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The Religious Motivation of the Early Buddhists

Torkel Brekke

THIS ARTICLE IS CONCERNED with the question of why Buddhism arose. However, my aim is not to offer any definite answers to such a large and complicated question but rather to open a discussion about how a question of this type should be approached. What exactly should we mean when we ask why Buddhism arose? Such a discussion is needed because many buddhologists are vague about the methodological foundation on which they base their theories about the origin and development of the religious tradition that is their field of expertise. Moreover, it would surprise me if a similar lack of consciousness could not be found in the writing on other religious traditions—Christianity, Judaism, Islam—which implies that the discussion is of general importance to the study of the history of religions.

I argue that in order to understand why a religion comes into being we should devote more attention to the religious motivation of individuals than is usual in the study of religious history. Needless to say, in historical studies it is often difficult, or even impossible, to say anything about cognitive processes of individuals. However, when there is a possibility, we should try to understand the motivation of the people who initiate change.

Theories of motivation were up to the 1950s dominated by drive-theory both in mainstream psychology and in the psychoanalytic tradition. Much of psychoanalytic thought is still permeated by the idea that

Torkel Brekke has a Ph.D. in Oriental Studies from the University of Oxford, Wolfson College, Oxford OX2 6UD, U.K.

the need to satisfy drives is the basic motivating force in human life, and sex and aggression are often prominent candidates in the explanation of behavior. On the other hand, there is a large tradition of research in motivation that has abandoned the cruder forms of drive-theory and seeks to explain human behavior from a number of different angles. I wish to explore to what extent the findings of this tradition can be applied in order to explain why people chose to follow the movement of the Buddha and, thus, why Buddhism came into being. In doing so I have no intention of presenting a total picture of the vast field of motivational research or of giving any definite answers with regard to my particular object of study, early Buddhism. From motivational theory I will pick an approach that sees psychological incongruity, the discrepancy between an internal state and an external stimulus, as a basic motivating factor, and from this general approach I will pick two more specific conceptualizations of motivation, namely, the theory of cognitive dissonance and a theory of secondary control. I should emphasize again that I do not believe that the exercise of applying these theoretical constructs to early Buddhist textual material will render radically new answers to the question of why Buddhism arose. My aim is first of all to open a discussion about the use of modern psychology in the study of ancient and alien religious traditions.

PSYCHOLOGICAL INCONGRUITY

A large trend in psychological research has shown that people need a certain complexity in their stimuli, a certain challenge from the environment. If the incongruity between the environment and the standard of reference is too small, people will seek a more challenging situation. If the challenge is too great, they will avoid it and seek a situation that corresponds to a higher degree with their standard of reference. There are in particular two conceptualizations of psychological incongruity that I will look at in this article. First, there is L.Festinger's famous theory of cognitive dissonance. I will apply the theory of cognitive dissonance to understand the motivation of the members of the early Saṃgha. Secondly, Rothbaum, Weisz, and Snyder place attempts to reduce psychological incongruity in the larger context of the fundamental need for perceived control. They believe that there are basically two ways of gaining control: *one*, by changing the environment to fit the self, and *two*, by changing the self to fit the environment. I believe that research and theory on perceived control can be very useful for the understanding of religion. I will apply the theory of Rothbaum et al. and picture early Buddhism as an attempt indirectly to gain control over an unpredictable world by changing one's cognition of the environment.

However, before I apply these two theoretical constructs to my material, I wish to point out that the need to avoid incongruity between the individual and the world is a subject that is not limited to psychology. For instance, sociologists of knowledge approach the same basic need to harmonize the internal world with one's perception of the external world from a different angle and with a different terminology. Transformations in a person's worldview are seen as an adaption to the environment. These sociologists have also put religious motivation in the context of such needs to adapt subjective reality to the objective world (Berger and Luckmann:176).

Most of the time people are able to safeguard a necessary degree of symmetry between objective and subjective reality by procedures of reality-maintenance. The subjective reality is maintained through the normal interaction with the institutions of the society and through the interaction with other people. But when the subjective reality that the person has received through socialization and internalization can no longer be maintained in the face of the external world, the subjective reality must be radically transformed in order to be in harmony with objective reality. And since in the history of humankind religion has served to validate and define reality, since religion has provided the crucial link between objective and subjective reality, a transformation in subjective reality often means religious conversion. The convert is re-socialized and must accept the subjective world that is given to him or her by the new community, and the past is often interpreted in light of a new internalized truth. Thus, religious conversion is an alternative strategy when the individual is no longer able to maintain consistency between perceptions and an inner structure of belief and values through normal adjustment.

