

# The Dialogue Between Hua-yen and Process Thought

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IN HIS *The Buddhist Teaching of Totality* (1974), C. C. Chang noted some of the interesting parallels between the process thought of Alfred North Whitehead and the Hua-yen Buddhist thought he was describing in his book. In my own *Hua-yen Buddhism: The Jewel Net of Indra* (1977), I also noted in passing some commonalities of vision in the two systems. Neither Chang nor I did more than briefly mention some parallels, but in the few years that have passed since then, a number of articles and one full-length study have appeared which try to compare the similarities in more detail and depth. These studies often originate in the belief that while both systems are impressive, each is somewhat imperfect, and that each can benefit from an encounter with the other. The result of "the current encounter of Buddhism with process philosophy," says Robert Neville, "enables each to develop beyond its previous achievement."<sup>1</sup> In the area of process theology, Charles Hartshorne contemplates and welcomes a "Buddhisto-Christian religion" which combines the great insights of Buddhism and the Christian theology based on process thought of which he is the foremost living exponent.<sup>2</sup>

This article is an attempt to contribute to this dialogue, by clarifying one or two points of controversy and suggesting satisfactory solutions. The focus of the discussion will be the recurrent criticism of Hua-yen by some process thinkers who reject no less than the central, characteristic Hua-yen teaching of the interdependence and interpenetration of contemporary entities. This theme appears frequently in the literature because

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<sup>1</sup> Robert Neville, "Buddhism and Process Thought," in *Buddhism and American Thinkers*, ed. Kenneth Inada and Nolan P. Jacobson (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1984), p. 122.

<sup>2</sup> Charles Hartshorne, "Towards a Buddhisto-Christian Religion," in the above publication, pp. 2-13.

for Whitehead, who was extrapolating a metaphysics from the relativity physics as theorized in the 1930's, it is impossible for any two or more contemporary entities (atoms in physics) to exert any causal influence on each other. So, if Whitehead is correct, the Hua-yen doctrine of *shih shih wu ai (jiji muge)* is in error. While there is often talk of a cross-fertilization between Hua-yen and process thought, the discussion frequently takes the form of a strong suggestion that Hua-yen abandon its central teaching and substitute a Whiteheadian scheme of a temporal causality wherein the past conditions (and creates) the present but in which any contemporaries are causally independent.<sup>3</sup>

What has captured the attention of students of Whiteheadian thought and Hua-yen is a concurrence on several key points. First, there is the denial in both systems of an enduring substance or self as has been the object of criticism by Buddhism since its beginnings, but which has been at the foundation of Western philosophy and science for centuries. For Whitehead, as for Buddhism, no actual entity exists independently of other entities, nor does it endure self-identical through time. His philosophy is consequently a sharp departure from the traditional view of reality as composed of substances with attributes. A second area of agreement is a corollary of the first. "Existence" is, in Whitehead's own terms, a "perpetual perishing," in which all things that can be said to truly exist die into the past as soon as coming into being. Hence, his vision closely approximates the Buddhist view of being as impermanent becoming.

However, the most interesting parallel between the two systems is the idea that the entities that make up the world are mutually implicated or interdependent. Despite substantial and critical disagreements between the two visions of interdependence, it was the more general agreement that aroused Chang's and my interest earlier in the decade. Both systems agree that an entity does not exist independent of other—perhaps all—entities, and therefore, any entity must be understood as being essentially relational by nature and constitution. First Buddhism, and then Whitehead many centuries later, discovered the essentially social, rela-

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<sup>3</sup> The main source for Whitehead's thought is the very difficult *Process and Reality*. A more accessible version can be found in Donald Sherbourne's *A Key to Whitehead's Process and Reality* (Indiana University Press, 1975). Another valuable interpretation is William Christian's *An Introduction to Whitehead's Metaphysics* (Yale University Press, 1959).

tional nature of things. However, despite this fundamental agreement, the two systems disagree on the basic structure of this relationality. Hua-yen is mainly concerned with demonstrating how simultaneously existing entities, or contemporaries, exert a conditioning influence on each other in mutual reciprocity, how they depend on each other in an ecology of cosmic dimensions, and how they include each other, or co-inhere. It is in this sense that things do not exist independently but rather interdependently. But, by "dependent existence" Whitehead means that a present entity is dependent on, and arises from, *past* entities, not contemporaries. The interdependence is a rather weak one, in that two contemporaries share a by-and-large common past and are related internally through appropriating each other's past experience. However, in accordance with Einstein's relativity theory, the two or more contemporaries are causally independent, cannot co-inhere, or internally constitute each other. Consequently, from the point of view of process thought, Hua-yen is mistaken in believing that contemporaries causally influence each other. From the point of view of Hua-yen, process thought is deficient in allowing for only a temporal cause-effect relationship and not allowing contemporaries to condition each other.

