

Comparative Philosophy: A Methodological Approach

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Since the passing of its founder – Charles Moore – in 1967, the Hawaiian ‘Philosophy East and West’ has approached comparative philosophy as synonymous for ‘non-Western philosophy’. This is not in agreement with what I consider comparative philosophy to be. To me, the focus remains on the word ‘comparative’: only by real comparison do we bring cultures closer. Those who limit themselves to a purely descriptive juxtaposition lay the load of comparing on the shoulders of the reader, who is often not best placed or equipped to successfully do this, through lack of experience and knowledge. Comparison is the task of philosophy.

What is this comparison? It is most certainly not the search for similarities, because these are often trivial. Dissimilarities are much more interesting to explore; they represent furthermore the characteristics of civilizations. Additionally, the sum of all these dissimilarities can be used as the basis for a world-encompassing meta-philosophy. But it is not my purpose to construct a World philosophy.

A model, however, is a frame in which one can place different worldviews, although – as described elsewhere – as a model, it needs to be non-contradictory, i.e. it should be able to house both affirmation and negation of the same item. For instance, it has to incorporate both theism and atheism. A world philosophy, on the other hand, would be obliged to make a choice between both, in order to respond to the principle of non-contradiction.

Because the comparative philosopher is himself always part of a specific culture, he is often tempted to take his own civilization as the criterion: but this only results in a deformed image of the other cultures, and – as a rule – only those foreign themes then tend to get highlighted that are recognized in categories of the own culture. Some philosophers try to avoid the difficult assignment of comparison by posing incommensurability, which isolates cultures into ‘culture islands’ and reduces everyday life to a market: we do buy one another’s goods but not ideas.

To compare in an objective manner requires first and foremost the acknowledgment of the equal value of all cultures c.q. philosophies as starting points. None of them should be the criterion against which the others are compared. To achieve this, we need to develop a model that starts from objective categories within which the different world-views can be reduced to a basic set of formal themes. However, it

is clear that all cultures are heterogeneous. Yet those who are familiar with a specific culture know its fundamental characteristics, which unite in an ideal type. Our article explains what we mean by this approach. Ordinary falsification is of no value here.

I restrict myself in my approach to Greek, Indian and Chinese philosophies, because I am familiar with all of them. My structural insight in African, Islamic and Jewish philosophy is not detailed enough to integrate them in my field of research. I dealt with them in a general way in my book ‘Within the Four Seas’. As comparative philosophy is not identical to world philosophy, it does not have to be all-encompassing, it can be partial; and realistically speaking, nobody can be expected to be fully acquainted with ALL the world-views. However, to me the Islamic and Jewish (next to the Christian) philosophies are highly tributary to Greek thought, and are in a way historical sub-models of Greek philosophy. As a first step, within this sub-model, these need to be mutually compared. Their degree of difference will not be as deep as that between Greek, Indian and Chinese thinking.

I have elaborated on this philosophical work-model fully in my ‘Inleiding Comparatieve Filosofie’ (4 vols., 1995–2005) and in ‘Within the Four Seas’ (2007). In this article, I only try to show how this model can be applied in practice.

Comprehensive Description of Three Different World-Views

The following world-view descriptions are the result of active reduction. I try to construct the inner logic of these different world-views in a hermeneutic circle. Starting from this hermeneutical approach I design, in an initially intuitive way, a first model that I then check and recheck in the light of further text analysis. I do accept the axiom that philosophers everywhere in the world try to construct coherent world-views. Some Chinese and Buddhist texts may give the impression to be less coherent, but by reconstruction of their inner logic we do detect a coherent system, of course based on very different axioms than we use in Western thinking.

But, as already mentioned, comparative thinking is not in search of similarities – which are mostly very trivial in nature – they look for the dissimilarities. The basic mistake often made is that one approaches Chinese or Indian philosophy as a whole. What would be the coherence of ‘Western philosophy’ if it were considered as one single philosophy? We should reflect on what we actually mean when we mention things like ‘Asian philosophy’ or ‘African philosophy’. We dealt with these problems extensively in our books and refer to these for more information, since it is impossible to repeat all in the present article.

The Chinese World-View: The ‘Self-Existent’ and the Tao

The most obvious ontological aspect of Chinese Culture is found in its Taoist world-view. In this philosophy the world is *tzü-jen*, ‘by-itself-so’. This means that

the cosmos is the ultimate reality; there is no deeper level or origin. The world was not created by a God, but has always existed. Existence is a process of becoming: nothing is everlasting in the cosmos, everything is incorporated in a process of continual change. The world consists fundamentally of *ch'i*, energy, which is omnipresent. This *ch'i* would remain unknown to us if it did not manifest in the form of structured patterns or order patterns. These patterns are summarized in the transcendental concept¹ of Tao or the Way. Every phenomenon passes along a path, and this can be observed in nature. This path is like a biorhythm which cannot be further explained and remains the mystery of the universe. However, this path cannot be linear: a tree cannot grow forever, and so time must be cyclical. Every phenomenon will first go through an expansive phase, developing fully, followed by a phase of contraction, returning to its *ch'i* basis and to finally disappear from the world of phenomena. Life and death are two phases of the same process. Traditionally, the first phase is called yang and the second yin.² All phenomena are subjected to this eternal rhythm; nothing is invariable, neither atom or substance, nor soul or god.

As the universe is a *ch'i*-space, all is related to all by a field of force. Contrary to western thinking, action at a distance is here quite normal. Every event in the cosmos influences all others and consequently the entire universe is in resonance.³ Man, through his ancestors⁴ also a product of this universe, has his individuality expressed in his 'decree from heaven', but 'heaven' "does not speak",⁵ it invests our nature with talents. Man is the only being that can somewhat resist the Tao-rhythm, because of a limited amount of free energy. His Tao is not purely definite, this personal Tao is called Te. The wise man will always try to protect his deepest Tao: that is why he will never harm nature. Hence his motto of wu-wei, no action: i.e. not resist the natural patterns of order, but live in complete harmony with the rhythms of nature. Confucianism does not accept this non-action, it attempts to create a perfect society. It distinguishes "the great man" from "the small man": the former doubles his talents, the latter uses them for his own profit.

This Tao is an inexplicable mystery, and it satisfies the human religious need by its sacredness. It also satisfies the rational need: "science" does not exist in the analytical knowledge of the phenomena, but in the careful observation (*aisthèsis*) of the patterns; which could even be used to develop environment-friendly technology. Economics is not the imposition of a rational model on the Earth, but the unfolding of natural trends, e.g. agriculture, which is a refinement of nature. This is a coherent world-view, which satisfies our need for logic.

¹This means that there are as many paths as there are phenomena. We indicate all these paths together with the term Tao. However, this is an abstraction: the Tao does not exist *an sich*, it is not a kind of God. It is the same as with man: the abstraction 'man' does not exist, there are only individual men.

²Actually yang is the sun-side of a valley, yin the shadow-side. But the sun-side in the morning is the shadow-side in the evening.

³This is the reason why magnetism was not mysterious, but quite natural.

⁴This is a very modern idea: the genome of each person is the result of his ancestry, and so we are all children of the cosmos.

⁵Fung Yu-lan, *A History of Chinese Philosophy*, part I, p. 115.

The Western World-View: Between Reason and God

The Western Weltanschauung is double-faced, depending on whether we regard it scientifically or religiously. The scientific world interprets the phenomena: our starting point is the world of becoming. We consider this world of becoming as real but imperfect, because we accept that perfection is eternal and invariable. For Plato this invariability lay beyond the phenomenality in the realm of Ideas, while for Aristotle it lay in general concepts; in both cases a common core present in the things themselves. Also, if motion is not eternal, then there has to be a starting point, and this was Plato's *deus faber* or Aristotle's 'unmoved mover'. They put the *causa causarum* outside the world, so that the ultimate reality does not belong to the world, but brought it into existence. Consequently, physics is insufficient to understand the world, one also needs metaphysics. The eternal element in the cosmos is God, conceptualised as a world-spirit; the eternal element in man is his soul that survives him after death; the eternal element in matter is the atom, or the chemical elements. All phenomena must be explained within a causal interrelationship, their internal structure can be revealed by analysis. This constitutes science. This knowledge can be applied back on the phenomena, and so new structures with new characteristics come into being: this is the technology that can make our precarious existence more comfortable.

Medieval philosophy was theontic in character. It drew its inheritance not only from classical antiquity but also from the Jewish religious tradition. Rationality diverged from the phenomena and was directed at revealed truths, which, in a theology, were made acceptable to our rationality. The Greek 'logic' was used as long as it did not contradict the given truths. This religiosity has a dualistic character: the eternal and invariable transcend the world, and are called God. The phenomenal world is created by God but is neither divine nor sacred. To use the Buddhist image; the waves of the ocean are whipped up by the divine wind which 'blows above the water'. But this ocean, the primeval chaos, is itself created by God out of nothing. The Mystery is therefore not immanent to the world. Man is ethically obliged to obey God's commandments. He is rewarded or punished after death, but his soul will exist eternally.

At the time of the Enlightenment it became clear that we would never acquire any knowledge of the phenomenal world by speculative and theontic metaphysics: neither Greek philosophy nor Christian religion can teach us to understand the world in a rational way; only the phenomenal world itself can do this. Hence we use Greek 'logic' to question nature, convinced as we are that the truth about the cosmos is stored within the cosmos. This anchoring of thought in the phenomenal world is the origin of modern experimental science. The Greek ideas of substantiality (self-identity) and causality provide the mental framework within which we interpret the world; but nature provides the basic data. If we prefer not to consider this world self-sufficient, and so question its origin, we are linking science to a transcendental principle (*causa causarum*) or God. This insight into the structure of things soon gives relatively powerful control over them: this is the birth of modern technology.

Until now, this remained the western logic. Is it also the universal logic? Or is it just one aspect of reality?

The Indian World-View: Between Appearance and Void

Indian philosophy is very complex and difficult to reduce to a single basic system. But we can say – from a pure philosophical viewpoint – that Indian philosophy culminated in Buddhism. In Buddhist philosophy the ultimate reality is the unknowable foundation of all things. To our rational comprehension it is empty (*śūnya*), and remains forever a Mystery. Because it is not easy for westerners to follow Buddhist logic, we shall use an illustration: the Mystery, which is the true reality, we will imagine an ocean. To our rationality this ocean is a no-thing, i.e. it is not an object that we can approach rationally. It is a Void, but then there is nothing as full as the Void (this is definitely not nihilism!). The ocean generates waves, i.e. phenomena that are perceptible and can be analysed mentally. But these waves only have a relational reality: they appear in time and later disappear, and so do not constitute true reality. But the waves are interrelated and can ‘observe’ each other. From this arises a false perception of reality: we think the sum of all the waves – the set of all phenomena – is the reality. Buddhists call such a ‘reality’ *māyā*, i.e. phenomena that are mere apparitions in comparison to the true reality: these waves are causally dependent on one another, and the nature of something that is caused by something else is not absolute. Even here we do not encounter a God-concept (if one claims that Buddhism is an atheism, then one should qualify this term; there really is an absolute reality, but because human rationality sees it as empty, there is no God-*concept*. A wave, in its deepest being, is ocean. This means that the deepest nature of each phenomenon is the ocean-nature, i.e. the buddha-nature (this is not the nature of the Buddha, but the true nature of every living being, also of plants and animals). Gautama Siddharta was the first to ‘realize’ this nature, the first Buddha, i.e. the enlightened one.

