

Creativity in the Buddhist Perspective

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THE SUBJECT of my paper is what Whitehead meant by “the eternal greatness incarnate in the passage of temporal fact,”¹ and an effort to indicate its relevance to Buddhist thought. Obviously, the paper is not focused upon creative work in the arts and sciences about which so much writing is being done as one decade follows upon another in the present century. The focus is upon the creativity that transforms individuals and their experience by enriching the flow of quality and widening the range of their perceptive participation in the life of the world.

The sense of our being individual and unrepeatable actualities in a world where new increments of quality are forever being added is “the gift of aesthetic significance” that frees us from the limitations of any one occasion that happens in our lives.² The feeling of these increments of quality is the feeling of the basic and unavoidable change in the ongoing of a dynamic world. It is simply “the becoming of ever-new events.”³

Creativity, the many, and the one are ultimate terms, presupposed by all other generalizing insights in Whitehead’s philosophy.⁴ It goes without saying that this process of creativity, which is called “the form of unity of the

¹ Alfred North Whitehead, *Adventures of Ideas* (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1933), p. 41. Henceforth referred to as AL.

² Charles Hartshorne, *Whitehead’s Philosophy: Selected Essays, 1935–1970* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1972), p. 135. Henceforth referred to as WP.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ Victor Lowe, *Understanding Whitehead* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1962), p. 108. Henceforth referred to as UW.

Universe,"⁵ is the source not only of all human good but of all human freedom as well. It is "the way of the world" with an ultimate momentum of its own. Any initial situation "*with its creativity* can be called 'the actual world.'"⁶

The freedom to which we have just referred is caught in the vocabulary we have all come to associate with Hartshorne, as in the following quote:

'Creative' means, as in Bergson's 'Creative Evolution,' unpredictable, incompletely determined in advance by causal conditions and laws. Accordingly, it means *additions to the definiteness of reality*. Every effect is in some degree, however slight, an 'emergent whole' As Bergson and Peirce insist, prediction is limited, not alone by ignorance, but by the very meaning of the future as a sphere of decisions yet unmade [occasioned by the emergence of new increments of quality yet to appear], issues not yet settled even by the totality of causes already operating. Reality is predictable just in so far as it is not creative, but rather mechanical, automatic, compulsive, habit-ridden. Much of life is thus uncreative and hence predictable.⁷

We are thus in immediate, momentary, unbroken contact with the creativity that drives the world, enriches life, and likewise constitutes the ultimate source of power in our lives. Peirce has his own way of making this focus clear, as a few lines will serve to suggest:

Every quality, every feeling is perfectly simple and irrespective of anything else . . . undivided, without parts. . . . Feeling is the consciousness of a moment as it is in its singleness, without regard to its relations whether to its own elements or to anything else.⁸

This consciousness or awareness of a quality in the Present, as Peirce goes on to say, allows no time "for any inference at all, least of all for inference

⁵ AI, pp. 230-231.

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ Charles Hartshorne, *Creative Synthesis and Philosophic Method* (La Salle, Ill.: The Open Court Publishing Co., 1970), pp. 4-5. Henceforth referred to as CSPM.

⁸ *Collected Papers of Charles Sanders Peirce* Vol. VII, edited by Arthur W. Burks, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1958), pars. 538-540. Henceforth referred to as CPP. Cardinal numbers refer to paragraphs, not pages.

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concerning that very instant,"⁹ hence for any inference that *the power of quality in the moment* is the feeling of an *ego*. The *self*, as this American "Buddhist" says, is only inferred, along with other general ideas which he calls "living feelings spread out."¹⁰

It is interesting to observe that all these Philosophers of Process, at variance in much that they think, nevertheless agree that the flow of quality through the neural networks of the live creature is the source of man's vitality and power. Thirty years ago Wieman was observing as follows: "Quality is objective fact It is the substance of which all is made It is energy, but energy is quality to human experience, and that means ultimately and absolutely for human living."¹¹ Most of us are apt to recall in this connection what Bergson was always saying about the ultimate momentum of life: "In the depths of our experience," he writes, "at the point where we feel ourselves most intimately within our own life" the joy of a novel penetration "swells unceasingly with a present that is absolutely new," conferring upon us our zest for living and freeing us from all that is merely repetitive, mechanical, stereotyped, and compulsive in our lives.¹² Unless we feel these strands of energy, these new increments of emerging quality alive in us in each passing moment, we are out of touch with the ultimate source of our personal power, the power of qualities composing themselves in new forms of togetherness, which, as Whitehead puts it, "constitutes the drive of the universe."¹³

In the light of what we have been saying, the reality of experience is marked by the sense of power, vitality, quality, freedom, and the self-active creativity with which everything begins. This is the reality that shows the difference between being aware of what is happening in one's own feeling system and

⁹ CPP. Vol. v, par. 462 (Eds. Charles Hartshorne and Paul Weiss; published in 1934 and 1960).

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, Vol. vi, par. 143.

¹¹ Henry Nelson Wieman, *The Source of Human Good* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1946), p. 303.

¹² Henri Bergson, *Creative Evolution*, translated by A. Mitchell (New York: Henry Holt & Co., 1911), pp. 199-200.

