ENGAGING BUDDHISM

Why It Matters to Philosophy

JAY L. GARFIELD

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For the ven Prof Geshe Yeshes Thabkhas
Whose extraordinary kindness,
Whose perfect clarity as a teacher
And whose profound insight Into the meaning of the Buddhadharma
Has made it possible for me, and for so many others
To approach and to benefit from the ocean of Buddhist philosophy.

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PREFACE

The Western philosophical tradition is, of course, part and parcel of Western culture, entangled as much with Western politics and history as it is with Western religion and science. And these political and historical threads, like the more conceptual threads deriving from religion and science, determine, often in ways of which philosophers are but dimly aware, the character of the discipline.

While philosophy is, among contemporary academic disciplines, unique in containing its own history as a subspeciality, that history is too often focused on the history of specifically philosophical texts and their immediate intellectual context. The larger political history of the discipline is often occluded, and our self-understanding is thereby impaired. Unfortunately, that impairment is not a merely intellectual disability; it has a moral dimension as well. For the Western colonial enterprise, and the racism and blindness to non-Western ideas it enshrines, is as much a part of our intellectual heritage as are Plato, Augustine and Galileo. As a consequence, we are accustomed to regarding "philosophy" as denoting *Western* philosophy, "metaphysics" as denoting *Western* metaphysics, "ancient philosophy" as denoting *Greek* philosophy, and so on. And to the extent that in our professional practice, either in scholarship, the organization of professional meetings and journals, or in curriculum, we recognize non-Western philosophy at all, it is marked: *Asian* philosophy; *Indian* Philosophy; *African* philosophy, or the like. European philosophy is just "philosophy," the unmarked, privileged case, the "core" as it is sometimes put.

That phrase "the core" is revealing. When we use it we re-affirm the position of the European tradition at the center of human history, as the most important intellectual tradition the world has ever known, as that around which all others revolve. In the wake of colonialism and in the context of racism, this is both intellectually and morally indefensible. Indeed, the entire conduct of philosophy as a discipline—from the way our curriculum is structured to the way we run our professional organizations and journals—looks to anyone not

already socialized into it like an extension of a British club in India, celebrating European intellectual hegemony and excluding the "natives."

To take the West as the unique locus of philosophical activity was never a good idea. For one thing, it is obviously and demonstrably false. For another, to do so deprives us of valuable philosophical insights. For yet another, in the context of centuries of racism and colonialism, it is to perpetuate at least a passive deprecation of non-Western cultures and people. All of this is a problem for us. And, as Eldridge Cleaver put it so eloquently, "You're either part of the solution or you're part of the problem" (Scheer 1968, xxxii).

This book is not devoted to making that case. Indeed, I don't think that anything but ostension is needed to make that case. Instead, it is meant as a step towards remediating the problem. For recognition of transgression is not sufficient to enable redemption. One needs to begin to see routes to a better way of living, and most contemporary Western philosophers, through no fault of their own, have been educated in so parochial a fashion that they cannot even imagine an alternative to their own philosophical practice.

To take the Buddhist tradition seriously in in the way I do here is one of the many first steps we might take in the way of solving the problem of Western parochialism. It is not the only possible first step, and it had better not be the last. The Buddhist tradition is but one of many non-Western philosophical traditions, and one way to gain access to them is to peruse a truly comprehensive history of philosophy, such as Ben-Ami Scharfstein's (1998) or one of the many handbooks of world philosophy, or introductions to such traditions as Asian Philosophy, Buddhist Philosophy, Indian Philosophy, Chinese Philosophy, African Philosophy, Native American Philosophy (Garfield and Edelglass 2011, Koller 2012, Laumakis 2008, Lai 2008, Bartley 2011, Imbo 1998, Carpenter 2014). Or one might choose a great non-Western text and dive in. Or retrain entirely. Any of these approaches work. A truly global philosophy must attend to non-Buddhist Indian philosophy, to Daoist and Confucian philosophy, to the many schools of Africana philosophical thought, to Native American philosophical thought and to a range of other less well-known intellectual traditions. But Buddhist philosophy is what I can offer, and I offer it here in the hope that attention to these ideas will advance the goal of a truly global philosophical engagement.

For those philosophers whose preoccupations are more systematic, and less historical or cultural in nature, I suspect that such engagement is best facilitated by attention to how some particular non-Western tradition can enable one to think through philosophical problems with which one is already preoccupied, or to see how non-Western voices can participate in current discussions. That is what I propose to do here, using the Buddhist tradition as

a case study. I choose the Buddhist tradition for two reasons. First, and most important, it is the one with which I am most familiar. Someone else might, and should, write a similar book on Daoist philosophy or on Native American philosophy. But I am not competent to do so.

Second, and perhaps less arbitrarily, my study of Buddhist philosophy and my work with colleagues in which we have integrated Buddhist and Western approaches and ideas, convinces me that this is a living tradition that benefits from engagement with the West, and from engagement with which Western philosophy benefits. An important precondition for genuine conversation—mutual interest—is hence satisfied. Another precondition for successful conversation is also satisfied, and in part motivates this book: The concerns and methods of Buddhist philosophy and Western philosophy are sufficiently proximate to each other, sharing sufficient horizons, that they are easily mutually intelligible, but sufficiently distant from one another that each has something to learn from the other. Conversation can hence be productive.

My hope is that by taking a number of examples of important current philosophical issues and showing how Buddhist voices can contribute, I can show Western philosophers both *that* the Buddhist tradition matters to them, and *how* to engage that tradition. I am not interested in defending a Buddhist position here, much less in trying to demonstrate the superiority of either tradition over the other. Instead, I want to argue, through a series of examples, that ignoring the insights and arguments that tradition has to offer is irrational for anyone seriously interested in any of a number of philosophical problems. If anyone takes from this the hunch that the same is true, *mutatis mutandis*, with respect to many of the world's philosophical traditions, so much the better.

In this respect, the present volume is a kind of mirror image of my earlier book, *Western Idealism and Its Critics* (2011), in which I strove to demonstrate to Tibetan Buddhist philosophers the claim—frankly incredible to many of them—that Western philosophy could deliver any significant arguments or insights to discussions of idealism. I am pleased to say that many of my Tibetan colleagues took the point. I hope that I encounter minds as open in the Western academy.

There are many things that this book is not. It is not an introduction to Buddhist philosophy. There are several very good books on the market that do that already (Kalupahana 1976, Gethin 1998, Guenther 1976, Laumakis 2008, Siderits 2007, Emmanuel 2013, Carpenter 2014). Nor is it a brief for treating the Buddhist tradition as a philosophical tradition, as opposed to a purely devotional tradition. Mark Siderits (2007) and Paul Williams (2009) have already done that job admirably. Nor is it a deep exploration of some

single important issue in Buddhist philosophy, or examination of a single core text. There are books aplenty that do this, and many are cited in these pages. Finally, it is not an anthology of Buddhist texts. Edelglass and Garfield (2009) have already done that.

