

ORIENTAL PHILOSOPHIES

JOHN M. KOLLER

SECOND EDITION



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JOHN M. KOLLER

Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute

M
MACMILLAN

TO JACK AND RUTH JOYCE

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Preface

DURING THE FOURTEEN YEARS since the first edition of this book was published I have received numerous comments from readers suggesting changes to make in a new edition. I am delighted to have had this opportunity to revise the book, and grateful for the helpful suggestions I have received. Most of them have been incorporated into this second edition. The review questions that have been added at the end of each chapter were suggested by teachers using the book as a text in courses dealing with Oriental philosophies and Asian religions. The addition of an annotated reading list at the end of each chapter is a response to student suggestions. A new chapter, "Theistic Developments: Vishnu, Shiva, and Kali," has been added in response to many suggestions that new material be added explaining the philosophy of Hinduism. A considerable amount of new material has been added to chapter 3, explaining the main features of Vedic thought, and a fuller explanation of *yoga* has been provided in the fifth chapter. In chapter 9, I have added a section on the philosophy of Gandhi. The chapter on Zen has been rewritten to give a better sense of Zen thought and practice. In Part III, I have revised the chapters on Confucianism, Taoism, and Neo-Confucianism. And the final chapter has been expanded to include the thought of K'ang Yu-wei, Chang Tung-sun, Hsiung Shih-li, and Fung Yu-lan along with that of Mao Tse-tung.

My reasons for revising the book are the same as for writing it originally: to help readers understand the Asian mind, and to see how philosophical questions have been considered in the major Oriental traditions. My con-

viction that one of the most urgent tasks each of us faces is to construct a philosophy of life which reflects the wisdom of the Eastern as well as Western traditions is stronger than ever. If this new edition helps the reader in any way to construct such a personal philosophy my efforts will have been amply rewarded.

I take this opportunity to thank all who have contributed to this book. My students and my colleagues at Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute have challenged me to put forth my best effort. Comments from readers have helped me to see various issues more clearly and have led to many of the changes in this new edition. To my teachers, particularly Shri Krishna Saksena, Charles A. Moore, Kenneth Inada, and Chung-ying Cheng, I owe a great debt which I can only hope to repay through my own teaching. My greatest debt is to my wife, Patricia. Her love and encouragement over the years have sustained and nourished my life. Without her at my side I would have had neither the courage nor the strength to write and revise this book. Our children, John Thomas and Christy, have enriched our lives; I hope this book will help enrich theirs.

JOHN M. KOLLER
Troy, New York
June 26, 1984

Preface to the First Edition

THIS BOOK has been written with two basic aims in mind. First, it is intended to make possible an understanding and appreciation of Oriental thought and life. Second, it is intended to introduce the reader to certain fundamental and characteristic problems in philosophy as they are considered in the Oriental traditions. This is done in an attempt to make it possible for the reader to understand some of the answers given to the basic questions in life. The author is of the opinion that the traditions of Oriental philosophy are no less valuable and important than the traditions of Western philosophy. The assumption that a person can be introduced to philosophy only by considering the major thinkers and problems in the Western tradition is so obviously parochial that it is amazing that it continues almost completely unchallenged.

In the West philosophy is usually thought of in terms of the classical philosophers of the Western world. But in terms of understanding the nature of philosophy and philosophical problems there is no special advantage to studying philosophers who happen to have lived in the Western Hemisphere; geography is irrelevant here. Of course, there is an advantage in studying Western philosophers if the aim is not merely an understanding of the nature of philosophical activity and familiarity with certain philosophical positions, but also that of using the philosophical traditions as a means of understanding those ideas which have shaped the present condition of man in the Western Hemisphere. But by the same token, there is an advantage in studying the Oriental philosophers, for in addition to acquainting

one with the nature of philosophy, one also gains understanding of the present condition of man in the Orient.

The reader who is accustomed to reading only Western philosophy will find it tempting to pigeonhole some of the material in this book as religion, or psychology, or even etiquette. He may dismiss certain areas of discussion (and the rest along with it) as "unphilosophical." But why should we force Western definitions of philosophy on the Orient? So far as I know, no one has ever demonstrated the superiority of Western concepts of philosophy over Oriental. And until this is done (if, indeed, it were possible!) Eastern thought should be studied within its own terms.

