

PROGRESS, APOCALYPTICISM AND THE COMPLETION OF HISTORY, AND LIFE AFTER DEATH IN THE WORLD RELIGIONS

Introduction

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1. The Supposed Opposition of Individual Striving for Salvation and Striving for the Progress of Humanity

The progress of history and the idea of individual life after death appear to be two ideas that do not lie at the same level. The progress always comes too late for the dead; and the individual person always dies too early to benefit from the progress of humanity. The theme of this book, therefore, brings together two themes that are often not regarded as belonging together: the theme of history, of progress, of the apocalyptic end and the eschatological completion of history; and the theme of life after death and the resurrection of the human person. There is tension between these two themes. The progress of history does not seem to mean much to the individual who strives for his salvation and resurrection or for his release from the cycle of rebirth. Of what value to the individual is the progress that can be realized within a single human lifespan in comparison to eternal life in glory? One might think that the interest in personal salvation exceeds the interest in the progress of the community and of humanity so much that little room remains for interest or even the engagement in the progress of humanity. There is even less interest in the progress of history and in individual life after death for the person who is convinced of the apocalyptic end of the world and of history.

Leo Strauss – and, in a different way, also Thomas Hobbes – already had an analogous thought about the relation of religion and politics, of individual striving for salvation and striving for political and social progress. The question of politics, how one should live politically in the few years before eternal life, become unimportant from the perspective of eternal life. Or, as Hobbes puts it: One cannot conduct politics with people who are convinced of the idea of eternal life, because they will always be prepared to place questions about eternal life above questions about the correct order of social existence, of politics, and of progress. These people, according to Hobbes, will also not keep political

peace, because they are not afraid of death and because with them, therefore, the strongest power that moves people to obey the political sovereign and the laws, namely the fear of death, is only weakly developed.

It is easy to recognize the application of this problem beyond Christianity to other religions, such as Islam and Hinduism. The accusation is often made against Islam that its emphasis on eternal life increases the readiness to die for the faith in a holy war and, therefore, sometimes does not make political peace easier. Hinduism, in turn, frequently receives the reproach that the interest of the believing Hindu in overcoming individual rebirth outweighs his interest in a political rebirth or in social progress so much that too little room remains for social progress.

It is obvious that this reproach against the religions – that with their concern for individual salvation and, therefore, about the “progress of the individual,” they forget about the concern for political and social welfare and, therefore, about social progress – falls short. The religions are in general aware that the attainment of individual salvation cannot be separated from the realization of common salvation or the common good. The progress of the individual is closely connected with the progress of the community in which he lives.

Because we live in a globalized world and conduct economic activity within a system of global division of labor, both the progress of the individual and that of the nation are tied to the progress of the human race and the world. For the sake of the earthly and eternal salvation of the individual human being, therefore, the religions must be interested in the progress of the communities and of the human race.

2. Apocalypticism, Eschatology, and Faith in Progress

What is the nature of the tense relationship between the idea of progress and the idea of the apocalypse of the end of the world? The Lutheran theologian Paul Althaus said that the Christian revelation of John, according to which the Antichrist stands at the end of history, has only one function: to prevent us from believing that history is a single history of progress, in which everything will always get better, even without the individual moral effort of the individual.¹

¹ Cf. P. Althaus, “Eschatologie VI. Religionsphilosophisch und dogmatisch,” in *Die Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart*, Vol. 2 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1958), cols. 685 and 688: “Faith has always expected and testified to the end of history, even as the zeitgeist revelled in the idea of infinite progress. The modern awareness of life and thought has changed: today it is anxious about the possible self-destruction of history. Faith may greet the change, but it does not have to rely on it. Its knowledge about the end of history does not flow from historical and contemporary reflection, but from the certain expectation, based in the promise of the kingdom that Jesus Christ in person represents. His coming means the end of history, the end that is at the same time the fulfilment of its meaning, that indeed first gives meaning to it at all.... Eschatology ... cannot and

This danger of the idea of the one great progress of history, that, with its faith in the inevitable self-realizing progress of the human race, it will forget about individual moral and spiritual progress is a mirror image of the danger that the individual search for salvation, with its focus on individual spiritual progress, will forget about social progress and the common good.

There is also tension between the eschatological idea of the completion of history and apocalypticism's idea of the apocalyptic end of the world. Apocalypticism has only a transitory character for eschatology. It is not an end in itself. The end of history is only the transition to its completion, just as death and the end of the individual human person are only a transition to his eternal life and his completion.

The religions attempt to avoid both errors, that of political-social utopianism and that of salvation-seeking privatism and redemption-egoism, and likewise to show the human person a way out and an orientation from the trap of the universal faith in progress, as it was advocated in the first half of the twentieth century by the secular ideologies with catastrophic consequences, and to open up an alternative to the quietism of only circling spiritually around one's individual salvation. According to Christian doctrine, it is not permissible to seek one's individual salvation without consideration of that of one's neighbor.

There is, however, also the doctrine, which is to be drawn from the disaster of the twentieth century, that the individual cannot be exonerated from accepting responsibility for his own ethical actions and to realize his "progress" as a moral and intellectual individual by a universal idea of progress, a progressive ideology or a collective goal. The one large progress cannot replace the small progresses of the individual, and the small progresses of the individual must be pursued in association with the progresses of the community in which the individual lives.

3. The Connection between Eternal Life and the Completion of History: Exodus on the Earth instead from the Earth

The connection between the search for individual salvation and the social conditions under which the realization of the prerequisites necessary for attaining salvation or eternal life or *nirvana* bring it about that the attainment of final salva-

may not become apocalypticism, i.e. a doctrine of the end of history, its stages and events. It must limit itself from talking about ends and goals. Eschatology as the expectation of the salvation of the finite from the transcendence, of God's day and deed, means a limit and moderation for all confidence in the results of Christian *activity* in history. It is a "no" to the delusion that the action of the Christian and of Christendom would create the new man, the new humanity, the new world. But the Christian healing would be completely misunderstood and misused, if it were to lead to a paralysis of action. From it flow instead seriousness, joyfulness, and confidence of action despite ever new limitation and disappointment." Cf. also P. Althaus, *Die letzten Dinge: Lehrbuch der Eschatologie* (1922; 10th Ed., Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus G. Mohn, 1970).

tion or eternal life is linked to the completion of history and the world. The completion of all human beings, who are destined as individuals for eternal life, is linked to the final realization of the conditions that allow or make it easier for the individual to attain eternal life. The completion of humanity to eternal life is only possible by the completion of history.

This relationship between eternal life and the completion of history is also a necessary relationship, because everything in the world is made for finiteness and not for eternal life. According to the second law of thermodynamics, the “most metaphysical of all natural laws” (Henri Bergson), all energetic states strive for the more probable state, thus the more disordered, more undifferentiated state. Negentropy or order is replaced by entropy or disorder; life by death. The state of eternal life is not possible in a world subject to the laws of thermodynamics. Resurrection, eternal life, or *nirvana* requires, instead, a world in which the second law of thermodynamics is not valid. It requires an ontological transformation of the world, its complete transformation and transfiguration.

Only a transformed world permits being able to think of eternal life as a state, because in the world as we know it, all life and all high degrees of organization or order are subject to decay and death. Everything temporal is determined by the passage of time. As Paracelsus wrote, “Time causes decay in all things.” This decay of time in all things can be remedied only by a complete transformation of all things. Therefore, transformation becomes a basic concept of the religions; indeed, all of the hopes of the religions come together in the transformability of nature and of the human life.