The "entities" I have been referring to in connection with Whitehead are the core of his metaphysics, and the important category of "causation" refers to the relationship among these entities. Whitehead calls them "actual entities" or "actual occasions," and claims that they are the really real things of which the world is composed. They are not the perceived objects of ordinary experience, such as people, plants, stones, houses, etc., which are composites or "societies" of these actual occasions. An actual occasion is not material or even a thing, but is, as Whitehead calls it, a drop of experience. An actual occasion is a quantum of feeling, a happening, a way of taking data into account, and everything, whether granite boulder or human being, is composed fundamentally of these quanta of experience. Actual occasion succeeds actual occasion in a serial route, so that a macrocosmic enduring object is analyzable into a vast number of these routes of occasions.

The actual occasion is for the most part a product of the past, in the sense that it is a convergence or concrescence of past experiences which, as Buddhism would affirm, possess causal efficacy. The actual occasion comes into being through a series of "phases of concrescence" during which these past occasions regroup themselves into a new unity, the novel

actual occasion. As the past assumes a new unity, it achieves a determinate form, at which time it perishes to become a datum in the past, to be a potential component in a later synthesis. However, when I say that the actual occasion is "for the most part" a product of the past, I mean that it is not wholly explainable as a new unity of past experiences. Whitehead says that the concreting conditions from the past are able to *decide* what new form they will assume, so that the new entity is partly self-causal or self-determining as well as being a result of past conditions. It is important to note that this self-determination is not the act of a preexistent subject or self which surveys the past and decides how to use it. The subject which decides arises out of the objective data themselves, and it is this constantly emerging and perishing series of subjects which are said to decide what new shape they will assume. As soon as the new form emerges, the entity perishes, so that reality is a succession of actual occasions becoming and perishing: "the many become one and are increased by one." The real world is thus a fluid transition from actual occasion to actual occasion, lacking any enduring substratum, which is why this is called "process philosophy."

What is to be noticed in this description is that the causal flow is from past to present only; that is, past experiences possessing causal power converge and assume a novel unity. Consequently, to say that real things—actual occasion—are dependent on the world of other actual entities means that they are dependent on *past* entities. Two or more contemporaries in parallel routes can not condition each other. They may have various external relationships but can have no internal relationships in the sense of constituting each other in the way past occasions internally constitute an emerging occasion. The upshot of this discussion is that causal or conditioning power flows from past to present. It does not flow from present to past or from the future to present or past, nor does it operate among contemporaries, as Hua-yen claims.

There is much more to Whitehead's philosophy than the idea of "actual occasions" and temporal causation, such as the doctrines of "eternal objects" and the dipolar God, but this brief description will suffice for the following discussion. Nor will I attempt to outline the formal arguments given by Hua-yen thinkers for its teaching of interdependence, interpenetration, and so on, on the assumption that readers of this journal will be familiar with them. It is only necessary to mention by way of contrast with the Whiteheadian view that Hua-yen is famous for a doc-

trine of multi-directional causality. The future conditions the present and past, the present conditions past and future, and the past conditions present and future. Most importantly, contemporaries condition each other in this Chinese application of the doctrine of *sūnyatā*.

This latter doctrine is made abundantly clear and unambiguous by not only the formal arguments of a text such as Fa-tsang's *Wu chiao chang* (*Go kyō shō*) but particularly by the images used to illustrate this relationship. The images of the ten coins, the building and a rafter in it, and the jewel net of Indra are images of simultaneously existing particulars or parts that make up a totality (i.e., the *dharma-dhātu*). Someone like Fa-tsang is not *particularly* interested in the history or material origin of the rafter in the building (though, as I will argue, this is adequately accounted for), but rather is interested in the relationship among particulars or individuals which exist as facts of experience and which constitute a whole. Nor is someone such as Fa-tsang interested in the microcosmic components of enduring objects as Whitehead is. Fa-tsang wants to understand how animals, plants, and so on, are related. The central Hua-yen question (and perhaps Buddhist question) is, given that I find myself, in everyday experience, one among many others, what am I, what are they, and how are we related?

