the theoretical frame work that could have led them to a negative view of metaphysics of stasis. The third chapter dealt exclusively with the Buddhist conception of metaphysics, which can be said to be an anti-thesis of the traditional western concept of metaphysics. I pointed out the major reason why Buddhist philosophy had to be anti-metaphysics as construed in this thesis, namely, the quest and struggle to eliminate suffering in the human condition and situation.

The following chapter was then a comparative analysis of the western critiques of metaphysics and the Buddhist negative conception of it. In comparing Buddhism and the western critiques of metaphysics, one discerns an empiricist trend that runs in their thoughts. However, the Buddhist empiricism is ethical, in the sense that it enables one to attain nirvana instead of engaging in trivial metaphysical discourse, while that of the western critiques can be said to be strictly epistemological, that is, expressing the condition for true knowledge, and not engaging itself in ethics. By comparing the two views, namely the critiques from the west and that of the east as found in Buddhism, I have shown that the two can engage each other in a fruitful dialogue.

The major achievement of this thesis is that it has gone a long way to show that the same trend of thought that runs in the history of western philosophy can also be found in Buddhism and Buddhist teachings. This thesis then contributes to other sources through which the continuous dialogue of the east and west can be sustained.

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