Man also is a revelation of the Mystery: he is a wave that appears and disappears in the ocean. He does not appear as an unwritten page, but is bearer of a cosmic past whose origins we cannot determine but whose phenomenal flow generates him. Since man possesses an amount of free energy, he can give his own wave a certain impulse through his deeds (*karma*): this wave will have an influence on all following waves. When my life-wave disappears, there is no substance or soul that remains for eternity: Buddhism is the doctrine of an-*ātman*, not-soul. This does not mean that I completely disappear when I die, because my *karma* has become a part of history. History, an evolution towards “spiritualisation”, i.e. the realization of the complete buddha-nature of the universe, is partly determined by me. But, as I am entranced by my faulty reality-consciousness, I must first become enlightened: I have to realize that the buddha-nature (ocean in me) is my true nature. This enlightenment forces me into deliverance; I have to release myself from my natural ego-intentionality, which is related to the idea that the waves constitute the real

world. I also have to let go of the idea that the Mystery can be understood and realize that any statement about the ocean is nonsense. What remains is: to entrust myself to the Mystery.

In China, Buddhism came into contact with Taoism. Buddhism was very much transcendently-oriented: it sought nirvāna in the non-phenomenal world and did not focus its attention on the phenomena, unless as a starting point on the path to deliverance. Taoism kept Buddhism's feet on the ground, however. The consequence is that sacrality lies in nature itself. This leads to the formation of a non-dualistic religiosity: this is Zen.

Buddhism, as philosophy, is highly coherent. But at the same time it is very different from western logic. For instance, there is no principle of identity; the real Reality cannot be known, it can be experienced. The real is not the rational, the rational is not the real – adversus Hegel. Nevertheless there exists a real Buddhist logic.

Comparison of Chinese, Greek and Indian World-Views

Can we interpret the Chinese, Indian and Greek-western philosophies more meaningfully and compare them without using our own world-view as criterion? Let us, on the basis of a series of headings, examine their characteristics, to define the fundamental differences between these three major philosophies of life. We are here clearly dealing with ideal types, since cultural patterns do not occur in such black and white form, despite the fact that they form the hard core of the Taoist, Greek-Western and Buddhist views respectively.

The selection of the three headings of our model is most certainly not exclusive. It is based on my long personal study of these three world-views over many years. The selection of criteria was, to be honest, not surprisingly first inspired by my own western world-view, but this cannot be taken as an argument against. When we compare, we can never compare things as a whole: how could we possibly compare two persons as there is, from a purely logical viewpoint, an infinite set of characteristics. Consequently, any comparison is actually theoretically impossible.

Before starting off on the path of comparative philosophy, we need to thoroughly discuss the meaning of the term 'comparison'. My viewpoint is not in the first place a theoretical, but a practical one: how can I explain Buddhism to Western people? Or can I explain Greek logic to Buddhist philosophers (remembering that there is no identity principle in Buddhism, no substance and no individuality)? So we have to make a choice. What I avoid is selecting paradigmatically bound characteristics, such as 'soul', 'God', 'substance', etc.

On the other hand, 'energy', for instance, is not a typically western item, because Chinese thinking is based on this same concept, called ch'i. The same holds for concepts such as time, space and causality. Those who maintain that Eastern thought does not know 'concepts' are saying that the Chinese and Indians are not able to think. They are inspired by the prejudice that there is only one type of

philosophy, viz. the Western type. In that scenario, Western thinking provides all the criteria for comparative philosophy and other philosophies are only valuable in as far as they have an intersection with the Western world-view. However, let us remember ‘das Ende der Philosophie’, the ‘rationality crisis’ and the religious wars. I am not at all convinced of the claim that the apogee of thinking lies in Western philosophy – and definitely not in applied philosophy.

So, if my selection seems in some way personal and somewhat arbitrary, I never suggested that it is the only way of approach. But at least what I am doing is not theorizing about comparison in the first place, yet constructing a provisional comparative model to practically apply – it has not at all the pretension to be exclusive.

The rationale of my selection can be rendered as follows:

Energy/matter and **Form** (in-forma-tion) are the basic features of our objective world. Discussing the position of the subject, I have to investigate its **epistemological** relation to the object. We can only describe this object within a framework of coordinates: it is clear that the phenomena can only be described within the categories of **space** and **time**, which make **motion** possible. Motions are interlinked by **causality**. We can reduce the objective world to its **ontological** basis, the subject to the way it displays itself in the world: this requires a **philosophy of life**. The relation between subjects is determined within a **social context**, i.e. an **ethical community**. This requires communication in **language**. Finally we stay in relation to the Mystery of being in **mysticism, c.q. religion**.

The *headings* for the description of these three cultures are:

1. Energy
2. Information
3. Epistemology
4. Coordinates, including:
 - (a) Time
 - (b) Space
 - (c) Motion
 - (d) Causality
5. The ontological status
6. Philosophy of life
7. Ethics (social dimension)
8. Mysticism/religiosity
9. Language

Chinese Taoism: Tzŭ-Jen and Tao

The Chinese world-view is based on three pillars: Confucianism, Taoism and (Chinese) Buddhism. The most typical ontologically, is Taoism, to which we limit ourselves here, bearing in mind that it pervades all Chinese thought.

In Chinese, **nature** is called **tzŭ-jen**, the ‘by-itself-so’. This means that nature is the irreducible ultimate reality. It is not the creation of a god: Chinese thought does not include a God-concept. Furthermore, the world has always existed and hence is itself the absolute. This does not mean it is immutable, on the contrary: placing immutability synonymous to perfection is a Greek idea. But is a stone more perfect than a tree? Perfection can also exist in a perfect dynamic.

Let us now analyze this tzŭ-jen.

1. *Energy* is tied to fixed patterns of behaviour, which are phylogenetically inherited. This energy sustains the structure of the system, but at the same time activates the dynamic balances, i.e. the action by which energy is converted into deeds. This energy is not specific to the action alone, but is present everywhere in space [compare to a space of pure radiation]: this is the ch’i concept. In living creatures energy is also employed to maintain anti-entropic structures by the dissipation of energy, i.e. heat loss.

The Universe consists of ch’i (energy): this means that space is a force-space. Every point in space is charged with energy. If this force-space were homogeneous, nothing would occur and there would be nothing to observe. But I see that well defined forms exist in the phenomenal world. I also see that all these forms are constantly changing: a world of becoming: existing means changing. There is no ontological category other than Becoming. Ch’i sometimes translates as ‘matter-energy’, because matter is nothing but concentrated energy (in older writings this is compared to water and ice, water standing for energy, ice for matter). Ch’i is different from the Greek energy, that which enables the working to happen. Greek physics was based on matter and form. So, in order to dynamize the world, energy had to be added. But a world of becoming is itself ch’i; ch’i is not added, it is fundamental.

2. The *information* consists of patterns of becoming, which in Taoism are summarized under the name *Tao*, the Way. These patterns can be read *aesthetically*⁶ in nature and experienced as *biorhythms*. Becoming does not follow random paths: every phenomenon develops in a particular way (tao). Tao is actually a transcendental concept: the sum of all tao’s is called the Tao.

Things are not substances that remain identical to themselves – my so-called ‘identity’ is nothing other than my life-path. This means that the Tao is a creative principle: it brings about every being’s life-path. The principle of identity is meaningless. Tao does not exist on its own somewhere outside the universe, like some God. It is immanent to the universe. Hence it is said that Tao is non-existing. The question of the origin of Tao is inadmissible: we know from the phenomenal world itself that this order pattern exists, but there is no transcendental being that created it.

3. *Epistemology*: Rationality and emotionality are not separate. Knowledge arises by aisthesis, i.e. by a receptive presence in wordless experience. This knowledge is not analytical, but comprehensive – it is a vision on existence.

⁶For the concept ‘aisthèsis’ cf. *infra*.

Aisthèsis is ‘attentive presence’. It was characteristic for Chinese epistemology. He who wants to know a reticular whole, cannot achieve this by subdividing the causal network into a set of binary relations within closed systems. Example: an ornithologist knows that he cannot study the ethology of a bird by dissecting its corpse nor by observing its behaviour in a cage; he can only do this in the wild by non-interfering, aisthetical observation. From old, the main feature of ‘science’ in China was aisthetical, which is different from occasional or directed observation.

Aisthèsis brought an overwhelming amount of knowledge (printing, gunpowder, compass), which – according to Francis Bacon⁷ – changed history but did not lead to modern science. There are many sociological reasons for this, some of which are convincing, as e.g. that philosophers and technologists never did meet. But there is also an important philosophical reason, namely that aisthèsis is holistic and consequently cannot give rise to modern science; this can only be done by directed experiences in closed systems, linked to theories.

Unknowable Tao: Taoists do not believe that we can ever explain the Tao, i.e. the full dynamics of nature. This is in contrast to the western scientific conviction. As rationalists we imagine that we can penetrate the Tao through our power of reason in phenomenological analysis. We are in search for the cosmic formula, to give us final power over the totality of the phenomenal world. This conception follows from the idea that the universe is a pure rational structure and thus intelligible; it is not a mystical field, i.e. a fundamental mystery. A thorough analysis must open the gate to the cosmic secret. But for Taoists the universe is also the expression of the mysticity of being, and Tao is an irreducible mystery; it cannot be analyzed in a rational way. This explains the anti-intellectualism of Taoism. However, Taoists realize that by means of the rational function we can learn a lot, yet there is an insurmountable limit to all our knowledge: one can never elucidate Tao in depth; I cannot say why biorhythms are as they are. True knowledge can only describe the tao-patterns of the phenomenal world. Is this really knowledge? When one asks what the smell of the rose is, there is no analytical answer, like the chemical formula or the Latin name; I can only ask ‘to go along’ with the rose and to inhale its aroma.

In an immanent context knowledge cannot be analytical, only analogical. As subjects that are part of the object, we can never objectivate things, but all dynamic patterns existing in the object can also be detected in the subject. This idea follows from the principle of structural identity, which is a kind of analogy reasoning. The term ‘identity’ is however somewhat misleading, because it gives a static impression. Actually ‘resonance’ is the right term. In Taoism this

⁷“It is well to observe the force and virtue and consequences of discoveries. These are to be seen nowhere more conspicuously than in those three which were unknown to the ancients, and of which the origin, though recent, is obscure and inglorious. Namely, printing, gunpowder, and the magnet. For these three have changed the whole face and state of things throughout the world, the first in literature, the second in warfare, the third in navigation; whence have followed innumerable changes; insomuch that no empire, no sect, no star, seems to have exerted greater power and influence in human affairs than these mechanical discoveries.”, *Novum Organum*, book 1, aphorism 129. We give the modern version from J. Needham, o.c., vol. I, p. 19.

resonance model was attributed to the whole cosmos. ‘Law’ means here: model, pattern. In heaven some dynamic patterns become visible: those are determined by the dynamics of Tao (we should say by fundamental physical laws, like gravity and electromagnetic forces), and this cannot be explained further. This spontaneity creates resonance patterns on earth, like day/night, phases of the moon, seasons ... Man lives within these biological rhythms with his daily rhythm, menstruation, seasonal work ... The universe is one mighty resonating whole.

Man can vibrate sympathetically with the cosmic harmony: he is in experiential relation with Tao, to which he is related by heaven and earth. Resonating with Tao consequently means: resonating with nature.

4. *Coordinates*

(a) *Time* is cyclical. This is defined as the yin-yang principle. No linear transformation can exist – this would lead to a runaway phenomenal world (e.g. trees would continue to grow forever) – so time has to be cyclical. However, this time does not exist as an autonomous, absolute parameter, it is the way we measure the transformation. Becoming is thus conceived as a wave-like movement from existence to non-existence and vice versa. This means the ‘ten thousand things’ are born and perish in an eternal Tao rhythm.

But what does existing and perishing mean? Existing means that the ch’i produces forms and develops according to a particular Tao. At the end of this life the phenomenon disappears once more into the undifferentiated ch’i field. Since every process of becoming is cyclical, it has an expansive phase (yang) and a recessive phase (yin).