¹³ Alfred North Whitehead, *Modes of Thought* (New York: G. P. Putnam's & Sons, 1928), p. 119, paperback edition; also The Free Press, paperback, 1968. Henceforth referred to as MT.

having no "really real" experience at all. The base line of human living is constituted by these vectors of quality. One of the early books of the *Tripitaka* refers to these infinitesimally small and unique increments of quality in the life-continuum as vibrating after or toward, or, more specifically, "vibrating with" (*anukampati*).¹⁴

At the risk of needless elaboration of the point, let us hear Hartshorne again on the ultimate momentum of life. "The unity of the momentary experience," he said in a paper presented in 1960 in the Personalist group meeting at the Eastern Division of the APA, "is taken as a primitive; there is no other unity from which it can be derived or by which it can be explained." It is simply "the self-active experience." Each experience is thus a feeling that incorporates within itself what may be happening now, or what may be only presented now through memory of earlier events. This is the only real unity, the wholeness of the momentary present, which may embrace its predecessors through memory and anticipate or intend something waiting to be realized in the future. This wholeness of the present moment is a "decisive moment," Hartshorne writes, a moment in which to become more fully alive and more vitally a participant in the "shared creative experience" that constitutes a world.¹⁵ And, as the same writer observed in his most recent book,

The basic motivation . . . is neither the appeal of a self for that same self; nor even the appeal of other selves for the own self. Rather, it is something more general and yet, in its instances, more specific or concrete: *the appeal of life for life*—thus my past or future life (or self) for my present life or self and also the appeal of your past or future life (or the lives of birds, or the cosmic life) for your or my present life, reality, or self. Apparently it was Buddha who discovered this, centuries before Christ, if I may so speak, rediscovered it.¹⁶

One of the very strange matters in the comparative study of civilizations is that the stream of life in which we are all embedded—the one that traces

¹⁴ *Samyutta-Nikaya*, 105. Pali Text Society edition, 1950, Vol. 1, pp. 131–132.

¹⁵ Charles Hartshorne, "The Structure of Givenness," *The Philosophical Forum*, 1960–1961, pp. 22–39.

¹⁶ CSPM, pp. xx–xxi.

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its roots through the revolutions of modern science and technology, the French and American Revolutions, the Protestant Reformation, the Renaissance, the ferment of the late Middle Ages, the Roman Empire, the Greek city states, and Hebraic-Christian traditions—it is strange that this civilization should have taken so long to become aware of its own compulsive passion for security and permanence in its affairs. Threatened almost constantly from barbarians without and anarchy within, this civilization seems to have been forced by its own volatile change, its amalgam of ethnic and linguistic groups, and other sources of disunity to use the power of intellect to impose order and social control. By way of contrast, the Buddhist perspective had concluded twenty-five centuries ago that man has no other option than to participate as fully as possible in the Creativity that drives the world, in the fullness of the present moment, in the vivid flow of quality at the root of our individual awareness. While Western civilization was probing for something permanent in our experience, some “unknown substratum to which the qualities of experience do adhere,” the long Buddhist vision was transmitting its conclusion that the world that exists is the result of the *non-existence* of such unknown independent substance. Buddhism was attending, awakening, becoming more fully and vividly aware of those “truly singular events” in which we experience “the varied wonder and splendor of this world.” As Herbert Guenther puts it, “creative forces” encountered forever as events interrelated in various changing forms, in flowers that bloom and birds that sing, are all that exists.¹⁷ Buddhism is centered in this kind of continuing analysis *by individuals* of their own “stream of experience” and “fleeting moments.” The

¹⁷ Herbert Guenther, *Philosophy and Psychology in the Abhidharma* (Berkeley: Shambhala, 1974), p. 241. The early Buddhist philosopher, Asanga, wrote this many centuries ago. Everyone at one time or another has come upon the quotation from Shwe Zan Aung, pages 11–12 of his translation of the *Abhidhammatta-Sangaha*, entitled *Compendium of Philosophy* (London: Luzac & Co., Pali Text Society, 1956 ed.): “The Stream of Being . . . is an indispensable condition . . . the *sine qua non* of present conscious existence; it is the *raison d'être* of individual life; it is the life-continuum.” See also Gunapala Piyasena Malalasekera, “Aspects of Reality Taught by Theravāda Buddhism,” in *The Indian Mind*, ed. by Charles A. Moore (Honolulu: East-West Center Press, 1967), p. 77: “Thus the universe . . . represents an infinite number of discrete, evanescent elements in a state of ceaseless activity or commotion . . . in a state of perpetual becoming.”

whole of Buddhist thought is "permeated," as Inada writes, with this concept of the momentariness in which we live (*khana-vāda*/*kṣana-vāda*).¹⁸ In methods of meditation and analysis, Buddhism sought to become more fully awake to the aesthetic richness Professor Malalasekera called "the fulfilled Now," which Whitehead called "the aesthetic foundation of the world."

According to Buddhism, we miss our chance to live "the fulfilled Now" unless the quality of the momentary present can be synthesized to facilitate ever more encompassing streams of quality, leading us to be more free and full participants in the life we share with those who live, with those who have lived, and with those who will yet live. In such aesthetically consummatory awareness, as Abe Masao says, everyone and everything is enriched without eliminating its differentiation. This, he continues, is "the living structure of Nirvana," the free flow of living quality with no attachment to arrest the flow. Instead of obscuring or obliterating the differentiation of everyone and everything, as Buddhism has sometimes been thought to teach in its concept of Nirvana, we have an interaction between all entities in the interdependent cocreation of all, each individual becoming increasingly capable of synthesizing and assimilating the flashing qualities of the others. This may be what Whitehead had in mind in saying that each entity becomes *increasingly* capable of producing that particular effect which in all the universe no other entity could produce.¹⁹

One of the most provocative modern writers on Buddhism says that "it is precisely because of this living juxtaposition and succession of events in their momentariness that the possibility of becoming free" from our own distortions and distractions exists. Life, Govinda says, "knows only centres of relation, continuous processes of unification, because reality cannot be broken up into bits; therefore each of its phases is related to the others, thus excluding the extremes of identity or non-identity."²⁰ What Govinda means, and what

¹⁸ Kenneth Inada, "Time and Temporality: A Buddhist Approach," *Philosophy East and West*, Vol. XXIV, No. 2 (April 1974), pp. 171-173.

