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EMPTINESS AND BECOMING:
INTEGRATING MADHYAMIKA BUDDHISM AND
PROCESS PHILOSOPHY

by

Peter Paul Kakol, BA (Hons.)

Submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Deakin University

December, 2000
DEAKIN UNIVERSITY
CANDIDATE DECLARATION

I certify that the thesis entitled: EMPTINESS AND BECOMING: INTEGRATING MADHYAMIKA BUDDHISM AND PROCESS PHILOSOPHY

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We (the undivided divinity operating within us) have dreamt the world. We have dreamt it as firm, mysterious, visible, ubiquitous in space and durable in time; but in its architecture we have allowed tenuous and eternal crevices of unreason which tell us it is false.

Jorge Luis Borges, ‘Avatars of the Tortoise.’
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ABSTRACT

Beginning with a comparison of process philosophy and Madhyamika Buddhism – focussing in particular on Charles Hartshorne and Nagarjuna – which seeks to find points of similarity and difference, this thesis goes on to ask whether the differences are disagreements or complementary insights that may be integrated by means of a hermeneutical framework which can facilitate the enrichment of both systems.

It is argued that process philosophy’s method of creative synthesis and Madhyamika’s method of negative dialectics are complementary rather than rival methods, because: (1) the Madhyamika bi-negation of symmetrical internal and external relations is complemented by process philosophy’s argument that asymmetrical relations have primacy, which can be integrated into a theory of ‘asymmetrical interdependence’; (2) the Madhyamika bi-negation of being and non-being is complemented by process philosophy’s argument that becoming has primacy; (3) Madhyamika’s emptiness (or openness) and process philosophy’s creativity are complementary ideas that can be integrated into a ‘creative emptiness’; (4) Madhyamika’s deconstruction of theism and acceptance of a conventional (and thus empty) ‘Cosmic Buddha-Bodhisattva’ and process philosophy’s panentheism are complementary and can be integrated in the idea of an ‘empty God’; (5) The creative emptiness and the empty God are two different but complementary ultimates – the ultimate activity and the ultimate actuality; (6) Madhyamika’s two truths – conventional (empty world) and ultimate (emptiness) – can be enriched by expanding the conventional to include ultimate actuality (empty God), and not subordinating the conventional to the ultimate; (7) process philosophy can be similarly enriched by meditating on creative emptiness, which reveals the empty God-world, which is not dominant vis-à-vis creative emptiness.

An attempt is made to develop a hermeneutical framework for the comparison and integration of Madhyamika and process thought, which can also be used to construct a general theory of worldviews and a theory of interreligious dialogue. Finally, the practical applications of the integration of process thought and Madhyamika Buddhism are explored, focussing on ethical and socio-political issues and how the integration of the two systems can be used to advantage in these contexts.
CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

My original purpose in writing this thesis was to confirm (or disconfirm) a hunch I had that two different approaches to making sense of reality are complementary. The two approaches in question can be found embodied in many different world views. One approach uses a ‘negative dialectics’ to deconstruct or bi-negate any purported total view of reality, showing that all such views have paradoxical consequences that render them incoherent. All views are therefore empty or open. The other approach uses a ‘positive dialectics’ that reconstructs or creatively synthesizes views of reality within a wider view in an on-going process of ‘inclusive transcendence’, which shows that all views are incomplete or one-sided and that therefore there can be no one static view of reality because reality itself is in process. These two approaches can be found in their most philosophically developed forms in the Madhyamika Buddhism of Nagarjuna and the process thought of Charles Hartshorne and A. N. Whitehead.

As an undergraduate I became converted to both of these approaches to reality. This thesis is the result of the problems I faced in trying to reconcile them with one another. How can reality be understood to be both empty of being and non-being and full of becoming? Are deconstructive negative dialectics and reconstructive creative synthesis complementary or contradictory approaches to understanding reality? If complementary, what form does this complementarity take? These are the questions which animate this thesis. In a sense, the problem here is similar to that faced by the narrator in Nikos Kazantzakis’ Zorba the Greek, who is attracted to both the Buddha’s life of detached serenity and Zorba’s attachment to living and fully enjoying the present moment.

In researching this topic, I found that not much has been written on the comparison of process thought and Madhyamika. Therefore, the time is ripe for a book-length dialogue between these two philosophies, especially as interest in both is growing. Such a work can provide an alternative to the far more prevalent studies of the relations between different philosophies of being and substance. Instead of the ontological difference between Being and beings, this thesis looks at the ‘cosmological difference’ between emptiness and becoming. I have found inspiration for this from the post-structuralists (such as Jacques Derrida), whose work can act as
a bridge between these two philosophies as they too are concerned with the problem of the relation between deconstruction and reconstruction.

The foregoing indicates that this thesis cannot limit itself to a mere clinical comparison of Madhyamika and process thought. For I am not primarily interested in looking for similarities and differences. My concern is the more interesting one of discovering whether the differences amount to disagreements or whether they are complementary (or supplementary). That is, I am asking whether the two systems' different approaches can be integrated. But what do I mean by 'integration'? In an integration, two systems are brought together in such a way that they are not synthesized into one greater system, but maintain their integrity as two complementary systems. I am not attempting a synthesis of the two systems as this would be to subordinate Madhyamika to the methodology of process thought (which is, as I have said, synthetic). Nor do I wish to subordinate process thought to Madhyamika methodology (which could be described as 'disintegrative'). I want to maintain the integrity of both systems. It is important not to suppress experience in the interest of system. The experience of process and the experience of emptiness are both real – if they cannot be synthesized into one system, then so be it. Whitehead said that it is better to assemble than to systematize, for an openness to experience beyond what our (necessarily partial) systems can explain is the only way that we can avoid the 'dismissal of experience in the interest of system'.

What Whitehead calls 'assemblage' I call 'integration' – it can also be called 'mutual transformation', which is awkward but better expresses the idea that in integration each system integrates its complementary other as other. There is no mediation between the systems – rather, each system is itself the mediator. (This is a metaphysical anarchism, which denies that there is a single principle, law, or method.)

I will be focussing primarily on Madhyamika as understood by Nagarjuna and process thought as understood by Charles Hartshorne. This is because these two philosophers are, in my view, the best exponents of their respective philosophies. Hartshorne has synthesized the thought of Whitehead and C. S. Peirce into an impressive 'logic of ultimate contrasts', whereas Nagarjuna has developed a similarly impressive method that can be used to bi-negate conceptual contrasts. Hence, I will be focussing on these two different approaches to categorial opposites in order to see whether or not they are complementary. Another reason for my focus

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on these two philosophers is that Hartshorne's engagement with Nagarjuna's thought in several places in his œuvre is the best of the small number of attempts that have so far been made at bringing these two systems into interaction. Hence, Hartshorne's critique of Nagarjuna makes for a good starting-point.

I begin with the usual literature review (chapter 2), which will give a good indication of the topic's context, previous comparisons of the two systems, and principle works that I have consulted. This is followed by introductory expositions of process philosophy (chapter 3) and Madhyamika Buddhism (chapter 4), which focus on those issues most relevant to the thesis topic so as to set up the discussions that follow. After this, each system is critically examined from the other's perspective (chapters 5-6), with the purpose of overcoming any disagreements. This is followed by a comparison of process thought's concepts of creativity and panentheism with Madhyamika's concept of emptiness and its attitude toward theism (chapter 7). This leads into a discussion of different hermeneutical frameworks that can be used to understand the complementarity of the two systems and effect their integration (chapter 8). The practical implications of the integration is in two parts, the first discussing interreligious dialogue and worldview analysis (chapter 9) and the second, ethical and socio-political concerns (chapter 10).

Note on diacritics. I have decided to drop the Sanskrit diacritical marks as it would be too difficult and time-consuming to include them.
CHAPTER 2

SURVEY AND DISCUSSION

Review of Relevant Literature

The number of works written from a Madhyamika perspective that engage with process thought critically, comparatively, or dialogically is very small in comparison to the writings of process thinkers about Madhyamika. There is nothing special about Madhyamika in this regard, as Buddhist thinkers in general have not engaged much with process thought, with the exception of the Kyoto school, members of which have been involved in an ongoing dialogue with process thinkers for several decades. Frederick Streng wrote an important essay in the special issue of Philosophy East and West on Buddhism and process thought, where he discusses Whitehead’s metaphysics and is critical of his theory of ‘eternal objects’.¹ There is not much more than this worth noting, all other discussions of process thought being in the form of a few comments made in passing within works dealing with other matters. Also worth mentioning are some important Buddhist thinkers who belong to other traditions but have been influenced by Madhyamika thought and have engaged with process thought. One is Masao Abe, who has written several papers discussing aspects of process thought and comparing them with Mahayana Buddhism. In one paper he argues that just as the idea of process transcends and includes the idea of substance, so the idea of emptiness transcends and includes that of process.² In another critical paper he argues that Whitehead’s God is an exception to his otherwise general principle that all is interdependent, as God has an independent aspect.³ Abe is also an important figure in the Christian-Buddhist dialogue as well as the dialogue between process thought (especially John B. Cobb, Jr.) and the Kyoto school of Mahayana Buddhism.⁴ Another is Kenneth Inada (a translator of Nagarjuna into English), who


in one paper compares Whitehead’s dipolar God to the Buddha-Bodhisattva and his creativity to dependent origination, and in another paper formulates a theory of oriental aesthetics that sees Being and Nonbeing as aspects of Becoming. There are also several Madhyamika scholars who have been influenced by process thought even though they do not discuss it in their writings. Examples are Venkata Ramanan’s use of Whiteheadian concepts such as ‘misplaced concreteness’, David Kalupahana’s application of ideas from William James, and Nancy McCagney’s use of ‘becoming’ as well as references to Charles Hartshorne in her bibliography. (Both Kalupahana and McCagney have translated Nagarjuna into English.) The dearth of Madhyamika engagement with process thought has made it necessary for me to widen the net to include Madhyamika engagement with other philosophies similar to process thought. Since process thought has been categorized as a (constructive) form of postmodernism, it would therefore be a good idea to look at works that compare Madhyamika with postmodernist and post-structuralist thought. Notable works in this category include those of Harold Coward, Ian Mabbett, Cai Zong-qi, and Robert Magliola – all of whom compare Madhyamika (usually Nagarjuna) with Derrida’s deconstructionism. Also worth mentioning is C. W. Huntington, Jr., who compares Madhyamika (specifically as interpreted by Candrakirti) with the postmodern

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pragmatism of Richard Rorty (who, interestingly, was a student of Charles
Hartshorne and wrote an early essay on Whitehead's superiority to Aristotelian
realism and subjectivist reductionism, which is widely regarded as a classic work of
process philosophy). These works' importance to this thesis is that they can act as a
bridge between process thought and Madhyamika.

The first process thinker to write about Madhyamika was Charles Hartshorne,
who studied Murti and Stcherbatsky in preparation for a Fulbright lectureship in
Kyoto University in 1957–8. In several essays, Hartshorne argues that Nagarjuna's
philosophy is correct in its critique of symmetrical relations – namely, two-way
internal relatedness (or interdependence) and two-way external relatedness (or
mutual independence) – but is unaware of the asymmetrical relations in which one
term is internally related and the other externally related (which, in Hartshorne's
view, finds a parallel in the philosophy of F. H. Bradley). Robert C. Neville
similarly argues that process thought is immune to Nagarjunian deconstruction as the
former sees relationships and causation as asymmetrical, whereas the latter is
directed only towards symmetrical theories of relationship and causation. John
Cobb often discusses Madhyamika implicitly within the context of his general
dialogue with Mahayana Buddhism. For example, he compares process thought (or
more accurately, Christian process theism) with Buddhist emptiness (sūnyata) in a
number of works – especially in his book on Buddhist-Christian dialogue – but he

9 C. W. Huntington, Jr., The Emptiness of Emptiness: An Introduction to Early Indian Madhyamika
(Honolulu: Univ. of Hawaii Press, 1989); Richard Rorty, 'Matter and Event', in Lewis S. Ford and
George L. Kline, eds., Explorations in Whitehead's Philosophy (New York: Fordham Univ. Press,
1983).

10 Charles Hartshorne, 'The Prejudice in Favour of Symmetry', Creative Synthesis and Philosophical
Method (London: SCM Press, 1970); Charles Hartshorne, "Emptiness" and Fullness in Asiatic and
a Buddhista-Christian Religion', in Kenneth K. Inada and Nolan P. Jacobson, Buddhism and
American Thinkers (Albany, New York: State Univ. of New York Press, 1984); Charles Hartshorne,
'Sankara, Nagarjuna, and Fa Tsang, with Some Western Analogues', in G. J. Larson and E. Deutsch,
eds., Interpreting Across Boundaries: New Essays in Comparative Philosophy (Princeton, New

State Univ. of New York Press, 1982).

