

A Recent Criticism of Buddhism

PROFESSOR Toynbee in his recent work, *An Historian's Approach to Religion*, makes certain criticisms of Buddhism on the basis of what he believes to be the account given of the life and teaching of the Buddha in the Hinayanian¹ scriptures. It is proposed in this article to examine these criticisms in the light of the relevant material in the Pali Canon, which the Hinayana School holds in high regard as its main source of knowledge and inspiration with regard to the Buddha and his doctrine.

Toynbee's criticisms may be briefly listed as follows. He asserts that (a) there is a basic inconsistency between the life and teaching of the Buddha and that (b) it would seem that his life has at least more value than his teaching since (i) the account given of human nature in his teaching is wanting, (ii) the goal it sets forth would appear to be intrinsically unattainable and that (iii) even if it were attainable it would not seem desirable.

I

Let us examine the grounds on which these criticisms are made and see whether they are justified in the light of the account given of the life and teaching of the Buddha in the Pali Canon.

Toynbee says that "the Buddha was an illogical evangelist" (p. 77) and speaks of his "sublime inconsistency" (p. 64) or "sublimely illogical practice" (p. 73). Now what is the nature of his inconsistency? There seem to be three respects in which a religious teacher may be held to be inconsistent. His life may be inconsistent in the sense that his response or pattern of behaviour in some situations may be radically different from that of other situations which are essentially like them. His teaching may be inconsistent in that there are at least two propositions in it, one of which or what it entails contradicts the other or what the other entails. Lastly while his life may be perfectly consistent and his teaching a coherent whole when taken independently of each other, his life may not be compatible with his teaching and vice versa. When Toynbee speaks of the inconsistency of the Buddha he seems to have this last sense in mind.

1. "Hinayana" is not a very happy term to denote the Theravada School of the S.E. Asian countries partly because it is a term of contempt but mainly because it tends to presuppose the Mahayana metaphysics. I am using it, as no doubt Toynbee does, merely to denote by it the Southern School of Buddhism.

Strictly there is nothing 'illogical' in this kind of inconsistency since such a state of affairs is quite conceivable and perhaps not uncommon, since it is not everyone who for good or for worse practises what he preaches. Consider for instance the case of a person who says quite sincerely that it is bad to smoke but continues to smoke or says that it is good to have a regular medical check up but does not himself do so. In both cases we find a person asserting that a certain proposition p is true and behaving as if he does not believe p or finds it difficult to live up to the demands that p makes on him. In such situations, however valid the grounds for asserting the truth of p may be, his behaviour seems to undermine or impugn it, since not only do his actions not seem to follow on the track of his beliefs but appear to go contrary to them. I suppose this is part of what Toynbee intends to convey by calling this relationship between teaching and practice 'illogical'. But perhaps he means more. Consider the case of the person who says that he has given up smoking but continues to smoke. Such a state of affairs is also quite conceivable and therefore cannot strictly be called 'illogical' but his behaviour shows that his statement is false. In the previous case the statement "it is bad to smoke" could still be true even if he smoked but the statement "I have given up smoking" cannot possibly be true in the light of his behaviour since his behaviour is directly relevant to the truth or falsity of his statement.

Consider Toynbee's own statement of the case he makes: "The Hinayanian scriptures purport to be recording the Buddha's practice as well as His preaching; and if their record is true, we are bound to conclude from it that the Buddha was not preaching what He was practising. In preaching, if He did preach this, that man's paramount aim ought to be self-extinction, He was recommending to others a course of action which He had rejected for Himself when the Tempter, after His attainment of Enlightenment, had suggested to Him that he should make His exit into Nirvana without delay. In choosing, instead, deliberately to postpone His own release from Suffering in order to work for the release of His fellow sentient beings, the Buddha was declaring, in a positive act, that, for Himself, he believed that to suffer in the cause of Love was a better course than to release Himself from Suffering through Self-extinction" (p. 292). In other words, if Buddha taught the proposition that "man's paramount aim ought to be self-extinction" (p), then in not extinguishing himself when he gained this knowledge he was acting as if he did not believe in p as far as he was concerned. Toynbee puts this argument in a slightly different form elsewhere. He says that if the attainment of Nirvana

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involves the suppression of both good and bad desires, then after attainment there should be no motive or desire on his part to preach. If he does preach out of Love or Pity, this would be not compatible with his teaching about Nirvana since there would be at least some desires (Love, Pity) which have not been suppressed and continue to influence his behaviour. Either his claim about the nature of Nirvana as a state in which all desires (good and bad) are suppressed is false or his behaviour is not compatible with his teaching. So "if this impartial suppression of all desires, good and bad alike, was thus a logical consequence of the Hinayanian Buddhist doctrine, the Buddha Himself was guilty of a sublime inconsistency" (p. 64). In short, if the Buddha's teaching about the nature of Nirvana and the means of achieving it is true then his practice is not only quite incompatible with it but seems to show that this teaching was false.

