Chapter 2
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Introduction

This chapter will attempt a presentation of Gautama’s approach to, and ideas of, human beings and their main characteristics. Gautama the Buddha seems to have been a person with such a practical turn of mind as to make him apparently anti-speculative, anti-theoretical and anti-metaphysical. His main concern was suffering humanity and the way to liberation from suffering and cessation of suffering. It is possible also that he was adapting his instruction to a quite unsophisticated audience. His discourses are therefore quite unsophisticated, quite direct and didactic. Such didactic and practical discourses usually presuppose some minimum of theoretical elements or serve as a basic foundation in which theoretical elements can be planted as may be required for the answering of questions and solution of problems that inevitably arise as the practical discourses of the Buddha gain wider and wider audiences, spread to new regions and new regional cultures if not new religions. In the process, many fusions had to be made with new horizons. Theoretical and speculative questions could not be avoided.

No wonder then that Buddhist schools began to emerge with variant versions of the Buddha’s teachings in India, China, Burma, Japan and other parts of Eastern Asia. Hence the risk of losing the single-mindedness of the Buddha’s discourses on the one hand, and also the enhancement of philosophico-cultural
systematization on the other. This systematization, as has been said, required a rounding off of Buddha’s practical ethics by elements of anthropology, psychology, epistemology and even metaphysics. This partly accounts for the divergences we find in Buddhist thought from region to region and school to school. Moreover, every variant and every school would like to be recognized as the authentic teaching of the Buddha. These claims add to the problem of discerning accurately the Buddha’s original teaching. Bearing this in mind let us attempt to have a glimpse into the Buddhist approach to reality in general and to the human reality in particular. This will be followed by a presentation of Friar John’s approach.

**Gautama Buddha**

**The Human Condition**

Let us recall the phenomena that for Gautama were the most striking during the four trips referred to above\(^1\). The ancient traditions are almost unanimous in recording these instances as landmarks in Gautama’s development. Disease, old-age and death are so essential to the human condition that they become the doorway to Gautama’s approach to reality. On the fourth trip when Gautama encounters some human joy in an ascetic who has given up all attachments to the world, Gautama has a glimpse of the solution to the problem of suffering. Suffering then, sounds an important note in Gautama’s understanding of the human reality. Let us try to obtain an in-depth understanding of the full meaning
and range of suffering for Gautama Buddha. The Pāli word for suffering is *dukkha*, one of the most important terms in Buddhist literature.

**Dukkha**

Dukkha in Sanskrit (*duhkha* in Pāli) is commonly translated as suffering, stress, anxiety dissatisfaction, unhappiness, pain, sorrow, grief, affliction, distress, misery, trouble, difficulty, uneasiness, uncomfortable, unpleasant, etc. ²

Within the Buddhist tradition, dukkha is commonly explained according to three different patterns or categories. In the first category, dukkha includes the obvious physical suffering or pain associated with giving birth, growing old, physical illness and the process of dying. These outer discomforts are referred to as the *dukkha of ordinary suffering* (*dukkha-dukkha*). In a second category, dukkha also includes the anxiety or stress of trying to hold on to things that are constantly changing; these inner anxieties are called the *dukkha produced by change* (*vipariṇāma-dukkha*). The third pattern or category of dukkha refers to a basic unsatisfactoriness pervading all forms of life because all forms of life are impermanent and constantly changing. On this level, the term indicates a lack of satisfaction, a sense that things never measure up to our expectations or standards. This subtle dissatisfaction is referred to as the *dukkha of conditioned states* (*saṃkhāra-dukkha*).³ This *dukkha* is so widespread, so all-pervasive in human experience, so inescapable for so many that it may be identified as a basic reality and considered as “the First of Noble Truths”.

The Buddha states the Noble Truth of Sorrow thus:
“Now, monks, this is the Noble Truth as to sorrow. Earthly existence itself is sorrowful. Decay is sorrowful. Disease, death, union with the unpleasing, separation from the pleasing is sorrowful; the wish which cannot be fulfilled is sorrowful; in brief, the desirous, the transient individuality is sorrowful”.

When we view the world with dispassionate discernment, it becomes very clear that there is only one problem in the world, that of suffering (dukkha); all other problems are included in this one. As the Buddha says: “The world is established on suffering, is founded on suffering” (dukkhe loko patithito). To this one single problem we give different names: economic, social, political, psychological and even religious. They all emanate from one single problem, dukkha i.e. unsatisfactoriness. All the problems too bring about unsatisfactoriness and our entire endeavour is to put an end to them, but they beget each other. The cause is often not external, but in the problem itself. We often think that we have solved problems; but they only crop up in other forms, in diverse ways. We are constantly confronted with fresh ones and we make fresh efforts to solve them – thus the process of problems and solving of them goes on and on. Sufferings appear and pass away only to reappear in other forms.

The cause of Dukkha - Craving

Now what is the cause of dukkha? It is given in the Second Noble Truth:

It is this craving (‘thirst’, tanhā) which causes re-becoming, re-birth, accompanied by passionate pleasure, and finding fresh delight now here, now there, namely, craving for sense pleasures (kāmatanhā), craving for continued
existence, for becoming (bhava-tanhā), and craving for non-existence, for self-annihilation (vibhava-tanhā). Thus it is clear that craving is the cause of suffering. We see here the seed and the fruit, action and reaction, cause and effect. This craving or ‘thirst’ keeps existence going. Life depends on the desires of life. It is the motive force behind not only the present existence, but past and future existence too. The present is the result of the past and the future will be the result of the present. This is a process of conditionality. This force is compared to a river (tanhā-nadi); for like a river when it is in flood submerges villages, suburbs, towns and countries, craving flows on continuously through re-existence and re-becoming. Like fuel that keeps the fire burning, the fuel of craving keeps the fire of existence alive. The Buddha says: “Monks, I do not see any other single fetter bound by which beings for a long, long time wander and hurry through the round of existence, like this fetter of craving (tanhāsamyojanam). Truly, monks, bound by this fetter of craving, beings do wander and hurry through the round of existence.”

Is this craving which is the cause of so many miseries, wanderings and aberrations something sinful? It seems certainly it is something wrong. But Buddhist scholars as well as others dispute about the notion of sin in Buddhism.

**Buddhist Notion of Sin**

There are different opinions regarding the understanding of sin in Buddhism. Christoph von Furer-Haimendorf, an ethnologist says: “In Buddhist thinking the whole universe, men as well as gods, are subject to a reign of law.
Every action, good or bad, has an inevitable and automatic effect in a long chain of causes, an effect which is independent of the will of any deity. Even though this may leave no room for the concept of ‘sin’ in the sense of an act of defiance against the authority of a personal god, Buddhists speak of ‘sin’ when referring to transgressions against the universal moral code.”

But on the other hand American Zen author Brad Warner states that in Buddhism there is no concept of sin at all. The Buddha Dharma Education Association also expressly states: “The idea of sin or original sin has no place in Buddhism.” Zen student and author Barbara O'Brien has said that “Buddhism has no concept of sin.” Chögyam Trungpa specifically disagreed with the notion of “original sin” saying: “The problem with this notion of original sin or mistake is that it acts very much as a hindrance to people. At some point it is of course necessary to realize one’s shortcomings. But if one goes too far with that, it kills any inspiration and can destroy one’s vision as well. So in that way, it really is not helpful, and in fact it seems unnecessary.” Walpola Rāhula also disagreed with the notion of sin saying “In fact there is no ‘sin’ in Buddhism, as sin is understood in some religions.”

However, Buddhism does speak of five cardinal sins. They are:

- Injuring a Buddha
- Killing an Arhat
- Creating schism in the society of Sangha
- Matricide
Patricide

In Theravada Buddhism Anantarika-karma is a heinous crime, which through karmic process brings immediate disaster.¹⁷

In Mahayana Buddhism these five crimes are referred to as pañcānantarya (Pāli), and are mentioned in The Sutra Preached by the Buddha on the Total Extinction of the Dharma.¹⁸ They are considered so heinous that a Buddhist or a non Buddhist should avoid them. According to Buddhism, committing such a crime would prevent him or her from attaining the Arhat stage.¹⁹

Referring to the Anguttara Nikāya Dr. S. Radhakrishnan says: “Buddha had to oppose the prevailing view and declare that virtue and happiness, vice and suffering are organically related.”²¹

Chapter IX of the Dhammapada speaks about evil and has a few references to sin. Here are a few verses:

“A man should hasten towards the good, and should keep his thought away from evil; if a man does what is good slothfully, his mind delights in evil.”²²

“If a man commits a sin, let him not do it again; let him not delight in sin: the accumulation of evil is painful.”²³

“Even an evil-doer sees happiness so long as his evil deed does not ripen; but when his evil deed ripens, then does the evil-doer see evil.”²⁴

“Let no man think lightly of evil, saying in his heart, It will not come nigh unto me. Even by the falling of water-drops a water-pot is filled; the fool becomes full of evil, even if he gather it little by little.”²⁵
“Let a man avoid evil deeds, as a merchant, if he has few companions and carries much wealth, avoids a dangerous road; as a man who loves life avoids poison.”

“If a man offend a harmless, pure and innocent person, the evil falls back upon that fool, like light dust thrown up against the wind.”

According to the teaching of the Dhammapada, some people are born again: evil-doers go to hell, while righteous people go to heaven and those who are free from all worldly desires, attain Nirvana.

Asserting the universality of evil (and of sin?) it says: “Not in the sky, not in the midst of the sea, not if we enter into the clefts of the mountains, is there known a spot in the whole world where a man might be freed from an evil deed.”

Elsewhere too we find allusions to evil and sin in the Dhammapada:

“The evil done by oneself, self-begotten, self-bred, crushes the foolish, as a diamond breaks even a precious stone.”

“Not to commit any sin, to do good, and to purify one’s mind, that is the teaching of (all) the Awakened.”

“They who see sin where there is no sin, and see no sin where there is sin, such men, embracing false doctrines, enter the evil path.”

“They who see sin where there is sin, and no sin where there is no sin, such men, embracing the true doctrine, enter the good path.”

And finally, advising one to keep oneself from evil and sinful company, it says:

“It is better to live alone, there is no companionship with a fool; let a man walk alone, let him commit no sin, with few wishes, like an elephant in the forest.”
Thus we see that although there is no unanimity among the scholars regarding the concept of sin in Buddhism, we see various references and allusions to it in the Dhammapada.

