The Vibhajjavādins argued against the view, held by the Sarvāstivādins and Puggalavādins, that some *Arahats* could regress from their state after temporarily attaining it (*Kvu*.I.2). For the Vibhajjavādins, such a person was not yet a true *Arahat*. They also argued against related points which became known as the 'five points of Mahādeva', the earliest reference to which is in their *Kathāvatthu* (II.1–5). The first point is that, even though all *Arahats* are free of sensual desire, a Māra god can cause the bodies of some *Arahats* to emit semen; those with full mastery of meditative accomplishments are immune from this. The second point is that, as an *Arahat* may be ignorant of matters such as a person's name, he may lack a certain kind of *ñāṇa*, or insight. In their original form, in which the present fifth point was probably replaced by the idea that some *Arahats* could regress, the 'five points' were probably *Abhidhamma* debating points, used to sharpen up people's understanding of certain issues and distinctions. They may well originally have been propounded by the Sarvāstivāda school.

The monastic traditions of all surviving forms of Buddhism go back to the Sthaviravāda fraternities, which means that much less is known of the Mahāsānghika ones. The doctrines ascribed to them by others are described in relatively late texts, of the early centuries AD. These broadly differentiate a northern and southern branch, the Ekavyavahārika and Caitra fraternities (which perhaps divided in the second century BC). Whoever originated the 'five points of Mahādeva', they became associated with the 'Mahāsānghikas', or more specifically with the Caitra branch. This may have been originated by the monk Mahādeva, who seems to have propounded a new formulation of the points. Some scholars have held that Mahādeva's points imply a 'downgrading' of an *Arahat* relative to a perfect Buddha. This seems to be incorrect, however. Only a slight 'downgrading' is implied, and this applies to one kind of *Arahat* relative to another. The first has only a limited attainment of the meditative state of *jhāna*, and lacks the higher knowledges which can be developed using these as a basis. The second has these higher knowledges, and can use them so as to be 'skilled in the states of others': he knows the inner states and needs of others, and can use this knowledge in compassionately helping them. Mahādeva's points are thus associated with an increased emphasis on altruistic action.

As regards actual Mahāsānghika texts, some of their *Sutta* collection

and all of their *Vinaya* survive in Chinese translation. In a language approximating to Sanskrit, there survives a text known as the *Mahāvastu*, which also purports to be a *Vinaya* work. It describes itself as a work of the Lokottaravāda, or 'Transcendentalist' school, which is probably the same as the Ekavyavahārikas or 'One-utterancers'. The latter held that *all* the utterances of the Buddha were concerned with what was transcendent. The *Mahāvastu* grew over a number of centuries, perhaps beginning in the late second century BC. While its outlook has often been seen as foreshadowing certain Mahāyāna ideas, it has itself been shown to incorporate whole passages from early Mahāyāna scriptures, and may have been influenced by Mahāyāna concepts up to as late as the fifth century AD. It sees Gotama as 'transcendental' even before his Buddhahood. He leaves the Tusita heaven in a mind-created body to bestow his blessings on the world (see p. 16), and though highly spiritually developed, he pretends to start from the beginning, making 'mistakes' such as asceticism (*Mvs*.I.169–70). As a Buddha, he is an omniscient being who is ever in meditation. No dust sticks to his feet, and he is never tired. He eats out of mere conformity with the world, and so as to give others a chance to make much 'merit' by giving him alms food. For such a world-transcending being, it was felt that all incidents in his life must have occurred for a special reason. The *Mahāvastu* thus gives much attention to the Buddha's biography, and also includes many *Jātaka* tales. In examining his development to Buddhahood, a series of ten stages of the *Bodhisattva* (Pali *Bodhisatta*) career were outlined. This idea was also important in the Mahāyāna, though the details are different. Unlike the Mahāyāna, the Transcendentalists still saw the goal for most people as Arahatship, the way of the *Bodhisattva* being for extraordinary individuals.

THE RISE OF THE MAHĀYĀNA

The movement which became known as the Mahāyāna arose some time between 150 BC and AD 100, as the culmination of various earlier developments. Its origin is not associated with any named individual, nor was it uniquely linked to any early school or fraternity. It may well have arisen at around the same time in the south, north-west and east. It had three main ingredients. Firstly, a wholehearted adoption of the *Bodhisattva*-path, which various early schools had outlined. Secondly,

a new cosmology arising from visualization practices devoutly directed at the Buddha as a glorified, transcendent being. Thirdly, a new perspective on *Abhidharma*, which derived from meditative insight into the deep 'emptiness' of phenomena (see p. 50), and led to a new philosophical outlook. There developed a new orientation to traditional Buddhist teachings and an upsurge of novel interpretations, whose gradual systematization established the Mahāyāna as a movement with an identity of its own.

The Mahāyāna emerges into history as a loose confederation of groups, each associated with one or more of a number of new *Sūtra*s (Pali *Sutta*s). These attained a written form, in Middle Indian dialects, very soon after they were composed. Scribal amendations then gradually transformed them into 'Buddhist Hybrid Sanskrit', which approximated to classical Sanskrit, the prestige language of India. Anyone accepting the new literature as genuine *Sūtras* – authoritative teachings of the Buddha – thereby belonged to the new movement. This did not necessitate monks and nuns abandoning their old fraternities, as they continued to follow the monastic discipline of the fraternities in which they had been ordained. The Mahāyānists remained a minority among Indian Buddhists for some time; though, in the seventh century, perhaps half of the 200,000 or more monks counted by the Chinese pilgrim Hsuan-tsang were Mahāyānist.

Traditionalists denied that the new literature was 'the word of the Buddha' (*Buddha-vacana*), like the early *Suttas*. This early material did include teachings and inspired utterances of the Buddha's major disciples, but these were accepted as 'the word of the Buddha' as he had agreed with the teachings, or because of his general praise for such disciples. Even after these were all dead, some remembered material was added to the *Suttas* if it harmonized well with the existing corpus in style and content. The new *Sūtras* were very different in style and tone, but were defended as 'the word of the Buddha' through various devices. Firstly, they were seen as inspired utterances coming from the still-existing Buddha, through meditative visions and vivid dreams. Secondly, they were seen as the products of the same kind of perfect wisdom which was the basis of the Buddha's own teaching of *Dharma* (Pali *Dhamma*) (*Asta.* 4). Thirdly, in later Mahāyāna, they were seen as teachings hidden by the Buddha in the world of serpent-deities (*nāga*'s), till there were humans capable of seeing the deeper implications

of his message, who would recover the teachings by means of meditative powers. Each explanation saw the *Sūtras* as arising from meditative experiences. Nevertheless, they take the form of dialogues between the 'historical' Buddha and his disciples and gods.