Several problems need to be addressed before proceeding to the main point of my discussion. The first is the problem of multi-directional causality in Hua-yen thought. Process philosophy is unanimous in rejecting it because it appears to threaten the freedom of decision or self-determination (free will) which is said to be a crucial and real part of the career of the actual occasion over and above its conditionedness. A typical reaction to the Hua-yen version of causality can be seen in a recently published comparative study of Hua-yen and Whitehead, Steve Odin's *Process Metaphysics and Hua-yen Buddhism* (State University of New York Press, 1982). Quoting Charles Hartshorne, Odin claims that the Hua-yen doctrine of multi-directional causality precludes the possibility of creativity, freedom, and novelty, since each entity is reducible simply to its many causes or conditions (pp. 75–78). The point seems to be that if the future is determinate and can act as a cause for the present, then there is no possibility of freely choosing a different future. This also means that there is no freedom of decision because the present actuality is nothing more than the effect of massive conditions. What is at stake is self-determination or freedom, an act strenuously defended

and affirmed by all process thinkers. It may be the one non-negotiable item in the whole Whiteheadian scheme, less expendable even than the Whiteheadian God.

I would like to try to defuse this issue by suggesting that the Hua-yen idea of future events exerting causal influence on the present is not an essential part of its total system and may be eliminated. Here I follow the suggestion of Yusugi Ryōei, who has made the point in his *Kegon Taikei* that Hua-yen thinkers included the idea in the system in order to account for problems that arose in interpreting material from the *Avatamsaka Sūtra*.<sup>4</sup> In that text, spoken by the Buddha immediately after his enlightenment, while he is revealing the content of the *sāgara-mudrā samādhi* (*kai-in zammai*), Anāthapiṇḍika's gift of the garden six years after the enlightenment is spoken of as a *present* occurrence (i.e., present at the time the sutra is being delivered), and so is the Buddha's mother's death, which had occurred many years in the *past*. Both events, future and past, are *experienced* as present events. In the absence of a critical and historical understanding of the composition of this scripture, Fa-tsang had to develop some explanation for what appeared to be a discrepancy of time. The result was a doctrine of the interpenetration of time and its corollary, the multi-directional flow of time and causality.

Fa-tsang knew, as did all his predecessors, that time as we know it is an abstraction from real time as the flow of concrete nature. This is also Whitehead's position. For him, the quantum of real time is identical with a quantum of experience (the duration of an actual occasion). Both Fa-tsang and Whitehead thus agree that, in Fa-tsang's words, "time is inseparable from dharmas." Now, "present" must refer to events taking place now, and "past" must refer to events that have occurred, are dead, and which can, as causes, be reenacted in the present. However, "future" must refer to events that have not yet occurred, and it is difficult to see how something which has not occurred, a mere possibility or potential, can have a causal effect on the present. This seems implausible on the level of concrete experience, though it might make sense if time were thought of abstractly and visualized spatially as it seems to be in the *sāgara-mudrā samādhi*. But such a view of time is problematical for Hua-yen if it is referring to real time. It is significant that neither of Fa-tsang's successors, Hui-yüan, and Tsung-mi, had much interest

<sup>4</sup> Yusugi Ryōei, *Kegon Taikei* (Tokyo: Kokusho Kankōkai, repr. 1975), pp. 500-502.

in the idea and may have seen it as either unimportant or suspect. Perhaps we should consider the idea to be simply a response to a hermeneutical problem and not essential to the philosophy. Thus, it may not really be an issue at all, although the idea of self-determination or freedom is not necessarily rescued with the rejection of the idea of the causal efficacy of the future.

A second problem concerns oversimplification or incompleteness in describing the whole Hua-yen system. Odin, in his above-mentioned book, is typical of a tendency among process critics of Hua-yen to see only a part of the whole Hua-yen picture. They focus attention on the doctrine of identity but fail to take into account the whole story, which is identity *in difference*. Or, they focus attention of totality but fail to see that Hua-yen is talking about the relationship of the whole to real parts. Also, Hua-yen is talking not just of emptiness but an emptiness inseparable from things or events (*shih, ji*). Most important, however, critics such as Odin are so exclusively concerned with the interpenetration or intercausality of contemporaries that they ignore or do not appreciate sufficiently the important, traditional doctrine of temporal causality. It must be remembered that Fa-tsang's primary objective was to incorporate all Buddhist teachings into one grand synthesis. In doing so, he took account of the temporal cause-effect relationships taught by the earlier schools.