12 See John B. Cobb, Jr., 'Buddhist Emptiness and the Christian God', Journal of the American

13 John B. Cobb, Jr., Beyond Dialogue: Towards a Mutual Transformation of Christianity and
does not usually specify whether this is the emptiness of Madhyamika or of some other form of Mahayana Buddhism. However, Cobb co-wrote a paper with Ryusei Takeda that compares Nagarjuna and Whitehead, specifically their respective concepts of *mosa-dharma* and prehension.\(^4\) Another important process thinker who has discussed Madhyamika is Nolan Pliny Jacobson, who has written a number of books on Buddhism. In one of these he argues that Nagarjuna expresses the two central aspects of process thought: creativity and reality as social process. He does not think it correct to interpret Nagarjuna as committing the fallacy of ‘misplaced symmetry’ (as Hartshorne does).\(^5\) And in his important essay ‘The Central Conception of Buddhism’, he argues that Nagarjuna’s negative dialectics are intended to peel away the conceptual superstructures that obscure our true insight into reality as a creative process.\(^6\) Finally, I will mention Joseph A. Bracken, who has engaged with Madhyamika within a work that attempts to show that Whitehead’s concept of creativity can be used as a link between East and West.\(^7\) He argues that Nagarjuna’s concepts of emptiness and dependent co-arising are two sides of the same reality that process philosophers call creativity and process respectively, and it is for this reason that process thought escapes Nagarjuna’s critique.\(^8\)

There are also a number of works comparing process thought and Madhyamika from perspectives external to both systems. Important in this regard is David Dilworth’s paper, which first compares Whitehead’s philosophy to Buddhist Abhidharma *dharma* theory and then uses this comparison to see how the Madhyamika critique of Abhidharma can also be used to critique process thought. He agrees with Hartshorne that process thought and Abhidharma stress as basic the asymmetry of relations whereas Madhyamika and Bradley are only aware of the symmetry they deconstruct, which leads them to affirm a trans-conceptual


\(^8\) Ibid., 4.
absolutism.\(^{19}\) Dilworth has also constructed a hermeneutical framework for analyzing worldviews based on an 'archic matrix' or table that can be used to characterize different worldviews, which could lend itself to the comparison of process thought and Madhyamika.\(^{20}\) Another is the transpersonal psychologist, Ken Wilber, who has constructed an integral philosophy that incorporates the partial truths in all worldviews – including concepts from process thought (creativity) and Madhyamika (emptiness) – into a developmental 'holarchic' system which provides a framework for the comparison and mutual evaluation of different worldviews.\(^{21}\)

**Discussion**

As the above survey indicates, the dialogue between Madhyamika and process thought is still in its infancy and is asymmetrical in nature (mostly from the process side). To date, process thinkers have tended to dialogue with Japanese forms of Buddhism, particularly the Kyoto school. However, the growing popularity in the West of both Madhyamika philosophy (via Tibetan Buddhism) and process philosophy will no doubt stimulate more dialogue between them. Madhyamika thinkers have been more interested with analytic philosophers, especially Wittgenstein; however, the recent trend is towards a dialogue with deconstructive forms of postmodernism (particularly Derrida's). Perhaps this trend will eventually lead Madhyamika thinkers to converse also with constructive forms of postmodernism, such as process thought. The fact that the process-Madhyamika dialogue has to date been largely a one-sided affair – largely a process monologue on Madhyamika – has necessitated that I compare Madhyamika and process thought with other philosophies that both have engaged with – such as analytic philosophy, German idealism, and deconstructionism – so that these can be used as a common conceptual background against which process thought and Madhyamika thought can be compared and integrated.

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The aim of this thesis is not primarily to compare Madhyamika and process thought. For comparison between two worldviews is only possible once they have entered into dialogue with one another. An a priori standpoint external to the two worldviews, from which such comparison could take place, is unattainable. Such a standpoint must be created within each worldview by engaging the other worldview, as such encounter cannot but lead to their mutual transformation in which each worldview becomes a creative synthesis of itself and the other. This alone makes comparison possible. But comparison is not just about looking for pre-existing similarities and differences. For it needs to be realized that a similarity is not necessarily an agreement and that a difference is not necessarily a disagreement. This realization makes it inevitable that comparative philosophy will transcend the mere search for similarities (with which we can agree) and differences (with which we can disagree) and search for complementarity. This means that comparison and integration cannot be separated – they are interdependent aspects of the one activity. Recognizing this, we can avoid the two dangers of interpreting the other via our own conceptual categories (which reduces the other to an aspect of the self) and deeming the other to be radically other and thus beyond comparison (which is to alienate the other).

This thesis’ double aim of comparison and integration of Madhyamika and process thought is in agreement with the recent tendency to move beyond mere comparative studies towards a dialogical and integrative approach. This can be seen, says J. J. Clarke, in ‘the proliferation of philosophical studies in which Western philosophers engage directly with Eastern thinkers and movements, not in order to compare them but simply as part of the philosophical enterprise’,22 or what Richard Rorty calls ‘the conversation of humanity’. At a recent conference of the Australasian Society for Asian and Comparative Philosophy, Jay Garfield, in his presidential address stressed this need to move beyond mere comparison of worldviews to their integration in a ‘fusion philosophy’. Thus, although I acknowledge that it is an ambitious undertaking, nevertheless, the time is ripe for a study such as this, which attempts to integrate Madhyamika and process thought. This will require the construction of a hermeneutical framework for the comparison and integration of these two systems. In order to construct such a framework, I will

be drawing upon ideas within both Madhyamika and process thought as well as ideas external to them.
CHAPTER 3

PROCESS PHILOSOPHY

The term ‘process philosophy’ is usually used to describe the type of philosophy inspired by A.N. Whitehead and developed by Charles Hartshorne. However, in its widest meaning it refers not to a particular school of thought but to a tendency of thought that has surfaced in various times and places.¹ According to Nolan Jacobson, there have been three significant process philosophies in history – Early Buddhism, Heraclitean philosophy, and Whiteheadian/Hartshornean process philosophy.² Some other leading exponents of this line of thought were G. W. Leibniz, Henri Bergson, C. S. Peirce, William James, Samuel Alexander. Also, the thought of Gilles Deleuze,³ Friedrich Nietzsche, Wilfrid Sellars,⁴ and Heidegger⁵ can be considered to be varieties of process thought in the wider sense of the term. Other philosophies which are closely related to process philosophy are the ‘philosophy of creativity’ (Nicholas Berdyaev’s personalism being an example), the ‘philosophy of history’ (of which G. W. F. Hegel is a chief example), and the ‘philosophy of events’ (such as is found in Stoicism). I will, for the most part, be restricting this discussion of process philosophy to the thought of Charles Hartshorne, partly because of considerations of space, but mostly because I believe that his is the most systematic, consistent, and inclusive development of process thought to date.

The single most important idea in process thought is undoubtedly the idea that the unity of being and becoming (and other categorial contrasts) lies in


⁴ See Wilfrid Sellars, ‘Foundations for a Metaphysics of Pure Process’, Monist 64 (1981): 3–90, where (like W. V. O. Quine) he reduces nouns to verbs and adverbs (e.g., ‘S Vs’), and reality to process.

⁵ Charles Hartshorne, Insights and Oversights of Great Thinkers (Albany, New York: State Univ. of New York Press, 1983), 374: ‘Heidegger is, in his way, a process philosopher’. His ‘Being’ is very
becoming, which is conceived as a self-creative and ‘prehensive’ event that is internally or inclusively related to past events, resulting in a temporal process that is cumulative in the sense that past events ‘live on’ as sublated in the present, which inclusively transcends them.\textsuperscript{6} Hence, for process thought, being is seen as both a special case and a partial aspect of becoming. This can be seen in: Heraclitus’s belief in both the primacy of becoming and the unity of opposites; in Leibniz’s ideas that every monad ‘expresses’ or is internally related to every other monad, and that to be is to act; in Hegel’s ideas that becoming is a sublation of being and that nature is a process of inclusive transcendence;\textsuperscript{7} in William James’s idea that reality consists of experiences of past experiences, which are themselves experiences of experiences, and so on; and especially in Whitehead’s concept of ‘prehension’, which is a feeling of other feelings (which Hartshorne calls the ‘phenomenological principle’).\textsuperscript{8} The profundity of Whitehead’s concept of prehension becomes obvious when we consider that it makes possible the unification of no less than nine different phenomena: (1) memory, as intra-bodily prehension of the distant past; (2) perception, as extra-bodily prehension of the more recent past; (3) time, as the passage from prehension to prehension; (4) space, as a complication of time: the prehension of parallel or contemporary prehensions; (5) causality, as the influence (in the sense of necessary condition only) of the prehended upon the prehending; (6) substance, being, and enduring individuality, as abstractions from spatial and/or temporal prehensions such that only common features are prehended; (7) mind-body relation, as the interaction between two types of the previous relation – namely, a temporal series of prehensions (the mind) and a spatio-temporal grouping/series of prehension (the body); (8) subject-object relation, as the prehension of past

\textsuperscript{6} ‘Becoming’ is an ambiguous term, as it can mean either coming-to-be or change. Process philosophers usually use it in the first sense, as even being can undergo change, but only becomeings come-to-be. The difference is that what comes to be is relational whereas change can happen to beings that are composed of non-relational atoms. Hence, process philosophers often stress that becoming is a ‘relational process’ (or ‘social event’, ‘intersubjective happening’, etc.).

\textsuperscript{7} However, Hegel’s derivation of becoming from being by way of double negation makes no sense, for one can derive being from becoming by the latter’s negation (being is that which does not become), and non-being by the negation of being, but the negation of non-being is just being over again, not becoming.

prehension(s); and (9) *God-world relation*, as the interaction between the totality of non-divine prehensions and the divine series of prehensions.  

Hartshorne has called this synthesis the 'most powerful metaphysical generalization ever accomplished' and 'a feat comparable to Einstein's'.

Hartshorne, who is as much influenced by Peirce as he is by Whitehead, further systematized and simplified Whitehead's philosophy by framing it in terms of a table of categories that illustrates clearly the phenomenological principle (prehension), and further derives from it the principles of moderation, contrast, and inclusive polarity. His basic insight is the 'logic of ultimate contrasts', as he calls it — a kind of post-Hegelian dialectics inspired by Peirce's three categories — in which there is an asymmetrical relatedness between the terms of contrasts of the highest generality, such as being and becoming, absolute and relative, object and subject, and so on.

Although Hartshorne considers himself a metaphysician, it would be more accurate to describe him as a post-metaphysician if this means that his system is a sublation of metaphysics as it has been traditionally understood — that is, as the science of being *qua* being and of the most universal abstractions — which for Hartshorne is sublated in his science of becoming *qua* becoming and of ultimate contrasts. '[Process]

[m]etaphysics seeks,' he says, 'the essential nature of becoming which does not itself become and cannot pass away; or, it seeks the universal principle of relativity whose validity is absolute. "Nothing is absolute but relativity".'

That is, (post-) metaphysics seeks the 'abiding features of process itself', and discovers that what is absolute and abiding is none other than process, relativity, becoming. Beings perish, but becoming is forever — or, as Deleuze puts it, it is only difference which eternally

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11 However, Hartshorne ('A Reply', 577) argues that the logic of inclusive polarity does not require a special logic as per Hegel or Marx, for its asymmetrical synthesis is perfectly in harmony with Aristotle's principle of non-contradiction: 'the same attribute cannot at the same time belong and not belong to the same subject and in the same respect' (italics mine, Metaphysics 1005b19), for one term is always concrete and the other abstract, as we shall see in a moment.

12 Hartshorne, Creative Synthesis, 46.

returns, whereas identities and forms can be repeated only a finite number of times before they decay, die, or change into something else.\textsuperscript{14} Hence, metaphysics seeks the necessary truths − those truths which cannot not be the case. But this does not mean that these truths are ‘a priori’, if this means ‘prior to experience’, for they are an element within all experience and cannot not be experienced (like mathematical truths, which are experienced to be true from all perspectives)\textsuperscript{15} − that is, they are non-empirical truths because no conceivable experience can falsify them, although they are still grounded in experience.\textsuperscript{16} Wittgenstein’s statement about theology − ‘theology as grammar’\textsuperscript{17} − can also be said of metaphysics: its truths are not tested empirically (though they still arise from experience); rather, they are tested for meaningfulness and usefulness in language (the pragmatic test). On this view, metaphysical truths are like immanent transcendentals\textsuperscript{18} − that is, necessary conditions of experience without which experience is impossible, which nevertheless themselves arise from experience like invariances in general systems theory or dissipative structures in dynamical systems theory (except that these are only relatively invariant, whereas the absolute is the universality of relativity). Hartshorne calls these necessary features of all experience ‘categories’ − a term which I will now examine in more detail.

\begin{flushleft} which most fully exhibits the universal necessities of existence'. Process metaphysics is thus concerned with the common experience, rather than the common essence.\end{flushleft}


\textsuperscript{15} See Charles Hartshorne, \textit{Anselm's Discovery: A Re-Examination of the Ontological Proof for God's Existence} (La Salle, Illinois: Open Court, 1965), 171, where it is stated that necessary truths are sensed (by the brain) as true from all points of view.

\textsuperscript{16} I agree with the Logical Positivists that metaphysics is non-empirical, but this doesn’t mean it is nonsense − rather, it belongs to the category of necessary truths together with logic and mathematics. Analytic philosophy has of course progressed beyond Logical Positivism, as can be seen in Quine’s and Strawson’s attempts to make (descriptive) metaphysics respectable again.


\textsuperscript{18} This notion of the ‘immanent transcendental’ is a neo-Kantian view (sometimes called ‘transcendental pragmatics’) espoused by contemporary philosophers as diverse as Habermas, Derrida, Quine, and Sellars. It is the view that although there are no transcendental and private a prioris, there are nevertheless public or social a prioris (such as language − indeed, analytic philosophy can be understood as a translation of Kant’s transcendental deduction into linguistic analysis and the recognition of language as the new a priori).
A Brief History of Categories

A large part of my thesis is concerned with comparing Hartshorne’s creative synthetic method with Nagarjuna’s negative dialectics. In order to make that task comprehensible, we need to look at Hartshorne’s categorial theory in more detail. However, since Hartshorne has described his understanding of the categories as a refinement of, and improvement upon, all previous categorial schemes, it is necessary that I begin with a short outline of the categorial systems which Hartshorne creatively synthesizes. Of course, the two most famous categorial schemes are those of Aristotle and Kant, but there are other lesser-known ones, such as those of the Stoics, John Scotus Erigena, C.S. Peirce, and of course those of Whitehead and Hartshorne. Hartshorne argues that his categories are a revision of Peirce’s (his Firsts, Seconds, and Thirds), which, according to Pierce, are themselves an improvement upon Kant’s; and Kant himself states that his categories bring to completion those of Aristotle.