The new *Sūtras* were regarded as the second 'turning of the *Dharma*-wheel' (see p. 23), a deeper level of teaching than the early *Suttas*, with the Buddha's *Bodhisattva* disciples portrayed as wiser than his *Arhat* (Pali *Arahat*) disciples. Because of the liberating truth the *Sūtras* were seen to contain, there was said to be a huge amount of 'merit' in copying them out, and disseminating, reciting, expounding, understanding, practising, and even ritually venerating them. Such claims suggest defensiveness on the part of a new, small movement trying to establish itself. The Mahāyāna *Sūtras* were probably produced by the new breed of charismatic *Dharma*-preachers who championed them. These monks, and some lay-people, directed their preaching both within and beyond the existing Buddhist community, to win converts. This they did by extolling the virtues of perfect Buddhahood, so as to elicit a conversion experience of profound psychological effect. This was the 'arising of the thought of enlightenment (*bodhi-citta*)', the heart-felt aspiration to strive for full Buddhahood, by means of the *Bodhisattva*-path.

The new perspective on scriptural legitimacy led to the Mahāyāna having an open, ongoing 'revelation', which produced a huge outpouring of new *Sūtras* in India in the period up to around AD 650. These were composed anonymously, often by a number of authors elaborating a basic text, to produce works frequently running to hundreds of pages in length. In contrast, the early *Suttas* are ninety-five printed pages long at most, and often only run to a page or two. In certain early *Suttas* such as the *Mahā-samaya* (*D.*II.253–62), the Buddha is a glorious spiritual being surrounded by countless gods and hundreds of disciples. The Mahāyāna *Sūtras* developed this style. In them, the Buddha uses hyperbolic language and paradox, and makes known many heavenly Buddhas and high-level heavenly *Bodhisattvas*, existing in many regions of the universe. A number of these saviour beings, Buddhas and in time *Bodhisattvas*, became objects of devotion and prayer, and greatly added to the appeal and missionary success of the Mahāyāna.

The nature of the Mahāyāna and its attitude to earlier schools

At first, the new movement was called the *Bodhisattva-yāna*, or '(spiritual) vehicle of the *Bodhisattva*'. This was in contradistinction to the 'vehicle of the Disciple' (*Śrāvaka-yāna*), followed by disciples of the Buddha's earlier teachings, who sought Arhatship rather than perfect Buddhahood. It was also contrasted to the 'vehicle of the solitary Buddha' (*Pratyeka-buddha-yāna*), a term used to cover the practice of certain solitary ascetics, mainly of a past age, who were seen to have attained Buddhahood, but who were unable to teach others as a perfect Buddha did. As the new movement responded to criticisms from those who did not accept the new *Sūtras*, it increasingly stressed the superiority of the *Bodhisattva-yāna*, and referred to it as the 'Great vehicle', the *Mahā-yāna*. The other 'vehicles' were disparaged as being the 'Inferior vehicle', or *Hīna-yāna*. The 'greatness' of the new vehicle was seen to lie in three areas: its compassionate motivation, directed at the salvation of countless beings; the profundity of the wisdom it cultivated; and its superior goal, omniscient Buddhahood.

Around AD 200, the *Sūtra* known as the *Saddharma-puṇḍarīka*, or 'Lotus of the True *Dharma*' ('Lotus' for short) developed a perspective which, while hostile to the 'Hīnayāna', sought to portray it as incorporated in and completed by the Mahāyāna. Chapter 2 of the *Sūtra* achieves this accommodation by what was to become a central Mahāyāna concept, that of skilful (*kauśalya*) means (*upāya*). This built on the old idea that the Buddha had adapted the particular contents of his teaching to the temperament and level of understanding of his audience. This was by simply selecting his specific teaching from a harmonious body of teachings. Now he was seen as having given different levels of teaching which might actually appear as conflicting, for the 'higher' level required the undoing of certain over-simplified lessons of the 'lower' level. While the Buddha's ultimate message was that *all* can become omniscient Buddhas, this would have been too unbelievable and confusing to give as a preliminary teaching. For the 'ignorant with low dispositions', he therefore began by teaching the Four Holy Truths, setting out the goal as attaining *Nirvāṇa* by becoming an *Arhat*. The *Arhat* was seen as still having a subtle pride, and as lacking in compassion in his hope of escaping the round of rebirths, thus leaving unenlightened beings to fend for themselves. For

those who were prepared to listen further, the Buddha then taught that the true *Nirvāṇa* was attained at Buddhahood, and that all could attain this, even the *Arhats*, who currently thought that they had already reached the goal. The Buddha has just 'one vehicle' (*eka-yāna*), the all-inclusive Buddha-vehicle, but he uses his 'skilful means' to show this by means of three: the vehicles of the Disciple, solitary Buddha, and *Bodhisattva*. He holds out to people whichever of them corresponds to their inclinations and aspirations, but once he has got them to develop spiritually, he gives them all the supreme Buddha-vehicle. As the *Bodhisattva*-path leads to Buddhahood, it seems hard to differentiate the *Bodhisattva* and Buddha-vehicles. Not all Mahāyāna texts follow this 'one vehicle' perspective; for some follow a 'three vehicle' one in which *Arhats* cannot develop further, but have attained a *Nirvāṇa* which is inferior to Buddhahood.

According to the standards of Arhatship preserved by schools such as the Theravāda, the charge that the *Arhat* is proud and selfish is absurd. By definition, he or she is one who has finally destroyed the 'I am' conceit, the root of all egoism and selfishness. He is also described as imbued with lovingkindness and as compassionately teaching others. The Theravāda still acknowledges that the long path to Buddhahood, over many many lives, is the loftiest practice, as it aims at the salvation of countless beings (*Vism.*13). Nevertheless, while this *Bodhisattva*-path has been and is practised by a few Theravādins (often laypeople), it is seen as a way for the heroic few only. Most have gratefully made use of Gotama Buddha's teachings so as to move towards Arhatship, whether this be attained in the present life or a future one.

The peculiarity of the Mahāyāna was that it urged all 'sons and daughters of good family' to tread the *Bodhisattva*-path. Even so, the stereotype of the Mahāyāna as being more open to lay aspirations does not seem straightforwardly applicable to the early Mahāyāna. In early Chinese translations of Mahāyāna texts, the lay *Bodhisattva* is expected to live a life free of attachment to family, and to aim to ordain as soon as possible. In much of this, he is akin to the ideal devout lay disciple in the Pali *Suttas* (e.g. *A.*IV.208–21). He might reach an advanced spiritual stage, but so might a layperson in the Theravāda tradition, say. Nevertheless, lay practitioners do play a prominent part in several important Mahāyāna *Sūtras*, such as the *Vimalakīrti-nirdeśa*. The call to the *Bodhisattva*-path was inspired by the vision that the huge universe

will always be in need of perfect Buddhas. The person entering this path aspired to be a compassionate, self-sacrificing hero. His path would be long, as he would need to build up moral and spiritual perfections not only for his own exalted state of Buddhahood, but also so as to be able altruistically to aid others by teaching, good deeds, 'merit' transference, and offering response to prayers. While compassion had always been an important part of the Buddhist path (see p. 69), it was now more strongly emphasized, as the motivating factor for the whole *Bodhisattva*-path.