This is especially true of the Abrahamic religions, which set their hope in the bodily resurrection and a bodily eternal life. The bodily resurrection and the bodily eternal life are only conceivable under the assumption of a complete, ontological transformation of matter. Therefore, the transformability of matter is among the great hopes of mankind. Christianity – as well as Judaism and Islam – assumes that, just as a transformation of matter and the body to coarseness and mortality has taken place as a consequence of the fall, so an eschatological and apocalyptic transformation of matter and corporality to the transfigured and eternal body will be realized.

Such a hope in the transformation of matter is also the basis of the idea in Hinduism and Buddhism of the karmic body, which with better deeds attains for its possessor a better mode of existence and a finer materialization. To be sure, Hinduism and Buddhism do not recognize eternal corporality and understand the eschatological state of perfection as disembodied. The question whether the cycle of rebirth is eternal for living beings as a whole or whether it will sometime come to an end for *all* living beings, and the question whether *nirvana* or *moksha* possesses characteristics of an eschatological completion are of great significance to the dialogue of the world religions and to understanding their

answers to the question of this book, to the question of the completion of history and eternal life.

It is only noted here that the eschatological hopes of modern technology also cannot disregard the law of entropy and the prediction of the heat death of the universe. Even the technological utopias of computer scientists such as Bill Joy, who assume that modern technology will be in the position to create human immortality, regard this as possible only under the presupposition that we leave our solar system when its energetic potential is exhausted.² Even here immortality is considered to be possible only if an ontological change of the energetic situation takes place. According to the technological vision of immortality, this transformation of the situation of the human race can take place only if the human race performs an exodus from the earth and its galaxy to other galaxies or worlds. One easily sees in this utopia the future of a human race that performs one exodus after another from one star to another in order to ensure its eternal life.

The biblical interpretation of eternal life is not that of an exodus *from* the earth, but instead one of an exodus *on* the earth. The biblical interpretation of eternal life is that of an eschatological, ontological transformation of the human person and the earth. The prophecy of the renewal of the face of the earth in the Bible opposes the picture of the exodus from the earth as the utopia of modern technology.

The biblical religions and the thermodynamics of physics are based on the idea of the world as a whole, which – as it is – has a beginning, which is on the basis of the present character of matter and energy finite, and which will have a state of exhaustion, of ending, and of death.³ The apocalypticism of the expectation of an end of the world and of history is, therefore, deeply inscribed in the religion and natural science of the Western world.

² According to Bill Joy, “Many people seriously advise us to abandon the earth as quickly as possible. According to von Neumann, we should colonize the Milky Way with spaceships and hop from one solar system to another. This step ... could already become necessary in the middle of this century” [!] (“Warum die Technik uns nicht braucht: Die mächtigsten Technologien des 21. Jahrhunderts – Robotik, Gentechnik und Nanotechnologie – machen den Menschen zur gefährdeten Art,” *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 6 June 2000, pp. 49 and 51, here p. 51). On the attempt of modern technology to ensure human immortality, see P. Koslowski, “Nature and Technology in the Religions,” in Koslowski, ed., *Nature and Technology in the World Religions*, Discourse of the World Religions, Vol. 3 (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 2001), pp. 11ff.

³ Cf. P. Koslowski, “Energie,” *Staatslexikon*, 7th Ed., Vol. 2 (Freiburg, Basel, Wien: Herder, 1986), cols. 247-53.

REINCARNATION AND PERSONAL IMMORTALITY

The Circle and the End of History in Hinduism

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To speak and write on such a vast subject is an uphill task, which I am attempting in a short discourse. First of all, I must state that Hinduism is not a monolithic religion like Judaism or Islam. It is difficult to define who a 'Hindu'¹ is, because Hinduism has no fixed doctrines, no prophets, no holy book, and no organised church acceptable to all the believers of that religion. Even the *Bhagavad-Gītā* is not holy text for all Hinduism; Saivism, for instance, does not recognize it as such, though most Hindus hold its ideas in reverence. Broadly speaking, there are three perspectives from which we can deal with the problems in the title: i) the religio-philosophical point of view, as can be gathered from texts like the *Vedas*, *Upaniṣads*, and the texts of the six orthodox schools of Indian philosophy and their commentaries; ii) the popular religious perspective, which is derived from the mythological and epic sources, from the *Purāṇas*, local spiritual lore, and the *Itihāsas*, like the *Rāmāyaṇa* and the *Mahābhārata*, which have the character of spiritual histories (or *Geistesgeschichten*, as Germans would call it); and iii) the Hindu view of life as stated in the legal and social codes of India, the *dharmasāstras*, as they are called,² the most important of which is the *Code of Manu*.

In the succeeding pages, I shall attempt the difficult task of elucidating and synthesizing all of these perspectives, so as to give a total picture of reincarnation, personal immortality, and the destiny of man vis-à-vis the Hindu conception of history. These points of view are more divergent than is generally sup-

¹ Most Indian thinkers would like to avoid the use of the term 'Hindu,' as there is no such word anywhere in the ancient literature of India. It possibly came into vogue during the Islamic conquest of India, when the invaders called the local inhabitants 'Hindus' (originating from the river Indus, Sanskrit '*Sindhu*'). For want of a better term, I shall use the terms 'Hindu' and 'Hinduism' to denote the traditional peoples and doctrines in vogue in the subcontinent of India.

² The *dharmasastras* have been challenged by many Indians today, especially by the so-called *dalits*, the ex-untouchables, who under the constitution of India have been fully integrated into Indian society, and even given preferential treatment. But the *dharmasastras* have enjoyed a high and authoritative position, not only in India, but in several parts of South-Asia, such as Thailand and Cambodia (where they are called '*Thammasat*' – see George Coedès, *Les États Hindouises d'Indochine et d'Indonesie*, Paris, 1964).

posed and, therefore, it is difficult to reconcile philosophical Hinduism with popular Hinduism based on the *Purāṇas*.³ In this essay, we shall take into consideration all three of these perspectives in our exposition and discussion of the three problems stated above.

1. The Problem of Rebirth according to Different Schools of Indian Philosophy

Most religions of the world, including Hinduism and Buddhism, accept the belief that life in this world suffers from serious deficiencies and that the fullness of a spiritual being can be realized only in the transcendental realm. In popular Hinduism, we find the conceptions of heaven and hell, to which one goes after death, the exact destination being determined by the deeds one has performed in the present life. Yama is the god of death and he appears invisibly when one's time to die has come. In Indian mythology, we have the story of Sāvitrī, who, upon the death of her husband Satyavān, successfully enters into a dialogue with Yama to bring back the soul of her husband, which had been snatched away. Another story of conquest of Yama or the god of death appears in the philosophical text *Kāthopaniṣad*, where the youth Naciketa enters into a dialogue with Yama, in order to learn the secret of life and death.⁴ The souls thus transported to heaven (*svarga*) or hell (*naraka*) enjoy the merits and demerits of their good or bad actions in the earthly world by happiness or by torture by demons and are reborn in this world, taking on another body. This is a popular belief based on mythology, which in many respects is akin to the Greek mythology of death and the survival of the soul after death.

