

Problems with Paccakabuddhas—Decoding Early Buddhism

A Rejoinder to Steven Collins

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Steven Collins's review (*Religion* 2:3 (July 1992), pp. 271–8) of my publication *Ascetic Figures before and in Early Buddhism: the Emergence of Gautama as the Buddha*, Berlin, New York, Mouton de Gruyter 1990) warrants an extended response for a variety of reasons. In a circumstance where a four-thousand word review has not one positive thing to say about a book, then the principle of natural justice particularly cries out for the author's right of reply. If Collins's review should have the effect of putting off prospective readers of my book then my reply is designed to recuperate their interest. Notwithstanding, it does not take an adept in the art of hermeneutic suspicion to realize the review actually tells us much more about the reviewer than the book. I cannot think that frenzied expressions like 'academic hooligan', 'hearer-bashing', 'fantasy', 'biting the hand that feeds you, with a vengeance' could so easily have poured forth from the pen of normally so gracious a reviewer, had this particular book not hit an emotive nerve—if nothing else!—and sent Collins into an unparalleled fit of moral panic. Indeed, I shall be so bold as to suggest that Collins's reaction to the book has less to do with questions of its scholarly credibility (though his academic posturing would have us believe otherwise): 'the thesis is presented as historical scholarship, and so it must be judged on academic grounds' (p. 274) than with Collins's own narrow, pedantic conception, or preconception, of Buddhist Studies. This means my rejoinder to Collins's review inevitably draws me into a discussion of broader methodological questions of general interest to the wider academic community as well as particular issues pertaining to Buddhist scholarship.

In his review of *Ascetic Figures* Steven Collins has accused me of propounding a doctrine of the Buddha's 'final uniqueness' (p. 274). According to Collins I impute to *Gautama*, the founder of Buddhism, the same final uniqueness that properly belongs to the founders of Christianity and Islam. From this kind of remark, one could easily be led to suppose that my book makes comparisons between aspects of Buddhism and other non-Indian faiths which transparently it does not. Therefore, I want to make clear that it is Collins who introduces this so-called 'comparative' element of discussion in his review, in order to sound-off to the reader, I suggest, his own knowledge of comparative religion, a knowledge which incidentally is defective. Not only does he misrepresent the place of Christ and Muhammad in their own traditions (one Messiah the other Seal of the Prophets) by lumping them together into the same salvific category he also misunderstands the entire nature of my argument. His misunderstanding arises from an inability to distinguish sociological observations from religious and doctrinal judgments. It cannot be denied that a founder of a religion possesses some form of uniqueness solely by virtue of being the founder; the really interesting question is the degree to which the salvific significance of that uniqueness becomes in due course marginalized or intensified by doctrinal interpretation. In terms of the two extremes of the spectrum of uniqueness, the Buddha theoretically or normatively belongs much closer to the non-unique end but in practice and non-normatively reaches out in the other direction. This distinction was already acknowledged a generation ago by

Winston King, *A Thousand Lives Away*, Oxford, Bruno Cassirer 1964 and Melford E. Spiro, *Buddhism and Society*, Berkeley, CA, University of California Press 1970, therefore I shall not rehearse it again here. From his approach to my book one would almost suppose that Collins is unaware that Buddhism was as much an anthropological and sociological reality in its beginnings as it is today. That for historical reasons we have little else but the sacred corpus of scriptures as a resource is neither here nor there when it comes to appreciating this fact. It should not preclude us from using the theoretical framework of these methodologies as interpretive tools, otherwise our picture of the time is restricted to explicating and commenting upon matters of doctrine. To view religious or sacred texts as a possible resource of (in my case) sociological observations about the beginnings of Buddhism seems to me to be no great deal, but somehow it has upset Collins who, himself experiencing a fit of rhetorical hysteria, decides to dub it by the aforementioned attributes, 'academic hooliganism', etc. In adopting this attitude towards textual interpretation, he is unprepared to concede that the *sāvakas* (i.e. redactors) are not to be comprehended simply as custodians of the texts but as themselves products of the religious, social and cultural significations attested within the texts and their contents. My book attempts to determine their particular brand of subjectivities by using features of the framework associated with New Religious Movements as a model. In general categories the model understands the emergence and development of a new religious group or movement in terms of the interactive dynamics of, in this case, ascetico-religious backcloth (environment), charismatic founder (individual agent) group adherents (reception community). It is not simply a question of linear sequence in these variables—A shapes B which shapes C—but A shapes B and C, so that C shapes B as well as B shapes C. One can only assume from the stance taken by Collins in his review that he prefers the former, linear model—the Buddha's self-understanding is reported or repeated by his followers—to my model where the Buddha's self-understanding is interpreted by his followers (in accordance with the psychological and sociological constraints of a newly-founded community intent upon survival and consolidation). That strategies, particular and determinant, are entered into during and subsequent to the lifetime of the founder is simply recognition of the de facto historical situation and not a 'fantasy'.

