

**PHILOSOPHICAL AND ETHICAL MOVEMENTS
BEFORE THE LORD'S FIRST ADVENT**

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INTRODUCTION

In this address I am going to risk the impossible, for it covers a great deal of information and includes many complex concepts. Try to imagine lecturing on just Christianity to a non-Christian audience in an hour or less. The thought is frightening. And yet I can think of no better opportunity—or, for that matter, no other opportunity—of sharing with others observations and conclusions that have excited me now for ten years and more. And since the Swedenborg Scientific Association has only given me that one hour instead of a whole term of regular classes, I will do what I must—condense so much into so little.

Please note very carefully that I present this address only as an introduction to an eventual understanding of other religions and their possible connection with the New Church. We must deal here with universals and generals in a sketchy fashion. And we must look to the future for an understanding that comes only from the knowledge of particulars and singulars, and from their arrangement.

I was led to the study of ancient and foreign religions by a burning question which first arose in my mind when I was in Junior Year Religion during a unit on Church History. The Lord has apparently concentrated His efforts on western man, for His churches have been in Canaan and generally westward. What has He done, and what is He doing for the rest of mankind—the majority of mankind?

Certain doctrinal statements have given me a general comfort. The Lord has provided for mankind by the formation of a universal church which includes as its heart and lungs the Lord's special church. This special church consists of those who have the Word and by means of it know the Lord, worship Him, and walk in His ways. But most good people belong to the universal church. They worship some being higher than themselves and live a life that they genuinely believe to be a good life. Such people exist in the various religions on this earth, for most religions do offer a theology and an ethic to their followers. These religions have risen primarily from the Word of the Ancient Church, the second of the Lord's special churches on earth¹. The teachings from this Word spread over the

¹ See SS 117.

globe and enabled people to be saved. But why has the Lord not given His Word to all these people? Why allow them to be part of His universal church, and not of His special church?

While these and other questions lodged quietly in my mind, I studied the Classical World of Greece and Rome, the cultures of the ancient Near East, religion as a subject, and the Oriental religions. Over the years these studies and questions have come together, and this address represents the synthesis that emerged.

Students have long noted that around 600-500 BC many major religious movements began in both the Near East and the Far East. They all began with the efforts of individual men and resulted in widespread acceptance. We do not have the time this evening to look at the spread of these movements, but only at the men from whose insights, thoughts and activities those movements sprang.

In our discussion of some of their principal or fundamental teachings emphasis will be placed on certain major agreements among them. All the originators questioned and re-evaluated traditional views and customs. In this evaluation the spirit of inquiry was strong, and this spirit led to new philosophical positions and processes, as well as to new theological beliefs and practices. (Up until fairly recently philosophy as a term meant the inquiry into the nature of things, especially the source of reality. It is in this meaning that the term is used in this paper.) The search for truth also took the original thinkers inside their minds as well as outside their bodies. Introspection joined extrospection in human thought as a means of discovering reality and salvation. Perception and intuition were usually considered as valid as empirical evidence.

In terms of the three basic elements to any religion (beliefs or faith, piety or charity, and ritual or worship) the great thinkers of the sixth century BC were radical reformers. The older, traditional religions for the most part had heavily stressed ritual as the essential of religion, particularly sacrifices and offerings. The reformers questioned and attacked this emphasis. All of them thought that ritual was of secondary importance at best. Some even wanted to do away with most of the ritual. Instead of emphasizing ritual they stressed theology and ethics, or beliefs and piety. Some put more emphasis on the importance and saving value of knowledge, and others on the importance and saving value of proper behavior. But all of them saw the need for both.

It is noteworthy that in all the movements under discussion there was a very strong trend to monotheism or to a philosophical

monism, i.e., to the belief in a supreme personal God or the belief in a unifying impersonal principle. Both of these trends were a violent reaction against traditional polytheism.

The goal of each position was some form of salvation. For the monotheists, salvation was effected by God, and the saved lived to eternity in a paradise. For the monists, salvation was effected by the person who had acquired perfect knowledge, and he then became one with the Ultimate Reality. Although there was this big difference between the monotheists and the monists, they both agreed that salvation was impossible without a moral life in which the good of society was to be sought.

These preceding remarks have of necessity been general. And general remarks about changes in the civilized world are only meaningful when those remarks are supported by an examination of the specific philosophical and ethical movements. This examination will include illustrative materials from the sacred texts that were authored by the originators of these movements.

INDIAN PHILOSOPHY

Oriental religions after 500 BC, especially those of India, have often been called philosophies rather than religions. There are two reasons for this: 1) the term philosophy is used broadly to mean a way of life with no attempt to separate the religious life from other aspects of life; and 2) the term philosophy is felt to better convey the Oriental emphasis on mental activity rather than physical activity as the essential activity of life.

Oriental religions are introspective. They summon people to find reality and order within themselves. This does not mean that the majority of people in India and China participate in the intellectual exercise of an introspective religion. Actually a vast majority still engage in elaborate ritual rather than in meditation. But this majority believes that activity is inferior to meditation, and most believe that ritual is not saving in itself. They simply believe that, although contemplation and attention to duty are the essential ways to salvation, they are not yet capable of such a life. In India such people believe that they will be able to meditate and act properly in a future life on this earth. In China they believe that they will attain a lesser heaven.

The goal for an Indian is release from this world of illusion and suffering. The world is evil and salvation is escape from it. Most Indians believe that this release is accomplished by a mystical experience which leads directly to enlightenment. If salvation does not

come in this present life, it will eventually come, for almost all Indians believe in reincarnation, or the transmigration of souls from one body in one time to another body in a future time. If a person is weighed down by desires, improper thoughts and improper activities, he will return to this imperfect world. This is the doctrine of *karma*. But if through the life of meditation, religious devotion and proper works he gains enlightenment, he will be released from the cycle of births.

The desire for release has always been present in Indian religion from the earliest history of India. But the way to that release has changed. I have just described the views of Indian thought since the intellectual revolution in India in the sixth century BC. Before that time it was believed that release was only possible for the highest caste in Indian society, the priestly caste called the Brahmins. And they could only achieve it by means of extensive and elaborate rituals provided to serve the many gods of the Vedic religion. That religion was also idolatrous and magical.

It is important to note at this point that the three gravest perversions of the Ancient Church, which had spread to "the Indies," were polytheism, idolatry and magic. So we may see in the Vedic religion of India ca. 1500-600 BC(?) the remains of a fallen Ancient Church. (It would be interesting and useful to pursue the elements of the Ancient Church in the early sacred texts called the Vedas, for those elements are there, brought into India by the Aryan invasion after 2000 BC. But this is not the place to pursue such matters.) The point is that the Vedic religion had become more and more corrupt as the centuries passed. Idolatrous and sacrificial worship of India's many gods steadily increased along with magic. Such perversions probably threatened the opportunity for Indians to be a part of the Lord's universal church.

Is it then coincidence that three great movements began ca. 600-500 which took great strides to reduce these three perversions and to introduce the belief in someone or something higher, whose authority must be accepted and who or which demand a life of proper thought, proper speech, and proper behavior? Hardly.

Mahavira

The first of the revolutionary movements in India was begun by Vardhamana, who later received the title Mahavira, or "the Great Hero." No one is sure when he lived, but he is generally placed in the sixth century BC (probably either 549-477 or 599-527). He was a

member of the warrior caste, the Ksatriyas, and so was raised in the life of gentlemanly ease. But he was dissatisfied with life in general, and with the contemporary religious situation in particular. He saw no salvation in the Vedas and the elaborate rituals of the Brahmans. So at the age of thirty Mahavira left his family to wander and search for the truth. (I must pause here to note how many great religious leaders began this religious journey and/or ministry around the age of thirty: Mahavira, the Buddha, Zoroaster, and the Lord, just to name four of the greatest leaders.) After twelve years of meditation and extreme austerities, in which he neglected his body and social contacts, he gained enlightenment. He then spent the rest of his life teaching others the path to salvation and in organizing monasteries.

We do not have any works authored by Mahavira, and yet there is enough agreement among his followers as to what he taught that there is no reason to doubt his role as the founder of the religion called Jainism, which today has approximately 2,000,000 adherents, almost all of whom are in India. According to his disciples, this is what Mahavira taught.

Although we do not know specifically what or whom Mahavira believed in as the supreme power in creation, we do know what he did not believe in. He preached against the growing Brahman monistic position that in essence everything was the same, therefore a Oneness. To Mahavira there were two realities everywhere, each consisting of an indefinite number of items. The realm of living souls gave life to the realm of tangible objects. The souls were in the objects, but were not the same. At the same time Mahavira also denied the existence of the Vedic gods, and seems not to have believed in any personal god. And yet he does believe in a source of order that governs both a heaven and the earth, although the universe is, to him, eternal and uncreated. Beyond this we cannot be sure of Mahavira's theology and cosmology.

More clear is his doctrine of salvation or release. For the soul of a person to break away from its body and any future body, and for it to go to a wonderful heaven where he retains his own identity, that person must earnestly practice a life of meditation, virtue, and austerity. A person refrained from evil conduct by means of austerity, and then he acquired virtue. And these activities were accomplished by strict meditation or mental concentration. In the process the old priests or Brahmans were of no use. Neither were rituals or the Vedas. Salvation was not outside a man, but was inside. And so Jainism is introspective.