It is worth pointing out that although Toynbee sees an incompatibility between the teaching and practice of the Buddha, one of the points often stressed in the Pali Canon is that the Buddha "preached what he practised and practised what he preached" (yathāvādi tathākāri yathākāri tathāvādi²). Let us start at a point where Toynbee and the Pali Canon seem to agree namely that what the Buddha suffered during the forty five years of his ministry was inspired by his Love for mankind. As Toynbee puts it : "Even if He did recommend in His teaching a self-centred pursuit of self-extinction, He was tacitly countermanding His words by His acts of self-devoting love" (p. 292). The Pali Canon makes frequent reference to the love and compassion of the Buddha. One of his lay disciples, Jivaka, says on one occasion : "I have heard it said that God is loving (Brahmā mettāvihāri) but I have seen with my own eyes how full of love the Blessed One is (Bhagavā mettāvihāri)"³. Where the Buddha converts the robber Angulimāla at the risk of his life, his kindness is referred to (Buddho ca kāruṇiko⁴) and it is often mentioned that the Buddha preaches not through desire for gain or glory but out of compassion and benevolence (anukampako Bhagavā hitesī anukampam upādāya dhammaṃ desesi⁵).

If the Buddha practised Love, did he also not preach it? The injunctions to practice love and compassion towards our fellow beings are much more numerous in the Pali Canon than the references to his own example.

2. Itivuttaka, P.T.S. Ed., 122.

3. Majjhima Nikāya, P.T.S. Ed., I. 369.

4. Ibid., II. 100.

5. Ibid., II. 238.

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The Buddha tells his followers : “ Just as a mother loves her only child even more than her life, do thou extend a boundless love towards all creatures”⁶. The importance that he attaches to the cultivation of love for our fellow beings above all else is seen from the following statement that he makes : “ None of the good works employed to acquire religious merit, O monks, are worth a fraction of the value of loving-kindness ” (*mettā*)⁷ Then there is the well-known saying to his disciples : “ Even if ruffians were to seize you and cut you limb from limb with a double-handed saw, you would not have carried out my bidding if you felt the slightest anger towards them”⁸.

It would appear therefore that not only did the Buddha practise Love but he preached it and viewed in this manner, there does not seem to be any inconsistency between what he practised and what he taught. But Toynbee is now likely to raise the question as to how his teaching about self-sacrificing love would be compatible with the proposition “ if He did preach this, that man’s paramount aim ought to be self-extinction ” (p. 292). If Love and Pity along with selfish desires were to be extinguished in Nirvana, how can they continue to influence a person after his attainment of Nirvana? If the latter is true, the teaching about Nirvana would be false.

In spite of Toynbee’s use of the epithet “ self-extinction ” to denote the ideal set up in Buddhism, it seems to be fairly clear from his references to the concept of Nirvana (pp. 62, 63) that he quite rightly does not subscribe to the annihilationist view of Nirvana which has been discarded by scholars on the ground that it does not take account of the positive description of Nirvana in the Pali Canon as also Buddha’s own categorical denial that Nirvana was annihilation. But Toynbee does not seem to take account of all the implications of this view. Just as much as it is man’s duty to attain “ self-extinction ” it is equally a duty of his to attain ultimate Reality for “ self-extinction ” and “ ultimate Reality ” are paradoxically synonymous. The Buddha’s view seems to have been that the categories of logic do not apply to (*atakkāvacara*) Nirvana. As such Nirvana cannot strictly be described by positive or negative epithets. Positive epithets suggest empirical reality and negative ones annihilation, both of which are misleading. Nirvana is a transcendent reality beyond space (*na katthaci*,

