

Lecture 15

The Meaning of Perfect Teaching in Buddhism

In the last lecture we spoke of “One mind opens two doors” in the Buddha-Womb [Ch. *Rulai zang*, Skt. *tathāgata-garbha*] system. We can look upon this framework as a universal common paradigm and use it to digest some of the problems in Kant’s philosophy, and that would be a great contribution to philosophy. But according to the Tiantai school’s critique and classification of Buddha’s teachings, the Buddha-Womb system falls under Special Teaching [*bie jiao*, Distinct Teaching]. The several questions we have discussed in previous lectures were treated from the perspective of the development of Buddhism. For example, in regard to the system of the Weishi [Consciousness-Only, Yogacara, Mere Ideation] school, we focused on the question of Three Substances and Two Truths. And in regard to the Buddha-Womb system, we discussed the importance of the doctrine of one mind opening two doors. These all fall under the Special Teaching of Mahayana.

Today we shall go on to discuss the meaning of Perfect Teaching [*yuan jiao*] and the idea of Perfect Teaching. According to the critique and classification established by the Tiantai school, the highest standard is Perfect Teaching. The highest state of spiritual cultivation is also Perfect Teaching. And the reason why it can determine whether other traditions are Hinayana or Mahayana, are Mahayana Common [*tong*, Penetrating, Shared] Teaching or Mahayana Special Teaching is because there stands behind it the standard of a Perfect Teaching. What then is Perfect Teaching? What is Imperfect Teaching? Why is what we have mentioned before only Special Teaching and not Perfect Teaching? This question of perfect or imperfect is most intriguing. And it is a question that has not emerged in Western philosophy. Western philosophy has produced many systems, many schools of thought, but it has never produced this concept of “Perfect Teaching” nor the question of Perfect Teaching and Imperfect Teaching. Thus we may say that the concept of Perfect Teaching is a new concept introduced by Buddhism in the course of its development in China.

Of course, we do not claim that in the history of Western philosophy there was no concept of “perfect.” The concept of perfect is an ordinary one which can be used by anyone. But “perfect” does not necessarily represent what Buddhism meant by “Perfect Teaching.” On the surface the characters *yuan jiao* [rounded, complete, perfect, teaching] implies perfection, for if something is not rounded it is not complete, and something not *yuanman* [perfect, complete] cannot be Perfect Teaching. But the meaning of perfect or perfection found in Western philosophy cannot accurately convey the meaning of Buddhist Perfect Teaching.

These days many Westerners have translated *yuan jiao* [Perfect Teaching] into Round Teaching. This would give the impression that there is also a Square Teaching. Actually round only represents a circle, and a circle is perfect without gaps. But does that mean that a square is not perfect? So this kind of translation is not quite appropriate.

This is not to say that the word perfect cannot be used. But the meaning of the word perfect in Western philosophy cannot completely convey the meaning of what Buddhism meant by *yuan jiao*. In Western philosophy, Plato’s Idea [Form] can be said to be most perfect and most real. Elsewhere, when the rationalism of Western philosophy speaks of what is meant by moral good, it speaks of the good according to a certain ontological perfection. Here the good is different from that of hedonism or utilitarianism, where good is defined by empirical happiness. We can trace this ontological perfection upward until we come to God, God Himself being that which is most perfect. Thus in Western philosophy, perfect can be called a technical term referring to the Idea of Plato or to God’s existence.

What is the origin of Plato’s Idea [Form]? His Idea is reached after we have, through our analytical faculty, removed all the things of the sensible world and have arrived at a highest standard, which is the perfect Idea. But this is to speak of perfect in terms of the Idea itself. It is different from the meaning of Perfect Teaching in Buddhism. For even if the Idea is most perfect, we have erased all the things of the empirical world, the sensible world, revealing Idea as the perfect highest standard. This is precisely not what Buddhism stresses in the spirit of Perfect Teaching

Second, if we affirm God on the basis of a transcendent consciousness, saying that God is the most perfect existence, that the things of reality are finite, created, and not autonomous, that only God is an autonomous existence who created all dharmas, then God Himself can be the greatest perfection. But his perfection is not the same as what is meant by Perfect Teaching. For even if God Himself is the most perfect, most real existence, this doctrine of a single infinite existence is still different from what is meant by the Buddhist Perfect Teaching.