Most of the philosophical systems deviate from the view of popular Hinduism, which owes its origin to the accounts in various *Purāṇas*. The Mimāṃsā system, however, does talk of accumulation of merit (*puṇya*) and sins (*pāpa*), and the resultant reward or punishment in the world hereafter, and also rejects the hypothesis of God or any divine agency, which ensures such results. It instead posits a transcendental law, *karma*, which by its unseen force (*apūrva*) operates in ensuring the results of men's actions. Its entire philosophy is devoted to investigation into the nature of *dharma*, which in the context of Mimāṃsā refers only to ritualistic performance, for which the interpretation of the vedic passages is important. The law of *karma* determines the fruit of our actions, and God is not necessary; the Mimāṃsā system is openly atheistic, and subordinates

³ There are eighteen *Purāṇas* (or mythological texts): *Brahma*, *Padma*, *Viṣṇu*, *Śiva*, *Bhāgavata*, *Nārada*, *Mārkaṇḍeya*, *Agni*, *Bhaviṣya*, *Brahmavaivarta*, *Linga*, *Varāha*, *Skandha*, *Vāmana*, *Kūrma*, *Matsya*, *Garuḍa*, and *Brahmāṇḍa*. See V. Mani, *Puranic Encyclopaedia* (Delhi, 1978).

⁴ *Kāthopaniṣad*, Chaps. 1-4. For translation and commentary, see S. Radhakrishnan, *Principal Upanishads* (London, 1953) and R. E. Hume, *Thirteen Principal Upanishads* (Oxford, 1949).

the human being to the dictates of the eternal law of *karma*. All systems of Indian philosophy (excluding the materialistic Cārvāka, but including Canonical Buddhism and Jainism) recognize the law of karma, even if not in the rigid form of the Mimāṃsā system. In the philosophy of Śaṅkara, the main exponent of Advaita Vedānta, the non-dualistic idealism which is as claimed by it, is an all-inclusive philosophy, in the sense that it includes but transcends all other systems. *Karma* is an empirical phenomenon and has to be transcended by *jñāna*, or knowledge and wisdom. Seen empirically, *karma* binds us to the world by its apparently inescapable force; but we can escape from bondage to *karma* and the empirical world by transcending it. One of the many ways of attaining this transcendence is the performance of duty, without any attachment to the empirical humdrum world, which can only lead to rebirth over and over again. Most human beings are in bondage to this world (called *samsāra*), because they do not realize the need for spiritual fulfilment, which has greater – inestimably greater – value than that of the ordinary empirical life of action and reaction, of rewards and punishments, of sensuous and materialistic enjoyment and bodily suffering. Śaṅkara calls liberation from this state *mokṣa* or *mukti*. It is also somewhat akin to the Mahāyānist ideal of *nirvāṇa*, though in the latter case philosophers desist from any verbal explanation or even description of what it is. In Advaita Vedānta, liberation is realization of the hidden higher Self, which is possible only for specially disciplined beings.⁵

Rāmānuja's Vedānta (which is called Viśiṣṭādvaita, a theistic form of monism) does not agree with Śaṅkara's point of view, and puts forth devotion (*bhakti*) and self-surrender to God. Rāmānuja's form of Vaiṣṇavism (called 'Śrīvaiṣṇavism') reconciles itself very consistently with the popular beliefs regarding rebirth, the conception of liberated souls attaining happiness in heaven and evil-doers being tormented in hell, etc. Souls can attain Godhead by intense devotion and performance of the rituals prescribed by the *Vedas*. The Vaiṣṇavaite (like the Śaivaite) literature is well-known for some of the finest religious poems in Tamil, rich in depth and symbolism, being highly emotive.⁶

Like Śaṅkara, Rāmānuja and ten other Vedānta philosophers also wrote commentaries on the three basic texts of the Vedānta: the *Brahmā-Sūtras* of Bādarāyaṇa, the *Upaniṣads*, and the *Bhagavad-Gītā*. In my view, Rāmānuja is fairer to the theistic point of view of the *Bhagavad-Gītā* than Śaṅkara – the

⁵ Śaṅkara's distinction between the empirical (*vyāvahārika*) and the transcendental (*pāramārthika*) is sometimes compared to the same kind of distinction in Kant and German idealism and is also to be found in Nagarjuna, the Mahāyāna-Buddhist philosopher, who preceded Śaṅkara by 400 years. Śaṅkara seems to affirm that *jñāna* or higher wisdom is not for ordinary mortals, who are condemned to rebirth, but meant for practice by a few gifted men. *Karma* (action) and *bhakti* (religious devotion), on the other hand, can be practised by all.

⁶ See translations by G. E. Phillips, *Hymns of the Tamil Saivites* (Calcutta, 1921) and A. K. Ramanujan, *Speaking of Siva* (Baltimore, 1973).

latter being more metaphysical, places more stress on *jñāna* or philosophical wisdom. The *Bhagavad-Gītā* itself attempts to reconcile all the three of the paths to liberation, namely *jñāna*, *karma* (moral and ritualistic action), and *bhakti* (devotion to God).⁷ According to Śaṅkara, the highest reality is not God, but a metaphysical Absolute called Brahman, which is better expressed by the neuter 'It' than by the masculine 'He.' The latter is not accessible to ordinary people in everyday life, as it cannot be realized either by sense perception or by reason. The higher reality, the Brahman, is a spiritual being of the nature of consciousness, and is hidden within us. Because of ignorance (*avidyā*), we fail to understand that the world we live in is phenomenal and is merely an appearance (*Māyā*). Theology cannot but distinguish between God and the souls, between God and the world, and between souls and the world; dualism is innate to the religious point of view and stands in the way of a monistic understanding of reality.

This in brief is the point of view of the Advaita Vedānta of Śaṅkara. Rebirth, transmigration of souls, etc. are but phenomenal and do not belong to the realm of the Absolute, which is one and is identical with universal consciousness.⁸

One should not get the impression that the whole of Hinduism and its philosophy are represented by Advaita Vedānta, or for that matter by the whole of the Vedānta, which is but one school of thought among the many within Hinduism. It is admitted, however, that most of the Indian thinkers in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, such as Swami Vivekananda, Sri Aurobindo, Rabindranath Tagore, Radhakrishnan, and K. C. Bhattacharya were influenced by Śaṅkara's Vedānta.

Vedānta has so dominated Hindu thinking for the last 150 years that one would think that it is synonymous with Hinduism; this being the case, one has lost sight of the fact that non-metaphysical Hinduism forms the core of popular Hinduism, and the sources for this belief have to be found in *Purāṇas*, *Itihāsas*, and *Dharmśāstras*. However, the *Bhagavad-Gītā* synthesizes the Vedānta, Sāṃkhya-Yoga, and popular Hinduism based on the *Purāṇas* and *Itihāsas*, which form the core of Indian spiritual history (or *Geistesgeschichte*, there being no exact equivalent in English for this unique term). The *Bhagavad-Gītā* is held with great reverence by most Hindus (exceptions being the Śaivaites). Therefore, we shall give emphasis to it in our discussion of the three problems stated at the beginning.

⁷ *Bhagavad-Gītā*, Ch. XII.

⁸ Paul Deussen, who did pioneering work in interpreting the Vedānta in Germany, attempts to reconcile it with Hegelianism. Friedrich Max Müller also gave more importance to the Vedānta. See P. Deussen, *The System of the Vedānta*, trans. C. Johnson (Chicago, 1912); and F. M. Müller, *Vedānta Philosophy* (Calcutta, 1954 (reprint)).