Buddhism along with a number of other sects was a reaction against beliefs and values that no longer were in harmony with a society undergoing drastic and rapid change. At the time of the Buddha the society or societies of northern India were undergoing great changes. The Brahminical tradition could not satisfy the religious needs of a considerable proportion of the population, particularily in the growing towns. A number of sectarian leaders—as attested by the Sāmaññaphalasutta and other texts—appeared on the scene to offer new and more credible banners to the people. At the time of the Buddha four great kingdoms, Avanti, Vatsa, Kosala, and Magadha, were thriving. At the same time parts of the population of the sixteen great countries (*mahājanapada*) organized themselves into chiefdoms, *gaṇasaṃghas*, with councils and assemblies. Other *janapadas* supported kings. The chiefdoms were ruled by *kṣatriya* lineages, and there was a sharp demarcation between the ruling families and the people who worked for them as employees or slaves. Cities grew as commercial

centers and as political centers. Industries grew in the cities, and a monetary system developed. With the expansion of trade and business, artisans organized themselves into guilds (usually referred to as *śreni* or *pūga*). Over time guilds became hereditary professional groups and developed into castes, *jātis*. Economic change interlocked with social change.

In addition to soldiers, ministers, and religious officials employed by the kings there were money-lenders, medical practioners, potters, weavers, dyers, reed and leaf-workers, leather-workers, architects, smiths, hunters, and butchers. The urbanization and the proliferation of trade and industry, not to mention the maintenance of communities of mendicants, required a considerable agricultural surplus, and some scholars attribute the advancement in agricultural technique to the use of iron. Irrigation was also a central element in the agricultural development and thus a significant variable in the social change (Misra:240ff.).

The climate of the Ganges plain must have been warm and wet, and both the jungles that were gradually burnt away and the muddy fields that were cleared must have provided close to perfect living conditions for a number of different parasites and insects that served as carriers of maladies, as has been pointed out by R. Gombrich (58). People probably lacked resistance to the diseases of the environment that they had only inhabited for a few generations, and the Buddhist literature has passages about the threat of sickness. In the Mahāvagga (MV) of the Vinaya Piṭaka I.18 a number of people join the Saṃgha because they are afflicted with different diseases and are in need of treatment. In the Theragāthā 55 we are told that Añjana joined the Buddha as a result of a panic in the Vajjian territory. The people of the area are said to have been afraid of three things: drought, sickness, and evil spirits. According to this text the Buddha quieted the panic, and it seems that it was the Buddha's ability to ease the fear that made Añjana join the order of monks. I argue elsewhere that fear was a prominent motivational factor for the early converts to Buddhism and that the Buddhist missionaries actively used the inducement and subsequent alleviation of fear as a missionary technique (Brekke forthcoming).

On the other hand, it seems that the quality of life had improved for a large number of people in this period. There was an availability of luxury goods such as salt, pottery, and textiles of different sorts, and the material culture improved in general. The successful *gahapatis* could invest part of their earnings in business and thereby augment their wealth. "There is evidence of an improvement in living conditions, . . ." says R. Thapar (99).

To sum up my steps so far, I am trying to outline an analysis of a religious transformation by emphasizing the importance of *three* elements in the explanation. *First*, one has the social situation in which the religious transformation took place. *Second*, we have the religious movement: Bud-

dhism. I have suggested that Buddhism was a reaction against a state of incongruity between objective reality and the subjective reality of a large number of people at the time. These two standards needed to be synchronized. Faced with the inability to adjust in the normal, step-by-step process of modification of subjective reality, people embraced the solutions offered by a few charismatic leaders who were able to define the problems and point the way out. It was a switching of worlds, the cutting of the Gordian knot of the consistency problem, a throwing away of all traditional religious banners. With these two elements we describe the origins of Buddhism in a way that has been done by previous historians. The attempt here to offer a new understanding of this process consists in the contribution of a *third* element in the explanation: *motivation conceptualized as psychological incongruity.* To do justice to the individual convert and to obey what I would call *the motivational imperative,* one should try to describe the causal mechanism going from the starting point (social conditions), through the individual, to the reaction (religious movement).