6. Sutta Nipāta, P.T.S. Ed. p. 26, verse 149.

7. Itivuttaka, P.T.S. Ed. 19-21.

8. Majjhima Nikāya, I. 129, 186.

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kuhinci), beyond time since “ the distinctions of past, present and future do not apply to it ” and beyond causation (na paṭiccasamuppannam). The passage from our finite self-centred existence to Nirvana is pictured as one from bondage to Freedom (vimutti) and Power (vasi), from imperfection to Perfection (parisuddhi, paramakusala), from unhappiness to Perfect Happiness (pāramasukha), from ignorance to Knowledge (vijjā, aññā), from finite consciousness to transcendent Infinite Consciousness (anantavijñāna), from the impermanent to the Permanent (nicca), from the unstable to the Stable (dhuva), from fear and anxiety to Perfect Security (abhaya), from the evanescent to the Ineffable (amosadhamma), from a state of mental illness to a state of Perfect Mental Health⁹, from darkness to Light (āloka) etc.

In Mahayana we are familiar with the conception of the Buddha as embodying Infinite Wisdom (mahaprajñā) and Infinite Love (mahakarunā) but this conception seems to have its roots in the Pali Canon where Nirvana is depicted not only as state of Perfect Knowledge (vijjā, aññā, jñāna) but as a state in which the ‘ boundless states ’ (appamaññā) of Love (mettā), Pity (karunā), Sympathetic Joy (muditā) and Equanimity (upekkhā) find their fulfilment¹⁰. Nirvana is frequently defined as a state in which craving (lobha), hatred (dosa) and delusion (moha) are completely extinguished but with the elimination of hatred, for instance, perfect Love (mettā) takes its place. One who has attained Nirvana is therefore endowed with the finest qualities of compassion, utterly refined and removed from the slightest tinge of selfishness. With the total elimination of the finite self-centred qualities of craving, hate and delusion the transcendent mind shining with its natural lustre (pabhassaram cittam) is wholly filled with perfect renunciation and charity (alobha, arāga, cāga), loving-kindness (mettā) and perfect wisdom (amoha, paññā). So with the eradication of the selfish desires Love and Pity find their perfect expression.

In other words, far from it being inconsistent for one who has attained Nirvana to minister and preach unto others out of pity and compassion, it would be quite natural for him to do so. He does this not out of earthly considerations of gain or glory or out of a sense of duty for as one who has attained the Highest he is described as one who is ‘ free from debt ’ (anaṇa)

9. Anguttara Nikāya, P.T.S. Ed. II 143. Here diseases are classified as bodily (kāyika-roga) or mental (cetasika-roga) and it is said that while we have bodily diseases from time to time mental illness is almost continual until Arahantship is attained so, that only the saint can be said to have a perfectly healthy mind.

10. Majjhima Nikāya, I. 297.

and as 'one who has discharged his obligations' (katakaraṇīya) but because it would be just what such a person would quite naturally do by virtue of his attainment.

The role of Love and Compassion before and after the attainment of the ideal is not infrequently referred to in the texts. A person, for instance, who attains final salvation after the cultivation of these qualities of love, compassion and meditation is described as "one who is cleansed with an internal bathing" (ayam vuccati bhikkhave bhikkhu sināto antarena sinānena)¹¹ and it is urged that this bathing is to be done not in the river but "in the waters of Love and Compassion for one's fellow beings" (idheva sināhi brāhmana sabbabhūtesu karoḥi khematam)¹¹. Consider again the following passage: "In whatever monk who was covetous, covetousness is got rid of, who was malevolent, malevolence of mind is got rid of, . . . wrath . . . grudging . . . hypocrisy . . . spite . . . jealousy . . . stinginess . . . treachery . . . craftiness . . ., who was of evil desires, evil desire is got rid of, who was of wrong view, wrong view is got rid of. . . He beholds himself purified of all these evil unskilled states, he beholds himself freed (vimuttam attānam samanupassati) . . . When he beholds himself freed, delight is born; rapture is born from delight; when he is in rapture the body is impassible; when the body is impassible he experiences joy; being joyful the mind is concentrated. He dwells, suffusing one direction with a mind of loving-kindness (mettā-sahagatena cetasā), likewise the second, likewise the third, likewise the fourth; just so above, below, across; he dwells having suffused the whole world everywhere, in every way with a mind of friendliness that is far-reaching, wide-spread, immeasurable, without enmity, without malevolence. He abides . . . with a mind of pity (karuṇā), . . . with a mind of sympathetic joy (muditā) . . . with a mind of equanimity (upekkhā) . . . without enmity, without malevolence. It is as if there were a lovely lotus-pond with clear water, sweet water, cool water, limpid, with beautiful banks; and a man were to come along from the east, west, north or south, overcome and overpowered by the heat, exhausted, parched and thirsty and on coming to that lotus-pond might quench his thirst with water and quench his feverish heat. Even so . . . one who has come into this Dhamma and discipline taught by the Buddha, having thus developed loving-kindness, pity, sympathetic joy and equanimity attains inward calm¹².