Aristotle’s ‘categories of being’, as they are sometimes called, must be grasped if we are to understand the entire categorial tradition that he gave birth to. His ten (sometimes eight) categories are usually stated in English as follows: substance, quantity, quality, relation, place, time, position, action, passion, and condition. The problem with this is that these are nouns, as are the Latin words from which they were translated. However, the original Greek words which Aristotle uses are adverbs and verbs, except for the first, which is a pronoun. In fact, all of these words are interrogative and it is clear that Aristotle understood them to be the fundamental questions which one can put to being: what, how much, what kind, in what relation, where, when, etc.¹⁹ The exact number of categories was not important to Aristotle, as he sometimes referred to ten, other times to eight, four (he saw the first four as being more important than the others), and two (the division between substance and the rest being for him the most important). An interesting observation made by Robert Hanna is that Aristotle could not decide how to deal with substance, for he sometimes gives it priority over the other categories, as the subject of which they are the predicates, whereas at other times he turns it into a ‘super predicate’ (that is, essence, which is the most general predicate) among predicates (that is, the

other categories), whose corresponding subject is being *qua* being.20 (Herein lies, I believe, the seed of the later controversy between analogical and univocal language, and perhaps even Kant's theory of equivocal 'things in themselves'.)

Kant's categories, which are grouped in a table of four triads, rather than a list as in Aristotle, appear to be a more orderly and systematic formulation of Aristotle's. In fact they have nothing in common with Aristotle's, but are rather the various forms that propositions can take – more reminiscent of Aristotle's *On Interpretation* (which discusses various syllogisms) than his *Categories*. Even the apparently Aristotelian categories in Kant's table – namely, quantity, quality, and relation – have nothing in common with Aristotle's, for by 'quantity' Kant refers to propositions that are either universal or existential, whereas for Aristotle 'quantity' means 'how much'. And by 'quality' Kant is concerned with whether propositions have a positive or negative form, whereas Aristotle's 'quality' means 'what kind'. And by 'relation' Kant refers to propositions with either predicative, implicative, or disjunctive forms, whereas Aristotle is not primarily concerned with different forms of relation, so 'relation' for him merely refers to the verb connecting two or more subjects. Using these forms of predication, Kant derives the various a priori categories that the mind uses to structure reality as it appears to us, as opposed to how it really is in itself. Furthermore, for Kant, these categories are transcendentals, although he uses this latter word in a wider sense to include also the forms of intuition (space and time), and the Ideas or noumena (world, soul, and God); whereas for Aristotle, transcendentals are strictly trans-categorial (such as 'being', 'unity', and the like).21

Charles Sanders Peirce thought long and hard about the Aristotelian and Kantian categorial schemes and concluded that there are only three categories: Firsts (objects or qualities), Seconds (subjects reacting to, or related to, Firsts), and Thirds (habits or general principles that arise in the relation between Firsts and Seconds). It seems that Peirce derived his Firsts and Seconds from Aristotle's major division between substance and its predicates (the other categories), and his Thirds form Kant's categories understood as being the various ways in which subjects and predicates, or substances and qualities, can be related to one another. (Although, he was also influenced by Kant's division of categories into groups of three each, as

well as by his three critiques.) In other words, Peirce combined Aristotle's focus on terms with Kant's focus on relations between them. I will add here the observation that Peirce's triadic categories have nothing in common with Hegel's, for (1) the latter are, properly speaking, not metaphysical categories, but 'scientific' subcategories that evolve by synthetic enrichment (it is said that Hegel dialectically derived a total of 272 categories); (2) furthermore, according to Peirce, Hegel's third movement or 'synthesis' swallows up the two previous ones ('thesis' and 'antithesis') and thus does not allow them to stand as independent categories in their own right; and (3) Hegel's triads represent the dialectical movement of history as the unfolding of Spirit, whereas Peirce's triadic categories are the three possible kinds of relation that can be found anywhere (in reality and in thought). 

Hartshorne's Creative Synthesis of the Categories

Charles Hartshorne has creatively synthesized Peirce's and Whitehead's categories, reducing Peirce's three, and Whitehead's eight (or 37 if we include his entire axiomatics), to a pair of ultimate contrasts - r-terms and a-terms (or relatives and absolutes) - which can nevertheless take an indefinite number of forms, such as: becoming-being, subject-object, particular-universal, difference-identity, after-before, effect-cause, mind-body, etc., where the first term of each pair is an r-term (corresponding to Peirce's Seconds) and the second term is an a-term (Peirce's Firsts). Hartshorne's criticism of Peirce is that he failed to see that all Firsts (a-terms)

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22 C. S. Peirce, Collected Papers of Charles Sanders Peirce, vols. 1–6, ed. Charles Hartshorne and Paul Weiss (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, 1931–5), vol. 5, para. 79. Closer to the process sublation is Schelling's (re)production, for whereas Hegel's sublation is a conceptual unfolding of the implicit, Schelling's (re)production is a procreative will that supplements rather than cancels the past - that is, it creatively transcends yet includes previous moments in the temporal process. See Edward A. Beach, 'The Later Schelling's Conception of Dialectical Method in Contradistinction to Hegel's', The Owl of Minerva 22 (1990): 35–54.


24 That is, his category of the ultimate, eight categories of existence, twenty-seven categories of explanation, and nine categorial obligations (which correspond to Aristotle's material (that), formal (what), efficient (how), and final (why) causes, respectively). See Alfred North Whitehead, Process and Reality: An Essay in Cosmology, eds. D. R. Griffin and D. W. Sherburne, corrected ed. (New York: Macmillan, 1978), 20–8.
were themselves once Seconds (r-terms), but not vice versa – which is an asymmetrical relation – and therefore Thirds, which are relations between Seconds and Firsts, are themselves Seconds that are internally related to Firsts-as-former-Seconds (which is a relation to the indeterminate future; hence a Third is a third kind of relation other than the independence of Firsts and the dependence of Seconds). In other words, Thirds merely represent the insight that Firsts (‘objects’) and Seconds (‘subjects’) are not absolute, but relative, shifting with the passage of time (today’s subject is tomorrow’s object). Hence, categories are ultimate (or universally exhaustive) pairs of ‘opposites’ – which are technically not opposites as one is always the concrete whole which contains the other as abstract part – and are thus asymmetrically related to one another such that the relation is not some third term or reality, but the r-term itself as internally related to the a-term. All other kinds of relation – symmetrical independence (mutual external relatedness) or symmetrical dependence (mutual internal relatedness, or interdependence) – are lower order (subcategorical) abstractions from this basic asymmetrical relation. Interestingly, Kant’s forms of intuition – space and time – bear the closest similarity to a- and r-terms, for Kant says that time is inclusive of space, which is similar to the inclusion of a-terms (such as space, being, absolute, etc.) in r-terms (such as time, becoming, relative, etc.). Kant’s categories are too abstract and can only make sense if understood to be grounded in the forms of intuition and reduced to the asymmetrical relation of causation (as Schopenhauer noted), or more accurately cause-in-effect, which is the same as saying a-term-in-r-term (conditionality). This asymmetrical synthesis of concept and intuition is in fact the answer to Kant’s question: ‘Are synthetic a priori judgments possible?’ All the other relations that Kant recognized are derivative notions, so Aristotle was correct in recognizing only one kind of basic relation – the internal relation that an individual substance has to its attributes (which


26 Kant argues that space is the form of outer appearance and time is both the form of inner appearance and (indirectly) the form of outer appearance; however, as Heidegger observes, the spatial metaphors ‘inner’ and ‘outer’ imply a covert reduction of time to space. Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (Oxford: Blackwell, 1962), 472.

27 A ‘synthetic a priori judgment’ is a synthesis of intuitions based on principles not given in intuition – ‘creative synthesis’ in process terminology. The difference is that for Kant, the active subject that synthesizes intuitions does not act upon the world, whereas for process philosophy, today’s appearance becomes tomorrow’s reality.
are former substances – a fact which Aristotle rejected with his insistence that subjects do not become predicates).

Now, according to Hartshorne, ‘process metaphysics stands or falls with two basic ideas: the idea of one-way dependencies or relative predicates … and the idea of dual transcendence [of divine attributes]’. However, it is a further fact that the idea of dual transcendence stands or falls with the idea of one-way dependencies (asymmetrical relations). Hence, I will discuss Hartshorne’s theory of God as dual transcendence after discussing in more detail his theory of categories as asymmetrically related pairs of ultimate contrasts. As mentioned above, Hartshorne views all ultimate contrasts as consisting of $r$- and $a$-terms according to a principle of proportionality such that any $r$-term is correlated with all other $r$-terms (i.e., becoming, dependent, relative, subject, whole, many, effect, contingent, complex, etc., are all forms of internal relatedness) and any $a$-term is correlated with all other $a$-terms (i.e., being, independent, absolute, object, part, one, cause, necessary, simple, etc., are all forms of external relatedness). The fact that $r$-terms are inclusive of $a$-terms means that the contrast between the two terms is itself included in the $r$-term, rather than in a third term between them. (Thus, we can escape Bradley’s infinite regress argument, as this only applies to symmetrical relations). Hartshorne explains this ‘principle of inclusive transcendence’ as follows:

Since $r$-terms are inclusive and express the overall truth, … we can find the absolute only in the relative, objects … only in subjects, causes only in effects …, earlier events only in later, being only in becoming, the eternal only in the temporal, the abstract only in the concrete, the potential only in the actual, the necessary only in the contingent, … the infinite only in the finite, the simple only in the complex …. If one wants to understand an $a$-term one should locate it in its $r$-correlate. There are not subjects and objects but only objects in subjects, not causes and effects but only causes in effects, not earlier and later but only earlier in later, not necessary things and contingent things but necessary constituents of contingent wholes …

Hartshorne believes that this (descriptive) understanding of the nature of things is a middle way between, on the one hand, the extreme of two-way or symmetrical internal relatedness (reducing $a$-terms to $r$-terms), as found in Bradley, Hegel, Spinoza, Blanshard, Hua-yen Buddhism, and others; and, on the other hand, the extreme of two-way or symmetrical external relatedness (reducing $r$-terms to $a$-

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terms), as defended by Ockham, Hume, Russell, Carnap, and others. For far too long, philosophers have defended either of these two extremes of radical interdependence and equally radical mutual independence – both ultimately absurd if carried through to their logical ends – and have completely ignored the possibility of relations that are dependent at one end and independent at the other, without denying the possibility of the two symmetrical relations as derivative cases of asymmetry.30

Hume’s famous ‘separability maxim’, that what is distinguishable in thought is separable in reality,31 is contradicted by the asymmetrical relations in which r-terms inclusively transcend α-terms. For it is possible to ‘imagine something’, says Deleuze,

which distinguishes itself – and yet that from which it distinguishes itself does not distinguish itself from it. Lightning, for example, distinguishes itself from the black sky but must also trail it behind, as though it were distinguishing itself from that which does not distinguish itself from it. ... Difference is this state in which determination takes the form of unilateral distinction.32

There is plenty of evidence for this idea of asymmetrical relatedness. A number of examples readily come to mind: the child is dependent on its parent, but the parent did not have to produce that child, only some child; I am now dependent on my past history, but that history is not dependent on me-now (for I may have died or turned out to be someone completely different); an oak tree is dependent on its parent acorn, but that acorn is not dependent on the oak tree (for many different oak trees may have grown from it, or none at all); ‘there is an animal’ follows from ‘there is a fox’, but ‘there is a fox’ does not follow from ‘there is an animal’. Hartshorne comes up with many examples from logic and mathematics. For example, he makes the observation that it is a basic principle of modal logic that the conjunction of a necessary truth (e.g., ‘2+2=4’) and a contingent truth (e.g., ‘it is now raining’) will result in a statement that is itself contingent (‘it is now raining and 2+2=4’); hence, the contingent is inclusive of the necessary.33 Another example is the fact that in

30 In this regard Aquinas and other scholastics had more sense, as they did not deny the possibility of asymmetrical relatedness; e.g., see Thomas Aquinas, Summa Theologiae: A Concise Translation, trans. Timothy McDermott (London: Methuen, 1992), 1, 13.7, and Thomas Aquinas, Selected Philosophical Writings, trans. Timothy McDermott (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1993), 62.


32 Gilles Deleuze, Difference and Repetition, 28.
logic, the bi-conditional (i.e., equivalence or mutual implication) is derivative from the asymmetrical conditional (‘if p then q’; which is itself an example in logic of the possibility, often overlooked by philosophers, of asymmetrical relations). Or, take the fact that in mathematics the product of a variable and a constant is itself variable, which shows that becoming can contain being but being cannot contain becoming. As Hartshorne puts it: ‘The togetherness of Being and Process can itself only be a process; for if anything becomes, the total reality becomes, inasmuch as a single new constituent always gives a new totality’. Hence the dependent or relative can contain independent or absolute factors just as a whole, which is dependent on its independent parts, contains those parts. (Hartshorne rejects the ultimacy of the organic interdependence of part and whole.) So process philosophers agree with those who say that ‘all is relative’, but this is not to deny that the relative totality can contain an absolute aspect or ‘immanent transcendental’. These examples support the basic idea in process philosophy that every experiential event is a whole that is internally related to, and thus dependent on, independent yet subordinate parts (which are either previous experiential events, or abstractions from these). Hartshorne criticizes the prevalent notion that ‘included in’ and ‘dependent upon’ are equivalent terms, when in fact ‘it is including, not being included, that implies dependence’. This idea of dependent wholes and independent

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33 Hartshorne, Creative Synthesis, 84. Note the asymmetry: the contingent contains the necessary, but the necessary does not contain the contingent.