¹⁹ Abe Masao, "Review Article: *Christianity and the Encounter of the World Religions* (Paul Tillich)," *Eastern Buddhist*, Vol. 1, No. 1 (Sept. 1965), p. 114. Cf. also MT, p. 59.

²⁰ Lama Anagarika Govinda, *The Psychological Attitude of Early Buddhist Philosophy* (London: Rider & Co., 1961), pp. 56-57.

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Buddhism has emphasized throughout, is precisely what the major Process Philosopher now living has written: "For a philosophy of becoming," Hartshorne writes in his most recent book, "basic terms like 'reality', 'truth', 'what there is', the 'universe', 'what is going on', really mean reality as of now, the truth now, what there is now, the universe now, what is going on now (as conditioned by what has already gone on)—or else they have no unambiguous meaning."²¹ As everyone reading Hartshorne knows, creative synthesis is what is "going on" in these momentary nows. And this is what the Buddhists for centuries have been saying, as Hartshorne insists in the following way:

Experience of emergent synthesis feeds on its own previous products, and on nothing else whatever! This is the 'ultimacy' of creativity.

Sharing of creativity is the social character of experience, its aspect of sympathy, participation, identification with others. Moreover, even one's own past self is, strictly speaking, 'another'—as hundreds of thousands of Buddhists have, for over a score of centuries, been trying to tell the world. I hold that in this they have simply been accurate. One can regard one's past self with love, but also with antipathy, much as one can the selves of other persons. Sheer identity or sheer non-identity cannot be the correct account of this matter.²²

In his recent inquiry into Western interpreters of Nirvana, Welbon confirms what we have been saying, that "creativity pervades both the way and the goal of Buddhism," and that "ignoring its presence would be to imperil any attempt to understand the Buddhist nirvana" as well as to ignore the one unambiguous distinction between Buddhism and Hinduism.²³ Much earlier, Mrs. Rhys Davids was concluding that the early Buddhists were "groping"

²¹ CSPM, p. 17.

²² CSPM, p. 8.

²³ Guy Richard Welbon, *The Buddhist Nirvāna and its Western Interpreters* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968), p. 304.

and "feeling out" that "dynamic conception of things," that world of "becoming, movement, process, sequence, force," which is found in all the interpretations of modern science.²⁴

No one, of course, would expect the terminology of a radically different symbolic system and culture world to have a one-to-one relation with our own, and we reserve until later the question as to how far modern Process Philosophers and Buddhism in, for example, Nagarjuna, may be employing reason in different ways. It is commonly agreed, however, that the creativity which is the most general feature of reality in Process Thought is asserted by Buddhist writers most profoundly in the concept of "conditioned genesis," "dependent origination," or what Nakamura and Suzuki prefer to call "the interrelatedness of all things." All things exist interdependently, and "all change is made intelligible as the becoming or creation of events. . . . Such is Whitehead's or the Buddhists' view."²⁵

The familiar formula in Buddhism is *pratitya-samutpāda*, or *paṭicca-samuppāda*. As Govinda writes, it "shows itself as the necessary counterpart of the anatta-idea which emphasizes the character of existence and conceives the individual from the standpoint of life and growth, in contrast to the fossilized concept of an absolute entity which would logically call for similarly absolute (lifeless) laws."²⁶ Actualities of the moment are novel, interrelated but always expressing some novel enrichment of experience.

As this familiar formula suggests, society is more fundamental in the Buddhist orientation than substance, a feature associated with all Process Thought. Nothing has a self-established nature (*svabhāva*) either beyond or above or within the stream of events; there is no unconditioned substance or substratum, no soul or self or Being, or Nature, or Universe-at-large, or Truth from which the qualities we experience and analyze flow. The most famous illustration in Buddhist literature occurs in a collection of dialogues between a Buddhist sage, Nagasena, and King Menander, one of Alexander's successors and sovereign of northwest India in the second century B.C. In

²⁴ C. A. F. Rhys Davids, in *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* (1903), p. 588.

²⁵ WP, p. 135.