Over the centuries, many monks studied and practised according to both the Śrāvakayāna and Mahāyāna; not infrequently, both were present in the same monastery. The Chinese, in fact, did not come to clearly differentiate the Mahāyāna as a separate movement till late in the fourth century. Moreover, in Eastern and Northern Buddhism, the term 'Hīnayāna' came to be mostly used to refer to the lower level of spiritual motivation and practice which prepared for the Mahāyāna level. In fact, it is a mistake to equate the 'Hīnayāna' with the Theravāda school, both because the term is a disparaging one not accepted by the school, and also because it was used to refer to all schools which did not accept the Mahāyāna *Sūtras* as authoritative. Moreover, these schools also included a *Bodhisattva*-path, so it is incorrect to see them as purely Śrāvakayāna in nature.

5

MAHĀYĀNA PHILOSOPHY

The Mahāyāna perspective is expressed both in *Sūtras* and a number of *Śāstras*, 'treatises' written by named authors. These systematically present the outlook of particular Mahāyāna schools, based on the *Sūtras*, logic, and meditational experience. Each school is associated with a particular group of *Sūtras*, whose meaning it sees as fully explicit; other *Sūtras* may be regarded as in need of interpretation. In India, the Mahāyāna developed two main philosophical schools: the Madhyamaka, and later the Yogācāra. Both have had a major influence on Northern and Eastern Buddhism.

THE PERFECTION OF WISDOM LITERATURE AND THE MADHYAMAKA SCHOOL

Sources and writers

The Madhyamaka school was also known as the Śūnyatā-vāda, the 'Emptiness Teaching', for its key concept is that of 'emptiness', also central to the *Prajñā-pāramitā*, or 'Perfection of Wisdom' *Sūtras*. Among these is the oldest extant Mahāyāna text, the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā*, or '8,000 Lines' Perfection of Wisdom *Sūtra*. Originating in the first centuries BC and AD, its contents were expanded, in the period to AD 300, to form works of varying sizes up to 100,000 lines. In the following century, two short versions were composed, the *Vajracchedikā*, or 'Diamond-cutter', and the one-page *Hṛdaya*, or 'Heart', Perfection of Wisdom *Sūtras*.

The Madhyamaka school, an adherent of which is known as a Mādhyamika, was founded by Nāgārjuna (*c.* AD 150–250), a south Indian monk, philosopher and mystic. The school's foundation-

document is his (*Mūla)-madhyamaka-kārikā*, 'Verses on the (Fundamentals of) the Middle Way'. This argues for what Nāgārjuna sees as the true 'Middle Way' of the Buddha (see p. 69), seeking to convince those who did not accept the Mahāyāna *Sūtras* that a proper understanding of the early scriptures leads inevitably to seeing everything as 'empty'. Many other works are attributed to Nāgārjuna, though several were probably by later writers of the same name. Among the more reliable attributions is the *Vigraha-vyāvartanī*, 'Averting the Arguments', which seeks to overcome objections to his ideas. While his outlook seems close to that of the Perfection of Wisdom *Sūtras*, he does not in fact quote from these, or even refer to the 'Mahāyāna' or '*Bodhisattva*' in the *Madhyamaka-kārikā*. It was left to his other works, if authentic, or his key disciples, Āryadeva and Nāga, to make such explicit connections.

In the fifth century, Buddhapālita and then Bhāvaviveka built up the popularity of the school. The latter improved its logical methods and, around AD 500, developed a new interpretation of Nāgārjuna's ideas, thus forming the Svātantrika-Madhyamaka school. Its interpretation was then disputed by Candrakīrti (late sixth century), who built on the work of Buddhapālita to found the Prāsangika-Madhyamaka school as a definitive statement of Madhyamaka. Candrakīrti's ideas are expressed in such works as his commentary on the *Madhyamaka-kārikā*, the *Prasannapadā*, or 'Clear-worded'. In the eighth century, Śāntarakṣita and his pupil Kamalaśīla added some Yogācāra ideas to those of the Svātantrika-Madhyamaka, thus forming the Yogācāra-Madhyamaka school.

The Śūnyatāvādin orientation

The Perfection of Wisdom literature extols the wisdom (*prajñā*) which is *pāramitā*, literally 'gone beyond' (to *Nirvāṇa*), and also the other 'perfections' involved in the *Bodhisattva*-path. While it and Nāgārjuna's works were clearly for intellectuals, they re-emphasized the Buddha's rejection of all speculative 'views', claiming that *Abhidharma* analytical thinking could lead to a subtle form of intellectual grasping: the idea that one had 'grasped' the true nature of reality in a neat set of concepts. In later Zen, such an endeavour was seen as like trying to catch a slippery catfish in a equally slippery gourd. The new literature also saw the *Abhidharma's* contrasting *Nirvāṇa* with the conditioned *dharmas*

making up a 'person', as the basis of a subtle form of spiritual self-seeking: the desire to 'attain' *Nirvāṇa* for oneself, to *get* something one did not already have. The new texts sought to re-emphasize that the goal was to be attained by totally 'letting go', so as to produce a thought transcending any sensory or mental object as support (*Vc.* sec. 10c; cf. p. 63).

Empty *dharmas* and Conditioned Arising

A key Perfection of Wisdom criticism of *Abhidharma* thought – primarily Sarvāstivādin – was that it did not go far enough in understanding that everything is not-self (Skt *anātman*), or 'empty' (*śūnya*) of self. It understood the 'non-selfness of persons' (*pudgala-nairātmya*), the absence of a permanent substantial self in a person. Nevertheless, it analysed 'persons' down into *dharmas*, each with an inherent 'own-nature', so it was seen not to have understood the 'non-selfness of *dharmas*' (*dharma-nairātmya*). That is, seeing a *dharma* as an ultimate building-block of reality, with an inherent nature of its 'own', is to hold that it can be identified without reference to other *dharmas* on which it depends. This implies that it can *exist* independently, making it a virtual self. Thus *dharma*-analysis, developed as a means to undercut self-centred attachment, was seen as having fallen short of its mark.

Nāgārjuna's critique of the notion of own-nature (*Mk.* ch. 15) argues that anything which arises according to conditions, as all phenomena do, can have no inherent nature, for what it is depends on what conditions it. Moreover, if there is nothing with own-nature, there can be nothing with 'other-nature' (*para-bhāva*), i.e. something which is dependent for its existence and nature on something *else* which has own-nature. Furthermore, if there is neither own-nature nor other-nature, there cannot be anything with a true, substantially existent nature (*bhāva*). If there is no true existent, then there can be no non-existent (*abhāva*); for Nāgārjuna takes this as simply a correlative term denoting that a true existent has gone out of existence. Like Nāgārjuna, the Perfection of Wisdom literature therefore regards all *dharmas* as like a dream or magical illusion (*māyā*). There is something there in experience, and one can describe it well in terms of *dharmas*, so it is wrong to deny these exist; yet they don't have substantial existence either. What we experience does not exist in an absolute sense, but only

in a relative way, as a passing phenomenon. The nature of *dharmas* lies in between absolute 'non-existence' and substantial 'existence', in accordance with an early *Sutta* passage quoted by Nāgārjuna (*S.*II.16–17; see p. 69). This is what Nāgārjuna means by the 'Middle Way'.