Mahavira stressed certain ethical activities as being essential for salvation. The monks had to take the Five Great Vows, 1) They had to be extremely careful not to harm any creature in any way, for all creatures had souls. (This included the care not to step on or accidentally drink even the smallest insect. The monks sweep the ground with soft brooms to brush aside any life forms, and they carefully strain the liquids they drink. This vow, however, also includes the care to examine ones own thoughts before he acts or speaks lest he hurt another's life or feelings.) In addition the monks had to swear: 2) that they would always speak the truth; 3) that they would always guard against the act of stealing and the motive of greed; 4) that they would not engage in any sexual pleasure and avoid lusts; and 5) that they would avoid all forms of attachment to the things of the world. Faithfulness to these vows assured the monks of salvation.

For the laity there were more, but easier vows: 1) the avoidance of consciously killing any creature; 2) the avoidance of lying; 3) the avoidance of stealing; 4) the avoidance of unchastity in thought, word and action; 5) the avoidance of greed; 6) the avoidance of temptation; 7) the avoidance of materialism; 8) the avoidance of any noticeable evil; 9) the development of meditation; 10) the observation of periods of self-denial; 11) the setting aside of certain periods of time in which the layman would temporarily become a monk; and 12) the giving of alms to those who have need.

Although Mahavira preached against a belief in gods, it is an unfortunate irony that this man became an object of reverence and even of worship. His life was legendized, and prayers to him were believed to be magically effective. In other words, although Mahavira taught against polytheism, idolatry and magic, he did not stamp it out. (This is true also for almost all the other great leaders still to be discussed.) But it must be emphasized here that those three perversions were severely curtailed by Mahavira and the others, and that the more pure thought of these religious founders is still the basis of their religions.

The Buddha

Like the term "Mahavira," "Buddha" is a title rather than a personal name, and it means "the Enlightened One." He was born a prince to the Gautama family and was named Siddhartha. Although the birth and life of the Buddha were also legendized, it is probable that he lived 563-483 BC. Like Mahavira, the Buddha was a member of the Ksatriya caste who rebelled against the Brahman religion

with its emphasis on the Vedas and ritual. He too left home around the age of thirty and went on a long search for the truth. After various failures using various means to attain release from this world of suffering, the Buddha finally reached that sublime state called Nirvana, in which he realized fully that he was one in essence with all things. This release was the result of keen observations on the state of man and the world, and the inward path of deep meditation. After his enlightenment, the Buddha resisted all sorts of temptations to neglect his fellow man in order to fully enter Nirvana, and decided to stay in his body in order to teach others the path he had discovered. He spent the rest of his life meditating on the path and teaching that path. He also prepared others to carry on his mission by establishing monastic orders consisting both of monks and nuns.

The essence of Buddhism exists in the Buddha's teachings which he gave in his first sermon. These teachings are the Four Noble Truths with an emphasis on the fourth Noble Truth which contains the Noble Eightfold Path². These teachings were easy to understand and accept. These are the Four Noble Truths:

- 1) Life is filled with suffering.
- 2) The origin of suffering lies in craving and grasping.
- 3) The end of suffering comes when the craving ends. And
- 4) The way to stop craving is to follow the Noble Eightfold Path.

That path was a series of ethical commandments involving:

- 1) right views;
- 2) right aspiration;
- 3) right speech;
- 4) right conduct;
- 5) right livelihood;
- 6) right effort;
- 7) right mindfulness or motives; and
- 8) right contemplation³.

² See the brief "First Sermon" of the Buddha in the following source, or anywhere it is given. A Sourcebook in Indian Philosophy, Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan and Charles A. Moore (eds.), University of Princeton Press, Princeton, New Jersey, 1957, p. 274f.

³ This path is explained in the Buddha's "Second Sermon," which is also called "The Synopsis of Truth." See Radhakrishnan and Moore, *ibid.*, pp. 275-278.

From birth a person suffers, not only physically and emotionally, but more deeply as well. He feels as if he is impermanent, that he has no eternal self. This appearance tends to lead people into a life of evil as well as ignorance, for they see no use for a noble life. This view traps people and binds them to the Chain of Causation, which is pictured as a wheel of recurring lives of suffering. That wheel, called the Wheel of Becoming, keeps turning until a person dispels his ignorance from previous lives with truth, and curbs his evil desires with proper pursuits.

But they who know truth as truth and untruth as untruth
arrive at truth and follow right desires.⁴

A person must especially beware of his senses, for they bind him to ignorance and craving. He must reach beyond his senses by delving deep into his soul. This is the Buddha's Doctrine of Dependent Origination.

With respect to man's salvation, the Buddha saw no active role outside of the person. The Buddha has been called atheistic, for he did not openly teach the existence of a personal God. In fact, he was unable to reconcile such a God with the human state of suffering. And so he felt that religious devotion to any divine being was not beneficial, and may be harmful. He also rejected prayers, ritual sacrifice and the Vedas for the same reason. For example, the Buddha taught:

If a man month after month for a hundred years should sacrifice with a thousand [sacrifices], and if he but for one moment pay homage to a man whose self is grounded in knowledge, better is that homage than what is sacrificial for a hundred years⁵.

And yet students have noted the Buddha's longing for some power that enabled men to act properly. That power was Nirvana, which was also the origin of everything, and the goal of every person. Nirvana is the ultimate, impersonal unity of Being itself. It is peace itself and bliss itself, and it somehow strives to re-unify all men with it. The person who breaks the Wheel of Becoming and becomes one with Nirvana finds eternal permanence in a state of peace and extreme joy. Nirvana then seems to have purpose and

⁴ The Buddha, *The Dhammapada*, 1:12, Radhakrishnan and Moore, *loc. cit.*, p. 293.

⁵ *Ibid.*, VIII:7, p. 300.

activities, and these are *human* qualities. (So there may be some true theology in Buddhism, however implicit, that has enabled Buddhists to be a part of the Lord's universal church.)

Becoming one with Nirvana required a person to lose his ego (self), for individual egos are impossible in a unity. And the loss of one's ego depends on his becoming concerned with the needs of others. From being selfish, he must become selfless.

Cut out the love of self as you would an autumn lily with the hand. Cherish the path to peace, to Nirvana pointed out by the Buddha⁶.

This is the key to the Buddha's ethical position based on the concept of *dharma*, translated usually as "duty." Because of previous selfish lives a person will tend to continue his selfish ways. He must control his cravings or evil desires and encourage genuinely good desires which have no selfish attachment at all.

A man should hasten towards the good; he should restrain his thoughts from evil. If a man is slack in doing what is good, his mind rejoices in evil.

If a man commits sin, let him not do it again and again. Let him not set his heart on it. Sorrowful is the accumulation of evil conduct.

If a man does what is good, let him do it again and again. Let him set his heart on it. Happiness is the outcome of good conduct⁷.

This process must be slow and steady.

As a smith removes the impurities of silver, even so let a wise man remove the impurities of himself one by one, little by little, and from time to time⁸.

In addition to the Noble Eightfold Path, a layman is expected to follow the Five Precepts:

- 1) not to take the life of a person or animal;
- 2) not to steal;
- 3) not to engage in wrong sexual relations;
- 4) not to use speech in the wrong way; and

⁶ *Ibid.*, XX:13, p. 314.

⁷ *Ibid.*, IX:1-3, p. 301.

⁸ *Ibid.*, XVIII:5, p. 311.

5) not to use drugs or alcohol.

A layman is also expected to support the monks and the temples used in worship, and also to perform pious acts.

The monks and nuns, of course, were to follow a stricter path. In addition to devoting their lives to teaching and meditation, they were expected to take strict vows of celibacy and poverty. There were also ten precepts especially for them:

- 1) refrain from destroying life;
- 2) do not take what is not given;
- 3) abstain from any form of unchastity;
- 4) do not lie or deceive;
- 5) abstain from intoxicants;
- 6) eat moderately, and not after midday;
- 7) do not look at dancing, singing or dramatic spectacles;
- 8) do not lavishly use garlands, scents, ointments and ornaments;
- 9) do not use special beds [literally high or broad]; and
- 10) do not accept gold or silver.

The simple message is to avoid temptation and to strive to live well.

The religion taught by the Buddha was based on and filled with common sense. This is best exemplified by the doctrine of the Middle Way, which is based on the Noble Eightfold Path. This Middle Way is similar to Aristotle's and Confucius' concepts of the proper life. Certain attitudes and activities are seen to be proper and beneficial. If these attitudes and activities are too much or too little, too strong or too weak, then they are improper and harmful. For example, the religious life should not be too austere, and yet it should not be too easy either. The Middle Way demands that a person put effort into his life, but not so much that he is too busy or too tired to perform his duties.

These two extremes, O monks, are not to be practiced by one who has gone forth from the world. What are the two? That conjoined with the passions—low, vulgar, common, ignoble and useless—and that conjoined with self-torture—painful, ignoble and useless. Avoiding these two extremes the Tathagta has gained the knowledge of the Middle Way, which gives sight and knowledge, and tends to calm, to insight, to enlightenment, and to Nirvana⁹.

⁹ The Buddha, the introduction to his "First Sermon," Radhakrishnan and Moore, loc. cit., p. 274.

Religion, to the Buddha, must apply to human life. Philosophical speculation on matters that were not demonstrable was futile. The Buddha was not so much a philosopher as a keen observer of life and human nature. For example:

The fault of others is easily seen; our own is difficult to see. A man winnows others' faults like chaff, but his own faults he hides even as a cheat hides an unlucky throw [of the dice]¹⁰.