Where does the figure of the *paccekabuddha* come into this? He is vitally important because he can be used as the secret code for deciphering the relation between the three variables of background environment, founder and community. His obscurity, his paragon status as *buddha*, as well as his doctrinal ambiguity, together disclose the presence of a subtext within these sources. This subtext has something to say about the uniqueness of Gautama. It has nothing to do with pronouncing whether the Buddha is unique or not unique in a narrow either-or religious sense (here, Collins's anxiety over this issue betrays his own fundamentalistic predisposition) but makes it possible to extrapolate the sectarian meaning which the community conferred on him. This is why my term 'alleged uniqueness', which Collins berates, is chosen deliberately and advisedly on my part as a way of showing that there is an inevitable cognitive difference between the way the believer-adherent and the way the outsider, the secular historian or sociologist, perceive a religious founder. That which is apprehended through faith by the believer can only be 'alleged' by the outsider, and I recommend to Collins that explicit acknowledgement of this methodological impasse, even if construed as orientalist, is a more honest approach to the problem than an otherwise unconscious orientalism or what I suspect Collins is guilty of, inverted orientalism or Buddho-centrism. The figure of the *paccekabuddha*, however, is not my only inroad into the subject of

Gautama's uniqueness, although he is the principle interpretative key. Collins takes no account of the books' contribution to the important subject of regal and other epithets—*mahā-muni*, *mahesi*, *cakkavatti*, *dhamma-rāja*, *mahāpurisa*, etc.—used to differentiate the Buddha in the *Sutta Pitaka* (Wiltshire, *Ascetic Figures*, pp. 191–202). It is an endeavour on my part to break new methodological ground in Buddhist Studies by pursuing an equivalent approach to that of New Testament Christology which looks at the significance of technical titles applied to Jesus by investigating their provenance. The Buddha's salvific significance could not be verbally articulated in terms other than the cultural vocabulary available at the time. He was a figure unique to a degree both sociologically and doctrinally; and, by dint of belonging to a specific culture and a particular period of history, to a degree he was not unique. Again, this is not a religious evaluation but an academic one, and Collins's charge that I bite the hand that feeds me just shows he is incapable or, more likely, unwilling to grasp the 'complexity and subtlety' of my own methodological position.

Truth and Revelation

In order to dispel the idea that the Buddha might be interpreted as soteriologically unique in a manner which he thinks horribly and distortedly reminiscent of the Semitic religions, Collins condescends to give the reader a brief lesson in comparative religion. He begins with his own account of the precise soteriological significance of the Buddha in (Pali) Buddhism which, of course, the reader should understand is the correct(ed), definitive version, putting the record straight. Buddhism, he assures the reader, regards its own 'Truth' (with a capital T) 'as universally true, whether or not at any given time there existed a Buddha to discover and preach it' (p. 274). Having its concept of 'revelation' in 'the experiences and statements of a historical, human person', Buddhism is different from Vedic Hinduism where 'revelation' is ahistorical and from Christianity and Islam where 'the historicity' of the 'unique founding figure' is 'intrinsic to the salvific message'. In spite of the authoritative tone with which he makes these statements, his logic is somewhat flawed. Surely it is the case that all 'Truth' (with a capital 'T') is by definition 'universally' true, for to suppose otherwise would involve a self-contradiction (by virtue of the meaning of the word). So Collins cannot plausibly maintain as he does that the nature of Buddhist Truth as 'universal' is somehow different in that respect to the Truth of other religious systems of thought, Hindu, Christian or Islamic. What he is really meaning to say is that the circumstances of the 'revelation' of Truth are not presented as an 'absolute' in Buddhist dogmatics in the same way as these other traditions. Here he is exposing his own Buddho-centric bias (is this itself a form of the orientalism he accuses me of? Where, for instance, does the Orient begin and end?), first, by choosing to make generalized contrasts between Buddhism and other religious traditions and, secondly, in by-passing the 'subtlety and complexity' in other religions' doctrines of revelation. Above all he fails to appreciate the basic categorial distinction between the concepts of 'natural' and 'special revelation' which are present within all the major faith traditions, including Buddhism itself. For all traditions Truth can only be conceived as universally true, it is the circumstances in which this Truth is communicated or mediated (revealed) to humans which represents their different conceptions. Collins writes as if Truth and 'revelation' (notice his use of a lower not upper case 'r' indicating for him, with his own Theravādin presuppositions, revelation is a secondary consideration), were completely separate and distinct from one another. They are, however, inextricably bound together. Once Truth is

defined synthetically then its substantive meaning becomes the 'content' component of revelation. The Truth that '*dhamma* is universal', for example, becomes revelatory truth once it is affirmed. Hence, Collins cannot talk as if Buddhist Truth were something that existed independently of its idea of revelation; in other words, when interpreted analytically his assertion that Buddhist Truth is universally true is simply a form of tautology, and if read as a synthetic statement it necessarily tells us something doctrinally substantive, namely, that it does not come into existence or go out of existence with an historical Buddha (here, unsuspectingly, he is coming, for him, perilously close to declaring the Mahāyāna 'meta-historical' version of Buddhism).