COGNITIVE DISSONANCE

My argument is that a basic religious motive for the earliest Buddhists was a need to reduce an incongruity between their own inner structure of beliefs, attitudes, and values, on the one hand, and an external world in rapid change, on the other. The theory of cognitive dissonance was formulated by Festinger in 1957. Basically Festinger says that cognitions can stand in different relations to each other. Two or more cognitions can have a relationship of consonance, they are harmonious, or one follows from another. Secondly, cognitions can have a relationship of irrelevance. Lastly, cognitions can have a relationship of dissonance. When a person has cognitions that stand in a relationship of dissonance, it causes discomfort which motivates him or her to reduce the dissonance between cognitions and achieve consonance.

Let us look briefly at how the theme of cognitive dissonance is reflected in early Buddhist literature. According to the Buddha biographies—which all spring from a common source—there were certain sights or omens that made the Buddha-to-be renounce his life as a prince and take up the life of a religious wanderer. In the Mahāpadāna Sutta these sights made the former Buddha Vipassi aware of the problem of birth, ageing, sickness, and death, and this made him feel uneasy and scared. These four—birth (*jāti*), ageing (*jarā*), sickness (*vyādhi*), death (*maraṇa*)—are all causes of *saṃvega* (*saṃvegavatthu*) according to Buddhaghosa, and thus the uneasiness and fear of Vipassi were the religious perturbation of *saṃvega.* According to, for instance, the Buddhacarita, the young Siddhārtha was

motivated by the same kinds of experiences. On three pleasure excursions outside the palace he saw an old man, a sick man, and a corpse. These sights were illusions created by gods in order to bring about a disturbance in the mind of the prince. In canto 3.4 we are told that his father, the king, was aware of the distressing sight the world might present, and he forbade the appearance of afflicted common folk on the royal road. The Sanskrit word denoting religious perturbation here is *saṃvega*, a noun made from the root *saṃ-vij* which means to tremble or start with fear. The translator E. H. Johnston explains the term in the following way: "Saṁvega as a religious term denotes the first step towards conversion, when the perturbation of mind is produced by something and leads to consideration of the inherent rottenness of the world and so to the adoption of the religious life" (32, n. 4).

What the king is afraid of, then, is his son's conversion, his adoption of the religious life. In order to protect his son from the distressing sights of the world, he clears away those whose limbs were maimed or senses defective, the aged, and the sick, but to no avail. The prince is destined to become a Buddha. The term *saṃvega* occurs several times both in the Pāli Canon and in Buddhist texts in Sanskrit (Brekke forthcoming). Through the discussion of cognitive dissonance and *saṃvega* I am trying to address a problem of how to analyze the religious motivation of early Buddhists with the language of psychology. This is an instance of a general problem in the study of religions. How can we describe a religious movement in a language that does not belong to that movement or to the culture in which it arose? In the words of Milton Yinger: "A serious difficulty associated with virtually all efforts to measure religion is the limitation of the dimensions or scales to one or to a few closely related religious traditions. This puts serious limits on any efforts to develop generalizations about the relationships of religion and society that are capable of being applied across cultural lines and across time periods. Measurements having crosscultural validity must abstract from specific social and cultural systems those qualitites that are intrinsic to the phenomenon of religion whatever the form of their expression" (32).

The sociology of religion must shun categories dictated too specifically by the characteristics of a particular theological tradition and must develop categories that facilitate crosscultural comparison. Observing phenomena in real life, the scholar must conceptualize ideas in the language and form of expression used by the community in which the observations are being made. Later he or she must present the observations in terms that are shared by the community of scholars, terms that are abstracted from their particular context and that make comparison across cultural and temporal boundaries possible. In this leap the discussion of reduc-

tionism becomes relevant. The transformation of communicative experience to data for scientific investigation must contain an arbitrary element. However, this does not mean that we cannot do our best to construct analytical categories that correspond *as far as possible* with the concepts used by the participants of the religious life themselves. The now so familiar idea that the scholar's task is to bridge the gap between experience-near and experience-distant concepts—between *inside* and *outside*, *subjective* and *objective*, *emic* and *etic*—is just as essential to traditionally hermeneutical disciplines as to the social sciences. Gadamer pointed out that it is madness for the historian to try to leave out his or her own concepts in the study of a historical epoch or tradition (374).