The Madhyamaka interpretation of Conditioned Arising sees it as meaning that phenomena are not only mutually dependent for their 'arising' in time, but are so in their very nature. Thus they cannot really be spoken of as separate entities which interact. By 'itself', a thing is nothing. It is what it is only in relation to other things, and they are what they are in relation to it and yet other things. In his examination of the process of seeing (*Mk.* ch. 3), Nāgārjuna argues that there is no activity of vision which is presently not-seeing. Therefore, one cannot say that there is something, 'vision', which may then go on to perform the separate action 'seeing': 'vision' and 'seeing' are mutually dependent, and cannot be separately identified. As the Perfection of Wisdom literature would paradoxically put it, vision is 'empty of' vision. There is, then, no real activity 'vision' which 'sees'. But if vision does not see, then non-vision certainly does not see, so how can one identify a 'seer' who is characterized by his 'seeing'? Without a seer, how can there be anything seen? All such concepts, and the more general ones of subject and object, are meaningful only in relationship to each other. Similarly, what is short depends on what is long; for long and short are correlative concepts. Light is light in relation to darkness; for it is its absence. By such reasoning, Nāgārjuna even says that the 'unconditioned' (traditionally a term for *Nirvāṇa* and, in Sarvāstivādin *Abhidharma*, space) is conceptually dependent on the conditioned, its opposite (*Mk.* ch. 7, v. 33).

Conventional truth and language

The Madhyamaka school holds that confusion over the nature of phenomena arises because people do not understand how the Buddha taught according to two levels of truth: 'conventional truth' (*saṃvṛti-satya*) and profound 'ultimate truth' (*paramārtha-satya*) (*Mk.* ch. 24, vv. 8–9). The concept of two levels of truth already existed in *Abhidharma*. There, 'conventional truths' were those expressed using terms such as 'person' and 'thing'; 'ultimate truth' referred to more

exact statements, expressed in terms of *dharmas*. For the Mādhyamika writers, however, talk of *dharmas* is just another kind of provisional, conventional truth, which ultimate truth transcends.

For the Mādhyamikas, true statements at the conventional level are 'true' because humans agree to use concepts in certain ways; because of linguistic conventions. 'Ice is cold' is true because 'ice' is a term used to describe a form of 'water' which is experienced as 'cold'. The terms of language arise because, from the continuous flux of experience, discriminating conceptualization (*prapañca*) abstracts various segments and takes them to be separate entities or qualities, with fixed natures. These then become focuses of attachment. The language-constructs (*prajñapti*) which are labels for them are inter-related in many ways. They gain their meaning from how they are used, in relationship to other concepts, not by referring to objective referents existing outside language. Yet while language determines how we experience the world, it does not bring things into existence; it too is a dependent, empty phenomenon. A particular 'thing' enters the human world by being discriminated through a name or concept, but this exists in relation to a 'something' to which it is applied: both exist in relationship to each other (*Mk.* ch. 5).

Emptiness

In the Śūnyatāvādin perspective, each phenomenon lacks an inherent nature, and so all are said to share an empty 'non-nature' as their 'nature'. Thus one *dharma* cannot ultimately be distinguished from another: the notion of the 'sameness' of *dharmas*. Their shared 'nature' is 'emptiness' (*śūnyatā*). As the Heart *Sūtra* says, 'whatsoever is material shape, that is emptiness, and whatsoever is emptiness, that is material shape' (and similarly for the other four factors of personality). 'Emptiness', though, is not some ultimate basis and substance of the world, like the *Brahman* of the *Upaniṣads*. It implies that no such self-existent substance exists: the world is a web of fluxing, inter-dependent, baseless phenomena. Nāgārjuna, in fact, equates emptiness with the principle of Conditioned Arising; for this logically leads to it (*Mk.* ch. 24, v. 18). Emptiness, then, is an adjectival quality of '*dharmas*', not a substance which composes them. It is neither a thing nor is it nothingness; rather it refers to reality as incapable of ultimately being pinned down in concepts.

Some physicists have seen modern physics as containing parallels to this perspective. When the 'solid' objects of common-sense reality were first analysed, they were seen to consist of empty space and protons, neutrons and electrons. Classical physics saw these as hard, indivisible particles, the ultimate building blocks of matter; but further analysis showed them to consist of a whole range of odd particles such as 'quarks', whose nature is bound up with the forces through which they interact. Matter turns out to be a mysterious field of interaction, with 'particles' not being real separate entities, but provisional conceptual designations.

Critics from the early schools saw the emptiness-teaching as implying that the Four Holy Truths were themselves empty, thus subverting the Buddha's teaching. In reply, Nāgārjuna argued that it is the notion of *dharmas*-with-inherent-nature which subverts the Four Truths (*Mk.* ch. 24). If suffering had own-nature, it would be causeless and eternal, and could never be brought to an end. If the Path had own-nature, it could never be gradually developed in a person; for he or she would either have it or not have it. In a world of entities with own-nature, all change and activity would be impossible; everything would be static and eternal. It is because everything is empty that there can be activity, including spiritual development. An analogy, here, is that the decimal number system would collapse without the quantity zero (a concept which derives from India).

Skilful means and the transcending of views

Nāgārjuna emphasizes that ultimate truth, indicated by talk of emptiness, completes rather than subverts conventional truth. Indeed, it can be understood only if the conventional Four Holy Truths have been understood (*Mk.* ch. 24, v. 10). This relates to the concept of 'skilful means', which in the Śūnyatāvādin perspective is developed to mean that *all* Buddhist teachings – including Śūnyatāvādin ones – should be regarded as provisional devices. The teachings, especially on Conditioned Arising, are simply to induce people into a skilful frame of mind: one in which there can be insight into inexpressible ultimate truth, transcending all such teachings.

Nāgārjuna's method in the *Madhyamaka-kārikā* is to criticize all views and theories about ultimate entities or principles. This he does by showing that their necessary consequences (*prasanga*'s) contradict either the views themselves, which are thus reduced to absurdity, or experience. Moreover, he seeks to show that *all* logically possible views on specific topics are untenable. In this, he uses his method of 'four-cornered (*catuṣkoti*) negation', the device of examining and refuting all the four logically possible alternatives on a topic: x is y, x is non-y, x is both y and non-y, x is neither y nor non-y.

In chapter 1, he examines theories on causality. The first logical possibility is 'self-production': that an effect arises from a cause ultimately identical with itself, part of the same underlying substance (as in the Hindu Sāṃkhya school). This would lead to pointless self-duplication, however, and if a thing reproduced itself, there would be nothing to stop it continuing to do so for ever. The world is not observed to be like this. If the same substance is said to manifest itself differently only when conditions are appropriate, '*self*-production' has already been given up.