Conception of history

The Chinese conception of history is that life on earth started from a paradisiacal situation within an intact natural environment, but this situation deteriorated quickly because of the development of civilisation. Hence the idea that history is actually the history of decline. Duration, continuity of the good, recurrence of the same are highly elevated above continuous change, which has to lead to increasing perfection – the unrest of western civilisation.⁸ “Changes are, in old China at least from the end of the Chou dynasty, considered to be deviations from a fixed, permanent ideal, which was realized in an ‘absolute’ past”.⁹ Every new beginning in history was interpreted as an attempt to restore this eternal order, so that the past became normative for present and future. Each dynastic cycle was a new beginning, necessarily to lead to decline, after which followed a new beginning. This was the “cyclical approach and deviation of a permanent ideal”. For Confucianists this ideal was situated in the

⁸“Chief characteristic of traditional Chinese conception of history is the consciousness of duration. Herein it differs fundamentally from the traditional European-western historical consciousness that history consists of motion of time towards a goal,” Bodo Wiethoff, *Grundzüge der älteren chinesischen Geschichte*, p. 32.

⁹*Ibid.*, p. 32.

Chou-period,¹⁰ for Taoists it was in a remote past when human beings still lived harmoniously with nature.

- (b) *Space* is a ch'i space. No place exists without ch'i. It is not an empty mathematical space. Space is an *open* system and not a set of closed subsystems. Such a force-space is a ch'i continuum, where everything is linked to everything else in a reticular causality (holism). The ch'i is in eternal movement, but this movement is not locomotion; it is inner transformation, which is the Tao of the phenomenon.
- (c) *Causality* is reticular (network causality): everything is linked to everything else. The system is holistic and open, yet not in a multiple linear causality. In Chinese thought distant action was not a problem because space was not empty but full of ch'i. This means that everything resonates with everything and that the universe is a ch'i-continuum. Consequently each local vibration is transmitted through the whole universe.

Actually this was a kind of organicist thinking, typical of live beings, characterized by intrinsic rhythms: beings never remain for an instant what they were. Consequently mechanistic thinking (billiard ball causality) cannot be suitable for a transformative reality. This explains why mechanistic thinking never dominated in China, and the aversion of Taoists for technical tools. Taoist philosophy was indeed a process philosophy.

- (d) *Motion* is transformation: since every phenomenon is a process of becoming, it is constantly changing. The Herakleitean idea of self-transformation and that there are no eternal unchanging beings, only phenomena, is fundamental to Chinese philosophy, which is based on the observation of living nature (tzu-jen). Eternal motion, as feature of the universe, has no starting point and so this universe is the 'eternal return of same'.
5. *The ontological status* is Becoming: the cosmos is an event. The differentiation we observe in the phenomenal world is explained by the form being stored and transmitted in the seed. This seed can again develop into a phenomenon by the 'spirit of the seed' or the vital spirit, which is the Tao impulse. The life-force is present everywhere in the universe, and it is a property of ch'i.
 6. *Philosophy of life*

Authenticity: In nature, life is struggle for life, but with built-in constraints. A young child comes closest to authenticity: its life is pure spontaneity, it follows the Tao without resistance. In his immanence, an adult remains a young child all his life, the child of nature. Even when part of his energy frees itself, he takes care that this transcendence does not harm his immanence.

¹⁰Cf. John T. Marcus, *Sub Specie Historiae*, p. 58: "In the classical Confucian perspective, the Golden Age was conceived as having occurred in the past. The essence of Chinese civilisation was its sense of tradition, preserved in the rituals of life, the forms of civility, and the continuity of the family. The purpose of historical thought, consequently, was to perpetuate the ideals of the ancient sages and the image of a former social order, and the function of the individual was to live up to them."

The natural, spontaneous and ‘female’ always contrasts with the artificial, cultural and ‘male’.¹¹ Since Antiquity, cultural heroes have since antiquity changed the world through civilisation, but ‘the spirit of the valley never dies: it is the mysterious female nature’,¹² that which is immanent. That it never dies means that life always survives, whereas human constructions easily decay.

Taoist virtues: Now, on by some romantic perspectives on life, one might imagine that the Taoists were sentimental about nature, idealising it and considering it the absolute good. But their realism forced them to recognize that nature is ethically indifferent: nature brings us youth, strength, health and beauty, but it will also take them all away again. For this reason one must not attribute to it any ‘Confucianist’ virtues such as humanity, justice, love or warm-heartedness. These virtues are simply natural, the natural human does not realize that they exist. Morality is a proof of decline. A natural human is always mild, moderate and humble.

It is therefore not surprising that the great principle of human life is *wu-wei*, non-action. The less one transcends nature, the better the tranquil balance and happiness will be preserved. Plants and animals do not act purposefully, and yet they carry on their lives. We westerners always want to plant adult trees for immediate results, while the Taoist plants young trees and lets them grow. For the Taoist, the virtue of virtues is the mysterious force that arises out of life itself. One consequently has to cultivate this force, and then will have sufficient *ch’i* for a flawless life. The opposite picture is the rationally planned life, which expects all benefits to come from the action. Thus, the virtues of the Taoist are caution, not purposefulness, seriousness, flexibility, genuineness, frankness, responsiveness, gentleness, contentment, spontaneity and authenticity or, in one word, naturalness.

The Taoist’s fundamental attitude is *anti-intellectual*; we can never get to know the deep secret of the Tao by conceptualisation. Taoism is also *anti-cultural*, because culture is anti-natural. Consequently, Taoism is *anti-technological* too. And Taoism is *anti-religious* because it does not have any such transcendental value as God or *nirvāna*. It is indeed not a monotheism nor monism. But it finds satisfaction for its mystical needs in the sacredness of nature. Life is good and one tries to achieve longevity, but not to escape from this vale of tears.

Te 德, the personal tao: As stated earlier, the Tao is a transcendental concept. The individualised tao, the personal potency is called *Te*. It is a fact that not all beings have the same ‘life amplitude’ and are not synchronous with each other. In man, this *Te* also concerns his free energy. By contrast with animals, it allows him to disrupt the Tao pattern.

7. *Ethics:* The question ‘whether or not it is possible to have a satisfactory ethics without a religious or metaphysical basis’, was posed by missionary-sinologist

¹¹ Female does not mean: woman; male does not mean: man. This is proved by the use of characters. ‘Female’, in Lao-tzu, ch.6 and 61, is represented as *p’in* 牝, female animal, and in ch.28 as *tz’u* 雌, female bird, in contrast to *hsiung* 雄, male bird. These terms makes no sense in their literal translation; these are in all probability endeavours to express the abstract concepts ‘femaleness’.

¹²Ch. 6.

D.H. Smith in *Confucius and Confucianism*.¹³ Taoists believed that the categories of good and bad were meaningless for the universe, and indeed, where death is bad for the individual, it is not so for mankind. Hence nature is good and bad, or neither good nor bad. Of course, we cannot build a society without ethical principles, because of man's free energy. China never knew a religious or philosophical sectarianism, so that many Confucianists were also Taoists at heart. Confucianists focussed on ethics. Confucianism built up a high-principled ethical system, containing the highest virtues such as love, righteousness and respect for the feelings of others (li). However, this system was not based on a divine commandment, as there is no concept of a personal God in China. When Confucius says that Heaven commands, he says also that Heaven does not speak. This means that the universe has inscribed in man, as a being disposing of some free energy, a categorical imperative, which was called 'command from heaven' and which is, according to the *Chung-yung*,¹⁴ your own nature, i.e. your innate talents. In this way ethics is not abstract, general and legalistic, but personalized: he who does not double his talents behaves unethically; it is insufficient to obey rules.

Wu-wei: Not disturbing the course of nature. Taoists realized that nature survives in its pure form only in remote mountains, and many of them retired to these lonely places. Culture with its orientation on transcendental values disturbs spontaneity. It was believed – as in so many cultures – that long ago there was a period in which people lived in full harmony with nature. But then culture-heroes arose who wanted to reorganize nature.

Chuang-tzū believed that moral qualities belong to immanence. Man is by nature good, not a 'fighting beast' (he becomes that rather in transcendence). If human nature is fundamentally good – an idea we find also with Mencius – then Confucianist virtues belong to human nature. Mencius however thinks that we have to cultivate our good nature to guard it from becoming bad. Chuang-tzu thinks the opposite: when we bring nature into culture, nature becomes bad. Human reason believes that it can order nature better, yet although nature knows a restricted 'struggle for life', reason did not bring peace in the world: on the contrary, it brought confusion, unrest and many wars. Ever since, culture was no longer an aspect of human nature, but was opposed to it.

Nature is ethically indifferent: Taoists are not back-to-nature philosophers and they do not know a romantic nature sentimentalism typical of city inhabitants alienated from nature, who ascribe moral qualities to it. Taoists teach that nature is ethically indifferent: neither good nor bad, or both good and bad. Nature gives and takes: life, youth, health, beauty ... Taoists reject the Confucianist ethics that say that virtues such as human-heartedness and justice (which are imparted by education – i.e. artificially – can bring about better people and a better society. They believe that happiness is dependent on *wu-wei*. According to Chuang-tzū,

¹³ p. 62.

¹⁴ The *Chung-yung* (Doctrine of the Mean) is a small book of the Confucian school, now contained in the *Li Chi*, ch. 28. Translation by J. Legge in *The Chinese Classics*, vol. 1, p. 383.

the original natural morality decayed and was replaced by artificial ethics. He who disturbs the natural balance, is left with 'weeds', because he harvests out only the useful herbs. The fact that a mother feeds her children, had nothing to do with goodness, only with naturality.

Immanent love: There are some strange texts in the Tao-te-ching, which we would expect only in the context of transcendent religions. "The wise has no unshakeable heart. He considers the heart of the common people as being his own heart. For those who are good I am good. For those who are not good I am also good. Te is always good. For those who are sincere, I am also sincere. For those who are not sincere, I am also sincere. Te is sincere. The wise man is in the world, peaceful and still. 'Making' the world disturbs his heart. People all keep their ears and eyes directed to him, and the sage treats them all as his children."¹⁵ Love for the fellow-man is mostly monopolized by transcendent religions as Christianity and Buddhism, but here an immanent philosophy that believes in the innate goodness of nature, also developed this idea. Yet here the love-concept is not rooted in an illumination-redemption, which rejects nature as being no-illuminated and undelivered, but in the idea of the caring mother. She cannot break the pattern of life, and cannot put 'good' life opposite 'bad' death. The transcendental world-view considers the good as the eternal Being or eternal Non-being, but never as Becoming. The cycle of the seasons, of growth and decay, is bad in the view of the Absolute but in the natural rhythm of the 'Eternal return of the same', everything is good.

This goodness of becoming results in some high-standard ethical principles. Lao-tzu criticizes the unjustness of the world, where the rich enrich themselves and the poor become poorer.

Human society: Small is beautiful. Taoists defend the village society as the most organic. Urbanization always goes hand in hand with intellectualism, technology and culture, which are all anti-Taoist.

8. *Taoist mysticism* is not transcendental mysticism, but nature-mysticism. The mystery of being is omnipresent in the cosmos. The wise retire 'to the mountains' in order to experience the Tao in its purity. Today, man no longer lives in a natural context. The experience of nature is not continuous but a momentaneous happening which he has to actively seek.

Since we no longer live in a natural situation, we have to return meditatively to the Tao to be guided by the immanent experience. We will occasionally leave the everyday-life situation and let go of analytical thought (the 'fasting of the spirit') and the power of words, to experience the mysterious unity of the Tao.

The Taoist saint: In Taoism a 'saint' was called a man of the mountains, one who retired from society.