Odin believes that the doctrine of the interdependence of contemporaries is a doctrine of genesis which tries to explain the material origins of things (p. 65). But he neglects the presence in Hua-yen of a genetic model of origins very similar to that of process thought. Hua-yen would explain the origin of a human being, for instance, as the result of the union of parental sperm and egg (which of course also has its own antecedents). The fertilized egg results later in the birth of a human being in a temporal cause and effect process. However, once the human being appears in the world, he finds himself in a world of many other beings—human, nonhuman, sentient, and nonsentient—and then the question is, what is his relationship with all these other beings? Fa-tsang recognizes both kinds causality or conditionedness, the temporal and the simultaneous. When he discusses the relationship of the rafter to the whole house, for instance, he is not concerned with where the wooden rafter came from but rather its relationship to the whole house. However, he would account for the material origin of the piece of wood in terms of



antecedent causes and conditions.<sup>5</sup>

Relationships in Hua-yen are thus a more complex matter than in process thought. In the latter, relationships are discussed primarily in terms of temporal causation, cumulative genetic inheritance, and emergent novel entities. To use Odin's terminology, process thought sees important causation in terms of *cumulative* penetration, in which the increasing richness of historical experience (both personal and nonpersonal) is synthesized perpetually into emergent novel unities. Hua-yen, and Buddhism generally, shares a very similar conception, but then goes on to analyze the relationships among emergent contemporaries, discussing them in terms of *interpenetration*, mutual support, and ecological interdependence. It consequently supplements a conception of *emerging* reality with one of *merging* reality, a point well made by Kenneth Inada<sup>6</sup> in his response to an earlier article by Odin in which Odin recapitulates his criticisms in his book.<sup>7</sup> Inada makes the further point, with which I agree, that Odin has overlooked the presence of temporal causation in Hua-yen and that the presence of such a conception provides for all the freedom, creativity, and novelty required. I believe that Inada is generally correct as far as creativity and novelty are concerned, but he may be too eager to find the ground for freedom in the Buddhist temporal causality. In other words, I am not so sure that freedom or self-determination are proven facts, for I doubt that Buddhism accepts the notion, and I doubt that Whitehead and Hartshorne are correct in saying that freedom is a fact. I will return to this important issue in a moment.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> See my translation of an extended portion of Fa-tsang's *Hua-yen i-ch'eng chiao i fen-ch'i chang* (*Go kyō shō*), in my *Hua-yen Buddhism: The Jewel Net of Indra* (Pennsylvania State University Press, 1977, pp. 75-89), where the analogy of the building and a rafter is discussed. Although Fa-tsang is concerned with the relationship of part and whole, it is clear from his description of the rafter in terms of size, shape, etc., that he accounts for the particular in temporal as well as atemporal terms.

<sup>6</sup> Kenneth Inada, "The Metaphysics of Cumulative Penetration Revisited," *Process Studies*, vol. 13, no. 2, 1983, pp. 154-158.

<sup>7</sup> Steve Odin, "A Metaphysics of Cumulative Penetration," *Process Studies*, vol. 11, no. 2, 1981, pp. 65-82.

<sup>8</sup> A substantial criticism of the notion of self-causation or freedom on the level of Whitehead's "actual occasion" can be found in Steven David Ross' *Perspective in Whitehead's Metaphysics* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1983, pp. 61-83). His basic argument is that Whitehead has ill-advisedly used the model of human consciousness and perception to develop a theory of self-causation on a non-



Now I must return to what I hope may help to clarify the major disagreement between the two philosophies, the Hua-yen doctrine of the interdependence and interpenetration of contemporaries. Most of the debate has been on the side of process thought and little clarification of Hua-yen thought has come from a Buddhist perspective. Odin has granted that Hua-yen's position is plausible as long as interdependence and interpenetration pertain to words, names, and concepts, but not if they refer to concrete reality (p. 25). His theory seems to be based on C. C. Chang's interpretations, in *The Buddhist Teaching of Totality*, which in turn rely on an idealistic (*wei-shih, yuishiki*) view of Hua-yen. I tend to believe that Hua-yen is a genuine cosmology and a description of concrete reality, not a theory about abstract, mental events. In this I agree with scholars such as Yusugi and Takamine who see Hua-yen as a species of the teaching of *tathāgata-garbha*. Inada has argued that while the dynamic, temporal process described by Whitehead and Hua-yen is an accurate description on one level, the teaching of the interdependence of contemporaries is a vision of the *dharma-dhātu* (the "realm of reality") from a higher standpoint, from the perspective of enlightenment. The implication is that what may be true on one level is not necessarily true on the other.