²⁶ Govinda, *op. cit.*, p. 57.

the document entitled, "Questions of King Milinda," Nagasena tells the king that the chariot is made up of wheels and axle and other parts, just as a house or army or tree or city are likewise societies of elements disposed toward one another in the unity of function. If you infer a chariot behind the parts, and a similar entity behind a man or a house, you must infer such an entity behind every individual thing.²⁷ The same point has been made again and again by major philosophers since Plato. As Whitehead put it, "There is no going behind actual entities to find anything more real."²⁸

Hume's way of putting Nagasena's point is the best-known statement in Western thought. Speaking of the author of his earlier *Treatise* in the third person, Hume writes in the *Inquiry* as follows: "He asserts that the soul, as far as we can conceive it, is nothing but a system or train of different perceptions—those of heat and cold, love and anger, thoughts and sensations—all united together but without any perfect simplicity of identity."²⁹ Despite all his efforts, Hume was unable to persuade his readers that, in seeking to free our experience from the "propensity to feign" a soul or personal substratum, he was substituting a new navigational system for the direction of life. Conventionalized clichés and doctrines would no longer function as a mariner's compass; neither these nor the intellectual residue of a lifetime of habitual responses to one's rearing. I once wrote an essay, which promptly dropped from sight, on the possibility that, considering his relations with Adam Smith and his knowledge of Francis Hutcheson, Hume was trying to induce men and women to open their feeling systems to the free flow of quality always emerging in Hume's backgammon and in the shared creative experience of which Hartshorne writes. To base life in the matrix of interpersonal relations in which we meet and care and mutually create the qualities that enrich our experience seemed to Hume's own philosophical descendants

²⁷ Quoted in Louis de la Vallée Poussin, *The Way to Nirvana* (Cambridge: The University Press, 1917), pp. 42–43. Comments by *Visuddhimagga*, *Milindapañha*, and reactions of modern scholars are given.

²⁸ Alfred North Whitehead, *Process and Reality* (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1929), pp. 27–28. Henceforth referred to as PR.

²⁹ David Hume, *An Inquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, edited with an Introduction by Charles W. Hendel (New York: Liberal Arts Press, 1955), p. 194.

an effort to turn the work of the intellect upside down.³⁰ Peirce, Whitehead, and Hartshorne all take up Hume's point, as I see it, but with more positive and recent resources, clarifying what may be called the Buddhist side. "Personal identity through experiences," Hartshorne writes, "is a property of the experiences, they are not properties of the identity, or of the ego. . . . Ego-centric motivations essentially consist in metaphysical confusion."³¹ This is precisely what the Buddha said. The fundamental element in our experience is a process of appropriating and synthesizing from many directions the "stream" or continuum of life. According to Buddhism, we become more intelligent, deliberate, responsible participants in this process in the course of discovering this deeper stream of existence. What we discover along all our vectors and parameters is what Whitehead referred to as "the eternal greatness incarnate in the passage of temporal fact."³²

In the Buddhist concept of conditioned genesis, each determinate event inherits along innumerable lines and synthesizes the qualities of the organic unity that is the momentary *now*. Each such actuality is dependent upon its predecessor or contemporary (dependent origination) but independent of events that follow in any series. "The adult must have been a child, the child may or may not become an adult. . . . Our knowing Plato relates us to Plato, not Plato to us."³³ Every individual is the shepherd, therefore, of many

³⁰ Nolan Pliny Jacobson, "The Uses of Reason in Religion: A Note on David Hume," *Journal of Religion*, Vol. XXXIX, No. 2 (April 1959), pp. 102-110. See also Vol. XL, No. 2 (April 1960) for a discussion of this article by two philosophers. Cf. "Hume on the Uses of Reason in Religion," *Ilfiff Review*, Vol. xv, No. 2 (Spring 1958), pp. 49-59.

³¹ Charles Hartshorne, "Introduction," in Douglas Browning, ed., *Philosophers of Process* (New York: Random House, 1965), pp. xii, xix. The question of Gautama Buddha acquires fresh relevance in this context: "Which, now, is thy true self, that of yesterday, that of today, or that of tomorrow, for the preservation of which thou dost clamor?" Quoted in Paul Carus, *The Gospel of Buddha* (Chicago: The Open Court Publishing Co., 1894), pp. 138-139. Our personal pronouns refer to processes of "point instants" as all Buddhist philosophers have argued. In an essay on personal identity, Hartshorne comments as follows: "Perhaps at long last we should join the Buddhists in recognizing" that "an enduring individual is a society or sequence of occasions." In "Personal Identity from A to Z," *Process Studies*, Vol. II, No. 3 (Fall 1972), p. 214.

³² AI, p. 41. Also *supra*, p. 1.

³³ CSPM, p. 224.

lives, those contemporary with his own, those stretching backward into an unbroken process out of the past, and those who will yet become in the future. This is why Buddhism has been called the perspective of "infinite compassion"—there is no other way than perceiving oneself a participant in all that lives, or has lived, or will live. Once illusions are swept away, "the immanence of the past" is found "energizing in the present."³⁴ Human occasions or "cells of experience" do not inherit in a one-dimensional personal order alone, since each occasion is "broken into by innumerable inheritances through other avenues,"³⁵ the illustration nearest us being our bodies whose functionings are occasions of energy transference from physical nature stretching into the environment at large.³⁶ Early Buddhism placed this kind of emphasis upon the role of the human body. Life for the Buddhist becomes meaningless, indeed, only when, beginning with his life in the body, his widening participation in the stream of becoming "comes to a dead end."³⁷ "To be and to remain alive we must not allow ourselves to be carried into some shallow back-water."³⁸ Unless we perceive these manifold lines of inheritance, and unless we feel this creative matrix of energy alive in us each moment, we are out of touch with what is "really real" in our existence. *The reality of experience is marked by the sense of quality and power with which it begins.* The problem here is that it takes rigorous efforts in meditation, according to Buddhism, to heighten and intensify the qualitative richness of life.³⁹

In the Buddhist view, this creative synthesizing of innumerable qualities present in the momentary now is a process for which, according to Nagarjuna,

³⁴ AI, p. 241.

³⁵ AI, p. 243.