Philosophy of the body: The first thing we have to do is to keep the body in balance, since "your reason is your small wisdom, your body your great wisdom" (Nietzsche). K. Schipper draws attention to the fact that, in a non-dualist

¹⁵Ch. 49.

philosophy of nature the subject coincides with its body, and his bodily landscape is in the frame of structural identity the correlate of the cosmic landscape.¹⁶

But also after death man remains part of the environment. “His higher souls (shen) become ancestor, whereas his bones (po) are buried according to the rules of Chinese geomancy, so that their power can be controlled and further benefit the survivors. For the souls of the dead are a treasure for the living: each family possesses a number of life spirits in the shen- and po-souls of their ancestors, they form a kind of charisma familiaris.”¹⁷

That life is the greatest value is reflected in the idea of ‘the lost souls’. A life that is not completed, and thus leaves unused ch’i, falls outside the cycle of existence. In the words of popular belief: ‘ghosts’ roamed about and threatened in the world of men. This is the popular rendering of a philosophical conception that the world is a cyclic dynamics, wherein the used yang starts the yin-phase. When the cycle is interrupted, this non-integrated ch’i becomes dangerous to the cosmic order, home of the Taoist.

So, for the common man, there is no reason to strive for salvation: “For the common man saving his soul – or souls – is completely superfluous, as his real benefit lies in the natural course of things.” There is no transcendental religion to save man from this earthly suffering. As life has value in itself, the wise man lives in harmony with nature, he will reach old age, become an ancestor, a shen. All this is far away from dualistic thinking: man is his body.

9. The *language* is a metaphorical language. This metaphorical use of language often generates the wrong idea that Chinese philosophy is a kind of intellectual poetry, and often text translations are too poetical. In my experience these texts are philosophical, but just like nature they are not explicit. Nature can only be described in a intelligible way by abstracting its features into a rational scheme, this means as a kind of natural science. Yet the Taoist world is one of resonance, and I have to resonate with nature. Rational language, as in physics, cannot trigger this resonance. On the other hand, not analyzing nature’s features in a rational way means I can only approach it by aisthèsis – i.e. without theories – and emotional resonance. I think that this is how Taoists describe reality. When I describe the behaviour of a bird, I use metaphors to communicate with other bird-watchers. Yet at the same time I cannot unhook my description from my own emotional experience.

Nature does not speak more than absolutely necessary: language belongs to the transcendental dimension. Lao-tzu says: “One who knows does not speak; one who speaks does not know.”¹⁸ Words have no value by themselves: Chuang-tzu says: “A word is not only a puff of breath, he who speaks has always something to say; but this something is never completely defined by the word.”¹⁹

¹⁶ K. Schipper, Tao, *De levende religie van China*, p. 14.

¹⁷ Schipper, o.c., p. 53.

¹⁸ *Tao-te-ching*, ch. 56.

¹⁹ B. Watson, o.c., p. 39.

Greek Philosophy: Between Reason and God

As Greek-western philosophy is multi-faceted, we cannot describe it here in its entirety. We shall restrict ourselves to classical Greek (Platonic and Aristotelian) philosophy, addressing only occasionally Stoic and Christian thought.

1. *Energy*: According to Hesiod the universe was first chaos, unordered primeval matter. This chaos was transformed into cosmos. But transformation requires energy, so where does it come from? From a God, himself eternal unchanging Being, functioning as an ‘unmoved mover’ (Aristotle)? Or from an archè, a primeval matter, which condenses and dilutes (pre-Socratics and also Aristotle)? But the question remains: where does the energy for this motion come from?²⁰ The alternative for chaos is the creation e nihilo. But what is this ‘nihilo’? Is it God (Eriugena), so that God is the eternal energy? Parmenides solved the problem by rejecting the phenomenal world itself.

En-ergeia is derived from en, in + ergon, work; energy = what expresses itself in work, it cannot be seen, only its action can be seen. We traditionally interpret energy as the cause of observable ‘workings’. ‘Working’ is the ‘moving’ of an object, and this requires a ‘force’. Is this conception not hidden Aristotelian substance-thinking? Everybody knows now that there are no fixed stars and that the whole universe is a huge process in continuous motion. But, does this process still require added energy, or is it itself fundamentally energy, ‘working’ being the equilibrating energetic tension expressed in the changes of the moving system, i.e. in its becoming?

2. *Information*: Matter is not informative as such; only forms are informative. New forms can be created by combinations of natural forms. But this is limited to what can be logically (Boolean) described, and excludes what is emotional. This information increases the order of the universe and is therefore negentropic (negatively entropic). ‘Heat’ (emotion, tapas) is a dissipation of energy and is considered to be a loss factor.

Greek informative thinking is tributary to Parmenides’ famous dictum: being and thinking is the same, i.e. the logic of thinking and the logic of being is the same. We accept that the phenomenal world hides a basic logicity. In modern science we try to detect this logicity in a hermeneutic circle. But Parmenides believed that logical thinking suffices and that the logicity of reality must necessarily correspond to the logical model we construct based on (seemingly) evident axioms. So we construct patterns of order on the three levels of formal logic: classification, attribution, relation. Following strict rules of derivation, we get the truth.

Plato says: “It is by means of problems, then, said I, as in the study of geometry, that we will pursue astronomy too, and we will let things in the heavens, if we

²⁰ Compare to high- and low-pressure areas, which cause indeed the movement of the air; but they can only originate by increase or decrease of energy in the form of warmth.

are to have a part in the true science of astronomy and so convert to right use from uselessness that natural indwelling intelligence of the soul.” (Republic, VII, 530a v). This means that, if our geometrical constructions are logical, they must necessarily correspond to things in heavens. This is the only way we can approach the Ideas. And indeed Plato’s inspiration started from the Idea of the perfect circle, the actual circle never being perfect.

But there is more: logic can only be applied to ‘beings’, not to ‘becomings’. So the atomists started from unchanging particles, and explained motion as particle locomotion. The phenomena were reducible to ‘beings’ and inner transformation was nothing but appearance.

Plato’s ‘realism’ attributes autonomous existence only to ‘beings’ and considers the ‘becomings’ as faint silhouettes of these ‘beings’. These famous Ideas are not only non-falsifiable ‘gods’, but they are unusable for building a science, because science describes the phenomena which are ‘becomings’. But the Aristotelian conception that there is a core of being (substance) in the phenomena, is based on reduction of the attributes. The result of this reduction should not be nothing, but an elusive and dim thing that functions as bearer of these attributes. Not surprisingly, Buddhism and also Hume did not believe in this substance.

‘Being’ can be interpreted in three different ways. According to Plato it is an Idea, which exists eternally by itself. According to Aristotle it is a substance, which cannot exist without attributes: e.g. there is no human being without attributes. It can also be a concept, i.e. an abstraction that only exists in my mind. So, ‘being’ cannot be observed in the phenomenal world, it can only be constructed by a rational act through: conceptualisation, substantialisation and idealisation. As long as there was no human mind there was no ‘being’, only ‘becoming’.

Rationalism

In general, one can say that Greek philosophy attributes no real reality to the world of becoming. This is why the empirical aspect of Greek philosophy was so weak, and why, before the Late Hellenistic period, little observation was done. The only exceptions are the Hippocratic writings. Plato in particular abhorred observation and thought that one did not have to look at the stars to be an astronomer. Although Aristotle made more use of empirical data, he also built major logical constructions on sparse facts, which as a rule he had himself not even checked. It was partly as a result of the negative influence of these two great philosophers that for two millennia natural science did not advance beyond natural philosophy.

What is becoming is transient and therefore imperfect. Behind this world of becoming lies the world of being. However, this cannot be observed, only conceived in metaphysics based on generalities that form the lasting and therefore perfect being of phenomena: they are self-identical. The great value of this rationality lies in the fact that science can indeed only be a science of beings and not of becomings.

The thinking subject can approach this world of being because it can use logical thought patterns. These patterns may assume the form of eternal Ideas (Plato); or class-logical models (Aristotle); or a propositional logic (Stoics).

In fact the whole of Greek philosophy – with the exception of Heraclitus and the Stoics – is a struggle against becoming, driven by the idea that the everlasting is the perfect. Christians also understand the perfection of God in this way.

3. *Epistemology*: Knowledge is oriented towards in-sight into the cosmic structure. The criterion is logicity and the fundamental postulate is ‘the *intelligibility* of the world’. Objective knowledge is realised by eliminating subjectivity in the Subject ↔ Object relationship (i.e. subject opposite to object). The subject is reduced to its rational dimension.

Greek philosophy was actually metaphysics. We can build up metaphysics either by pure logical thinking (geometry) or by reduction from the phenomenal world (astronomy). The Classic Greeks were bad observers (this alters in late-hellenistic times in Alexandria, but decays and disappears altogether in the Middle Ages that inherited the Greek way of thinking). Concerning the oldest Ionian philosophers, A. Pannekoek writes: “That they put forward conceptions about the universe that already by the slightest attentive observation of the heavenly phenomena could be rejected proves that they were absolutely not observers and not astronomers, but thinking technicians.”²¹ This is a very important conclusion: there is very little attention for the phenomena, i.e. the world of becoming, but all attention for mechanical explanations and explanatory geometrical constructions, i.e. for the world of ‘being’. The great philosophers confirmed this logical attitude, which tries to elucidate the logos of the phenomenal world. Plato says: “Are you unaware that the true astronomer must be a man of great wisdom? I do not mean an astronomer of the type of Hesiod and his like, a man who has just observed settings and risings, but one who has studied seven out of the eight orbits, as each of them completes its circuit in a fashion not easy of comprehension by any capacity not endowed with admirable abilities.”²² This proves the fact that “the Greek scholars were not observers, not astronomers, but extremely acute thinkers and mathematicians.”²³ They tried to get a logical insight in the cosmic events and “this concentration on the ideal aspect of things results in a underestimation by Platonists of the observation of phenomena”,²⁴ and in a retarded development of science, as remarked by E.J. Dijksterhuis: “The restraining influence, which Platonism could exert on the natural sciences, made itself known indeed; we shall find it mostly in times where the philosophically motivated disdain for empirical scientific research into natural phenomena was supported by a religiously motivated disdain for things material.”²⁵

It is not surprising that G. Sarton concludes: “It must be admitted that few books created so much intellectual evil as the *Timaeus*; the only one which created a greater perversion of thought in the Christian world was the revelation of St.

²¹ *De Groei van ons Wereldbeeld*, p. 81.

²² Hamilton, *Plato: The Collected Dialogues, Epinomis*, p. 1531.

²³ Pannekoek, o.c., p. 91.

²⁴ R. Hooykaas, *Geschiedenis der natuurwetenschappen*, p. 29.

²⁵ O.c., p. 15.

John the Divine.”²⁶ And “One of the most important works of Plato is the *Timaeos*, not, however, because of its intrinsic value, but because of its immense influence upon medieval thought. This influence was largely an evil one.”²⁷

Aristotle attached more importance to observation, surely in the field of biology; but in things astronomical he was a child of his time: “He starts from a superficial observation and then he gives way to the general weakness of antique science: he builds up a big theoretical structure, obtained by syllogistic reasoning, on this narrow and weak fundament.”²⁸ and “After all even Aristotle’s science, as every Greek science, is the science of Being and not of Becoming”.²⁹ It was mainly based on philosophical speculation, as e.g. that the circle was the perfect shape and thus all in the universe must be circular; and that the celestial bodies were composed of the fifth element, ether.

As his world-view was adopted and blindly believed by the Church for over a millennium until Galilei, scientific progress was restrained for a long time.

4. *Coordinates*

(a) *Time* is abstract, linear, infinite and autonomous. This time is mathematically divided into identical moments (cf. Newton). Already at the time of the pre-Socratics there were three different conceptions of time. For Anaximander and the atomists our world is only one of many worlds, all originating and perishing. For others (Anaximenes, Anaxagoras) the world originated, but remains forever. For Herakleitos and Empedocles the world always exists, but subject to a kind of eternal rhythm of originating and perishing (cf. yin-yang). Of course, these are all proto-scientific theories. But as soon as one considers the world to be a fabrication of God, it becomes hard to build a coherent world-view. A perfect God can only produce a perfect world; so it is not easy to declare how this perfect world can perish. Hence Plato accepted that the world is Gods handiwork, but it will exist forever. Aristotle disagrees on this one-sided eternity and conceives the world as eternal in both directions, but accepts that its dynamics depend on the ‘unmoved mover’. This poses the problem of the relation between time and timelessness, time being cyclical, given the seven planets (incl. sun and moon) passing through their own cycle. The Greek also believed in a Great Year, whereof the beginning is determined by the conjunction of all planets, calculated at once every 36,000 years. This Great Year also had its rhythms – at least according to the Stoa – the ‘eternal return of same’.