This practical aspect of Buddhism gave it a universal appeal—an appeal that was strengthened by the teaching that anyone could obtain enlightenment at any moment. Release was not the exclusive privilege of a few Brahman males. Salvation was in the soul of everyone. All a person needed to do was to *realize* this, i.e., to make it real through the life of meditation and beneficial acts.

Although these noble teachings of an ethical life still exist in Buddhism, the Buddha himself came to be revered and worshiped, as was the case with Mahavira. Also, magic and idolatry crept into Buddhism, but never to the extent that existed in the age before the Buddha.

The Bhagavadgita

Mahavira, the Buddha, and several others had reacted against the official religion of India ca. 600-500 BC. In the face of growing opposition, in which Jainism and Buddhism were gaining increasing support, Hinduism adapted and recovered. It accepted many of the criticisms raised by the revolutionaries, and changed many of its doctrines to make it more appealing. Hinduism then entered its popular phase, that is, it became a religion of the people, not just of the Brahmins.

Hinduism accepted three distinct paths to salvation: 1) a path that emphasized works or action; 2) a path that emphasized knowledge; and 3) a path that emphasized devotion to a particular god. A person could choose his own path, but never to the exclusion of the other two paths. There must always be proper action, proper knowledge and proper devotion.

The path of action was for those who wanted to maintain the traditional use of ritual and adherence to prescribed duties by which salvation was believed merited. The way of knowledge was for those intellectuals who tended toward monism and the belief that a

¹⁰ The Buddha, *The Dhammapada*, XVIII:18, Radhakrishnan and Moore, *loc. cit.*, p. 311.

person became one with impersonal Reality by means of enlightenment. The way of devotion was added to satisfy many who could no longer accept ritualistic or intellectual Brahmanism, the earliest form of Hinduism.

The greatest exponent on this new phase of Hinduism was the *Bhagavadgita*, a sacred work which means "the Song of God." It is a song sung to man by the one God who wanted to save mankind from his ignorance and evil. This Hindu classic belongs in direct lineage with the Vedas (ca. 1500 BC?) and the Upanishads (ca. 800 BC). The four Vedas were a mixture of myths, hymns, magical chants, and other genres. They spoke of a complex pantheon of gods, and stressed ritual as the way to salvation. Out of this polytheistic and ritualistic religion arose the philosophical treatises called the Upanishads. These treatises were by and large monistic, and accordingly taught the saving value of enlightenment by means of knowledge. The *Bhagavadgita* is a portion of a very large epic called the *Mahabharata*. The teachings of the "Song of God" are definitely monotheistic and stress the value of devotion to God and a life of good will and beneficial action.

In fact, the *Bhagavadgita* made the way of devotion intellectually acceptable. This respectability made the teachings in the *Bhagavadgita* that much more appealing. And this work strongly asserted that any Hindu, no matter what his caste or sex, could attain release by his own efforts. Hinduism had fully and successfully responded to the challenge of Buddhism and Jainism.

The theology of the *Bhagavadgita* is extremely interesting to New Church students. It illustrates what the Heavenly Doctrines teach about the prophecies in the Ancient Church, that they told of the Messiah to come. And it is remarkably similar to the New Testament itself in that it treats of God on earth and his instruction to mankind.

The *Bhagavadgita* teaches that the path to salvation is obscured every once in a while by man's ignorance and evil. Because of his love for mankind, the *one* God appears on earth in earthly form to teach man the way to eternal happiness.

That one god is called Ishvara, which means "the Lord," and he has two qualities or states. He has a totally Divine quality which is barely knowable, and an immanent quality which is knowable and visible. And yet both should be known.

The deluded despise Me clad in human body, not knowing My

higher nature as Lord of all existences¹¹.

I am the origin of all; from Me all proceeds. Knowing this, the wise worship Me, endowed with meditation¹².

As the visible God he may appear in one of three general, personal forms: as Brahma the Creator, as Vishnu the Preserver, and as Shiva the Destroyer. And in each function God may take on particular forms. This is especially the case with Vishnu, whose responsibility is to save mankind. He has been born on earth several times, whenever he was needed. He is the main character in the *Bhagavad-gita* where he appears as Krishna, the God who sings his truths to the hero Arjuna, and to all mankind.

Though I am unborn, and My self is imperishable, though I am the lord of all creatures, yet, establishing Myself in My own nature, I come into [physical] being through My power.

Whenever there is a decline of righteousness, O Bharata (Arjuna), then I send forth Myself.

For the protection of the good, for the destruction of the wicked, and for the establishment of righteousness, I come into being from age to age¹³.

It is interesting to note the remarkable similarity between the description of the Lord's transfiguration recorded in the Gospels and the description of Krishna's transfiguration before Arjuna presented in the eleventh chapter of the *Bhagavadgita*. Such a similarity can only have come from some sort of Indian contact with the Lord's representative, pre-advent churches. (Remember that the *Bhagavad-gita* was composed centuries before the advent, before the Lord was transfigured.) Here are a few passages that demonstrate that similarity:

Arjuna: If You, O Lord, think that it can be seen by me, then reveal to me Your imperishable self [the higher nature], O Lord of yoga.

Krishna: But you cannot behold Me with this eye of yours; I will bestow on you the supernatural eye. Behold My divine power.

¹¹ *The Bhagavadgita*, IX.T1, Radhakrishnan and Moore, *loc. ext.*, p. 133.

¹² *Ibid.*, X:8, p. 135.

¹³ *Ibid.*, IV:6-8, p. 116.

If the light of a thousand suns were to blaze forth all at once in the sky, that might resemble the splendor of that exalted Being.

Then he, the winner of wealth [Arjuna], struck with amazement, his hair standing on end, bowed down his head to the Lord¹⁴....

The *Bhagavadgita* also teaches an ethical life that is completely tied to its theology. God strives to save all people, but they must be willing to respond and to do God's will.

I am alike to all beings. None is hateful or dear to Me. But those who worship Me with devotion—they are in Me and I also in them¹⁵.

And that human response includes the performance of one's duties, which involve the war against evil inside and outside a person and a concerted effort to promote good inside and out. Man must be wary of his senses and their deception, and he must avoid selfishness and passion. To do this he must concentrate on God and His will, and acquire the divinely commanded virtues.

Having brought all the senses under control, he should remain firm in yoga [discipline], intent on Me; for he whose senses are under control, his intelligence is firmly set.

But a man of disciplined mind, who moves among the objects of sense, with the senses under control and free from attachment and aversion—he attains purity of spirit¹⁶.

Resigning all your works to Me, with your consciousness fixed in the Self, being free from desire and selfishness, fight, delivered from your fever¹⁷.

For supreme happiness comes to the disciplined man whose mind is peaceful, whose passions are at rest, who is stainless and has become one with god¹⁸.

Fearlessness, purity of mind, steadfastness in knowledge and concentration, charity, self-control and sacrifice, study of the scriptures, austerity, and uprightness, non-violence, truth, freedom from anger, renunciation, tranquility, aversion to

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, XI:4, 8, 12, 14, p. 138f.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 111:30, p. 115.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, IX:29, p. 134.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, VI:27, p. 124.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 11:61, 64, p. 111.

fault-finding, compassion to living beings, freedom from covetousness, gentleness, modesty, and steadiness, vigor, forgiveness, fortitude, purity, freedom from malice and excessive pride—these, O Pandava [Arjuna], are the endowments of him who is born with the divine nature¹⁹.

CHINESE PHILOSOPHY

Before 1000 BC the Chinese were occupied by a fear of spirits, by divination, and by magic. They worshiped tribal gods associated with the Earth, and viewed them in human form, with the strengths and the weaknesses of human nature. The Chinese also worshiped spirits of the dead, whether good or bad. They courted the good spirits since they were beneficial to human society, and they tried to appease or frighten away the evil spirits who especially dwelled in the darkness of night. (This is why the Chinese developed lanterns and firecrackers—to frighten off wicked spirits.) Of all the good spirits, the most beneficial were the ancestors who retained special ties with the family. In exchange for offerings of food and drink, the ancestral spirits worked secretly to ensure the welfare of the family. This ancestor worship has continued to exist into modern times. (We are not quite sure what the Chinese today believe under their present Communist rulers.)

Around 1000 BC there was a dramatic change in Chinese thought. Heaven, as the sky, became more important than the Earth, and eventually it became the principle of existence and the impartial controller of destiny. There also arose the concept of the ideal man of virtue who was successful because of his knowledge, his ability, his skill, and his life. This development of thought constituted a strong humanism.

In this evolutionary period of Chinese religion certain basic doctrines arose which have been fundamental to Chinese thought ever since. In contrast to the Indians, the Chinese did not believe that the world was illusory or undesirable. On the contrary, the world was a perfect form of order—aesthetically pleasing and real. It also played a valuable role in man's religious progress and was organically related to him. The Chinese conceived of a unity consisting of Heaven, the world, and mankind. All three were interrelated to such a degree that any disturbance in one greatly and adversely affected

It was in this time that the doctrine of the *yang* and the *yin*

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, XVI:l-3, p. 152.

the other two.

developed. These are two interacting forms of energy that exist in every individual thing, in any combination of things and in the totality of things, and the things may be concrete or abstract, including activities. The *yang* is masculine, active, warm, dry, bright, procreative and positive. The *yin* is feminine, passive, cool, moist, dull, fertile and negative. The two may appear to be opposites, but in reality they are complements. For example, a man is primarily *yang*, but he has *yin* qualities, and a woman is primarily *yin*, but she has *yang* qualities. In a perfect marriage the dominant *yang* and *yin* join, and the recessive *yang* and *yin* also join. From this comes union.