Besides the word perfect, Western philosophy also has the word complete. Complete also implies the meaning of perfect. For example in the antinomy of Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant points out that regardless of whether it is by means of a thesis or an antithesis, we can affirm that the series of conditions of things can be made complete. For any thing or event has a cause through which it exists or is born. If we pursue this cause to look for its condition, we will find that there will be a cause of a cause and a condition of a condition. Continuing this investigation we will find that the series of conditions cannot be completed. But our reason wants to complete it. How then can we achieve completion and perfection? From the standpoint of a thesis, we must affirm a First Cause or God for this series of conditions to be complete. The world is finite from the aspect of time and space. Conversely, the antithesis holds that there is no First Cause in the world, which is infinite. Space is also infinite. This world is infinite, and the series of conditions here is infinite. Since we affirm that it is infinite, then it can in itself be complete. In this way, whether by means of a thesis or an antithesis, the series of conditions can be made complete. But this kind of completion is not Perfect Teaching. For this "completeness" is intrinsically problematic. First, the proof is problematic. Second, assuming the proof is not problematic, why would there be an antinomy?

From this we can see that Western philosophy has generally followed the path of analysis to explain what is perfect or complete. Plato's Idea is demonstrated through a transcendental analysis; it is not something that can be seen by experience. The aim of Plato's analytic method was to demonstrate the Idea. We can call it a transcendental analytic or a transcendent analytic. His transcendental path is not from the perspective of the Subject but from that of the object, the purpose being to demonstrate an Idea. On the other hand, Kant's transcendental analytic takes the perspective of the subjective, the

purpose being to demonstrate an a priori category, to demonstrate a pure concept. These are two different paths, but both are analytical paths, and moreover paths of transcendental analysis. Why do we call it transcendental analysis? Because from the perspective of the object, we first affirm an *a priori* existence, such as the Idea, which originally exists and is *a priori*. And from the perspective of the understanding, we affirm an a priori category or a pure concept, which is to say that, through a certain method, we can discover a concept that is supplied by understanding itself. Only this sort of analysis is called transcendental analysis. Supposing we do not adopt transcendental analysis but use empirical analysis, then it would be impossible to discover an *a priori* existence. Leibniz and Russell stressed logical analysis where they did not have to affirm an *a priori* existence. Of course they could affirm it but that would only have been a logical affirmation.

In general when we speak of analysis there is empirical analysis, logical analysis, and transcendental analysis. For example, when we speak of perfection in terms of the Idea, the method we use is transcendental analysis. Also, when we affirm that there is a transcendental, infinite, existence, namely God, and when, putting aside all finite things, we speak of the perfection of God, this is a transcendent consciousness as well as a religious consciousness. When we affirm the existence of God through this religious consciousness, the underlying reasoning is still the path of transcendental analysis. It is only through an analytical process that religious consciousness can reveal that God is on high, that He is transcendental and infinite, as well as omniscient, omnipotent, and omnipresent. But this is not Perfect Teaching.

Likewise when we speak of the completeness of a series of conditions. Completeness is spoken of in terms of the category of causality of our understanding. Starting with the empirical world, we pursue our inquiry upwards level by level until finally we ask whether there is or is not a First Cause. Either way, the series of conditions can be completed. But this kind of completeness is not Perfect Teaching. The reason why these doctrinal paths are not Perfect Teaching is because they all present through an analytical demonstration, analytically determining whether a concept is possible or not. For example, in following a series of conditions, how do we on the thesis affirm that there is a First Cause? At the same time, on the antithesis, we hold that this

sort of affirmation is groundless, that we cannot affirm that there is a First Cause. These two theories contradict each other, but each has a point, and each can affirm that this series of conditions can be completed. But this sort of completeness cannot convey the meaning of Buddhist Perfect Teaching.

Perfect Teaching has a special meaning, one not conveyed by what in the West is called perfect or complete. If we understand what Buddhism calls Perfect Teaching as that perfect or complete, then the *ālaya* [Skt. *ālaya-vijñāna*, storehouse consciousness] system of the Yogacara school was also perfect or complete. Then why is it only a Special Teaching? Or take the system of Buddha-Womb. One can say that it also affirms the existence of a First Cause, for all dharmas depend on the Buddha-Womb Self-Existent Pure Mind, and through it one mind opens two doors. Not only can Buddha-Womb explain the dharmas of birth and death and transmigration, but it can explain the pure dharmas of return-to-nirvana. Is this not also very complete? Then why must it be adjudged a Special Teaching? This shows that it is not enough to be systematically complete to qualify as Perfect Teaching. For example, the *Mahāyāna-samparigrahaśāstra* [*She-dacheng-lun* 攝大乘論] begins by quoting a hymn from the *Abhidharma-mahāyāna-sūtra* [*Abidamo-dacheng-jing* 阿毘達摩大乘經]: “From the time without beginning comes the cause, all dharmas successively conditioned, from which there are the various paths, and nirvana is attested.” When this hymn says the cause that comes from the time without beginning, all dharmas successively conditioned, is it not equivalent to what Kant meant by saying that the series of conditions are completed? *Jie* 界 [realm, cause] in the *ālaya* system refers to the *ālaya* consciousness, and in the later Buddha-Womb system it refers to Buddha-Womb Self-Existent Pure Mind. In these two systems, the *jie* itself can be completed, which is to say that both series are complete. But regardless of whether it is the *ālaya* consciousness system or the system of Buddha-womb Self-Existent Pure Mind, the Tiantai school in its critique of Buddhist doctrines still classifies them as Special Teaching and not Perfect Teaching.