34 Ibid., 205–10.


37 Compare Peirce, Collected Papers, vol. 6, para. 288: “The relatively independent is prior to the relatively dependent, as ... parts to whole.”

38 Hartshorne, Logic, 199–20, and Hartshorne, Creative Synthesis, 197.

39 Another important example is differential calculus, which explains rest as a special case of motion. Also, for examples from biology and physics, see Gregory Bateson, Steps To An Ecology of Mind (New York: Ballantine Books, 1972), 380; Gregory Bateson, Mind and Nature: A Necessary Unity (New York: Bantam Books, 1988), 10, 178–9; Joseph Rosen, ‘Response to Hartshorne Concerning Symmetry and Asymmetry in Physics’, Process Studies 26 (1997): 318–23; and John D. Barrow, The World Within the World (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1990), 115, 183–4, 298, 305–6. Although Einstein’s theory of relativity supports the asymmetrical theory, what about Bell’s Nonlocality theory? Most physicists agree that there is no true interaction here as it cannot be used to transmit messages superluminally. The effect is far more subtle than interdependence, appearing to be more like an acausal spontaneity similar to creativity (which eludes definition in terms of categorial opposites like ‘dependence’ and ‘independence’).
parts must be understood, for it is the most important feature of the process dialectic. It means that although universals, beings, concepts, forms, etc., are independent of particular becomings or events, they are nevertheless derivative parts or aspects existing only in the network of events, not outside of them. (This is similar to Aristotle’s principle that forms are in the world, not outside of it.) In other words, a universal is independent of any given particular, but dependent on the totality of particulars from which it is an abstraction; and yet, the universal is a condition sine qua non of those very particulars (hence their dependence on it). So although process philosophy rejects symmetrical dependence (that is, interdependence) as a basic principle, it nevertheless affirms a kind of ‘asymmetrical interdependence’, as it could be called, for \(a\)-terms are dependent on \(r\)-terms, but not in the same way that \(r\)-terms are dependent on \(a\)-terms. That is, the former dependence is collective and non-creative, whereas the latter is individual and creative. Only the dependence of particulars is creative because they are concrete instantiations of abstract universals; that is, they are unique syntheses of many parts which could be synthesized in many different ways, so the actual synthesis that results is not given in the many parts that are to be synthesized. On the other hand, the abstractive synthesis of many concrete particulars into a universal is given in the parts, for here we are passing from complex to simple, so the synthesis is not creative. Hence, creativity is intimately related to the idea of asymmetry, and both ideas help us to avoid the naïve idea of symmetrical interdependence of collectives and individuals, which has detrimental political consequences.

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42 Of course the concepts ‘particularity’ and ‘universality’ are interdependent; however, I am not here considering particularity in general, but the non-conceptual particular as instance of particularity. This is, I believe the flaw in Hegel: his synthesis is merely a synthesis of conceptual opposites, not of the more important contrast between concept and reality. In light of this analysis, Feuerbach’s attempt to invert Hegel makes a lot of sense.

43 This is related to Deleuze’s (*Difference and Repetition*, 207–12) distinction between passive differentiation of past potentials and active differentiation or actualization of entities in the present.

44 Recent versions of neo-Hegelianism that make this mistake of conflating individual with collective can be found in general systems theory – particularly Arthur Koestler’s theory that reality consists of nothing but ‘holons’ (part/wholes) arranged hierarchically such that the more complex inclusively transcend the simpler. Process philosophers would query whether the holon is not itself an abstraction from two types of ‘holon’: creative individuals (actual occasions) and non-creative (abstract) collectives. This would also be the question put to Ken Wilber, who also bases his system on the holon theory.
Causation, Being, Universals, and the Mind-Body Relation

At this point a number of issues need further clarification, namely the status in process philosophy – specifically, in Hartshorne’s asymmetrical categorial scheme – of causation, being, universals, and the mind-body relation.

Causation. In process philosophy, causation is not understood as the unfolding of an effect that already exists in the cause, nor an ontological form of logical deduction. Rather, causation is understood as a form of *modus ponens*: ‘If \( p \) then \( q \)’, where \( p \) is the effect and \( q \) the cause.\(^4\) For example, this oak tree implies that acorn. From this can be derived the truth that the non-existence of that acorn implies the non-existence of this oak. But we cannot derive from it that the non-existence of this oak tree implies the non-existence of that acorn, as it could have been either non-productive or productive of another oak tree); hence, neither can we say that that acorn implies this oak tree, for which oak tree results (if any does at all) is not determined by the acorn alone. In other words, the cause is the necessary, but not the sufficient, condition of the effect – it is that without which the effect cannot arise (*sine qua non*), whereas the set of possible effects of the cause are the sufficient, but not necessary, ‘conditions’ of the cause – i.e., each contains (or ‘brings along’) the cause, but neither is necessary (just as many roads are sufficient, but neither road necessary, routes to Rome). So an effect requires its cause (which is always a complex cause), but the cause does not determine *that* effect.\(^5\) This means that every event, as an effect, is partly other-determined (by the cause) and partly self-determined (which should not be described as self-causation, but self-creation). This is what is meant by ‘creative synthesis’ and ‘inclusive transcendence’. Every effect contains its cause, but the cause does not contain its effect – for it has no definite effect, only an indefinite effect, which is the future as vague skeletal outline from which the concrete effect emerges by spontaneous ‘contraction’. Hence,

\(^4\) In modern logic the *modus ponens* is used as the model for all propositions. For Whitehead a proposition is a creative synthesis of many actual occasions (as the subject) and an eternal object (as the predicate that the subject(s) contain – Leibniz’s principle of *in-esse*). Hence it should follow that the synthesis between terms of ultimate contrasts such as cause and effect takes the form of the *modus ponens*. See Charles Hartshorne, ‘Creativity and the Deductive Logic of Causality’, *Review of Metaphysics* 27 (1973): 67: ‘each event is a new premise for old conclusions. ... Each new experience of a grown man is a new premise from which that man's birth and childhood logically follows’.

\(^5\) See Charles Hartshorne, *The Fate Falsity and Other Essays in Neo classical Philosophy*, ed. Mohammad Valady (Chicago: Open Court, 1997), 162: ‘Without all the necessary preconditions the event cannot occur; with them it can. But can and will are irreducibly distinct, by any tolerable modal logic’.
process thought drops the principle of sufficient reason which, according to Heidegger, characterized Western ‘metaphysics’ from Socrates to Nietzsche. In reasoning we should recognize the creativity inherent in the nature of things and restrict ourselves to looking only for necessary conditions. A similar realization led to the theory of evolution, which is based on the understanding that an effect is not an inferior copy of its superior cause, but an improvement on its ‘cause’, arising partly by necessity and partly by ‘chance’.46 (The including effect is superior to its included cause.) As Peirce puts it: ‘Let us not put the cart before the horse, nor the evolved actuality before the possibility as if the latter involved what it only evolves.’47 There are then two types of priority (causality, origin, principle, arche): one ‘occurring earlier in the temporal process of generation’ and the other ‘ranking first in completeness of being’, as Aquinas so eminently describes Aristotle’s understanding of this process dialectic of asymmetrical inter-causality that is not ‘monarchical’ but an ‘anarchical’ balance of powers.48

**Being.** Heidegger says we must not ignore the ‘ontological difference’ between being-as-essence and being-as-copula. However, he did not see the further differences between concrete becoming and abstract being, both of which he seems to conflate within being-as-essence. Also, the ‘is’ of the copula is not Heidegger’s ‘Being’ or Hegel’s synthesis, but the asymmetrical identity/difference of implicational causation as discussed above. That is, when we say that ‘x is A’ we are saying that the event x contains, but transcends, the universal A, just as a set includes/transcends its subset. This ‘is’ is asymmetrical because x can say that it is A (but also more than A), but A cannot say that it is x, for most of it is outside of x. Hence, ‘is’ means ‘contains’, or better still, ‘enacts’ or even ‘does’ (as in ‘x As’). Hegel argues that if the ‘is’ in ‘S is P’ (e.g., ‘particular is universal’) implied the nonidentity of S and P (as commonly thought), then this would render the principle of identity (‘A is A’) unintelligible; but if this principle is true, he argues, the ‘is’ of predication must be

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46 The fact that all organisms contain their entire evolutionary past enfolded within their genes combined with the fact that new organisms arise partly by mutation means that the theory of evolution is mismanned – it should be called ‘involution’, as organisms do not evolve or unfold from a pre-given blueprint, but involve and enfold each newly created form. Organisms are not inferior copies of perfect originals, but ‘simulacra’ (to borrow a term from the postmodernists).


understood as an ‘is’ of equation (in which case ‘$S$ is $P$’ is the same as ‘$S = P$’, which results in the unity of opposites – e.g., ‘particular = universal’). Process philosophy solves this problem by pointing out that it is not a matter of simple symmetrical identity or symmetrical difference, but of asymmetrical identity/difference. This is in keeping with the definition of the principle of identity in modern logic as ‘$p$ implies $p$’ (which can be understood as arguing for a common core of identity among differences; consider: ‘$p \& q$ implies $p$’). A final point that can be made is that to the charge that becoming requires a being that becomes, the process philosopher can respond that this is nonsense, for the world is full of processes that do not require a substrate – rain, waves, storms, clouds, wind, electromagnetic fields, and so on.\footnote{See Nicholas Rescher, \textit{Process Metaphysics}, 42–9, where the thesis that there are unowned processes is forcefully defended.}

\textit{Universals}. In process philosophy, universals, forms, concepts, enduring individuals, bodies, and beings are all $\alpha$-terms that can be treated as different words for the same type of thing. All of these are abstract and indeterminate potentials for becoming and thus ‘exist’ in an indefinite form within the determinate. Whitehead called them ‘eternal objects’, which is an unfortunate term as they are not eternal but arise, as a function of the process of creative synthesis, in relative degrees of universality/particularity from the one and only truly ‘eternal object’ – namely, the idea of creativity or ‘universal of universals’ that is eternally thought in God’s mind. Another unfortunate aspect of Whitehead’s eternal objects is that he conceived of them as a multiplicity of all possible concrete events (‘actual occasions’). But if everything that can ever happen is already ‘out there’ waiting to be actualized, then how do we distinguish between actual and potential, real and unreal, what is and what could be? What does choice even mean in this case, considering that all possible worlds continue to exist whether they are chosen or not? There would then be no place for creativity, as nothing could arise that is truly novel and inconceivable. Whitehead himself says that ‘Continuity concerns what is potential; whereas actuality is incurably atomic’.\footnote{Whitehead, \textit{Process and Reality}, 61.} ‘Discreetness’, says Hartshorne, ‘simply means that some possibilities are not actualized, and what is actualization if not the emergence of a definite multitude out of an indefinite continuum?’\footnote{Thus, there can be no efficient causality of the past upon the present and the final causality exercised by the future and the creative present.}
be no possible worlds containing yet-to-be actualized particulars. 'Particularization and becoming are one. Hence there are no particulars or individuals in purely possible worlds. They are really only possible sorts of worlds containing only general kinds of particulars or individuals'. 52 Hence, Hartshorne agrees with Aristotle (and Peirce) that the law of excluded middle does not apply to the potential as it does to the actual, otherwise the future would be predetermined. 53 (Note: this also applies to the most concrete version of universals as '... related to x', where x is a past particular, because there are many different ways in which this can be actualized.) 54

Mind-Body Relation. Process philosophy repudiates the notion of a 'soul' or enduring individual whose identity persists through time as a substantial ground of the transition from mental event to mental event. Aristotle was right to locate concreteness in the more particular, but then why did he not realize that momentary events are more particular than enduring individuals? Just as species are more particular than genera and individuals are more particular than species, so events are more particular than individuals. By his own logic – and that of all nominalists – individuals should only exist as abstract aspects of events, which a temporal series of events has in common. To believe otherwise would be to violate the law of non-contradiction (e.g., 'John is both sick and healthy' – true, not at the same time, but why should this be an exception when 'not at the same place' is not?), as well as a violation of the law of identity ('John-sick is John-healthy')! Hume came closer to the truth with his argument that he has no experience of an enduring individual, only a succession of mental states. But he commits the same mistake as those who believe in such individuals – that is, he ignores the asymmetrical alternative. Apart from symmetrical dependence (bi-conditionality, or equivalence) and symmetrical independence (atomism), there is the asymmetrical 'is' mentioned above – me-ten-


52 Ibid., 328. Process philosophers could benefit here from Deleuze's (Difference and Repetition, 279–80) distinction between 'possible' (the whole of which the actual is a part) and 'virtual' (as part of the actual whole). Only the actualization of the virtual is creative, not the selection of one member from a set of composites (ibid., 212). Unfortunately, he shares Peirce's mistake of taking the continuum for a concrete reality.

53 This is confirmed by the quantum mechanical description of quantum events as alternating between an indefinite wavefunction (potentiality) and its so-called 'collapse' into a definite particle (actuality).