2. The Points of View of Various Systems of Indian Philosophy regarding Rebirth and Liberation, as Distinguished from the Religious Perspective

Sāmkhya, Yoga, and the Advaita Vedānta are the three systems of Indian philosophy, which can be said to complement each other in their philosophical quest for truth and reality. The Sāmkhya and Yoga systems have contributed a great deal towards developing a philosophy of the human mind and the self. Of course, the concept of *puruṣa* in Sāmkhya is not the same as that of *ātman* of the Vedānta, although one definition of the Sāmkhya is that it is the spiritual knowledge of the pure self.⁹ At the same time, however, Sāmkhya speaks of the plurality of *puruṣas* or selves. But Sāmkhya is silent about the existence or non-existence of God. Its investigations stop with the discovery of the pure self and its modes. By implication, it is atheistic, but at the same time spiritualistic. But the *Yoga-Sūtras* do mention God (Īśvara) at two places (1.23 and 1.25).¹⁰ But Sāmkhya and Yoga agree on the nature of human bondage. Bondage is only of an illusory nature; we become deluded because we are bound to nature and are prevented by it from attaining purity of the self. For Advaita, however, bondage is real and rebirth and transmigration through several bodies is also something from which we must be liberated. These are some of the basic differences between Sāmkhya and Yoga on the one hand, and Advaita Vedānta on the other.

In spite of these differences, there is also some agreement: 1) The world is the stage where successive births of human beings takes place, each human being passing through several bodies, including those of animals. 2) The law of *karma* operates, determining in what body the human being, or rather his soul, manifests itself. This law ensures that the soul, in the case of good deeds in the present life, takes on the body of a higher being in the following life. (This explains why there is such a wide gulf in the status of human beings in this world, and why some people suffer more than others.) 3) Liberation means, according to some schools of thought, that we have to escape this rigid application of the law of *karma*, and escape from the chain of repeated transmigration of our souls. 4) It is not clear from the texts of various systems of philosophy (except the *Bhagavad-Gītā*) what role God plays in the operation of the law of *karma*. The moral argument for the existence of God, which we find in the philosophy of Kant in the West, is also to be found in the *Bhagavad-Gītā*, where God is the arbiter of human destiny in this life and in the life hereafter.

No particular school of Indian philosophy and religion, however, can be cited as representative of the 'Hindu' tradition. And with regard to the questions about reincarnation, the immortality of the soul, and ultimate human destiny,

⁹ "Śuddhātma-tattvavijñānam Sāmkhyam iti abhidhīyate" (Aniruddha).

¹⁰ Vacaspati Mishra, one of the most versatile scholars of Ancient India (c. 11th century A.D.), has tried to reconcile the claims of these three systems in his famous work *Tattvavaisaradi*. Also see Gaspar M. Koelman, *Pātanjala Yoga* (Poona: Papal Athenaeum, no date given).

THE IMMORTALITY OF THE SOUL AND THE PROBLEM OF LIFE AND DEATH IN THE ZEN-BUDDHIST THOUGHT OF DOGEN

Kogaku Arifuku

In this paper I would like to consider above all Dogen's refutation of the Indian, non-Buddhist theory of the immortality of the soul and the transitoriness of the body, which is based upon the distinctions between essence and appearance and between soul and body. At the same time I will especially develop his basic concept that life and death as nirvana form a non-duality, which for its part is based on the idea of the absolute present as the time of current action.¹ In order to accomplish this, I will address, first, the theory of the immortality of the soul; second, Dogen's refutation of it on the basis of the non-duality of essence and appearance and that of soul and body in all things; and third, his interpretation of the relationship of life and death as nirvana (calmness) in every moment of action. In conclusion, I will explain how the theory of the absolute present as the time (moment) of present action is related to the idea of karma, which implies a kind of causal and historical action theory, and whether there is a contradiction here. The paper is structured as follows: 1) The problem of the immortality of the soul, 2) Dogen's refutation of the theory that the body is transitory and the soul immortal, 3) The problem of life and death as nirvana in Dogen, and 4) Action in the absolute present and its historicity.

1. The Problem of the Immortality of the Soul

What is the soul? What is the spirit? What is the self? Upon what is the self or spirit based? Although we can presume the existence of the soul or spirit from the awareness of the self, bodily actions, and different sensations that are considered to be effects of the soul or spirit, we can by no means know what it is. For we can neither see nor touch the so-called soul, as we can the body. It could

¹ This paper is based on the following investigations of the immortality of the soul and of the problem of life and death: K. Arifuku, *Shôbôgenzô ni shitashimu: Dogen no shizenshisô* [Introduction to *Shôbôgenzô: Dogen's Theory of Nature*] (Tokyo: Gakuseisha, 1991), pp. 19-39; K. Arifuku, *Shôbôgenzô no kokoro* [The Spirit of *Shôbôgenzô*], NHK Books, No. 701 (Tokyo: Nihon-hôsô-shuppanyôkai, 1994, pp. 79-100.

be that there is really nothing behind the self or mind, no substance, as is commonly meant by the word "soul." We humans, however, necessarily ask about it when we wish to know, according to causal laws, about the reason and the cause of the effects of our thinking, acting, and feeling self.

These questions are related to the additional question whether the soul or mind ceases to function after the death of the body? That must be true, if the soul and the body are inseparable from one another. In that case, the soul must stand and fall with the body. But if one thinks of the soul as the substratum of mental effects, it is not so simple to clarify the situation. In the religions, the salvation of the soul alone was, is, and remains the eternal mission and final end. It is a completely natural and common way of thinking, on one hand, to consider the body indeed to be mortal, but on the other hand, to regard the soul as immortal and non-transitory. The further one goes back in time, the more certainly one can find this belief in the immortality of the soul. However, not only primitive people, but also even European philosophers since Plato have wanted to believe in and prove it.

What is the soul, understood as the subject of immortality, anyway? According to a standard Japanese dictionary² the Japanese word "*tamashii*" or "*tama*" ("soul") means the entity and its principle that indwells mostly human persons and animals, but now and then also plants, that produces the effects of the spirit and gives life, and that can, according to general belief, exist persistently by itself apart from the body after the body's death. There is an on-going debate concerning whether plants possess souls. Beyond that, it is not so easy to argue about the existence of the soul and its immortality in more detail and more precisely. In reference to the definition of the soul, the contrast and close connection of body and soul are interesting and characteristic, which is why one acknowledges the soul above all in animals. For, although the animal as a moving thing (*Dô-Butsu*) is a corporal being, one presumes a soul in its body, because its movements are thoroughly self-controlled. Therefore, another Japanese word for "soul" is "*tama*," which actually means "ball." The ancient Japanese imagined the soul to be a round entity, self-enclosed and perfect, which could fly in the air like a bird.

Aristotle defines the essence of the soul, for example, as "the principle of animal life" and "the cause or source of the living body."³ The English verb "animate," which is derived from the Latin "*anima*," means "support," "inspire," "encourage," etc. The adjective "inanimate" means "lifeless," "inorganic," "non-living." Furthermore, Aristotle identifies movement and sensation as the two most important characteristics distinguishing things that have a soul

² *Nihon-Kokugo-Daijiten*, 20 Vols. (Tokyo: Shogakukan, 1972-76); *Kôjien* (Tokyo: Iwanami, 1991).

³ Aristotle, *On the Soul (De Anima)*, trans. J. A. Smith, in *The Basic Works of Aristotle*, ed. Richard McKeon (New York: Random House, 1941), 402a, 415b.

from things that do not.⁴ Thus, the soul designates the properties that make up a living being or life itself, so that the soul is seen as the impulse and source of corporal and living activities. Thus, the soul is that by which we live, perceive, and think in the primary sense.⁵

I will attempt to explain this interplay of separation and relationship by looking at the three following *tanka* (Japanese poems with thirty-one syllables), in which the separation of the soul from the body and the influence of the soul on the body play a role.