Aristotle believed the world to be eternal in both directions, i.e. the world was also not created. Every living being passes through its own cycle, but the species is eternal. With this we approach linear time as a spiral motion or epicycle.

²⁶ W.K.C. Guthrie, *History of Greek Philosophy*, V, p. 241.

²⁷ Sarton, I, *Introduction to the History of Science*, I, p. 113.

²⁸ Hooykaas, o.c., p. 37.

²⁹ Hooykaas, o.c., p. 36.

But fundamentally speaking the time of heaven and earth remains cyclic, because time is a measure for motion and all motion is cyclical. When God is not necessary as creator, He is totally separated from the world. However He still plays the role of ‘unmoved mover’: the dynamics of the cosmos is dependent on God.

J.L. Russell says: “that the Greek cosmic and historic time were infinite in both directions: the human race has no beginning and no end. History had a long-term cyclic pattern imposed by the planetary cycles, but it had no purpose beyond that of reflecting God’s eternity. It was not fulfilling God’s designs progressively nor moving to any final, irreversible consummation; man was there simply to be born, to perpetuate his species and to die.”³⁰ The final choice of the western time conception came from the Jews: time is linear in the sense that there is a starting point and a final point, between which God realizes his plan in history. Abraham Heschel says: “Judaism is a religion of history, a religion of time. The God of Israel was not found in the first place in natural phenomena [which are cyclical by nature]. He was talking through events in history.”³¹ For the Jews history is not the eternal return of same, but a series of unique events. Christianity inherited from both Greek and Jewish traditions. For time, it accepted the Jewish idea that there is a start and an end – creation (Genesis) and the Last Judgment – and rejected the Greek eternal time. This was restored only in the Newtonian physics and became an independent linear variable, which could be measured by a mechanical clock.

(b) *Space* is abstract, empty and mathematically homogeneous. For Democritus and the atomists the universe is composed of atoms and empty space. There are an infinite number of atoms, eternal and uncaused, and differing from each other only in shape, arrangement and magnitude. They move through an infinite empty space.

For Aristotle the cosmos is finite and not empty. He defines space as that which encompasses a body, as the inner border of a encompassing body. Outside this border nothing exists, not even space. He distinguishes it from a mathematical space which is infinite, but this infiniteness exists only in our mind; the real physical world is finite.

(c) *Causality* is linear (binary). It is a billiard ball causality based on direct contact (collision). It can only function in closed systems. Movement is not fundamental, and so requires a cause.

³⁰ ‘Time in Christian Thought’, in J.T. Frazer (ed.), *The Voices of Time*, p. 67.

³¹ This does not mean that there was not also an undercurrent where time was cyclical. Stephen J. Gould drew attention to this point in *Time’s Arrow, Time’s Cycle*: “Time’s arrow is the primary metaphor of biblical history ... Many scholars have identified time’s arrow as the most important and distinctive contribution of Jewish thought, for most other systems, both before and after, have favoured the immanence of time’s cycle over the chain of linear history. – But the Bible also features an undercurrent of time’s cycle.” (p. 11). Very typical for *Ecclesiasticus*, I, 4–11.

The idea of causality originated in principal amazement (for Plato and Aristotle the starting point of all philosophy) but it was in the natural philosophy of Aristotle that the concept of causality was fully developed: nothing is without cause. He distinguished four types of cause: material, formal, moving or efficient, and final cause. It is important to note that this interpretation of causality is generally derived from mechanistic thinking. It is related to Aristotle's conception of motion: every motion, change of place and growth process is conceived as locomotion. This is only possible when a push brings a thing into motion [in Chinese thinking motion is fundamental and does not require a cause: existing is moving].

Does this mean that all under heaven is deterministic? If man has a free will, he can himself cause some of his acts. This is an object for ethics. Important is the idea of a causal chain, in which each cause has its own cause, but not ad infinitum. There must be a First Cause, a *causa causarum*, and this is identified with God, who is *causa sui* [in a reticular causal field the universe is the cause of phenomena].

Final causality – rejected by modern mechanistic science – can only exist where there is a degree of freedom, as in organic, psychic and spiritual life. This is a causal chain of goals and means, which cannot be infinite.

The cosmos is a machine constructed by a *deus faber*. This mechanistic viewpoint will dominate the whole western philosophy; God becomes a causal God, a 'dieu des philosophes', and the universe is linked to an absolute cause, which is its energy. How the perfect God – the Pure Being – could create an imperfect world of Becoming is an insoluble enigma. For Aristotle God was not the creator of the world but the dynamizer, the energizer of the eternal chaos. Such a God is entirely superfluous in a world-view where energy is fundamental.

The archè, the source of everything. The cosmos is considered to be a system derived from one unique basic material. Hesiod starts from chaos, Anaximander from the *apeiron*, which is perhaps an empty chaos surrounding the visible world; Anaximander equals this *apeiron* with air, etc.

Herakleitos opted for becoming, Parmenides for being, but the Pythagoreans opened a third way, which is still the modern way of science: the world is seen as a relational structure, which can be expressed in numbers. This is the start of the mathematization of the universe, not in the usual geometric sense, but in the algebraic sense. This means that the concept of causality is replaced by that of functionality. Finally, atomists reduced everything to a set of invariable atoms, which were always in motion, and so created the phenomena by simple translocation.

(d) *Motion* is locomotion. 'Beings', e.g. atoms, swap places and thereby explain change, the becoming in the phenomenal world. There has to be a Primary Cause, an 'unmoved mover' (God). In human consciousness, movement signifies 'thinking'.

Explaining motion was actually the chief problem in Greek philosophy, except for Herakleitos who accepted motion as the fundamental feature of all existence.

Everybody can see that the universe is in eternal motion, but in Greece the antithesis of in-variability was created and put equal to perfection.

The big question is how unchangeable Being can produce ever-changing Becoming? The Milesian philosophers accepted a unique unchangeable ground for the universe, and they explained change by condensation and dilution of the original matter. These systems are incoherent because they have to add a dynamic principle that enables the working of this condensation/dilution – actually energy is secretly smuggled in.³² Parmenides by-passed the incoherence by accepting only one unchangeable being and rejecting motion, because it cannot be deduced from this eternal One. For him, motion is only appearance. This way of thinking, which annihilates reality was successful in Greece because we can easily build up a static logic, i.e. a logic based on unchangeable ‘atoms’ (principle of identity), not a dynamic functional logic, where the fundamental data are ‘actual entities’ that transform continuously. Describing relations between beings is much simpler than between becomings. But as Parmenides believed that being (material logic) and thinking (formal logic) is the same, the Aristotelian logic was directly applicable on reality.

Religious criteria developed in Christianity, were connected to eternal beings such as God and the soul that were not subjected to originating and perishing. This made Greek logic was useful for a Christian metaphysics in medieval philosophy. On the other hand, the non-real character of the phenomenal world can only open perspectives on a metaphysics and philosophy of nature in the Aristotelian sense, but not on natural science, which is fully based on the phenomenal world.

The only solution to the problem of motion came from Empedocles and Anaxagoras: they substituted the concept of transformation by that of locomotion: the elements, the atoms remained eternally the same, but they changed place. However, as motion is impossible in a full space, space had to be empty, but real. It was also a closed universe. In this empty ‘receptacle’ the homogeneous matter was atomized, i.e. subdivided into infinitesimally small particles, each of them a Parmenidean ‘being’: homogeneous, indivisible and unchangeable. Consequently, change could only be a change of place (locomotion), because internal transformation or transmutation of these elementary particles was impossible. What Greeks did not see is that motion within a world of being requires energy.

5. The *ontological status* is Being: ‘Being’ indicates immutability.

Everybody can see that the universe is a process, but to the Greek motion is an imperfection and they developed the antithetical idea of changelessness. Non-change is of course a ‘negative proposition’ but was a dominant in classical philosophy. What we call (eternal) Being is not observable, it is actually the negation of Becoming: Being = Non-Becoming.³³ The unchanging is more

³²In modern physics we say that high and low-pressure areas cause the movement of the atmosphere, but these areas can only originate when we add energy in the form of heat.

³³The same holds for the concept of an atom. Nobody has ever seen an atom, it is a thought construction. ‘A-tom’ is a negation, meaning ‘the non separable’.

perfect than the changing; this is why in the West God was always considered to be an eternal immutable Being, transcending the world of becoming, the inferior form of existence.

Eleatic being could not tolerate becoming, and hence Parmenides and Zenon considered the latter as a form of non-existence, an illusionary world. Plato further responded by introducing a strange dualism that withdraws the real beings – the Ideas – from the phenomenal world. But we live in the phenomenal world as in a world of experiential reality. What is its status?

Although Platonic philosophy became the primary paradigm for Christian theology, it was completely useless for science. This explains why Platonic inspired theology flowered until the 12th century, but also why natural sciences remained underdeveloped. These required a more realistic philosophy, which they found with Aristotle who ‘solved’ the problem of being and becoming with his concept that motion is a transition from potentiality to actuality.

The big problem in all these constructions remains the energetic impulse that actualizes the change into the phenomenal world from the world of unchanging Being. Plato could only give metaphorical explanations, e.g. that one of the cave. Christianity inherited this philosophical predicament: why did the perfect God create this imperfect world? About Aristotle, Hooykaas writes: “Every becoming is a transition from potency into act ...a verbal solution which doesn’t explain anything.”³⁴ Indeed, what is the impulse that forces potentialities to actualize themselves? And what is the nature of the not yet actualized potentialities? B. Russell: “When the concept of potentiality is used as a fundamental and irreducible concept, this conceals always a confusion in thinking. It is one of the weak points in his system that Aristotle makes use of it.”³⁵

6. *Philosophy of life*

What do we strive for in human life? For the Greeks this was in the first place eudaimonia, happiness. A first source of happiness was the will to power: ambition was always a typical feature of the Greek world-view. Everyone strives to be honoured by friends and feared by foes. Another source of happiness was lust, and related imperturbability (ataraxia), since a life of undisturbed lust did not exist. With Plato the *vita contemplativa* directed to the good, was the central ethical attitude, although he could not say what this meant in practice. Aristotle did focus his ethics on values that could be achieved in the historical world rather than absolute principles – which resembles somewhat practice-oriented Confucianism. For Aristotle ethics is based on nature; nature is good, but it must be developed in three transcendental dimensions: the spiritual, the corporeal and the social, in which he develops categories of virtue.

7. *Ethics – the social dimension*: The social dimension is regulated by rational precepts: *laws*. In sharp contrast to the Confucian society, Greek society is a

³⁴O.c., p. 35.

³⁵*Geschiedenis der westerse filosofie (History of Western Philosophy)*, p. 166.

world of unrest: contending cities, internal revolutions, foundations of colonies and wars against non-Greeks. An individual can only protect himself, by pacts of friendship with like-minded others or by independence from others. Friendship is not based on flattery but on free open-mindedness. What we love in friends is not their similarity with ourselves, but their personal values, which can enrich our own restricted personality.

The political doctrine can be reduced to two fundamental questions: firstly, must power be in the hands of one person or has it to be based on the law? Secondly, should authority in accordance with the law be concentrated in one person, a king, or in a group of *aristoi* (the best citizens), or does it belong to the entire nation (democracy)? The purpose of the state is not the state itself, but the creation of possibilities for the development of each individual. The rulers must be integer, and to Plato these are the philosophers.