Instead, it is a demonstration for Western philosophers of the value of engaging with the Buddhist tradition over a wide range of topics, and of the value of that engagement for contemporary philosophical practice. I would measure its success by subsequent decisions to read Buddhist texts, to take Buddhist positions seriously and to reconfigure curriculum to attend to Buddhist texts. I would be even happier if Buddhism was not alone in this reconfiguration, if the prefix "Western" or "European" became de rigeur when the topic under discussion was purely Western, and if our professional meetings and journals became a bit less like colonial relics.

There is no common structure to the chapters in the volume. Some, particularly the earlier chapters, introduce Buddhist ideas systematically and then apply them to some topic or literature of interest in the contemporary West. Others begin with a problem, and then introduce a Buddhist voice. Others take hybrid approaches. My aim is to focus on ideas, and not on comparison. And the choice of texts and ideas to which I pay attention will perforce be idiosyncratic. The chapters are arranged topically, not historically, or according to Buddhist traditions. So they move freely between Western and Buddhist ideas, and among Buddhist ideas from quite diverse traditions. I have tried to represent the range of domains in which I see fruitful dialogue emerging. There is one significant lacuna, however, and that is aesthetics. The Buddhist tradition in which by far the most sophisticated aesthetic theory has developed is that of Japan. But most of the important work in Japanese aesthetics is only available in the Japanese language, which I do not read. So, I feel a bit of an amateur in that domain, and leave it to somebody more qualified to fill that important gap.

I spend much of my professional life with Indian and Tibetan Madhyamaka and Yogācāra treatises, and so I probably give these texts more prominence than some might think they deserve. I do so not because I think that they are disproportionately representative or important in the Buddhist traditions, but rather because they are the ones that come to my mind most often when I work in Buddhist philosophy. I have tried to salt the book with texts from other traditions as well, and I hope that my readers will attend to the Buddhist tradition broadly, not only to the corner I find so absorbing. I also confess that at times my reading of parts of the Buddhist tradition may seem a bit tendentious or idiosyncratic. I present Buddhist texts as I read them, Buddhist doctrines and ideas as I understand them. I see no other way to come at this. This is a

rich tradition in which canonical figures and modern scholars alike dispute with one another regarding the proper readings of texts and interpretation of doctrine. At times those disputes are central to my presentation. But I do not pretend to neutrality, or to completeness in these matters. Instead, I present my take on these matters, in the hope that it is of interest to others, and with reasonable confidence that it is a reasonable reading.

A word about the title is in order. When I use the word *Engaging*, I do so with the Sanskrit and Tibetan terms most often translated by this term in mind. In Sanskrit the term is *avatāra;* in Tibetan *'jug pa*. These terms have nice semantic ranges. They can mean *engaging with*, or *engaging in*, as in engaging with a body of literature or an object, or in an activity; they could equally well be translated as *descending*, as in coming down from a mountain into the real world; or as *manifesting*, as in being the manifestation of a deity or a realized being; they can also mean *proceeding*, as in proceeding on a journey. And they can mean *an introduction*, as in *Introduction to Buddhist Philosophy*. I like these terms, and I bring all of these senses to mind when I invite the reader to Engage with Buddhism—to take it seriously; to take up thinking through the point of view of this tradition; to come down from the mountain of Eurocentric isolation into a multicultural philosophical marketplace; to manifest as a cosmopolitan intellectual; to take up a new journey; and to be introduced to the Buddhist world.

There are many to whom I owe enormous debts of gratitude. Thanks are first due to Smith College for sabbatical leave and to the John Templeton Foundation for generous research support. Without this support and the encouragement that the College and the Templeton Foundation provided, this book would have been impossible. I also thank the Australian Research Council for research support that facilitated much of the work represented in this volume and the National Endowment for the Humanities for a summer institute in the context of which many of these ideas germinated. Thanks also to Yale-NUS College for a generous research grant that made the completion of this project a lot easier.

This book has been a long time in the making, and many have contributed to my thinking about these matters. Reflecting on their contributions only increases my confidence in the importance of dependent origination, and my sense that I deserve very little credit for the ideas I express.

I recognize the ancestry of some of these thoughts in what I was taught when I was an undergraduate at Oberlin College, first by Norman S. Care, who introduced me to Hume and Kant and then by Robert Grimm, with whom I studied Wittgenstein. I also owe an enormous debt to Annette Baier and to Wilfrid Sellars who taught me in my graduate studies. Their stamp on

my own thinking about the history of Western philosophy and the philosophy of mind is indelible.

I was introduced to Buddhist philosophy by Robert A.F. Thurman, who also kindled my fascination with Tsongkhapa's thinking and directed my attention to the affinities between Hume's and Wittgenstein's thought and that of Candrakīrti. Bob has been a source of inspiration and a mentor as I have worked to develop an understanding of the Indian and Tibetan Buddhist tradition. David Kalupahana, Steve Odin and Guy Newland taught me Nāgārjuna, and Guy first directed my attention to Tsongkhapa's *Ocean of Reasoning (rTsa she tik chen rigs pa'i rgya mtsho)* as a way into Madhyamaka thought. Since that time, he has taught me much about Madhyamaka, and still more about how compassion can be embodied in life and in the academic profession. His translations and his expositions of Buddhist doctrine are models of lucidity, and his comportment itself teaches Buddhist ethics. The ven Khenpo Lobsang Tsetan Rinpoche was my first Tibetan language teacher, and the first to introduce me to the reading of Tibetan philosophical texts. I always remember him with respect and gratitude.

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The Smith College Philosophy Department and the Five College Buddhist Studies Faculty Seminar have provided a rich and supportive environment for this research. In the philosophy department, I particularly acknowledge

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My new home at Yale-NUS College and the National University of Singapore is proving to be a wonderful research environment as well. I am blessed with generous and thoughtful colleagues from whom I have learned much and whose serious commitment to cross-cultural philosophy in research and pedagogy is a real inspiration. I note in particular Neil Mehta, Sandra Field, Simon Duffy, Nico Silins, Matt Walker, Taran Kang, Cathay Liu, Amber Carpenter, Andrew Bailey, Neil Sinhababu, Ben Blumson and Saranindra Nath Tagore who have all contributed to my thinking about these issues and who have contributed to the collegial environment since I have arrived here. I thank Michael Pelczar, Pericles Lewis, Charles Bailyn, Casey Nagey, Jenifer Raver and Grace Kwan Chi-En for creating an environment in which such research is possible.

My association with the University of New Mexico and with the Bodhi Manda Zen Center has been rewarding. Richard Hayes and John Taber have taught me a great deal, about Dignāga and Dharmakīrti to be sure, but also about the nature of Buddhist thought and practice in the West. The ven Joshu Sasaki Roshi has no doubt influenced my thinking in ways that I may never understand. Through this association, I was also fortunate enough to encounter Sandy Gentei Stewart Roshi, one of the most lucid and inspiring Western Buddhist teachers I have ever encountered, and one to whose formulations I often turn when perplexed. The folks at Bodhi Manda and Sandy have shown me how to integrate Zen thought with Indian and Tibetan Madhyamaka.