The doctrine of Tao, or Way, was stressed ca. 1000 BC, and this doctrine may be considered the very basis of Chinese thought. The Tao is order itself. It is the harmony of all things that forms a unity. It is eternal. It is the origin of creation, the plan of creation, the guide of creation, and the goal of creation. The Tao is the correct order of the operation of Heaven and of earth, and it should be the correct order of human behavior. And when human behavior is correct, then unity exists and peace, harmony, and prosperity reign.

Associated with the Tao is the concept of *te*, for *te* is the effective power of the Tao. The Tao is Being itself, and *te* is the Tao in action. It is *te* that produces virtue in a person and in a society.

Lao-Tzu

Out of the intellectual development that began ca. 1000 BC arose two great thinkers, Lao-Tzu and Confucius. Both accepted the general doctrines just described. Both were humanists, for each saw that a person had the capability of making himself virtuous and could bring himself into harmony with the Tao. And, like Mahavira and the Buddha, these men strongly reacted against the corrupt social condition of their day. China had gone through a long period of feudalism which had been breaking up, and this dissolution resulted in serious social problems. But Lao-Tzu and Confucius disagreed on how to react. Lao-Tzu rejected feudalism and Confucius wanted to restore it in a reformed fashion. Lao-Tzu was also more concerned with metaphysical doctrines, while Confucius may have been the most practical revolutionary in the ancient world.

Lao-Tzu's dates are obscure, but it is generally believed that he lived in the sixth century BC (ca. 570?). His life has been so legendized that many believe that he himself may be a legend. We cannot be sure of his life, and none of his literary works survive without several layers of additional material from other generations. And

yet we can be sure of his basic teachings, especially as they appear in the *Tao Te Ching* ("The Treatise on the Tao and Its Power"). We can also be sure of the impact his teachings have had on hundreds of millions of followers. For the testimony from his disciples and followers agree with these statements. (The religion he founded is Taoism, named after the doctrine of the Tao which Lao-Tzu so greatly emphasized.)

Lao-Tzu identified the Tao with Heaven, which had been the chief object of Chinese worship in his day. But he also brought a mystical element to the belief in the Tao. To Lao-Tzu the Tao was an absolute and impersonal principle which must be the object of meditation rather than of worship. It may be comprehended only by intuition as a person searched within himself and in the universe. It is eternal, spontaneous, and indescribable. Human harmony with the Tao is peace and happiness themselves.

Taoism is called a religion in spite of its omission of a personal God. It can be called a religion because for Lao-Tzu the Tao determined destiny and had a ruling, active force (*te*) which operated purposefully in all the world. The *te* operates especially in simplicity and weakness or humility, and is visible in morality and knowledge. Again, as was the case with the Buddha's Nirvana, the human qualities of the Tao make Taoism a religion with saving truths.

Lao-Tzu taught that from the Tao came all things in order, including mankind. But the fall of the Golden Age came when man chose to follow his own path, to build for himself doctrines and laws. From his choice came the loss of pristine harmony and the cause of suffering that is rife in this existence, for these human constructs were contrary to the Tao and its laws. Mankind may yet return to a perfect harmony in this life, but only after merely human ways are rejected and mankind submits himself to the Tao. That is where hope resides, and this is why humility is considered the greatest virtue in Taoism.

The emphasis of Lao-Tzu's teachings were on man's proper life. And the Taoist ethic may simply be summarized as this: Oneness with the Tao is the result of proper attitudes and proper behavior.

Therefore he who follows Tao is identified with Tao. He who follows virtue is identified with virtue²⁰.

The first charge given to the followers of Lao-Tzu is not to interfere

²⁰ Lao-Tzu, *Tao Te Ching*, 23, *A Sourcebook in Chinese Philosophy*, Wing-Tsit Chan (ed.), University of Princeton Press, Princeton, Newjersey, 1963, p. 151.

in the processes determined by the Tao, and this is done by avoiding selfish desires and activities. The second charge is to acquire and display the Tao in one's life by producing unselfish action. The Taoist is to avoid ambition, greed, and lust. At the same time, he is to enkindle kindness, sincerity, and above all humility. Here are some selections that illustrate Lao-Tzu's ethics:

Therefore let people hold on to these:

Manifest plainness,
Embrace simplicity,
Reduce selfishness,
Have few desires²¹.

He who knows others is wise;
He who knows himself is enlightened.
He who conquers others has physical strength,
He who conquers himself is strong.
He who is contented is rich.
He who acts with vigor has will.
He who does not lose his place [with Tao] will endure.
He who dies, but does not really perish, enjoys long life²².

When one cultivates virtue in his person, it becomes genuine
virtue.

When one cultivates virtue in his family, it becomes over-
flowing virtue.

When one cultivates virtue in his community, it becomes
lasting virtue.

When one cultivates virtue in his country, it becomes
abundant virtue.

When one cultivates virtue in the world, it becomes universal²³.

When the highest type of men hear Tao, They diligently
practice it.

When the average type of men hear Tao, They half believe it.

When the lowest type of men hear Tao, They laugh heartily
at it²⁴.

I treat those who are good with goodness, and
I also treat those who are not good with goodness.
Thus goodness is attained²⁵.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 19, p. 149.

²² *Ibid.*, 33, p. 156.

²³ *Ibid.*, 54, p. 165.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 41, p. 160.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 49, p. 162.

The Way of Heaven has no favorites.
It is always with the good man²⁶.

The Way of Heaven is to benefit others and not to injure.
The Way of the sage is to act but not to compete²⁷.

Confucius

Confucius (551-479 BC) probably began his public teaching while Lao-Tzu was nearing the end of his mission. He was born to a noble but poor family, and he eagerly acquired an education for himself. He was keenly interested in politics and education. He served in various administrative offices, and was the first professional educator in China. Confucius was also the first to teach the principles of conduct as well as the traditional subjects. And he was the first person to open up education to any one regardless of station, birth, wealth, etc.

Most of Confucius⁷ ideas are reliably contained in *The Analects*, a collection of his sayings. They also appear in other Confucian books, notably the *I Ching*, or "The Book of Changes."

Confucius is somewhat different from the other revolutionaries which we are considering here. For unlike them, he did not reject the major ideas of the past, including the need for and the role of ritual in salvation. But he was critical of several aspects of the ancient cults and exercised discrimination in evaluating what of the past was still useful, and should therefore be maintained. And he emphasized the error of mere activity in the rituals. A person must be properly prepared.

If a man is not a true man, what is the use of rituals?²⁸

To Confucius there was a spiritual existence that must be communicated to man. But it was man that needed to tune into that communication, which was constantly inflowing into him. Confucius⁷ focus was on man, and it was a critical focus. He was a rationalist and the strongest humanist in ancient China.

Confucius is best known for his keen observations of the world and human behavior, and for his emphasis on a practical philosophy of life: But he also was interested in the principle behind and within

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 79, p. 175.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 81, p. 176.

²⁸ Confucius, *The Analects*, 111:3, in John B. Noss, *Man's Religions*, 4th ed., Macmillan, New York, 1969, p. 289.

nature and man. For him this principle was Heaven, but not as the Chinese had thought. To Confucius, Heaven was an object of contemplation as well as an object of reverence. Heaven was not the greatest of all spiritual beings; it was the origin of all things and the supreme Reality. It has a knowable purpose which is manifested in the Tao, or Way, for the Tao is the Way of Heaven. Whereas Lao-Tzu had emphasized the Tao and identified it with Heaven, Confucius emphasized Heaven and saw the Tao as springing from it.

More specifically, the Tao is *moral* law or order. And it is only meaningful when it is practiced by man. So when a person is moral, he does the will of Heaven. And he exercises real power (*te*) in moral action. Confucius emphasized the fulfillment of the purpose in human life by means of human choice and activity. This emphasis is illustrated in his teaching. "It is man that makes the Way great, and not the Way that can make man great"²⁹. Confucius' philosophy was an ethical humanism.

The ideal and ultimate goal was a "harmony of perfect individuals in a well-ordered society based on the mutual moral obligations of the five human relations"³⁰. To Confucius there could be a full harmony among men, earth and Heaven, for the Tao of Heaven can operate fully in all things. Man could return to the Golden Age that had once existed in this world.

The five human relations were these: 1) ruler and minister; 2) father and son; 3) elder brother and younger brother; 4) husband and wife; and 5) friend and friend. For these relations to be solid, happy, and beneficial there must exist in the participants piety and mutual respect. The higher should work for the welfare of the lower, and the lower should obey and serve the higher. Each has his responsibilities which should be dutifully discharged.

As an essential part of this ultimate goal of full harmony, Confucius taught the need for humanity, which he called the unifying virtue. So important was humanity that he said:

If you set your mind on humanity, you will be free from evil³¹.

He told his followers to strive for the human spirit of mutual respect and courtesy. The proper way to strive was to observe Confucius'

²⁹ Chan, *Sourcebook*, loc. ext., XV:28, p. 44.