8. *Mysticism and theology*: Greek philosophy did not care much about mysticism, and when it deals with religion it talks about theology. Neither the Eleusinian Mysteries, nor the cult of Dionysius, nor even Orphism had a profound influence on classical Greek culture. It was only with Plotinus that mysticism, as a foreign element, penetrated the classical world. Christianity, which surfaced about the same time, inhibited free mystical development, mainly by its Christocentrism, power of the revealed word and authority of the dogma. Christian mysticism was to remain marginal. But it can be said of the Greek classicism that, because it was based on an axis of rationality, it did not allow mysticism to develop properly.

Did mysticism in the Indian sense of the word really exist in Greece, or is it just theology? In many histories of mysticism Plato is considered to be the father of Christian mysticism, but F.C. Happold states: "Plato may not be a mystic in the way St. John of the Cross was a mystic."³⁶ Plato only devised a philosophical frame of reference, in which mystical experience could come to self-understanding. G.C. Field says: "When we contemplate his interpretation of the nature of religious experience and the right behaviour of human beings towards God in general, everybody, who grew up in the Christian tradition, would be astonished by a striking omission. He says practically nothing about the necessity of any personal relation of man to God, which plays such a great role in the Christian doctrine. Pure religious experience, if it exists, does not take an important place in Plato's thinking."³⁷

Theology: Traditionally the *theoi* were 'supermen', living on the other side of the earth. They have their own history told in *mythoi*. Real theological thinking originated from a philosophical reaction against this mythology. The 'divine' must be invariable and perfect – the birth of the idea that 'being' is divine, and hence that it is opposed to the 'becoming' of the phenomenal world. This 'divine' is unrelated to

³⁶F.C. Happold, *Mysticism*, p. 176.

³⁷p. 156.

the mythological gods, who are the objects of cult. The process started with the pre-Socratics,³⁸ but culminated with Plato and Aristotle. Plato stated that God is good: it raises the problem that evil must come from somewhere else. Furthermore God is unique – monotheistic – and unchangeable. The idea of the God-craftsman also finds its origin with Plato: God created the world according to the eternal patterns of the Ideas. For Aristotle, God was a pure Spirit, who is eternally unmoved. His life is pure thought, its object himself. Consequently contemplation is the highest form of human existence. On the other hand this unmoved being is the mover of the cosmos. He is the perfect good and all creatures strive to become one with this goodness. For Aristotle the divine expresses itself in the eternal cycle of the stars, and even more in the divine ether, but also in living beings and in human spirit.

All these Platonic and Aristotelian elements strongly influenced Christian theology.

Philosophy of the soul: In Homeric times the psychè was only a principle of life, identified with breath. But with Plato the problem of death, and subsidiarily also mystical experiences, resulted in the conception of an everlasting soul. This soul was the real part of man, the body only the temporary dwelling of the soul. After death, the soul remains alive. The place where it then finds abode is heaven. However, the soul cannot be material, it was conceived as a spiritual principle, a *nous*. The consequence was a fundamental dualism: the soul – because it was connected to God, to eternal being and truth – could not be free and happy within the mortal body, its jail and also its tool. This means that a transcendent principle became the real core of human beings and that the phenomenal world was inferior. This dualism was inherited by Christianity and is still a paradigm of western thought.

9. The *language* is a logical language, with *mathematics* (geometry) as its ideal.

The Indian World View, Culminating in Buddhism

As the Indian world-view is very complex, we limit ourselves here to Buddhism,³⁹ which is its most original philosophy. However, as it cannot be thoroughly comprehended without its Upanishad background, we sometimes refer to the other philosophies.

1. *Energy is absolute reality:* The *energy* is free, but not directed at an act, i.e. not vectorial as in the world of rationality, but it forms a scalar field.⁴⁰ In contrast

³⁸ Cf. Werner Jaeger, *Die Theologie der frühen Griechischen Denker*.

³⁹ This is not a description of Buddhism, either as religion or as philosophy. Here we restrict ourselves to Buddhist logic in the sense of Th. Stcherbatsky's *Buddhist Logic*: what is the formal background of this worldview? As Buddhism evolved from the elementary teachings of the Buddha into a real philosophy in the Madhyamika, we only try to reconstruct the fundamental constants.

⁴⁰ A scalar field can only fluctuate. For example a heat field fluctuates, but it can not be vectorially directed. So the oceans of the world contain a huge amount of heat, but cannot be focussed to boil an egg.

with a vectorial field which is object-oriented, a scalar field is subject-oriented. This means that the first can be focussed by the will, which is a transcendent drive; animal drives are aimed at an observed object (prey, partner ...), transcendent ones at a virtual object that only exist in imagination. But a scalar field is not oriented on anything, it cannot be influenced by the will, it depends only on the 'heat' of feelings, i.e. on the unrest of emotionality, which belongs to subjectivity. Thus my emotions fluctuate, but cannot be focussed on a goal.

To start with a metaphor: real Reality is an 'ocean' of energy and phenomena are waves on the surface. The 'ocean' in me is called my buddha-nature. This emotional core of my being is totally at rest, and receptive to the mystery of being. What I have to realize in meditation is to subdue the undulation of the field, i.e. the unrest of my immanent feelings. This rest is called nirvāna.

The oldest concept of energy in India is to be found in Sāmkhya philosophy, which is older than Buddhism. *Rajas* is the driving force of the universe, the primordial nature is called *mulaprakṛti*,⁴¹ the dynamic basis of material reality – in contrast to *puruṣa*, the Mind. The dynamics of *mulaprakṛti* consists of three agents: *sattva*, the 'clear, intelligent lightness'; *rajas*, 'stimulating, moving, activity', *tamas*, 'restraining, heaviness'.

The Buddhist concept of 'energy' seems to be derived from this *rajas*.⁴² "The Buddhist idea of a force seems to be that it is the subtle form of a substance."⁴³ However this is not a universe-pervading *ch'i* as in Taoism, but rather reminds of the Greek *en-ergeia*.

To find a basic concept of autonomous energy, we have to go back to the Buddhist real or ultimate Reality. However, the 'ocean' is inaccessible to our ratio and thus empty; we have to start from the energetic component of the phenomena. If the waves originate from the ocean, the ocean must be fundamentally dynamic. The waves are observable, but whence do they originate? They are surely not created by an external transcendental God. "The sensible world consists of *sensibilia* [these are the waves] which are but momentary flashes of energy. The perdurable, eternal, pervasive Matter which is imagined as their support or substratum is a fiction of the Sāmkhyas and other schools."⁴⁴ This means that the 'ocean' does not exist as a substance, nevertheless it must be energy: "It is clear that the fundamental elements of matter are rather forces or momentary quanta of energy than substantial atoms."⁴⁵

How can we understand this dynamic ocean from a philosophical viewpoint? The real Reality must be energetic, because otherwise phenomena could not exist. Energy is fundamental, eternal, but unknowable; it creates bits of information, which are observable.

⁴¹ Mula = root, prakṛti = matter.

⁴² Th. Stcherbatsky, *The Central Conception of Buddhism*, p. 22.

⁴³ Ibid., p. 100f.

⁴⁴ Th. Stcherbatsky, *Buddhist Logic*, vol. I, p. 79. n fact, also of Greek philosophers.

⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 101.

The phenomenal world (the ‘waves’) has no independent existence, but derives its reality from the absolute (the ‘ocean’). Because of the phenomenal character of my own subjectivity, I can only approach the absolute by negation of the phenomenal world: the absolute is not the sum of all phenomena, nor is it itself a phenomenon, it is the ‘ocean’ that continues to exist when all the ‘waves’ have been subdued. Whether the absolute exists cannot be demonstrated purely rationally because the absolute cannot be described or defined: consequently, my intellect sees it as a ‘Void’ (*sūnyatā*). But I assume that my mystical experience has an objective counterpart, in the same way that I assume my subjective logic – the logicity of my consciousness – indicates the existence of an objective logicity. So it cannot be known, but can be experienced. “When one experiences directly one’s conscious state there is as yet neither subject nor object, and knowledge and its object are completely united. This is the purest form of experience” (K. Nishida).⁴⁶

This absolute is the only real Reality, inaccessible to our rationality. The phenomenal world, in which Reality makes itself known, does not have its own reality, only a conventional ‘reality’, which we describe in science: since we are able to describe the mechanics of the waves, without knowing what energy really is, we imagine that we are describing Reality. Buddhists call this world *māyā*, phenomenon, i.e. that which appears, and is thus only ‘appearance’ in relation to real Reality.

2. *Information* is our only access to real Reality. “There is no other ultimate reality than separate, instantaneous bits of existence”.⁴⁷ However, we must keep in mind that only energy is real and that phenomena, considered as entities, are constructions of our mind. Every bit of existence is a part of a string of momentary events. Energy generates dharmas, which are only flashes of existence (like energy quanta), they last only for an infinitesimal moment, disappear and are followed by other dharmas. “But a thing cannot be the object of a purposive action and cannot be efficient otherwise than by its last moment” ... “Reality indeed is kinetic, the world is a cinema. Causality, i.e. the interdependence of the moments following one another, evokes the illusion of stability or duration, but they are, so to speak, forces or energies flashing into existence without any real enduring substance in them, but also without intervals or with infinitesimally small intervals.”⁴⁸ This means that only energy is everlasting and real, but that it phenomenalizes itself in quanta, i.e. dharma’s. The string of dharmas evokes the illusion that the phenomenon is stable.⁴⁹

In Sāmkhya, but also in Taoism, the dharmas are interlinked in a continuous way: “the phenomena are nothing but waves or fluctuations standing out upon a back-ground

⁴⁶ *Inquiry into the Good*, p. 3f.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 80.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 82.

⁴⁹ Logically speaking, this is the same problem as we encounter in integral calculus. We integrate a series of infinitesimal small differentials and get a measurable magnitude.

of an eternal, all-pervading, undifferentiated Matter with which they are identical. The Universe represents a legato movement.”⁵⁰ This means that there exists a fundamental real ‘ocean’ (of energy), which undulates. But in Buddhism this was a discontinuous staccato movement: there is no supporting material ‘ocean’, there are only waves, i.e. energy pulses.⁵¹

Information about the ‘ocean of energy’ arises from personal experience, and is not transferable. What Buddhists call the buddha-nature is actually my own real Reality, the ocean in the wave I am. This means that the primeval energy, which generates my own dharmic string, is at work in me. As bound energy it manifests in my gravity, in the electromagnetic solar energy which provides my life energy, in food combustion which supports my (anti-entropic) body temperature. As free energy it generates my spiritual life ... In fact, I experience the oceanic energy everywhere in my existence. As I know that all phenomena are unreal, this information endeavours to ‘dis-order’ this false experience of being, or to strip it of all conceptualisation: the result is *sūnyatā*, the Void.

Nirvāna is sometimes considered to be a name for the Void (the object), but actually it is also the name for my own buddha-nature (the subject). It is a psychological concept. When I realize an-ātman, i.e. when I am stripped of every feeling of individuality (everlasting substance, a soul), and at the same time see the absolute reality as a pure void, I experience nirvāna. So nirvāna is not a transcendent thing, it is the ocean in me: when all my individuality has gone, I am one with my buddha-nature.

Buddhism is the doctrine of an-ātman. The energetic impulse of Buddha’s life survives with no remaining trace of individuality: it becomes part of the informative Emptiness. This free energy cannot be reactivated: it is in a situation of parinirvāna, the nirvāna of the other side. As all living beings are interconnected in a reticular causality, none of them can reincarnate as such. But the karma, i.e. the deeds done with free energy, influences the reticular field. No one can pinpoint where this energy goes, it spreads through the whole field, bringing the field of existence to a higher or lower level. So, rebirth does not mean rebirth of information – one or other individual – but rebirth of non-liberated energy. As this energy is no longer individualized but part of the whole energetic field, one can never say that a specific person is reborn.