At Bodhi Manda I also met Prof. Shoryu Katsura, one of the titans of contemporary Buddhist Studies. Prof. Katsura's work on Buddhist epistemology and philosophy of mind and the relationship between Buddhist epistemology and Madhyamaka has been invaluable to me, and I have always profited from and enjoyed our philosophical discussions. His combination of philological erudition and philosophical acumen is rare indeed.

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This brings me to the Cowherds, the collective of which Graham is also a member. Working with the Cowherds, first on *Moonshadows* and now on *Moonpaths*, has been a source of great philosophical pleasure and real insight. This collective, also comprising Koji Tanaka, Bronwyn Finnigan, Georges Dreyfus, Tom Tillemans, Mark Siderits, Jan Westerhoff, Sonam Thakchöe, Guy Newland, Amber Carpenter, Charles Goodman and Steve Jenkins, has shown how to engage Buddhism philosophically, integrating the methodologies of Buddhist Studies and contemporary philosophical analysis. The present work is but an extension of the Cowherds' project, and I thank each Cowherd for helping me to think through problems in Buddhist philosophy and to think about the relationship between Buddhist and Western philosophy.

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In the summer of 2012, Christian Coseru, Evan Thompson and I co-directed an NEH institute on consciousness in a cross-cultural perspective. This was an extraordinary experience in which a group of scholars from Buddhist Studies, Western analytic philosophy and Western phenomenology talked all day for two weeks about consciousness. The quality of these discussions was very high, and I learned a lot from each person in that room. There are too many to name individually.

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To study the buddha way is to study the self. To study the self is to forget the self. To forget the self is to be actualized by myriad things. When actualized by myriad things, your body and mind as well as the bodies and minds of others drop away. No trace of realization remains, and this no-trace continues endlessly.

—*Dōgen, Genjōkōan* (trans. R. Aitken and K. Tanahashi)

1 WHAT IS "BUDDHIST PHILOSOPHY?"

1. Introduction

I spend a certain amount of my professional life working with Tibetan colleagues and students in India. In the course of our collaborations, they often ask me a question like, "What do Western philosophers think the nature of mind is?" or, "What do Western philosophers think a good life is?" I have to take a long deep breath and explain that the West is a very big place, that there are a lot of Western philosophers, and that they disagree among themselves about every important question in philosophy.

This might seem odd. But I have the same experience in the West. I am often asked by Western colleagues and students, "What do Buddhists think about personal identity?" or, "What do Buddhists think about idealism?" And I have to take a long deep breath and explain that the Buddhist world is a very big place, that there are a lot of Buddhist philosophers, and that they disagree among themselves about every important question in philosophy. Just like their colleagues in the West.

But not quite. For the Buddhist tradition is but one of the great Indian traditions of philosophical reflection, and India is only one part of Asia. Within the Indian traditions, the Buddhist tradition, although vast and diverse, is unified by a coherent set of joint broad commitments that define a position as Buddhist. The precise interpretation of these commitments differs among Buddhist schools, but some allegiance to some recognizable form of them defines a position as Buddhist. When I refer to "Buddhism," or to "a Buddhist view," as opposed to the view of a particular Buddhist school or philosopher, I will have this broad picture in mind. Often it will be necessary to be more precise, and to specify the doctrine of a particular figure or group of figures, but sometimes the broad brush will do for our purposes.

These commitments can be summarized as follows:

- Suffering (*dukkha*) or discontent is ubiquitous in the world. The sense of *dukkha* is complex, and we will have occasion to spell it out in detail below, but for now think of it as a sense of the unsatisfactoriness of life.
- The origin of *dukkha* is in primal confusion about the fundamental nature of reality, and so its cure is at bottom a reorientation toward ontology and an awakening (*bodhi*) to the actual nature of existence.
- All phenomena are impermanent (*anitya*), interdependent (*pratītya-samutpāda*) and have no intrinsic nature (*śūnya*). Once again, each of these Sanskrit terms is a technical term; each has a complex semantic range that does not map easily onto that of any English philosophical term; and the sense of each is contested within the Buddhist tradition. We will return to each many times in this book. But we need to start somewhere, and these rough and ready translations will do for now.
- Fundamental confusion is to take phenomena, including preeminently oneself, to be permanent, independent and to have an essence or intrinsic nature (*svabhāva*).
- The elimination (*nirvāṇa*), or at least the substantial reduction of *dukkha* through such reorientation, is possible.
- An ethically appropriate orientation toward the world is characterized by the cultivation of *mudita* (an attitude of rejoicing in the welfare and goodness of others, of *mettā*) beneficence toward others, and especially of *karuṇā* (a commitment to act for the welfare of sentient beings).[1]

Of course the specific interpretations of these commitments differ from one Buddhist school to another, and a great deal of other variation in a range of metaphysical, epistemological, semantic, logical, hermeneutical, ethical

1. The reader who is familiar with the elements of Buddhism will recognize that I have articulated what are generally known as the "four noble (or ennobling) truths" taught by Siddhartha Gautama (the historical Buddha, or awakened one) in the *Discourse Setting in Motion the Wheel of Doctrine (Dhammacakkappavattana-sutta)*, along with some related doctrine. The four truths are generally articulated as follows:

(1) All of life is suffering;
(2) There is a cause of suffering (primal confusion, leading to attachment and aversion);
(3) There is a release from suffering (through the cessation of that attachment and aversion consequent on the termination of primal confusion);
(4) The eightfold path to the release from suffering (right view; right intention; right speech; right action; right livelihood; right effort; right mindfulness; right meditation).

I have conjoined the four noble truths with the three characteristics of reality (impermanence, selflessness and interdependence) to construct this list of basic tenets.

and aesthetic commitments follow from these, each with variations. We will have occasion to remark on some of that variety below. But surveying the range of Buddhist schools and doctrines is not my aim in this book. Instead, I wish first, to spell out my own Madhyamaka- and Yogācāra-[2] (and probably Geluk (*dGe lugs*))[3] -inflected understanding of these core commitments in a way that ties them together as a coherent perspective on reality; and second, to take particular examples of Buddhist analyses and current Western debates to show what a Buddhist voice can contribute to a contemporary conversation, and what joining that conversation can contribute to the modern Buddhist tradition.

Before returning to the broad principles noted above, a remark on methodology is in order. Philosophy is, after all, the reflexive discipline: just what it is to practice philosophy in the company of texts from multiple cultural traditions is itself a philosophical problem. One approach to that practice, initiated by the great late 19th-century Indian philosopher Brajendranath Seal, is *comparative philosophy*. We needed comparative philosophy at an earlier stage of cultural globalization when it was necessary to juxtapose different philosophical traditions in order to gain an entrée and in order to learn how to read alien traditions as philosophical. But now we can safely say, "been there; done that." I therefore take it for granted that the days when "comparative philosophy" was the task are over, and a different methodology is necessary at this stage of philosophical practice.

I have previously used the term "cross-cultural philosophy" to characterize my own enterprise, and I still like that term. Mark Siderits prefers to think in terms of "fusion philosophy" (2003, xi). I like that phrase as well, but I think that it can be misleading. I intend not to fuse philosophical traditions, but rather, while respecting their distinct heritages and horizons, to put them in dialogue with one another, recognizing enough commonality of purpose, concern and even method that conversation is possible, but still enough difference in outlook that conversation is both necessary and informative. This may well be what Siderits has in mind as well, and I have no quarrel with his project, but the term suggests a project that is not my own. I am trying to build bridges, not to merge streams.