**Cause of Dukkha – Ignorance and Illusion**

Suffering is not only due to the individual’s own agency (sayamkāra); for he is part of the world of sentient beings and therefore the environment influences him in diverse ways. In the same way man’s action, his behaviour is not solely determined by external agency (para-kāra); for then there will be no place for man’s freedom of will and moral responsibility. The doctrine of the middle path, MadhyamaPratipat or Dependent Arising, which avoids the two extremes, explains that all dhammas, things or phenomena, are causally dependent on one another and interrelated.

The doctrine of conditionality (idhappaccayatā) cannot be labelled as determinism, because in this teaching both the physical environment and the moral causation of the individual function together. The physical world influences man’s mind, and mind influences the physical world, of course in a higher degree, as the Buddha says: “the world is led by the mind” (citenaniyatiloko).\(^{35}\) However, we must not mistake the conditional arising for a mechanical law of causality or a first beginning. As the Buddha says: “Notions and speculations concerning the world (loka-cintā) may lead to mental derangement.”\(^{36}\) “O monks, this wheel of existence, this cycle of continuity (samsāra) is without a visible end, and the first
beginning of beings wandering and hurrying round, wrapt in ignorance (avijja) and fettered by craving (tanhā) is not to be perceived.”

Thus we see that the Buddha considers craving and ignorance as the causes of all suffering.

Pratītyasamutpāda

Pratītyasamutpāda (Sanskrit; Pāli: paticcasamuppāda) is commonly translated as dependent origination or dependent arising. The term is used in the Buddhist teachings in two senses:

- On a general level, it refers to one of the central concepts in the Buddhist tradition—that all things arise in dependence upon multiple causes and conditions.

- On a specific level, the term is also used to refer to a specific application of this general principle - namely the twelve links of dependent origination.

The Dalai Lama explains:

In Sanskrit the word for dependent-arising is pratītyasamutpāda. The word pratītya has three different meanings—meeting, relying, and depending—but all three, in terms of their basic import, mean dependence. Samutpāda means arising. Hence, the meaning of pratītyasamutpāda is that which arises in dependence upon conditions, in reliance upon conditions, through the force of conditions.

Generally speaking, in the Mahayana tradition, pratītyasamutpāda (Sanskrit) is used to refer to the general principle of interdependent causation, whereas in the
Theravada tradition, *patīcasamuppāda* (Pāli) is used to refer to the twelve nidanas.

The concept of *pratītyasamutpāda* (in both the general and specific meanings) is the basis for other key concepts in Buddhism, such as karma and rebirth, the arising of dukkha (suffering), and the possibility of liberation through realizing no-self (anatman). The general principle of *pratītyasamutpāda* (that everything is interdependent) is complementary to the concept of emptiness (sunyata).\(^{40}\)

The doctrine of Pratītyasamutpāda or Dependent Origination is contained in the Second Noble Truth which gives us the cause of suffering, and in the Third Noble Truth which shows the cessation of suffering. According to Madhyamika-Karika (25, 9) Pratītyasamutpāda, viewed from the point of view of relativity is Samsāra; while viewed from the point of view of reality, it is Nirvana.\(^{41}\) It is relativity and dependent causation as well as the Absolute, for it is the Absolute itself which appears as relative and acts as the binding thread giving them unity and meaning. Pratītyasamutpāda tells us that in the empirical world dominated by the intellect everything is relative, conditional, dependent, subject to birth and death and therefore impermanent. The causal formula is: ‘This being, that arises’ (*asmin sati, idambhavati*), i.e. ‘Depending on the cause, the effect arises’. Thus every object of thought is necessarily relative. And because it is relative, it is neither absolutely real (for it is subject to death) nor absolutely unreal (for it appears to arise). All phenomenal things hang between reality and nothingness,
avoiding both the extremes. It is in this sense that Buddha calls the doctrine the Middle Path, Mādhyama Pratipāt, which avoids both eternalism and nihilism.\footnote{42}

Troubled by the sight of disease, old age and death, Buddha left his home to find a solution to the misery of earthly life. Pratītyasamutpāda is the solution he found. Why do we suffer misery and pain? Why do we suffer old age and death? Because we are born. Why are we born? Because there is a will to be born. Why should there be this will to become? Because we cling to the objects of the world. Why do we have this clinging? Because we crave to enjoy the objects of this world. Why do we have this craving, this thirst for enjoyment? Because of sense-experience. Why do we have this sense-experience? Because of sense-object contact. Why do we have this contact? Because of the six sense-organs (the sixth being the mind). Why do we have the six sense organs? Because of the psycho-physical organism. Why do we have this organism? Because of the initial consciousness of the embryo. Why do we have this consciousness? Because of our predispositions or impressions of Karma. Why do we have these impressions? Because of Ignorance. Hence Ignorance is the root-cause of all suffering.

Thus we get the twelve links of the Causal Wheel of Dependent Origination:

1. Ignorance (avidyā)
2. Impressions of karmic forces (saṃskāra)
3. Initial consciousness of the embryo (vijñāna)
4. Psycho-physical organism (nāmarūpa)
5. Six sense-organs including mind (saḍāyatana)
6. Sense-object contact (sparśa)
7. Sense-experience (vedanā)
8. Thirst for sense-enjoyment (trṣṇā)
9. Clinging to this enjoyment (upādāna)
10. Will to be born (bhāva)
11. Birth or rebirth (jāti)
12. Old age and death (jarāmarāṇa)

This is the cycle of birth and death. This is the twelve-spoked wheel of Dependent Origination. This is the vicious circle of causation. It does not end with death. Death is only a beginning of a new life. It can be destroyed only when its root-cause, ignorance is destroyed.\(^{43}\)

**Skhandas - the Aggregates**

In his formulation of the First Noble Truth – of Suffering, the Buddha says:

In short, the five aggregates of clinging are suffering.\(^{44}\) Suffering cannot be separated from the five aggregates. The aggregates of grasping and suffering are one and the same and not two different things. The Buddha asks: “Monks, what is suffering? It should be said that it is the five aggregates of grasping.”\(^{45}\) Elsewhere he says: “In this very body, a fathom long, with its consciousness and perception I declare are the world, its arising, its cessation and the path that leads to the cessation of the world.”\(^{46}\) World here denotes suffering, dukkha.\(^{47}\)

In the Theravada tradition, suffering arises when one identifies with or clings to an aggregate. Suffering is extinguished by relinquishing attachments to aggregates.
The Mahayana tradition further puts forth that ultimate freedom is realized by deeply penetrating the nature of all aggregates as intrinsically empty of independent existence.

So it is evident that to understand the Four Noble Truths it is essential to have clear idea of the five aggregates, which we shall attempt now.

As we have seen above, “the world is led by the mind.” Here we must raise the question: What is the mind? How is it related to the body? Is it in some way connected with the senses? Is it the essence of the human person?

In Buddhist phenomenology the **skandhas** (Sanskrit) or **khandhas** (Pāli), aggregates in English, are the five functions or aspects that constitute the human being. The Buddha teaches that nothing among them is really “I” or “mine”.

According to Thanissaro, the Buddha gave a new meaning to the term “khandha”.

Prior to the Buddha, the Pāli word khandha had very ordinary meanings: A khandha could be a pile, a bundle, a heap, a mass. It could also be the trunk of a tree. In his first sermon the Buddha gave it a new, psychological meaning, introducing the term **clinging-khandhas** to summarize his analysis of the truth of stress and suffering. Throughout the remainder of his teaching career, he referred to these khandhas time and again.

The Sutta Pitaka of the Pāli Canon describes the five skandhas or aggregates:

1. “Form” or “matter” (rūpa): external and internal matter. Externally, **rūpa** is the physical world. Internally, **rūpa** includes the material body and the physical sense organs.
2. “Sensation” or “feeling” (vedana): sensing an object as either pleasant or unpleasant or neutral.

3. “Perception”, “conception”, “apperception”, “cognition”, or “discrimination” (samjñā): registers whether an object is recognized or not (for instance, the sound of a bell or the shape of a tree).

4. “Mental formations”, “impulses”, “volition”, or “compositional factors” (samskāra, or sankhara): all types of mental habits, thoughts, ideas, opinions, prejudices, compulsions, and decisions triggered by an object.

5. “Consciousness” or “discernment” vijñāna or vinnana):

1. In the Nikāyas/Agamas: cognizance, that which discerns.


3. In some Mahayana sources: the base that supports all experience.

Buddhist literature describes the aggregates as arising in a linear or progressive fashion, from form to feeling to perception to mental formations to consciousness. In the early texts, the scheme of the five aggregates is not meant to be an exhaustive classification of the human being. Rather it describes various aspects of the way an individual manifests.\(^{49}\)

The first (rūpa) is physical and the last four (collectively called nāma) are mind components.

When the Buddha of the Pāli Nikāyas speaks about personal identity and the human predicament, he uses the technical expression “five aggregates of grasping”
(pañcupādānakhandhā). The aggregate material form is explained as the four
great elements and the shape or figure of our physical body. The four great
elements are earth, water, fire, and air. The earth element is further defined as
whatever is solid in our body, and water as whatever is liquid. The fire element
refers to “that by which one is warmed, ages, and is consumed,” and the process of
digestion. The air element denotes the breathing process and movements of gas
throughout the body.50

The aggregate sensations denote pleasant, unpleasant and neutral feelings
experienced after there is contact between the six sense organs (eye, ear, nose,
tongue, body, and mind) and their six objects (forms, sounds, odors, tastes,
tangible objects, and mental phenomena). The aggregate perceptions express the
mental function by which someone is able to identify objects. There are six types
of perceptions corresponding to the six objects of the senses. The aggregate
formations express emotional and intellectual dispositions, literally volitions
(sañcetanâ), towards the six objects of the senses. These dispositions are the result
of past cognitive and affective conditioning, that is, past karma or past voluntary
actions. The aggregate consciousness connotes the ability to know and to be aware
of the six objects of the senses.51

These five components have been called Groups of existence or Five
Aggregates (pañcakkhandhā). While corporeality is readily understood the other
four components are more subtle. Three of these, viz. feeling, perception and
consciousness, are known to modern psychological science, and the Buddhist
interpretation does not differ substantially from the scientific one. But the concept of “formations” is not known to modern psychology. At the same time there is nothing in conventional psychology that denies its existence. Here the Buddhist view transcends that of the conventional analysis of mental components.\(^5\)

**Anicca**

The Pāli word *anicca* (Sanskrit *anitya*) literally means “inconstant”, and arises from a synthesis of two separate words, ‘Nicca’ and the “privative particle” ‘a’.\(^5\) Whereas the word ‘Nicca’ refers to the concept of continuity and permanence, ‘Anicca’ refers to its exact opposite - the absence of permanence and continuity. Thus the term expresses the Buddhist notion that all of conditioned existence, without exception, is in a constant state of flux.