As well as drawing out attention to something that every student of (Pali) Buddhism already knows, that *dhamma* is non-contingent, he correctly indicates that *buddhas*—*sammā-sambuddhas* and *paccekabuddhas*—are the only ones to discover or come to a knowledge of the *dhamma*. In other words, there are only two ways of coming to a knowledge of the Truth: either learning it from a *sammā-sambuddha* or, in rare circumstances, finding it for one's self. For myself, I would have thought, contra Collins, this constitutes a version of revelation which is fairly 'historically-contingent' and not so dissimilar from certain expressions of inter alia Christian and Hindu salvific concepts. It amounts to saying that the Truth is not accessible unless one learns it from a Buddha (or from a disciple of the Buddha, etc) or possibly on one's own (where very special conditions apply). Its equation of Truth with *dhamma* constitutes Buddhism's doctrine of natural revelation, and its doctrine of buddhas its form of special revelation. Collins's mistake is to confuse one with the other and present its natural revelation as if it were special, or at least to exaggerate the one at the expense of the other. In spite of his fidelity to the Theravādin ideal, Collins here writes and thinks too much as an academic. He knows that today's members of the *bhikku-saṅgha* operate on the assumption that salvation, the availability of *nibbāna*, is significantly curtailed by their situation relative to the last and the next Buddha. Seen from this institutional perspective, the doctrine of the universality of the *dhamma*, whilst indubitable from the theoretical standpoint, has negligible soteriological significance practicably. If this is the case then Collins's assertion that 'canonical texts repeatedly stress that it is the truth rather than its prophet which is important' is either a contradiction of the way Theravāda Buddhism is thought and practised today, if correct, or (as I suspect) itself a misrepresentation of the doctrinal contents of the Pali Canon and therefore as an 'absurd misreading of Buddhism' as ever he accuses me of. The salvific role of the Buddha as portrayed in the Pali sources is by no means as clear and unequivocal as Collins claims in his review. There is an indecipherable admixture of natural and special revelation: doctrine of 'faith in' the Buddha is always a precondition of spiritual progress (Wiltshire, *Ascetic Figures*, pp. 73–6); the ontological identity of a Tathāgata is problematic; self-dependence is continually emphasised.

Text and Institution

On another occasion when Collins is setting the record straight and providing his own 'official' version of Early Buddhist doctrine, his words successfully encapsulate one of the dilemmas peculiar to Early Buddhism, a dilemma eventually to be resolved overtly in the Madhyamaka doctrine of the dissolution of all views. The canonical texts, he says, 'are remarkable . . . for their sophisticated intertwining of the ideas that there is a *right view* and that the highest levels of religious experience are beyond the holding of such *views*'. My book argues the early Buddhist community, by adopting a critique of

all views as a doctrinal principle, became involved in a double-bind or a fundamental antinomy that inhibits practice (*Ascetic Figures*, pp. 28–9, 272–82). This viewpoint is not a case of *sāvaka*-bashing' but simply acknowledges the sociological axiom that no human institution, however principled, lives up to its ideals. The degree of shortfall between declared and realized objectives is one of the principal justifications for sociological enquiry. Community creates organizational inertia and dysfunction, a state of affairs that Early Buddhism with its acute pragmatic and realistic sense was itself all too aware of. That is why, on the one hand, the solitary ascetic figure, the *paccekabuddha*, was held up as an ideal, and, on the other, it was seen a Buddha (and his word) was needed to lead and guide the community. Those familiar with the *Nikāyas* and especially the *Vinaya* will know that even the Buddha found the disputes, wrangling and dissension among the *saṅgha* a 'headache'. Collins reserves corrigibility and fallibility for academics; he does not seem prepared to accept the possibility that followers of the buddha, the 'believers' (other than the Mahayānists!!) could not themselves, in spite of their high ideals, be the product of social processes or involved in power relations. By contrast, my book subscribes to the notion of the problematic nature of the relation of doctrine to experience, as well as to the potential dissonance between belief and practice in the religious community. If Collins wants to refer to this procedure as seeing 'through the texts to reveal a hidden truth' (p. 275), then so be it! His apparent alternative is to remain with a tired, dualistic conception (incidentally, which his own mentor, Richard Gombrich, did much to dispel in his book, *Precept and Practice*, Oxford, Oxford University Press (1971) that there must be a one-to-one correspondence between religious praxis and the doctrines enunciated in sacred texts. Not only is this a travesty of the real situation by which a corpus of texts comes into being but fails to appreciate that the relationship between text and institution is not necessarily a case where one party determines the other (even in a circumstance where the text holds absolute authority—the *Qur'ān* in Islam, for example). It has been noticed that there is a temptation for some western academics and scholars to reduce a religion to its official doctrines—a hangover from the cultural ascendancy of Christian Protestantism with its strong emphasis on the doctrinal dimension of religion and the privileging of credal assent. Perhaps this is the albatross hanging round Collins's neck.