The important questions of life are no different for the Orient than for the West. Questions like, What is man? What is the nature of the universe in which man lives? In what does the good life consist? and, How can we know if the claims we make about the nature of man, the universe, and the good life are true? are basic philosophical questions, common to human beings the world over because they arise whenever and wherever man reflects upon his experience. Of course, these questions arise in different contexts and assume different forms for people living at different times and in different places, and the answers given may differ considerably. But these are the questions of man as man, arising out of the curiosity attending man's self-conscious nature and the innate urge to improve the conditions of his existence, and no human being can live without considering them. The question is not whether to answer or not answer these questions, but whether the answers will be explicit, thought-out, and well-argued, or whether they will be merely assumed, hidden, and implicit in the actions that constitute the history of a person.

On the easy assumption that an understanding of these questions as posed by philosophers and an analysis of the answers they have given will enable a person to understand and evaluate better the answers he or she gives to these questions, it seems obvious that it is important to know the forms and contexts of basic philosophical questions and answers, not just as they have appeared in the Western tradition, but as they have appeared in the whole philosophical tradition of man. This knowledge is needed to provide the imagination with the insights into man's experience which are required to provide an interpretation of experience that is worthy of the human animal. Ignoring the philosophical traditions of a majority of mankind and thereby depriving oneself of insights and knowledge needed for constructing a satisfactory philosophy of life is surely rash and unjustified.

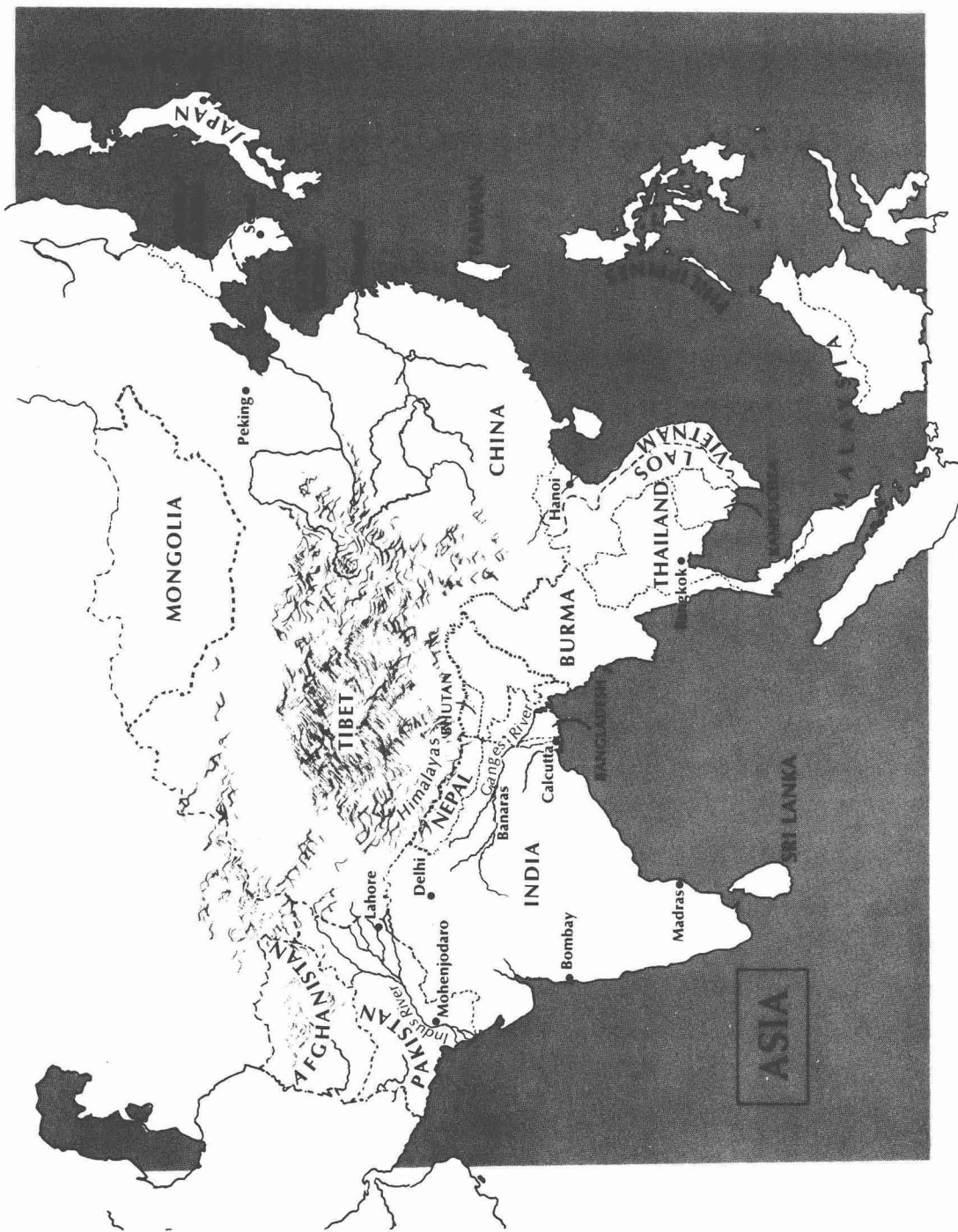
The individual's need to construct for himself a philosophy of life is, I believe, imperative in our time. Therefore I have endeavored to make