I should also note that this book is not meant to be a comprehensive introduction to Buddhist philosophy, and still less an introduction to Buddhism

2. The middle way and the Buddhist idealist schools. We will characterize each in more detail below.

3. One of the principal schools of Tibetan Buddhism, and indeed the one in which I pursued most of my own study of Buddhist philosophy.

as a civilization or religious tradition. Nor again is it meant to be a systematic presentation of a single Buddhist tradition. There is much of importance in the Buddhist world that I will ignore, including much of its attention to soteriological, cosmological, devotional and practice concerns. For example, I do not discuss Buddhist theories of rebirth, of karma, or approaches to meditation. That is not because I take these to be unimportant, or even peripheral, to understanding Buddhist thought. It is rather because I do not see them as principal sites of engagement with Western philosophy, which is the primary intent of this volume. And there are many important Buddhist ideas that I have simply left aside, either because I don't see them as important sites of engagement at the moment, or because I don't understand them enough myself at this point.

And while I try to retain a catholic, and decidedly nonsectarian attitude to Buddhist philosophical traditions, representing quite a few of them in this book, I am not self-consciously striving for completeness, or even fairness, in coverage, only touching base with the ideas that I have found most useful in my philosophical explorations. This perhaps somewhat capricious (with the etymology of that word firmly in the mind of this once and future goatherd) approach is, despite its incompleteness, very much at odds with another way I could have gone. That is, I could have restricted my attention to a single lineage or tradition, mapping and interacting with its philosophical commitments, and striving for fidelity in conveying its view of things. I have elected not to do that for several reasons. First, I simply think that the Buddhist tradition is richer for its variety, and I would like to convey some of that—there simply is no monopoly on good ideas held by any one tradition or lineage; second, I do not want to convey the misleading impression that I am an orthodox exponent of a single tradition; third, I don't want to play the sectarian game of valorizing one tradition at the expense of others.

One further remark on my methodology is important. As a translator, I am frequently confronted with the difficulty of rendering Tibetan or Sanskrit terms into English. This difficulty, as any translator or sophisticated consumer of translations, is aware, is multidimensional. (See Gómez 1999, Bar-On 1993 and Garfield unpublished for extensive discussion of these issues.) One dimension reflects the very different philosophical and linguistic milieus in which terms in source and target languages figure. Simply because the meanings of words in any language are fixed by their relations both to other terms and to philosophical or other ideological commitments in the cultures to which those languages belong, there is bound to be slippage. There will be terms in any language whose semantic range is not shared by any term in any other language. We will discuss some terms that pose this problem in Buddhist languages below.

Another dimension reflects that fact that technical terms are often contested within a tradition, and have different meanings in the hands of different philosophers. "Idea" means one thing for Locke, and another for Hume, as does "perception." And some terms are ambiguous even in the work of a single philosopher, with different meanings in different contexts. The same kinds of ambiguities and shifts in meanings of technical terms are found in the Buddhist tradition, with terms changing their meanings for a single school over time, diverging in meaning when used by distinct schools, or simply having different meanings in different contexts.

As a consequence, while I will present and rely upon quite a few translations in this book, and will adopt some favored translations of some technical terms, I will also often discuss a term and then leave it untranslated, inviting my reader to enter the world of Buddhist philosophy in part by entering some of its language. Just as we learn an unfamiliar culture better by learning at least a bit of its language, and coming to inhabit the perspective on the world reflected in that language, we can come to appreciate a distinct philosophical framework a bit better by adopting some of its technical vocabulary and accustoming ourselves to thinking through that vocabulary. While this might seem awkward at first, I invite the reader to give it a try. It will pay off.

A word on policy regarding the rendering of personal names and of the titles of texts is in order. Sanskrit personal names will always be written in Roman script with diacriticals. This has become so standard in Buddhist Studies that I see no reason to deviate from this practice. Those interested in proper pronunciation of Sanskrit can refer to any of many good published or online guides to Romanized Sanskrit. Tibetan personal names are another matter, as the standard Wylie transliteration of Tibetan gives no real clue to pronunciation to anyone unfamiliar with that language. I will therefore spell all Tibetan personal names phonetically, but will give the Wylie transliteration on first occurrence should anyone want to know how to spell these names. The titles of all texts will be translated into English, with the original-language title in parentheses at first mention. Just as we write *Critique of Pure Reason* these days instead of *Kritik der Reinen Vernuft* we will write *Introduction to the Middle Way* instead of *Madhyamakāvatāra*. This should be easier on readers unfamiliar with Asian languages. Specialists may cringe, but they have the original at first occurrence, and they should take comfort in the fact that this is one more step toward moving these texts into the Anglophone mainstream.

One final methodological note: This is not meant to be an authoritative treatment of particular texts in the history of Buddhist philosophy, but rather an invitation to those who do not know the tradition well to take it seriously

enough to approach such treatments. For this reason, I eschew the common practice of including footnotes containing the original language whenever I present a translation of a passage from a canonical text. I figure that most readers won't know the original languages, and those few who do know the languages know where to find the texts. And we philosophers don't do that when we quote Kant, Descartes or Aristotle, unless we are trying to make a point about the translation or the original terms. Unless otherwise noted, all translations from Tibetan are my own. The reader unaccustomed to Pali, Sanskrit and Tibetan terminology may find some of the names and terms used unfamiliar, confusing and hard to pronounce. When discussing specific terms, I will often include terms in several canonical languages. But I will always gloss them and will always translate text names.

2. The Ubiquity of *Dukkha*

> *The World is a beautiful place to be born into*
> *If you don't mind happiness not always being so very much fun . . .*
>
> *—Lawrence Ferlinghetti (1958, 108–110)*

First, let me say why I am not translating *dukkha*, which is usually translated as *suffering, dissatisfaction, unease, stress, anxiety* or even *pain*. This term is so central to Buddhist philosophy, and its semantic range does not coincide perfectly, or even very well, with any of these perfectly adequate, but very different, English choices, each of which can function as a technical term in Western moral psychology. I am therefore worried that too quick a translation can lead to too great an assimilation of Buddhist ideas to Western ideas, or to finding what Buddhist philosophers take to be Siddhartha Gautama's most fundamental insight to be either trivially true or trivially false, depending upon the translation chosen. As we explore the senses of the ubiquity of *dukkha*, what the term means will become contextually apparent, and we will do well to use this Pali loan word.