Collins rounds-off his discussion of this aspect of my argument with the tetchy comment that but for the canonical texts, in other words the author's source materials, the 'book would have been wholly impossible' and therefore I bite the hand that feeds me with a vengeance (p. 273). This kind of remark I find far more threatening than the 'hooligan' epithet because it has sinister overtones of academic totalitarianism. Certainly it is no indication of the scholarly evaluation he purports to be applying but *ad hominem* 'canon-bashing' of the book's author (who is the hooligan now?). Is his remark saying that persons who disagree with his (the definitive) interpretation do not have the right to interpret Buddhist texts and tradition in a way that is consistent with their own understanding? Are his words intended to deny an author the most cherished right of the academic vocation, the right to freedom of interpretation? By what authority other than that arising out of his own *hubris* does he behave as the official interpreter of the Theravāda community's canonical corpus. If what is written in the book offends that community then it can provide its own representative spokespersons; it does not need a self-appointed academic to tell me that I bite the hand that feeds me. Incidentally, in regard to the two works of fiction he chooses to cite in his review, Elias Canetti's *Auto da Fé* and Hermann Hesse's *The Glass Bead Game*, it is not without some irony that the title of one alludes to the Inquisition, and the theme of the other is

scholarship and state forming a single totality in which dissent is not possible. Collins appears to dislike dissent, but *dissent and the right to dissent are the life-blood of the academic community*. Paying so much lip-service to the ideal of scholarly criteria he overlooks its most basic precepts. Furthermore, Collins ought to be aware that in the interests of preserving academic freedom and integrity, the academic qua academic has no moral obligation to the religious community (though outside of being an academic he may have many obligations); his obligation is to objectivity and truth. The fact that Collins seeks to compound the two is to revive a very dangerous precedent, where scholarship is the handmaiden or tool of ecclesiastical interest. These remarks should not be taken to mean that I am denying phenomenological sensitivity ought to be a principal feature of the scholar's relationship to the sacred texts or to the community to which s/he belongs. Collins, however, seems to be confusing the distinct roles of *academic and practitioner: the exponent (interpreter) becomes their proponent (guardian)*. This, perhaps, is partially understandable given the scholar's impetus to tune into the wavelength of the object of study. But in so far as academics allow themselves willy-nilly to be the propounders of the message then they are in danger of departing from the Religious Studies or phenomenological perspective and straying into 'dogmatic theology'. If they so choose there is no reason why they should not do this, but they need to become aware they are now donning the theologian's hat. I wonder if Collins is aware that for much of his review he writes as a theologian. Certainly he exhibits all the stereotypical characteristics of the parson in the pulpit: sermonizing from 'the high moral ground' to the less informed occupants of the pews; in a frantic state of moral panic sternly warning them against the folk devils who lie in wait to subvert with some horrible heresy their 'right view'; finally, countermanding it with an ample dosage of his own orthodox medicine for his 'ingenuous' audience.

At one particular juncture in his review Collins's frustration appears to get the better of him and he lets slip a remark which, unfortunately for him, betrays his own one-dimensional understanding of Buddhism: 'If such a conspiracy theory of Buddhist history were presented . . . by a (Mahāyāna) Buddhist, it would of course be inappropriate for me to describe it as a fantasy; one would simply say that it could not be justified on academic grounds' (p. 272). I cannot quite see the purpose of making this remark which does not seem to be directed at myself, the author, but at Mahāyāna Buddhism. If you look at it carefully he seems to be disparaging the Mahāyāna Buddhist tradition. Strange—that such a remark should come from a Buddhist scholar! Whilst he is not prepared to go quite as far as to describe the Mahāyāna perspective on the historical origins of Buddhism as a fantasy (though clearly he would like to!) because it would be 'inappropriate to talk of a "religious" position in such terms', he remarks that 'Wiltshire's is different because it is an academic not a religious position'. What then he is really saying is that we all know—nudge-nudge—that the Mahāyāna version is mythical nonsense. I can only think that Collins is motivated to make this allusion to the Mahāyāna, as a subtle way of differentiating it from the Sthaviravāda whose sources he regards as more historically informative. But was it necessary to make *this remark at all, entirely out of context*, given the fact the subject of the Mahāyāna does not come into my book. It looks to me like a clear case of someone using their academic licence to the wrong purpose, someone who maybe has his own preferred agenda with regard to the priority of the Theravāda over the Mahāyāna *weltanschauung*, which seems to be reflected in his contrasting 'reality' and 'fantasy' as his review's theme. He is, of course, thoroughly entitled to have such a view but it is scurrilous to introduce it in the disguise of scholarly objectivity.