The second possibility, 'other-production', is that, ultimately, an effect arises from a cause that is inherently 'other' than it, with a different 'own-nature'. Here, Nāgārjuna argues that, if really distinct entities existed, all would be equally 'different', so anything could 'cause' anything. To say that a cause and its (different) effect always occur together is to *explain* nothing about how causality works. What is inherently 'other' than something cannot be its cause. A 'cause' is not a 'cause' in itself, then, but only in relation to its 'effect' (v. 5).

The third theory is that causality involves both 'self-production' and 'other-production'. If this means that parts of the cause and effect are the same, and part different, the problems of the first two views apply. If it means that all of the cause is both the same as and different from all of the effect, this is impossible. The final possibility is that things originate by neither 'self-production' nor 'other-production': spontaneously, without a cause. But if this were true, everything would be an unpredictable chaos, which it is not. This final view, note, is not that of Nāgārjuna. His 'position' seems to be that at the conventional, phenomenal level, causality can be observed, with 'one' thing causing 'another' to originate; yet none of the logically possible theories of causality can explain how it 'works'. This is because, at the ultimate level, no real 'things' can be found which 'originate'. Nāgārjuna also analyses such concepts as motion and time (chs. 2 and 19), and purports to show that our notions of them are inherently self-contradictory.

The Mādhyamikas' talk of emptiness, then, is intended as the antidote

to *all* theories: 'Emptiness is proclaimed by the victorious ones (Buddhas) as the refutation of all views; but those who hold "emptiness" as a view are called incurable' (*Mk.* ch. 13, v. 8). Nāgārjuna examines the views of others as a form of spiritual therapy, to help liberate them from all constricting viewpoints. In doing this, he claims not to have any presuppositions of his own, but to work with those of his opponents, and conventional logic, performing a kind of logical judo. The insights which this produces are also to be deepened by meditative contemplation of phenomena.

The Svātantrika-Madhyamaka school held that logic itself is not empty, but has an autonomous existence (*svatantra*), such that valid positive statements can be made from a Madhyamaka perspective. The inferences made at the conventional level are a real bridge to at least some aspects of ultimate truth. The Prāsangika school, on the other hand, emphasized that the Madhyamaka contained only a negative dialectic, to disprove the views of others, and that ultimate truth completely transcends all logic, words and concepts. This seems to accord with the Perfection of Wisdom *Sūtras*, which certainly sought to avoid setting up any views, or indeed to 'say' anything: 'There is nothing at all to understand. For nothing in particular has been indicated, nothing in particular has been explained' (*Asta.* 38).

Ultimate truth and thusness

At the ultimate level, even talk of 'emptiness' is to be finally given up: as the things which are said to be empty do not ultimately exist, one cannot even say that 'they' are 'empty' (*Mk.* ch. 22, v. 11): 'the emptiness of all *dharmas* is empty of that emptiness' (*Panca.*196). The ultimate truth, then, is that reality is inconceivable and inexpressible: 'When the domain of thought ceases, that which can be stated ceases' (*Mk.* ch. 18, v. 7). The Perfection of Wisdom literature contains an elusive series of subtle allusions to that which lies beyond words. An indicator which it uses for this is the notion of *tathatā*: 'thusness' or 'suchness'. The thusness of something, equivalent to its emptiness, is its very as-it-is-ness, what it is such as it is, without conceptually adding anything to it or taking anything away from it: it is simply 'thus'. Thusness is 'immutable and unchangeable, undiscriminated, undifferentiated', it belongs to nowhere, is neither past, present nor future, and

the same thusness is found in all *dharmas* (*Asta.*307). 'True reality' (*tattva*) is 'not conditioned by something else, peaceful, not elaborated by conceptual proliferation (*prapañca*)' (*Mk.* ch. 18, v. 9). Ultimate truth is known when spiritual ignorance is transcended and the limitations of language are totally seen-through, with no further generation of, or attachment to, dream-like linguistic constructs, just perfect evenmindedness. Empty, conditioned phenomena are seen as worthless and are thus no longer constructed, so that insight into ultimate truth is attaining the bliss of *Nirvāṇa* (*Mk.* ch. 24, vv. 10 and 24).

Nirvāṇa and *saṃsāra*

In Śūnyatāvādin thought, the *Nirvāṇa* which is thus attained is not seen as a *dharma* different from conditioned *dharmas* of *saṃsāra*, 'there is not the slightest bit of difference between the two' (*Mk.* ch. 25, v. 20). How can this be? The very fact of the 'unconditioned' *Nirvāṇa* being contrasted, at the conventional level, to *saṃsāra*, makes it exist only *in relationship* to it, and thus empty. *Nirvāṇa*, indeed, was held to be emptiness (Pali *suññatā*) even by the early schools of Buddhism; for it was seen as empty of defilements and beyond conceptualization in any positive terms. The conditioned and the unconditioned cannot, then, be differentiated because 'both' are found to 'be' emptiness. What is more, while *Nirvāṇa* is seen by all schools of Buddhism as 'unborn', 'deathless' and not impermanent, in the Śūnyatāvādin perspective, conditioned *dharmas* can be similarly described. This is because, if they lack own-nature, and do not exist as such, they cannot be said to 'originate' or 'cease'. Consequently, they cannot be said to be impermanent (not that they are permanent): they remain 'unoriginated' (the Heart *Sūtra*), 'unborn', and without differentiation from *Nirvāṇa*. Thus *Nirvāṇa* is not attained by the eradication of anything real, namely defilements, but by the non-construction of the conditioned world of *saṃsāra*: for 'all *dharmas* are nirvanic from the very beginning'. *Nirvāṇa* and *saṃsāra* are not two separate realities, but the field of emptiness, seen by either spiritual ignorance or true knowledge.

The idea that *Nirvāṇa* and *saṃsāra* are non-different plays a central role in the Perfection of Wisdom perspective. Once 'established', there followed other conclusions with consequences for the whole of Mahāyāna thought. Most importantly, the *Bodhisattva* need not seek to

escape *saṃsāra* to attain *Nirvāṇa*. He can tirelessly work to aid 'suffering beings', sustained by the idea that *Nirvāṇa* is something already present in *saṃsāra*. As an advanced *Bodhisattva*, he directly experiences this non-duality of *saṃsāra* and *Nirvāṇa*, this realization being fully matured when Buddhahood – *Nirvāṇa* in the highest sense – is reached. The nature of Buddhahood, 'Buddhaness' (*buddhatā*), is of course emptiness, as is the nature of everything. Because of this, all beings are seen to have a nature which is non-different from Buddhaness. Without this, how could ordinary frail beings eventually become omniscient Buddhas? The task of beings, then, is not to 'attain' something that they do not already possess, but to *uncover* and know their Buddhaness. The task of the *Bodhisattva* is to skilfully help them in this.