According to the impermanence doctrine, human life embodies this flux in the aging process, the cycle of birth and rebirth (samsara), and in any experience of loss. This is applicable to all beings. **The Buddha taught that because conditioned phenomena are impermanent, attachment to them becomes the cause for future suffering (dukkha).**

Impermanence is intimately associated with the doctrine of anatta, according to which things have no fixed nature, essence, or self. For example, in Mahayana Buddhism, because all phenomena are impermanent, and in a state of flux, they are understood to be empty of an intrinsic self (shunyata).\(^5\) All compounded phenomena (things and experiences) are inconstant, unsteady, and impermanent. Everything we can experience through our senses is made up of
parts, and its existence is dependent on external conditions. Everything is in constant flux, and so conditions and the thing itself is constantly changing. Things are constantly coming into being, and ceasing to be. Nothing lasts.

The important point here is that phenomena arise and cease according to (complex) conditions. In Mahayana Buddhism, a caveat is added: one should indeed always meditate on the impermanence and transitory nature of compound structures and phenomena, but one must guard against extending this to the realm of Nirvana, where impermanence holds no sway. In this view, the ultimate nature of reality is free from the stains of dualistic thought, and should therefore not be labeled as ‘one or the ‘other’ (i.e. ‘permanent’ or ‘impermanent’).

The law of impermanence asserts that all phenomena are subject to constant change, to rise and fall, and no permanent states, either physical or animate, exist. The law of anicca establishes impermanence as the basic universal law. According to the Sarvastivada or the Vaibhasika school, the so-called matter is nothing more than a series of momentary atoms of earth, water, fire and air. Everything is momentary. Change is the rule of the universe. “The most important doctrine of this school is Ksanabhangavada, i.e., the theory of Momentariness. Sometimes it is also called Santanavada or the theory of Flux or Ceaseless Flow. It is applicable to mind and matter alike, for both are momentary. Sometimes it is also referred to as Sanghatavada or the theory of Aggregates which means that the so-called ‘soul’ is only an aggregate of the five fleeting Skandhas, and the so-
called ‘matter’ is only an aggregate of the momentary atoms. The denial of an eternal substance, spiritual as well as material, is called Pudgala-nairatmya.”

“Everything is momentary. Nothing is permanent. Body, sensation, perception, disposition, consciousness, all these are impermanent and sorrowful. There is neither being nor not-being, but only becoming. Reality is a stream of becoming. Life is a series of manifestations of becoming. There is no ‘thing’ which changes; only ceaseless change goes on. Everything is merely a link in the chain, a spoke in the wheel, a transitory phase in the series. Everything is conditional, dependent, relative, pratītyasamutpanna. Everything is subject to birth and death, to production and destruction, to creation and decay. There is nothing, human …, that is permanent. To quote the excellent words of Shelley:

‘Worlds on worlds are rolling over,
From creation to decay,
Like the bubbles on a river,
Sparkling, bursting, borne away.’”

Two classical similes are given to illustrate the doctrine of universal momentariness, that of the stream of a river and that of the flame of a lamp. Heraclitus said: ‘You cannot bathe twice into the same river’. Hume said: ‘I never can catch “myself”. Whenever I try, I stumble on this or that perception.’… A river is not the same river the next moment. The water in which you have once taken your dip has flown away and has been replaced by other water. A river is only a continuous flow of different waters. Similarly a flame is not one and the same
flame. It is a series of different flames. One volume of water or one flame continually succeeds another volume of water or another flame. The rapidity of succession preserves continuity which is not broken. Similarity is mistaken as identity or sameness.\textsuperscript{57}

However, in reality there is no thing that ultimately ceases to exist; only the appearance of a thing ceases as it changes from one form to another. Imagine a leaf that falls to the ground and decomposes. While the appearance and relative existence of the leaf ceases, the components that formed the leaf become particulate material that may go on to form new plants. Buddhism teaches a middle way, avoiding the extreme views of eternalism and nihilism.\textsuperscript{58}

**Anatta**

The general connotation of the term *anatta* (Sanskrit: *anātman*)\textsuperscript{59} seems to be that there is no such thing as atman or self and no substance beyond phenomena.\textsuperscript{60} However, there seems to be nonetheless a wide divergence of interpretations of the term *anatta* as will be evident from what follows.

The one scriptural passage where Gautama is asked by a lay person what the meaning of anatta is, is as follows:

At one time in Savatthi, the venerable Radha seated himself and asked of the Blessed Lord Buddha: “Anatta, anatta I hear said, Venerable. What, pray tell, does Anatta mean?” “Just this, Radha, form is not the self (anatta), sensations are not the self (anatta), perceptions are not the self (anatta), assemblages are not the self (anatta), and consciousness is not the self (anatta). Seeing thusly, this is the
end of birth, the Brahman life has been fulfilled, what must be done has been done.”

The Nikāyas state that certain things such as material shape, feeling, perception, habitual tendencies and consciousness (the five aggregates), with which the unlearned man identifies himself, do not constitute his self and that is why one on the path to liberation should grow uninterested in the aggregates, become detached from them and be liberated.

The Buddha reiterates again and again throughout the Pāli Nikāyas that any of the five aggregates “whether past, future or present, internal or external, gross or subtle, inferior or superior, far or near, ought to be seen as it actually is with right wisdom thus: ‘this is not mine, this I am not, this is not my self.’ ” When the disciple contemplates the five aggregates in this way, he or she becomes disenchanted (nibbindati), lust fades away (virajjati), and he or she attains liberation due to the absence of lust (virāgāvimuccati).

“Wherefore, monks, whatever is material shape, past, future or present, internal...thinking of all this material shape as ‘This is not mine, this I am not, this is not my self,’ he should see it thus as it really is by means of perfect wisdom. Whatever is feeling...whatever is perception...whatever are the habitual tendencies...whatever is consciousness, past, future or present, internal...thinking of all this consciousness as ‘This is not mine, this am I not, this is not my self,’ he should see it thus as it really is by means of perfect wisdom. Seeing it thus, monks, the instructed disciple of the pure one turns away from material shape, he turns
away from feeling, turns away from perception, turns away from the habitual tendencies, turns away from consciousness; turning away he is detached; by his detachment he is freed; in freedom there is the knowledge that he is freed and he comprehends: Destroyed is birth, brought to a close the Brahma-faring, done is what was to be done, there is no more being such or so.”

Arguments for the Doctrine of Non-self

The Buddha of the Pāli Nikāyas justifies this view of the five aggregates as non-self with three main arguments, which are used as a method of analytical meditation, and in polemics with members of other schools. The assumption underlying the Buddha’s arguments is that something might be considered a self only if it were permanent, not leading to suffering, not dependently arisen, and subject to one’s own will. Since none of the five aggregates fulfill any of these conditions, it is wrong to see them as belonging to us or as our self.

In the first and most common argument for non-self the Buddha asks someone the following questions: “What do you think, monks, is material form permanent or impermanent?” – “Impermanent, venerable sir.” – “Is what is impermanent suffering or happiness?” – “Suffering, venerable sir.” – Is what is impermanent, suffering, and subject to change, fit to be regarded as: “this is mine, this I am, this is my self?” – “No, venerable sir.” The same reasoning is applied to the other aggregates.
The first argument is also applied to the six sensual organs, the six objects, the six types of consciousness, perceptions, sensations, and formations that arise dependent on the contact between the senses and their objects.\textsuperscript{65}

The second argument for non-self is much less frequent: “Monks, material form is non-self. If it were self, it would not lead to affliction. It would be possible [to say] with regard to material form: ‘Let my material form be thus. Let my material form not be thus.’ But precisely because it is non-self, it leads to affliction. And it is not possible [to say] with regard to material form: ‘Let my material form be thus. Let my material form not be thus’”.\textsuperscript{66} The same reasoning is applied to the other four aggregates.

The third argument deduces non-self from the fact that physical and mental phenomena depend on certain causes to exist. For instance, in Majjhima Nikāya\textsuperscript{67}, the Buddha first analyzes the dependent arising of physical and mental phenomena. Then he argues: “If anyone says: ‘the visual organ is self,’ that is unacceptable. The rising and falling of the visual organ are fully known (paññāyati). Since the rising and falling of the visual organ are fully known, it would follow that: ‘my self arises and falls.’ Therefore, it is unacceptable to say: ‘the visual organ is self.’ Thus the visual organ is non-self.” The same reasoning is applied to the other senses, their objects, and the six types of consciousness, contacts (meeting of sense, object and consciousness), sensations, and cravings derived from them.
Buddhism teaches that there is a cycle of birth, death, and rebirth and that the process is according to the qualities of a person's actions. This constant process of becoming ceases at the fruition of Bodhi (enlightenment) at which a being is no longer subject to causation (karma) but enters into a state that the Buddha called *amata* (deathlessness).

According to the philosophical premise of the Buddha, the initiate to Buddhism who is to be “shown the way to Immortality (amata)” therein wherein liberation of the mind (*cittavimutta*) is effectuated through the expansion of wisdom and the meditative practices of *sati* and *Samādhi* must first be educated away from his former ignorance-based (avijja) materialistic predisposition in that he “saw any of these forms, feelings, or this body, to be my Self, to be that which I am by nature.”

Thus, desiring a soul or ego (atman) to be permanent is a prime consequence of ignorance, itself the cause of all misery and the foundation of the cycle of rebirth (samsara). Form and consciousness being two of the five skandhas, or aggregates of ignorance, Buddhism teaches that physical immortality is neither a path to enlightenment, nor an attainable goal: even the gods which can live for eternity eventually die. Upon enlightenment, the “karmic seeds” (sankharas or sanskaras) for all future becoming and rebirth are exhausted. After biological death an arhat or buddha, enters into parinirvana, a state of deathlessness due to the absence of rebirth, which resulted from cessation of wantings.
In Samyutta Nikāya both when asked if there was a soul, and when asked if there was no soul (*natthatta*), Gautama Buddha refused to answer.⁷⁰ Within the Mahayana tradition, the position that there is no soul is conventionally considered to be equivalent to Nihilism (ucchedavada). The Buddha himself said: “Both formerly and now, I’ve never been a nihilist (vinayika), never been one who teaches the annihilation of a being, rather taught only the source of suffering, and its ending.”⁷¹ The early Suttas see annihilationism, which the Buddha equated with denial of a Self, as tied up with belief in a Self.⁷² It is seen as arising due to conceiving a Self in some sort of relationship to the personality-factors. It is thus rooted in the ‘I am’ attitude; even the attitude ‘I do not exist’ arises from a preoccupation with ‘I’.⁷³

Anatta is not meant as a philosophical position. According to Peter Harvey, one uses ‘not-Self’, then, as a reason to let go of things, not to ‘prove’ that there is no Self. There is no need to give some philosophical denial of ‘Self”; the idea simply withers away, or evaporates in the light of knowledge, when it is seen that the concept does not apply to anything at all, or, as the Suttas put it, when it is seen that everything is ‘empty’ of Self. A philosophical denial is just a view, a theory, which may be agreed with or not. It does not get one to actually examine all the things that one really does identify with, consciously or unconsciously, as Self or I.⁷⁴

Some people may interpret *anatta* as a denial of the spiritual while taking for granted the affirmation of the material. Such for instance, were the Epicureans and
Charvacas. The Buddha, according to some, admits not only material but also spiritual phenomena but deny to both any permanent substantiality. This view seems to approach Humean phenomenalism.