Subtleties and Generalizations

Although his review flies a flag for the 'subtle and complex', Collins is by no means exempt from some bland generalizations himself. He maintains, for instance, that 'an extensive literature exists on the origins of asceticism' (p. 272). If this is the case why does he not mention some of it and expose my negligent scholarship? for my own part, I have misgivings about the whole idea of the quest for the 'origins of asceticism'. Which expression of asceticism does he mean? Asceticism is an umbrella term which in the Indian context covers traditions as manifold and diverse as Vedic ritual, the *sannyāsin* institution, theistic traditions, tribal culture as well as the Hindu heterodoxies of Buddhism and Jainism. Therefore, I cannot possibly conceive of what a quest for 'the origins of asceticism' per se could mean. I would also add that I am most unhappy about Collins's implication that my book is that broad and far-ranging in the first place. Its very title, 'ascetic figures before and in', conveys the selective nature of the study. The aspect of asceticism that I do address is fairly specific, namely, the origins of the *Śramaṇa* Movement whose sine qua non is the tradition of religious 'renunciation'.

Another Collins generalization: '(Wiltshire must be aware that) in extensive discussions of the origin of renunciation, a common position has held that it was a pre-Brahmanical, non-Aryan practice which was introduced, perhaps by the kingly class, into Brahmanical religion' (p. 276). For Collins to talk as if there is a common position among scholars, implying that it is unassailably common, is an obvious overstatement of the complexity of the subject. A case in point is the crucial issue of the problematic historical relationship between Upanishadic and Buddhist culture, or Jain and Buddhist, where much of the groundwork investigation still remains to be done. Unfortunately, academic compartmentalization does not create the ideal conditions for cross-specialization: in order to achieve an encompassing picture indology has not only to combine the findings of historians, archaeologists, sociologists and philologists but to cope with a multiplicity of religious traditions like Buddhism, Jainism, Hinduism with their own disparate textual and cultural source-materials. I therefore make no apologies for not extending the scope of my investigation into this vast and uncharted territory. On the other hand, to deduce from my reticence to look into some speculative theory which is far from being substantiated historically or textually that I therefore 'ignore all this and simply announce that the origin of renunciation lay in the rejection of Brahmanism' (p. 276) is to malign the element of sophistication in my approach to this aspect of my study. I confine myself to the textual analysis of stories (including the *Mahājanaka Jātaka*, *Ascetic Figures*, pp. 153–9, the text of which I do not change, as Collins charges (p. 275), but merely draw inferences from narrative inconsistencies) about the mythical archetypal renouncer, with a trans-sectarian identity, called Nimi (Wiltshire, *Ascetic Figures*, pp. 118–66). The results of my analysis point to the existence of a seminal connection between the rejection of Brahmanical cultic ritual and the decision to 'renounce'. To suggest that I should extend this into a quest for the elusive origins of the endemic Indian socio-religious institution of renunciation in pre-Brahmanic, non-Aryan times is something of a preposterous notion almost on a par with the endeavour of some 19th-century ethnographers to discover the 'origins of religion'.

For Collins it appears the larger issues of the subject area have in the main already been decided: within the arena of Buddhist Studies the depiction of doctrine in texts is straightforward and unambiguous; in Ancient Indian history there is a strong quorum of scholarly agreement about the origins of renunciation and asceticism. What has

happened to his favourite criteria of 'subtlety and complexity' here? There is one rule for the larger issues and another for the minutiae, it seems.

Interpretations and Translations

Collins says I do not debate the idea that the term *paccekabuddha*, if derived from the term *pratyaya-buddha*, must have constituted a mistaken understanding on the part of later texts. First, I would remind him that it not my own but Norman's philological researchers (P. Denwood and A. Piatigorsky, *Buddhist Studies Ancient and Modern*, London, Curzon Press, 1983) that suggest the former term is a misconstruction of the latter, as Collins knows well. Norman's evidence becomes very important for my argument because it demonstrates the general possibility that later aspects of a tradition can miscomprehend earlier aspects and, what is more, is shown to have done so in this particular case of the *paccekabuddha* concept, if Norman is correct. (Here it is only fair to add that Norman puts the view that the *pratyeka-buddha* (sic) is based on a concept alien to early Jainism and Buddhism—*ibid.*, p. 102.) Second, the whole of my first chapter is devoted to showing that in its earliest identifiable occurrence (middle-*Nikāya* period) the term *paccekabuddha*, on the one hand, has a doctrinally low-key significance and, on the other, a pronounced cultic significance; whereas in sections of the later *Nikāya* it becomes a term used most often in direct antithesis to *sammā-sambuddha*, to emphasize a doctrinal distinction. Third, given that it is my research which also has supplied some of the evidence for the two distinct portraits of the *paccekabuddha*, I could hardly have written the book without seeing the issue of their connection as crucial and hence attempt to address it. Clearly, as Collins says, if no viable connection can be shown then my thesis collapses. The solution is not so difficult, however, and it turns out (much to Collins's chagrin I am sure) there is no elusive 'profound paradox' underlying it (p. 273). Since Collins has raised the issue without describing its resolution in my book, I shall briefly summarize it here (but only in the most generalized terms) to show that it has not been left undebated (see Wiltshire, *Ascetic Figures*, pp. 123–33 et seq.). At a given time in pre-Buddhist history the possibility of realizing religious transcendence was monopolized by the 'cultus' of Vedic ritual and its Brahmanic hegemonization. In due course a reaction set in but, so strong was the Brahmanic hold on society, breaking with this tradition was only possible by renouncing altogether the society to which it belonged. Those who took this step were called *śramaṇas*. What was at first a singular, unco-ordinated protest gradually took on the momentum of a social movement with rudimentary organizational features. The story of this transition from dissent to counter-culture and, eventually, to becoming an element leavening mainstream society, Brahmanic culture itself, is symbolically expressed in the shift from the concept of *paccekabuddha* (i.e. *pratyaya-buddha*) and *muni* to the concept of *sammā-sambuddha*. In its initial phase the process of renunciation entailed two steps: separating oneself socio-economically from society and all that it represented; from this comes the ideal of 'solitariness', so celebrated in the *Khaggavisāṇa Sutta* and in the *Moneyya Suttas* of the *Sutta-Nipāta*. In addition, it entailed turning from society to Nature as the source of one's religious and philosophical inspiration. The 'cause' or 'trigger' (*pratyaya*) for religious transcendence ceases to be cultic ritual and instead becomes the natural world. Only by stepping outside a society so strongly hieratically-bound and hierarchized was the realization of a 'universal' morality and soteriology possible. The *pratyaya-buddha* is the one who is the prototype renouncer, who sees that 'Nature (not Brahmin) is his instructor' (Wiltshire, *Ascetic Figures*, p. 156). He is a self-become (*sayambhū*) not Brahmin-born figure, whose existence and potential for religious transcendence is no