Hyôbukyo-no-miya writes: “*Tamashii ya kusamura goto ni kayou ran, nobe no mani mani naku koe zo suru.*”⁶ This means: “Oh my soul! It would reach you through the bush. Here and there in the field I hear chirping voices that correspond to it.” I must explain this poem in more detail: Could the voice of my soul reach you? I hear chirping voices here and there in the field, as if they sympathize with my soul. Here the author understands by the word “*tamashii*” (“soul”) a being that can influence all things in general, in this case the chirping animal. This means that the soul is clearly distinguished from the self, in so far as the latter can operate only with my body.

Sano-no-otogame-no-otome writes: “*Tamashii wa ashita yûbe ni tamauredo, aga mune itashi koi no shigeki ni.*”⁷ This means: “I receive your soul in the morning and in the evening. But my heart pains me, for my love for you is all too strong.” I explain this as follows: Although your soul reaches me, I can do nothing to you, for my love for you is so strong that it pains me as if my heart were breaking. From that one can derive the idea that the soul could exist alone in itself separated from the body, so that the soul of the loving friend could come to me.

Shôin Yoshida, a patriot of the last period of the Shogunate, who was sentenced to death for violating the Japanese law of that time concerning sealing out the external world, wrote the following *tanka* shortly before his execution: “*Mi wa tatoi musashi no nobe ni kuchinu tomo, todome okamahi yamato damashii [= tamashii].*”⁸ This means: “Although my body must be ruined on the scaffold in only the twenty-ninth year of life, I would nevertheless like to wish that my Japanese soul (i.e. my idea or form) will still remain and continue to function after my death” This implies that the soul could exist eternally in separation from the body. That is precisely Shôin Yoshida’s desire and hope. In this way, one believed and expected that the soul, completely distinct from the body, would be immortal. From that one can assume that we humans have a yearning

⁴ Aristotle, *On the Soul*, 403b.

⁵ Aristotle, *On the Soul*, 414a.

⁶ Cf. Utsubo-Monogatari, “Saga no in,” in *Nihon-Kotenbungaku-Taikei*, Vol. 10 (Tokyo: Iwanami, 1952), p. 227.

⁷ *Manyôshu*, Vol. 15; in *Nihon-Kotenbungaku-Taikei*, Vol 7 (Tokyo: Iwanami, 1962), p. 105.

⁸ Shôin Yoshida, *Ryûkonroku*.

for the immortal, because our human body is a finite being, which comes into existence, grows, constantly changes, and finally disappears. Consequently, we invented words like “soul” and “*tamashii*” in order to express the hope in eternal life.

Plato famously has Socrates – after he was sentenced to death, because he supposedly corrupted the youth with heresy and, according to the law of Athens, had to drink poison and journey into the hereafter, the realm of the dead – explain the immortality of the soul in the dialogue “*Phaedo*.” After Crito had listened to Socrates’ hypothetical proof of the immortality of the soul, the following exchange took place between them:

But in what way would you have us bury you? – In any way that you like; only you must get hold of me, and take care that I do not walk away from you. Then he turned to us, and added with a smile: I cannot make Crito believe that I am the same Socrates who have been talking and conducting the argument; he fancies that I am the other Socrates whom he will soon see, a dead body – and he asks, How shall he bury me? And though I have spoken many words in the endeavor to show that when I have drunk the poison I shall leave you and go to the joys of the blessed, – these words of mine, with which I comforted you and myself, have had, as I perceive, no effect upon Crito.⁹

In this dialogue both Crito and Socrates recognize that Socrates’ body will necessarily die. But the central point is the question of the immortality of the soul. The necessity of bodily death is a motivation to the question of the immortality of the soul, but is not at all its central point. In other words, the question is whether the proposition “All humans are mortal” is valid for human persons only as corporal beings, but not as spiritual beings. Therefore, Socrates teaches the immortality of the soul with the following words:

And the same may be said of the immortal: if the immortal is also imperishable, the soul when attacked by death cannot perish; for the preceding argument shows that the soul will not admit of death, or ever be dead, any more than three or the odd number will admit of the even, or fire or the heat in the fire, of the cold.¹⁰

According to this theory, immortality is the essential characteristic of the soul. Furthermore, immortality and mortality are opposing concepts. Plato is of the opinion that the soul is immortal, although the body is mortal, so that this immortal soul of a person departs from the body after its death, wanders in search of a new home, and finally arrives at the appropriate place corresponding to the change in its life. This thought originates from the universal religious be-

⁹ Plato, *Phaedo*, trans. Benjamin Jowett, in *The Dialogues of Plato*, trans. and ed. Jowett, 4th Ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1953), 115c-d.

¹⁰ Plato, *Phaedo*, 106b.

lief of the Greek populace at that time.

In the tradition of the history of Western philosophy it was Descartes who took over the Platonic idea of the immortality of the soul. But he approached this question from the inner self-consciousness of the thinking I-subject. Thus, he called the proposition "*cogito ergo sum*" ("I think, therefore I am") the "first and most certain of all knowledge"¹¹ and "the first principle of the philosophy for which I was seeking."¹² He concluded

that I was a substance the whole essence or nature of which is to think, and that for its existence there is no need of any place, nor does it depend on any material thing; so that this "me," that is to say, the soul by which I am what I am, is entirely distinct from body, and is even more easy to know than is the latter; and even if body were not, the soul would not cease to be what it is.¹³

This conclusion is as surprising to our common human understanding as a bolt of lightning out of a blue sky. According to Descartes' sharply distinguished dualism of body and spirit or soul, only a mechanistic movement drives the human body, in so far as it is an extended being (*res extensa*). Accordingly, thought (*pensée*) belongs only to the soul (*l'âme, animus*), which is to be distinguished fundamentally from the body. Since Descartes understood the thinking self as a substance to be distinguished absolutely from matter and the body in this way, the thinking self had to become a completely objectively and abstractly separated entity. Kant saw in that a paralogism of pure reason. It consists in the fact that Descartes leaped from the properties of the merely thinking self-subject (independence from the mechanistic material body, purity, intellectuality, spirituality, etc.) to the presumed, substantial, separated existence of the self as a soul. In any case, Descartes identified the self not only with the thinking self, but also with the spirit (*l'esprit, mens*), the soul (*l'âme, animus*), reason (*la raison, ratio*), and the intellect (*l'entendement, intellectus*). From this way of thinking, Descartes argued quite naturally for the immortality of the soul:

I have here enlarged a little on the subject of the soul, because it is one of the greatest importance. For next to the error of those who deny God, which I think I have already sufficiently refuted, there is none which is more effectual in leading feeble spirits from the straight path of virtue, than to imagine that the soul of the brute is of the same nature as our own, and that in consequence, after this life we have nothing to fear or to hope for, any more than the flies and ants. As a matter of fact, when one comes to know how greatly they differ, we understand much

¹¹ René Descartes, *The Principles of Philosophy*, 1-7.

¹² Descartes, *Discourse on the Method of Rightly Conducting the Reason and Seeking for Truth in the Sciences*, Part IV, trans. Elizabeth. S. Haldane, in *The Philosophical Works of Descartes*, ed. Haldane and G. R. T. Ross (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1968).

¹³ Descartes, *Discourse on the Method*, Part IV.

ON APOCALYPTICISM IN JUDAISM

Moshe Idel

1. Introduction

Judaism, like many other religions which developed over a long period of time, is a complex phenomenon. It not only developed diachronically but also diversified itself synchronically, given the wide geographical dispersion of the Jews, as part of their diasporic plight. Any attempt to describe the main factors which contributed to the vitality of the constellation of practices, beliefs, and institutions that constitute Judaism, should take in consideration also the ongoing impact of messianic aspirations, prevalent in so many layers of Jewish people. This statement does not come to minimize the importance of other religious factors like the performance of ritual or the study of the Torah – in the wide sense of the word – neither the triggers created by interactions with various religious and cultural environments.