THE YOGĀCĀRA SCHOOL

Sources and writers

The Yogācāra school is rooted in the ideas of certain *Sūtras* which began to appear in the third century AD. The most important is the *Saṃdhinirmocana* ('Freeing the Underlying Meaning'), which sees itself as a 'third turning of the *Dharma*-wheel', surpassing the first two 'turnings': the teachings on the Four Holy Truths, and the Perfection of Wisdom *Sūtras*. The *Mahāyāna-abhidharma Sūtra* is another. The influential *Lankāvatāra* ('Descent into Lankā') *Sūtra*, which gradually developed from around AD 300, also contains many Yogācāra ideas in its unsystematic summary of Mahāyāna teachings. The Yogācāra was founded as a separate school by Asanga (fourth or fifth century), seen by tradition as a monk ordained in the Sthaviravādin Mahīśāsaka fraternity. His 'teacher' was one Maitreyanātha, or Maitreya, who may have been a human teacher, or the heavenly *Bodhisattva* Maitreya. In time, Asanga converted his half-brother Vasubandhu to the Mahāyāna. The scholarly debate as to whether the brother was the same 'Vasubandhu' who composed the Sarvāstivādin *Abhidharma-kośa* is as yet unresolved.

Asanga's works include the *Mahāyāna-saṃgraha* ('Compendium of the Mahāyāna'), the *Abhidharma-samuccaya* ('Collection of *Abhidharma*'), this being a Yogācāra version of the *Abhidharma*, and a commentary on the *Saṃdhinirmocana Sūtra*. Several other works

associated with Asanga are attributed by either Chinese or Tibetan tradition to 'Maitreya', in the sense that this *Bodhisattva* inspired Asanga to write them. The most philosophically important of these is the *Madhyānta-vibhāga* ('Discrimination between the Middle and Extremes'). Vasubandhu's most important works are: the *Triṃśatikā-kārikā* ('Thirty Verses'); the *Viṃśatikā-kārikā* ('Twenty Verses') and his commentary on this, the *Vimśatikā-Vṛtti*; the *Tri-svabhāva-nirdeśa* ('Exposition of the Three Natures'), and his commentary on the *Madhyānta-vibhāga*, the *Madhyānta-vibhāga-kārikā-bhāṣya*.

The Yogācāra orientation

Asanga and Vasubandhu not only developed the characteristic ideas of the Yogācāra school, but also sought to systematize and synthesize all the strands of the Mahāyāna, and some Śrāvakayāna ideas. While Vasubandhu was primarily a theoretician, and gave the school its classical form, Asanga's writings were deeply rooted in the practice *dhyāna* (Pali *jhāna*), or meditative trance. Accordingly, 'Yogācāra' means the 'Practice of Yoga', referring to the *Bodhisattva's* path of meditative development. While the Mādhyamikas and Yogācārins had their philosophical differences, they both had Buddhahood as their goal, and can be seen as being complementary in their approaches. The Mādhyamikas had an analytical, dialectic approach to reality, emphasizing *prajñā* (wisdom); the Yogācārins emphasized *samādhi* (meditative concentration) and the withdrawal of the mind from sensory phenomena. Just as the early Buddhists sought to transcend limiting attachment by seeing phenomena as impermanent, unsatisfactory and not-self, so the Mādhyamikas sought this by seeing them as 'empty', and the Yogācārins sought it by seeing perceived phenomena as mental constructions.

The Mādhyamikas regarded the normal experience of the world as a product of conceptual constructions, but had not concerned themselves with the psychological details of this process. The Yogācārins addressed this question and related ones. For example, how are memories and the effects of past karma transmitted over time, if a being is composed of a stream of momentary events, as described in the *Abhidharma*? Here, the Yogācārin answer built on those of earlier schools, such as the Sautrāntikas, who had posited a series of momentary karmic 'seeds'

reproducing themselves over time, and the Vibhajjavādins, who had posited *bhavanga* consciousness, which gave continuity to personality even through dreamless sleep. In continuing to wrestle with such questions, the Yogācārins developed a new *Abhidharma* literature set within a Mahāyāna framework.

Central to the Yogācāra is an emphasis on consciousness; indeed an alternative later name for the school was Vijñāna-vāda, the 'Consciousness Teaching'. In early Buddhism (see ch. 3), the flux of consciousness is seen as the crucial link between rebirths, and a transformed state of consciousness is associated with *Nibbāna*. The perceiving mind is also that which interprets experience so as to construct a 'world', and can be the basis for experiencing the world-transcending *Nibbāna*. In the Yogācāra, the role of the mind in constructing the world is so emphasized that all concepts of an external physical reality are rejected: the perceived world is seen as 'representation-only' (*vijñapti-mātra*) or 'thought-only' (*citta-mātra*). In this, the Yogācārins went one step beyond the Sautrāntikas' theory, in which objects were seen as real, but were only known by inference from the representations that they caused in the mind.

The Yogācāra and the Madhyamaka

Both the Mādhyamikas and the Yogācārins saw themselves as preserving the Buddhist Middle Way between the extremes of nihilism (everything is unreal) and substantialism (substantial entities exist). The Yogācārins criticized the Mādhyamikas for tending towards nihilism, while the Mādhyamikas criticized the Yogācārins for tending towards substantialism, setting up mind as an ultimate entity when all was equally 'empty'. The Madhyamaka assessment is reflected in a fifth century schema, later used in Tibet, which grades the key schools according to their grasp of the truth: (i) Vaibhāṣika Sarvāstivāda, (ii) Sautrāntika, (iii) Citta-mātra (Yogācāra), (iv) Madhyamaka. To reach the Madhyamaka level, however, the other schools had to be progressively studied. Moreover, the Yogācāra-Madhyamaka later developed as a powerful syncretistic school. The 'substantialism' of the Yogācārins is in fact more apparent than real, as their theories on mind are essentially tentative devices, 'skilful means' to be used in conjunction with a series of meditations in leading the practitioner beyond all mental constructions, including all theories, to a direct experience of ultimate reality.

For them, one who cannot get beyond words and theories is like someone who mistakes a finger-tip for the thing that it is pointing at (*Lanka*.196).

The Yogācārin view of the role and nature of consciousness

In early Buddhism, the personality factor of consciousness (Pali *viññāṇa*, Skt *vijñāna*) was referred to equally as *viññāṇa*, *citta* (thought) or *mano* (mind-organ; Skt *manas*), and was seen to be of six types: eye-, ear-, nose-, tongue-, body- and mind-consciousness, each related to a particular sense-organ. In the Yogācāra, however, two more types of consciousness or *citta* are added, making a total of eight. As in earlier *Abhidharma*, each *citta* is seen as consisting of a series of momentary events, accompanied by an appropriate collection of 'mental states' (*Trims*. v. 3–8).

The first addition is made by treating *manas* as a separate type of consciousness, a process of subliminal thought. This organizes data from the six consciousnesses into the experience of a meaningful world, according to set categories. It contains the basis both for correct judgements and misperception of reality, and for both skilful and unskilful karma, which are generated by volitions accompanying the six consciousnesses (*Trims*. vv. 6–8).