longer Brahmin-ritual dependent but a form of awareness (*bodhi*) 'causally stimulated' (*pratyaya*) by meditation on the natural world (*ibid.*, p. 295). The story subsequent to this initial moral and conceptual insight, together with its practical imperative, is how gradually it gathers the momentum and acquires the characteristics of a social and religious movement in which alternative groupings (*gana*) arise with their own particular doctrines and forms of praxis (*ibid.*, pp. 127–9). Buddhism was one such grouping or strand of groupings whose informing principle was the social and moral philosophy of the Middle Way. Since Buddhism historically is part of the *Śramaṇa* Movement, then it naturally retained and cherished the old value of 'solitariness' exemplified in the earlier renouncers, *paccekabuddhas*. Consequently, there is no contradiction or paradox: *pratyaya-buddha* marks the original, semantic expression of liberating insight or religious transcendence deriving from contemplation of the non-socialized self and its symbiotic counterpart, the natural world; *paccekabuddha*, the accommodation of that idea within Buddhist doctrine in its post-Gautama environment. Evidence for this interpretation is furnished from, among other things, the representation of the experience of (*pacceka-*) *bodhi* and the renouncing event as simultaneous and indissoluble (*ibid.*, p. 131), as well as the particular soteriological emphasis provided by the *Mahā-purisa* interpretation of a *sammā-sambuddha* (*ibid.*, pp. 191–2).

Collins (p. 273) indicates that my translation 'like a rhinoceros' is a mistranslation of *khaggavisāṇa-kappa* which should read 'like the horn of the rhinoceros'. Either he chose to ignore it or did not himself read sufficiently carefully to notice that I do make reference to the problem of translating this expression in a footnote (*ibid.*, p. 51, footnote 26). Collins seeks to give the impression it has a clear-cut, unequivocal meaning. No doubt he does this in the basis of Norman's discussion of the term in his translation of the *Sutta-Nipāta* (*The Group of Discourses*, vol. II, Oxford, Pali Text Society 1992, pp. 133–6), not available to me at the time of writing. That Norman devotes two full pages of copious notes (and earlier M. A. G. Th. Kloppenborg—*The Paccekabuddha. A Buddhist Ascetic*, Leiden, E. J. Brill 1974, pp. 59–60—at some length too) on whether *khaggavisāṇa* should read 'rhinoceros' or 'rhinoceros horn' would seem to indicate that the matter is far from clearcut, even though he does come down eventually on the side of the latter, largely on the basis of subsequent commentarial interpretation. The Commentaries are not themselves without ambiguity, however, as in one place *khaggavisāṇa* is glossed *khaggamigasiṅga* (*Paramatthajotikā II*, vol. 1. Helmer J. Smith (ed.), London, Pali Text Society, p. 65), in another *khaggavisāṇamigasiṅga* (*Visuadhajanavilāsinī nāma, Apadānaṭṭhakathā*, C. E. Godakumbura (ed.), London, Pali Text Society, p. 204). If the former is taken to mean 'horn of the rhinoceros' then the latter cannot mean the same (as Kloppenborg, *op. cit.*, p. 60 would have us believe) but must mean 'horn of a rhinoceros horn'. In principle the term *khaggavisāṇa* can be translated either way, according to whether it is construed as a *bahuvrihi* compound (J. J. Jones, *The Madāvastu*, vol. 1, London, Luzac 1949, p. 250, footnote 1) meaning the animal itself (after the manner of the Latin designation: *rhinoceros unicornis*) or as 'horn of the rhinoceros', a synecdochical usage.