The *anattā* doctrine is not a type of materialism. Buddhism does not necessarily deny the existence of mental phenomena (such as feelings, thoughts, and sensations) that are distinct from material phenomena. However, are mental phenomena spiritual? Where does the material end and the spiritual begin? Thus, the conventional translation of *anattā* as “no-soul” can be misleading according to Theodore de Bary. If the word “soul” refers to a non-bodily component in a person that can continue in some way after death, then Buddhism does not deny the existence of a soul.

After biological death an arhat or Buddha, enters into parinirvana, a state of deathlessness due to the absence of rebirth, which resulted from cessation of wantings.

Śūnyatā

Śūnyatā, (Sanskrit, also *shunyata*; Pāli: *suññatā*), in Buddhism, translated into English as *emptiness* or *openness*, refers to the absence of inherent existence in all phenomena, and it is complementary to the Buddhist concepts of not-self (*anatta*) and dependent origination (*Pratītyasamutpāda*).

Etymologically, “Śūnyatā” (Sanskrit noun from the adj. śūnya: “zero”, “nothing”) is usually translated as “emptiness”. It is the noun form of the adjective “śūnya” (Sanskrit) which means “empty” or “void”, hence “empty”-“ness” (-tā).
Sunya comes from the root *svi*, meaning “swollen”, plus *-ta* “-ness”, therefore “hollow, hollowness”. A common alternative term is “voidness”. This word is ultimately derived from the Proto-Indo European root *k̑eu*- which means ‘to swell’ and also ‘to grow’.79

The exact definition of emptiness varies from one Buddhist tradition to another. In the course of time, many different philosophical schools have arisen within Buddhism in an effort to explain the exact philosophical meaning of emptiness. After the Buddha, emptiness was further developed by Nagarjuna and the Madhyamika school, an early Mahayana school.

In the Pāli canon, the *Suñña Sutta*, relates that the monk Ānanda, Buddha's attendant asked: “It is said that the world is empty, the world is empty, lord. In what respect is it said that the world is empty?” The Buddha replied, “Insofar as it is empty of a self or of anything pertaining to a self: Thus it is said, Ānanda, that the world is empty.”80

In the *Majjhima Nikāya*, the term “emptiness” (*suññatā*) is used in two suttas, in the context of a progression of mental states.81 According to the Madhyamaka school, to say that an object is “empty” is to say that it is dependently originated. The Madhyamaka states that impermanent collections of causes and conditions are designated by mere conceptual labels. This also applies to the principle of causality itself, since *everything* is dependently originated.82

Nāgārjuna equates emptiness with dependendent origination.83
On the basis of the Buddha's view that all experienced phenomena (dharmā) are “dependently arisen” (pratitya-samutpanna), Nagarjuna insisted that such phenomena are empty (sunyata). This did not mean that they are not experienced and, therefore, non-existent; only that they are devoid of a permanent and eternal substance (svabhava). Since they are experienced elements of existence, they are not mere names (prajnapti).\textsuperscript{84}

The Madhyamaka philosophy is often misunderstood as being nihilistic:

A nihilistic interpretation of the concept of voidness (or of mind-only) is not, by any means, a merely hypothetical possibility; it consistently was adopted by Buddhism’s opponents, wherever the religion spread, nor have Buddhists themselves been immune to it…\textsuperscript{85}

But this is not a correct understanding: Voidness does not mean nothingness, but rather that all things lack intrinsic reality, intrinsic objectivity, intrinsic identity or intrinsic referentiality. Lacking such static essence or substance does not make them not exist – it makes them thoroughly relative.\textsuperscript{86}

**Karma Samsara**

Karma and Samsara together show the moral and mental consequences of a life of greed. They play a very important role in the beliefs and practices of the majority of the Buddhists. This is probably because karma and samsara predate Buddhism. They were found in Indian society long before Buddhism was born. It is important to remember that each of these terms is used by Buddhists in more than one sense; they have a popular sense and a more authentic sense. Once we are
acquainted with different senses we can judge which sense is intended, according to the context.\(^\text{87}\)

As one scholar states, “the Buddhist theory of action and result (\textit{karmaphala}) is fundamental to much of Buddhist doctrine, because it provides a coherent model of the functioning of the world and its beings, which in turn forms the doctrinal basis for the Buddhist explanations of the path of liberation from the world and its result, \textit{nirvana}.”\(^\text{88}\)

According to Bruce Matthews, in the early sutras, as found in the Pāli canon and the Agamas preserved in Chinese translation, “there is no single major systematic exposition” on the subject of karma and “an account has to be put together from the dozens of places where karma is mentioned in the texts.”\(^\text{89}\)

Nevertheless, the Buddha emphasized his doctrine of karma to the extent that he was sometimes referred to as \textit{kammavada} (the holder of the view of karma) or \textit{kiriyavada} (the promulgator of the consequence of karma).\(^\text{90}\)

In the \textit{Nibbedhika Sutta} the Buddha says:

“Intention I tell you, is kamma. Intending, one does kamma by way of body, speech and intellect.”\(^\text{91}\)

In the \textit{Upajjhatthana Sutta} the Buddha states:

“I am the owner of my karma. I inherit my karma. I am born of my karma. I am related to my karma. I live supported by my karma. Whatever karma I create, whether good or evil, that I shall inherit.”\(^\text{92}\)
The word *karma* derives from the verbal root *kr*, which means “do, make, perform or accomplish.” Karma (or also *karman* in Sanskrit and *Kamma* in Pāli) means “action” or “doing”; whatever one does, says, or thinks is a *karma*. In Buddhism, the term *karma* is used specifically for those actions which spring from the intention (*cetana*) of an unenlightened being. These bring about a fruit (*phala*) or result (*vipāka*) either within the present life, or in the context of a future rebirth.

Literally and etymologically karma means action. In the broadest sense of the word any action – eating, drinking, walking, sleeping etc. – could be termed karma. But in its religious sense it refers to an action that has a moral or ethical value. Karma therefore is good or bad action resulting in reward or punishment in this life or in the next. Good or meritorious actions are called kusala karma and bad or demeritorious actions are called akusala karma. The ten actions that are commonly considered bad are⁹³:

1. Killing
2. Stealing
3. Sexual misbehaviour
4. Lying
5. Slander
6. Harsh language
7. Gossip
8. Sloth
9. Hatred
10. Illusion

The second meaning of karma is that it is not an action but a law. It is the law of retribution that rewards or punishes human actions. Because of the karma law a person now pays for what he or she has done in the previous life, and will pay in the future life for what he or she is doing now.

According to a third meaning of karma, it is again a law of retribution, but whose application is restricted only to the actions of those persons who are not yet liberated. Buddhist philosophical understanding is that human beings by their behavioural patterns fall into one of two levels of human existence: one is that of samsara and the other is nirvana. Persons in samsara are not yet liberated from craving. That does not mean they are incapable of good actions. “Nevertheless, their best actions – even such actions as alms-giving are tainted with feelings of self-love. It is the actions of such persons that are governed by the karma.”94

Another concept closely connected with karma, therefore, is Samsara. Etymologically, samsara means fluctuation or an aimless wandering about.95 Literally it means “continuous movement” and is commonly translated as “cyclic existence”, “cycle of existence”, etc. It is defined as the continual repetitive cycle of birth and death that arises from ordinary beings’ grasping and fixating on a self and experiences. Specifically, it refers to the process of cycling through one rebirth after another within the six realms of existence, where each realm can be understood as physical realm or a psychological state characterized by a particular type of suffering.96 It is said that beings in samsara are in aimless
movement like a cork on the waves of the sea; they do not move themselves but are being moved by the objects of their senses. Their lives are a continuous rotation around sense-objects. As the Buddha says: “Truly, monks, beings do wander and hurry through the round of existence bound by the chain of greed” (*Itivuttaka*, 8, Vegga II, Sutta 5).

The functioning of samsara has been traditionally explained by a process called “re-birth”, an Indian notion, which was absorbed into Buddhism. Re-birth can be interpreted in two very different and distinct ways – physical sense and moral sense. In the physical sense, it refers to existence, or rather existences, outside the present life of an individual. These existences pertain to the period following death and that preceding birth. In the moral sense, it refers to the unwholesome – sometimes bad, but never perfect – thoughts that appear, disappear, and reappear in the mind of a person. Such mental transformations naturally occur within one and the same life-span of an individual. Both these senses are incorporated into Buddhism. *Re-birth and its sister doctrine karma are so important to the Buddhist masses that popular Buddhism has at times been called a “karma-rebirth Buddhism.”*

In the religions of India there is a common belief that a human being is born again and again in a number of lives; and it is not only as a human being that one is reborn, but as the *Chandogya Upanishad* says: “Those whose conduct here has been good will quickly attain a good birth, the birth of a brahmin (member of the priestly caste), the birth of a kshatriya (member of the soldierly caste), or the birth
of a *vaishya* (member of the merchant caste). But those, whose conduct has been evil, will quickly attain an evil birth, the birth of a dog, the birth of a hog, or the birth of a *chandala* (impure laborer) outcaste.”

According to popular Buddhist understanding, an imperfect being, after death can be reincarnated in one of the five realms of existence: (1) the lower world (*duggati, vi*Nipāta, niraya*), (2) the animal kingdom (*tiracchanayoni*), (3) the spirit sphere (*petavisaya*) or the sphere of ghost beings and demons, (4) the realm of human beings (*manussaloka*), (5) the realm of gods (*devaloka*). The *devaloka* itself has several levels.