54 General forms/beings are derivative from particular events, but are independent of them in the sense that those particular events can perish even though the form continues as long as it is embodied in some other events. See the above discussion on asymmetrical relations.
years-ago is (or includes) me-five-years-ago, but me-five-years-ago is not (or does not include) me-now (for I could have died or become a different person a few years ago). Thus, we need to distinguish between the succession of past-inclusive subjects or ‘I’s’ and the ego-self that is an abstraction from these. Although the ego-self and the body are two different abstractions or ‘enduring objects’ (one temporal, the other spatiotemporal), the mind-body relation can be explained as the inclusion of the body (and even the ego-self) within the momentary I-subjects. Hence the mind is not in the body; rather, the body is in the mind. But it must be remembered that process philosophers are panpsychists who recognize some degree of mentality ‘all the way down’ and thus see ‘body’, ‘matter’, and ‘physical’ as abstractions from spatiotemporal groupings of mental events. Hence, the mind-body relation ultimately reduces to a mind-mind relation (or, more accurately, a one-mind–many-minds relation). The problem with identity theories is that they too easily move from the asymmetrical truth that mental events imply brain events (‘no brain, no mind’) to the symmetrical doctrine that mind and brain mutually imply one another and are thus identical (or equivalent). But although it is true that a change of brain state necessitates a change of mental state, it doesn’t follow that every change of mental state requires a corresponding change in the brain; for, according to the logic of material implication, we cannot conclude from ‘m implies b’ that ‘no m, therefore no b’. Every mental state is conditioned by a brain state, but the conditioning is necessary, not sufficient. Without brain state A, I couldn’t have mental state x; but

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55 This is similar to William James’ and George Herbert Mead’s I-Me distinction: the ‘me’ is a social inheritance from the past, whereas the ‘I’ is the individual creatively determining itself in the present.

56 Of course, Aristotle’s idea that the mind is the form of the body also means that the body is in the mind. But he elsewhere says that form is a particular that differentiates matter as genus, implying that matter is itself a form (for only primary matter is formless). But must mind be a form? Only as abstract ego-self – but the I-subject is formless (just as feeling is formless and yet mental). Nevertheless, it is the formless and concrete mental events that contain abstract forms (both body and ego-self), and not vice versa.

57 The debate on panpsychism among analytic philosophers (e.g., between Searle and Chalmers) is hampered by an uncrical equation of panpsychism with animism – which often reduces the debate to a pointless argument over whether or not thermostats are conscious. More sophisticated ideas come from thinkers like Nagel and Chomsky, who argue that the question whether the mental can be reduced to the physical misses the point because we do not yet know what counts as ‘physical’ – in physics this term has been continually expanded in meaning (to include things like action at a distance, electromagnetic fields, and strange quantum effects), so who knows whether or not it will be further expanded to include aspects which today are called ‘mental’? See Noam Chomsky, 'Language and Nature', Mind 104 (1995): 38; and Thomas Nagel, The View From Nowhere (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1986), 52.

58 This view is neither ‘idealism’ (because ideas are abstractions, whereas mental events are concrete) nor ‘materialism’ (because matter is also an abstraction).
given brain state $A$, I need not have mental state $x$. I may instead have mental state $y$, which also could not exist without brain state $A$.

Fallacies and Category Mistakes

Whitehead's 'fallacy of misplaced concreteness'\(^{59}\) - mistaking the abstract for the concrete - is always a danger and results in worldviews that reduce $r$-terms to $a$-terms. For example, the belief in enduring individuality is a category mistake that turns an abstraction into a concrete reality. Another example would be Hegel's concept of 'concrete universals'. However, it is not always concreteness that is misplaced. Any given pair of categorial contrasts may be erroneously transposed. An example would be the designation of the category of 'subject' as $a$-term and that of 'object' as $r$-term. This mistake is understandable considering the misuse that the term 'subject' has been put to, such as equating it with substance, enduring individuality, or the subject of absolute idealism (where is becomes correlated with 'identity') - in which cases it would be an $a$-term. Another common mistake is the transposition of the mind-matter categorial pair, again understandable if 'mind' has the meaning it does in idealism and 'matter' is taken as the opposite of 'form' (which is an $a$-term). In fact these two mistakes often reinforce one another in that 'matter' is often associated with 'object', both of which are taken to be concrete. However, the most serious kind of category mistake is Hegel's inclusive absolute, which confuses 'independent' with 'whole' and 'dependent' with 'part', as if 'dependent upon' were identical to 'included in'. But, as argued above, the process understanding of 'dependent' is in terms of internal relatedness and inclusion, whereas 'independent' (or 'absolute') is merely an included aspect or part. Without an understanding of why inclusive absolutism is a fallacy, it is impossible to grasp the very core of process thought itself.

Another kind of fallacy arises when we take sides between the categories, calling one term 'good' and the other 'evil'. This would mean that 'good and evil' is itself an ultimate categorial contrast. But these categories are not universal - animals are neither conscious nor capable of evil and God, who in the process system is taken to be an embodiment of the categories, cannot do evil. Of course suffering is a universal evil (even God suffers), but the doing of evil is not. Evil is not a category,
but a category mistake; and good is not a category, but the lack of category mistakes. That is, the asymmetrical synthesis of the categories is the good as the principle of moderation between the two evil extremes of mutual dependence (which takes $\alpha$-terms as nonexistent, or at least inferior) and mutual independence (which excludes or devalues $\tau$-terms). This is precisely the point that Kierkegaard makes against Hegel in his assessment of the latter's principle of mediation as incapable of mediating between speculation (whose method is mediation) and its other.\footnote{Soren Kierkegaard, \textit{Concluding Unscientific Postscript to 'Philosophical Fragments'}, vol. 1, trans. H. V. Hong and E. H. Hong (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton Univ. Press, 1992), 376.}

Although there is some truth in post-Wittgensteinian claims that rival systems or 'language games' are incommensurable, this is only true of systems at the same level of complexity. However, such systems can be compared and evaluated from the point of view of a background system of greater complexity that sublates these two systems within itself. Now, process philosophy is a system that recognizes the possibility of three kinds of relation (two symmetrical and one asymmetrical) and incorporates them into its system. Hence, it is in a position to classify and evaluate all other systems as these are simpler and included by it. Following Peirce, we can classify systems according to 'what ones of the three categories each system admits as important metaphysical-cosmical elements'.\footnote{Alfred North Whitehead, \textit{Science and the Modern World} (New York: Free Press, 1967), 51.} Those that include Firsts admit relations of mutual independence, Seconds, relations of interdependence, and Thirds, relations of asymmetrical in/dependence. In that case there are seven possible systems (more if we include the null case of non-relations, which could be called 'Zeros'), which can be arranged in a veridical order so that the more inclusive have more truth and the less inclusive have less truth. Furthermore, each system is able to evaluate and classify those which are less inclusive than it, but is blind to those which are more inclusive and tends to misunderstand them in terms of those systems it can understand.

\textit{The Dual Transcendence of the Divine}

Now that I have explained the basic elements of process philosophy, I can move on to a discussion of the other idea with which, together with the idea of asymmetrical
relatedness, Hartshorne believes process thought stands or falls – namely, the idea of
dual transcendence. Whitehead says that ‘God is not to be treated as an exception to
all metaphysical principles, invoked to save their collapse. He is their chief
exemplification.’\(^6\) For Hartshorne this means that God is an entity just like any other
entity and thus cannot not violate the categorial scheme. Reality consists of relative
events with absolute aspects, that is, r-terms embodying a-terms. Therefore, God
cannot also be a relative and mutable becoming with a core of absolute and
immutable being. Theists tend to see the world as relative, dependent, mutable, etc.,
and God as absolute, independent, immutable. But this would be a form of dualism,
which is unacceptable within the process system. Pantheists, on the other hand, who
see God as the all-inclusive absolute commit the category mistake of (con)fusing r-
terms with a-terms, or else they are monists who equate God with the interdependent
totality. But in the process system, existents differ from one another not by categorial
opposition, but by embodying the categorial oppositions in varying degrees of power.
This means that, in Hartshorne’s words, ‘To turn from ordinary things to the
transcendent cannot be to turn from dependence to independence, but only from
selective or non-universal forms of dependence or independence to the universal
forms of both.’\(^6\) This can be understood as followings. All enduring individuals are
both relative and absolute. They are relative in the sense that they are constantly
changing and are internally related to other entities. They are absolute in the sense
that, despite their relativity and constant change, they have an abstract core that does
not change but is independent of other entities. This is their identity or essence. Now,
all individuals apart from God are relatively relative and relatively absolute. That is,
although they are constantly changing and internally related to other entities, this
relativity is not absolute in the sense of being responsive to all things – e.g., there are
events occurring on the other side of the galaxy that barely change them in any way.
Also, their absoluteness is not absolute because even their identity or essence is
changing, although at a very slow rate – indeed, eventually they either die or
disintegrate. But God’s relativity and absoluteness are absolute in the sense that the
divine relativity is all-responsive and affected by all that goes on in the universe, and
the divine absoluteness is absolutely immutable and everlasting. (Process theists


\(^{63}\) Hartshorne, *Creative Synthesis*, 230.
often use the analogy that God is to the world as the mind is to the body, but in the sense explained earlier where the body is in the mind – hence, 'panentheism', or world-in-God.) This is what is meant by 'dual transcendence': God transcends other entities' relative and absolute aspects. Hence, there is here a second-order use of the categories such that each of the two terms of every ultimate contrast is applied to the ultimate contrasts themselves so as to delimit two spheres of categorial instantiation. 64

If God cannot be an exception to the categories, this means that the divine causality must function the same as for other entities. It would therefore make no sense to say that God as cause determines all events in the world as their necessary and sufficient condition, for as we have seen, all causation without exception is necessary but not sufficient conditionality. This means that God does not have coercive power, or power to act unilaterally, but must cooperate with others and persuade the world to evolve in directions which divine wisdom deems appropriate. (This guidance is, however, indefinite due to the indefiniteness of future potentialities, so there is still a creative role for events to play in actualizing these divinely-chosen potentialities.) As Whitehead puts it: 'God's role is not the combat of productive force with productive force, of destructive force with destructive force; it lies in the patient operation of the overpowering rationality of his conceptual harmonization. He does not create the world, he saves it; or, more accurately, he is the poet of the world, with tender patience leading it by his vision of truth, beauty, and goodness.' 65 Hence the answer of the process theist to critics who ask how God can allow evil in the world is the same as God gives to Job: 'Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth? Tell me, if you have understanding'; 66 and so on – in other words, 'you don’t know what method I use to act in the world, so your criticism misses the point'.

Are there proofs for God's existence? If by 'proof' we mean 'empirical demonstrations' then the answer is no; but God's existence follows necessarily from the coherence of the concept of God as explained above. In other words, within the

64 See Hartshorne's The Divine Relativity: A Social Conception of God (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1948), passim, where this theory that the world's relativity and absoluteness are both second-order relative, and God's relativity and absoluteness are both second-order absolute, is developed at length.

65 Whitehead, Process and Reality, 346.

66 Job 38.4 NRSV.
process system, the statement ‘there is a God’ emerges as a belief without which that system would collapse. None of the traditional ‘proofs’ are really empirical, as usually thought, but are versions of the ontological argument. Consider the first premise of the cosmological argument: ‘contingent things exist’ – what conceivable experiential evidence could falsify this view? Or, how can we falsify the design argument’s first premise: ‘there is some order’? Hartshorne contends that the ontological argument in its valid form shows, not that God exists, but that if God exists it must be necessarily rather than contingently. This means that empirical theism and empirical atheism are both impossible because oxymoronic, leaving only the two alternatives of positivism (‘God’ is meaningless and therefore both ‘God exists’ and ‘God doesn’t exist’ are meaningless) or a priori theism (‘God’ is meaningful and therefore necessarily exists). It all comes down to the question whether the concept of ‘necessarily existent being’ makes sense or not. Within the process system it does make sense, as the discussion above of dual transcendence indicates. Therefore God exists.\textsuperscript{67}

Hartshorne believes that the debate between rival theologies (pantheists, theists, panentheists, and their varieties) can be resolved if everyone comes to an exhaustive understanding of the variety of forms of God-world relation. If we consider both God and the world in terms of necessity and contingency (or any other pair of ultimate contrasts), we find that there are no fewer than nine possibilities (sixteen if we include the null cases of atheism and/or no-world). Let \( N, C, \) and \( NC \) stand for God as necessary only, contingent only, and both necessary and contingent, respectively; and let \( n, c, \) and \( nc \) stand for the world as necessary only, contingent only, and both necessary and contingent, respectively. Then the possibilities are: \( N.n, N.c, N.nc, C.n, C.c, C.nc, NC.n, NC.c, \) and \( NC.nc \).\textsuperscript{68} Spinoza’s position is represented by \( N.n \) (God and world as both necessary only); classical theism’s by \( N.c \) (God as necessary only and world as contingent only), and panentheism’s as \( NC.nc \) (both God and world as both necessary and contingent). The advantage of process theism (panentheism) over the others is that it is inclusive of both pantheism and classical theism (at the second-order level), with the addition that it allows for the inclusion of

\textsuperscript{67} See Hartshorne, Anselm’s Discovery, for a convincing version of this modal argument in defense of the ontological argument.