I am suggesting that in *saṃvega* and cognitive dissonance we may have a pair of concepts—one used by the early Buddhists themselves and the other by western psychologists—that can be applied to bridge the gap between the experience-near and the experience-distant, the subjective and the objective, in the study of the religious motivation in early Buddhism. Let me investigate this possibility a bit further.

It is fear that is the core of young Siddhārtha's perturbation in the Buddhacarita. When he is told by his charioteer that he will grow old, become sick, and die like the people he sees, he is terrified. Canto 3:37: "This being so, turn back the horses, charioteer; go quickly home again. For how can I take my pleasure in the garden, when the fear of old age rules in my mind?" Canto 3:47: ". . . And on hearing of the danger of disease, my mind is repelled by pleasures and shrinks, as it were, into itself."

It is clear from the Buddhacarita and from the other biographies that what causes the prince's perturbation, his *saṃvega*, is the realization of the inherent suffering of life. But what makes this realization so powerful in the case of the prince is the dissonance between his original cognition of his own life and this new knowledge that he himself must grow old, suffer, and die. The sight of sickness, death, and old age, which is the murderer of beauty and ruin of vigor (*rūpasya hantrī vyasanaṃ balasya*), does not have the enormous impact on others whose previous ideas of life converge to a larger degree with the facts.

His father, the king, for instance, is a realistic man. His ideas of his own life are in harmony with the objective truths of life. Canto 2:34: "He did not, like one wanting in self-control, indulge in the pleasures of the senses, he cherished no improper passion for women, with firmness he overcame the rebellious horses of the senses, and conquered his kinsmen and subjects by his virtues." Canto 2:38: "He spoke what was pleasant and not unprofitable; he stated what was true and not disagreeable; for self-respect made him unable to say even to himself a pleasant falsehood or a harsh truth."

In contrast, the prince has lived a life of pleasure, hidden behind the walls of the royal abode, and the discrepancy between his cognition of his own life and the unavoidable facts of the world is overwhelming. This cognitive dissonance gives the prince a strong feeling of discomfort that motivates him to equalize the discrepancy. Obviously the facts of life cannot be changed, and the only solution is to bring his own life into some sort of harmony with these facts.

The reaction of the young prince is extreme. His father has managed to achieve harmony between his life as a king and the facts of the world by choosing a realistic middle way between the pleasant falsehoods of imagined immortality and indulgence in the pleasures of the senses, on the one hand, and the harsh truths of suffering and death, on the other. The young prince rejects everything: his family, his amusements, his wealth, and the duties of his social standing (*varṇadharma*). The Buddha is essentially what William James called the *sick soul:* "Make the human being's sensitivity a little greater, carry him a little farther over the misery-threshold, and the good quality of the successful moments themselves when they occur is spoiled and vitiated. All natural goods perish. Riches take wings; fame is a breath; love is a cheat; youth and health and pleasure vanish. Can things whose end is always dust and disappointment be the real goods which our souls require?" (122).

Not only in the biography of the Buddha himself does the dissonance between expectations and attitudes derived from a pleasant and protected life, on the one hand, and the harsh realities of the world, on the other, appear as a motivational factor. In the Mahāvagga (MV) of the Vinaya Piṭaka the young man Yasa approaches the Buddha after a sudden realization of the rottenness of the world. Typically, he is the son of a great merchant (*seṭṭhiputto*), a member of a good family (*kulaputto*), and delicate and tender (*sukhumālo*). He has different mansions for the different seasons, and he is entertained by female musicians.

When Yasa realizes the inherent decay and death of the world at the sight of his female dancers sleeping in the palace, the dissonance between the cognition of his own life and the inevitable facts of the world creates an overwhelming discomfort, and he leaves the palace and rejects his life as the merchant-son. According to MV I.7.2, seeing the sleeping women, he feels as if he looked at a cemetery. In the parallel Catuṣpariṣatsūtra I.16.4, seeing the women, he sees the image of a cemetery in his own apartments. For Yasa, the skull has grinned in at the banquet, and his normal sanguine healthy-mindedness can no longer make him forget the evil background of universal death and all-encompassing blackness, to speak with James again.