There is little point in trying to prove that one system of thought is superior to the other, for several reasons. First, both systems are self-admittedly incomplete and provisional. Whitehead denounced absolutism and foresaw that his metaphysics would be modified in time, and contemporary process thinkers are fond of saying that "process thought is still in process." Hua-yen thinkers in turn saw their philosophy as a mere attempt to articulate, demonstrate, and systematize an intuition derived from samadhi experience. Second, despite so much agreement between the two, one is speculative metaphysics in the Western tradition and the other is a religious view with salvific objectives. Third, and this is my main point, Whitehead's subject for analysis is the actual entity, short-lived in that its life-span is probably to be measured in microseconds, and microcosmic in that the macrocosmic "enduring objects" of daily experience are composed of vast numbers of strands or routes of these serially ordered entities. Hua-yen, on the other hand, is primarily in-

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conscious or preconscious level where it is implausible. My own comments in the text reflect Ross' criticism as well as some reservations from a Buddhist viewpoint.

terested in analyzing the relationship among these "enduring objects" of ordinary experience. My question is this: is what is true on the microcosmic level necessarily true on the macrocosmic level?

If we admit the validity of speculation, there is no reason for not accepting the structure of experience on the microcosmic level so carefully articulated by process thought. This structure is not all all inconsonant with the more generalized conception first set forth in Buddhist *abhidharma* texts and subscribed to by subsequent Buddhist schools as well. In fact, there is no compelling reason why Buddhist thought can not be enriched by appropriating the Whiteheadian analysis of causality on the microcosmic level. A demythologized, existential interpretation of karma, for instance, could find a systematic grounding in such process categories as "prehension," "actual occasion," "objective immortality," and others. On the macrocosmic level of human experience, it might also provide a framework for understanding and discussing what some schools of Buddhism call the "true self." However, such a tantalizing idea can be no more than hinted at here.<sup>9</sup>

For Buddhism to incorporate the Whiteheadian description of causality on the level of occasions of experience would merely entail accepting a more detailed analysis of a doctrine already part of Buddhist thinking. Such an acceptance would also involve an admission that on this level of reality the flow of causal power is unidirectional only, from past to present. But should this description of causality be applied to the macrocosmic level of everyday experience? Many scientists believe that the laws that are observable on the subatomic level of particles do not necessarily apply to larger things. The discovery in physics that the behavior of particles is not predictable led many who sought a proof of freedom (as opposed to determinism) to claim that this proved that on the most fundamental level of reality the strict determinism that makes predictability possible does not exist either. Their conclusion was that this proved in turn that on the level of human consciousness, strict determinism does not operate. However, it was soon realized that the con-

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<sup>9</sup> Jay McDaniel has developed an interesting interpretation of the Buddhist "true self" using Whiteheadian language and models in "Zen and the Self," in *Process Studies*, vol. 10, no. 3-4, 1980, pp. 73 ff. I have written a similar interpretation based on some lines from Dōgen's essay, *Genjō-kōan*. It will appear in 1984 in *The Presence of Dōgen*, ed. William LaFleur, and published by University of Hawaii Press.

clusion was based on the suspicious premise that what is true on one level is true on the other. In fact, however, it is widely felt that while randomness may be the rule on the level of particles, larger bodies still obey Newtonian laws. The issue for Hua-yen is not that of freedom or predictability, however, but the issue of whether causal laws that operate on the microcosmic level also operate on the macrocosmic level.

To *deny* interdependence and interpenetration on the level of macrocosmic reality seems to deny the solidarity or unity of nature and any possibility of a genuine community. This is what Whitehead has done in saying that contemporary actual occasions are a mere chaos, at best only indirectly related and possessing only the weakest mutual immanence in inheriting a more-or-less common past and acting as potentials for all future becomings. Odin perceives the crucial importance of this idea in Whitehead's system: contemporaries are mutually immanent (and interdependent) "in only the weakest and most indirect sense of the word. Yet, what is lost in cosmological solidarity through the mutual exclusion of contemporaries is gained in creative freedom" (p. 94). Thus any family togetherness of contemporaries is impossible, but the gain is the ability of the emerging occasion to freely decide—outside the massive conditions that constitute it—how it will synthesize the objective data and assume a novel unity.<sup>10</sup>

But notice what this implies if applied to the macrocosmic level. It means that although I, as one being, am conditioned by your *past* (as well as the past of all others, of course) and may be a condition for your *future*, as two simultaneously existing beings we have no essential, real relationship. But we do in fact recognize and even affirm the importance of interdependence on the level of ecological systems and human societies. When we sit down to dinner, for instance, we can contemplate all the conditions that brought this food to this table at this time, conditions meaning many other people, soil, rain, and so on. In fact, there is a very

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<sup>10</sup> Whitehead simply seems to assume that the existence of novel unities implies that self-causation is a reality. That is, he equates self-causation with unity. One of the main objections to the Hua-yen view of complete causality is that if the individual is simply the locus of innumerable conditions which are constantly changing, the individual never is able to unify the innumerable experiences so as to be a determinate being. In fact, one can not really be a unique individual, because uniqueness is identified with self-determined unity. However, Ross explains uniqueness on other grounds, and I have discussed this in the article.

intricate web of interrelating conditions working to bring the food to the table. We do not extend gratitude and thanksgiving to past events, we acknowledge the contemporary world as being the matrix in which this event occurs. Regardless of the relationship among actual entities in a temporal sequence, the larger beings composed of these entities and inhabiting a common world seem to be interdependent in some very important way. It is difficult to appreciate why the microcosmic part is more real or primary than the whole of which it becomes a constituent, but process thinkers do assign ontological primacy to the actual occasion and consequently to the type of temporal causation that presumably operates on this level.