³⁶ AI, p. 242-244. See also Lucien Price, *Dialogues of Alfred North Whitehead* (Boston: Little Brown & Co., 1954), pp. 152-153: "For ages we have had immense quantities of human experience accumulating in men's bodies. The body itself was, and still is, an immense experience; the sheer harmony of its properly functioning organs gives us a flood of unconscious enjoyment. It is quite inarticulate, and doesn't need to be articulate. But in bulk, and perhaps in significance, it far outweighs the scope of the written word. That, by comparison, is mostly trivial." Henceforth referred to as DANW.

³⁷ Guenther, *op. cit.*, p. 134.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 229.

³⁹ *Visuddhimagga* V, pp. 12-20. Also Guenther, *op. cit.*, pp. 73, 134.

we have "a living thirst."⁴⁰ In the work until recently thought to be his, *Mahā-prajñāpāramitā-sāstra*, the point is made that man, unlike other creatures, has a specific nature and is a determinate individual, but he is not confined to his determinate nature; he is not bound forever to his fragmentariness. He has a thirst to regain the dynamic, organic relatedness in which richness of life consists. "The height to which the Mādhyamika would take us ultimately... is a comprehensive attitude where one takes interest in every little thing without being confined anywhere; for here one is aware of the place and function of everything... as well as of its ultimate meaning."⁴¹ The basic truth Nagarjuna affirms is not a position of his own; it is one within the range of every individual who penetrates the fragments and determinate character of his life. Readers are warned "to set free the sense of the real from its moorings in abstractions."⁴² *This is why the power of the Buddhist attitude and perspective has depended, not upon its being intellectually explained, but rather upon its being practiced far from the printed page.* The "enlightened" in Buddhism feels a zest for living; freed from habitual obstructions and distractions, he is in touch with the ultimate momentum of life. The problem here is not simply to discover a more valid philosophical structure upon which to perch. Only

⁴⁰ Venkata Ramanan, *Nāgārjuna's Philosophy: As Presented in the Mahā-Prajñāpāramitā-Sāstra* (Tokyo: Charles E. Tuttle Co., Inc., 1966), p. 264. Cf. pp. 38 f., and 317. See pp. 329-330 for the following: "Man is at crossroads. He is aware of the unconditioned and knows also the conditioned. With the unconditioned in his aim he has his concourse in... the world of mundane existence. It is this sense of the unconditioned that acts as the very spring of all his activities, theoretic and practical... The wise do not abandon things saying that these lead them to contradictions and conflict; they preserve these and abandon the roots of conflict, viz., ignorance and passion. Having abandoned these they freely use concepts, construct even conceptual systems if need be in order to root out conflict and suffering. Opposing statements do not land them in conflict for they are free from clinging. Suffering of life does not prompt them to abandon life; they live their lives putting an end to the root of suffering." In this work now considered a later synthesis of his major ideas, Nagarjuna claims that he has no position of his own. The basic truth he affirms is in the range of every individual who penetrates the fragments and compulsive character of his life. Readers are invited to free themselves from their mooring in abstractions. Cf. also pp. 41-42, 247-248.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 329-330.

⁴² *Ibid.*

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Buddhists penetrating the veiled features of their existence through meditation and analysis can experience the ultimate momentum of their lives as "flashes of reality" always outrunning their "grasp."⁴³ Reason in Buddhism has a chiefly evocative role. Properly lived, "our lives are passed," as Whitehead puts it, "in the experience of disclosure,"⁴⁴ a disclosure framed in the "vague totality" that haunts us with "the fullness of its existence." Behind what we think is "that vast background of feeling hardly touched by consciousness."⁴⁵

There has been much misunderstanding of the role of conceptual thought in both Whitehead and Nagarjuna. Puhakka and Puligandla are seeing the common ground here when they write of Nagarjuna that he is not only *not* opposed to system-building but sees conceptual systems as instruments for deepening understanding and the entire range of awareness. "Without reason guiding one's inquiry, one cannot understand anything." Nagarjuna cannot be characterized "by a thorough-going program of invalidating conceptual thought."⁴⁶ Nagarjuna is obviously using concepts with complete freedom, and advises others to do the same, even to construct conceptual systems, the only provision being that concepts are used to "root out conflict and suffering" and to enhance the unspeakable qualitative richness of life. People who are "free from clinging" and from compulsive drives can direct their theoretic activities in this way. The general thrust of Buddhism is not against reason in human experience but against ego-centered, culture-encapsulated reason. Creative theorizing can lead beyond all anthropomorphic perspectives into the clarification of what must be done to extend the range of awareness and awaken us to more of the fullness of existence. A Buddhist might have written the following remarks found in Wieman's "Intellectual Autobiography":

⁴³ Nolan Pliny Jacobson, *Buddhism: The Religion of Analysis* (Carbondale, Ill.: Southern Illinois University Press, 1970), Ch. iv.

⁴⁴ MT, p. 62.

⁴⁵ MT, p. 116.

⁴⁶ Jay McDaniel and John B. Cobb, Jr., "Introduction: Conference on Mahāyāna Buddhism and Whitehead," *Philosophy East and West*, Vol. xxv, No. 4 (October 1975), p. 395. For the Nagarjuna study, see K. Puhakka and R. Puligandla, "Nāgārjuna and Māyā," *The Middle Way*, Vol. XLIV, No. 2 (August 1974), p. 71.