Then what does Perfect Teaching in Buddhism mean? The words perfect or complete can of course convey the meaning, though not completely. For the concept of Buddhist Perfect Teaching has never appeared in Western philosophy, whether it is

Plato's system or the idea of God in religion. As for the question of completeness in the series of conditions in Kant's critique of the antinomy, we can also explain completeness in a series of conditions in *alaya* or the Buddha-womb system. But none of this is Perfect Teaching. They all belong to Special Teaching. So although the concept of Perfect Teaching appears easy to understand, it is actually difficult to grasp. For this reason, Buddhism has relied on the critique and classification of doctrine [*pan jiao*] to reveal Perfect Teaching. We should regard this as a philosophical problem that deserves to be considered anew. Since it is Perfect Teaching, it is of course a method of teaching. Since a teaching can be explained and pondered, we can follow a path or a method to convey the precise meaning of Perfect Teaching.

Śākyamuni discussed various methods of teaching the truth. First he discussed the Hinayana doctrine. Later he advanced to the Mahayana doctrine. The methods of teaching the truth included the instant, the gradual, the secret, the variable, and so on. These distinguished the various methods of teaching and are called *hua yi* [protocol for conversion/salvation]” The principles that he taught belonged to the content, and are called *hua fa* [principles of conversion].” Thus we have the distinction of the Four Teachings of the Protocol for Conversion, and the Four Teachings of the Principles of Conversion. The methods of teaching were to convert all sentient beings, and the Four Principles of Conversion consisted of the doctrines that were taught during the process of conversion. Consequently, as long as it was a doctrine, it could be accurately conveyed through speech and language. Then what could not be said? What the Chan [Zen] school called “main vehicle,” also called “upper upper main vehicle,” could not be uttered. For the “separate tradition [*bie chuan*] outside the doctrine cannot be put in writing.” What this meant was that what was within the doctrine could be uttered, while what was outside the doctrine could not be uttered. Since the separate tradition could not be uttered, it could not be written down. This shows that doctrine had to be written down. Since Perfect Teaching is still a kind of teaching, it can be clearly explained. This still belongs to the theoretical. But it is not enough to merely understand doctrinal principles, they must be practiced. If we really put our beliefs into practice, or practice them existentially, that would be *guan xing* 觀行 [contemplation and accordant practice]. Chan meditation is also in contemplation and practice. When meditation reaches the

ultimate stage, it becomes the Main Vehicle [*zong sheng* 宗乘], which is the Chan school. At this point it becomes the Separate Tradition outside the teaching, and thus it is only practiced and not written down. Thus since the Perfect Teaching can be spoken, we can treat its doctrinal principles as a philosophical problem to be pondered. It is a philosophical problem of a kind that is not found in the West.

In a certain sense, *yuan jiao* can be translated as Perfect Teaching. The systems of *ālaya* consciousness or Buddha-womb we have previously discussed are still not Perfect Teachings. For example, when Western philosophy speaks of Idea or God as being perfect, it is saying that the Idea itself or God Himself is perfect. But if we use practice or thought to demonstrate God or the Idea, there are many ways of doing so. For example, Christianity, Islam, Catholicism and so on all teach God. But God Himself is one thing, while demonstrating God through our practice, thought, or theory is another thing. When Buddhism speaks of Perfect Teaching, it does not do so on the basis of God Himself as Western philosophy or religion does, but judges whether a doctrine is perfect on the basis of the doctrinal principles that express “God Himself is perfect.” God Himself is not a religion, while demonstrating God’s perfection through theory, thought, or practice is religion. A religion must have an ecclesiastical head, doctrines, and rules to be observed. There are missionaries who object vehemently to the Chinese calling Christianity a Western religion. They often argue that Christianity is universal. Impressive as this statement sounds, it is actually flawed. God is catholic but Christianity is not necessarily catholic. Christianity is a particular mode in the process of historical development; it is governed by historical and cultural conditions. If we assert that Christ spoke not only to the Jews, then we can also say that Confucius spoke not only to the people of Shandong, but to the whole world. All truths are universal, but the set of truths of a historical or cultural system will evince distinctive characteristics which may be appropriate here but not appropriate there. That is, just to say that God Himself is perfect cannot be called Perfect Teaching. We must judge whether the doctrine is perfect on the basis of the method that is used to express God.