The details of the Hua-yen doctrine of interdependence and interpenetration occupy major portions of Hua-yen treatises, and it is not possible to review them here. However, a truncated and generalized statement is possible and necessary in order that I can subsequently make an important point. At the core of Hua-yen thought lies, I believe, a fascination—a very Chinese fascination at that—with the particular or individual. This fascination is revealed historically in several ways, in the Hua-yen philosophy itself, in the “one-corner” paintings of the Sung period, in a painting such as Mu-chi’s pa-pa bird, and in Japan in Dōgen’s demand that we “thoroughly penetrate” (*gūjin*) the ordinary events of daily life in order to grasp their true nature (*jissō*). As Takahashi Masanobu has suggested, this “thorough penetration” has a distinctly esthetic character and is related to the concept of *yūgen*.<sup>11</sup> Both *gūjin* and *yūgen* concern the possibility of apprehending a hidden dimension of things, *gūjin* being the epistemological side and *yūgen* being the ontological side of the search.

I am suggesting that behind the seemingly abstract analysis of parts and whole and behind the interminable categories and subcategories of Hua-yen thought lurks this concern for the hidden dimension of an event, the question, “What is it really?” Drawing on the terminology of part and whole, particular and universal, same and different, empty and existent, and having power and lacking power, Hua-yen thinkers attempt to draw some basic conclusions. The first is a simple one but with broad

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<sup>11</sup> Takahashi Masanobu, *The Essence of Dōgen* (London: Kegan Paul International, 1983). See chapter 5, “Gūjin (thoroughness) and Buddha,” and chapter 6, part 1, “Gūjin and *yūgen* (profundity).”

implications: the whole is necessarily made up of parts, and the part is always part of a whole. The important question arising from this point is, what is a whole that has no parts, or, more importantly, what is a part (individual) that has no context or nexus? To Hua-yen thinkers, a part isolated from its context is irrational and meaningless, and the only way to understand what something is is to take account of its whole world. Whitehead makes the same point very strongly, but he means that the individual, which is the actual entity, cannot be isolated from its *past* world because it is in fact mostly a synthesis of that past world. Hua-yen is asking a different question and on a different level of experience. Contemplating the world of beings both human and otherwise, it asks whether we are isolated monads as individuals with no intimate relationships or rather whether what we are is a function of our togetherness. Hua-yen sees the individual as an ultimately indispensable contributor to the whole, a unique individual with its own intrinsic, incomparable value. However, *at the same time*, the individual is a product of the whole and in fact derives its uniqueness and supreme value from the whole which conditions it. The result is that a unique being (unique in form and function) plays its role in the life of the whole society of beings, and the society-whole provides the necessary supportive conditions for the individual. In effect, however, the individual is the specific individual which contributes its own powers by borrowing (or “usurping,” to use a Hua-yen term) the supportive power of the whole society. This is what “interpenetration” means. It is also why emptiness is identical with form. Most important, however, the perception of this intimate interdependence among a family of beings serves as the basis for both the esthetic valuation of the individual and for ethical conduct.<sup>12</sup> Thus, Hua-yen, like Whitehead, argues for the fundamentally social nature of reality, but in different ways. I would like to suggest that in “thoroughly penetrating” some thing or event as Dōgen teaches, what is grasped is this dimension of the individual entity.

The kind of dependency addressed by Hua-yen is obviously different from the kind analyzed by Whitehead. The point I wish to make may be put in the form of a question: is the Hua-yen version of relatedness less fundamental, primary, or significant than the process version? In

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<sup>12</sup> See the last chapter, “Living in the Net of Indra,” of my *Hua-yen Buddhism: The Jewel Net of Indra*, which concerns the ethical implications of Hua-yen.

Whiteheadian terms, is this kind of external relatedness less real or important than the internal relatedness of process thought? Process thinkers say that it is. Because, as Whitehead says, actual entities are the really real things of which the world is composed, because actual entities are only internally related (the present is a synthesis of the past), and because contemporary occasions are only externally related in a weak and indirect manner, actual entities and their internal relations have ontological primacy and significance. By implication, the same must be true of macrocosmic reality, though in fairness it must be said that process thought does not usually draw this implication. My suggestion has been that while process thought may be correct as far as microcosmic reality is concerned, it is not necessarily correct in assuming, if it does, that the same patterns occur on the macrocosmic order.