The first step of religious commitment is repudiation of all belief and knowledge as ultimate source of security and value. The second step is the recognition that the ultimate source of security and value is the concrete fulness of quality, which is never identical with the structures by which we know it. The third step . . . is to seek knowledge not for any ultimate security it can yield but as an instrument to guide conduct and disposition in dealing with that fulness of concrete reality which extends infinitely beyond the compass of knowledge.⁴⁷

It is difficult to see how anyone can read Whitehead and Buddhism without acknowledging that they are together on this; namely, that the whole notion that what is fundamental in our experience is well-defined must be "*completely inverted*." As Whitehead puts it, "the specialist in clarity sinks to an animal level—the hound for smell, the eagle for sight."⁴⁸ This is why Whitehead remarks that most of what is said with our conscious minds and speech "is shallow and superficial. Only at rare moments does that deeper and vaster world come through into the conscious thought or expression."⁴⁹ Concepts are artifacts to be literally "seen through," and it is a "vicious regress," Whitehead argues, "from the indefinite complexity of what is felt to attempt to control life, thought, communication, memory, and aspiration under the dictates of existing forms of understanding."⁵⁰ This is why Wieman, too, always argued regarding our interchange together that "the process simply is not creative in the sense here understood . . . whenever you manipulate interchange to produce an outcome which you had in mind from the start."⁵¹

Every Buddhist philosopher in the past two thousand years would have had deep appreciation for the uses of reason Whitehead and Hartshorne explicitly state and exemplify in their work. They never forget that reflection and analysis are taking place amid "the creative advance of the world into

⁴⁷ Henry Nelson Wieman, "Intellectual Autobiography," p. 28, in Southern Illinois University Library Archives.

⁴⁸ MT, pp. 108–113.

⁴⁹ DANW, pp. 368–369.

⁵⁰ MT, p. 113.

⁵¹ Henry Nelson Wieman, "The Religious Significance of Creative Interchange," *Iiff Review*, Vol. XII, No. 2 (Spring 1955), p. 21.

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novelty.” As Lowe writes of Whitehead, the forms of understanding are presented “only as so many possibilities for realization in the flux of things—possible patterns of existence and possible ways of feeling the changing world.”⁵²

The function of reason in both Whitehead and Buddhism is to foster the ultimate momentum of life, the growth of quality in experience. Both philosophies realize that reason in the vast majority of people is convention-bound, ego-dominated by those who are “complacently perched on their cozy conceptual superstructures regarding the world.”⁵³ Both appreciate the possibility that concepts often become a bonding agent tying individuals more securely to things as they are, rather than luring them into fresh penetrations which stir and stimulate the depths of human experience.⁵⁴ As it is pursued by Nagarjuna, indeed, in the evocative manner, reason can sometimes touch the spark of an original venture far beyond the limits words and concepts can ever convey, inciting in the thinker an “appetition for creation.”⁵⁵ Hartshorne puts the issue in remarkable clarity in the following words: “Understanding must justify itself by enriching the present. . . . Understanding should mean a higher mode of existence. . . . Something is wrong if understanding robs us of peace in the present, only so that we may, given luck, prolong our anxious existence into old age.”⁵⁶ This is what Whitehead intended. “The function of reason,” he argued, “is to promote the art of life.”⁵⁷ Whitehead’s remark to Russell in this connection deserves to be more widely known. “You think,” Whitehead said, “that the world is what it looks like in fine weather at noon day; I think it is what it seems like in the early morning when one first wakes from deep sleep.”⁵⁸ “Clear, conscious discrimination is an accident of human

⁵² UW, p. 27.

⁵³ Bhikkhu Nanānanda, *Concept and Reality in Early Buddhist Thought* (Kandy: Buddhist Publication Society, 1971), p. 75.

⁵⁴ MT, p. 123.

⁵⁵ MT, p. 119.

⁵⁶ Charles Hartshorne, *The Logic of Perfection* (La Salle, Ill.: Open Court Publishing Co., 1962), p. 240.

⁵⁷ Alfred North Whitehead, *The Function of Reason* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1958, paperback ed.) p. 2.

⁵⁸ Quoted in UW, p. 155.

existence. It makes us human. But it does not make us exist. It is of the essence of our humanity. But it is an accident of our existence."⁵⁹ It is certainly some sort of human arrogance to believe that the continuing advance of the universe into novelty could ever be expected to come within the range of human understanding. Overwhelmingly, human reason becomes an instrument used by the power structures as man's invisible stockade. Only by accident, and chiefly in their own solitariness, a relatively few fortunate ones discover that most of what their minds and speech contain is shallow and superficial rubbish of irrelevant detail.⁶⁰ In this both Buddhist and Process Philosophies agree.

What distinguishes Buddhism from Process Thought much more than the function of reason is the Buddhist process of purification, of which there is no Whiteheadian analogy. Not even philosophers are free from what Buddhism calls the "overpowering forces" and "general defilements" that mutilate, suppress, scatter, and distort the natural rhythm of creativity flowing silently through our lives. Within the philosopher's interior landscape there are obstacles which in the last resort are his own invention, making it far more difficult than Western philosophers seem to think to pursue the practical, critical behavior that is the trademark of their concerns. Relative to men and women outside the profession, philosophers indeed are often more susceptible to the four "overpowering forces" which can only be mentioned here in passing: forced being (*bhava*), wrong or dogmatic view (*dittvi*), sensuality (*kāma*), and general ignorance (*avijjā*). They are in all likelihood less concerned than other people to pursue any rigorous discipline of meditation designed to bring their emotional life under rational control, and they share with other people in lesser degree an infection with "the three basic ills": greed (*rāga*), hatred (*dosa*), and delusion (*moha*). They are possibly somewhat evenly divided on the question of whether or not self-corrective, purifying power is, on the whole, subject to rational control or comes from beyond conscious awareness when required conditions are provided. They are less likely than others to accept the assertion of Buddhism that the attempt to

⁵⁹ MT, p. 116.