11. Ibid. I. 39.

12. Ibid. I. 283.

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That Love and Pity ceases or ought to cease with the attainment of Nirvana is a basic misconception due to misunderstanding the nature of this ideal. It is quite expressly stated that the saint who has attained perfection (*sampannakusalam paramakusalam uttamapattipattam samanam ayojjham*¹³) is endowed among other things with "right thoughts (*sammā-sankappa*) which do not require to be further disciplined (*asekha*)"¹³ and these right thoughts include *ahimsā* (*avihimsā-sankappa*) which is a positive concept in Jainism and Buddhism.

That a person on attaining perfection whether he be the Buddha or one of his disciples ought to pass away immediately into Nirvana without being a light unto the world by his example and teaching, is an idea which is quite alien even to Hinayanian ways of thinking. The Buddha exhorted his disciples who were arhats to go and preach unto the world for the good and happiness of mankind¹⁴. Perhaps Toynbee was misled by the significance to be attached to the first 'Temptation' of the Buddha. According to the explanation in the Pali scriptures themselves the Buddha's compassion is in no way compromised by his attainment of Nirvana. He hesitates for a moment wondering as to whether he should preach, not because of any lessening or lack of love on his part for his fellow beings nor because he thought that Nirvana 'was a prize to be clutched' (p. 293) but because he wonders whether the world, immersed in and getting satisfaction from its petty self-centred desires, hates and its cherished erroneous beliefs, would hearken unto a teaching which involves a total abnegation of all this. His thoughts on this occasion as recorded in the scriptures are as follows: "Should I teach what I have found with difficulty? This Dhamma is not readily comprehensible to those given to craving and hate. It goes against the current, is subtle, profound, and difficult of comprehension and as such those who are slaves to their desires and are enveloped in darkness, would fail to see its truths"¹⁵. It is only after he looks into the hearts and minds of men and sees that there are among them those would understand that he decides to preach.

Love and Compassion as ideals exemplified in the lives of Buddha and his disciples, far from being incompatible with the teaching of the Buddha, have a central place in Buddhism both as a means to the attainment of Nirvana and in a refined and transcendent form comprising the goal itself.

13. Ibid. II. 29.

14. Vinaya, P. T. S. Ed. I. 21.

15. Majjhima Nikaya, I. 168.

Nirvana was only the extinction of the fires of greed, hate and delusion in the infinite waters of transcendent and unconditioned Love and Wisdom. When the Buddha or one of his disciples attained this transcendent state he came back to make use of his psycho-physical personality to serve others until it passed away. The theory that it would be an act of selfishness to seek to share one's spiritual gains with another is unequivocally condemned by the Buddha in a sermon on the ethics of teaching. The brahmin Lohicca holds the view : " If a religious person acquired some spiritual state, then he should tell no one else about it. For what can one man do for another? To tell others would be like the man who, having broken through an old bond, should entangle himself in a new one. Like that is this (desire to preach to others) ; it is a form of selfishness. For what can one man do for another ?" ¹⁶. The Buddha dismisses this as a false and evil view (*pāpakam ditṭhigatam*) and among the reasons given for doing so, is that such a person would be one who is lacking in love and sympathy for the welfare of others.

II

If the Buddha's life has value, as Toynbee grants, it would be difficult to see how his teaching, of which his life was an expression, lacks value. Here again Toynbee seems to entertain this view owing to a misunderstanding of Buddhist teaching. Let us consider his criticisms in detail. Toynbee says that the Hinayanian account of human nature is defective : " If a twentieth-century inquirer, brought up in the Christian tradition, found himself called upon to answer these questions as best he could, no doubt he would be likely to declare in favour of Christianity and the Mahayana as against the Hinayana. On the question of fact he would find the Hinayana's diagnosis superficial in its failure to distinguish between self-devoting and self-centred desires. He would find that a superficial diagnosis had led to a wrong valuation and a wrong prescription " (p. 291). Earlier in his work Toynbee seems to concede that the distinction between good and bad desires, but that both are to be suppressed for the attainment of Nirvana : " If the Buddha was right as surely He was, in holding that absolute detachment can be achieved only through the extinction of all desire whatsoever, then the Hinayana must require not only the suppression of desires that are ordinarily regarded as being selfish, such as those of personal pleasure, prosperity, and power for oneself, but also the suppression of desires that are ordinarily regarded as being altruistic, such as Love and Pity for one's fellow sentient beings " (p. 64).