Any system that is expressed through the method of speech and writing is not Perfect Teaching. For all teachings are different and stand in opposition to one another.

For example, Christianity preaches one method, Islam another. Since each has its own teaching, neither of them is the ultimate Perfect Teaching. That is why we can say that Westerners have not considered the question of Perfect Teaching. Westerners are only interested in each establishing his own system, adhering strictly to it and denouncing other religions. If a religion is represented by a set of teachings, then none of the sets of religious teachings can be the Perfect Teaching. Neither Western philosophy nor Western religion has thought of the question of whether a doctrine is perfect or not, whereas the question of Perfect Teaching has been a major concern of Buddhism. Whether in the Mahayana or the Hinayana, the desire of every sentient being is to become a Buddha and realize nirvana. But realizing nirvana is itself not Perfect Teaching. For Hinayana also realizes nirvana, and if it does, why is it only Hinayana, the Lesser Vehicle? Mahayana, the Great Vehicle, also realizes nirvana. Why then does it contain many different systems? According to the Buddhist critique and classification of doctrine, none of these different paths of Mahayana and Hinayana to attaining nirvana is the ultimate path. Thus Perfect Teaching is determined to be perfect not on the basis of nirvana itself but on the basis of the method by which it expresses nirvana.

What then is Perfect? Hinayana claims that when one personally confirms and realizes nirvana, and is in nirvana itself, that is perfection. The *arhat*, for instance, is perfect. Mahayana has various methods of realizing Dao and attaining Buddhahood and thereby reaching nirvana, such as the Common Teaching, the Special Teaching, and so on. But these can only be regarded as the nirvana of Common Teaching and Special Teaching, not Perfect Teaching. Thus the perfect is not adjudged on the basis of nirvana itself but on the basis of the method of expressing nirvana.

That is because if there are many alternative systems jostling to replace one another, then they are not the ultimate Perfect Teaching. Westerners can well understand alternative systems, for instance, Plato's system, Kant's system, Russell's system. They have a clear idea of systems because they are good at building systems. Each system holds itself to be self-sufficient, logical, and perfect. But this is simply the perfection of the system itself, and does not mean that any of these systems are the Perfect Teaching, because as long as there are alternative systems pitted against one another, they are not

the Perfect Teaching. Westerners have not considered the problem of "What kind of system is the ultimate Perfect Teaching," whereas the reason why Buddhism brought up the concept of Perfect Teaching was in reference to the various schools of Hinayana and Mahayana, and to explain why they were none of them the Perfect Teaching, and from there to reveal the meaning of Perfect Teaching. Although Perfect Teaching is also a system, it is not an alternative system. If it were an alternative system, it would not be Perfect Teaching, and that would be a self-negation.

In Western philosophy, even so meticulous a thinker as Kant failed to consider the question of Perfect Teaching. He only thought of how to establish the system of the *Critique of Pure Reason* itself. Perhaps it was a perfect system but it was still an alternative system, and not what Buddhism meant by the Perfect Teaching. Then there was Russell with his logical mind and his analysis. Such things as "logical possibility" and "logical impossibility" were constantly hanging on his lips. He could modestly concede that other systems had logical possibility, although he would not necessarily subscribe to them. At the most he would acknowledge that yours was also a system, as for example, pragmatism was also a theory, a system, a logical possibility. But he did not go further and ask whether it was perfect. At the most his answer would be that "absolute perfection is impossible." Of course, as long as it is an alternative system, it cannot be absolutely perfect. Because for one to hold that a system is an alternative system and at the same time absolutely perfect is either being arbitrary or self-contradictory.

So I have brought out this question for all of you to ponder. It is certainly a philosophical question and a high-level one. In the more than two thousand years of philosophy, this question has failed to appear. Have we not enabled philosophy to take a step forward by introducing this question? We can now use the knowledge of modern philosophy and logic to tackle this question. A high level of technical skill is also required to handle this non-technical question.