But re-birth in the physical sense is not accepted by the Buddha. This is a fact amply borne out by the assertions in the Buddhist scriptures. In the India of the Buddha’s day, there was a belief that an individual was born in a higher or lower caste as a result of actions in previous life, which was strongly objected to by the Buddha as it lessened the personal responsibility in the present life.

As the *Dhammapada* states:

"*A man does not become a Brahmana by his platted hair, by his family, or by birth; in whom there is truth and righteousness, he is blessed, he is a Brahmana*".

And Majjhima Nikāya says:

*By one’s own action is one a brahmin, by one’s own action is one a non-brahmin.*

*By one’s own action is one a farmer, an artist, a trader, a servant.*
By one’s own action is one a robber, a soldier, a king’s counsellor, a king.\textsuperscript{105}

Since the Buddha preached a liberation that could be attained in the present existence, preoccupation with either past or future existences, was, in his view, an obstacle to the true goal. According to him only unenlightened, uneducated persons worried about such matters. In the Sabbhasava Sutta of the Majjhima Nikāya, he says:

“The uninstructed ordinary person, unskilled in the Dhamma, thinks: Was I in a past period? Was I not in a past period? What was I in a past period? ... Now, will I come to be in a future period? Will I not come to be in a future period? What Will I come to be in a future period?”\textsuperscript{106}

Since the primary concern of the Buddha was the present existence, he made it very clear to his followers that virtue should never be practiced for the sake of the benefits in an afterlife. A virtuous life was valuable for the very reason that it was the happier form of life right now.

From the above teachings of the Buddha it is evident that physical rebirth is not a doctrine advocated by the Buddha. As Venerable PunnajiThera a Theravada Buddhist scholar observes: “Genuine Buddhism therefore is not ‘Karma and Rebirth Buddhism’. Genuine Buddhism, which is independent of time (akalika), speaks not about rebirth, but about suffering (dukkha), and its cessation here and now”. \textsuperscript{107}
So *samsara* is concerned not with physical rebirth of individuals but their moral rebirth; and such rebirths take place not after a person’s death but within the present life. Venerable Buddhadasa Thera of Thailand makes that very clear in his book *Two Kinds of Language*. To him, the real meaning of rebirth is not the higher or the lower physical birth that follows death, but the higher or lower forms of mental birth in the same existence. To bring out that, he distinguishes between the popular interpretation of the doctrine and its real meaning:

“Birth as a beast means in popular language actual physical birth as a pig, a dog, or some other actual animal. Rebirth after death as some kind of some lower animal is the everyday meaning of rebirth into the realm of beasts. In the *dhamma* language it has a different meaning. At any moment when one is stupid, just like a dumb animal, then at that moment, one is born to the realm of beasts. It happens right here and now. One may be born as a beast many times over in a single day. So in *dhamma* language, birth as a pig means stupidity”.\(^{108}\)

Thus *samsara* in the deeper and the more authentic sense of the word is *cycle of births and rebirths of the animal in the human*. It is from such a samsara and such a law of *karma* that the Buddha wanted to liberate human beings.\(^{109}\)

**Conclusion:**

This section intends to give some picture of the human situation as viewed through the eyes of the Buddha especially after his enlightenment under the Bodhi Tree. The human situation is characterized by *dukkha*: pain, sickness, old age, suffering, anxiety, tension, dissatisfaction, disappointment, ignorance,
unhappiness, death. All this is the effect and sometimes the cause of craving. Cause and effect, effect and cause give rise interdependently and interminably to one another each cause and each effect fleeting away with the passage of time while people who are mere aggregates of senses, body, mind and consciousness are under the illusion that they themselves and the world around them have some permanence and substantiality, whereas they have none. And yet somewhat paradoxically the actions that people perform, whether good or evil, generate new causes that are destined to have the effects of merit or demerit either in this life or another life or in a subsequent series of lives before final happiness and fulfillment are attained.

This picture of the human situation seems to be attributed to the Buddha sometimes by the sources closest to him but sometimes only by sources that appear to be somewhat remote from him.

**John of the Cross**

**Introduction**

The world in which Friar John lived and moved was from many perspectives different from the world in which Gautama had lived and moved 2000 years earlier in north-east India. However, the question may be raised: How much can the basic metaphysics of the human situation differ in the east or the west, in the north or the south three or four millennia earlier or three or four millennia later? Are not all human beings born to see the light of day upon our planet more or less in the same way? Do they not grow and mature more or less in
the same way? Are they not subject to time, to old age, to death, generation after
generation more or less in the same way? They are also similar in their bodily
composition and constitution and the mental functioning: perception, doubt, belief,
conviction, volition, capacity for enlightenment.

Where do we find the differences and divergences? Important divergences
appear in convictions and beliefs. Though natural phenomena and human
situations be similar in east and west for thousands of years, the perspectives and
angles from which they are considered and interpreted may be vastly different.
This does not mean that there is no room for comparison even within frameworks
of beliefs and convictions that are or appear to contrast.

In this section we should like to have a look at the human situation through
the eyes of Friar John.

**The Human Condition**

The human condition for Friar John is no doubt very similar in general to
that seen by the Buddha: birth, growth, the ups and downs of life, death. However,
sickness, old age, death do not make on Friar John the same deep impression that
they had made on Gautama for some reason or other. Whereas Gautama had been
apparently over-protected in his courtly environment during his youth, Friar John
had experienced much hunger, poverty and hardship in his youth. In fact one of his
brothers is said to have died of hunger. One important factor that threw light on
these misfortunes and their not so negative meaning was his social environment
which was permeated with faith in the Bible. This faith was a source of
enlightenment for him from early youth and he came to believe and experience personally God’s interest in him and God’s love for him. Prayer and reflection on the sufferings of Jesus Christ gave new significance in his eyes, to the human situation.

It is to be noted that though the human situation appears to be generically the same in the east and in the west in 500 BC and 1500 AD, it is also true that this same human situation may be considered in vastly different ways depending on the impact made on individuals and different groups by personal experiences by cultural influences and by traditional beliefs. Though facts may be the same, the interpretation of facts and situations may sometimes be or present themselves identical with the facts. Gautama Buddha saw the human situation not only in the light of reason – a reason divorced apparently from religious beliefs – but closely knit into highly sensitized personal experiences of the tragic aspect of the human condition. Friar John, as we shall presently see, has an interpretation of the human situation partly from the perspective of natural reason and partly from the angle of supernatural faith. In the light of the supernatural faith he believes that ‘human nature was corrupted and ruined through Adam by means of the forbidden tree in the Garden of Paradise, so on the tree of the cross it was redeemed and restored when Jesus Christ gave it there, through His passion and death, the hand of his favor and mercy, and broke down the barriers between God and humans that were built up through original sin.’

110
Suffering

Friar John had learnt from natural philosophy that on the one hand suffering was very natural to material living beings. Grass is made for the cow. In the jungle the wild animals suffer pain and even death from one another and in the oceans the larger fish live on the smaller ones. Human beings too share this vulnerability and the possibility and actuality of pain, disease, suffering, old age and death. Friar John on the other hand learned from the Bible that the present vulnerability of the human race was the result and the punishment of the original sin of Adam and Eve because of which the whole family of Adam and Eve are subject to disease, old age and death. Not only because of original sin but also because of personal sins! These personal sins bring suffering on the sinner and also on the innocent because craving, passion, pride are often associated with desire for self-justification which leads the weaker and more innocent or ignorant section of humanity into very painful situations. Ignorance and craving have become in this way the cause of *dukkha* in its various forms and manifestations.

Causes of Suffering

As already mentioned, physical vulnerability is part of the nature of all flesh, human and infra-human. Proper, however, to the human condition is the problem of evil, pain and suffering. The plants and the animals, as far as we can see, are subject to disease, aging and death but these processes for them are only natural processes and not problems. However, for human beings, the experience of evil, pain, suffering and death are problems that call for understanding,
explanation and solution. For Friar John the greatest evil was moral evil, deliberate offence against God. This pertains primarily to the soul. Moral evil, therefore, is primarily spiritual. But since human nature is essentially a blend of the spiritual with the psycho-somatic and the material, human sinfulness has had physical, psychological and bodily repercussions and consequences. The body without the soul is not capable of guilt but the guilt of the soul may increase the natural weakness and vulnerability of the psyche and the body. The Bible in fact links the death of the body to the mortally sinful action of the first parents.112 No other human evil could compare with the evil of sinful acts and habits. Friar John understood and believed that the Word of God came in human nature to suffer and die on the cross in order to take on himself, “innocent though he was”113 the punishment that Adam and Eve as well as their posterity deserved. This is the Biblical perspective which Friar John personalized and according to which he interpreted the human situation.

For Friar John it is true as for Buddha that dukkha or suffering is caused by cravings that proceed from ignorance, ambition, lust, greed and other disordered desires, passions and emotions. What the Buddha calls cravings, Friar John calls disordered, inordinate appetites.

Inordinate human cravings lead to sinful acts and habits which increase immensely the sufferings of humanity but there are people who are free at least relatively, from sin who yet may not be free from suffering, disease, old age and death. This implies that all have to suffer because of the sins of some. It follows
that the greed of one man can lead to the poverty of another; the craving of one can lead to the misery of another. Friar John also believes that faith in Jesus Christ can turn physical suffering and poverty and even sickness and death into sources of blessings and merits. As St. Paul says, “For as by one man’s disobedience many were made sinners, so by one man’s obedience many will be made righteous”\textsuperscript{114} and St. Peter says “By his wounds you have been healed.”\textsuperscript{115}

Whereas for Buddha cravings are evils, natural evils, moral evils, for Friar John cravings may be or actually lead to sin which is offence against God. Many people including many Buddhists and even Buddha himself don’t appear to see how and why the wrong that human beings do against themselves or against one another can be an offence against the Almighty. At least neither Buddha nor any of the Buddhist scriptures available to us state in explicit terms that moral evil and sins are offences against God. For Friar John however, and all believers in the Christian Revelation, moral evil and wrong committed by human beings against themselves and against fellow humans are not merely aberrations or faults, defects or moral lapses, they are offences against the Almighty. The following is the celebrated passage in the Bible that teaches us this truth:

When the Son of man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne. Before him will be gathered all the nations, and he will separate them one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats, and he will place the sheep at his right hand, but the goats at the left. Then the King will say to those at his right hand, ‘Come, O blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from
the foundation of the world; for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me.’ Then the righteous will answer him, ‘Lord, when did we see thee hungry and feed thee, or thirsty and give thee drink? And when did we see thee a stranger and welcome thee, or naked and clothe thee? And when did we see thee sick or in prison and visit thee?’