When in the *The Discourse Setting in Motion the Wheel of the Doctrine (Dhammacakkappavattana-sutta)*[4] Siddhartha Gautama says that "all this is *dukkha*," the scope of the claim is broad, and the sense of the term is rich. First of all, "all this" means everything: every aspect of human life, both on

4. The Pāli term *sutta* and the Sanksrit *sūtra* are intertranslatable. In the Buddhist context a *sutta* or a *sutra* is a text taken to be spoken by or directly approved by the historical Buddha Siddhartha Gautama. I use *sutta* when the text in question is a Pāli *sutta, sūtra* when the text is a Sanskrit *sūtra*. We will return to the relation between these bodies of literature in the final section of this chapter.

the subject and the object side, the animate and the inanimate, is either an instance of *dukkha* or a cause of *dukkha* in ordinary human experience. It is partly for this reason that we cannot use any of the standard English equivalents without careful gloss and a string of caveats. In order to see why this is the case—why *dukkha* is such a pervasive and universal aspect of experience—it is helpful to explore the three levels at which, from a Buddhist perspective, *dukkha* operates.

At the most mundane and obvious level, our lives are permeated by *dukkha* in its manifestation as straightforward physical and mental pain. We endure headaches, illnesses, the boredom of airport terminals, fatigue at the end of a long day, hunger, thirst, difficulties in interpersonal relationships, the anxiety of the dentist's waiting room, the awareness of our own mortality, the terror of immanent death. We suffer the annoyance of not having what we want ("Lord, won't you buy me a Mercedes Benz . . . ") and dissatisfaction with what we have ("How can I miss you if you won't go away? . . . "). Most of us experience at least some aspect of this discomfort daily. That is the most superficial aspect of the pervasiveness of *dukkha*, and it should be obvious that just about anything and anyone in our environment can, in the right circumstances, be the occasion for *dukkha*.

If we are lucky enough to experience a day in which none of this occurs, we might say to ourselves as we settle in for a glass of good wine in the evening, "Life is good!" But even here there is *dukkha* in this first sense, even if in a subtler manifestation. For we must be aware that others are experiencing the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune that we have today avoided. We might feel sympathy for them, a sadness that they are in pain, even if we are not. ("When something is wrong with my baby, something is wrong with me . . . ") And that emotional pain in us is *dukkha*, occasioned not only by their discomfort, but also, paradoxically, by our comfort, which we know is, in the end, a matter of chance, and not something we earned. After all, who earns the good fortune not to have been born in a war zone, or without a ghastly hereditary illness?

On the other hand, we might *not* be troubled by pangs of sympathy or guilt when we contemplate our own good fortune and the suffering of others. In that case, however, we do not avoid this subtle *dukkha*, but suffer from a deeper and subtler version of it. For none of us could contemplate a self that is utterly indifferent to the suffering of others, and utterly complacent about one's own privilege, with complete approval. ("No man is an island / Entire of itself.") None of us, that is, would want our children to grow up to be like that, or would honor a colleague for those traits. Therefore, if we notice this attitude in ourselves, we experience the *dukkha* of knowing that we are less

than we would be, that we cannot reflectively endorse our own attitudes, and we experience the *dukkha* of shame.[5]

This is but the first level. The second level of pervasive *dukkha* is the *dukkha* of change. While there is a retail chain called *Forever 21*, none of us is forever 21. We are all aging, and we know that. Each moment of life is a moment closer to infirmity, pain, dementia, the loss of our loved ones and death. Each moment of life is therefore necessarily bound up with *dukkha*, and we know that. We either dwell on that fact and fret, or repress it and seethe. Everything we enjoy—all sources of happiness—are also impermanent, and so are slipping from our grasp, or at least from their status as sources of pleasure at every moment. The best bottle of wine will soon be empty; the sunset lasts only a few minutes; our children age; we tire of what was once our favorite music. This, too, is a source of *dukkha*.

The third and most profound sense of *dukkha*, and the one that gets us most directly to its pervasive character, is the *dukkha* of pervasive conditioning. We live in a world of inextricable interdependence, where most of the causal chains that impinge on our well-being are outside of our control. We cannot seize a day or our own destiny and control it; we cannot "stand on our own two feet," however much we may be exhorted to do so. Our well-being, security and success depend not only upon our own efforts, but upon our genetics, the weather, earthquakes, the presence of disease, the decisions of political leaders or university administrators, just plain luck, other drivers on the road, the skills of the pilot who flies the plane, the judgment of a doctor or the kindness of strangers.

None of us can ensure safety from misfortune on our own. We know that, and this is *dukkha*, and it is *dukkha* at its deepest and most fundamental level, for from the perspective of Buddhist metaphysics, as we shall see below, causal interdependence is the deepest and most fundamental fact about reality. Causal interdependence, in turn, is inextricably bound up with *dukkha*, both because we are subject to misfortune at any moment and because we must live in that knowledge and attendant anxiety. This is why change is a source of *dukkha*, and why, even when we are not currently suffering pain or misfortune, the presence of pain and misfortune in our past, future or fellows is nonetheless our *dukkha*.

We can now see why *dukkha* is so pervasive, and so why the term *dukkha* does not admit of easy translation into a language that does not encode this

5. It is interesting to note (and we will return to this in our discussion of ethics toward the end of this book) that a sense of shame (*hiri*) is regarded as an important human virtue in Buddhist ethical theory. See Heim (2013) for an excellent discussion.

view of reality. Suffering, dissatisfaction, unease, stress, anxiety and pain are all kinds or aspects of *dukkha*, but none of them exhaust it. Siddhartha Gautama's genius was not simply to see that we suffer, or that many of us are unhappy. That has been noted many times by philosophers in many traditions. His genius was instead to see that *dukkha* is the fundamental structure of our lives, what Heidegger would have called our *existentiale*. To be human is to live in *dukkha*.

And his genius was to see that this is a *problem*, indeed *the* problem of human life. For *dukkha* is universally undesirable, or at least it is undesirable to most of us. And this means that our lives and the worlds we inhabit, which are the most desirable of all things, are in fact, as they are lived, undesirable. If our lives are to be worth living, and if they are to be sources of happiness and legitimate motivation, this puzzle demands solution. This is the absolute foundation of the Buddhist view of the nature of human life. (See Carpenter 2014, c. 1 for a more detailed discussion of *dukkha*.)

3. Primal Confusion

Dust in our eyes our own boots kicked up . . .

—The Indigo Girls

Siddhartha Gautama argued that *dukkha* is caused by what I think is best rendered in English as primal confusion. This confusion, as the great 14th–15th-century Tibetan philosopher Tsongkhapa (Tsong kha pa) felicitously puts it, is not mere ignorance, but the positive superimposition of a characteristic on reality that it lacks. He writes,

> [Ignorance] is not just *not* seeing the way things really are, nor just any old thing. Instead it is the diametrical opposite of that, maintaining the antithetical mode of apprehension. Therefore it grasps its object as really existent. (2006, 34)

Tsongkhapa's point is that, in a kind of cognitive reflex—one that in contemporary terms seems to be part of our evolutionary endowment—we take the objects we encounter and ourselves to be independent entities, to be permanent, and to have intrinsic characteristics. From a Buddhist perspective, this is the diametrical opposite of the fundamental mode of existence of all things.