Perfect Teaching can be used to translate *yuan jiao*, but why do translators not use this term? The reason is because the translators do not understand the content and meaning of *yuan jiao* and so they translate it literally as Round Teaching. Round Teaching is not positively incorrect. Why then are both Perfect Teaching and Round

Teaching permissible translations? What does Round Teaching mean? Perhaps it is not quite apt and does not convey the essential meaning of *yuan jiao*, but most people have only a vague idea of what *yuan jiao* means. Then when it is translated as Round Teaching, what do they mean by it? In terms of the meaning of *prajñā* in the *Mahāprajñāpāramitā-sūtra* [*Da-bore-jing*], Round Teaching refers to perfectly penetrating without obstruction [*yuantong wu'ai* 圓通無礙]. Perfectly penetrating without obstruction refers to the marvelous functions of *prajñā*. If Round Teaching corresponds to this meaning, then it is appropriate. According to the *Mahāprajñāpāramita-sūtra*, the spirit of *prajñā* is that "The mind should without attachment be activated,"¹ and "the Buddha preaches *prajñā pāramita* [perfection of Wisdom] is not *prajñā pāramita*; that is *prajñā pāramita*."² *Prajñā* establishes not a single dharma, knows nothing and gains nothing, and without jeopardizing Provisional Names [i.e., things of the empirical world] expresses the True Suchness of dharmas. It is the perfect. Therefore the perfectly penetrating without obstruction is said in terms *prajñā* wisdom, and in this sense, *yuan* may be translated as round.

But *yuan* has two meanings. One refers to the perfect interpenetration without obstruction of *prajna*. Another refers to what the Huayan school calls *yuanman wujin* 圓滿無盡 [perfect and inexhaustible] and *zhuban juzu* [mutual entailment of principal and attendants; i.e., every entity in the phenomenal world entails and determines all the other entities]. According to the Huayan school, the *yuan* [rounded, perfect] is not only *yuantong* 圓通 [perfectly penetrating] or *yuanrong* 圓融 [perfectly dissolving] but it is also *yuanman wujin* 圓滿無盡 [perfect and inexhaustible]. Thus its *yuan* has the two levels of meaning, perfectly penetrating and perfect. *Yuanman wujin* [perfect and inexhaustible] is simply perfect, whereas *yuantong wu'ai* 圓通無礙 [perfectly penetrating without obstruction] can be translated as round. To speak of *yuantong wu'ai* then, is always to speak of *prajñā*. There is also what the Huayan school describes as the Ten Profound Doors [*shi xuan men*, ten profound principles], one is identical to all, all is identical to one, and so on. "Ji" [is, is identical to] and "she" [include, entail] always refer to the *prajñā* spirit of perfectly dissolving without obstruction [*yuanrong wu'ai*]. As to "perfect and inexhaustible [*yuanman wujin*]", it refers to the Ten Doors to

Enlightenment [*shi famen*]. When speaking of door to enlightenment [*famen*, dharma-door], the Huayan school always speaks of Ten Doors to Enlightenment. And when it speaks of Buddha, it also says the Ten-Body Buddha, for ten is the most perfect number. Here “ten” is not a random number, but indicates doctrinal principles that have necessity. The contents it lists can be arbitrary and variable, but the Ten Doors to Enlightenment are required and necessary. For only the expression “Ten Doors to Enlightenment” can indicate the “perfect and inexhaustible [*yuanman wujin*]” and “the mutual entailment of principal and attendants” [*zhuban juzu*]. “Ten” is not only the number ten, but represents the infinite and inexhaustible, which means that any dharma is infinite. Thus “perfect and inexhaustible”, and “mutual entailment of principal and attendants” are spoken in terms of the countless Buddha-dharmas and Buddha-natures of the Buddha-womb. If we understand Perfect Teaching in terms of “perfect and inexhaustible” and “mutual entailment of principal and attendants,” then the translation “Perfect Teaching” is appropriate. Moreover, Perfect Teaching is Perfect Teaching from the standpoint of “mutual entailment of principal and attendants” and of “perfect and inexhaustible” and so this is its essential meaning. Of course, “mutual entailment of principal and attendants” and “perfect and inexhaustible” are also “perfectly penetrating without obstruction,” but this last is not the essential meaning of Perfect Teaching.

Why is *yuantong wu'ai* “perfectly penetrating without obstruction” not the essential meaning of Perfect Teaching? Because the *prajñā* spirit is a common dharma, a common element. It is commonly shared, Hinayana having the *prajñā* of Hinayana and Mahayana having the *prajñā* of Mahayana. The distinction between Mahayana and Hinayana is not determined by *prajñā*. What makes Mahayana Mahayana and Hinayana Hinayana is determined by the Buddha-nature. Although Hinayana is the smaller vehicle, it can reveal the complete penetration of its *prajñā* spirit. This resembles what Zhuang Zi [c.369-c.286 BCE] says in the “Roaming [Xiaoyao you]” chapter, of the big *peng* bird, “grasping the whirlwind and soaring ninety thousand miles.” This may be called roaming freely, perfectly penetrating without obstruction [*yuantong wu'ai*]. But the cricket and the partridge hopping in bush and tree is also perfectly penetrating without obstruction; they too can be roaming freely. From this we can see that the general understanding is a superficial one. That is why they use the translation Round Teaching to translate Perfect