Manas and the six consciousnesses represent only the surface of the mind, which is active and oriented towards 'objects'. There is, though, an eighth form of consciousness, which is the *āśraya*, or 'basis' of the rest; it is their fundamental root. Devoid of purposive activity and unaware of objects, it is an underlying unconscious level of mind known as *ālaya-vijñāna*, the 'storehouse consciousness'. Asanga equates it with what the *Mahāyāna-abhidharma Sūtra* calls the 'Realm (*dhātu*) without beginning in time, which is the common basis of all *dharmas*' (*Ms*. ch. 2).

When a person performs actions, or karmas, traces are left on his unconscious: 'seeds' of future karmic effects sink into the *ālaya*, a receptacle which actively stores them. The *ālaya* consists of a series of *cittas*, accompanied by both karmic 'seeds' and the 'seeds' of potential defilements and memories. These all reproduce themselves over time, thus accounting for the continuity of personality through death and periods of unconsciousness, when the seven active consciousnesses are absent (*Trims*. v. 16).

The *ālaya* is also said to contain some intrinsically pure 'seeds', the source of religious striving. They arise from the profound depths of the *ālaya*, the *param-ālaya* or '*ālaya* which is beyond' (*Lanka*.272). In the She-lun school, the earliest Chinese version of the Yogācāra, this is designated as a ninth, 'taintless', consciousness. This depth-aspect of *ālaya* is seen to be beyond the dualisms of subject and object, existence and non-existence, and is known as the *Dharma-dhātu*, the '*Dharma*-realm', or as 'thusness', equivalent to emptiness and *Nirvāṇa*. It is a 'level' of *ālaya* which goes beyond the individual unconscious, and can be seen as a universal reality which lies 'within' all beings. The *Lankāvatāra Sūtra* (pp. 46–7, 38–9) sees the seven active consciousnesses as related to the *ālaya* as waves are related to the ocean: they are not really separate from it, but are simply perturbations in it. These perturbations do not affect the ever-still depths of the ocean-like *ālaya*, though.

Ālaya acts as the basis of the active consciousnesses by actually projecting them out of itself. The Yogācāra, then, regards a person's perception of the world as a product of the unconscious mind. This notion is related to the observation that, in any situation, we only really notice what our mind is attuned to perceive, be this something that interests us, threatens us, excites us, or disgusts us. We only ever get 'edited highlights' of the possible field of perception. What we perceive is clearly related to our nature, which is the product, among other things, of our previous actions (cf. pp. 40 and 57). The Yogācārins emphasized this to such an extent that perception is regarded as essentially a process of imagining, in which the mind generates mental constructions that are perceived as a world.

The Yogācāra philosophy explains the 'mechanics' of the process of construction as follows. Within the *ālaya*, the karmic 'seeds' are matured by the subtle influence of *vāsanā*'s or perfuming 'impressions' generated by ingrained attachment to mental constructions. The 'seeds' then ripen in the form of the flow of experiences which consists of *manas* and the six consciousnesses, each oriented to its own type of 'object', of which it is a 'representation' (*vijñapti*) (*Lanka*.44, and *Trims*.v.2). *Manas* splits the seamless flow of experience into an experiencing 'subject' and an experienced 'object', or 'grasper' and the 'graspable'. Building on this, it then generates other forms of delusory discrimination (*vikalpa*). In this process, language plays a large role. It is suffused with the subject/object distinction and provides concepts

under which 'significant' forms can be separated out from the flow of experience and named, as supposedly fixed entities (*Lanka*.226).

While all that is actually experienced is consciousness and its mental concomitants, then, discrimination produces the fiction that these are experiences undergone by an 'inner' subject, and are of a separate 'external' world, along with 'inner' feelings and emotions. For the Yogācārin, the flow of experiences is actually neither 'internal' nor 'external' – it just is. A rough analogy is afforded by the situation of watching a two-dimensional television picture (cf. p. 84), where the mind perceives in it a three-dimensional world and may also identify with one of the characters depicted. The analogy is, of course, imperfect. It still contains a watcher of the television, whereas in the Yogācāra view the watcher 'himself' is like the television picture! *Manas* takes the supposed 'subject' as a real permanent self or I, partly due to a confused awareness of the *ālaya* which is its basis. This I-delusion is then the source of cravings related to 'objects', and of a variety of volitions which generate karmic 'seeds' – to be stored in the *ālaya* till they ripen into the future flow of experience. Thus the cycle of life and lives continues, with *ālaya* and *manas* mutually conditioning each other.

The world as 'thought-only'

The Yogācāra view has been generally taken as a form of philosophical idealism, which denies the reality of the material world and asserts that reality is mental. It can certainly sound idealist: 'Visible entities are not found, the external world is merely thought (*citta*) seen as a multiplicity (of objects); body, property and environment – these I call thought-only (*citta-mātra*)' (*Lanka*.154). The intention of the school, though, is not to propound a mere philosophical viewpoint, but to develop a perspective which will facilitate enlightenment. In doing this, it develops many tentative theories which aim to articulate what is immediately experienced, and rejects theories which go beyond this to discuss a 'material world'. If an extra-mental reality exists, we never experience it. Our actual 'world' is merely 'thought' or a 'representation' produced by consciousness. Conscious experience may contain some shadowy reflection of extra-mental existences, but is so massively conditioned by mental constructs that it is these that must be the focus of analysis and spiritual change.

To support this view, meditative experience is appealed to. In this,

concentration on an object can generate a mental image such as a coloured disc of light, which in time becomes more vivid and clear than objects seen with the open eyes. Asanga argues that, however real such images appear, they are clearly nothing apart from thought. If this applies to experiences had in a calm, less deluded state, how much more does it apply to ordinary experience? He also argues that, as some advanced meditators can change earth into water, then these are not really outside the mind. Moreover, dreams show that one can have pleasant and unpleasant impressions when there is no real object to cause them (*Ms.* ch. 2, vv. 6–8, 4, and 27).

This perspective is not taken to mean that we all inhabit totally private worlds. The similarity in people's karmic 'seeds' means that our 'worlds' have much in common, and what one being does can help or harm another. Vasubandhu asserts that this is not through the action of material bodies and external speech, but by one being's mental 'representations' causing an effect in those of another. While beings are only streams of mental phenomena, these do interact (*Vims.* vv. 18–20).

The three natures

While the Mādhyamikas talk in terms of 'two levels of truth', a central Yogācārin concept is that of three apparent 'natures' – the three *svabhāva*'s. Each is a perspective on experience which concerns both a type of real or supposed knowledge, and a degree of reality that this knowledge relates to. As in the Madhyamaka, the intention is to move from one's ordinary, vitiated experience to that of the highest degree of truth or reality. For the Yogācārins, there is also an intermediary level of reality, though the Mādhyamikas regarded this as an impossible mix of reality and unreality.

The first of the three 'natures' is the *parikalpita*, the '(mentally) constructed' or 'imagined'. This is what is structured by the subject/object discrimination: the commonsense world of self, people and things, and 'objects' of thought such as mental and physical *dharmas*, all wrongly seen as having real permanent essences ('own-nature'). Its 'degree' of reality is zero: it is just an illusory appearance. As a kind of 'knowledge', it is taken in by the illusion, engrossed in its general forms and details (*Lanka.*67).