The question whether nirvana is existence or non-existence is a false problem. If I look at nirvāna from the standpoint of energy it has real existence, but when I look at it from the standpoint of information it is non-existent. Or, in the traditional Buddhist imagination: the ocean is real Reality from the viewpoint of energy, but it is informatively empty, thus non-existing.

H. von Glasenapp writes: “Conversely, the old Buddhism denies categorically that in the world of ceaseless change something might exist to which one might attribute the properties of eternally remaining and being independent. Consequently it does not see the last elements or reality as material or spiritual

⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 83.

⁵¹ This reminds us of the idea of Max Planck that energy is discontinuous and consists of energy quanta.

entities, to which certain states, qualities, etc. manifest themselves, but the mental powers with which we try to grasp and control the world, as well as the sensory perceptions and mental data that enter our consciousness, are themselves the factors (dharma) to which everything can be reduced.”⁵² Buddhists see the world as a play between the dharmas, a sort of ‘actual entities’ (Whitehead) that only exist for an instant.

3. *Epistemology*: The Indian philosophers assume that the Mystery reveals itself (or in our metaphor: that the ocean generates waves, which can be observed). In the classical philosophical systems there are two paths that lead to knowledge: firstly natural intelligence, which enables us to discover the structure of the phenomenal world (science!), but which can also lead to a deeper metaphysical insight into the universe, the self, time, etc.; secondly, the revealed Vedic writings, the ‘Word of God’. Jainism and Buddhism do not accept the authority of these holy scriptures. The ‘free-thinking’ Buddhists teach that words are pure conventions, that philosophy cannot be reduced to words, but to personal experience: a philosopher must be his own doctrine. “It does not aim at mere intellectual conviction but at transforming such conviction into direct experiences. In fact, the word ‘darśana’ means ‘vision’. It stands for the direct, immediate and intuitive vision of Reality, the actual perception of Truth which cannot be discovered by mere intellect.”⁵³ (B.N. Singh)

‘Knowledge’ of the real Reality comes through Enlightenment, which changes the consciousness of reality. Enlightenment can only occur when one surrenders to the Mystery, and leads to Deliverance, in the religious act, from ego-intentional emotionality (with an-ātman as highest goal), as well as from the tendency to rationally interpret experiences rationally (with the goal of śūnyatā, the conceptual Void).

Epistemology in Buddhism is not easy to describe. The ‘cognition’ of Emptiness, cannot be achieved by rational analysis because there is nothing to analyze: “What knowledge is in itself we never will know, it is a mystery.”⁵⁴ But this does not mean that we cannot experience it.”⁵⁵

Cognition in the field of phenomenology is handicapped by the pratīyasamutpāda, the fact that every phenomenon is linked to all other phenomena in a huge reticular field. When I analyse one phenomenon, I have to extract it from this reticulum, cutting its external relations and so falsifying it. Hence I cannot describe the phenomenal world as such: “what a thing is in itself, what its essence is, we never can express, we know only its relations”.⁵⁶ On the other

⁵² *Die Philosophie der Inder*, p. 302.

⁵³ *Dictionary of Indian Philosophical Concepts*, p. 81.

⁵⁴ Th. Stcherbatsky, *Buddhist Logic*, p. 147.

⁵⁵ Stcherbatsky speaks about direct and indirect knowledge. “The whole science of epistemology is built up on this foundation of a difference in principle between a direct and an indirect knowledge.” (o.c., p. 147).

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 146. Contrary to Indian and western realists (e.g. Aristoteles) buddhists do not believe that ‘essences’ exist.

hand, as each wave is a part of the ocean, the real Reality must be hidden in the phenomena themselves. Phenomena are the informative aspect of Reality, but their dynamics, their energetic aspect is the real Reality. Śūnyatā is pure, informationless energy. This energy is also detectable in the phenomena, and my approach to real Reality has to start from nature. The dynamics of life are not analysable rationally, but I can experience them all my life. The same is true for my consciousness. Experiencing the rajas is experiencing of the real Reality, i.e. Energy. However, as energy is always bound to structures, these disturb my experience of pure free energy. Taoists try to experience pure life, sometimes described as life before birth, in their meditative practices. Buddhists aim at experiencing pure consciousness, pure mental energy without images. Real Reality is the energetic aspect of life, the phenomenal structure its informative aspect.

Buddhism does not believe in the concept of ātman, self, soul. In the Vedic period the mental was seen as fine material. The idea that an autonomous spiritual substance existed only arose in the Upanishads. In some systems this spiritual substance became so dominant that matter was considered to have been born from the spirit (idealism). But Buddhism developed the doctrine of an-ātman, non-self. In Buddhism the ego-feeling belongs to the phenomenal world and not to the absolute. The wave has no existence separate from the ocean and its individuality is only temporary. The fact that we nevertheless have the feeling of being a self is a result of the ego-intentionality of our emotionality; this feeling is essential to survival, but the aim is to ultimately overcome it and no longer experience oneself as a wave but as ocean: this deeper nature is the buddha-nature. This is not the nature of Buddha, but that of all conscious beings: Buddha was simply the first to have achieved it. The goal of my life is also to liberate my real nature. It is not only from an ontological point of view that this is true. In meditation I also try to allow a consciousness to develop which is not my wave consciousness but my ocean consciousness. The an-ātman is thus only achieved in the religious act.

4. *Coordinates*

- (a) *Time* is a spiral: one rises to full transcendence (nirvāna) through countless cyclical samsāras. In nirvāna time ends and timelessness begins (this is not the same as eternity, which is an infinitely continuing time).

The fundamental characteristic of the waves is their ‘temporality’: they appear and disappear. This is expressed in the concept of samsāra, the cycle of existence. But in essence they constitute only one facet of a succession of waves: they pass on the life impulse and generate new waves.

Reincarnation is therefore not a resurrection of the ‘deceased’ wave, but the continuation of the succession of waves. I have no ‘self’ that survives the phenomenal world. Buddhism is an an-ātman, non-self, teaching.

But Buddhism believes in the transcendence of the universe through karma. To understand the Buddhist concept of karma properly, one has to see it in relation to the an-ātman concept. I am a wave in a succession of waves. Since I have free

energy at my disposal, my deeds – karma (from kr: to do) – will give an impulse to the next wave. It is true that no one is born as a blank sheet, but inherits his starting programme from everything that has gone before. A Darwinist interpretation would be that they change the environment which influences my offspring. In both cases, the consequence of positive karma is that following generations are given a higher spiritual platform from which to start, and negative karma does the opposite. Human history consists of the totality of human deeds, i.e. karma. Every deed I do becomes forever a constituent part of history and can never again be separated from it. History is a karma flow towards the ‘spiritualisation’ of the world, i.e. towards the universal realisation of the true buddha-nature. Anyone who produces positive karma is acting well morally. He is not however rewarded for this as an individual, because this would contradict the teaching of an-ātman, and would carry the ego-intentionality on into the hereafter. Buddhism sees the personal eternal life as a form of egoism. What motivates me to act positively is the ‘Great Attractor’, the ocean, which expresses itself in the meditative attitude as an urge towards reaching the Absolute. The decline of self, i.e. the an-ātman, is the only reward. Since I am only a phase in the cosmic line, I have a responsibility towards the cosmos. It demands a mystical attitude at the highest level, whereby Subject = Object (experiencing myself as the Mystery, as ‘God’) is the ultimate aim of my existence.

(b) *Space* is a field space, which induces moods in our consciousness. These moods are caused by the Mystery and are thus transcendent by nature. The Mystery is only given to us as a field: a field cannot be described (it is a Void), we only know it by its effect: it is *experienceable*.

It is so that we not only deceive ourselves rationally by believing that the māyā world is real and think that we find the meaning of existence there (science, technology, economics, politics, etc.), but we are also emotionally tied to it by our thirst for life, which is a consequence of the energetic impulse given by the succession of waves. This manifests itself in a series of shackles to existence such as sexual desire, the urge for survival, material possessions and comfort, the hunger for power, etc.

I am not powerless against these impulses, because I have free energy that enables me to boost or subdue the impulse, i.e. increase or decrease the thirst for life. When I subdue the wave in meditative calm, this state is called nirvāna which I am able to achieve momentarily. If the succession of waves itself is subdued, it is called parinirvāna: at that moment the impulse has passed and the succession of waves has become one with the ocean of the absolute.

Space is a mystical space: the mysterious energy is everywhere around me and in me. Although it is unknowable, it is experienceable. Meditation is the wordless experience of this field. Prayers are replaced by transcendental moods, just as musical notes have to be replaced by musical emotions.

(c) *Causality* is a field causality (comparable to a magnetic field which affects a magnetic needle). Science is disclosing the causal links in reality. But is

this the real Reality? Phenomenal reality does not exist as a sum of waves, but as a dynamic aggregate of successions of waves, like cosmic strings, yet they are wave fields: every wave is the result of a field of waves, which are themselves the results of fields ... until in the end every wave is a product of the entire cosmos. This is by no means a speculative idea: 300 years ago I had – at least theoretically – 3^{10} (1,024) ancestors; if I go back into evolution I will ultimately end up in the whole of humanity, and then beyond into the animal kingdom ... and then into the entire cosmos – not forgetting that all living things on Earth are products of solar energy.

In this world I am the subject that observes and that is moved, so I have the feeling to be in some way an individual, a person. According to Buddhism, my individuality is not real. It is in fact a process, a conglomeration of cosmic forces called skandhas. These cosmic forces are dynamically interwoven; together they form a dynamic pattern and they are subject to incessant change. I can observe this in my own life-process: it is not only my body that is constantly changing, but also my mind. However, I am only one of the countless products of the cosmos. This cosmos started as pure energy and developed ever-higher life forms; this means that all forms were already present in the primal energy: my body, my intellect, and my affectability have at all times been present in the cosmos. So contrary to Western materialist belief, not matter, but energy is primordial. The five skandhas, viz. matter, sensation, perception, conception, higher consciousness, are cosmic potentialities that were present from the very beginning, but which only made themselves explicit in the course of evolution, dependent on the environment. They represent five levels of freed energy. All five skandhas have been realised on the human level. At death they break up again and their energy is reabsorbed into the cosmic field. All that remains is the impulse, which in its turn will build new dynamic skandha-bundles out of the ocean of energy.

So man is simply one of these skandha-bundles and his deeper nature is the ocean. He is not a particular substance that possesses these skandha qualities and survives independently like a sort of soul after the bundle has broken up. The individual is nothing more than the sum of these skandhas: if the bundle disintegrates, the individual vanishes. Moreover, my apparent individuality is constantly changed by the internal dynamic and mutual influence of the skandhas: my life is a process. Because the cluster tries to maintain itself, for which it needs ego-intentionality, I have the impression of being a 'self', whereas in fact I am only a process.

(d) *Motion* is e-motion: the consciousness is 'moved' by the Mystery's field effect. The cycle of existence, *samsāra*, can hinder people from realizing their buddha-nature of the cosmos. This cycle is described in the doctrine of the twelve causes that make us continue to revolve in the merry-go-round of existence. These causes are: (1) *avidyā*, the non-enlightenment with regard to the true nature of phenomena; from this arises (2) a blind instinct for life (life is the only value and one wants to retain it), this awakens (3) a self-consciousness in

the subject (S) who thinks he can perpetuate life by intervening in objectivity (O) by developing the $S \leftrightarrow O$ relationship (science); from this (4) the nama-rūpa world is born, the objectivity of names and forms; (5) this leads to the genesis of an ego-consciousness: I can face the world and learn, by way of my senses, to know and control it; (6) in this way we consider the phenomenal world as the real Reality; (7) from this comes the urge to dominate reality by perception and conception; this leads to (8) the desire for things; and (9) attachment to existence (kleśas), with the karmic burden as its consequence; (10) this results in an urge to perpetuate life (sexual desire); this leads (11) to the birth of new life and to (12) old age and death; but (1) leads again to rebirth in avidyā ...