\textsuperscript{68} If ‘0’ means there is no God (or God cannot be characterized in terms of contrary concepts) and ‘\( o \)’ means there is no world (or the world cannot be conceptually characterized), then we have seven more positions: \( 0.n, 0.c, 0.nc, N.o, C.o, NC.o, \) and \( 0.o \).
the contingent aspects of the world in the divine knowledge. For as we have seen, the necessary cannot include the contingent – a truth that Aristotle recognizes, with his doctrine that the Unmoved Mover as necessary being has no knowledge of the contingent world but merely ‘thinks on thinking’, as does Spinoza who for that very reason denies the world contingency in order to include it in the divine knowledge (for the necessary can include the necessary – the only case in which ‘all-inclusive absolute’ makes sense). Christian theism, unfortunately, has contradictorily tried to have a wholly necessary God that has knowledge of a wholly contingent world. Only panentheism can solve this dilemma by including a contingent aspect within God. By the use of a number of eliminative criteria, such as: the principle of contrast, the fact that only the contingent is concrete; the need for divine knowledge of the world; the problematic nature of a purely contingent God; and the requirement that the world have a necessary aspect, results in the elimination of all except the panentheistic position.\textsuperscript{70}

**Process Thought and Postmodernity**

I will be using some of the ideas of postmodernists such as Derrida in this thesis as a potential bridge between process thought and Madhyamika; so it would be a good idea to now discuss some of the similarities and differences between process thought and postmodernism. Both John Cobb and David Ray Griffin argue that process thought is a kind of ‘constructive postmodernism’ that opposes itself to ‘deconstructive postmodernism’.\textsuperscript{71} But this distinction is too simplistic. Derrida’s term ‘\textit{d\textdegree\textit{construction}}’ is a rarely used French word that does not just have the negative meaning of the English ‘deconstruction’ and of the (more common) French ‘\textit{deconstruction}’; rather, it can mean either \textit{de}-construction or \textit{re}-construction (as in the word ‘re-arrange’).\textsuperscript{72} Derrida’s use of this word is in keeping with his penchant

\textsuperscript{69} For example, the necessary truth that \((2 \times (2 \times 3)) = 12\) contains the necessary truth that \((2 \times 3) = 6\).


for words that have ambiguous meanings (like ‘supplement’). Cobb and Griffin argue that deconstruction (in the purely negative sense) is only the first phase in a constructive postmodernism that is also reconstructive. A hence, process thought and Derridean Poststructuralism are both deconstructive and reconstructive in nature. A better distinction, in my view, would be between (de)constructive postmodernism and what could be called ‘destructive’ postmodernism (e.g., that of Richard Rorty, Jean-François Lyotard, Jean Baudrillard, etc.), for these latter favor the relative over the absolute and merely ‘deconstruct’ without reconstructing.

The vital difference between these two types of postmodernism is that, although both agree that truth and meaning are relative (or context bound), only the latter conclude from this that all views are equally true (or equally false) and that we cannot choose between them (radical incommensurability). Hence, they argue, there can be no reconstructive ‘grand narrative’ that transcends the individual narratives or language-games. There is superficial similarity between this view and Derrida’s. The central thesis of Derrida’s deconstructionism can be summed up as: (1) all texts are dependent on contexts; and (2) these contexts are themselves texts dependent on contexts, and so on. This implies that truth and meaning are context bound – they are dependent on more inclusive truths and meanings, which are themselves dependent on even more inclusive truths and meanings, and so on. Notice the asymmetry here – it is like an infinite series of nested Chinese boxes or Russian dolls. This is Derrida’s reformulation of the Hegelian ‘sublation’ (Aufhebung), which he calls ‘relève’, but also ‘supplement’, ‘pharmakon’, ‘differance’, etc. For Derrida, every text is incomplete and needs to be supplemented by an extra-text that is in one sense an addition and in another sense a substitute that swallows up the text it supplements – in other words, the supplement transcends but includes that which is

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73 At a recent conference I attended Griffin expressed his regret that the book he edited (Griffin, *Founders*) did not instead have ‘reconstructive’ in the title so as to show that he accepted deconstruction as a first step on the way to reconstruction.


75 Heidegger’s method of ‘destruction’ is closer to what I am here calling ‘destruction’ than it is to Derrida’s ‘deconstruction’, for the end result of applying either negative method is the same: the mystical coincidence of opposites in a distributed both/and.

supplemented, which is an asymmetrical relation. The same thing occurs in process philosophy – the supplementation of $a$-terms by inclusive $r$-terms is relativized as the temporal process whereby all perspectival events are wholes sublating antecedent events as parts that themselves become sublated parts of subsequent events, which means that there can be no totalistic picture of reality given once for all, but a constant deferral of wholeness as every whole (or essence) becomes a part (or accident) of a greater whole.

But just because truth and meaning are relative or context-dependent does not mean that there cannot be relative degrees of truth and meaning. The incommensurability principle only applies to views (or 'language-games') that are at the same level of the hierarchy of sublation. That is, two texts that share the same context have no criteria of comparison and evaluation, but the text that inclusively transcends them as their context or background does have such criteria. Hence, rival views that have been sublated in a more inclusive view can be evaluated by that viewpoint. Also, the inclusive views are relatively more true than the included views, although this can only be known by the former – that is, the incommensurability only works one-way. Problems only arise when the relativity of this distinction between text and context is forgotten and the context is 'lifted up' as an absolute and transcendent center, origin, or arche that stands outside the text. But, unlike the destructive postmodernists who throw out the baby with the bath water, Derrida does not deny the functionality of the center, only its ontological status. In his words: 'I believe that the center is a function, not a being – a reality, but a function. And this function is absolutely indispensable.' Hence, truth and meaning are 're-inscribed' into the text as immanent transcendentals. (This concept of 're-inscription' is a very important part of Derrida's method, appearing again and again in his texts.)


78 Consider the supplementation of real numbers by fractions: fractions are dependent on real numbers in the sense that we could not express fractions if real numbers did not exist; so fractions are merely additions to the set of real numbers. However, real numbers can be expressed in terms of fractions with the numeral '1' in the denominator, so fractions become the whole that includes the set of real numbers as parts.

79 In R. Macksey and F. Donato, eds., The Structuralist Controversy: The Languages of Criticism and the Sciences of Man, Proceedings of the Languages of Criticism and the Sciences of Man Symposium, 18–21 October, 1966 (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1972), 271. See also Jacques Derrida, 'Afterword', in Limited Inc. (Evanston, IL: Northwestern Univ. Press, 1988), 122, 141, 146, 150, 153, where he defends the value of truth and denies the charge that he sees no use for truth and other related values.
Hartshorne is also concerned with the ‘etiolatry’ inherent in much of Western philosophy; but, like Derrida, he does not dispense with $\alpha$-terms such as ‘cause’ and ‘absolute’, but re-inscribes them within the network of $r$-terms. Hence, although ‘all is relative’, there is no reason why relativity cannot contain an absolute aspect.

There are several apparent differences between deconstruction and process philosophy. Derrida is concerned that in overturning a hierarchy (in which one term of a pair of contraries is subordinated to the other) we do not establish a new hierarchy. Is not the asymmetry between $r$- and $\alpha$-terms in process philosophy a kind of hierarchy? However, subordination is a kind of reduction, and this would be equivalent to denying the existence of $\alpha$-terms altogether. But in process philosophy, they are inscribed in the order of $r$-terms, while retaining their independence of individual instances of $r$-terms. As discussed above, there is an interdependence between contraries, but it is asymmetrical in nature. It is the Hegelian symmetrical synthesis that really reestablishes the hierarchy, for the mediation between concept and existence will always favor the concept. Process philosophy is based on the ontological primacy of events, whereas deconstructionism says there is ‘nothing outside the text’ and that there is no going beyond language. But in fact Derrida denies the thesis that there is ‘nothing beyond language’, saying instead that ‘the “other” of language’ is not a “referent” in the normal sense which linguists have attached to the term. Furthermore, Derrida’s argument that writing came before speech can be used to show that reality is an ‘archive’ and that writing exists at all levels of reality (e.g., DNA). Also, Derrida’s argument that the sign is a combination of the repeatable (iteration) and the unrepeatable (difference or uniqueness) is similar to the process view of events as unique $r$-terms that can be repeated as $\alpha$-terms. Hence even events can be seen as signs – as Peirce well understood.

Unlike philosophies of identity and substance, it is the nature of process philosophies to take a diversity of forms in different times and places; this is an unavoidable function of their subject matter. Their very concern with events and

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81 The inclusion of $\alpha$-terms in $r$-terms is thus a form of non-eliminative reductionism.


83 See Derrida, *Limited Inc.*, 119 on iterability: ‘It entails the necessity of thinking at once both the rule and the event, concept and singularity’.
difference means that they must use strategies that overcome the tendency inherent in
language to abstraction – strategies which must take different forms in different
languages and cultures, as each has unique forms of the suppression of uniqueness.
Hence, those who criticize deconstructionists and process philosophers on the
grounds that their untranslatability makes them suspect, miss the point, for they are
philosophies that seek the unique and untranslatable.

Unlike destructive postmodernism, both deconstruction and process
philosophy are undoubtedly ‘grand narratives’ or reconstructive systems, for both
describe reality as an on-going process of inclusive transcendence – whether this is
put in terms of texts or events. Both avoid, on the one hand, the performative
contradiction of postmodernists, whose grand narrative is that grand narratives are
impossible, while recognizing, on the other hand, that this does not necessitate
affirming a transcendent grand narrative standing above the process (as Lyotard and
others would have us believe), but one that is inscribed in the very process itself as
an immanent transcendental. Hence there is no reality outside of experience to which
experience can correspond – rather, reality is the cumulative flow of inclusively
transcending experiences and it is to this that our views of reality correspond.\textsuperscript{84} There
is no reason to think that there is a one-to-one correspondence between theory and
reality. Indeed, this is impossible as theory is abstract whereas reality is concrete, so
there is a degree of freedom or ‘openness’ (as Heidegger puts it) in our theories about
the world. The mind is a mirror of nature, but not one that reflects with absolute
distinctness and precision (e.g., it is more like a map).\textsuperscript{85}

\textit{Conclusion}

Process philosophy finds its greatest level of systematization and consistency in the
thought of Hartshorne, who has taken the ideas of other process philosophers –
particularly Whitehead and Peirce – and reduced them to a logic of ultimate
categorial contrasts between relatives ($r$-terms such as becoming, contingent, subject,
particular, concrete, etc.) and absolutes ($a$-terms such as being, necessary, object,

\textsuperscript{84} The objective is inscribed within the intersubjective.

\textsuperscript{85} This means that we can have grand narratives, but ones that are non-totalistic in the sense of being
abstract parts of concrete reality. We must not confuse incompleteness with partiality (for we may
have a complete view of the world, but for all that it may be indistinct and imprecise).
universal, abstract, etc.), expressed as an asymmetrical dialectic wherein relatives are
dependent wholes that include independent absolutes as parts. Another way of
putting this is that absolute 'things' are derivative abstractions from the concrete
processes that are internally related to them. Reality is thus primarily process-
relational in nature, which means that the notion of 'independent things' (absolutes)
is a useful fiction whose existential status is as an abstraction included within the
intersubjectivity of relational processes, which is a non-eliminative reductionism.
The ultimacy of relativity (as inclusive of absoluteness) means that reality can be
understood as a cumulative process of 'inclusive transcendece' whereby relatives
become absolutes sublated within more inclusive relatives (e.g., subjects become
objects of subsequent subjects). The placement of process philosophy within the
context of post-structuralist thought, where it can be framed within a deconstructive-
reconstructive axis, is useful in the context of this thesis as Madhyamika philosophy
is often described as a form of deconstruction. Hartshorne's process theology of
'dual transcendece' is built upon this asymmetry of absolutes-in-relatives by
postulating a second-order contrast between the panentheistic divinity that is all-
inclusive (absolutely relative) and included by all (absolutely absolute), and the non-
divine world in which entities are locally inclusive (relatively relative) and locally
included (relatively absolute). However, as there cannot be an exception to the
process metaphysic of 'immanent transcendentals', so even God's dual
transcendence must be understood as being immanent to the cosmos of
interdependent processes.
CHAPTER 4

MADHYAMIKA PHILOSOPHY

In its simplest and most concise definition Madhyamika is, as its name suggests, a
philosophy of the middle path. (Thus it is sometimes called the Centrist school.) It
takes a middle path between all conceivable extreme positions or pairs of conceptual
opposites, but without settling in a middle or mediating position or concept; it takes a
dynamic middle path, rather than a static middle position. Nagarjuna – the South
Indian Buddhist philosopher of the second and third centuries C.E., who is usually
considered to be the founder of Madhyamika\(^1\) – says that Madhyamika is a middle
path between origination and extinction, destruction and permanence, identity and
difference, coming and going (the denial of which is known as the ‘eight
negations’).\(^2\) In negating these concepts, the Madhyamika seek not only to deny their
existence, but also to deny their nonexistence; hence they are often defined as a
middle path between both eternalism and nihilism (or absolutism and relativism) and,
vis-à-vis other Buddhist schools, as a middle path between Hinayana Buddhist
atomism and Yogacara idealism.\(^3\) But it would be incorrect to say that Madhyamika
is the only form of Buddhism which follows the middle path, for Buddhism itself has
often been called a ‘philosophy of the middle path’; it is just that of all the schools, it
is the Madhyamika that has been the most consistent in applying this philosophy to
all conceptual opposites without exception. The Buddha himself taught the middle
path between existence and nonexistence:

\[\text{On two things, Kaccana, does this world generally base its view, – on existence}
\text{and on non-existence. Now he who with right insight sees the arising of the world as it really is, does not believe in the non-existence of the world. But,}
\text{Kaccana, he who with right insight sees the ceasing of the world as it really is,}\]

\(^1\) However, it needs to be understood that this is a claim made by the Madhyamika school itself, which
arose many centuries after Nagarjuna. When Nagarjuna uses the term ‘madhyamaka’ it refers not to a
school, but to the middle path.