³⁰ Wing-Tsit Chan, "Confucius," in *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Macmillan, New York, 1967, Vol. II, pp. 416-420.

³¹ Confucius, *The Analects*, XV:23, in Chan, *Sourcebook*, loc. ext., p. 44.

Golden Rule (which is so close to the Lords teaching in the New Testament).

Tzu-kung asked, "Is there one word which can serve as the guiding principle throughout life?" Confucius said, "It is the word altruism (*shu*). Do not do to others what you do not want them to do to you³²."

Another significant doctrine with respect to harmony was that of the Mean, which is remarkably similar to the teaching of the Buddha, his contemporary, and of Aristotle, who lived thousands of miles away and two centuries later. It stressed the need for moderation in human action, a moderation that automatically led to universal harmony.

"That virtue is perfect which adheres to a constant mean³³."

Confucius spoke with urgency when he taught about harmony. Chinese society was filled with corruption, and it needed to be set in order. This would happen when individual men themselves were set in order. And although their present behavior was bad, Confucius taught that man was inherently good. There was a good core in each person covered over by selfishness. And man can relearn to be good by attaining the Five Cardinal Virtues:

- 1 humanity (the root of the tree of life);
- 2 righteousness (the trunk);
- 3 religious or moral activity (the branches);
- 4 wisdom (the blossoms); and
- 5 faithfulness (the fruit).

Since the ultimate goal of harmony is only possible with the reformation of individuals, the immediate goal of Confucius⁷ teachings was the formation of the ideal human being, whom he called the Superior Man. With regard to such a person Confucius said:

Set your will on the Way. Have a firm grasp on virtue. Rely on humanity. Find recreation in the arts³⁴.

The superior man understands righteousness; the inferior man understands profit³⁵.

³² *Ibid.*, vi:27, in Noss, *Man's Religions, loc. cit.*, p. 290.

³³ *Ibid.*, iv:4, p. 25.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, vii:6, p. 31.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, iv:16, p. 28.

The superior man has nine wishes. In seeing, he wishes to see clearly. In hearing, he wishes to hear distinctly. In his expression, he wishes to be warm. In his appearance, he wishes to be respectful. In his speech, he wishes to be sincere. In handling affairs, he wishes to be serious. When in doubt, he wishes to ask. When he is angry, he wishes to think of the resultant difficulties. And when he sees an opportunity for a gain, he wishes to think of righteousness³⁵.

Such a person displays the Five Cardinal Virtues at all times. And these are supported by the Five Constant Virtues: self-respect, nobleness of mind, sincerity, earnest effort, and good will³⁷. For Confucius, there was no place for mere pretense in these matters. Selfishness must be removed. There must be a perfect harmony between one's motives and manners. So Confucius encouraged his followers to examine their motives as well as to exercise morality. The result of all this would be a person who is, in addition to the virtues listed above: decorous, dutiful, modest, simple, honest, just, self-controlled, tasteful, studious, courageous, conscientious, altruistic, etc.³⁸.

But the Superior Man is not just concerned with his own moral progress. A true person of humanity, "wishing to establish his own character, also establishes the character of others"³⁹. In this way

³⁶ *Ibid.*, XVI:10, p. 45.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, VI:28, p. 31.

³⁸ Confucius also offered these teachings about the superior, or virtuous, man and humanity: "Yen Yuan asked about humanity. Confucius said, To master oneself and return to propriety is humanity" (*Analects* XII:1).

"Fan Ch'ih asked about humanity. Confucius said, 'It is to love man.' He asked about knowledge. Confucius said, 'It is to know man' " (*Analects* XII:12).

"Wealth and honor are what every man desires. But if they have been obtained in violation of moral principles, they must not be kept. Poverty and humble station are what every man dislikes. But if they can be avoided only in violation of moral principles, they must not be avoided. If a superior man departs from humanity, how can he fulfill that name? A superior man never abandons humanity even for the lapse of a single meal. In a moment of haste, he acts according to it. In times of difficulty or confusion, he acts according to it' " (*Analects* IV:5).

From Chan, *Sourcebook*, loc. cit., p. 26, 38, 40.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, XVII:6, p. 46f.

society as a whole benefits, for every Superior Man knows that more important than self-dependency is mutual dependency.

Confucius also stressed the importance of moral example. Good deeds speak better than words. For instance, a moral king sets a powerful example for his subjects. To Confucius the appeal to the inner goodness of people by example was more effective than the legislation of laws and rules. (Confucius himself was a model gentleman: wise, kind and beyond corruption. His disciples loved to speak of this as well as the clarity and depth of his words.)

NEAR EAST RELIGION

When we turn our attention to the ancient Near East, we see a similarity of circumstances and reaction ca. 1000 BC. The traditional religions of Egypt, Babylonia and elsewhere at that time were still steeped in polytheism, idolatry, magic and merely external ritual. But, as was the case in India and China, a re-evaluation of these religions began ca. 1000 BC. And out of that general movement arose certain men who challenged and rejected the old view that salvation was earthly and was the result of a strict adherence to a set ritual (or service of the gods) and magic (or the control of the gods). In Israel the revolution had begun centuries before under Moses' leadership, but was not complete or explicitly preached until the prophets ca. 900-400 BC. In Persia the revolutionary was Zarathustra, or Zoroaster. The new religions of the Near East in Israel and Persia gave "...a high value to human individuality and conceive [d] of the relationship between God and man as a person-to-person encounter, in which the moral element is prominent⁴⁰."

Zoroaster

Of all the ancient revolutionaries, Zoroaster is the one most clouded by legend and by a lack of material from the early period of Zoroastrianism. Some scholars have thought that he lived in the tenth century BC, but the general consensus is that he lived in the sixth century (ca. 550 BC). He was either the son of a pagan priest in a pastoral tribe, or the son of an important farmer. Around the age of thirty Zoroaster had a religious experience, not unlike those described in the Old Testament. The angel Vohu Manah, which means "Good Thought," appeared to Zoroaster and led him "in the spirit" to Ahura Mazda ("The Great Lord"). Ahura Mazda revealed his truth to Zoroaster, told him of his hopes and plans, and commis-

⁴⁰ Noss, *loc. cit.*, p. 342.

sioned him to become his prophet. Zoroaster willingly accepted the mission and taught for the rest of his life. After a decade of failure, Zoroaster converted some high Persian or Median officials, and Zoroastrianism quickly spread. It even became the official religion of the Persian Empire ca. 500 BC, at which time its influence was felt throughout the Near East.

We do not have much of what may confidently be called Zoroaster's own words. But we do have some teachings in the form of sacred hymns called the Gathas. More of his teachings may be in the rest of the Zoroastrian sacred scriptures called the Avestas, of which the Gathas are a part.

Zoroaster's mission was to purify the old Persian religion of its polytheism, its idolatry, its magic, and its dependency on ritual. Ahura Mazda had said that these were perversions of the true religion he had established in a pristine period. The worshiped Persian gods were real, but they were evil spirits, not gods, and they effectively kept men ignorant of Ahura Mazda and away from a heavenly existence with him.

Ahura Mazda revealed to Zoroaster an ethical monotheism. It was by means of the true worship of the one God, Ahura Mazda, and by means of the life of morality that man may return to a state of purity and happiness.

The old ritual was almost completely rejected as unnecessary and detrimental. It trapped the mind in meaningless externals and served the evil spirits. Only the fire-sacrifice was kept by Zoroaster, and this was completely transformed to carry a different, symbolic significance. (Compare what the Lord did in His rejection of Israelite ritual and the institution of baptism and the Holy Supper in its place.) Zoroaster taught that true prayer from a humble heart was effective in man's salvation, not sacrifices.

Zoroaster's theology is especially interesting. For him, there was only one God, Ahura Mazda, who ruled heaven and earth, and who ruled in natural order and in moral order. He was conceived of as being perfect wisdom and perfect goodness, who acts in nature and in history for the sake of mankind. He cares for man's freedom of choice, and provides for that choice with occasional revelations of his truth. Otherwise man would have no chance for paradise, since the evil spirits allow no choice and close men's minds.

Ahura Mazda (again, "The Wise Lord,") expresses his will through Spenta Mainyu ("the Holy Spirit") and through divine actions which are also personified. He has his angels, or agents, who

are either personifications of his own qualities (e.g., "Good Thought," and "Rightness" or "Truth"), or they are separate entities who govern certain expressions from Ahura Mazda.

From the beginning, or from a time near the beginning, Ahura and his agents were opposed by evil powers, led by Druj ("the Lie"). He and all the other powers had openly evil names (e.g., "Evil Spirit"). They had successfully deceived humans and led the humans to the worship of themselves under new, less threatening names, namely the old Persian gods, called as a whole the Daevas.

The Daevaists did not discriminate accurately between these two, because just as they were deliberating, there came upon them a delusion so that they should choose the worst Mind, so that all together they rushed over to Fury, through which they afflict the life of man with disease⁴¹.

A cosmic struggle grew between these military forces. The whole of creation was involved, especially mankind. In fact the major battlefields were in the minds of individual people, and there the two sides mustered their forces. The person himself could participate in the battle as a soldier for either side.

At the beginning both these Mentalities [Ahura Mazda and Druj] became conscious of each other, the one being a Mentality better in thought, and word, and deed, than the other Mentality, who is bad. Now let the just man discriminate between these two, and choose the benevolent one, not the bad one⁴².