16. *Dīgha Nikāya*, I. 224 ff.

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Although the analysis, classification and valuation of desires in Buddhism would not be the same as what Toynbee adopts, it would be quite incorrect to say that Buddhism fails to distinguish between self-devoting and self-centred desires. According to Buddhism, the springs of action are sixfold comprising the three immoral bases of action (akusalamūla), namely craving (lobha, rāga), hate (dosa) and erroneous beliefs (moha) and the three moral bases of action (kusalamūla) consisting of their opposites, selflessness (alobha cāga), love (adosa, mettā) and wisdom (amoha, paññā). One of the terms generally translated as desire (taṇhā) literally means 'thirsts' (Skr. tṛṣṇā) and there are said to be three thirsts, the thirst for sensuous pleasures (kāmatāṇhā), the thirst for selfish pursuits (bhavataṇhā) and the thirst for destruction (vibhavataṇhā). Of these the thirst for sensuous gratification (kāmatāṇhā, kāmarāga) and the thirst for selfish pursuits (bhavataṇhā) such as the desire for self-preservation, self-continuity (personal immortality), self-assertion (power), self-display, self-respect etc. arise from the basis (lit. root, mūla) of craving (rāga, i.e. kāmarāga, bhavarāga). The thirst for destruction (vibhavataṇhā) springs from (the root of) hate. These are the three forms of thirsts or desires, which continually seek and find temporary satisfaction (tatratatrābhinandini) though ever remaining unsatisfied and provide the fuel for the process called the individual. The distinction made between these unwholesome desires (taṇhā) based on craving and hate and righteous aspirations (sammāsankappa) based on selflessness and Love is so marked that the term 'thirsts' is not used to denote the latter. What springs from selflessness and Love are not 'thirsts' unlike the products of craving and hate. Love (mettā) is as such not termed a desire since a desire in the above sense of a 'thirst' (taṇhā) is basically self-centred and its role would be to build the house that is the individual from birth to birth. Selflessness (alobha, cāga) and Love (mettā) as the opposites of craving and hate, when they occur in their purest form do not have these characteristics and are hence not considered desires in the sense of 'thirsts'. In fact by not doing so, Buddhism recognises the wide gulf that exists between the two. Desires are narrow and selfish (pamāṇakatam¹⁷) while selflessness and Love are boundless (appamāna¹⁷). And what the Buddha recommends is the complete elimination and eradication of the former until the mind is entirely suffused by the latter in their most refined state. The distinction and opposition between the two as motives of action is often mentioned. For instance, it is said that "one's speech may be opportune, or inopportune, true or false, gentle or harsh, useful or futile and *inspired by Love (mettacittā)*

17. Majjhima Nikāya, I. 297.

or influenced by hate (*dosantarā vā*)”¹⁸. The narrow desires are in fact to be eliminated by the development of the latter, their opposites. It is said that “by cultivating Love (*mettam bhāvayato*), ill-will (*byāpāda*) subsides”¹⁹.

The criticism is sometimes made that although the cultivation of selflessness and Love may be recommended as a means to an end namely in order to expel craving and hatred, they too have to be given up in order to attain the state of perfect detachment which is Nirvana. There are passages in the Canon which *prima facie* appear to favour such a theory. It is said for instance that the mind’s emancipation through Love (*mettā-cetovimutti*) is conditioned (*abhisankhata*) and as such impermanent and liable to cease and realising this he attains the supreme secure state of Nirvana²⁰. To cite another instance, it is recommended that “one should work for the cessation of evil habits (*akusalānam silānam nirodhāya paṭipanno*) as also for the cessation of good habits (*kusalānam silānam nirodhāya paṭipanno*) or for the cessation of good aspirations (*kusalānam sankappānam nirodhāya paṭipanno*)”²¹. It is perhaps passages of this sort, which if not carefully examined in their respective contexts are likely to lead one to the conclusion that the Buddha recommends the suppression of both good and evil and that both are almost valued alike.