This primal confusion is not, on a Buddhist view, the *consequence*, but rather the *source* of bad philosophy. We take the world to be like this despite

the fact that we know better. It is not news to any of us that all phenomena are impermanent and constantly changing; that things come into existence in dependence on causes and conditions and pass away when the conditions on which their existence depends no longer prevail. It may take a bit more reflection—reflection in which we will engage in subsequent chapters—to convince ourselves that for these reasons it makes no sense to take things to have intrinsic natures, that the notion of an intrinsic nature makes no sense at all. But this reflection, a Madhyamaka philosopher like Tsongkhapa would argue, is possible. And as we will see, this reflection is at least prima facie cogent.

Primal confusion is then more like optical illusion than like misguided reflective metaphysics. Even though we know, and can even *see*, that the lines in the Müller-Lyer illusion are of equal length, they still irresistibly appear to be of different lengths; even though we know, and even come to take it to be *obvious*, that all phenomena are interdependent, impermanent and empty of intrinsic nature, they nonetheless irresistibly appear to be independent, permanent, and to have intrinsic identities.

A special case of this primal confusion emerges in the experience of the world as structured by subject–object duality. We will go deeper into this topic when we turn to phenomenology, below. For now we just note that one way to take oneself to be an independent entity and to have an intrinsic identity that persists through time is to take oneself as radically distinct as a subject from all of the other entities one experiences. From this perspective, our objects exist only in relation to our own subjectivity. They are object; the experiencer is subject; objects are known indirectly; the self is known directly.

To take up with the world this way is to see oneself—in Kant's metaphor—as subject at the center of a phenomenal universe, or perhaps better, as Wittgenstein put it, as the eye with respect to the visual field. It is to see the world as *my* world. This standpoint, as Schopenhauer noted in *On the Basis of Morality*, is the root of egoism. But it is also, from a Buddhist point of view, on reflection, crazy. For this attitude is available to every potential subject. And not *every* subject can be the center of the universe. The world does not partition itself into a single subject and a field of objects, and to take it to do so is to confuse my own particular standpoint with ontology. Nonetheless, to take up with the world this way is a reflex. It is the reflex of taking oneself to be an ontological, epistemological and moral singularity.

This appearance and this way of taking up with the world, Buddhist philosophers argue, is the origin of *dukkha*. It is referred to canonically as "the twofold self-grasping." There are a couple of ways to parse this. But the most basic one is this: to grasp oneself as a privileged subject in this way is to assign

special ontological and moral importance of the referent of 'I'. That is the first grasping.

The second, which follows from the first, is to see everything else as existing in relation to the self, as "mine": *my* friends, and those who are *not* my friends; *my* possessions and those that are *not* mine; *my* field of interest, and those that are *not* mine; *my* location, and *other* places, and so on. Once again, the idea that the fundamental nature of reality is reflected in this structure is mad, but the tendency to take up with and to experience reality through this structure is irresistible, perhaps an essential character of human phenomenology. It is the view that takes us each to live at the center of a universe most naturally mapped in a polar coordinate system, and is the view reflected in the indexical system of every natural language.

On this view the pain and irritation of life goes beyond being mere pain or irritation and becomes *dukkha* as a result of the mismatch between the illusion we project and the reality in which we live. A headache might hurt, but it becomes *dukkha* when I identify the pain as a state of the center of the universe, as the way things are, as opposed to being a transient sensation experienced in one cognitive continuum. My aging and mortality might be inescapable facts, but they become *dukkha* only when I take them to be the wrong alternative to remaining forever 21. And the fact that I have no absolute control over my life might be reality, but it is *dukkha* only if I thought that such control even made sense. Pain, impermanence and interdependence are facts; to take them as existential failures is to experience *dukkha*; and to take them in this way is the inevitable consequence of primal confusion.

4. Reorientation

On what I am calling a Buddhist view, a cessation (*nirvāṇa*) of *dukkha* is possible through awakening (*bodhi*) to the nature of reality, involving a direct apprehension and engagement with reality—including both our objects and ourselves as subjects—as impermanent, interdependent and lacking any intrinsic reality. This distinctive epistemological orientation is coupled closely with an ethical orientation to the world characterized by sympathetic joy (*mudita*), beneficence (*mettā*) and care, or a commitment to act for the welfare of all (*karuṇā*). Once again, we will explore each of these issues in depth in subsequent chapters. For now, we are trying only to sketch the outlines of the orientation.

Epistemologically, the idea is this: *dukkha* is caused by a misperception of reality—the cognitive superimposition of permanence, independence and intrinsic nature on things that lack it that we noted above. Therefore, *dukkha*

can be alleviated by, and only by, the cessation of this superimposition. And note that this is a cessation (*nirodha*), in particular, that consummate cessation denoted by *nirvāṇa* (Pāli: *nibbāna*). The term *nibbāna/nirvāṇa* is chosen carefully, and is often misunderstood by Western consumers of Buddhist literature. It is essentially a negative term, and figures in an elaborate fire-based metaphor (Gombrich 2009). Let us spend a moment on that metaphor, as often an appreciation of the metaphors through which a philosophical framework structures a view of the world can be useful in working one's way into the way of seeing things that framework encodes. This metaphor is particularly important for understanding the broad Buddhist perspective on reality and our experience of it.

When Buddhists think about the human being analytically it is in terms of five *skandhas*, or *piles* of phenomena. For now we can enumerate these as the physical (*rūpa*); the sensory/hedonic (*vedanā*); the perceptual/discriminative (*samjñā*); the dispositional (cognitive and affective traits) (*samskāra*); and the conscious (*vijñāna*).[6] The details of this analysis need not detain us here. The important point is the complex metaphor encoded in the term *skandha* and its relationship to that encoded in *nirvāṇa*.

First, it is important to see that the term is chosen as a technical term in this context not despite, but because of its imprecision. A pile is not a precise thing. In a pile of sand, for instance, there may be considerable indeterminacy both with regard to how much sand is needed to constitute a pile, and whether particular grains are in the pile or not. There may be similar indeterminacy regarding how many piles are in a particular spot. And big piles decompose into smaller piles. Just so regarding the person. Our constituents and boundaries are indeterminate, and there may well be no canonical account of our constitution. What constitutes us may in part depend on how we count, on our explanatory interests, and so forth.

But there is a deeper point, one that connects directly to the idea of cessation mooted above. The term *khanda* (Pali for *skandha*) refers originally to a very specific kind of pile—a pile of firewood on a funeral pyre. *Skandhas*, therefore, are conceived as burning, and as being consumed. And this is an important soteriological metaphor. In the *Fire Sutta (Additapairyaya-sutta)*, Siddhartha Gautama is represented as saying that our life is led as though we are on fire. We are burned by *dukkha*, consumed by forces out of our control, and we are being depleted all the time by those forces. *Nibānna* is also a term

6. I should note that there are many ways of translating these Sanskrit terms, which do not map easily onto English. Nothing here hangs on the translation choice, and I omit the Pali and Tibetan equivalents here as they are not relevant to the present discussion.

with a very specific core meaning—the extinction of a flame, as in blowing out a candle or a lamp. *Nibānna*, or *nirvāṇa*, then, is not a positive attainment or state of being. Nor is it a state of complete non-being, of annihilation. Instead it is the state of no longer being driven, consumed and tormented (however unconsciously) by *dukkha*.