\(^2\) These are found in the dedicatory verse at the beginning of Nagarjuna’s *Mulasiddhāntakārikā*
(hereafter referred to as ‘MK’). The wording used here is from Kenneth K. Inada, trans., *Nagarjuna: A
Translation of his Mulasiddhāntakārikā with an Introductory Essay* (Tokyo: The Hokusaido

\(^3\) See Jose Ignacio Cabezón, *Buddhism and Language: A Study of Indo-Tibetan Scholasticism*
(Albany, New York: State Univ. of New York Press, 1994), 154, where Madhyamika is characterized
as a radical nominalism directed not only to universals, but also to particulars.
does not believe in the existence of the world. ... “All exists,” Kaccana, — that
is one extreme. “Nought exists,” Kaccana, — that is the other extreme. Not
approaching either extreme, Kaccana, the Tathagata teaches you a doctrine by
the middle way ... 4

This understanding of the middle path obviously informed much of the Buddha’s
teachings, especially his ‘thesis’ (which, together with the rest of the Dharma, is to
be discarded once it has served its purpose) that there is no self (anatman) because
there is nothing that does not arise in dependence on other things (pratitya-
samutpada). From the Madhyamika point of view, dependent origination and the
negation of conceptual oppositions are one and the same. 5

As in early Buddhism, the emphasis on the middle path between extremes can
be found in most later schools (although in some forms it is, unfortunately, reified),
such as: Nagarjuna’s well-known analysis (in the Milindapanha) of the self as being
reduced neither to the psychophysical organism nor to something beyond it; the
Prajna-paramita scriptures’ oft-repeated formula, ‘X is not-X, therefore X is truly
X’; the Yogacara teaching of ‘nonduality’ as neither dualism nor monism; and the
Zen method of using koan to awaken disciples to a truth that is beyond words and
silence. Thus, it is not without reason that Conze characterizes Buddhist philosophy
in general as a ‘new ontology’, which takes a middle path between existence and
non-existence, unlike Western ontology, which focuses upon existence alone. 6

Introductory Exposition of Madhyamika Philosophy

In this section, I will be focussing primarily on the thought of Nagarjuna, especially
as found in his Mulamadhyamakakarika and its sequel, the Vigrahavyavartani. This
task will be made problematic due to the variety of extant translations, each
interpreting Nagarjuna in different ways (a translation cannot but be an
interpretation). At all times it is important to be aware of the interpretative lenses that

4 In Rhys Davids, ed., The Book of Kindred Sayings (Sanyutta-Nikaya) or Grouped Sayings, part III

5 For an important study of the early Buddhist origins of Madhyamika, see Luis O. Gomez, ‘Proto-

6 Edward Conze, Buddhist Thought in India: Three Phases of Buddhist Philosophy (London: Allen
and Unwin, 1983), 219. This ‘sunyatology’, as it could be called, is not limited to Buddhism — it can
be found in Taoism, Hellenistic Skepticism, Deconstruction, etc.
translators uses in their readings. Thus, we must be aware of the following
conjunctions between translator and hermeneutical framework: Frederick J. Streng
and Wittgenstein-influenced religious phenomenology, Kenneth K. Inada and
Ch' an/Zen Buddhism, Mervyn Sprung and neo-Kantianism, David J. Kalupahana
and Theravada Buddhism laced with Jamesian pragmatism, Jay L. Garfield and Indo-
Tibetan (specifically, Geluk) Prasangika-Madhyamika, Nancy McCagney and the
spatial metaphor for sunyata, Stephen Batchelor and the aesthetic of the sublime. 7
This picture is further complicated by the variety of scholarly interpretations of
Nagarjuna's thought, which have moved chronologically along the following
sequence: nihilist, absolutist, positivist/analytic, post-Wittgensteinian, and, most
recently, de- and re-constructionist. And we should not forget the earlier, Eastern,
interpretations such as Prasangika, Svatantrika, and the various Tibetan Buddhist
interpretations. Finally, we must also take into account the hermeneutical framework
of the person giving the so-called objective reading, in this case myself. In light of
this plurality of interpretations, the following exposition will not focus on any
specific interpretation but will instead draw upon all of them with the hope that their
different perspectives can be to our advantage and add up to an adequate
understanding of what Nagarjuna really meant.

Summary of Nagarjuna's Mulamadhyamakarika

Nagarjuna’s approach can be briefly characterized as a double argument which
attempts to demonstrate two truths: firstly, that all phenomena – whether things or
selves – are neither existent nor nonexistent, but empty; and secondly, that emptiness
is itself empty, i.e., neither existent nor nonexistent. The first truth is argued for in
the first part (chapters one to twenty-one) of his MK, whereas the second truth is
dealt with in the second part (chapters twenty-two to twenty-seven). We could say
that the first part concerns itself with dualistically categorizable phenomena.

7 Frederick J. Streng, Emptiness: A Study in Religious Meaning (Nashville, Tennessee: Abingdon
Press, 1967); Inada, Nagarjuna; Mervyn Sprung, Lucid Exposition of the Middle Way: The Essential
Chapters from the 'Prasannapada' of Candrakirti (Boulder: Prajna Press, 1979), which is a
translation of Candrakirti's commentary on Nagarjuna's MK; David J. Kalupahana,
Mulamadhyamakarika: The Philosophy of the Middle Way (Albany, New York: State Univ. of New
York Press, 1986); Jay L. Garfield, The Fundamental Wisdom of the Middle Way: Nagarjuna's
'Mulamadhyamakarika' (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1995); Nancy McCagney, Nagarjuna and the
Philosophy of Openness (Lanham, Maryland: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 1997), who
samsara, conventional truth (samvrti-satya) and dependent origination (pratitya-samutpada); whereas the second part is concerned with nondual transcendentalists such as nirvana, ultimate truth (paramartha-satya), and emptiness (sunyata).

Nagarjuna begins by analyzing things or objects (bhavas, dharmas, skandhas), using a preliminary analysis of causation as his starting-point. To begin with an analysis of causation is very significant, for, as Garfield puts it, 'a clear understanding of the nature of the causal relation is the key to understanding the nature of reality itself and of our relation to it' – which is why so many philosophers, East and West, have made an analysis of causation central to their systems. Nagarjuna argues that nothing can arise from itself, from another, from both, nor from no cause. This is his famous ‘tetralemma’, which he uses often throughout the text. The first view, self-causation, held by Samkhya philosophers, among others, is the view that the effect already exists potentially in the cause. This view is absurd, he says, because if an effect already existed in its cause, it would not need that cause, as it would already be existent. Other-causation, the view that effects are not in their causes, is likewise absurd because if an effect does not exist in its cause, there is no way of distinguishing between a given effect’s cause and causes of other effects. Again, the conjunction of both self-causation and other-causation is absurd because if each of these is absurd on its own, their conjunction must also be absurd. Finally, something arising from no cause is also absurd because this would mean that there are effects without causes. Interestingly, Nagarjuna’s application of the tetralemma to causation (hetu) in verse one is not repeated in verse two when discussing conditions (pratyaya); instead, he accepts that there are four kinds of condition: efficient, percept-object, immediate, and dominant. Nagarjuna’s point seems to be that although there is no evidence for the existence of causation as an occult power, there is evidence of dependent conditioning, at least conventionally (if not ultimately).

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9 MK 1.1.

10 This is, at any rate, the interpretation found in Garfield, Fundamental Wisdom, 103–9. He elsewhere admits that it is controversial and that as yet no consensus has been reached by Madhyamika scholars. See Garfield, ‘Dependent Arising’, 246–7. See also Robert Magliola, Derrida on the Mend (West
Another example of Nagarjuna’s analysis of things, which is very much relevant to this thesis, is his examination of motion (in chapter two of the MK), which has been compared to Zeno’s arguments against motion. Nagarjuna argues that we cannot say that a mover moves nor can we say that a mover does not move. This is because we cannot say that the mover and the motion are one (otherwise we would be absurdly equating agent with action) and we cannot say that they are two (or else we would have to say that there could be motion without mover or mover without motion, which is also absurd). The conclusion is not that there is no motion and that all is static and unmoved – as Zeno concludes – for this same analysis can also be applied to non-motion. The conclusion is that motion, conceived as an entity, is neither existent nor non-existent and therefore empty. So the problem is not in motion itself, but in our reification of it as an entity that can either exist or not exist.\(^\text{11}\)

Nagarjuna’s demonstration of the emptiness of things and objects was intended as a correction of the early Buddhist tendency (as found in the Abhidharma philosophy) to reify or hypostasize them. But Nagarjuna also analyses the individual self or subject to show that it too is empty, so as to discourage any attempt to ground empty objects in hypostasized subjects. In this he had foresight, for this is exactly what the Yogacara (or Buddhists Mind-only school) tried to do. His basic argument (in chapter eighteen) – which was further elaborated and developed by Candrakirti – is that the enduring self is neither identical to the mind-body (for if it was it would be composite and thus partake of origination and destruction), nor different from it (otherwise it would not have the characteristics of the mind-body, such as sensory perception, etc.). His conclusion is that there neither is nor is not an individual self.

In demonstrating that things and selves, or objects and subjects, are neither existent nor nonexistent, Nagarjuna has shown that they are empty of independence or self-existence (svabhava), which is the same as saying that they are dependently-existent (which implies that they are also dependently-arising and dependently-ceasing). But in order to deter anyone from concluding that the mutual dependence of subjects and objects is itself some kind of hypostasized relation between two empty terms, Nagarjuna concludes the first part of his MK with an analysis of dependent origination (pratitya-samutpada) to show that it too is neither existent nor

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nonexistent. Echoing his analysis of causation in the first chapter, Nagarjuna argues that an entity cannot arise from itself, from another, from both, nor from neither. In Nagarjuna’s words:

An entity does not arise from an entity.
An entity does not arise from a nonentity.
A nonentity does not arise from a nonentity.
A nonentity does not arise from an entity.

An entity does not arise from itself.
It is not arisen from another.
It is not arisen from itself and another.
How can it be arisen?\textsuperscript{12}

The point here is that arising cannot make sense if it is understood as the arising of individual self-existent events. Thus, dependent origination too must be thought to be other than the interdependence of entities which are nevertheless inherently existent individuals in a serially-ordered flux.

But Nagarjuna has not yet finished. If he had stopped there, it could be possible that someone would get the wrong idea and assume that although subjective and objective phenomena in the realm of \textit{samsara} are empty — being neither existent nor nonexistent — \textit{nirvana}, the Tathagata, and even emptiness are themselves truly existent. But Nagarjuna argues that even these, insofar as we conceptualize them, are neither existent nor nonexistent. Here, however, Nagarjuna’s argument is more subtle, for unlike subjective and objective phenomena, which, although lacking existence and nonexistence, still have \textit{conventional} existence; ultimates such as \textit{nirvana} are neither existent, nonexistent, nor conventionally existent.\textsuperscript{13} Thus, we have two truths – the conventional and the ultimate – which are two different ways of experiencing reality. As Nagarjuna puts it:

That which comes and goes
Is dependent and changing.
That, when it is not dependent and changing,
Is taught to be nirvana.\textsuperscript{14}


\textsuperscript{14} MK 25.9, in ibid., 74.
A Generalization of Nagarjuna’s Method

Although it is true that Nagarjuna has no method ultimately – for even methods can be reified – he does believe in a conventionally existing method for attaining insight into emptiness, as he says that the ultimate truth cannot be taught without the use of conventional means.¹⁵ Nagarjuna’s method may not be necessary in the sense of its being the only method (the Zen koan may be another such method to attaining insight), but it is a sufficient method for the realization of emptiness. Nagarjuna’s method is often equated with the tetralemma, which presents a choice between the following meta-propositions: X is affirmed; X is denied; X is both affirmed and denied; X is neither affirmed nor denied (where ‘X’ is a proposition in the form of ‘A is P’). The tetralemma can take either a positive form, in which all four propositions are affirmed, or a negative form, which denies the four alternatives. Ultimately, this does not make much of a difference, provided that we accept the three rules of logic (identity, noncontradiction, and excluded middle) – and there is plenty of evidence that Nagarjuna accepts these rules.¹⁶ After all, the double negation of X is the same as its affirmation, for as Nagarjuna points out, to say ‘both’ is the same as saying ‘neither’.¹⁷ Both forms of the tetralemma have the same effect of unsettling ordinary predication, leading to the failure of predication itself. Hence, the conclusion is that A is neither existent nor nonexistent because it cannot be characterized in terms of P and not-P. In fact, this conclusion can be drawn from the first two lemmas alone, so the other two are superfluous. They merely warn us against turning the ‘neither’ (which is also a ‘both’) of the conclusion into a proposition which could then in turn be affirmed (or denied). (Also, they merely restate Nagarjuna’s commitment to the three rules of logic so as not to give anyone the wrong idea.) In fact, the tetralemma can be extended indefinitely (for those who do not yet ‘get it’) into ‘both (both X &

¹⁵ MK 24.10.

¹⁶ For the evidence, see Guy Bugault, ‘Logic and Dialectics in the Madhyamakakarikas’, Journal of Indian Philosophy 11 (1983): 7–76; Ng Yu-kwan, ‘The Arguments of Nagarjuna in the Light of Modern Logic’, Journal of Indian Philosophy 15 (1987): 363–384; Richard H. Robinson, ‘Some Logical Aspects of Nagarjuna’s System’, Philosophy East and West 6 (1957): 293–7; and Richard H. Robinson, Early Madhyamika in India and China (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1976), 50–1. It is important to realize that the anatman doctrine is an attempt to adhere to the law of identity – it is the stubborn belief in an enduring self or personal identity which really violates this law, for it postulates that the self can remain identical even though it changes through time.