But, if he chose the evil side, he went to an eternal hell. If he chose the good side, he went to an eternal heaven. This is why Ahura Mazda revealed himself and the realities of this situation to Zoroaster—so man could freely make the right choice.

Now will I speak out: Listen and hear, you who from far and near have come to seek my word; now I exhort you clearly to impress on your memory the evil teacher and his faults; for no longer shall the evil teacher—druj [Lie] that he is!—destroy the

⁴¹ Zoroaster, *The Gathas*; the specific hymn is unknown, but is quoted in *The Portable World Bible*, Robert O. Ballou (ed.), Viking Press, New York, 1944, p. 214.

⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 214.

second life, in the speech of his tongue misleading to the evil life⁴³

The ethical message was basically this: speak the truth and aid the good at all times, while at the same time avoid deceit and stamp out evil in oneself and in the world. In this way the individual is saved, and all of society is redeemed from the evil forces. A person also ought to have as much regard for his neighbor as for himself.

At the end of a person's life his spirit faced a last judgment at a narrow bridge where his book of life was read. If he had more demerits than merits he was thrown over into an abyss whose depths cannot be seen, and from where rises the foulest stenches. There he lived in the "Abode of Lies" where there is darkness and loneliness. If his record is good, he crosses over to paradise in communion with his God.

The world was also to have its last judgment when the evil spirits would be locked up in hell, allowing heaven to descend to earth. The good men would then be resurrected. The outlook was therefore optimistic, but it was clear that the good would eventually triumph over evil only after great trials and wars.

This ethical monotheism did not last long after Zoroaster. Within a century the monotheism became a dualism, where a god of evil (Ahriman) was thought to be equal in power to Ahura Mazda. And later Zoroastrianism became polytheistic, as the followers worshiped the divine agents as separate gods. This included Satan (Shatan, the Adversary, the primary agent of Ahriman) whose role became fixed in Jewish thought at the time when Judah was a part of the Persian Empire.

But in spite of these theological problems, Zoroastrianism still contained its great ethical teachings. And the monotheistic teachings have resurfaced at times among the Zoroastrians (currently numbering about 250,000).

Israel's Prophets

Perhaps I may be allowed to summarize the Israelite prophets even more than I have the thoughts of Mahavira, the Buddha, the *Bhagavadgita*, Lao-Tzu, Confucius and Zoroaster. I do this because I believe the Prophets are fairly well known to us, although perhaps not as well known as they should be. Also, there is no one revolutionary prophet, but rather a revolutionary movement by the prophets as a group.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 208.

Israel had always been a unique nation in the Near East. From its beginning as a nation ca. 1400 or 1200 BC, Israel had a very heavy ethical element in its religion. No other nation until Persia ca. 500 laid such stress on a moral life, although, of course, every nation depended to some extent on the morality of its citizens. But in those nations ethics was considered a civil matter ordained by the gods, and of secondary importance. Of far greater significance was strict adherence to a fixed ritual, for such ritual sustained the many gods of nature who were in nature. In Israel there was also an emphasis on ritual—the Sabbath, the Passover, sacrifices, the priesthood, etc.—but the Lord also had given social commandments by which the Israelites were to behave properly toward each other. No other nation *began* their religion and government with anything like the Ten Commandments.

But what is taught is not always what is believed. There is a great difference between the official religion, as set forth in sacred texts, creeds and doctrines, and the popular religion as practiced by the people. The Lord gave the commandments, but the Israelites did not practice them faithfully. The Lord taught against polytheism and idolatry, but the Israelites believed in many gods and set up idols.

By the time of the Monarchy ca. 1000 BC the covenantal relationship was threatened by the Israelite desire to forsake the Lord and to turn to Baal and other gods. And for those Israelites who did not turn away, they tended to content themselves with the ritual and not with their prescribed social obligations.

This is why the Lord raised up His prophets during the Monarchy. Men such as Elijah, Amos and Isaiah preached against the sin of the people. They taught a clear, explicit monotheism (much clearer than appears in the Books of Moses).

I am the Lord, and there is no other;
There is no God besides Me.
I will gird you, though you have not known Me,
That they may know from the rising of the sun to its setting
That there is none besides Me.
I am the Lord, and there is no other;
I form the light and create darkness,
I make peace and create calamity;
I, the Lord, do all these things⁴⁴.

They attacked idolatry⁴⁵. And they proclaimed a Divinely directed

⁴⁴ Isaiah 45:5-7.

⁴⁵ For example, see Isaiah 44:9-20.

ethic for Israel. They did all this with the threat that unless Israel reformed its cult and its society, doom would soon come.

So, once again, we see that ca. 1000 BC with Nathan and other little known prophets a great movement began to challenge the generally accepted ways of thought and life. And for the next six hundred years or so, the Lord's prophets preached an ethical monotheism that depended less on ritual and more on proper beliefs and proper activity.

Seek good and not evil,
That you may live;
So the Lord God of hosts will be with you.
As you have spoken.
Hate evil, love good;
Establish justice in the gate.
It will be that the Lord God of hosts
Will be gracious to the remnant of Joseph ⁴⁶.

Wash yourselves, make yourselves clean;
Put away the evil of your doings from before My eyes.
Cease to do evil,
Learn to do good;
Seek justice,
Reprove the oppressor;
Defend the fatherless,
Plead for the widow⁴⁷.

Seek the Lord while He may be found,
Call upon Him while He is near.
Let the wicked forsake his way,
And the unrighteous man his thoughts;
Let him return to the Lord,
And He will have mercy on him;
And to our God,
For He will abundantly pardon⁴⁸.

I hate, I despise your feast days,
And I do not savor your sacred assemblies.
Though you offer Me burnt offerings
and your grain offerings,
I will not accept them,

⁴⁶ Amos 5:14f.

⁴⁸ Isaiah 55:6f.

⁴⁷ Isaiah 1:16f.

Nor will I regard your fattened peace offerings.
Take away from Me the noise of your songs,
For I will not hear the melody of your stringed instruments.
But let justice run down like water,
And righteousness like a mighty stream⁴⁹.

For I desire mercy and not sacrifice,
And the knowledge of god more than burnt offerings⁵⁰.

With what shall I come before the Lord,
And bow myself before the High God?
Shall I come before Him with burnt offerings,
With calves a year old?
Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams
Or ten thousand rivers of oil?
Shall I give my firstborn for my transgression,
The fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?
He has shown you, O man, what is good,
And what does the Lord require of you
But to do justly,
To love mercy,
And to walk humbly with your God⁵¹?

It is interesting to note that the prophetic movement was especially active ca. 600 BC, just prior to the Babylonian Captivity, when the people of Judah were especially wicked, and when they especially needed a plan to reform and a hope in the future. The Prophets satisfied both needs. It was during the Babylonian Captivity that the Jews did become outwardly monotheistic and stressed morality. The prophetic movement had succeeded, at least in external life.

And yet, as was the case in India, China and Persia, perversions crept in and the ideal set forth by the great religious leaders became ignored. The Lord had to come on earth because He had been so rejected by the Jews (through the prophets). But still, the thoughts of the Prophets lived on and greatly affected Jewish and Christian thought for the good of western society.

GREECE

Little of philosophic thinking existed in either Zoroaster's teachings or in the Prophets' proclamations. Their movements were

⁴⁹ Amos 5:21-24.

⁵⁰ Hosea 6:6.

⁵¹ Micah 6:6-8.

religious and ethical, with only minor excursions into the examination of the nature of things. Such things were declared rather than reasoned.

In Greece we find another distinctly different movement. This movement was more philosophic than religious. In fact religion entered into the Greek movement as little as philosophy did into the Persian and Israelite movements. But religion was there, for the gods were examined and underlying Reality was posited in their place.

As had been the case in Israel, in Greece there was no one man who can be called the "Father" of the movement. There were many thinkers who made their contributions, but the contributions of this philosophic movement were as revolutionary as those of the Buddha or Lao-Tzu. And, like the other revolutions, they too arose out of an intellectual fermentation that occurred soon after 1000 BC. Finally, as was the case in the Far East and in the Near East, the first real solidification of the Greek revolution occurred in the sixth century BC when various philosophic positions arose.

The Greek Philosophers

Greece awoke ca. 800 BC from a dark period in which little development was made in political, economic or cultural matters. Greek civilization blossomed at that time with a new contact with the Near East triggered by Phoenician traders. Greece itself turned to trade, and the incoming wealth financed a great cultural productivity on the part of writers and artists.

The contemplative men of this period strove to find meaning in life, and so they re-evaluated their religion, their government, their society, etc. They generally wanted to find what was reasonable and what was beautiful. Like the thinkers in the Far East and the Near East they looked deeply within man, as well as at nature. They wanted to know what was human and what it should become. Such inquiry had to consider what was ethical.

We have no literature from these early thinkers, for the writers of the time chose to record religious texts (e.g., Homer's *Iliad*) and economic transactions, and not the new thought of the day. We only know of the thinkers from subsequent writers. These later writers agree that one commonly accepted ethical teaching was moderation: "Nothing to excess" was a common maxim. Practical rules of a moral life such as this were set forth by many of the early philosophers in Greece.