Dukkha, is caused by a *perceptual* process. It is not that we engage with the world, or contemplate our selves, and *infer* or decide that we or the things around us are permanent, independent and have identifiable intrinsic natures. Rather, we take the world and ourselves to be like that in our immediate perceptual engagement—we *see* the world *as* constituted by entities with that nature. Perception itself is therefore shot through with reification.

Tsongkhapa distinguishes two kinds of reification (Thurman 1984, 231). The first, or most obvious, he argues, is that caused by bad philosophy. That is the reification of self and phenomena that is articulated theoretically as a sophisticated refinement and justification of our commonsense tendency to reify. The second is what he calls "innate reification," the cognitive reflex of seeing things as permanent, independent, substantially existent. The first kind of reification, he argues, can be cured by good philosophical argument. We will see whether he is right about this as we work through these issues in this book. The second kind, he argues, because of its "innate" character—what we might characterize as its deep embedding in our cognitive architecture—can only be eradicated by a fundamental transformation of our perceptual and affective response to the world.

Tsongkhapa, like many other Buddhist philosophers, believe that this requires sustained meditative effort. The important point for our purposes is not the specific method by means of which one might effect that transformation, or even whether that transformation is possible, but rather that this transformation is not superficial, but is a deep reform of our most fundamental engagement with, or comportment to, the world. And this transformation is a cessation—the cessation of a reflex superimposition. But it is also the cessation of a reflex that distinguishes ourselves as subjects from everything else, and that takes us to be isolated, persistent, and deserving of special attention. The ontological self-grasping we considered above has its affective and ethical image in a grasping of ourselves as primary objects of concern. Egoism is therefore the ethical face of reification and subject—object dualism. It is hence the moral aspect of superimposition, and so also requires elimination.

From a Buddhist moral point of view, as we will see in our discussion of ethics below, the cessation of this form of self-grasping, and hence of egoism, leads immediately to an impersonal, non-self-centered view of pain, *dukkha*, and of happiness. This leads us to take pleasure in happiness per se,

to be moved by *dukkha*, per se, and to commit ourselves to the promotion of well-being whosever it is. Hence, from this point of view, the arising of sympathetic joy, benificence and care are not positive phenomena consequent upon awakening and *nirvāṇa*. These moral attitudes, instead, are themselves negations; they constitute the way that the cessation of self-grasping, which is inextricably bound up with the cessation of reification, is experienced in ethical engagement. Epistemology, ontology, morality and soteriology are hence, on this way of thinking of the world, tightly bound to one another. (See Carpenter 2014, c. 3 for an extended discussion of the relationship between epistemology, psychology and ethics in the Indian Buddhist landscape.)

5. What I Am Up To

When I use the term "Buddhist philosophy," it will be to this broad orientation that I refer. It is an orientation that involves a broad metaphysical account of reality, a diagnosis of the fundamental human condition that rests on that account, and a soteriological and ethical framework resting on that diagnosis. My intention in the remainder of this book is to show that this broad framework and the many specific philosophical analyses that have developed within the tradition it inspires provide ideas and arguments that contemporary philosophy can and should take seriously, and that this framework can be usefully articulated in part through a productive engagement with the Western philosophical tradition. As I make this case, I will draw on texts and analyses from a range of sources in the Buddhist tradition, and will show how the philosophers who work within this tradition can be taken as partners in the conversation that constitutes the Western tradition. In doing so, I am emphatically not engaging in an exercise in the history of philosophy. And that is so in two senses.

First, as I noted above, I am not attempting to present a comprehensive—or even a limited—history of Buddhist philosophy. That is an important task, to be sure, but it is not mine. Much of that tradition will be ignored, and my selections will reflect not the historical importance of particular figures, doctrines or texts, but rather their relevance to contemporary Western philosophical discussions. My presentation will hence often appear—especially to scholars of Buddhist Studies—to be seriously decontextualized.

Second, I am less concerned with *lectio* (exegesis) than with *applicatio* (deployment). A historian of Western philosophy may legitimately care a great deal about precisely how a passage or doctrine in the *Nicomachean Ethics* should be read. An ethicist, on the other hand, may take the same passage, engage in creative rational reconstruction, and deploy the insights gained

from reading it for her own ends. Each application is legitimate, and each has a role in our philosophical tradition.

But while *applicatio* may require *lectio*, it need not be completely constrained by it. What makes the *Nicomachean Ethics* an eminent text, to use Gadamer's term, is the fact that it commands our attention *now*, not merely as a part of our history, but as a part of our contemporary practice. To engage with Aristotle philosophically is to take him as a conversation partner, not as a topic of conversation; to talk with him, not about him.

My intention in this volume is to show that we in the West can talk with, not about, philosophers and texts in the Buddhist tradition. I will hence be concerned not with the context in which the texts I address were composed, or how we can understand those contexts, but rather with the contemporary philosophical context in the West, and what we can learn by taking these texts seriously in our own intellectual lives.

6. A *Very* Brief Survey of the History of Buddhist Schools

The audience I intend for this book includes people who know very little about Buddhism and its long and complex history. Those who do know something about the history of Buddhism can skip this section. Those who want more than the very brief overview I offer here are invited to consult Gethin (1998), Lopez (2002) or Skilton (1997) for a general survey, Williams (2009) for a detailed history of the Mahāyāna or Carpenter (2014) for a fine history of Indian Buddhist philosophy. Those who read on should be aware that the level of detail I am providing would be roughly that one would provide in a history of Western philosophy of this brevity, and the attempt to provide a useful overview may be equally futile. Still, I think that it is nice for those new to the terrain to have a broad map into which to locate the detail that will be coming later.

In the beginning was the Buddha, Siddhartha Gautama. There is not complete consensus about his dates, but most scholars agree that he was born in the mid-6th century BCE and died early in the 5th century BCE. Upon his death the First Buddhist Council was held at Rajgir in present-day Bihar, at which time, according to tradition, the canon of discourses of the Buddha was established. These were passed down orally and were not committed to writing in the Pāli language (itself neither a scholarly nor a vernacular language, but a language of commerce used across language groups in India) until the Third Council in the 1st century CE in Sri Lanka. When we speak of the Pāli canon we speak of the discourses of the Buddha that were committed to writing at that time, as well as the Vinaya, or monastic code and the body

of commentarial literature (Abhidhamma/higher doctrine) also composed in that language and fixed in writing at that time. When scholars speak of Pāli Buddhism, pre-Mahāyāna Buddhism, (pejoratively) Hīnayāna Buddhism or (more politically correctly) Śrāvakayāna Buddhism, or sometimes Theravāda Buddhism, it is the Buddhism that evolved between the time of the Buddha and the Third Council that they have in mind.[7]

Already in this period there was a schism. The first schism reported in the tradition is said to have occurred at the Second Council, held between 50 and 100 years after the Buddha's death. It, like most such schisms, was grounded in questions of Vinaya, or monastic discipline, not in questions of philosophy or doctrine. Nonetheless, the schools that emerged from these schisms did develop some doctrinal differences. In the end it is said that 18 distinct schools emerged before the rise of the Mahāyāna, only one of which, the Theravāda (Way of the Elders) still exists. It is the dominant tradition in Sri Lanka, Burma/Myanmar, Thailand/Siam, Cambodia and Laos. It takes its doctrinal foundation to be the Pāli Suttas and the Pāli Abhidhamma.