And the King will answer them, ‘Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me.’ Then he will say to those at his left hand, ‘Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels; for I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me no drink, I was a stranger and you did not welcome me, naked and you did not clothe me, sick and in prison and you did not visit me.’

Then they also will answer, ‘Lord, when did we see thee hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not minister to thee?’ Then he will answer them, ‘Truly, I say to you, as you did it not to one of the least of these, you did it not to me.’ And they will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.¹¹⁶

A person who is guilty of such offences is constantly invited in the Bible to repentance, sorrow and contrition for sins committed. This sorrow and contrition may also be termed dukkha. It is a dukkha that is willed by the repentant sinner and a dukkha necessary for reconciliation with God. When therefore, John of the Cross condemns cravings as the cause of dukkha he condemns especially those cravings that lead to mortal sins and in a lesser degree the cravings that lead to venial sins or to imperfections. He says:
“Can any appetite produce and cause the two evils ... namely: the privative, which removes the grace of God from the soul; and the positive, which causes the five cardinal kinds of harm ...? ... I answer that relevant to the privative evil, the loss of grace, only the voluntary appetites whose object may involve mortal sin can do this completely. For they deprive the soul of grace in this life and of glory, the possession of God, in the next.\textsuperscript{117}

Friar John speaks of dukkha or suffering of the soul in three ways. In the \textit{Spiritual Canticle} the bride (soul) says:

\textit{“tell him I sicken, suffer, and die”}.\textsuperscript{118}

In this line the soul discloses three needs: sickness, suffering and death. The soul that truly loves God with some perfection usually suffers from his absence in three ways, with respect to the three faculties of the soul: intellect, will, and memory.

With respect to the intellect, she says she is sick because she does not see God, the health of the intellect.

With respect to the will, she declares she suffers because she does not possess God, the will's refreshment and delight.

With respect to the memory, she says she dies because she suffers a distress that resembles death on remembering that she lacks all the goods of the intellect (the vision of God) and the delights of the will (the possession of God), and it is highly possible, among the dangers and sinful occasions of this life, to be without him
forever. For, she sees her lack of the sure and perfect possession of God, who is the soul's life.\textsuperscript{119}

Friar John also agrees with the Buddha when he says that suffering is caused by ignorance. Referring to the wise King Solomon\textsuperscript{120} who was perfect in the wisdom and gifts of God, who sank into such blindness and torpor of will as to construct altars to countless idols, and then worship them himself … which was caused by nothing else than his affection for women and his neglect to deny the appetites and delights of his heart, he says: “If the unmortified appetites could do this in a man who possessed such lofty knowledge of the distance between good and evil, what terrible damage can they cause in us who are ignorant … At every step we mistake evil for good and good for evil. This is peculiar to our nature”.\textsuperscript{121}

Therefore, when the soul drinks of the highest wisdom it makes her forget all worldly things. And it seems that her previous knowledge, and even all the knowledge of the world, is pure ignorance in comparison with this knowledge.\textsuperscript{122} John of the Cross exclaims:

O souls, created for these grandeurs and called to them! What are you doing? How are you spending your time? Your aims are base and your possessions miseries! O wretched blindness of your eyes! You are blind to so brilliant a light and deaf to such loud voices because you fail to discern that insofar as you seek eminence and glory you remain miserable, base, ignorant, and unworthy of so many blessings!\textsuperscript{123} So it is clear that while ignorance leads to suffering, knowledge or wisdom leads to the cessation of suffering.
The Human Composite

As already suggested above, in his desire for goodness and happiness the human person experiences a tug of war between the animal and the rational, the senses and the mind, the emotions and the reason, the body and the soul. Friar John would agree in the classical definition of a human being as a rational animal. Let it be understood here that the term ‘animal’ just means ‘animate’. In other words, as plants and animals are animated by a life-principle, so also are human beings, whose parts, organs, functions, needs manifest some similarity with those of human beings. What is specific to human beings is their rationality. For Friar John, human rationality is rooted in a spiritual soul. And this spiritual soul must take cognizance and control of all the corporeal aggregates. In fact, it is the spiritual soul of each human person that so blends, moulds, unifies and holds together all the aggregates that they no longer remain mere aggregates but become integrated into the human personality. For Friar John, the greater a personality, the greater the integration of the parts – which might otherwise have remained mere aggregates.

In spite of this, Friar John maintains that there is a hierarchy of priorities in the body-spirit composite constituting the human person. The spirit must attend first to its own well-being and secondarily to the well-being of the body. He uses a metaphor ‘the wretched state of captivity’ to explain the composite relationship of body to the soul. “The soul through original sin is a captive in the mortal body, subject to passions and natural appetites.”124
Friar John frequently uses the word ‘soul’ in referring to the whole person (a soul or souls) with an emphasis on the spiritual dimension.125 “There is much difference between the soul and other corporal creatures as there is between a transparent liquid and the filthiest mire.”126 The soul is “in itself a perfect and extremely beautiful image of God”127, where God dwells, as the soul in the Living Flame of Love says:

Where in secret you dwell alone.128

Interpreting this he says, “It should be known that God dwells secretly in all souls and is hidden in their substance, for otherwise they would not last”.129

The human person may be compared to a building with a ground floor and a top story. The five senses may be compared to a door and four windows (eyes) on the ground floor. The internal senses and feelings may be compared to the staircase leading to the top story. The top story – the human spirit, is relatively dark, in the sense that all the information here comes normally from the ground floor or by some kind of faith. The three indwellers of the top story or spirit are the memory, intellect and will. In the Living Flame of Love the soul says:

the deep caverns of feeling.130

“These caverns are the soul's faculties: memory, intellect, and will. They are as deep as the boundless goods of which they are capable since anything less than the infinite fails to fill them. From what they suffer when they are empty, we can gain some knowledge of their enjoyment and delight when they are filled with God, since one contrary sheds light on the other”.131
The human person in order to be human must maintain constant care that the spirit viz. intellect and will may be ever governing the body, senses and appetites.

In the poem the Dark Night:

One dark night,

Fired with love’s urgent longings

— Ah, the sheer grace! —

I went out unseen,

My house being now all stilled the house is stilled or is at rest when all the passions, instincts, emotions, urges, cravings are perfectly subordinate and submissive to a will well-ordered by the mind and reason. “‘My house being now all stilled” means that the house of all the appetites, the sensitive part of the soul, is now stilled, and the desires conquered and lulled to sleep.’

Each one’s character and personality are his or her own house.

For Friar John and probably for Buddha not all desires are cravings. The word craving has a connotation of something that is disordered, unreasonable, unregulated, and inordinate. Not all human desires therefore are cravings. Human beings for Friar John are imperfect as all living beings in the earlier stages of life. They become perfect in the course of time by pursuing what is good for their growth and development. But that which is good is presented to their powers of knowing. What is good for each one must first be known in order to be desired and loved. The body is equipped with its cognitive faculties and so is the soul. The
cognitive faculties of the body are the senses and the cognitive faculty of the soul is intellect. Likewise the body as well as the soul are equipped with the faculties for pursuing what is presented as desirable by the faculties of knowing. The faculties of the body for pursuing what is good and desirable are the passions and emotions which Friar John often calls appetites. The passions also called emotions belong, with the appetites, to the human affective (or appetitive) part. The eleven classic passions defined by Aristotle (the six concupiscible passions of love and hate, desire and aversion, and joy and sorrow; and the five irascible passions of hope and despair, confidence and fear, and anger) are reduced to four principal ones by Friar John: **joy, hope, sorrow and fear**. In the passions, interlinked in their activity, lies one's strength. “The strength of the soul comprises the faculties, passions and appetites”. When unbridled, they become the source of all vices and imperfections; when properly regulated, they give rise to all the virtues.

The four main passions are: joy, fear, hope and sorrow. They dance to the tune of love. When we get what we love, joy is experienced. When we lose what we love, sorrow is experienced. When we don’t have what we love, we hope to have it. When we have what we love, we fear to lose it. Fear, hope joy and sorrow make the soul restless. The objects or goods of desire and joy are divided by John into six categories: “temporal, natural, sensory, moral, supernatural and spiritual”. This division as recognized by John is not a logical division. Because in a logical division there should be no overlapping of categories, whereas here temporal, natural, sensory may be found to overlap one another. The temporal is natural and
the natural temporal. Similarly the moral can be natural and the natural can be moral. John however feels that this non-logical division suits his purpose well. He gives rather detailed guidelines about how the will should steer itself in dealing with each of these six categories in such a way as to attain its goal which is union with God.

In treating of each categories John gives a clear definition of what he means by the terms.

By ‘goods’ – he means possible objects of desire.¹³⁸

i) Temporal – “By temporal goods we mean: riches, status, positions, and other dignities, and children, relatives, and marriages, etc. all these are possible objects of joy for the will.”¹³⁹

ii) Natural – “By natural goods we mean: beauty, grace, elegance, bodily constitution, and all other corporal endowments: also in the soul, good intelligence, discretion, and other talents pertinent to the rational part of man.”¹⁴⁰

iii) Sensory – “by sensory goods we mean all the goods apprehensible to the senses of sight, hearing, smell, taste, and touch, and to the interior faculty of discursive imagination. They are goods pertinent to the exterior and interior senses.”¹⁴¹

iv) Moral – “By moral goods we mean: the virtues and their habits in so far as they are moral; the exercise of any of the virtues; the practice of the works of mercy; the observance of God’s law; urbanity and good manners.”¹⁴²
v) Supernatural – “By these we mean all the gifts and graces of God that exceed our natural faculties and powers, called *gratiae gratis datae*. Examples of these are the gifts of wisdom and knowledge God gave to Solomon and the graces St. Paul enumerates: faith, the grace of healing, working of miracles, prophecy, knowledge and discernment of spirits, interpretation of words, and also the gift of tongues. (1 Cor. 12:9-10).”

vi) Spiritual – “I refer by spiritual goods to all those that are an aid and motivating force in turning the soul to divine things and to converse with God, as well as a help in God’s communications to the soul.”

With Socrates, Friar John would agree that generally speaking, no one does or chooses evil knowingly, i.e. with full realization. However, the good can be presented to a human person either by the senses or by the mind or by faith in God. To prefer the good presented by the senses to what is good as presented by the mind or by faith in God is not worthy of a human being. It may happen that an alcoholic feels that alcohol is good while his mind tells him that for him it is bad. Human reason is overturned if he follows the dictates of his cravings setting aside the light of his mind. Repetition of such wrong acts engenders evil habits along the lines of dependent origination (*pratītyasamutpāda*). Wrong habits become part of the character of a person and quite often this type of character can determine a person’s destiny. Friar John however, is aware that such dependent origination: craving – act – habit – character – destiny may not be necessarily deterministic. The human will enjoys a good deal of self-determination. He or she must give up
preferring the senses and feelings to mind and right reason. For Friar John, faith in
the Biblical Revelation heals and elevates human reason.