According to Windleband, three important developments occurred as a result of the ethical movement of the early philosophers. 1) The all-too-human qualities of the Greek gods were removed in order to make them rational and self-controlled rulers of the world. 2) Certain monotheistic thoughts or tendencies appeared as logical results of the evaluation of the order in the world. And 3) ideas of eternal reward and punishment for human acts developed as some philosophers taught immortality and some taught reincarnation⁵². (The Heavenly Doctrines tell us that Plato and others did believe in one God⁵³, and they probably received that idea and other correct ideas from the Ancient Word⁵⁴. Could all of the beneficial developments that took place in the sixth century BC have had the same origin?)

In the sixth century BC no person had a greater influence in these matters than Pythagoras⁵⁵. He founded an ethical, religious movement with a heavy reliance on philosophic thought. He emphasized the necessity of there being one God and the necessity for human response to him in the life of morality. Such a life resulted in happiness here and in future lives, for humans had eternal souls which were affected by their thoughts and deeds. Pythagoras taught the importance of duty, of introspection of one's intentions and reality, of submission to higher authority, of earnestness, and of the evil of sensual gratification. (Although we do not know the spiritual state of other revolutionary thinkers of this period, we do know from the Writings that Pythagoras is in heaven⁵⁶.)

The theological elements of early Greek philosophy were not stressed or developed. But the ethical concerns were, and ethics became a major branch of later Greek philosophy.

CONCLUSION

In our conclusion, two things need to be done. We must seek a unity within these diverse movements. And we must find a possible purpose for such a world-wide phenomenon.

The Heavenly Doctrines teach that the Ancient Church had a representative worship. It used objects to present in a physical way the ideas of Divine and heavenly things. It used words to present in a natural way celestial and spiritual concepts. When the people of that

⁵² VV. Windelband, *History of Ancient Philosophy*, Dover Publications, New York, 1956 (originally published ca. 1900), p. 28.

⁵³ TCR 9.

⁵⁴ See SS 115.

⁵⁵ See Windelband, p. 28ff.

⁵⁶ CL 151.

Church turned to evil and falsity, they lost the knowledge of such things and began to worship the objects themselves and to revere the representative style of writing. This is the origin of polytheism and idolatry. It is also the origin of magic, for the people of the fallen Ancient Church used the knowledge of representatives (or better, correspondences) to effect marvelous things for their own sake. They also *believed* that the objects of worship were magical and could be used to control the gods, nature and men. And finally, the worship of that fallen Church also became merely external and false.

The Ancient Church had been centered in the Near East from where it spread above the Black Sea into Tartary and down into Africa, into "the Indies" (probably India and Southeast Asia), and elsewhere⁵⁷. Presumably it also spread into China, either as the pure Church, the fallen Church, or as an influence, for the Writings declare that all the religions of the globe own their origin, at least in part, to the Ancient Church. And besides, certain beliefs and religious customs existed in ancient China which were very similar to those of India and the Near East where the Ancient Church had been. And finally, the Ancient Church had a great influence on the early Greeks who borrowed the idea of representatives and used them in their myths and cult⁵⁸.

So, all the areas under discussion in this paper had a common background and religious origin, the Ancient Church. And all of them suffered from the fall of that Church, for all the nations had polytheism, idolatry, magic and an emphasis on merely external worship or ritual. That is, they also shared the same religious predicament.

We do not know at what time the Ancient Church had spread into the civilized areas of the world and beyond. But it must have been before 1000 BC for all the characteristics of its fallen state appear by that time.

And then, sometime around 1000, or within a couple of centuries afterwards, all these nations or territories experienced some sort of intellectual fermentation in which the old religions, and the institutions they permeated, were evaluated instead of just accepted for what they were. Religious beliefs as they appeared in the cult, in the government, in the artistic products, in the economy, and in society were examined. Obviously, at least a few people in each of the nations must have found the old ways lacking sufficient value and

⁵⁷ Coronis 39 and SS 117.

⁵⁸ SS 117.

benefit. In India the philosophic *Upanishads* raised such questions. In China it was the rise of Heaven as the supreme guide in human affairs and the rise of humanism. In Israel it was prophecy. In Greece it was a movement which has not yet been satisfactorily named, but was the precursor of philosophy. It too was a humanism. (We do not know if there was such a fermentation in Persia, for no records have survived from that early period.)

And then out of the general fermentation arose outstanding and brilliant men who drastically reacted against traditional views and customs. They rejected the emphasis on external worship or ritual. They rejected the myriads of gods and the belief that idols could somehow house the gods' powers and presence. They also apparently found no room for magic, for either they rejected magic or ignored it in their new views and customs⁵⁰.

In place of the rejected gods they posited monotheism or monism (or, in the case of Mahavira, a dualism)—some form of ultimate reality far beyond man and nature, or far within them. The one God or underlying principle was seen as the origin and maintainer of all creation. In place of the rejected cult they stressed morality (including the *proper* worship of God for the monotheists).

In all of this mental activity, both the rejections and their replacements, the revolutionaries used reasoned inquiry. Nothing was thought to be too sacred for questioning although to some men certain concepts were considered too far beyond the ability of the mind to consider. (This was especially true of the Buddha.) In short, all of the movements contained the seeds of philosophy, both in the East and in the West.

All the original thinkers were also teachers. Mahavira, the Buddha, the author of the *Bhagavadgita*, Lao-Tzu, Confucius, Zoroaster, the Prophets, the philosopher—everyone taught what he had discovered, whether the discovery was through self-discipline in the Far East, or from revelation in the Near East. (We do not know the method of discovery in Greece, but revelation and meditation are both documented.) In fact the idea of universal education in their respective nations have been traced to these men, either as founders (e.g., Confucius), or as major contributors.

The great German philosopher, Hegel, noted that with every thesis or position there arises an antithesis, and that from the

⁵⁹ It is interesting to note the following statement in AC 2591 and to wonder at its possible connection with the movements ca. 600 BC. "There were very many wise men in ancient times, especially in the Ancient Church, from whom wisdom emanated to many nations."

conflict that results from their co-existence there arises a synthesis. Such a model or analogy also works with respect to our various movements. After the movements reacted against the tradition of their land, some form of counter-action occurred. The old and the new adapted to each other, and although the new movements won the wars, none of the victories were without considerable losses. The great theological and ethical teachings of their founders gave way as certain old beliefs and practices entered the movements. Polytheism, idolatry, magic, and an emphasis on ritual to varying degrees were revived. This is especially the case in Buddhism, Hinduism, and Zoroastrianism.

But again, it must be stressed that the movements did win. New teachings were believed and lived that had significant results in the cultures of the Orient, the Near East and the whole world. This is especially the case with the ethics of these movements. The failure of the various movements was to stamp out *completely* polytheism, idolatry, magic and an emphasis on empty ritual. But even these were curbed, and they were forced to share importance with the life of morality.

The discussion of the unity with respect to the several movements has been based on observations, and may be easily tested. But the discussion of the apparent purpose behind these movements is speculative—although not entirely so. It is based on a model described and explained in the Heavenly Doctrines, and it generally fits into the general teachings about Divine Providence. This, then, is an attempt to see the workings of Divine Providence in past events, which, we are told, we are permitted to do.

As it was stated in the introduction, the Lord always foresees man's spiritual needs and provides for their satisfaction. It is man who willingly closes up heaven for himself, and in so doing harms the chances of his descendants to see clearly what constitutes a genuinely good life. When the situation becomes extremely dangerous, the Lord provides a means by which the problems are alleviated. With His special church on earth the Lord has at times revealed Himself in new ways so that the people who receive those revelations may see the Lord, respond to Him, and be saved. These revelations, of course, have been the Ancient Word, the Old Testament, the New Testament and the Heavenly Doctrines.

The question here is this: Does the Lord also provide for His universal church? And if so, how? For the Lord must so provide. He is love itself, and that love is for the whole human race. It is apparent

from some passages in the Heavenly Doctrines that the Lord provides for the needs of His universal church also by means of revelation, at least in certain instances. AC 2910 lists the Lord's special churches on earth: the Most Ancient Church, the Ancient Church, the Israelitish Church, the Christian Church and the New Church. But it also mentions many other churches besides these which the Lord has raised up. These are said to be mentioned in the Word, where they are not described. Presumably they are *not* the Oriental religions, but are probably the churches of the nations in the Old Testament. The point is that these other churches are not a part of the special churches specifically listed. And yet the Lord provided them, and they too followed the general pattern of the life of a church: birth, growth, decline, and end.

Now the Lord only raises up a church by means of revealed truth; And several passages in the Heavenly Doctrines speak of men outside the special church who do receive revelations from the Lord. Most of these passages refer to Africans who in Swedenborg's day were receiving revelations and who, admittedly, are of a celestial genius⁶⁰. Could it be that the founders of the new religious movements in the sixth century BC also received revelations from the Lord? It is possible, and even probable, especially when one sees their strong emphasis on ethical living (i.e., the life of charity). All of the movements were based on the two pillars of salvation: the belief in one God (which I believe must include the submission to an overall, purposeful and orderly principle), and a good life.

We must be careful here, for there are no explicit statements from the Word that any of the revolutionaries based their revolutionary thoughts on Divine revelation from the Lord, except of course for the Israelite prophets. But Pythagoras did receive basic and essential truths from the Ancient Word. And Zoroaster had visions and heard voices as had the Old Testament prophets, and claimed to have received a divine revelation. And it is here that I wonder⁶¹.