The second 'nature' is the *paratantra*, the 'other-dependent'. This is the level of relative reality, in the form of the flow of changing mental

phenomena (i.e. *dharmas* properly understood), arising dependent on one another as in the system of eight forms of *citta* and accompanying mental states (*Mv.* ch. 1, vv. 9–10). It also refers to the relative knowledge which comprehends these phenomena as mutually dependent and impermanent. It is not the highest level of reality, however, for it is the very process which generates the subject/object duality and so projects the 'constructed' nature: it is the 'construction of the unreal' (*Tsn.* v. 4).

The third and highest 'nature' is the *pariniṣpanna*, the 'absolutely accomplished'. This is the absolutely real level, devoid of the subject/object duality, in which knowledge is perfected due to directly knowing the world as 'representation only'. While the 'constructed' is like the water in a mirage, and the 'other-dependent' is like the mirage itself, the 'absolutely accomplished' is like the complete lack of real water in the mirage. Or the first is like the illusory hairs seen by a person with cataracts, the second is like that which produces these illusions, and the third is like the unconfused objects seen by one with sound eyes.

Because it knows that the imaginary 'constructed' is empty of a real 'nature', and that the inter-dependent phenomena of the 'other-dependent' level are also empty of a real inherent 'nature' (as in Madhyamaka thought), the 'absolutely accomplished' is knowledge of the very empty 'nature' of all phenomena: emptiness. This 'nature' is also known as thusness, the inconceivable as-it-is-ness of reality. As the knowledge which knows it has totally transcended the subject/object illusion, it *is* the very thusness which it knows. Thusness is the very nature of reality and the three 'natures' are just three different perspectives on it, of varying degrees of adequacy (*Tsn.* vv. 18–21).

While the Mādhyamikas see 'emptiness' as simply indicating the absence of inherent nature in phenomena, the Yogācārins see it as itself positively existing – in the form of the non-dual nature of 'construction of the unreal'. Reality, understood according to the true Middle Way, is empty of duality but not empty of existence. 'Construction of the unreal', the 'other dependent' is not totally unreal, but exists 'within' emptiness, being neither separate from nor identical to it, just as impermanent things are not separate from nor identical to impermanence (*Mvkb.* ch. 1, vv. 3 and 14). It has an 'ineffable nature' known only by Buddhas (*Vrtti.* v. 10).

The Yogācāra path and goal

The first two natures are the basis of defilements and thus of suffering. The Yogācāra path therefore aims to understand the dualistic 'constructed' so as to undermine the 'other-dependent', its basis, till this is finally cleansed away from the 'absolutely accomplished'. In deep meditative calm, the mind gradually overcomes the tendency to interpret experiences as indicating external 'objects'. As this tendency wanes, consciousness is still grasped at as a real 'subject', more real than 'objects'. Finally, the full realization of 'representation-only' comes when the utter transcending of any 'object' leads to the collapse of any notion of 'subject', which is merely its dualistic contrast (*Tsn.* v. 36). Thus arises the experience of transcendent knowledge, which is an undifferentiated unity, beyond the subject/object duality and concepts of any kind, even 'thought'. It is thought which is no longer what is usually meant by 'thought', as it is without object, contentless (*Trims.* vv. 28–9 and commentary; cf. p.63). This is the realization of the 'absolutely accomplished', and is said to be perception of the 'unlimitedness' of the *Dharma*-realm, enlightenment (*bodhi*) (*Tsn.* vv. 37–8).

The path to *Nirvāṇa* is a gradual development of virtue, meditative concentration, and insight into the emptiness of 'other-dependent' phenomena. The final attainment comes suddenly, however, as a momentous spiritual transition, a shattering upheaval which takes place at the root of the mind – in *ālaya* in its form as *manas*. This event is known as the 'reversal of the basis' (*āśraya-parāvṛtti*). It is where the usual flow of the worldly mind suddenly stops, so that the six sensory consciousnesses no longer present information. Having stopped discriminating 'objects' in the flow of the six consciousnesses, *manas* 'turns round' from these and attains direct intuitive knowledge of *ālaya* as its basis. Due to this, *ālaya* is no longer capable of carrying karmic 'seeds', the source of the consciousness of 'objects', as its deluding nature is seen through. The intuition thus penetrates to the non-dual depths of *ālaya*, the *Dharma*-realm which is ultimate reality, so that everything is seen as 'thought-only' in the highest sense. In the mirror of *manas*, the unknowing *ālaya* has gained knowledge of its inner nature, so that *Nirvāṇa* is 'the *ālaya*-consciousness which is realized inwardly, after a reversal has taken place' (*Lanka.*62). *Nirvāṇa*, then, is the transfiguration of *saṃsāra*, not its abolition: as in the Madhyamaka, 'there is no difference between *saṃsāra* and *Nirvāṇa*' (*Lanka.*61).

An advanced *Bodhisattva* who has experienced *Nirvāṇa* does not rest content with this. He turns again to *saṃsāra* in the service of others, which the *Mahāyāna-saṃgraha* calls his *Nirvāṇa* 'without standstill' (*apratiṣṭhita*). He does this by meditatively sending forth a seemingly physical 'mind-made body' (*Lanka.*136, *Ms.* ch. 2, v. 27), in which he tunes into and perceives the apparent 'world' of those he is seeking to aid.

Purity and defilement

The Yogācārins reflected much on the relationship between a 'pure' ultimate reality and a defiled, impure *saṃsāra* found 'within' it. 'Reversal' does not bring about a change in ultimate reality; for what is changeable is impermanent. Its purity is intrinsic to it: 'As is pure gold, water free from dirt, the sky without a cloud, so it is pure when detached from imagination' (*Lanka.*131). Emptiness is seen as undefiled due to its very nature, the brightly shining state of the transcendental *citta*, but this purity is hidden by arriving defilements (*Mv.* ch. 1, v. 23, cf. p. 56). Vasubandhu comments that the existence of these alien defilements (at the 'other-dependent' level) explain why people do not attain liberation without effort, while the shining nature of ultimate reality explains why the effort to attain purity will not be fruitless. He also comments (on *Mv.* ch. 5, v. 21): 'The *Dharma*-realm, being like space, is pure by nature, and the duality "pure" and "impure" is only adventitious, arriving later'. That is, only in contrast to 'impure' defilements is the ultimate reality 'pure'; in itself it is beyond all such dualities.

TATHĀGATA-GARBHA THOUGHT

According to the Chinese tradition, Indian Mahāyāna thought consisted of the Madhyamaka, Yogācāra and 'Tathāgata-garbha' schools. The Indian and Tibetan traditions did not count the latter strand of thought as a separate philosophical school, though, as it originated in the period between the origin of the Madhyamaka and Yogācāra, its ideas were in some ways intermediary between theirs, and they both drew on these ideas. Moreover, there were no great Indian teachers associated with this strand of thought. This was probably because it was not intended as a well worked-out system, but arose among those seeking to articulate and support aspects of religious practice. Nevertheless, it made an important contribution to Mahāyāna thought.