What would Friar John think about *dukkha* in connection with the composite
nature of the human person? Most humans have sometimes in their lives
experienced some sort of struggle in maintaining unity and integrity in their
personality. The eyes are never satisfied with seeing and the ears are never filled
with hearing. This not being satisfied and not being filled is what the Buddha
would call *dukkha*. Such *dukkha* seems to be inherent to the human condition.

Friar John would explain this not being filled and not being satisfied by pointing
out that the senses are limited whereas behind the senses is the spirit which has a
potential infinity. Everything in this world is finite. What is finite cannot satisfy
and fill the potential infinity of the soul which is constantly searching for the
infinite. Another observation of Friar John is that what is desirable to the senses is
often experienced as undesirable to the spirit. This is another aspect of *dukkha*, a
kind of a cross that human beings have to carry. This is the struggle between the
spirit and the flesh. When the spirit fails to govern the desires of the flesh,
cravings arise. As St. Paul says “I see in my members another law at war with the
law of my mind and making me captive to the law of sin which dwells in my
members”. Here Friar John would agree with the Buddha that cravings are the
cause of *dukkha*. This is explained by Friar John in some detail in the First Book
of the *Ascent of Mount Carmel*. 
The appetites or desires according to Friar John cause five types of harm: they **weary, torment, darken, defile** and **weaken** the soul.146

1. The appetites/desires are wearisome and tiring for a man. They resemble little children, restless and hard to please, always whining to their mother for this thing or that, and never satisfied. Just as a man who digs covetously for a treasure grows tired and exhausted, so does he who strives to acquire the demands of his appetites become wearied and fatigued. And even if he does finally obtain them, he is still always weary because he is never satisfied. A man with desires wearies himself, because he is like someone with a fever whose thirst increases by the minute, and who feels ill until the fever leaves. The appetites are wearisome and tiring to a man, because they agitate and disturb him just as wind does with water. And they so upset him that they do not let him rest in any place or thing. The man seeking the satisfaction of his desires grows tired, because he is like a famished person who opens his mouth to satisfy himself with air, only to find that instead of being filled his mouth dries up more, since air is not his proper food. So it is clear, then, that the appetites weary and fatigue a man.147

2. Torment and affliction is the second kind of damage the appetites cause in an individual. A person is tormented and afflicted when he reclines on his appetites as is a man lying naked on thorns and nails. Like thorns, the appetites wound and hurt, stick to a person and cause him pain. Just as a
peasant, covetous of the desired harvest, goads and torments the ox that pulls the plough, so concupiscence, in order to attain the object of its longing, afflicts the man who lives under the yoke of his appetites. The intensity of the torment is commensurate with the intensity of the appetite. As a result the torment is as great as the appetite, and the more numerous the appetites that possess a person the greater in number are his torments. A man who lets his desires capture him suffers torture and affliction like an enemy held prisoner. They weaken and blind him, and then they afflict and torment him by chaining him to the mill of concupiscence, for they are the chains by which he is bound.  

3. The third kind of harm the appetites bring upon a person is blindness and darkness. Vapors make the air murky and are a hindrance to the bright sunshine; a cloudy mirror does not clearly reflect a person’s countenance; so too muddy water reflects only a hazy image of his features. In just this way a man’s intellect, clouded by the appetites, becomes dark and impedes the sun of either natural reason or supernatural wisdom from shining within and completely illumining it. The appetite blinds and darkens the soul because the appetite as such is blind. It is blind because of itself it has no intellect. Reason always acts as a blind man’s guide for the appetite. Consequently, every time a man’s appetite leads him, he is blinded, just as we might say that when a blind man guides someone who has good
eyesight both are blind. The appetites are like a cataract on the eye or specks of dust in it; until removed they obstruct vision.\textsuperscript{149}

4. The fourth way the appetites harm the soul is by defiling and staining it. Gold or diamond when placed upon pitch becomes more stained and unsightly as the heat melting the pitch increases. Similarly, a man, fired by his appetite for some creature, is stained and blackened by that creature because of the heat of his desire. There is as much difference between the soul and other corporal creatures as there is between a transparent liquid and the filthiest mire. This liquid would be polluted if mud were mixed with it; so too attachment to creature defiles a soul, because this attachment makes it similar to the creature. Strokes of soot would ruin a perfect and extraordinarily beautiful portrait, so too inordinate appetites would defile and dirty the soul, in itself a perfect and extremely beautiful image of God. Inordinate appetites for the things of the world do all this damage to the beauty of the soul, and even more.\textsuperscript{150}

5. Weakness is the fifth kind of harm the appetites produce in a man. For the appetites sap the strength needed for perseverance in the practice of virtue. Because the force of the desire is divided, it becomes weaker than if it were completely fixed on one object. The more objects there are, dividing an appetite, the weaker becomes this appetite for each. This is why the philosophers say that virtue when united is stronger than when scattered. It
is therefore clear that if the desire of the will extends to something other than virtue, it grows weaker in the practice of virtue. Hot water quickly loses its heat if left uncovered and aromatic spices when unwrapped eventually lose the strength and pungency of their scent. So the soul that is not recollected in one appetite alone, i.e., the desire for God, loses heat and strength in the practice of virtue. The appetites weaken a person’s virtue, because they are like shoots burgeoning about a tree, sapping its strength, and causing it fruitlessness. The desires are indeed like leeches, always sucking blood from one’s veins. The appetites do not bring any good to a man; rather they rob him of what he already has.\textsuperscript{151}

A fourth observation is that the soul being potentially infinite cannot be satisfied with nothing nor can it be satisfied with anything less than God. It was created for God who is the actual Infinite. But Friar John has a firm conviction that a person must pass through a process of deep self-emptying and purification in his spirit in order to reach the actual infinite. In the \textit{Living Flame of Love} he says: “Oh, who can tell how impossible it is for a person with appetites to judge the things of God as they are! If there is to be success in judging the things of God, the appetites and satisfactions must be totally rejected, and these things of God must be weighed apart from them. For, otherwise one will infallibly come to consider the things of God as not of God, and the things that are not of God as of God.”\textsuperscript{152}
That process of self-emptying is also an experience of *dukkha*. The experience of *dukkha* therefore becomes multi-dimensional, multi-faceted and in a sense encompassing the finitude of a composite being part of which, if we may say so, is potentially infinite. There is *dukkha* in growth, in work, in achievement, in love.

**Permanence and Impermanence**

In his scholastic studies, Friar John had certainly come across the question of permanence and impermanence since already in Greek philosophy thinkers like Parmenides had emphasized the stability, permanence and immutability of being while others like Heraclitus had maintained that reality was in such a state of fluctuations that no one could step twice into the same river. Aristotle had attempted a synthesis between the two views maintaining that it was a question of relativity in the world of material reality. Friar John understood that duration is finite. All finite material beings therefore have something of impermanence (*anicca*). Innumerable Biblical passages as well as daily experience remind Friar John of the impermanence of whatever passes with time. When united with the body however, the human soul must constantly reflect on the impermanence of life on earth. The book of *Ecclesiastes*, one of the books of the Bible says: “Vanity of vanities, says the Preacher, vanity of vanities! All is vanity.”

The word ‘vanity’ in this context seems to be equivalent to *anicca*. And again, “There is no remembrance of former things, nor will there be any remembrance of later things yet to happen among those who come after.”

As regards human life on earth we
have the testimony of the *Psalms*\textsuperscript{155} which were familiar to Friar John, like e.g. “Our span is seventy years or eighty for those who are strong.”\textsuperscript{156}

The human person being composite can decompose; since where there is composition, there can be decomposition.

Yes, as a philosopher, as a theologian and as a mystic, John of the Cross is keenly aware of the transitory nature of human existence. “Like the grass which today is alive and tomorrow is thrown into the oven”\textsuperscript{157}; “like a passing shadow”\textsuperscript{158}; “like the breath that passes never to return”\textsuperscript{159}… these and other such metaphors were familiar to John through his frequent reading of the Psalms and other Biblical texts. He was very well aware of the uncertainty and insecurity of human existence on earth.

On the other hand, Friar John is aware of the deep longing for happiness implanted in the human soul which, as said above, is potentially infinite. Happiness that passes away and is transitory is no happiness at all. Happiness connotes a state that is never ending. As Shakespeare says in one of his sonnets,

“… Time will come and take my love away

This thought is as a death that cannot choose

But weep to have what it fears to lose”\textsuperscript{160}

These lines of Shakespeare have references pregnant with meaning both to the experience of *dukkha* on the one hand and *anicca* on the other. But who and what is it that perceives the *anicca* that is the cause of *dukkha* – the possibility and the
probability of one day having to lose everything that is dear to us in this life and the inevitable necessity of having to let go every attachment? It is the potential infinity of the human soul. This same potential infinity re-enforced by the Biblical revelation elevates the vision of Friar John to a supernatural horizon with a promise of ultimate stability and permanence in a glorious vision and union with the actual Infinite which is none other than God Himself. He sees also that while such an attainment is the work of a supernatural grace, it requires the co-operation of the human will. As mentioned above, this co-operation will imply even an extra-ordinary amount of dukkha because of the dark nights that will have to be gone through. But Friar John has the conviction that this dukkha is worth experiencing for the prize that it promises.

Spirits

Relying on the Bible, Friar John believed in the world of non-material or spiritual beings. Spiritual beings have far greater stability and permanence than material beings. The human soul being spiritual is simple, is not composite and therefore is not subject to decomposition. Spiritual beings have no quantity and are not subject to space and time. For Friar John, the Supreme Being having neither beginning nor end has a supremely spiritual nature that is Supreme Consciousness. This Being or God reveals Himself to humankind as the Creator of all material and spiritual beings inviting human beings to believe in His revelation of love so that eventually at the end of their earthly life they may share in His happiness forever. Friar John’s greatest aspiration in life was to grow in the knowledge of God
through faith, become one with Him through love and grace, and be happy with Him forever.