Common to the Śrāvakayāna schools is a commitment to a broadly reductionist understanding of persons and other macroscopic objects as resolving into sequences of momentary property-instantiations called *dharmas*, a sense of the soteriological goal of Buddhist practice as *nibbāna*, or the complete cessation of *dukkha*, and as a moral ideal the *arhat*, or *accomplished one*, who has eliminated all sources of suffering in his or her own continuum. Practice and study in these schools was (and this is only changing in modernity) restricted to monastics. The role of the laity was to support the monastic community in its scholarly and soteriological venture; the monastic community in turn performed rituals for the laity and offered a route to education and salvation for their progeny.

At about the turn of the millennium, the movement in Buddhism known as the *Mahāyāna* or *Great Vehicle* took hold in India. There is a great deal of

7. Each of these terms is problematic in its own way. *Pāli* suggests that the Buddha actually spoke in Pāli and that all Buddhist discourse and scholarship in the tradition in question is conducted in that language, which is not true; *pre-Mahāyāna* suggests that the tradition in question existed only before the rise of the Mahāyāna, or even that its canon was written down before that movement began, both of which are false; *Hinayāna* means *inferior vehicle*, a term of derision used by some Mahāyāna practitioners, but understandably rejected by those to whom it refers; *Śrāvakayāna*, which has been introduced recently and means *disciples' vehicle*, suggests that there are no disciples in the Mahāyāna; *Theravāda* is the name of only one of the eighteen schools in this tradition, the only one to survive today. None of these terms are coextensive with any of the others; all are regularly used in the literature for one or more of the others. I will try to be both as minimally misleading and as minimally pedantic as possible when I use any of them.

scholarly controversy regarding its precise origins. Some take it to have originated in a lay movement to reclaim spiritual practice; others in devotional cults; still others in philosophical evolution within monastic communities. These issues need not concern us. (For details see Hirakawa 1963, Schopen 1999, Williams 2009.) We do know from the reports of Chinese pilgrims that many monasteries housed both Śrāvakayāna and Mahāyāna monks, and we also know from documents such as Nāgārjuna's *Jewel Rosary of Advice to the King (Ratnāvalī)* that there was competition for resources among these communities (Walser 2005). There is no sense that early on either regarded the other as especially heterodox. After some time, however, the split between these two broad traditions grew, and now most Theravāda practitioners regard Mahāyāna texts, doctrines and practices as heterodox, or even non-Buddhist, while many Mahāyāna practitioners regard Theravāda texts and practices as suitable only for beginners. Once again, the historical and social details need not detain us.

Buddhist schools seek foundations in *Buddhavacana*, the speech of the Buddha. It is the word of the Buddha himself, or at least words spoken in his presence and approved by him, that ultimately validate doctrine from a religious point of view as Buddhist. In the Pāli tradition, that is achieved by grounding texts ultimately in the *suttas*, which are represented as reporting the discourses given by the Buddha himself. Mahāyāna texts are composed in India in Sanskrit, the language of scholarship. The Sanskrit term for a *sutta* is *sūtra*. And Mahāyāna Buddhism appeals to a large set of Mahāyāna *sūtras* for its legitimization.

The Mahāyāna *sūtras* are regarded within the Mahāyāna tradition as having been spoken by (or in the presence of) the historical Buddha; most non-Mahāyāna Buddhists regard them as spurious fakes composed over 500 years after his death. Of course there is the problem about their provenance, and there is a canonical story to account for their appearance so long after the death of the Buddha. Briefly, worried that the doctrines they articulated were too profound for most people to understand, the Buddha, after teaching them to a small group of carefully selected disciples (many of whom were celestial beings) and telling them that if they fell into the wrong hands, they might be misunderstood and actually cause harm to those who misunderstood them, the Buddha did what most of us would do in such a circumstance—he entrusted them to a band of sea serpents (*nāgas*) for safekeeping, instructing them to hold them at the bottom of the ocean for about 500 years until a monk named Nāgārjuna came for them. Alternatively, one can suppose that these *sūtras* were composed by inspired monks in roughly the 1st century BCE through 3rd century CE and became accepted as canonical, ushering in a new, more open sense of canonicity.

Philosophically, several doctrines distinguish Mahāyāna Buddhism. Let us note the two most salient doctrines common to all Mahāyāna schools. The first is the doctrine of *śūnyatā* or emptiness. Whereas according to the *abhidharma* doctrine of most northern Indian Śrāvakayāna schools (although interestingly, not according to Pāli sources, which focus almost entirely on phenomenology, as opposed to ontology), macroscopic entities, such as jars and people, are empty of intrinsic identity, they resolve into fundamental *dharmas*, spatio-temporally atomic constituents, which do exist intrinsically with unique, essential characteristics. These *dharmas* are not empty of intrinsic identity or essential characteristics, and so exist substantially (*dravyasat*), while macroscopic objects only exist conventionally (*prajñāptisāt*).[8] Mahāyāna doctrine, on the other hand, asserts emptiness all the way down: everything, including the *dharmas*, is empty of intrinsic nature, and essenceless. There is no ontological foundation. We will be exploring these doctrines in detail in chapters 2 and 3.

From the ethical standpoint, the salient innovation in Mahāyāna Buddhism is the institution of the ideal of the *bodhisattva* in place of the Śrāvakayāna ideal of the *arhat*, one who has attained liberation from *dukkha*. The bodhisattva is one who has cultivated a special moral motivation, called *bodhicitta*, which is defined as an altruistic aspiration to attain full awakening not in order to alleviate his or her own *dukkha*, but rather to liberate all sentient beings from *dukkha* and rebirth. This aspiration to full awakening, and the altruism it involves, is grounded in what becomes the central character ideal in the Mahāyāna ethical system, *karuṇā*, often translated as *compassion*, but better rendered as *care*,[9] a commitment to act for the benefit of all sentient beings. We will return to this moral ideal in chapter 10.

Among the early Mahāyāna *sūtras* are the *Discourse of Vimalakīrti* (*Vimalakīrti-nirdeśa-sūtra*; that is, a *sūtra* that later becomes among the most popular and influential in East Asia, and one to which we will return in chapter 3), in which the hero is a layperson, and, most importantly, a body of *sūtras* known as the *Perfection of Wisdom Sūtras (Prajñāparamitā sūtras)* the oldest of which is the *The Perfection of Wisdom Sūtra in 8,000 Verses (Astahaṣrika-prajñāparamitā-sūtra)*. The others are either extensions or condensations of this one. The most popular condensation is the *Heart of Wisdom Sūtra (Prajñāparamitā-hṛdāya-sūtra)*, memorized and recited regularly by Buddhists all over central and East Asia. These *sūtras* become the foundation for the earliest Mahāyāna school—the *Madhyamaka* or *Middle Way* school.

8. See Siderits (2007) for a fine exposition of this position.

9. Thanks to Amber Carpenter for this felicitous translation suggestion.