Collins believes he has discovered a couple of textual inconsistencies or anomalies which raise a question-mark over the idea that there is within Buddhism a clear and

consistent doctrines that *sammā-sambuddhas* and *paccekabuddhas* do not live at the same time. Both of his objections focus on matters of the translation accuracy.

(i) In the first instance (p. 277) he takes exception to Kloppenborg's translation of the word *katādhikārā* as 'paid honour' (Kloppenborg, op. cit., p. 13). He cites Gombrich's preferred rendering, 'acquired the moral qualifications', given in his review (*Orientalische Literaturzeitung*, vol. 74, 1979) of Kloppenborg's work. What Collins appears not to understand is that these so-called moral qualifications are enumerated as types of 'cultic' acts of service towards buddhas; so that Kloppenborg's translation is not that far off the mark after all. Collins then picks up two other words in the same passage, *aladdhamokkhā Jinasānesu* ('without having attained liberation in the dispensations of Jinas') and interprets them not to mean that *paccekabuddhas* are a category of person who 'honoured' or 'served' Buddhas (at the time of Buddhas) but did not achieve *nibbāna* at such time, but to mean 'merely' that *paccekabuddhas* have fulfilled at least one of the necessary conditions without attaining *nibbāna*. This is a perfect example of doing what he accuses me of, 'changing the texts to fit his theory' (p. 275). Clearly the opening stanza of the text in question, in which the Buddha explains to Ānanda the identity of *paccekabuddhas*, is intended to make plain what *paccekabuddhas* were (i.e. must have been) doing during the dispensation (*sāsana*) of Buddha given they could not have realized *nibbāna* at that time; necessarily so or they would not have to wait to become *paccekabuddhas* at an unspecified future time. If *paccekabuddhas* achieve *nibbāna* under a Buddha (*Jina*), ex hypothesi, they could not become '*paccekabuddhas*', those who realize *bodhi* by themselves (*sayam bujjhanti*). Collins's maverick interpretation results from shutting his eyes to the context of the stanzas in which the words occur, as well as to the *Apadāna* (*Avadāna*) genre of texts, which has the pedagogical purpose of showing how prospective *paccekabuddhas* in their various births acquired the moral and spiritual powers that enabled them to make the resolve to become *paccekabodhisattas* and eventually realize *paccekabodhi*. What is here stressed, and reiterated throughout commentarial sources, is that all forms of supramundane attainment (including *sammā-sambodhi* itself—see Wiltshire, *Ascetic Figures*, pp. 88–9) cannot take place without some contact with a Buddha at a given stage in a person's cycle of rebirths (again, showing the crucial soteriological significance of a Buddha—see Winston King, op. cit., p. 171, footnote 2). This contact is essentially non-verbal and comprises a formative meritorious act (*adhikāra*) performed toward the Buddha. Distracted by an apparently compulsive urge to discover 'subtle and complex' clues where none exist, in the hunt for the complicated, Collins misses the obvious: *paccekabuddhas* do meet Buddhas, but in former existences not in their final existence *qua paccekabuddha*.

(ii) The second passage at the centre of this controversy as to whether Buddhas and *paccekabuddhas* can be contemporaries reads *paccekabuddhā buddhe appatvā buddhānaṃ uppajjanakāle yeva uppajjanti* (*Paramatthajotika II* vol. 1. op. cit., p. 51). Collins claims not only that I have mistranslated it but when translated correctly is found to contradict its parallel in the *Visuddhajana-vilāsini* (op. cit., p. 142). He rests much of his case on a translation of de Jong's (*Indo-Iranian Journal* vol. 18, 1976), which he calls 'the correct rendering' (betraying, again, his own rigid notion of what translation involves), which reads '*paccekabuddhas* arise without having met *buddhas* and only at the time of the birth of *buddhas*'. Its *Visuddhajana-vilāsini* counterpart reads unambiguously *paccekabuddha . . . buddhānaṃ uppajjanakāle n' uppajjanti* (*paccekabuddhas* do not arise at the time when Buddhas arise). The first point I would want to make is that even if there is a contradiction between the two passages it in no way undermines my thesis. For two reasons: first, a single swallow does not make a Summer! A single passage affirming the