⁶⁰ Alfred North Whitehead, *Religion in the Making* (Cleveland: World Publishing Co., 1926), p. 134.

dislodge concepts, or subject them to radical correction at the purely intellectual level leads to infinite regress in thought.⁶¹

These remarks about the possible Buddhist contribution to a more creative philosophical profession are not, I think, too severe. Peirce, possibly America's greatest philosopher of logic and science, died in poverty and debt, ignored by the "mandarins" of Boston, his unconventional creativity and divergent thinking even taxing at times the sympathy of his good friend, William James. "Wherever you are," Peirce wrote, "let it be known that you seriously hold a tabooed belief, and you may be perfectly sure of being treated with a cruelty no less brutal but more refined than hunting you like a wolf. Thus, the greatest intellectual benefactors of mankind have never dared, and dare not now, to utter the whole of their thought."⁶² The Spanish philosopher, Ortega y Gasset, saw this issue more broadly as follows: "Whoever is not like everybody, does not think like everybody, runs the risk of being eliminated." The ratio among philosophers is possibly not different from the ratio within the population at large in their willingness to follow the evidence wherever it leads, particularly when it leads them into the solitude where the distractions and the rootlessness of their lives may be flooded with the promise at least of creative renewal.

The struggle, and what Nagarjuna calls "the living thirst" for our own roots in the creativity that "drives the world" is fought on two fronts: first, against

⁶¹ Bhikkhu Nanānanda, *op. cit.*, pp. 73-84.

⁶² CPP, Vol. v, par. 386. Some of the essential features of Buddhist philosophy are found in Peirce's thought, for example, surprising penetrations from time to time into his own assumptions, repeated and almost unceasing drives beyond the limits of current forms of understanding, and the impossibility of pressing his thought into any kind of ideological mold. The following may serve as a tiny sampling: "Hume gave rise to all modern philosophy of every kind" (Vol. VIII, par. 34); of all things, one thing is "infinitely more wonderful; it is that protoplasm feels" (Vol. VI, par. 255); and this, "experience is not what analysis discovers but the raw material upon which analysis works" (Vol. VII, par. 536). Perhaps the most provocative thought is his persuasion that most philosophical posturing concerning doubt is false and artificial; doubt represents a change in the total pervasive nexus of events in which the mind is active. See Vol. v, pars. 421, 443, 575, 373, 376, VI, pars. 6, 499, VIII, par. 206. "But do you call it *doubting* to write down on a piece of paper that you doubt? If so, doubt has nothing to do with any serious business" (v, pars. 416-417).

the system of conceptual habits that reflect the intellectual and physical furniture of our convention-bound world; and, second, against the craving, grasping, ego-centered possessiveness that seem unconsciously for the most part to make everything and every thought exclusively "mine," decisively *not another's*. Both types of struggle become increasingly intense as individuals feel themselves caught in the drives of a superimposed ego and its counterpart,⁶³ the encapsulated culture world they call home. From a Buddhist perspective, therefore, a fundamental irrationalism has seemed to dominate the life styles of man everywhere on earth, even of those most committed to the life of reason. As regards the cultures of affluence now dominant, it is simply incredible to any Buddhist that men and women should be so compulsively devoted to living primarily as a consumer that prosperity and some kind of ill-defined "Progress" should be considered "essential to intelligent life,"⁶⁴ as even George Herbert Mead seems to have believed. Cultures of affluence threaten the creativity which Buddhism and Process Philosophy insist is what life is all about. When one remembers that, as Wieman and Bergson especially liked to say, "quality is equivalent to energy and power at the human level," we are speaking here about a pathological threat to the very source of the creativity that drives the world. It is strange to observe that in the present struggle between world powers there seems to be no realization that the resources capable of sustaining a complex civilization are centered in the live nexus of individualized feelings, in the flow of quality through the neural networks of the living moment, and in the creative sharing of this qualitative flow. Among Process Philosophers, Hartshorne seems unique in perceiving that such radical displacement of quality is destructive to human life because it turns that life upside down, ruins the value we find in living, and evacuates the "affirmation of worth that is life itself."⁶⁵

Creativity in the Buddhist perspective is not, therefore, an abstruse topic for philosophical debate. It is the most practical issue of our time, an issue that faces everyone at every moment, usually without breaking into conscious

⁶³ Bhikkhu Nanānanda, *op. cit.*, p. 11.

⁶⁴ George Herbert Mead, *Movements of Thought in the Nineteenth Century*, ed. M. H. Moore (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1936), p. 363.

⁶⁵ CSPM, p. 317.

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thought. "It is the wisdom of our lives," Wieman wrote in one of his last books, "to recognize that, to the degree to which we refuse to live for this creativity, we are moving toward our own self-destruction."⁶⁶

It is a strange anomaly that mankind at both ends of his long struggle out of bestiality into civilization has difficulty discovering how to safeguard his roots in the creativity that prepared his way, because he first lacks sufficient experience, and later builds the towers that will come to claim more and more of his energy for their maintenance and defense. At both ends of the human time span, at the relatively unawakened and at the most fully developed, the power of creative process moving silently through the passing moment, appropriating and synthesizing experiences into novel forms of togetherness, tends to be threatened with suffocation.