In MV.8 Yasa's parents approach the Buddha to get their son back. The Buddha convinces them that Yasa cannot turn back to the life of a house-

holder. He gives the great merchant a talk on Dhamma, and the merchant is deeply moved and goes for refuge to the Buddha, to the Dhamma, and to the Saṃgha, and he asks the Buddha to accept him as a lay follower. In fact, in consequence of Yasa's conversion all his family members end up as lay supporters. It seems reasonable to assume that this was a fairly common sequence of events. According to Gokhale, in the cases of eighteen of the individuals of his study of the early Buddhist converts the reason for conversion was the influence of relatives (398).

In the biographies of the Buddha a central motivating factor was the cognitive dissonance produced by the discrepancy between life in the palace and life outside, between the great lie of never-ending pleasure, on the one hand, and the truths of old age, suffering, and death, on the other. The stories of the Buddha and Yasa, elaborated and to some extent, of course, purely legendary, are interesting primarily as a formalized illustration of a sequence of events leading up to a person's religious motivation. We can make our discussion a little more realistic by bringing it closer to our own times. In his study of a doomsday cult John Lofland writes about *tension* as a motivating factor in the joining of the cult. He defines *tension* so that it clearly would include cognitive dissonance, although he does not use this term. "This tension is best characterized as a felt discrepancy between some imaginary, ideal state of affairs and the circumstances in which they actually saw themselves" (34). In other words, there are clear parallels between Lofland's description of a modern religious movement and the accounts we find in early Buddhist literature. Significantly, Lofland emphasizes that the psychological tension that was present in all the subjects in his study before conversion cannot explain why they chose to join the cult in question (41). This is also the view expressed by B.Wilson when, in a critique of the thesis that conversion is the simple reaction to relative deprivation, he says that there are many steps between needs and their supply in the field of religious involvement (118). As I said above, when we supply motivation as a cause, the concept of *cause* must be stripped of the factor of strict necessity. Lofland observes that all those who joined the group had experienced tension. Moreover, this tension was a necessary condition for joining a sect. However, a number of other elements must be present. First of all the converts would go through a state of religious seekership which implies that conversion is preceded by volition and conscious searching.

RELIGION AND CONTROL

In his study of the Srāmaṇyaphalasūtra Graeme MacQueen distinguishes a few major themes in the text. One of these major themes he calls "Internal and External Mastery." This is a common theme in early

Buddhist literature as well as in the literature of other Indian traditions. The figure of the king symbolizes external mastery, and the figure of the *śramaṇa*, sometimes the Buddha himself, symbolizes internal mastery. The conflict between the two roles is also seen in the Buddha biography where the child is predicted to become either a *cakravartin*—i.e., an all-conquering king—or a Buddha. MacQueen illustrates his point by analyzing the Khantivādi Jātaka in terms of the dichotomy between external and internal mastery. In this Jātaka a king cuts a peaceful ascetic to pieces with his sword in a fit of anger. The complete control and calmness of the ascetic is sharply contrasted with the wrath of the king. In the Śrāmaṇyaphalasūtra king Ajātaśatru is overcome with fear. The reason for his fear is the silence of the large company of monks who are staying in Jīvaka's mango grove. In the same way it is the superior calmness of the ascetic that causes king Kalabu's anger to grow out of proportion in the Khantivādi Jātaka. In other words, it is the kings' inability to understand and believe in inner mastery and peace that is the reason for their agitation. To be faced with silence is to be forced to look inward, and for the parricide Ajātaśatru, introspection is not very pleasant. According to MacQueen, Ajātaśatru's questions about the visible fruits of the life as a *śramaṇa* further show his inability to understand anything apart from external, material values. The fruit of the life of the *śramaṇa* is exactly the complete internal mastery that is embodied in the assembly of monks before him.

Several of the classical writers in the study of religion have in their works touched upon the human need to control external events. Spinoza, Hume, Frazer, Radin, and Malinowski all observed that religion was born as the individual tried to cope with more or less uncontrollable aspects of the world. Rothbaum, Weisz, and Snyder have formulated a two-process model of perceived control that I believe can be useful for the understanding of religion. In the study of perceived control it is often assumed that inward behaviors—passivity, withdrawal, and submissiveness—are signs that show that a person has given up hope of control over factors that affect his life. Rothbaum et al. have shown that such behavior can better be understood as an alternative way of gaining control.