But if these very same passages are carefully studied in their contexts and on the general background of Canonical thought they would acquire quite a different meaning and significance. Let us take the passage that we have just referred to. Here the question is asked: “How should one conduct oneself in order to eliminate evil habits?”²¹. The answer given is that we should exercise our will (*chandaṃ janeti*) or master-desire as Toynbee would have it (see below) and by a process self-analysis and effort on our part, strive (*a*) to eliminate evil states that have arisen (*b*) to be on our guard against the arising of evil states not arisen (*c*) to make arise good states not arisen and (*d*) to preserve (*thitiyā*), to not allow to fall into desuetude (*asammosāya*), to further develop (*bhiyobhāvāya*), to bring to maturity (*vepullāya*), to cultivate (*bhāvanāya*) and perfect (*pāripūriyā*) good states that have arisen. Evil in other words is to be eradicated and prevented from influencing us and part of the means for doing so is to cultivate the good. Now in this same passage when we come to the question ‘How is one to conduct oneself in order to eliminate good habits?’

18. Ibid. I. 26.

19. Ibid. I. 424.

20. Ibid. I. 351.

21. Ibid. II. 26.

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the answer given is precisely the same as the above comprising (a), (b), (c) and (d). Indeed it would look paradoxical as to how one can eliminate good habits (kusalanam silanam nirodhāya patipanno) were not the crucial distinction drawn in this passage between “conditioned virtue” (silamayo) and perfected “natural virtue” (silavā). It is said that the perfect saint who has attained final salvation (cetovimuttim paññāvimuttim yathābhūtam pajānati) is “naturally virtuous and not virtuous through conditioning” (silavā hoti no ca silamayo).

With regard to the elimination of the good aspirations, we find the same paradoxical statement, that this is to be done by eliminating evil states of mind and cultivating the good states of mind to perfection and here again the saint “who has attained the highest perfection (samppannakusalo), the highest good (paramakusalo) and the highest attainment (uttamapattipatto)” is said to be among other things “endowed with righteous aspirations which do not need further refinement or disciplining” (asekhena sammāsankappena samannāgato). This conception of the Arhat is surely far removed from that of a person who has attained a state of cold quietist indifferentism prior to extinction.

The distinction made in the Pali Canon is that of the Conditioned (sankhata) goodness of those whose self-centred desires (i.e. the threefold thirsts) are not completely eradicated and the pure goodness of the perfect ones or the Arhats in whom these thirsts or desires have been completely extinguished. The conditioned goodness requires further disciplining (Pali, sekha ; Skr. śaikṣya from √ śīks, to discipline, train) while the perfect goodness (paramakusala) of the saint does not require such disciplining or further refinement (asekha). The latter is naturally virtuous (silavā) while the virtue of those who have not as yet attained perfection is artificial and conditioned (silamayo). This is no denial of the importance of selflessness and Love the cultivation of which is necessary though not sufficient for the extinction of the self-centred desires but a recognition of the extent to which these same self-centred desires may condition and dominate much of our so-called acts of selflessness and Love so that it is only on attaining the detachment (virāga) of Nirvana that our Love and Pity could be entirely disinterested. What passes for Love and Pity is influenced consciously or unconsciously by our desire for gain or glory in earth or heaven and other such self-centred considerations such as fear of man or God. Disinterested Love and Pity can arise only when the mind at all its levels is totally purged of all such self-centred desires and considerations.

III

Now this goal, says Toynbee 'looks intrinsically unattainable': "Absolute detachment looks as if it might be intrinsically unattainable, because it is hard to see how the intensely arduous spiritual effort to detach oneself from all other desires can be achieved without attaching oneself to the single master-desire of extinguishing every desire save this. Is the extinction of the desire to desire nothing but the extinction of desire a psychological possibility?" (p. 64). To say that absolute detachment is intrinsically unattainable would of course imply that the claims made by the Buddha and some of his disciples to have attained such a state are in fact mistaken or false but it is not primarily by an examination of these claims that Toynbee makes this assertion. Instead he (i) asserts that the giving up of desires entails the presence of a single master-desire intent on eliminating all desires save this and (ii) questions the psychological possibility of extinguishing this master-desire.