There are three basic objections to assigning priority to actual occasions and internal relatedness. First, it has been said that Whitehead is merely arbitrary to assign primacy to actual entities and internal relatedness and to deny it to macrocosmic actuality and external relatedness.<sup>13</sup> The issue is one of ultimacy, and the question is whether ultimacy can be postulated outside of a particular perspective. Unless some comprehensive viewpoint can be established, some ultimate tribunal, it seems arbitrary to claim finality or absoluteness for some pattern or datum of experience. Second, temporal process is not the only kind of relationship among things and is not necessarily primary or even fundamental. It is primary if the main concern is the question of the origin and destiny of microcosmic drops of experience, with the assumption that the latter are really real, concrete, etc. However, as in the first objection, this may be true only from a certain perspective; from another perspective, the non-processive relationships among larger realities, such as that between parents and children, might be primary, fundamental, and significant. Thus, there are many kinds of relationship, each valid and important from a certain perspective, but perhaps no one absolute and ultimate relationship. This objection seems to be in accordance with Buddhist ways of looking at things. However, the point has been made

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<sup>13</sup> Justus Buchler makes the point in one way or another in his writings. See, for instance, "On a Strain of Arbitrariness in Whitehead's System," *Journal of Philosophy*, vol. 66, no. 19 (Oct. 1969), p. 590. See also, *Metaphysics of Natural Complexes* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1966).

by Justus Buchler in his philosophy of "ontological parity," or "ordinal metaphysics," where he has accused Whitehead's position of having a "strain of arbitrariness."<sup>14</sup> The third objection has already been made earlier in this article: patterns and structures that may occur on the microcosmic level may not necessarily be relevant to larger entities.

The main resistance to the possibility of interdependence and interpenetration among contemporaries is that these relationships render freedom (self-determination), novelty, and creativity impossible. Freedom is the basis for the novelty and creativity which is the essence of process thought, and Whitehead believes that novelty and creativity are not possible without freedom. Odin, for instance, sees Hua-yen as involving "a doctrine of total determinism since each dharma can be exhaustively factored or reductively analyzed into its constituent causes and supportive conditions without remainder" (p. 4). Following Hartshorne's lead, he concurs that the Hua-yen causality precludes the possibility of creativity, freedom, and novelty, since each thing is nothing more than the result of manifold causes (pp. 77-78). Whitehead's causation permits such a possibility, because, while the past entities which serve as objective data for the emerging actual occasion limit the possible ways for the occasion to take a novel form, the emerging occasion still is able to choose what form it will become. Thus, while causation plays a heavy role in the life of the actual occasion, there is freedom of decision which permits uniqueness and novelty, as opposed to mere repetition of form. Since the Hua-yen view, on the other hand, is said to preclude freedom, by implication it must also preclude novelty and uniqueness.

I think that there are several ways of responding to this criticism. First, it may be asked whether the freedom of decision by an actual entity is a fact rather than an assumption. Steven David Ross, in a book-length criticism of Whitehead's philosophy, has made a point sometimes made by others: "The concept of self-causation in Whitehead's theory is problematical . . ." (p. 61). It is problematical because we must somehow believe that the freedom to decide anything can occur on the unconscious level of microcosmic drops of experience. It must always be remembered that the actual occasion is an emergent synthesis of past data from past experiences, and during the time that the many data achieve a unified form, these data themselves decide their own final unified form. There

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<sup>14</sup> See the previous note.



is no preexistent subject that synthesizes and decides; the subject which decides emerges during and from the synthesis. Ross believes that this idea is the result of extrapolating from human consciousness and experience, where Whitehead ascribes to actual occasions what may only be possible on the level of high grades of consciousness. Whitehead seems to believe that the emergence of new unities from a multiplicity indicates an element of self-determination among the multiplicity itself, but the question is whether the existence of unities necessarily proves self-determination.

A second response is that if this kind of freedom is indeed a fact and is inherent in temporal causation, then Hua-yen is able to account for freedom inasmuch as it incorporates temporal causation into its system as well as an atemporal causation among contemporaries. This point has been made by Kenneth Inada in his reply to Odin.<sup>15</sup> There is no reason why a comprehensive metaphysics could not assert an asymmetrical causation on the microcosmic level to account for freedom, and a symmetrical causation on the macrocosmic level to found mutual support, mutual support, mutual implication, and real social solidarity.