available to the lay reader some of the insights of the Oriental philosophers. To understand these ideas does not require any previous acquaintance with technical philosophy. Philosophical concepts and theories universally have their origin in, and depend for their justification and meaning upon, ordinary human experiences with which everyone is familiar. So it is possible, by tracing the relevant reflections on various aspects of experience, to show how a particular concept or theory developed, what it means, and how it can be justified. The present work not only does not assume prior acquaintance with philosophy, but should itself serve as an introduction.

These are among the reflections that have led to this attempt to provide an introduction to philosophy emphasizing the Oriental philosophical traditions. There is no doubt that in our own age we put our very existence in jeopardy by allowing ourselves to remain ignorant of at least half of the world. Never has the need been greater to come to an understanding of all the peoples of the world. Consequently, upon the assumption that to understand what a people have done and what they are likely to do it is necessary to understand their basic attitudes about life as reflected in their views of the nature of man, the good life, the nature of the universe, and the ways in which we can know reality, it is imperative that the philosophies of the Orient be studied and understood. Thus, the two functions which this book is intended to serve—to introduce the reader to an understanding of the Asian mind and to indicate the different ways in which fundamental philosophical questions have been considered in the Orient—grow out of the same basic concern, the concern to maintain and improve human existence.

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Introduction

THE STORY OF PHILOSOPHY is the story of human reflection on life. The problems of life are the source and touchstone of philosophy. If all of our practical needs were provided for and our human curiosity satisfied it is unlikely that there would be any philosophical activity in the world, for the two principal sources of philosophy are curiosity about self and the world and a desire to overcome all kinds of suffering. Practical needs and theoretical curiosity lead to philosophical activity because people are naturally self-reflective. We not only have needs and curiosity, but we are aware of ourselves having these needs and this curiosity. We see ourselves in the context of our surroundings as beings struggling to overcome suffering and trying to uncover the mysteries of existence. In this way we come to examine the kind of beings we are, the kind of world we live in, and the sources of value and knowledge that are so characteristic of our existence. It is the self-reflective activity that constitutes philosophy.

The fundamental questions of philosophy are, "Who am I?" and "How should I live?" As we reflect on our experience of life and confront the inevitability of our death, we cannot help but wonder about the meaning and value of life. Since our most important activities are aimed at preserving life and giving it value, it is natural to reflect on how we should live and who we are, developing ideas about the nature of human existence and the good life.

But how do we know these ideas are correct? Reflective thought calls each idea into question, seeking criteria against which to test its validity. In

the process new ideas are generated, questioned, and either accepted or rejected. Seeking to know for sure who we are and how we should live, we not only reflect on our own experience, but we consider the ideas of others who have thought carefully about the fundamental questions of life.

Because these are the most important questions we can ask, we must challenge every proposed answer, testing it in every way we can to make sure it is reliable. Each formulation of the question and every aspect of every answer given must be examined from every side. Eventually even the criteria used to test our answers are challenged. How do we know when an answer is true? What is knowledge? How do we know that what we call knowledge is *really* knowledge?

Reflecting on what we know about our knowledge may seem very far removed from the ordinary problems of life. It is not enough that we ask a question or propose a solution; we must also attempt to justify the proposed solution as a satisfactory answer to the original question. If we discover that what we took to be knowledge was, in fact, opinion, perhaps mistaken opinion, then our whole theory which seemed to explain the meaning and value of life may have to change. And when it does, our orientation toward the good life—and our idea of the best means of achieving it—may also change. Could anything be more practical or closer to everyday life than that, even if it be abstract and subtle?

The charge is sometimes made that philosophers dwell in ivory towers, that they concentrate on logical subtleties and abstractions, ignoring the major concerns of life. There is, of course, the possibility that speculation may cease to be connected with the fundamental issues of life. When this happens philosophy loses much of its relevance; it no longer serves the ordinary person in reflecting upon his or her own existence in the world, failing to provide the materials needed for the construction of a personal philosophy of life. In the West we are accustomed, in large part, to thinking of philosophy as something apart from life, too abstract and academic for the ordinary person.