Friar John would note that though impermanence and change characterized the whole of material nature, some beings or forms of beings were more impermanent than others. The accompanying accidents for instance, were more impermanent than the substances. Quantities, qualities, places were more impermanent than things and persons. Things do sometimes appear to be far more permanent than people. Trees live much longer than men and even the books, the building, bridges, paintings, sculptures that are the works of human hands and minds turn out to be much more long-lived than their authors, builders and producers. These considerations would lead some philosophers to conclude to the immortality of the human person as apparently many followers of the Buddha also believed. As a Christian believer, Friar John cannot doubt the existence and the immortality of the soul. The soul for him is the heart of the self and being immortal, it enjoys permanence and even a degree of indestructibility. What is the relation between the self and the ego? For John, the self and the ego may be considered identical if by ego we mean selfhood. Though he does not explicitly deal with this question, contemporary readers need to have answers to questions like these. The self today as in ancient times can be approached in various ways. Ontologically every person is an ego or a self (selfhood). Psychologically however, the ego is often associated not with selfhood but with selfishness and egoism. When Gautama recommends *anatta* and denies that *atta* and happiness
can coexist John would agree, in the sense that egoism that leads to selfishness is precisely the self of the cravings that are the cause of dukkha.

“All things are full of weariness; a man cannot utter it; the eye is not satisfied with seeing, nor the ear filled with hearing.” (Eccles 1:8)

Search quotations in concordance... may be in asc. I bk and in III bk c.18....Somewhere in vanity of vanities, se in the index.

**Emptiness (Nada and Sunya)**

The necessity for self-emptying, purification and detachment has already been mentioned above. Friar John’s concept of this self-emptying may be considered akin to the idea of sunya in Buddhism the counterpart of which in Friar John is nada.

Friar John uses the Spanish word ‘nada’ which could be translated sometimes as emptiness and sometimes as nothing or nothingness. For him, the chief connotation of the term ‘nada’ is total detachment from creatures. This total detachment from creatures is part of the process through which a soul the potential infinite approaches the Supreme Being, the actual infinite. For Friar John the very being of all creatures is nothingness when compared to the infinite being of God as Prophet Isaiah says: “The nations are like a drop from a bucket, and are accounted as the dust on the scales.”

Friar John says:

All creatures of heaven and earth are nothing when compared to God ... All creatures considered in this way are nothing, and a person’s attachments to them are less than nothing since these attachments are an impediment to and deprive the
soul of transformation in God - just as darkness is nothing and less than nothing since it is a privation of light. One who is in darkness does not comprehend the light, so neither will a person attached to creatures be able to comprehend God … all the being of creatures compared with the infinite being of God is nothing, and that, therefore, a man attached to creatures is nothing in the sight of God, and even less than nothing, because love causes equality and likeness and even brings the lover lower than the object of his love.\(^{162}\)

If the very being of creatures is nothing in comparison with the Supreme Being, what do we mean by saying that the human soul is potentially infinite? In the first place, potential infinite means that the human soul cannot bring itself into actual existence independently of the Supreme Being. Secondly, the human soul is spiritual by nature. This very spiritual constitution confers on the soul some kind of infinity relative to the body. This relative infinity is the reason why human beings transcend the material universe. This transcendence is shown by human capacities to understand, explain, interpret, control and predict in greater or lesser degree the phenomena and the laws of nature. This potential infinity is also shown in the way human beings can engage in mathematics and use words as symbols for not only particular concrete material realities but also for general and universal ideas and concepts. The very words ‘infinite’, ‘eternal’, ‘unlimited’ etc. seem possible only because there is a spark of infinity in the bosom of the human soul. This accounts for the relentless search by science for the boundaries of the cosmos and of philosophy to transcend those boundaries. For Friar John this natural
potential infinity is the foundation of human openness to the Divine Being and to any revelation made by the Divine Being.

**Merit and Demerit**

Man’s life on earth is a time of trial for Friar John and the human will is to be constantly exercised in every kind of virtue with a view to attaining eternal happiness in the next life and the highest possible degree of union with God. With St. Paul, Friar John would hold “We know that in everything God works for good with those who love him.”¹⁶³ Action which includes thoughts, words and deeds must all proceed from faith in God if they are to be meritorious. This faith accepts a supernatural revelation and hence transcends human reasoning, without, however, contradicting it. Works performed in faith are works of charity. All such works are meritorious and will receive their reward. Merit or demerit yields their respective fruit in the next life.

**Conclusion**

Attempting to summarize comprehensively Friar John’s vision of the human situation we may conclude that from the cradle to the grave there is a sense in which man’s life could be described as *dukkha* in the terms of Gautama Buddha. As we have seen however, though this *dukkha* has sinful cravings for its cause, there are non-sinful factors that contribute to its presence in the human race at large and also in particular individuals. The presence of God and His salvific action in history and in particular individuals especially those who are touched by God through Jesus Christ exercises a purifying and transforming influence on
dukkha preparing human persons even through the experience of anicca in the
Johannine sense and sunya for a sukha that is divine.
23. Dhp 117
25. Dhp 121
26. Dhp 123
27. Dhp 125
28. Cfr. Dhp 126
29. Dhp 127
30. Dhp 161
31. Dhp 183
32. Dhp 318
33. Dhp 319
34. Dhp 330
36. AN ii. 80 as cited in Piyadassi Thera, *The Buddha’s Ancient Path*, p. 59.
37. SN iii.149, 151; SN ii. 179 as cited in Piyadassi Thera, *The Buddha’s Ancient Path*, p. 59.
44. SN v. 421 as cited in Piyadassi Thera, *The Buddha’s Ancient Path*, p. 44.
45. SN iii. 158 as cited in Piyadassi Thera, *The Buddha’s Ancient Path*, p. 44.
46. AN ii. 48 as cited in Piyadassi Thera, *The Buddha’s Ancient Path*, p. 44.
47. Cfr. Piyadassi Thera, *The Buddha’s Ancient Path*, p. 44.
48. P.54.
58. The Buddhist Publication Society, *The Three Basic Facts of Existence*, retrieved on 14.07.2009. “Change or impermanence is the essential characteristic of all phenomenal existence. We cannot say of anything, animate or inanimate, organic or inorganic, “this is lasting”; for even while we are saying this, it would be undergoing change. All is fleeting; the beauty of flowers, the bird’s melody, the bee’s hum, and a sunset’s glory... There are three types of teachers, the first one teaches that the ego or the self is real now as well as in the future (here and hereafter); the second one teaches that the ego is real only in this life, not in the future; the third one teaches that the concept of an ego is an illusion: it is not real either in this life or
in the hereafter. The first one is the eternalist (sasatavaadi); the second one is the annihilationist (ucchedavaadi); the third one is the Buddha who teaches the middle way of avoiding the extremes of eternalism and annihilationism.” Cfr. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Three_marks_of_existence, accessed on 23.4.2013.


60 We may recall here that the Buddhist view of the soul is called Nairatmyavada (theory of no-soul) and that of God is called Nirishvaravada (theory of no-God).


65 MN III. 278 ff. as cited inhttp://www.iep.utm.edu/buddha/ accessed on 4.4.2013; St. John of the Cross speaks of six objects of joy. No joy is permanent: what gives permanent joy is union with God or Nirvana.


76 Theodore de Bary (ed.), Sources of Indian Tradition, vol. 1, p. 94.


Cfr. Antony Fernando, *Buddhism Made Plain An Introduction for Christians*, p. 44.


102 Earlier Buddhist texts refer to five realms; other sources refer to six realms adding demi-god realm, which according to earlier texts is included in the god realm.


104 Dhp 393


107 M. Punnaji Thera, *Beyond the Horizon of Time*, Public Trustee Dept., Colombo, p. 35.


111 Original sin is the hereditary sin incurred at conception by every human being as a result of the original sinful choice of the first man, Adam.

112 Cfr. Gen 3 passim


114 Rom 5:19

115 1Pet 2:24

116 Mt 25:31-46

117 St. John of the Cross, *Ascent of Mount Carmel*, Book 1, 12, 2-3. Hereafter ‘A’ and the number of the book prefixed. St. Paul says: “For even if I made you sorry with my letter, I do not regret it … for I see that that letter grieved you, though only for a while. As it is, I rejoice, not because you were grieved, but because you were grieved into repenting; for you felt, a godly grief, so that you suffered no loss through us. For godly grief produces a repentance that leads to salvation and brings no regret, but worldly grief produces death”.

118 SC 2

119 Cfr. SC 2, 6
King Solomon was the wise king of Israel who ruled for about 40 years from circa 970-931 BC. Cfr. 1Kgs 3:12-13; 11:1-4; Cfr. 1A 8, 6.

Cfr. SC 26, 13

SC 39, 7

1A 15, 1

Cfr. 1A 1, 1-3

1A 9, 1

St. John of the Cross, Living Flame of Love, 4. Hereafter LF.

The soul comprises two main parts: sense and spirit; but the emphasis placed on the purification of these two parts does not seek to establish a dichotomy in the human being. “These two parts ... united and conformed are jointly prepared to suffer the rough and arduous purgation of the spirit which awaits them” ZN 3, 1; also cfr. SC 13, 3-6. In its operations it has a cognitive and an affective, or appetitive, dimension. Cfr. SC 28, 3-5. Its deep center or depth may refer either to its substance or to the limit to which the active or receptive capacity of the individual can reach. Cfr. LF 1, 9-13; 4, 4.

LF 3

LF 3, 18

St. John of the Cross, The Dark Night, 1st Stanza. Hereafter N.

1A 15, 2

Cfr. 3A 16, 2

3A 16, 2

Cfr. 3A 16, 2-5

Cfr. 3A 17, 2

3A 18, 1

3A 18, 1

3A 21, 1

3A 24, 1

3A 27, 1

3A 30, 1

3A 33, 2

Rom 7:23, cfr. 7:12 ff.

Cfr. 1A 6, 1.

Cfr. 1A 6, 6-7.

Cfr. 1A 7, 1-2.

Cfr. 1A 8, 1-4.

Cfr. 1A 9, 1-3.

Cfr. 1A 10, 1-3

LF 3, 73

Eccles 1:2

Eccles 1:11

Psalms (The Book of Psalms/ Psalter) is a book in the Bible. Psalms are a collection of prayers, for the most part without reference to date or specific events or persons.

Ps. 90:10 in The Divine Office The Liturgy of the Hours According to the Roman Rite, vol. I, Advent, Christmastide & Weeks 1-9 of the Year, Collins, London, Glasgow, 1974, p. [380]. The RSV Bible reads: “The years of our life are threescore and ten, or even by reason of strength fourscore”.

Cfr. Mt 6:30

Cfr. Ps. 102:11; 1Chr. 29:15; Eccles 6:12.

Cfr. Ps. 62:9; 94:11; 144:4
161 Is 40:15
162 1A 4, 3-4
163 Rom 8:28