A third response might follow some modern philosophers and say that the issue of freedom versus determinism is a pseudo-problem. This position assumes a complete determinism. It means that conditions are reasons, and there are always reasons for an event. For an event to occur without a reason or condition would mean that it just happened by chance, a purely random occurrence. Thus, the opposite of reasons or conditions is not freedom but rather randomness. However, neither Buddhism nor secular thought recognizes randomness. In the area of moral responsibility and choice, for instance, it is obvious that many conditions have brought about a situation in which a choice must be made. It is less obvious that the resulting choice is conditioned also, but is it possible to think of a choice that was not the outcome of a massive amount of conditioning? It would seem that a really free choice could only be made by flipping a coin or throwing the dice.

An alternate possibility is to see the choice itself as simply another condition rather than as an act outside of conditions. In conformity with the first suggestion, this one sees any event as the outcome of conditions, in which the final decision preceding the act or event is seen as

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<sup>15</sup> See note 6.

one among many conditions, rather than a unique event lacking the character of a condition albeit itself conditioned.

Then what does "freedom" or "self-determination" mean? The answer given by some philosophers is that "freedom" means a conscious sense of lack of coercion. In other words, to feel that no one or no thing forced one to act in a certain way is to feel free, despite the presence of many conditions discoverable in objective analysis. As an example, let us take two men who find themselves in the army. One has been drafted and the other has voluntarily enlisted. Both, however, are in the identical situation in being in uniform. Yet, they feel very different, because one feels victimized by forces beyond his control, while the other feels free because he decided to be where he is. However, the truth seems to be that both men were caused, or conditioned, to be where they are, by conditions including the political condition of their country, military needs, their ages and nationality, parental upbringing and advice, feelings of patriotism, and so on. Consequently, many conditions converge to bring about a definite result for both men, but despite determining factors, one feels free, the other does not. Perhaps to feel free is to be free, despite the obvious heavy weight of conditions that lie behind any decision or situation.

The self-determination of actual occasions is indeed problematical in Whitehead's philosophy, and it may be equally problematical on the level of human consciousness. Whitehead believed it was necessary in order to ground uniqueness and novelty of becoming. If an actual occasion is not free to decide its final, determinate form, it will simply repeat its past, rendering impossible both uniqueness and new unities that in turn enrich the future. However, Steven David Ross has suggested that self-causation is not necessary for uniqueness and novelty, and that these can be accounted for by the fact that each entity or being is a particular perspective on the whole world and is in turn in perspective by that world (pp. 19-20). The sheer multiplicity of perspectives should guarantee that each vantage point is unique, and the constantly changing perspectives should guarantee novel unities, without having to postulate free, self-determining subjects. I think that this position is quite similar to the Hua-yen view described earlier. Uniqueness is the result of the myriad conditions, not despite them, and novelty, or new unities, is the result of the constant shifting configuration of conditions in dynamic interaction. This implies, of course, the selflessness or substancelessness of things

(*śūnyatā*) but at the same time guarantees uniqueness and novelty. This solution allows the uniqueness and novelty so important to process thought to be retained, and thus eliminates a primary objection to Hua-yen causality, unless the doctrine of self-determination has to be retained for its own sake.

This rather generalized discussion of Hua-yen and process thought has sought to accomplish several tasks. I have tried, on a modest scale, to survey some recent literature which discusses and compares the two systems. I have also tried to highlight some of the important criticisms of Hua-yen by scholars who are based in or sympathetic to Whitehead's admittedly impressive metaphysics. My main objective has been to try to remove some of the points of disagreement by suggesting that Hua-yen incorporates a view of causality very close to Whitehead's, though on a more generalized level of description. Primarily, however, I have tried to argue that although Whitehead's view of causality may indeed be a true description of what occurs on a microcosmic scale, it is not necessarily applicable to the level of everyday social reality. Thus, it may be inappropriate to compare the two systems as if they were totally comparable systems. Finally, I believe that the detailed description of the nature and structure of causality in Whitehead's thought can serve as a hermeneutical device for understanding Buddhist teachings concerning temporal causation, such as karma and karma-result, for instance. However, the ideal would be a well-worked-out metaphysics which incorporates a reformed Whiteheadianism, in which ideas such as self-causation and eternal objects were eliminated, and a revised Hua-yen causality which eliminates the doctrine of the interpenetration and interdependence of the nine or ten time periods, thus providing for a reasoned, coherent, adequate description of both genetic and social reality. From a Hua-yen perspective, process thought would gain in eliminating a tendency to over-substantialize its actual occasions, rejecting an implausible and needless doctrine of self-determination, and finding a basis for a stronger ethic of compassion and love than it now possesses.