Here is a striking passage from the Heavenly Doctrines:

Those who are in good and thence in truth, especially those who are in the good of love to the Lord, have revelation from perception; whereas those who are not in good and thence in truth may indeed have revelations, but not from perception, but by a living voice heard in them, thus through angels from the Lord: this revelation is external, but the former internal.

⁶⁰ See SD 4777e, 5919; LJ post. 116, 124, 129; CLJ 76.

⁶¹ SS 117.

The angels, especially the celestial, have revelation from perception, as had the men of the Most Ancient Church, and some of the Ancient Church, but *scarcely anyone at this day*; whereas *very many*, even of those who have not been in good, have had revelations from speech without perception, and also by visions, or by dreams (emphasis added)⁶².

This passage shows that people other than the known revelators have received revelations. But another passage teaches that a revelation from perception comes when a good person reads the Word, for then his mind is in the light of heaven. He perceives to be true that which really is true, and nothing else⁶³.

Did the revolutionaries have the Lord's Word in some form? No definite answer can be given to this question, and yet we can be fairly sure that they *probably* did. We are taught that the ancient Gentiles knew the essentials of faith concerning God, the immortality of the human soul, and so on, from revelation which had come to them from the Ancient Church⁶⁴. Where else could the originators of such theological and ethical movements have obtained such fundamentally sound ideas than from the Lord through His Word?

We now turn our attention to the sixth century BC in an attempt to ascertain why so much activity occurred then. It must be remembered that the state of the world was very bad before the Lord was born. From the time of the fall of the Ancient Church the state had deteriorated steadily—and that Church was, as we have said, in all the areas under discussion, just as the Lord knew that He had to make His advent in order to provide for a new special Church, so too He must have known what was needed in regard to the universal church.

The intellectual fermentation of ca. 1000-600 BC was, I believe, a Divine preparation for the Lord's special dispensations. The Lord acts after preparations have been made. The old faith must be challenged before a new faith arises, for otherwise the people would not be ready to receive it.

When the civilized world was so prepared by the general fermentations, certain men were permitted to receive special light that enabled them to see what was good and what was true. Mahavira, the Buddha, the author of the *Bhagavadgita*, Lao-Tzu, Confucius, Zoroaster and the Greek philosophers—they were all enlightened,

⁶² AC 5121:2.

⁶³ AC 8780. See also AC 9905:4.

⁶⁴ AC 8944.

and they were all commissioned to spread that light. Now, by no means do I believe, nor am I stating that their teachings constitute the Lord's Word. They do not, for in their teachings there is no continuous internal sense as there is in the Word. But they reveal saving truths nevertheless. Perhaps we might compare this type of revelation to the works of Paul which contain true statements concerning important matters of theology and morality, but are not the Word. Paul based thoughts on the Word and was inspired by the Lord to aid His Church.

I also believe that the true statements made in the great movements of the sixth century BC were not only for the people who received them and lived according to them; I believe that they were more than an attempt to save a people trapped in a corrupt religion. They were also a preparation for future Divine events.

We also have a model for this in the Heavenly Doctrines: the Christian Church. We know certain revealed facts about this Church and the Lord's activity with it. The Lord prepared for the Christian Church in general and in particular ways. The Lord knew from the decline of the Most Ancient Church that He would have to come on earth as a man in order to reveal Himself as Divine Man. And he carefully and wonderfully prepared for this event. The most important preparation was His Word, including the Ancient Word and the Old Testament, especially the Prophets. The teachings about the Messiah were actively on Jewish minds when the Lord finally did come.

And although the Jews for the most part rejected the Lord, still enough believed in Him to begin the Christian Church. And that church spread to the Gentiles who had also been prepared, for the teachings of the Lord were presented in a way that was appropriate for the Mediterranean world at that time. The New Testament was adapted to their needs and their way of thinking (a way of thinking that had risen from the philosophical movement of Greece).

But the Lord knew that His advent would not succeed by itself. He knew that He would have to come again in the spirit of truth when the time was right—when men would be able and willing to receive Him in His truths presented in a new way, in the Heavenly Doctrines.

But does that mean that the Lord failed because Christianity failed? The teachings of the Lord while He was on the earth were new. They rejected the religious customs and beliefs of the Jews—except for a few (e.g., Holy Supper from the Passover). These new

teachings found believers all over the Mediterranean world where the old pagan ways were attacked. And Christianity won. But in spite of its victory, some of the corrupt Jewish and Pagan elements entered the Christian Church. From the struggle of the old paganism and the new Christianity arose a Christianity with a pagan influence. The synthesis meant the adoption of icons, the veneration of saints, an emphasis on ritual, and other vestiges of a corrupt past.

But the Lord did not fail. Certain seeds of truth had been planted which grew into strong, healthy plants. These have survived the corruption of Christianity and have served as a basis for the New Church.

And just as the Lord Himself did not fail with His teachings, neither did the great religious thinkers of the sixth century fail. Many truths of their teachings have survived to this day, waiting to be explained, clarified and made completely useful. In other words, I believe that these religions which began in the sixth century were a preparation for the universal spread of the New Church. The true statements of their theology and their ethics will be made to shine in the light from the Heavenly Doctrines, as do the statements in the letter of the Old and New Testaments. And their falsities will be seen as falsities.

It is not a coincidence that the Lord has presented the Heavenly Doctrines in a form that is universally appealing. They are not bound in their letter by space, by time, or by person. There is no cultural distinction that confines them to one nation or time, as the Old and New Testaments are limited in their appeal. The Writings teach all men—their nature, their hope, and their God. The sensual truths of the Old Testament tell of a particular nations events, the interior truths of the New Testament tell of events and present doctrine. But the still more interior truths of the Heavenly Doctrines present teachings that apply to all people in every cultural situation.

This appeal is also enhanced in other ways. For example, the two basic approaches to God and truth that exist in the East and in the West are contained in the Writings. The West has emphasized extrospection, the looking for reality and the source of reality outside of man. Reality is seen to exist in nature. And even though the Lord taught that the kingdom of heaven is within human beings, few Westerners have made the inward search. But the East has emphasized introspection, the inward view. Man is told to delve within himself, to peel off the layers of his egoism, in order that he

might realize unity with God or with an underlying principle. The world to the Easterners is either an illusion or the theater of divine or monistic activity. The Heavenly Doctrines offer both views. Man is to search within himself to find the presence of the hells and to root them out, and to find the presence of the heavens. But reality, whether spiritual or natural, is also outside of man. The Lord is within and He is without. In other words, with the New Church, although East is East and West is West, perhaps the twain will meet.

This same type of resolution exists for another apparent difference among the religions we have discussed. Some believe in the existence of a personal God, and others believe in the existence of a universal, underlying principle of reality. The Heavenly Doctrines teach that these two positions are not mutually exclusive. The fundamental doctrine of the New Church is that there is one God, and that He is a Divine Human. The Lord Jesus Christ is a personal God who loves us all very deeply. And yet He is also that principle that underlies everything, for all things exist from Him. He is the source of reality and the source of unity in all things. The heavenly Doctrines therefore offer a teaching and an explanation which are acceptable to both positions.

If, or when, the people of the Far East and the Near East do accept the doctrines of the New Church because of their appeal, then the Lord will have accomplished the task He began long before His first advent. This Divine task is to stamp out the perversions of religion which arose out of the fallen Ancient Church: idolatry, polytheism, magic and empty rituals. We know that His attack on idolatry and polytheism began in the giving of the Old Testament (note the First Commandment). We know that the Lord came on earth to abolish the representative worship that had become idolatrous⁶⁵. And we are taught that this abolition did not fully take place, for the Lord later raised up Muhammed and Islam to trample the smoldering fires of idolatry in the Near East⁶⁶. Perhaps He also raised up the Buddha, Zoroaster and the others for the same reason, for they all had stood up against the four perversions.

But, the perversions still exist. Hopefully, the Lord's previous efforts through His agents will be successfully culminated in the spread of the Lord's New Church. For with that spread the errors of the perversions will be clearly seen.■

⁶⁵ AC 4489:3.

⁶⁶ DP 255:2.

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Editorial Notice

In reference to the article titled "Probability: A View of Nature" (Gregory L. Baker, *The New Philosophy*, 87:306-316) note the following:

- 1) The equation on p. 310 should be omitted.
- 2) Eight lines from the bottom of p. 313, the latter part of the sentence should read: "...usually denoted as ψ ."

On the Origin of Religion

That from the most ancient times there has been religion, and that everywhere the inhabitants of the world have had knowledge of God, and have known something about a life after death, has not originated in themselves or their own penetration, but from the ancient Word, and, at a later period, from the Israelitish Word. From these two Words the things of religion have spread into the Indies and their islands, and through Egypt and Ethiopia into the kingdoms of Africa, and from the maritime parts of Asia into Greece, and from thence into Italy. But as the Word could not be written in any other way than by means of representatives, which are such things in this world as correspond to heavenly things, and therefore signify them, the things of religion among many of the nations were turned into idolatry, and in Greece into fables, and the Divine attributes and predicates into so many gods, over whom they set one supreme, whom they called "Jove"... from "Jehovah." It is known that they had knowledge of Paradise, of the flood, of the sacred fire, and of the four ages, from the first or golden age to the last or iron age, by which are meant the four states of the church (as in Daniel ii. 31-35). It is also known that the Mohammedan religion, which came later and destroyed the former religions of many nations, was taken from the Word of both Testaments (SS 117).