That the giving up of desires is to be accomplished by attaching oneself to a master-desire is precisely what Buddhism states: "Desires are to be given up depending on Desire" (*taṇham nissāya taṇham pahātabbam*²²). This master-desire is more usually designated by the term 'will' (*chanda*, sometimes translated as 'desire'²³) and is defined as "the will to prevent the arising of evil states of mind not arisen, the will to keep out evil states of mind which have arisen, the will to make arise good states of mind which have not arisen and the will to preserve, develop, refine and perfect good states of mind which have arisen"²⁴. In short it is the will or desire to do away with the unwholesome desires ('thirsts,' *taṇhā*) and to refine the wholesome states of mind to perfection by completely eliminating the impact of the former on the latter until these good states of mind (Selflessness, Love, Wisdom) cease to be in the least self-centred or affected by erroneous beliefs. This is the role of the master-desire which in a wider sense comprises the acts of will (*chanda*), the physical and mental energy (*virīya*), the thoughts (*citta*) and the mental investigations and analyses (*vīmaṃsā*) directed towards the above end. So on this count the Buddhism of the Pali Canon would have no quarrel with Toynbee's assertion that a master-desire would be necessary to give up every desire save this.

22. *Anguttara Nikāya*, II. 146.

23. v. *Kindred Sayings*, P.T.S. Ed., V. 239.; also p. 243, fn.

24. *Samyutta Nikāya*, P.T.S. Ed., V. 268.

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The disagreement would be with the next step of Toynbee, namely his statement that it would be psychologically impossible to extinguish this master-desire. If by "the desire to desire nothing but the extinction of desire" Toynbee means "the master-desire" the objection would be 'Is the extinction of the master-desire a psychological possibility?' But why is this psychologically impossible? Apart from the mere suggestion Toynbee does not seem to make it at all clear as to why this is so. He does not provide any empirical grounds or logical reasons for holding that this would be psychologically impossible. Would he say that from what we know of the psychology of man it would by no means be likely for one to have a desire to do away with desires or to extinguish a desire to do away with desires. Now Buddhism would grant that in desiring to do away with desires one would be going against the natural current (*paṭisotagāmi*) of the mind which continually seeks the gratification of its self-centred desires without ever finding satisfaction. But Buddhism would not grant that this is psychologically impossible and would point at least to the example of the Buddha and some of his disciples. It would be psychologically difficult particularly for those whose self-centred desires are strong but by no means psychologically impossible even for them.

On the other hand, is Toynbee's objection to the possibility of desiring the extinction of the master-desire primarily a logical one? Is he saying that just as much as we need have a master-desire to extinguish desire, it would seem necessary to have a super master-desire to extinguish the master-desire and that this would lead to an infinite regress? And is he also suggesting that the master-desire like the first-order desires cannot achieve permanent satisfaction? If the objection is in this form, it has already been raised and met in the Pali Canon itself. A brahmin asks Ananda how desire can be fully extinguished since the extinction of desire by desire would be an unending process :

“ ‘What is it, master Ananda, for which the holy life is lived under Gotama the recluse ?’

‘ For the sake of abandoning desire (*chanda*), brahmin, the holy life is lived under the Exalted One ’.

‘ But is there any way, is there any practice, master Ananda, for the abandoning of desire ? ’

‘ There is a way, brahmin, there is a practice for abandoning desire ’.

‘ Pray, master Ananda, what is that way and that practice ? ’

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- ‘ Herein, brahmin, a monk cultivates the basis of psychic power of which the features are desire (chanda) . . energy (viriya) . . thought (citta) . . investigation (vīmaṃsa) together with the co-factors of concentration and struggle. This, brahmin, is the way, this is the practice for the abandoning of desire’.
- ‘ If that be so, master Ananda, it were a task without end, not one with an end. That he should get rid of desire by means of desire is an impossible thing’.
- ‘ Then, brahmin, I will just question you in this matter. Do you answer as you think fit’.
- ‘ Now what think you, brahmin ? Was there not previously a desire in you (urging you) thus : “ I will go to the Park ” ? When you got to the Park was not that particular desire abated ? ’
- ‘ Yes, indeed it was, master ’.
- ‘ Was there not previous energy (viriya) in you (urging you) thus : “ I will go to the Park ” . . thought (citta) in you . . deliberations (vīmaṃsa) in you . . When you got there did not that energy . . thought . . deliberations subside ? ’
- ‘ Yes, indeed, master’.
- ‘ Very well then, brahmin. That monk who is an Arhat . . who is released by perfect insight,—that desire which he had previously to attain Arhatship, now that Arhatship is won, that desire is abated. . ’”²⁵

The argument is that logically the master-desire is not on the same footing as the first-order desires for unlike these self-centred desires which continually seek gratification without being permanently satisfied the master-desire would achieve final satisfaction and be extinguished with the eradication of the self-centred desires.