contemporaneity of *paccekabuddhas* and *sammā-sambuddhas* would comprise the sole exception to doctrinal assertions occurring throughout Pali commentaries and Sanskrit Avadāna sources and elsewhere supported by innumerable stories of *paccekabuddhas* whose setting is always outside the period of the Buddha's *sāsana*. Then there is the obvious point that I should not need to make but it seems for Collins's benefit I am obliged to: all texts, including sacred texts, are subject to scribal error in their written transcription; whether this passage is a particular case in point could only be decided by comparing different manuscript editions. Again, if *paccekabuddhas* are pre-Buddhist ascetics viewed ambivalently through the lens of Buddhist doctrine, a single inconsistency could be construed to favour rather than subvert my general thesis. Having said this, however, certain remarks still remain to be said about de Jong's ('correct') translation, which is not as convincing as Collins supposes. de Jong reads the verb *pāpuṇāti* (neg.abs. *appatvā*) as 'to meet', for example, when its accepted meaning is 'to reach, achieve, attain, arrive at'. A more felicitous rendering of the phrase *paccekabuddhā buddhe appatvā . . . uppajjanti*, therefore, is '*paccekabuddhas* arise, not having attained to *buddhas*', meaning they have not achieved the grade of *sammā-sambuddhas*, that is, definitionally they are distinct. When taken in conjunction with the clause *buddhānaṃ uppajjanakāle yeva*, the complete passage could either read '*paccekabuddhas* (are those who) arise, not having attained to *Buddhas* (i.e. *sammā-sambuddhas*) in the very time when *Buddhas* (i.e. *sammā-sambuddhas*) arise' or, conversely, combining de Jong's rendering of the latter phrase, read '*paccekabuddhas* (are those who) arise, not having attained to *Buddhas* (i.e. *sammā-sambuddhas*) and only in the time of the birth of *Buddhas*'. Also de Jong chooses, for some reason, to translate the cognate terms *uppajjana* and *uppajjanti* by the different English words, 'birth' and 'arise', respectively. In his discussion Collins does not point out that the passage figures as part of a longer sentence. The first part of this sentence addresses the subject of all *buddhas* (*sabbabuddhā*), stipulating when they appear (*uppajjanti*) and do not appear (*n' uppajjanti*) in terms of world cycles (*kappā*). The second part of the sentence, which is the passage whose meaning is disputed, talks about *paccekabuddhas* specifically, indicating their position in the buddhological scheme of things. Unfortunately, in this wider context de Jong's translation has little coherence, for what kind of doctrinally convoluted statement is it that says *paccekabuddhas* exist at the same time as *buddhas* but nevertheless do not meet them. Certainly it is found contradicted by a passage elsewhere (*Manorathapūraṇī*, vol. II, M. Walliser and H. Koppy (eds), London, Pali Text Society 1930, p. 37) which claims that the two kinds of *buddha* inhabit the same territory, namely the Middle Kingdom (*Majjhima-desa*)—but not during the same dispensation. Noteworthy too is the occurrence of a variant reading for *uppajjanakāle*, *anantarā-uppajjanakale*, which could either mean (*paccekabuddhas* arise) 'not in the interval between the time when *Buddhas* arise' or, contrarily, 'outside/immediately following the time when *Buddhas* arise'. In summary the passage may or may not contradict its *Visuddhajana-vilāsini* parallel; at worst it is an insignificant anomaly and not the earth-shattering piece of counter-evidence that Collins would have us believe confirms or disconfirms some fact of profound significance about the *paccekabuddha* concept.

Conclusion

Gombrich has maintained that the term *paccekabuddha* has no empirical object of reference. My book provides an argument that there were empirical referents, ascetic figures, which gave rise to this term, and further argues that their essential 'mystery' or 'obscurity' is not just attributable to the dearth of historical data but owes a great deal as

well to the ambiguity of their relationship doctrinally, as opposed to sociologically, to the historical Buddha and mainstream Buddhism. 'In the space allotted for this review', Collins says, he 'cannot attempt thoroughly to disprove Wiltshire's thesis' (p. 272). By the same token, I have tried to reply to a number of his key criticisms but there is not the time and space to respond to every point he makes. In the meantime I hope Collins will learn to recognize that whereas the believer's report may be taken to testify to both history and to his faith, it does not tell the entire historical story. This applies as much to the Buddhist faith as it does to theistic faiths. To allow Buddhism's acute philosophical sophistication and its non-theism to become a reason why it should be exempted from analysis in terms of cultural determinants and accompaniments is partisan and unwarranted. It is, if I may be permitted to say, a particularly 'subtle and complex' form of orientalism in reverse. It is inequitable to deny to the 'transcendental signifier' of an oriental tradition the same test as other systems of thought have been and are being subjected to by the contemporary canons of academic criticism.

If the tenor of Collins's review is anything to go by then moral panic is evidently no longer confined to the social world but now a feature of academia, allowing me to fulfil one of my long cherished ambitions. Perhaps, secretly I have always wanted to be a 'hooligan' but never had the courage nor received the provocation to become so. Nonetheless, the academic community need have no fear, for traditionally it is the job of the constable to make sure that rowdies are kept off the street and put behind bars where they do not constitute a threat to the academic order. Now, thanks to Collins's review, I am safely 'locked up'.

There is much catching up to do in the field of Buddhist Studies—conceptual as well as textual—and Collins's fundamentalistic approach to scholarship is an obstacle to progress. Meantime, he could do nothing better than immerse himself for a time in the study of *Mayāyāna sūtras* and allow himself to be bewitched by their pure 'fantasy'. If *Śāriputra's* ear can be charmed by the exposition of the *Saddharma-Puṇḍarīka*, there must also be some hope for the venerable Collins.

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