In the East the gap between the philosophers and the ordinary people is not nearly as great. Oriental philosophers keep closely in touch with life, returning to the touchstone of human experience to test their theories. The ordinary people stretch beyond their day-to-day concerns and struggle to see their existence in perspective, to understand it in philosophical terms.

This difference between East and West, which is, to be sure, a matter of degree, is due in part to the Oriental insistence on the wholeness of life and knowledge. Easterners tend to avoid cutting up and compartmentalizing life and knowledge. The result is that they do not separate the various fields of

philosophy, such as theory of knowledge, theory of being, theory of art, theory of action, theory of political organization, etc. There is no clear-cut distinction between Eastern philosophy and Eastern religion, between philosophy and psychology, or philosophy and science. One consequence of this is the Oriental tendency to take philosophy seriously. Philosophy in the Orient is not an abstract academic matter with little or no relevance to daily life—it is regarded as life's most basic and most important enterprise.

In China, after Confucianism became the state philosophy, it was impossible to get a government job without knowing the works of Confucius. Chinese history tells of many kings, artists, and scholars who were philosophers. The Chinese regard thought and practice as inseparable from each other, as aspects of the same activity. The central problems of Chinese philosophy are reflected in the questions "How can I achieve harmony with all humanity?" and "How can I achieve a harmony with nature?"

These two questions turn out to be closely related, because as philosophy developed in China, there was an increasing tendency to identify nature with human nature. To the extent that this identification took place, the problem of achieving harmony with nature was the problem of being in harmony with oneself. In turn, being in harmony with oneself was regarded as the necessary basis for achieving a harmony with other people. Being in harmony with oneself and in harmony with the rest of humanity is "the highest good" in Chinese philosophy. Because the basic nature of man is seen as essentially moral, the dominant concern of much Chinese philosophy has been moral. The questions "How can I be good?" and "What is the basis of goodness?" are basic questions throughout the history of Chinese philosophy.

India is famous for the high regard it accords the seeker of wisdom and for its reverence and respect for wise persons. The accumulated practical wisdom of India takes the form of self-discipline (*yoga*) aimed at the total integration of life. In order that this discipline be available to all persons, it is channeled through the activities of worship and devotion, the activities of work, and the activities of knowledge and concentration. These paths of self-discipline are simply the philosophic wisdom of the ages being put into practice by the people. The source of this wisdom of self-discipline is to be found in that combination of deep, intense personal experience and highly abstract rational explanation which is so characteristic of the Indian mind.

Three thousand years ago, the sages of India were pondering the nature of the self, and the nature of ultimate reality. Pursuing these two questions the philosophers of the Upanishads came to the wonderful realization that in our deepest being we are one with the ultimate nature of reality. The

immediate practical problem arising from this discovery was how to realize this inner Self and thereby identify with the very essence of the universe. The search for an answer prompted a variety of developments in *yoga* and religion as well as the construction of moral and social philosophies. The theoretical problems raised by this discovery centered around the difficulty of relating the multiplicity and diversity of experienced reality with the Upanishadic insight into the unity of all existence. Furthermore it was difficult to ascertain how knowledge of such an ultimate reality could be achieved. These problems—which can be formulated in terms of questions about the basis of morality, the nature and function of society, the means of valid knowledge, the principles of logic, and the relation between appearance and reality—all have a common basis in the practical question “How can we achieve the spirituality that is our true nature?”

In Buddhist Asia millions have embraced the teachings of the wisdom-seeking Gautama Siddhartha as the solution to all of life's sufferings. The central problem of Buddhism is that of overcoming suffering. The essential teachings of the Buddha revolve around the questions, What is suffering? How does it arise? How can suffering be eliminated? and, How should we live so as to achieve a suffering-less existence? These questions, however, cannot be answered without inquiring into the nature of the self that suffers and the nature of the world that constitutes a source of suffering for the self. The question, How is suffering caused? leads to a general theory of causation which shapes the theories of self and reality which constitute Buddhist metaphysics. The problems of justifying the claims made about the nature of the self and the nature of reality lead to a general theory of logic and knowledge. Thus, the eminently practical problem of overcoming suffering provokes the reflections that constitute the theoretical principles of Buddhist philosophy.

Despite the many differences between the philosophies of India, China, and Buddhist Asia, they share a common concern with living and being as well as with learning and knowing. Consequently, philosophy and the philosophers have primary importance in all Oriental cultures. In order to understand the life and the attitudes of the Oriental peoples, it is necessary to understand their philosophies. In order to understand their philosophies, it is necessary to look to the traditions in which these philosophies developed and through which they continue to nourish the cultures of Asia.

PART ONE



THE HINDU SYSTEMS