Messianism is not a homogenous phenomenon and its many forms differ from each other sometimes dramatically. Its history in the biblical times, and in the Qumran literature, shaped some other developments in the intertestamental period.¹ Here, we are not concerned with the huge diversity of messianic ideas and movements, but with one important component of some of them: apocalypticism.² This aspect of messianism was conceived of as a rather crucial one, and Gershom Scholem, whose deep affinities to the apocalyptic world we shall de-

¹ Cf., e.g., John J. Collins, *The Apocalyptic Imagination: An Introduction in the Jewish Matrix of Christianity* (New York: Crossroad, 1987); and Collins, "The Place of Apocalypticism in the Religion of Israel," in P. D. Miller Jr., P. D. Hanson, and S. D. McBride, eds., *Ancient Israelite Religion: Essays in Honor of Frank Moore Cross* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1987), pp. 539-58. On different types of messianism in medieval and modern Judaism, see M. Idel, *Messianic Mystics* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998); and Ravitzky, note 87 below.

² On the different meanings of apocalypse, apocalypticism, and apocalyptic, see Bernard McGinn, *Visions of the End* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1979), pp. 1-36; John J. Collins, *The Apocalyptic Imagination* (New York: Crossroad, 1987), pp. 1-17; Paul D. Hanson, *The Dawn of Apocalyptic*, Rev. Ed. (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979), pp. 4-6. For the Middle Ages, see McGinn, *Apocalypticism in the Western Tradition* (Variorum, 1994), Essays I and II; the Introduction of the editors, J. Collins, B. McGinn, and S. Stein, to the three volumes of the *Encyclopedia of Apocalypticism* (New York: Continuum, 1998), pp. IX-XIII; and Joshua Bloch, *On the Apocalyptic in Judaism* (Philadelphia: JQR Monograph, 1952).

scribe later on, declared that, "When the Messianic idea appears as a living force in the world of Judaism...it always occurs in the closest connection with apocalypticism."³ Elsewhere, when dealing with a more limited Jewish literature, the mystical one, he states that to the extent that messianism entered "as a vital force in the messianism of the mystics, it is permeated by apocalypse and it also reaches...utopian conclusions which undermine the rule of the Halakhah... in the days of redemption."⁴

How should we define apocalypticism? Was it indeed such a subversive power? More than anything else, apocalypticism is a vision of the world, that assumes an expectation of immediate and dramatic changes of the course of the world, which will lead to an improvement described as the end of the previous order, political, social, or religious and the installation of another, better one.⁵ More evident in a religious type of world, which is easier predisposed in the belief of the existence of supernatural powers that may interfere with the ordinary events, my description of apocalypticism does not exclude the acute sense of an end even in a secular society, though this issue is not going to preoccupy us below. Apocalypticism often gravitates around powerful human protagonists, like the Messiah in Judaism, or Jesus Christ in Christianity, or around a powerful deity capable of and willing to intervene in the course of history or nature, or around a combination of the two entities. Indeed, the very recourse to terms like history and nature is to a certain extent problematic, as it assumes a dichotomy between divine will and another, independent order, in a manner that is often-times exaggerated or anachronistic. The order implicit in the existence of a supernal powerful will is therefore the sine qua non condition for the upheaval of the existing forms of order, which is equivalent to apocalyptic redemption. Unlike other forms of eschatology, apocalypticism believes in, expects, and sometimes even calls for a manifest revolution. Nevertheless, what is characteristic of the apocalyptic expectations, as I understand them, is the emphasis upon supernatural revolution, rather than natural evolution which exploits potentialities inherent in the ordinary processes.

Much more a rupture than a continuation, apocalyptic salvation involves drastic restructuring that expresses a protest toward an existing order of things. Apocalypticism strives to solve the problem of a well-defined community, whether it is a tribe or a nation. Though it is definitely related to pondering on the human condition,⁶ in Judaism it is more eminently connected to quandaries re-

³ Gershom Scholem, *The Messianic Idea in Judaism* (New York: Schocken Books, 1972), p. 4. Cf. also Scholem, *Kabbalah* (New York: Dorset Press, 1987), pp. 68, 71-72.

⁴ G. Scholem, *'Od Davar* (Tel Aviv: 'Am 'Oved, 1986), pp. 234-35 (Hebrew).

⁵ For more on apocalypticism in Judaism, with an emphasis on the axes of time and place, topics that are not dealt with here, see M. Idel, "Jewish Apocalypticism 670-1670," *Encyclopedia of Apocalypticism*, ed. B. McGinn, Vol. II, pp. 204-37.

⁶ Cf. especially John J. Collins, "Apocalyptic Eschatology as the Transcendence of Death," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly*, 36 (1974), pp. 21-43; Frank Kermode, *The Sense of an Ending*:

lated to the specific vicissitudes of a certain group of people. From many points of view this is an escapist approach, especially because of the reliance on the intervention of a superior active power. One of the most common components of an apocalyptic mode of approaching existence is the dramatic rupture alongside the ordinary line of time envisioned as related to the eschaton. Regular time is conceived of as symbolic of the common and problematic sort of order that should be transcended by attaining a new kind of order. This rupture in the realm of time is often intertwined with a corresponding rupture on the geographical level, when the end of time will involve also a dislocation of masses. The arena of the eschaton is rarely identical to that of ordinary life. In some forms of apocalypticism, the restructuring of the two parameters is accompanied by a deepening of religious life, or of intellectual activity. A spiritually more intensive life is eventually envisioned either as the goal of apocalypticism, or as its by-product.

Most of messianic dramas related to the advent of the Messiah, or Messiahs, consist in a sequel of events, some of them having distinct apocalyptic features: natural disasters, mass religious conversions, bloody wars ushering in mass murder, death of messianic figures, etc. These upheavals were conceived of as being so painful that rabbinic figures confessed that they would prefer not to live to see them. Here, the apocalyptic nature of the eschaton is so strong that it deters people from even wishing to witness the advent of the messianic age, and therefore, we may assume that terror of apocalypticism deterred people from wishing to partake in the eschatological process.⁷

2. Sources of Jewish Apocalypticism

I would venture to say, following Whitehead, that if European philosophy may be described as a series of footnotes to Plato, Jewish and Christian apocalypticism may be conceived of as a handful of footnotes on the apocalyptic visions of Daniel. The content of this second-century B.C.E. enigmatic book, perhaps the most enigmatic part in the whole Biblical corpus, has tantalized generations of Jewish and Christian authors who attempted to explore the "messages" alluded to by the alleged sixth-century prophet. This is also the case of John's apocalypse. To a great extent, Jewish apocalyptic writings are indebted to various hints related to the future history of the Jews and of the Gentile empires in gen-

Studies in the Theory of Fiction (London: Oxford University Press, 1966), p. 22; Bernard McGinn, *Apocalyptic Spirituality* (New York: Paulist Press, 1979), pp. 10, 13.

⁷ Israel Levi, "Apocalypses dans le Talmud," *Revue des Etudes Juives*, 48 (1880), pp. 108-14; Anthony Saldarini, "Apocalyptic and Rabbinic Literature," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly*, 37 (1975), pp. 348-58; Saldarini, "The Use of Apocalyptic in the Mishnah and Tosefta," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly*, 39 (1977), pp. 396-409.

eral, spread over the obscure verses of this book. The mysterious figures, beasts, reigns, invited plenty of allegorical interpretations, which attempted to find out the precise dates and protagonists of the end. Indeed, the Book of Daniel combines several aspects of apocalypticism that may appear separately, though they are part of the apocalyptic complex: the nature of the apocalyptic events, the protagonists of the apocalyptic drama, and the feeling that there is a precise date, or dates, of that drama and its place or places.