Teaching, which is not quite accurate. The word perfect is better. So we see that the term *yuan jiao* has two levels of meaning. The *prajñā* spirit of perfectly penetrating without obstruction is shared by both Mahayana and Hinayana; it is a common element. But the “perfect and inexhaustible” and “mutual entailment of principal and attendants” of the Buddha-nature is what determines whether Mahayana or Hinayana is perfect or not.

But the “perfect and inexhaustible.” and “mutual entailment of principal and attendants” of the Buddha-nature is not obtained by the analytical method. “From the time without beginning comes the cause [*jie* 界], all dharmas successively determined” means that all dharmas are successively grounded on *ālaya* consciousness or on Buddha-womb, as if when the whole series is completed there will be perfection. If this were really true, then *ālaya* and Buddha-womb would all be complete. If that is so, then why do they still belong to Special Teaching, and not Perfect Teaching? Thus, merely for a system to be complete does not make it Perfect Teaching.

As to “perfect and inexhaustible” and “mutual entailment of principal and attendants,” Perfect Teaching actually implies the meaning of infinite, and this kind of infinite is an actual infinite. This sort of actual infinite is not acknowledged by Kant, who only recognizes the “potential infinite.” And what is called theory of the finite in present-day mathematics derives from Kant. Since “infinity” cannot be affirmed, we cannot objectively affirm that the world is infinite, for we have no basis for asserting it. Russell, however, affirmed the infinite, because he used the infinite class to define infinite number. This explanation of infinity is “the theory of the actual infinite,” also called “infinity theory of realism.” Russell, clever as he was, knew of course that this kind of affirmation of infinity was only an assumption, and impossible to prove. Since it was only an assumption, there was no point in objecting to it

However, the Perfect Teaching that Buddhists spoke of implied an infinite that was an actual infinite. This infinite comes from the countless Buddha-dharmas and Buddha-natures of the Buddha-womb. It is not an assumption, nor does it resemble what Russell calls a logical assumption. The “perfect and inexhaustible” and “mutual entailment of principal and attendants” of the countless Buddha-dharmas and Buddha-natures of the

Buddha-womb is a kind of ontological infinite, which can really be presented [manifested]. In terms of the superficial meaning, as long as the countless Buddha-dharmas and Buddha-natures of the Buddha-womb are presented, it will be possible to become a Buddha. But if we pursue it further, how can it be possible to become a Buddha? How can the countless Buddha-dharmas and Buddha-natures of the Buddha-womb be presented? Of course, it is not an assumption, nor is it a logical assumption. For if we say that Buddha is only an ideal which we can never reach, then the actual infinite cannot be a presentation, and it is then only what Kant calls a postulate. But this kind of thought is inadmissible to Buddhism. Buddhism maintains that there are actually Buddhas and, moreover, the various Buddhas of the past, present, and future can appear at any time. In other words, the countless Buddha-dharmas and Buddha-natures of the Buddha-womb can present themselves at any time, and so there are Buddhas in actuality. If this be the case, then the so-called actual infinite or ontological infinite is not merely an assumption nor what Russell calls a logical assumption.

The answer to this problem lies in affirming “intellectual intuition.” Of course there is no such term in Buddhism, and we are borrowing it from Kant. It is not enough for us to affirm the existence of Buddhas; there must really be the possibility of Buddhas. And the possibility of there being Buddhas hinges on affirming that man has intellectual intuition. Not only Buddhism, but Confucianism and Daoism also need to affirm intellectual intuition. Confucianism maintains that there are actually *shengren* [sages, holy persons] and that everyone can become a *shengren*. Here the ability to become a *shengren* rests on intellectual intuition. Thus all three teachings of Confucianism, Buddhism, and Daoism affirm that the human being has intellectual intuition. And because they share this affirmation, the “perfect and inexhaustible” and “mutual entailment of principal and attendants” that they present can become the ontological infinite, which is also the actual infinite.