It is possible to experience some measure of hope for the future, however, in the confluence of the Buddhist perspective with the recent work of Hartshorne and Whitehead, particularly on the cocreative character of man's life in the world, on his continuity with the rest of life as an organic part of all that is alive, and on his inescapable interrelatedness, therefore, with the earth's tender crust, the soil, minerals, air, food, population, disease, and the rest of the features of existence. Particularly is this to be viewed as a positive gain when behind Hartshorne and Whitehead we perceive so great a host of witnesses, beginning with Charles Darwin, Gustav Theodor Fechner, Ernst Heinrich Haeckel, Claude Bernard, Henri Bergson, Samuel Alexander, Charles Sanders Peirce, William James, John Dewey, Henry Wieman and many thousands now feeding on their most difficult and profound penetrations. It is a sobering thought to remember that in the entire list only Hartshorne has read deeply in the Buddhist orientation and has been urging repeatedly that in Whitehead, especially, philosophy in this country has finally "found its way to a view which was first clearly formulated two thousand years and more earlier by the Buddhists, with their 'no-soul, no-substance' doctrine."⁶⁷ Because of its probable intimation of some convergence between East and West in levels far deeper than conscious thought, it is worth noting that the similarities between Whitehead and Buddhist perspectives appear in one who

⁶⁶ Henry Nelson Wieman, *Religious Inquiry* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1968), p. 39.

⁶⁷ WP, p. 130.

not only knew very little about Buddhism but was largely mistaken in what he "knew," as research by Kenneth Inada recently has shown.⁶⁸

When we have more historical information regarding the formative period of Buddhist philosophy, we may understand why at least some of the similarities were able to surface then and now, despite the radically different stages of human development, linguistic systems, and geopolitical considerations involved. We shall also have more insight into why Buddhism should be a far more unrelenting adversary of the affluent society than any modern philosopher could effectively become and continue to communicate with members of his own profession and culture, and why Buddhism stands closer to Marxism than to Process Philosophy in terms of the famous "thesis on Feuerbach"; namely, that philosophers have only interpreted the world in different ways, while the point is to change it.

For those who find any historical parallels between the formative period of Buddhism and our own a simply incredible suggestion, it can be said that India then, as always, was being tested in its capacity to achieve that Pande calls the "progressive synthesis" for which Indian civilization has always struggled. Amid numerous linguistic, racial, ethnic, and religious traditions, India was then, as now, "seeking unity in the midst of an unending and bewildering diversity, and peace and harmony in the midst of struggle and conflict."⁶⁹ The age of the Buddha was marked by clashes between opposing "schools and sects and basic points of view" which fed the flame of spiritual quest. "At the same time it was an age of frequent and bloody wars and of much economic change. These circumstances must have created a feeling of distress and despair in the minds of many."⁷⁰ The polarization and fragmenta-

⁶⁸ Kenneth Inada, "Whitehead's 'actual entity' and the Buddha's *anātman*," *Philosophy East and West*, Vol. XXI (July 1971), p. 303. The errors Inada finds Whitehead consistently making are as follows: (1) that Buddhism has a savior just as Christianity, (2) that "the souls of the blessed return to God," (3) that the sense of active personal participation is discouraged in Buddhism, (4) that Buddhism includes moral aims "directed to altering the first principles of metaphysics," and (5) that ultimate reality is centered in a Buddhist Absolute, with the multiplicity of finite enduring individuals relegated to a world of appearances.

⁶⁹ Govind C. Pande, *Studies in the Origins of Buddhism* (University of Allahabad, 1957), p. 251.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 328.

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tion of life in the superindustrial age had its counterpart in the continuous effort of India to cope with the conflicting races and cultures that have marked her long history. Against this background, certain features of the Buddha's character stand out in ways that resemble some of the leading Process Philosophers. He was independent of mind, seeking to substitute a "profoundly based critical attitude" for the dogmatism of opposing traditions. "He recognized certain problems to be logically indeterminate and on these preserved silence. He was very practical. He wanted action and not mere speculation. . . . The greatness of Buddha's personality is manifest from the fact that no other individual has left as strong an impression on the history of Indian culture as he."⁷¹

Whatever the parallels between that time and our own, the confluence of the two traditions yields novel consequences that must be noted in closing. Man is not here, both Buddhist and Process Philosophy assert, to dominate other forms of life. He is not here to control the rest of nature for his own ends. The Buddhist position is extreme on this point: "any action which aims at any advantage whatever in the present life is bad."⁷² Man is not the center of creation. He and all his experience, what Dewey called "the funded experience of the race," are part of the vast interrelatedness of all things. He is capable beyond all other forms of life of understanding this and of celebrating the creativity that runs through his nerve endings. This is the secret hidden in his largely unawakened and underdeveloped state. Amid the confluence of radically different culture worlds rubbing abrasively against one another in our own time, it is the legacy of the Buddhist tradition that lures and empowers us to ask a question Process Philosophy has never decisively asked, the question of why man clings so tenaciously, why he displays such compulsive attachment to the shallow back-water, at the very moment when unprecedented and unpredictable "shared creative experience" beckons almost irresistibly toward a higher mode of existence.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 391-393.

⁷² Quoted in Louis de la Vallée Poussin, *The Way to Nirvana* (Cambridge: The University Press, 1917), p. 5.