The other main source for many late-antiquity and medieval discussions of the drama at the end of time is the exodus from Egypt, which has been envisioned as the prototype for the events of the redemption. While the role of Moses was now played by the future Messiah, the ancient Pharaoh was allegorically conceived of as representing powers of evil, while the exodus from Egypt was understood as adumbrating the return of the Jews to their homeland.⁸

Apocalyptic literature is mainly a religious phenomenon whose impact on the monotheistic religions is due to its first literary expression in the intertestamental period. Apparently of Iranian extraction, it has been appropriated in specific political and religious circumstances, those of prolonged expectations for the return of the Israelite king and to the events connected to his, oftentimes miraculous, return. In many cases, details of these eschatological events are reported as a revelation from above, a topic inherent in the very etymology of the term apocalypticism; but the revelatory aspects are less evident in discussions concerning apocalypticism. Though rooted in earlier forms of literature, its impact in the general economy of the biblical literature is small, though the dense discussions in the Book of Daniel, written in the East, are paramount. Nevertheless, with the passage of time, the topic gradually grew, though it never attained a status similar to other main topics in Judaism, like the legalistic and the interpretive projects.

The developments of apocalypticism in Judaism represent a combination between a gradually growing role of the redeeming figure within a more complex process, the messianic one, which includes in many cases apocalyptic components. Jewish apocalyptic themes as incorporated in the Talmudic and Midrashic literatures are almost always related to a more comprehensive topic, messianism. Since the belief in the advent of the messianic is the main focus of the discussion, apocalypticism can be seen as one possible components of messianism, though not tantamount to this broader phenomena. Though it is only very seldom in Jewish sources that there are non-messianic forms of apocalypticism, the only two significant exceptions being the cosmic cycles according to astrological and Kabbalistic speculations, it is easier, though rare again, to find messianic scenarios that are totally devoid of apocalyptic motifs. The focus of the

⁸ Cf. Baruch Bokser, "Messianism, The Exodus Pattern, and Early Rabbinic Judaism" in James H. Charlesworth, ed., *The Messiah: Developments in Earliest Judaism and Christianity* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992), pp. 239-58.

messianic scenarios is not the description of the apocalyptic sequences in themselves; they serve as preludes for the description of the advent of the Messiah and of the messianic age.

In the early medieval period, however, a series of short treatises dealing with the messianic drama were composed, most of them pseudographical, attributed as they are, for example, to the biblical figure of Zerubavel, or to the early rabbinic author R. Shimeon bar Yohai. The most famous and widely influential on a whole range of medieval messianic figures is the *Sefer Zerubavel*. These writings were collected and edited with a critical apparatus in Yehuda Even Shemuel's basic anthology *Midreshei Ge'ulah*, the "*Midrashim of Redemption*."⁹ They elaborate upon the signs preceding the coming of the Messiah, the terrible wars and the death of the Messiah ben Joseph, the arrival and final victory of the Messiah ben David. Though written during a period of several hundred years, between the seventh and twelfth centuries, this literature is relatively unified from the conceptual point of view. It is mythical in its approach to reality: God and the Messiah are conceived of as paramount factors capable of disrupting the course of nature and of history, and as actually doing it. Strongly oriented toward a redemption that will take place in both time and space, it has an obvious restorative nature, which includes the rebuilding of the temple, the descent of the pristine city of Jerusalem from above, and the victory of Judaism as an universal religion.¹⁰ The main target of the whole process is the redemption of the chosen among the people of Israel; individual spiritual redemption does not play any role in this more popular form of Jewish literature. The apocalyptic material collected by Even Shemuel, though modest in quantity, has nevertheless exercised a considerable influence on the popular imagination of both apocalypticism and messianism.

In the Middle Ages, Jewish apocalypticism had been influenced also by both Muslim and Christian forms of apocalypticism. So, for example, we find numerous themes dealing with Christian apocalypticism in late-fifteenth-century Kabbalistic corpus named *Sefer ha-Meshiv*,¹¹ while the Muslim impact is more diffuse but found in a greater variety of cases.¹²

⁹ Yehudah Even Shemuel, ed., *Midreshei Ge'ullah: Pirquei ha-'Apocalypsah ha-Yehudit*, 2nd Ed. (Jerusalem: Mossad Bialik, 1954). Some of the apocalyptic material has been translated into English by Raphael Patai, *The Messiah Texts* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1979), passim.

¹⁰ Cf., e.g., *Sefer Eliahu*, in Even Shemuel, ed., *Midreshei Ge'ulah*, p. 48.

¹¹ M. Idel, "The Attitude to Christianity in *Sefer ha-Meshiv*," *Immanuel*, 12 (1981), pp. 77-95; and *Messianic Mystics*, pp. 118-20. For the possibility that Christian themes influenced some elements in *Sefer Zerubavel*, see Joseph Dan, "Armilus: The Jewish Antichrist," in P. Schaefer and M. C. Cohen, eds., *Toward the Millennium: Messianic Expectations from the Bible to Waco* (Leiden: Brill, 1998), pp. 85-86, 93-95.

¹² Israel Friedlander, "Shiitic Influence in Jewish Sectarism," in Marc Saperstein, ed., *Essential Papers on Messianic Movements and Personalities in Jewish History* (New York: New York

DISCUSSION OF THE PROGRESS OF HISTORY, APOCALYPTICISM, REBIRTH, AND THE IMMORTALITY OF THE SOUL IN HINDUISM, BUDDHISM, AND JUDAISM

Presentations:

N. S. S. RAMAN:	Reincarnation and Personal Immortality: The Circle and the End of History in Hinduism
KOGAKU ARIFUKU:	The Immortality of the Soul and the Problem of Life and Death in Buddhism
MOSHE IDEL:	On Apocalypticism in Judaism
Moderator:	ERNST ALBRECHT
Summary:	FRIEDRICH HERMANNI

1. Is it possible, according to the Buddhist faith, for human beings to save themselves and, if so, how many accomplish this?

People can save themselves only on their own, by their own power. We can, to be sure, presuppose a God; but what is this God and where does he live? If we regard him as a power, where does this power originate? Salvation in the sense of nirvana exists only in the midst of life and death. Buddha or God exists only in our power. In Buddhism, one must hold two perspectives in view. Becoming a Buddha is one of them. This is the final objective, the ideal, towards which one strives. The other is that the human being is a finite, imperfect being; therefore he must work hard to attain this objective. One can at every moment of his actions experience nirvana, contentedness, and still remain a finite being. (ARIFUKU)

There is no single Buddhist doctrine. In many of the Buddha's texts the non-existence of the soul is maintained; but other texts assume different rebirths of the Buddha, and thus a continued existence of the soul. Dogen's Zen Buddhist theory assumes as its starting point that the soul dies with the body; all other Indian schools, on the contrary, believe in the transmigration of the soul. People want to know what will happen to them after death. In popular Hinduism there

are ceremonies in which one calls the soul of a dead person back to life through a medium. Many Hindus believe in this. (RAMAN)