The *primary* way of exerting control for a person is by acting on the environment and controlling aspects of the world by outward behavior. Instead of seeing inward behaviors as a sign of relinquished control, Rothbaum et al. point out that such behaviors can be expressions of a *secondary* way of exerting control. This *secondary control* means bringing oneself into line with the environment instead of bringing the environment into line with the self. It is this secondary control that Gautama chooses by becoming a Buddha instead of a *cakravartin*. The renouncers'

way of overcoming psychological incongruity by changing the self is the opposite of the violent strategy chosen by King Kalabu in the Khantivāda Jātaka and King Ajātaśatru in the Śrāmaṇyaphalasūtra. Through meditation and other practices the religious mendicants manipulate their own feelings and attitudes to make them correspond with the facts of life and death. The kings, on the other hand, manipulate the environment to fit their feelings and attitudes.

This is, of course, not unlike what Berger and Luckmann say about symmetry between objective and subjective reality by procedures of reality-maintenance. One can also see a parallel with Festinger's theory that attitudes change to fit cognitions of reality. Moreover, Jean Piaget uses the concepts of *assimilation* and *accommodation* in his theory of cognitive development, where assimilation is not unlike primary control and accommodation is the tendency to modify one's own cognitive structures to fit the world. I wish to show how religious groups in general and early Buddhism in particular may be seen as attempts by members to gain secondary control when the possibilities of primary control are limited.

Rothbaum et al. distinguish between four main types of secondary control. Two of these types—vicarious control and interpretive control—I find particularly apt to contribute to the understanding of the psychology of religion. Vicarious control is the secondary control gained by an individual when he or she aligns with more powerful others. When a person feels powerless in the sense that he or she is unable to influence his or her environment through active intervention—i.e., through primary control—the best solution is often to associate with a powerful group or a powerful person to share in this larger power. Vicarious control is related to the psychoanalytic construct of identification with powerful others and Fromm's emphasis on the need to escape freedom or individuation which leaves the individual the power derived from association with more powerful others. From this point of view vicarious control is preferable to primary control because primary control entails individuation and the breaking of conformity. All innovation entails a breaking of conformity and is in this sense unlikely. The paradigmatic example of gaining control through submission to a powerful other is submission to a god. As Rothbaum et al. observe: "Most significantly, vicarious control is evident in religious phenomena, as, for example, when persons speak of gaining 'strength through the Lord'" (20).

Motives of secondary control are easily detectable in literature on the early Buddhist Saṃgha. A sect leader often has the role of a powerful other with which converts may associate and thereby gain vicarious control. The Buddha certainly seems to have had this quality. B. G. Gokhale has analyzed monks and nuns of the early Saṃgha on the basis of the

Thera- and Therīgāthās. Many of them are said to be able to recall the immediate reason for conversion. Gokhale classifies the reasons under a few main headings, and he gives the number of monks and nuns who can be classified under each heading. 43% of the conversions were due to 1) *the impact of the personality of the Buddha.* 24% of the conversions were due to 2) *the impact of the personality of one of the leading disciples.* In addition to Buddhism there were a number of other contemporaneous religious or philosophical movements. As discussed, the times were probably psychologically challenging with widespread disease as well as deep-going changes in the social and economic spheres and in the spheres of thought. It is reasonable to assume that for many converts these sects gave a sense of control through association. As is evident even in texts with an early origin, the Buddha was thought to have had complete control over space and time, over gods and men. The identification with a charismatic leader such as the Buddha gave vicarious control. After the death of the Buddha his fame and powers grew, and the vicarious control gained by joining the Saṃgha did not diminish.

The power of the Buddha basically consists in knowledge, i.e., knowledge of the four Aryan truths (*cattāri ariyasaccāni*), the Aryan eightfold path (*ariya aṭṭhaṅgika magga*), and of Dependent Origination (*paṭiccasamuppāda*), which is a compressed statement of the state of the world and the cause of *saṃsāra* and of suffering. In the accounts of the Awakening of the Buddha we are told that he goes through the doctrine of Dependent Origination in direct and reverse orders. A constantly recurring theme in Buddhism is the ability to understand and see through the suffering of the world. This introduces the fourth type of secondary control, *interpretive control.* In the face of a situation that cannot be dealt with through primary control a normal reaction is to try to understand the situation and the reasons for failure. People who perceive a lack of primary control often seek secondary control in the form of reasons, explanations, and interpretations. In the words of Rothbaum et al., "Interpretive control refers to the search for meaning and understanding" (24). Interpretive control fits with our general discussion of psychological incongruity as a source of religious motivation. It is another way of seeing the search for consistency or symmetry between external conditions and internal states. As Rothbaum et al. observe: "The studies on interpretive control indicate that, rather than changing the world persons sometimes attempt to change themselves (specifically their views) so as to better accept the world" (26).