IV

The next criticism is posed in the form of the question as to whether the pursuit of absolute detachment, if feasible, is also good: “ They sought to detach themselves from every form of mundane society and, beyond that, from the lusts of mundane life itself ; and the very sincerity and resoluteness with which these Hinayanian Buddhist philosophers pursued their spiritual quest raise two questions : Is absolute detachment an

25. Kindred Sayings, V. 243, 5.

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attainable objective ? And, supposing it to be attainable, is the pursuit of it a good activity ?” (p. 63, 64). Perhaps this criticism which was based on the misconception that Love and Pity were extinguished in Nirvana along with the self-centred desires, is already met in so far as we have pointed out that these good states of mind, far from being effaced in Nirvana are refined and perfected so that they are no longer dependent on the egoistic base of the self-centred desires.

Yet the objection may be raised in another form. It may be asked how Love and Pity can be cultivated in the abstract by cutting oneself away from the life of society for the sake of one's own salvation. Is this not a radically egoistic pursuit in itself ? Is not the ethic of Hinayana Buddhism rooted in the idea of achieving one's own salvation with no concern for others and even one may say at the expense of others who have to provide with their toil and sweat the basic necessities of life without which even their selfish ascetic existence would not even be possible.

This picture does not do justice to the Buddhist conception of the religious life. The Buddha does not say that the contemplative life (*vita contemplativa*) lived apart from the active life of society, was essential even to seek the goal of Nirvana in this life itself, although there is no doubt that the contemplative life was recommended in view of the better opportunities that it provides the individual. The life of the Buddhist contemplative i.e. the monk, is not the same as that of the ascetic who retires from the world. He dwells aloof from society but nevertheless in society giving moral guidance and spiritual instruction to laymen. This work of his for society is considered as valuable as the production of mundane goods and services on the part of the other members of society. Although he seeks to achieve the final goal by his own individual effort yet the means of achieving it as well as the goal itself is stamped with selflessness. If he achieves his goal he continues to be of the greatest service to others because of his spiritual knowledge and attainments, with no expectation whatsoever of earthly or heavenly reward.

Can such a life be called egoistic ? Although the term ‘egoist’ strictly refers to an individual who seeks as an end his own welfare, we normally use the term to denote one who seeks primarily his personal material welfare even at the expense of others. But would a person who seeks primarily his own spiritual welfare at the expense of his material welfare or even his life and seeks it partly by his selfless service in the present

and in order to be of the greatest service to others in the future, rightly be called an egoist? In so far as he seeks primarily his own spiritual welfare until he reaches the goal he may be called an enlightened egoist. But in so far as he does this by cultivating a selfless love for his fellow beings culminating in a state of perfect selfless Love which enables him to live the rest of his life solely in the service of others it would at the same time be the life of an enlightened altruist. Buddhism holds to the principle that one cannot save another without saving oneself. The Buddha tells Cunda: "It is not possible for one who is stuck in the mud to help out another but it is possible for one who is not stuck in the mud to help out another who is stuck in the mud. It is not possible that a man who has not saved himself can save another but it is possible for a man who has saved himself to save another"²⁶.

Toynbee says that "the Mahayanian Buddhist's verdict on the Hinayanian philosopher can be summed up in an inversion of the Scribes' and Pharisees' jibe at Christ on the Cross. 'He saved himself; others he cannot save'" (p. 65). The Hinayana philosopher's reply would be: 'He saved himself so that others he can save'. The Buddha first trained his disciples to be Arhats and then sent them into the world to work and preach for the good and happiness of mankind. It would seem odd to call these Arhats, who like Punna went among unknown peoples ready to meet the worst persecution and even death with hearts of love, egoists. The ethical ideal recommended in the Pali Canon, as representative of the Hinayana viewpoint, is that of enlightened egoism-cum-altruism, the one being dependent on the other. The Buddha says: "Monks, there are these four persons in the world. What four? He who is bent neither on his own welfare nor on the welfare of others; he who is bent on the welfare of others but not his own; he who is bent on his own welfare but not of others and he who is bent on the welfare both of himself as well as of others. He who is bent on the welfare of oneself as well as of others, is of these four persons the chief and best, topmost, highest, and supreme"²⁷. According to this valuation the best of all people is he who works for his own good as well as for the good of others, there being no conflict between the two ends when the good happen to be moral and spiritual.

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26. Majjhima Nikāya, I. 46.

27. Anguttara Nikāya, II. 95.