Emotional life gives rise to suffering the border situations of life: disease, old age and death (as described in the life of the Buddha). Suffering is a consequence of frustration with the pointless cycle of existence. That is why I have to cultivate the real consciousness of reality that teaches me the buddha-nature of things. This is called enlightenment: it releases me from the avidyā and is not a rational insight but a mystical experience. After all, the ocean of the absolute remains a conceptual Void. My self-feeling becomes an-ātman, non-self. The experience of unity, Subject = Object, is called nirvāna, the subduing of the wave. I can experience this nirvāna momentarily. It leads to the deliverance of the succession of waves in the experience of unity with the ocean which is called parinirvāna. However the energetic impulse after deliverance survives without any trace of individuality: it becomes part of the informative Void. This free energy cannot be reincarnated: it is in a situation of parinirvana, the nirvāna of the other side, but the deeds influence the reticular field. The energy spreads through the entire field.

5. The *ontological status* is Non-Being. 'Non-Being' means: reality that cannot be conceptualised. Non-being = conceptual Void, but full of experience. Already the Upanishads acknowledged that there were two levels of reality: the empirical multiplicity of our observable world, and the Universal Oneness. The latter can be symbolised as the ocean, the former as the waves. Western positivism only accepts the waves, but every philosophy that has a mystical dimension assumes that a real Reality does exist. It is eternal, and one could call it 'God', on condition that it is an immanent God, and not a transcendent person.

The consciousness, the self or ātman participates both in the world of Multiplicity and of Oneness: in the Multiplicity because the ātmans have individuality, and in the Oneness because the ātman is identical to Brahman, but although in the Vedānta both are granted reality, it is assumed that Brahman is the deeper universal nature of ātman, thereby preserving the non-dualism. But in Rāmānuja's thinking (1040–1137), reality is attributed to souls, so that they continue to exist after death, and personality is attributed to the Absolute. Buddhism, however, opted radically for the doctrine of an-ātman: the ātman is not due any reality of its own, and it is illusory, like the whole of samsāra. The only reality is the

non-conceptualisable Void of the Mystery, but this is also the nature – the budha-nature – of my individual consciousness. In Mahāyāna Buddhism, the phenomenal world has a ‘conventional truth’ – the ‘truth’ of the waves – as an introduction to the deeper truth of the ocean. According to Nāgārjuna, the phenomenal world is not due any being-value, it is no more than a ‘flickering’ dharma world; but the Absolute, which we try to understand as a Non-being, and call a Void, is inaccessible to us. Since this teaching brings with it a heavy psychological burden, the Pure Ideation theory was developed, which designates the Absolute as pure Spirit, and the phenomenal world as a projection of this Spirit.

The numinous in atheistic systems. Most Indian philosophies are atheistic. In theistic religions God is the source of cosmic and moral order, revealer of the truth, help in existential need and deliverer. In Buddhism causality is autonomous, not only in the physical, but also in the moral sense, in the form of karmic law and reincarnation. One can call on the devatās for help; they have limited power, but more than humans. However, man has to achieve deliverance by his own efforts.

6. *Philosophy of life*

Human existence is problematic. In the Vedic period, as in the Homeric period, life was the highest value. But Brahmanism in particular realized that death was an inescapable reality that destroys life. This is where the idea of reincarnation originated, derived from the cyclical time concept. The quality of the next existence is dependent on the karma of the present. One is thus imprisoned in an endless cycle which can only end when the karmic energy is exhausted. Buddhism chooses as its starting point this problematic existence, its worst form is the frustrating transience of existence, but one must therefore pursue a higher level of existence.

The notion of deliverance had a somewhat elitist nature: few understood that one had to transcend the false consciousness of reality. The concept actually only fully ripened in philosophical reflection. But it is important that one does not in the first place think of the deliverance of the personal ego – a conception that has held sway in the Western world since the Greeks – but of the liberation of cosmic energy. When I die, my life-energy will already have been passed on to my descendants (or I contributed to the spiritual environment), and the saṃsāra circle will not be broken. After a great many revolutions it spirals towards the total liberation of the cosmos. The dharma structure of the life-flow means that on a cosmic scale I only exist for an instant, so I cannot extrapolate anything from my own tiny existence. So, on what basis do I assume that a cosmic evolution towards spiritualisation exists? On the one hand we have the evidence of sages, who have understood this in a moment of enlightenment, and on the other the idea arises out of philosophical reflection: the world of transience is experienced as negative compared to a world of eternal being. This deliverance is not only a human affair, but applies to the whole cosmos, which is a process of spiritualisation. Every phenomenon, including man, is a link in a cosmic chain:

the fact that one human is born at a higher spiritual level than another is a consequence of his place in the chain – and therefore of karmic law.

The state of deliverance, *nirvāna*, is often seen as something that can only be reached after death, but this view forgets to take reincarnation into account. Not I, only the cosmic string to which I belong can reach *nirvāna*. But when in mystical union ego-intentionality is completely eliminated, one undergoes a purely mystical experience, and this is a flash of *nirvāna*. The interpretation of the state of *parinirvāna* is a theological matter, open to speculation.

But in practice, yoga (not only in its technical sense, but as an attitude to life) is the way to deliverance: “That in the present era one can only achieve the highest mystical experience by the thorough exercise of yoga techniques.” (J. Gonda)⁵⁷

7. Ethics

The social result of mystical life is *maitrī* (love) and *karūna* (compassion), the consequence of empathic emotion. As man is by nature good, because of his buddha-nature, when he throws off his bonds to the phenomenal world, he becomes kind-hearted, loving and compassionate. That is also the reason for the great tolerance of Buddhism. In fact in the Buddhist world there was never a religious war, because truth (dogma’s) is of no importance, only transcendent emotionality (mysticism) determines religious life.

This results in a universal empathy including animals, plants and landscapes, and even one’s enemies. Compassion with everything is described by Felix Mauthner: “Compassion? Yes. When we mean by suffering what it originally meant: passively undergoing, co-experience without pain. Every creature undergoes this only world. Everybody co-experiences it, ‘com-passionates’ it.”⁵⁸

One particular weak point in Indian traditional ethics is the caste system and its social rigidity, only slightly compensated for by higher ethical obligations for the upper classes. This system was rejected by Buddhism, which holds “that ethics is not a consequence, but a premise for deliberation, respectively holiness. Moral behaviour does not remain at the end and is not the natural result of a life of belief and meditation, but it is the condition for the ‘true exertion’, ‘the true vigilance’ and ‘the true concentration’. It is a means on the way to the goal, not the goal itself.”⁵⁹

Buddhist ethical prescriptions are based on selflessness. Because I am not bound to this self, I can use my free energy to release others from suffering rather than serve myself. The greater part of the vices is related to this self. He who is able to reverse this self-intentionality becomes patient, tolerant, modest, devoted, humble. The ideal to strive for is the arhat-ideal. Arhat can best be

⁵⁷ *Die Religionen Indiens*, vol. II, p. 338.

⁵⁸ *Wörterbuch der Philosophie*, Zweiter Band, p. 132. Albert Schweitzer says: “European thinkers take care that no animals roam their ethics” (*Kultur und Ethik*, p. 225).

⁵⁹ Peter Gerlitz, “Die Ethik des Buddha: Philosophische Grundlagen und sittliche Normen in frühen Buddhismus,” in Carl Heinz Reischow (hrsg.), *Ethik der Religionen*, pp. 232vv.

translated as ‘the holy’, in the sense of one who realized the whole-ness, i.e. the complete man.

In order to achieve this, there are five fundamental prescriptions (prohibitions): respect for life, no thieving, no adultery, no lying, no drugs. Next there are also ten good deeds.⁶⁰ Moreover, all these commandments underwent a strong interiorization – precisely like the Jewish Mosaic law in the Sermon of the Mount – everything comes from the heart of man. Similarly, in Buddhism monastic rules become increasingly complex: there are 227 rules.

Social rules in Theravāda are restricted to the relation between husband and wife (mutual respect), parents and children (gratitude), teacher and pupil (knowledge), friend and friend (partnership), master and servant, king and subjects (justice), monk and layman. From the relation between master and servant, king and people, the fundamental principles of a political ethics are derived. Ethics are based on a refined human interaction, e.g. labour.⁶¹ Labour is in the first place human relation, and not purely directed to productivity. It is a relation based on justice and this determines harmony in the world.

It was not Buddha’s intention to reform the world by legalistic interventions, but his doctrine brought about some drastic reforms: abolition of caste society and consequently the installation of equality of all people. This step closer to social emancipation is a step not yet taken in Hinduism. Of course, slavery was forbidden.

The whole life had to be borne on love. Love expresses itself in compassion, shared delight, and equanimity.

8. *Mysticism*: Buddhism is mysticism. It is the most pure mystical philosophy, because the subject-object relation is reduced to an-ātman – śūnyatā (non-ego – void).
9. The *language* is a symbolic one, with silence as its ideal.

An extensive philosophy of language arose in India on the basis of belief in the Vedic writings, in the Mimamsa School and the School of Grammar, among others. The ‘free-thinking’ Buddhists teach that words are pure conventions. So, philosophy cannot be reduced to words, but to personal experience: a philosopher must be his own doctrine.

Buddha taught that one cannot trust words. He says: “Language, o Mahamāti is not the ultimate truth, and what can be attained by words is not the highest truth. And why? Because the highest truth can only be experienced by the wise men. With words you can get access to truth, but words are themselves not the truth”.⁶² Buddhist Tripitaka is a collection of religious writings, but it is not a

⁶⁰ Cf. T.W. Rhys Davids, *The Questions of King Milinda*, Part I, pp. 143vv.

⁶¹ In the *Dīgha Nikaya* (The Long Discourses) we read: “By arranging their work according to their strength, by supplying them with food and wages, by looking after them when they are ill, by sharing special delicacies with them, and by letting them of work at the right time.” (Maurice Walshe, *The Long Discourses of the Buddha – A Translation of the Dīgha Nikaya*, 1996, pp. 468.)

⁶² Lankāvātara Sūtra, ch. xxxiii. D.T. Suzuki (tr.), *The Lankāvātara Sūtra*, 1973 repr., p. 77.

Bible or a Koran: it has no special authority. Actually there is no reliance in words: “It is clear that Scripture, when tested by experience, has no authority at all”,⁶³ because “Ultimate reality is unutterable”.⁶⁴

The culmination point of this Buddhist distrust for words is reached in the fact that the sixth patriarch of Ch’an tore the sutras.

SUMMARY of descriptive patterns

	Taoism S ⊂ O	Greek philosophy S ↔ O	Buddhism S = O
Energy	Ch’i	En-ergeia Archè	Rajas
Information	Aisthèsis Observation	In-sight (logical patterns) Metaphysical thinking	Illumination Meditation
Epistemology	O: Tzū-jen, Tao S: Phenomenon	O: Logics S: Identity principle	O: Direct Experience S: an-ātman = Buddha-nature (skandha’s)
Coordinates	Naturalism	Rationalism	Mysticism
Time	Cyclic	Linear	Staccato: Dharma → samsāra Timeless → nirvāna
Space	Full of ch’i	Empty Abstract – mathematical	Numinous field
Causality	Reticular Actio in distans	Linear Collision	Dharma field Pratītya-samutpāda
Motion	Transformation	Locomotion	Emotion
Ontology	Becoming	Being	Non-being (Void)
Ethics	Vitalism	Legalism	Maitrī (love) + Karunā (compassion)
Language	Metaphoric	Logic Mathematical	Symbolic Silence

⁶³ Stcherbatsky, *Buddhist Logic*, vol. I, p. 67.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 71.