In a certain sense all of our speakers are correct; but in what sense? RAMAN brings the half-Kantian, half-Hindu theory of John Hick into play, by assuming that all cultures in some way participate in an unknown total truth. All religions, cultures, and philosophies asymptotically approach something that one can call reality. Each culture experiences this reality differently. By virtue of their fantasy, Buddhists believe that their form of salvation is salvation *simpliciter*. The same is true of other religions. Two vectors stimulate people's fantasy. The first gives them the impression of fullness and lets them imagine a world of abundance, which they can attain subjectively. Whether they can also do so objectively remains an open question. The other vector is that of scepticism. For the sceptic, reality remains outside our grasp. Thus, each of us creates for himself in some way a particular reality and thus opens for himself the possibility of striving for this as a kind of perfection. For many people, the idea of God facilitates the feeling of perfection; for others – such as Buddhists – precisely the idea of the non-existence of God communicates the feeling of salvation. (IDEL)

Christianity's concern was to maintain, in contrast to Greek antiquity and Judaism, a strong concept of salvation for itself, namely the hope in bodily resurrection after death. Is that only an idea specific to Christianity, which has nothing to do with the other religions, or does this idea of bodily resurrection also exist in other religions, for instance in Buddhism that is not influenced by Dogen's theory? (KOSŁOWSKI)

Buddhism cannot believe in a bodily resurrection; it can say nothing about it. Dogen, to be sure, introduces the idea of karma in three times, but it is questionable whether he means by it a resurrection of the physical body. This idea, like all ideas of resurrection, rebirth, apocalypse, karma, etc., is only a myth, which was fabricated for moral reasons, so that people would act rightly in the present. We can say nothing about a future life in the hereafter. We only know that our actions have causes, as well as effects that bind us. Therefore, according to Zen Buddhism, we should concentrate everything we do on the present moment. The idea of transmigration does not play a role here. It cannot prove it. (ARIFUKU)

2. How do the different religions understand salvation? Does eternity exist within time or is it timeless? How especially does Christianity understand eternal life?

In Christianity there are two ways of experiencing God, which are related to different ways of experiencing time. God meets us in time as a personal being amongst other beings. In addition, there is the mystical experience of God as the

One that exists outside space and time and is One and All (cf. Meister Eckhart). (ALBRECHT)

Hinduism has developed different understandings of the nature of salvation or self-realization (*mokṣa* or *nirvana*), depending upon the theological school. In many forms of Vaishnavism, in which the element of theism predominates, *mokṣa* is seen as the perfect identification of the soul with God. In other cases, one characterizes the relationship between God and the soul with the image of lord and servant. According to this view, the soul can never become God. The question of creation does not play a role here. God creates the world and souls. They migrate from body to body, without remembering their earlier lives, since memory takes place only within a body. Many Indian philosophers consider the soul to be atomistic, others regard it as a spirit. Buddhism includes sects that believe in the complete destruction of the soul at death, as well as others that deny this and advocate the idea of the transmigration of the soul. (RAMAN)

Buddhism, according to Dogen, has two perspectives of time. The first assumes the absolute separation of before and after as its starting point. This perspective sees time as an eternal now, a simultaneity with everyone who is holy or inspired (all Buddhas) and permits free action at every moment. The other perspective is that of the causal time continuum. We live in history and have historical relationships. But this perspective restricts our freedom; therefore we need both. (ARIFUKU)

Since time is created by God, according to the Christian understanding, God can also eliminate it. Therefore, according to Christianity, "eternity" cannot mean eternal duration in time. But there are actually two distinct conceptions of salvation in Christianity. There is the more spiritual-mystical conception, which is closer to the Asian religions. In it the finiteness of the soul ceases with the entry in God into the infinite, the individual into the universal. The other conception, advocated by the churches, denies such a mingling of Creator and creation and, consequently, emphasizes that human corporality and individuality remains preserved with salvation. Therefore, it is closer to Islam and Judaism. (KOSLOWSKI)

3. What roles does the idea of bodily resurrection play in Judaism and Islam?

Considered historically, we find nothing in the Hebrew Bible by way of bodily resurrection. This idea came later and influenced above all the rabbinic literature, but was never undisputed. Many Jews understand bodily resurrection symbolically as an image of spiritual resurrection. The possibility bodily resurrection can be understood both statically (by the assumption of infinite time) and medically (by artificial conservation of human life). That has, of course, nothing to do with religion. Religion brought this idea of resurrection into play in order

to improve life in this world. The promise of a better future has a moralizing function. (IDEL)

The isomorphic conception of the uniformity of the human body and the divine body is extremely important in biblical Judaism. It influenced the Western biblical-Christian tradition and was developed in the rabbinic literature. Besides that, however, there was also the dualistic idea, coming from Greek philosophy, of the separation of the body, which was considered to be of lesser value, from the soul or intellect, which was regarded as more valuable. From that a particular spirituality, which also influenced Christianity and Islam, was developed. Perfection meant the liberation of the spirit in identification or unity with the divine spirit. Both ideas of salvation, the monistic and the dualistic, exist within Judaism, and it has also experienced the collision of the two. One can understand this with the image of the pyramid in my paper (pp. 60-61 of this volume) understood as a clash between the first elite (the established church) and the second elite (the mystical-spiritual religious understanding). (IDEL)

Islam understands resurrection differently than Christianity does: we will not be resurrected with our present bodies. Paradise already exists in this life. Life in the hereafter is only the mirror of what we have done in this life. There are in the Qur'an verses that can be interpreted in the sense of bodily resurrection, but this interpretation is disputed. Many Muslims believe only in a spiritual resurrection. Sufis picture it as drops of water (human beings) that must disperse in the ocean (God) in order to become one with him. Like Hinduism and Buddhism, Islam also has diverse schools of religious thought; it is not a monolithic complex. (comment from the audience)

4. Apocalypticism in Judaism

In response to a question from the audience, IDEL sketched the philosophical background of apocalypticism once again: Apocalypticism is essentially a collective experience, which follows forms of causality that break through regular causality in order to introduce a higher form of causality according to apocalyptic belief, for instance, that of the immediate presence of the divine, that of the destruction of evil, that of a new form of knowledge, etc.

IDEL replied to a question about the apocalyptic understanding of time: In many medieval texts, time in this world was considered to be short. In order to intensify the experience of existence, "low" time had to be broken through for the sake of "higher" time. Not the origin of apocalypticism itself, but its reception, took place under the influence of particular historical events.

IDEL commented on the distinction between messianic and non-messianic forms of apocalypticism that apocalypticism is fundamentally concentrated on a particular person. In rare cases, however, there arises a form of apocalypticism

whose theme is primarily that of a future destruction that does not involve a divine or human protagonist. Instead, a potential already existing in reality is realized from an inner order of reality.

5. Rebirth in Buddhism and Hinduism

We can say nothing about rebirth. This idea is a myth that should motivate us to let the evil person within us die and the good person within us be resurrected in every moment of our lives. (ARIFUKU)

Popular Hinduism believe in the transmigration of the soul from one body to another, where the good deeds in the life of a person lead in the following life to ascent to a (socially) higher rank, and bad deeds to descent to a lower rank. Even a Brahman can descend to a lower cast. Considered philosophically, in the sense of the *Bhagavad-Gita* for instance, one should nevertheless act disinterestedly, i.e. desire the good for its own sake and not in view of some future reward. The ultimate goal of the human person is union with the deity. (RAMAN)

6. Materialism and Idealism in Buddhism

ARIFUKU replied to a question about Buddhism's intermediate position between materialism and idealism and the contradictions arising from it: Zen Buddhism has both idealistic and materialistic elements, but cannot be described as either idealistic or materialistic (or nihilistic). When someone dies physically, not everything is destroyed. To be sure, this person will not be reborn; but something of him remains, from which transformation, the new, then emerges. All elements of the old are needed for the origin of the new. Buddha is also present in nature, in plants, bodies of water, the air, etc. This is the idealistic aspect of Buddhism.