Interpretive control is an important aspect of many religious traditions. For the Buddha, salvation consists in awakening to the ultimate truth. In the MV I.6 he says: "And so long, monks, the vision of knowledge

(*ñāṇadassanaṃ*) of these four ariyan truths, with the three sections and twelve modes as they really are, was not well purified by me, so long was I, monks, not thoroughly awakened (*abhisambuddho*). . . . But when, monks, the vision of knowledge of these four ariyan truths, with the three sections and twelve modes as they really are, was well purified by me, then was I, monks, thoroughly awakened . . ." (Horner:17).

What the Buddha offers his followers is first of all an interpretation of the nature of existence (*dukkha*), the knowledge of the origin of this state (*dukkhasamudaya*), the consolation that this situation can be ended (*dukkhanirodha*), and the way which will end the state of suffering (*dukkhanirodhagāminīpaṭipadā*). In the Mahānidānasuttanta of the Dīghanikāya the Buddha says, "But, Ānanda, when once a brother has understood as they really are the coming to be and the passing away, the pleasures and the miseries of, and the way of escape from, these seven resting-places for Cognition, and these two Spheres, that brother, by being purged of grasping, becomes free. And then, Ānanda, he is called Free-by-Reason (*paññāvimutto*)" (Dīgha Nikāya [D] 2:70).

Paññā (insight, reason, understanding) leads to freedom. *Paññā* is better than any wealth (*dhana*) since by *paññā* one reaches perfection (*vosāna*), the venerable Raṭṭhapāla explains to King Koravya in the Raṭṭhapāla Sutta of the Majjhimanikāya. Gautama dealt with an uncontrollable world not by trying to gain the power to actually modify it—not by becoming a *cakravartin*—but by trying to understand its essence, by awakening to the truth, by becoming a Buddha. He adopted a strategy which was the opposite of that of the men of the world like Kalabu and Ajātaśatru. His followers also gained a feeling of control through the sharing of his interpretation of existence and suffering. In the Mahālisutta the Buddha tells Mahāli about the highest and most excellent things for the sake of which the monks lead the religious life. "And then further Mahāli, a monk, freed from the intoxications by the destruction of the intoxications having, by himself, understood, having realised, having attained emancipation by heart (*ceto-vimuttiṃ*) and emancipation by reason (*paññā-vimuttiṃ*) abides in the present existence. That, Mahāli, is a condition higher and more excellent for the sake of which the monks lead the religious life (*brahmacariyaṃ caranti*) under me" (D 1:156).

Paññāvimutti, emancipation by knowledge or understanding, is the highest good for the Buddhist monk. *Paññā-vimutti* is always mentioned together with *ceto-vimutti*, emancipation by heart. Emancipation by heart, together with the emancipation of mind, is the goal of the monk or nun, and the attainment of these two aspects of emancipation is what makes a person a real Samaṇa and a real Brahmin. In the Kassapasīhanādasutta the Buddha explains to Kassapa: "From the time, O Kassapa, when a Bhikkhu

has cultivated the heart of love that knows no anger, that knows no ill will—from the time when, by the destruction of the intoxications he dwells in that emancipation of heart (*ceto-vimuttiṃ*), that emancipation of mind (*paññā-vimuttiṃ*), that is free from those intoxications, and that he, while yet in this world, has come to realise and know—from that time, O Kassapa, is it that the Bhikkhu is called a Samaṇa, is called a Brahmaṇa" (D 1:167).

Ceto can mean *mind* as well as *heart. Paññā* and *ceto* can, perhaps, be seen as complementary in the sense that *paññā* is a state of mind and *ceto* is a faculty. For the early Buddhists it was the freedom in mind and heart that was the perfect happiness. In the Cakkavattisīhanādasuttanta the Buddha asks: "And what is the meaning of power for a brother? Herein, that a brother, by destruction of the deadly taints (*āsavānaṃ khayā*), enters into and abides in that untainted emancipation of mind and of insight (*ceto-vimuttiṃ paññā-vimuttiṃ*), which he by himself has both known and realized" (D. 3:78).