Continuing with the above analysis, we can see that Perfect Teaching has two meanings: In terms of round, it means *yuantong wu'ai* “perfectly penetrating without obstruction”. In terms of the perfect, it means “perfect and inexhaustible” [*yuanman wujin*], and “mutual entailment of principal and attendants” [*zhuban juzu*]. The latter is the essential meaning of Perfect Teaching. That is why its translation as Round Teaching

by Western translators is not quite apt. That only refers to the “perfectly penetrating without obstruction” nature of *prajñā*. But *prajñā* cannot really represent Perfect Teaching. If *prajñā* which is “perfectly penetrating without obstruction” is Perfect Teaching, then would not the Tiantai school simply be the Kong [Emptiness, Madyamaka] school? Why should one start a Tiantai school to propagate Perfect Teaching? That is why Perfect Teaching is determined to be Perfect Teaching on the basis of the Buddha-womb’s countless Buddha-dharmas and Buddha-natures being “perfect and inexhaustible” and with “mutual entailment of principal and attendants”; it is not determined on the basis of *prajñā* being “perfectly penetrating without obstruction.” That is why the Tiantai school is ultimately different from the Kong school, and the two should not be confused. There are even some Chinese monks who do not understand this distinction. They favor the *prajñā* sūtras [Wisdom sutras] and hold them to be extremely perfect, but they do not understand the special character of the *prajñā* sūtras. If we wish to evaluate Buddha’s teachings, we should first understand the character of the *prajñā* sūtras.

The character of the *prajñā* sūtras is very special. We must first understand it before we begin to evaluate Buddhist doctrines. The average person favors *prajñā* sūtras and cannot understand why, when they are so perfect, there should be another Perfect Teaching. What do we mean when we say that the *prajñā* sūtras are perfect [*yuan*]? This *yuan* is the *yuan* of *yuantong* [perfectly penetrating] (it may be translated into round here); it is what I call the functional perfection of *prajñā* Wisdom. For example, when we say that *prajñā* is all dharmas, it is to say that functionally it is all dharmas. *Prajñā pāramitā* [Wisdom for salvation, perfection of Wisdom] can accomplish all dharmas, whether it is endurance of humiliation, alms-giving, keeping the commandments, diligence, meditation or *prajñā* Wisdom. The Six Ways to Salvation [six *pāramitās*] and the Ten Thousand Acts must be infiltrated with the living Wisdom of *prajñā* in order to be exempt from attachment or perplexity. That is why *prajñā pāramitā* [the perfection of Wisdom] aids in the accomplishment of all dharmas. They depend on the marvelous function of *prajñā* Wisdom. This kind of *yuan* [roundness, perfection] is the functional perfection of *prajñā* Wisdom. But the *yuan* [perfection] of *yuan jiao* [Perfect Teaching] does not hinge on this. For the *prajñā* sūtra has not touched on the question of *yuanman*

wujin 圓滿無盡[perfect and inexhaustible] and *zhuban juzu* 主伴俱足 [mutual entailment of principal and attendants] of the Buddha-nature. To speak of the Perfect Teaching of *yuanman wujin* and *zhuban juzu* is not to speak of the functional perfect of *prajñā* but of the “ontological perfect”. This is to speak in terms of the existence of dharmas, namely to speak of the perfect and inexhaustible in terms of the countless Buddha-dharmas and Buddha-natures of the Buddha-womb. From this sense, we can see the difference between the Kong school and the Tiantai school as well as the meaning of the Tiantai school’s critique and classification of Buddhist doctrines.

Here let me refer to an idea that will help you understand the meaning of the term *yuanman* [perfect]. This idea is what Kant calls the highest good, *summum bonum* in Latin.³ According to Kant, *summum bonum* has two meanings. One is the highest, the other is the most perfect. Thus the English rendering highest good is not quite accurate. For when Kant uses *summum bonum*, he is thinking of its meaning as perfection [*yuanman*]. What does the highest good mean? Speaking of the highest good in terms of morality itself, any action that accords with the categorical imperative is the highest good. We can say that the so-called highest good refers to the purest moral nature. It resembles what Mencius [371?-289? BCE] meant when he said: “If today someone suddenly sees a child about to fall into a well, he will without exception be filled with fear and pity, not for the sake of cultivating the friendship of the child’s parents, not for the sake of winning the praise of fellow villagers and friends, and not because he fears to hear the child’s voice calling.”⁴ This stirring of pity is simply the highest good. This is morality itself being the highest good. But this is not what Kant means by the highest good. He insists on virtue united to happiness, on the two matching each other.

Of course there are those who say that virtue is simply happiness, that as long as your mind is at rest you are happy. This is to equate happiness with virtue, and to hold that happiness can be analyzed out of virtue. This is an analytic proposition, and the Stoics argued in this way. When Confucianism first established its doctrine and bent it so as to encourage people to turn upwards, it also favored this view, by saying, for example, that “Giving up one’s life to accomplish *ren* 仁 [humaneness, humanity] is happiness.”