The primary function of *paññā* is the understanding of the doctrines of the Buddha: the four noble truths, the chain of Dependent Origination, the doctrine of no-self, etc. These doctrines are, of course, to a large degree about the nature of reality and of human existence, a reality and an existence that can be controlled by right understanding. The importance of knowledge or understanding can, perhaps, be further illuminated by the parallels between medical practice and Buddhist teachings that are an instance of the essential therapeutic nature of Indian philosophy in general. The teaching of the Buddha is a medicine against the *kleśas*, the afflictions greed, hatred, and delusion; the Buddha is the king of physicians (*vaidyarāja*); and the Bodhisattvas are great medical experts (*bhaiṣajyaguru*). Many buddhologists have seen parallells between Buddhism and medicine, and some have even suggested that the Buddha borrowed his scheme directly from the science of medicine (Halbfass:244). Just as in medicine a knowledge of the body is necessary for effective therapy, so a deep insight into the workings of the body and mind is necessary for therapy in a Buddhist sense.

CONCLUSION

I have tried to illustrate an approach to religious motivation with examples from early Buddhist literature. The approach that I have chosen sees psychological incongruity, the discrepancy between an internal standard and an external stimulus, as a basic motivational factor leading the individual towards religious innovation or conversion. Two conceptualizations of psychological incongruity were used: Festinger's theory of cog-

nitive dissonance and the concept of secondary control suggested by Rothbaum, Weisz, and Snyder.

A number of serious objections could be made against an attempt at discerning the religious motivation of the Buddha and of other individuals of his time on the basis of the textual traditions available. Indeed, motivation is a complicated matter even without the uncertainties surrounding the transmission of the texts and the historicity of their contents (Brekke 1998a). The most glaring sin committed by this paper is summed up in one disquieting word: reductionism. The social scientific study of religion seeks to develop generalizations about religion that are capable of being applied across cultures and across time periods. It seeks concepts and measurements that have crosscultural validity. In doing so it adopts a reductionist method. The objections that some scholars have to the application of social scientific theory to religion are often based on a fear of reducing the different manifestations of a religion to simpler factors and in this process loosing the essence, the irreducible sacred core of the religion. The discussion of reductionism and autonomy is complex, and scholars who are sympathetic to a particular religious tradition often find the questions raised vexing and choose to avoid them altogether.

Many years ago H. H. Penner and E. A. Yonan defined four areas of particular importance for a clarification of the scientific status and the research strategies of religious studies. These were the questions of definition, reduction, explanation, and understanding. The authors argued that scholars disqualify themselves by running around the first hurdle in the study of religion, i.e., the question of definition, and by avoiding this problem they also keep away from the other three issues. Indeed, all four questions are closely interrelated and need to be confronted head on, although to hope for an easy solution is naive. Unfortunately, the term "reduction" has become a boo-word employed by scholars who wish to avoid the more complex methodological issues in the study of religion, and this attitude is classically represented in theories that speak of religion as a *sui generis* phenomenon and insist on approaching the subject through the "incredibly obscure operation of understanding" as Penner and Yonan called it (124, 130). The fear of reduction and reductionism often builds on the misunderstanding that it is the phenomena themselves that are reduced rather than our theories about them. Reduction in any normal sense of the word is about reducing theories to simpler theories, and if scholars understand this and still insist that reduction has no place in the study of religion, it must be because they see *theories* about religion as irreducible. This, however, simply amounts to an anti-scientific stance that should have no place in academia.

In the end, what we want to know is whether human beings have so much in common despite obvious cultural differences that it is possible to explain their feelings and their behavior by theories made in a particular culture, or whether human beings, as relativists assert, become human solely through enculturation and have nothing in common on which to base comparison or crosscultural analysis. A psychological theory that seeks to explain some aspect of religion independent of time and place must reduce particular observations of feelings, ideas, and behavior, which are necessarily culture-specific, to observations that are independent of the culture in which the observations were made. Such a theory presupposes a universal human nature, and some scholars would say that no such thing exists. The discussion of cultural relativism is a large topic in anthropology but has never gained the same prominence in the field of religious studies, and since a serious exposition here would bring us too far astray, I will simply assert with M. Argyle and B. Beit-Hallahmi that just as religious beliefs display similarities across cultures so do the psychological mechanisms involved in belief, ritual, and myth (230).

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