Giving up one's life to accomplish *ren* is certainly heroic sacrifice, with tragic overtones. But it is not what we envision for our whole life. It is much too tragic and heroic.

Kant did not explain it this way, however. He held that if we explained the relationship of virtue and happiness in this way, the meaning of happiness would be lost. Thus the relationship of virtue and happiness that Kant meant was not an analytic proposition but a synthetic proposition. What Kant called the highest good was determined by *yuanman* [perfect], and not by an analytic position of leaning to one side to talk about the highest good. For the perfect to determine the highest good means that virtue and happiness are synthesized. This meaning would be interchangeable with that of "perfect and inexhaustible" [*yuanman wujin*] and "mutual entailment of principal and attendants" [*zhuban juzu*] of Perfect Teaching. In Kant's system, only God can ensure that the matching relationship of virtue and happiness leads to the perfect state. It is here that God's existence is affirmed, for Kant held that only God could guarantee the perfect relationship between virtue and happiness. If obeying morality alone were the highest good, then we would not need to consider the question of happiness or unhappiness, nor need to affirm the existence of God. But if this happened, then the relationship between virtue and happiness would be an analytic one, and happiness would not have an independent meaning. But the relationship of virtue and happiness must be a synthetic one. Therefore it is necessary to affirm God in order to ensure the just proportion of virtue and happiness. For the same reason, we cannot translate the relationship of virtue and happiness as being consistent, for the consistency of virtue and happiness would then be analytic. But when Kant said that the relationship of virtue and happiness is synthetic, there is a ratio between the two, a proportionate relationship.

The Chinese often say that where there is virtue there is happiness. That is not necessarily so. However, as human beings living in this world, we always wish to do good and earn a good reward. Even if the reward is not immediate we hope to enjoy it in the next world. Who can know the proportionate relationship between virtue and happiness? According to Kant, it is up to God to ensure it and arrange it. Because happiness must be affirmed through the actual world, we must, in addition to morality, affirm that happiness can be realized. Happiness must rest in the actual world and the physical body, but not everything in the actual world is within the control of our morals,

and only God is in control of all. Therefore we must affirm the existence of God in order to ensure the perfect proportion of virtue and happiness.

The first hurdle of Confucian practice regards virtue and happiness in the same way as Stoicism. Both adopt the analytic attitude, maintaining that where there is virtue there is happiness. This means that virtue comes first, and happiness is definitely not a consideration. But this is not the highest state, nor is it the highest state even according to Confucianism itself. This is only the first hurdle where we need to turn around the life of our sensibility. Later on when the *lixuejia* [Neo-Confucianists, Rationalists] reached the highest level of development, it too did not halt at this state. It was simply that Confucianism did not talk much about this question, nor did it confront it directly. When it came for Buddhism to bring out Perfect Teaching, the concept of virtue and happiness suddenly achieved clarity. Here happiness had an independent meaning. However, although it had an independent meaning, it did not leave virtue, but was still subordinate to virtue, which is to say that there was a synthetic proportionate relationship between virtue and happiness. If we look at Kant's *summum bonum* through the Buddhist concept of Perfect Teaching, it is best translated as *yuan shan* [the perfect good], and should not be translated as *zui gao shan* [highest good]. At least we can see that he was speaking of the highest good as *yuanman* [perfect], and was not speaking of the highest good in terms of unconditional one-sided virtue.

Here we may bring up a question: Since Kant affirmed the existence of God to ensure the perfect good, then is Kant's philosophy simply Perfect Teaching? No. Kant's philosophy is still not Perfect Teaching, because he merely brought out one concept. Bringing out one concept cannot be counted as Perfect Teaching. All he did was elucidate this concept analytically. According to the Tiantai school's critique and classification of Buddhist doctrine, this is still not Perfect Teaching. This question deserves our careful attention and thought. We should carefully consider by what pattern [paradigm] we should define Perfect Teaching. Today I am offering all of you this concept and material so that you may think carefully about it. Next time we shall continue to examine what the Tiantai school meant by Perfect Teaching. And to understand this question, we must first understand the special character of the *prajñā*

sūtras. In other words, we must first understand analytical and non-analytical discourse before we can get a solid grasp of the meaning of Perfect Teaching.

Transcribed by Huey-jen You 尤惠貞

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¹ See *Jingang bore-polomi-jing* 金剛般若波羅密經 [*Diamond Sūtra*, Skt. *Vajracchedika-prajnaparamita-sutra*]

² *Ibid.*

³ Kant's discussion of the highest good appears in *Critique of Practical Reason*, part 1, bk. 2, "Dialectic of Pure Practical Reason."

⁴ See *Mencius* 2A.6.3.