¹⁷ MK 27.18. In formal logic, ‘X & ~X’ is the same as ‘~X & ~X’ (which can be put in the form: ~(X∨~X)).
~X) and (neither X nor ~X)', 'neither (both X & ~X) nor (neither X nor ~X)', and so on (as understood by the Chinese Madhyamika). Hence, it would seem that Nagarjuna's method is not so much the tetralemma as the bi-negation (Streng calls it 'negative dialectics').\^18

It is sometimes suggested by expositors of Nagarjuna that his method proceeds by way of a bi-negation which shows that the relation between two terms is neither existent nor non-existent, because there can be no relation between two terms if they are different or identical. For example, the relation between cause and effect cannot exist if they are identical, for relations can only exist between two different things; and the relation between cause and effect cannot exist if they are wholly different from one another, for difference implies lack of connection.\^19 As Peter Fenner puts it: '... different things have no characteristics that are in common, and hence have no provision of a basis for any interrelationships at all ... In the case where the terms of the relationship are the same, they cease to function as two terms of a relationship, and so there is no relationship.'\^20 In many ways this resembles Bradley's argument that relations are neither external to the two terms they relate (for this implies an infinite regress, since there must then be a relation between the relation and each term, and so on), nor internal to them (for such interrelatedness would imply the collapse of the terms into one another, which would render the relation superfluous).\^21 The whole point in analyzing a pair of conceptual opposites in terms of identity and difference is to show that there can be no relation between them if each term is considered to exist independently of the other. This forces the realization that in order for the two terms to be related to one another, they must be interdependent rather than self-existent. The demonstration of the interdependence of conceptual opposites is a recurrent feature of Nagarjuna's texts and thus plays an important part in his methodology.

How does the bi-negation function and what does it achieve? Fenner explains it in this way: 'When a bi-negation is applied as a descriptive symbol to any property

\^18 For more on different types of tetralemma, see Garfield, *Fundamental Wisdom*, 250-1; and Alex Wayman, 'Who Understands the Four Alternatives of the Buddhist Texts?', in Nathan Katz, ed., *Buddhist and Western Philosophy* (New Delhi: Sterling Publishers, 1981), 406-5.

\^19 Examples in the MK are: 2.21, 4.6, 6.4, and 14.5-7.


P of A – i.e. A is neither P nor not P – this is taken to designate that A is empty of property P.22 Hence, it is not the same as straightforward negation because the existence of A is not denied. Also, the bi-negation does not add any information – affirmative or negative – to phenomena. ‘In other words,’ continues Fenner,

[the bi-negation] describes emptiness, or the emptiness of phenomena, rather than phenomena themselves because no predicates are implicated in the description. This is clear from the fact that bi-negations do not help in the demarcation of phenomena, one from the others, whereas affirmations and negations do.23

In his commentary on Nagarjuna, Candrakirti often likens his use of the bi-negation to a nonsense statement (khapuspa) such as ‘horned rabbit’ and ‘son of a barren woman’, so that questions relating to these can only be answered in the form of ‘neither true nor false’. Likewise, Santideva says that to ask whether something is (inherently) existent or not is like asking ‘whether the looks of the daughter of a barren woman are attractive or not’.24 This is very similar to Bertrand Russell’s realization that sometimes the bi-negation is applicable, at least for questions which miss the point such as: ‘Is the present king of France bald or not?’, to which the only possible answer, now that France is a republic, is ‘neither’. The difference between Russell and Madhyamika is that the latter believe that there are far more of these kinds of meaningless statements than most people would think – in fact most, if not all, statements and beliefs held by philosophers and ordinary people.25

It is important to realize that the ‘neither’ of the bi-negation is not the same as that of the fourth lemma, which is a statement that can be affirmed or denied; rather, it is an index of the failure of predication, an observation of the endless ‘oscillation’,26 as Magliola puts it, between ‘A is P’ and ‘A is not P’. This is so

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23 Ibid.


25 There is disagreement among Madhyamika scholars over whether all views are empty, or merely those affirming or denying some kind of inherent existence, the latter being the view of the orthodox Geluk school and their Western sympathizers.

26 Robert Magliola, On Deconstructing Life-Worlds: Buddhism, Christianity, Culture (Atlanta, Georgia: Scholars Press, 1997), 118. He refers to the bi-negation as an ‘undistributed’ neither/nor so as to differentiate it from the distributed form, which would be a position that also has to be negated. See also D. Seyfort Ruegg, “The Uses of the Four Positions of the Catuṣkoṭi and the Problem of the
because of the nature of the Madhyamika methodology of 'paradoxical analysis' — at least in its Prasangika form — which proceeds by way of a 'non-affirming negation' or reductio ad absurdum that indicates the paradoxicality inherent in all predication. As Candrakirti puts it: 'This contradiction is exposed by an argument based solely on the opponent's own presuppositions. Only that much is achieved by our arguments.' Of course, 'paradox' in this context does not mean the relative paradox which is resolvable by the introduction of more information, nor does it mean the contradictory paradox of the third lemma; rather, it refers to the above mentioned 'oscillation' or 'double bind' (similar to the liar paradox) which signifies the failure of predication ultimately, but not conventionally. Also, it is not an objectively existing paradox, but one created by the mind's assumption that there are objectively (or inherently) existing things; nevertheless, it could be said to exist 'objectively' in the conventional sense. It would be wrong to conclude from this that, as it is sometimes put, Madhyamika uses logic to destroy logic. It would be more accurate to say that they use logic to destroy the tangled webs woven by those who use logic incorrectly. The ambiguous nature of logic as condition of both delusion and liberation was recognized by Streng:

logic as [Nagarjuna] applied it in the Karikas was a potent tool to cut into the net of illusory metaphysical dogmas based on the inherent limitations of discursive thought. Thus the logic which was the framework in which illusions were perpetuated was also the mechanism which could reduce this framework to its proper usage — the expression of conventional truth.  

The Two Truths

We have seen how the characterization of the Madhyamika method as proceeding by way of bi-negation needs to be supplemented by a recognition that it is also a

Description of Reality in Mahayana Buddhism', *Journal of Indian Philosophy* 5 (1977): 11, 17-9, where two kinds of bi-negation are likewise distinguished: the fourth lemma, which is a proposition, and the non-conjunctive bi-negation of both the first and second lemmas.

27 Of course, not all reductio arguments can be described as non-affirming negations as they are usually used to affirm a position by showing its negation to be absurd. In contrast, the non-affirming negation of the Madhyamika (prasāya-pratissauha) is a double reductio that shows both a position and its opposite position to be equally absurd. See Magliola, *Derrida on the Mend*, 20.


paradoxical analysis, in order to avoid equating the bi-negation with the fourth lemma, for it is not a view, but the reduction of all views to absurdity. Such a paradoxical bi-negation – a double movement in which all views are first negated and then their negation is negated – is none other than the two truths, which Nagarjuna calls samvrti-satya (conventional or world-ensconced truth) and paramartha-satya (ultimate or highest sense of the truth): all views are empty ultimately, but valid conventionally (as originating dependently). I shall now examine these truths in more detail, beginning with the conventional.

G. M. Nagao, who has analyzed the word samvrti in detail, says that its root meanings are ‘consent’, ‘convention’, ‘common sense’, ‘vulgar’, ‘covering’, ‘concealing’, ‘dissimulation’, ‘obstruction’, ‘choice’, ‘to come into being’. However, in the technical sense used by Candrakirti, samvrti has three main meanings: (1) ‘concealed truth’ or ‘phenomenal reality’; (2) ‘with one depending on another’ or dependent origination (pratitya-samutpada); (3) ‘conventional symbols’, ‘worldly designations’, or ‘word, concept, idea’.\textsuperscript{30} Candrakirti distinguishes between true and false forms of samvrti, both of which are ‘deceptive perceptions’: ‘Further, we assert that deceptive perceptions have two modes: one having a clear sense-faculty [the other] a defective sense-faculty. We assert that knowledge from defective sense-faculties is wrong (mithya) compared with knowledge derived from good sense faculties’.\textsuperscript{31} Furthermore, he says that ‘Anything – vases, blankets, tents, armies, forests, garlands, trees, houses, small carriages, hostels, and so on, should be understood as people describe them, since the mighty lord [Buddha] has no quarrel with the world’.\textsuperscript{32} By analogy with objects of perception, subjective phenomena such as beliefs, ideas, and concepts can also be divided into true and false depending on whether they are empty of inherent existence or not. In the final analysis, it could be said that conventional truths are truths concerning subjects and objects that are empty or dependently existent, whereas conventional errors are errors concerning subjects and objects that are thought to have real independent existence.\textsuperscript{33}


\textsuperscript{31} Candrakirti, Madhyamakavatara, 6.24, in Peter Fenner, Ontology, 321.

\textsuperscript{32} Ibid., 6.166, 267.
Paramartha-satyā has been translated as ‘the highest sense of the truth’ (Streng and McCagney), ‘absolute (supreme) truth’ (Inada), ‘truth in the higher or surpassing sense’ (Sprung), truth of ‘ultimate fruit’ (Kalupahana), ‘ultimate truth’ (Garfield), and ‘truths which are sublime’ (Batchelor).34 It is often equated with emptiness (sunnata), although this is not entirely accurate as even conventional phenomena are declared to be empty. Instead, the ultimate truth is the emptiness of trans-phenomenal things such as nirvana and emptiness itself. For, as we have seen, the emptiness of nirvana and of emptiness is not the same as the emptiness of conventional phenomena as the former lack even the conventional existence of the latter. Hence, Madhyamika do not reduce the meaning of emptiness to its equation with dependent origination or interdependence, as do the Hua-yen, but neither do they extend it to the positive (in the sense of non-empty) and monistic ‘Emptyness’ of the Yogacara. However, there has been much disagreement over whether Nagarjuna was also an absolutist like the Yogacara after him, the absolutist position being influenced by certain remarks by Candrakirti which seem to suggest that the ultimate truth is a self-existent (and thus non-empty) Emptiness.35 Although this view is no longer held by most scholars, it has been replaced by an interpretation which perhaps comes too close to the Hua-yen view. But, as Streng says, although there is ‘no reality outside the language system that correlates with the notion of emptiness’, ‘[t]his is affirmed not because there is nothing outside the language system’, but in order to avoid setting up emptiness as ‘a reality either in the subject or outside the self’; nevertheless, emptiness is ‘the root source for both subjective and objective experience’.36 Emptiness, as Robinson puts it, thus ‘symbolizes non-system, a surd within the system of constructs’.37 It is thus more likely that Nagarjuna takes a middle position that avoids both extremes of absolutism and relativism.38


The two emptinesses discussed above are, I believe, the two truths which Nagarjuna speaks of in the twenty-fourth chapter of his MK. These were in fact expanded by the later Madhyamika into the four emptinesses – the emptiness of things, non-things, nature, and nirvana – which were even further expanded into the sixteen emptinesses by Candrakīrti and others. But at the basis of these is probably the two emptinesses as correlated with the two truths: the emptiness of conventional phenomena and the emptiness of emptiness.

We come now to the question of the relation between the two truths. It is the opinion of some scholars, following the Geluk interpretation, that each of the two truths has its own object; others, however, following the Wittgensteinian interpretation, believe that there is only one reality or object which is seen in two different ways. These are called the ontological and epistemological interpretations, respectively. The latter view seems to be more in keeping with the passages where Nagarjuna equates samsara and nirvāṇa. However, it seems to me that a more consistently Madhyamika position would be neither ontological nor epistemological, neither dualistic nor monistic. Nagarjuna’s statement that ultimate truth cannot be taught apart from conventional truth (as skillful means) indicates that the ultimate is dependent on the conventional. This is in fact why we cannot reject the conventional as false. However, the conventional is also that which is dependent, whereas the ultimate is defined as the ‘unconditioned’ and independent. Hence, the two truths are interdependent. However, the relation here is not one between two independent objects, but more like the relation between two complementary aspects.

In the final analysis, it can be said that Nagarjuna uses the paradoxical method of bi-negation in order to show both that all views, theses, and conceptualizations are merely conventionally and dependently valid and that they are all invalid from the ultimate perspective. It is true that the Geluk deny that Nagarjuna brought all theses and views into question, only those bad theses and views that affirm self-existent entities or independent substances. Hence, when Nagarjuna says that the Buddha taught ‘the relinquishing of all views’, they take this to mean

38 See Robert A. F. Thurman, Tsong Khapa’s Speech of Gold in the ‘Essence of True Elocution’: ‘Reason and Enlightenment in the Central Philosophy of Tibet’ (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton Univ. Press, 1984), 151–60, where it is argued that Nagarjuna takes a middle position between absolutism and relativism.

39 A very good defense of the Geluk position can be found in Napper, Dependent-Arising and Empinness, passim.
the relinquishing of all self-existent views. However, this is only true conventionally. Ultimately, those in nirvana (which is a state of mind, or better, a state of experiencing) see the emptiness of even the conventional, and thus relinquish all views. After all, Nagarjuna says that those who hold ‘emptiness’ – which means ‘emptiness of self-existence’ – as a view are ‘incurable’. This must also apply to those (such as the Geluk) who believe that some views are non-empty because non-self-existent. Further, Nagarjuna’s response in his sequel to those who charge that he cannot ‘discard self-existence’ with groundless statements that lack self-existence is: ‘If I would make any proposition whatever, then by that I would have a logical error, but I do not make a proposition; therefore I am not in error’ and ‘Since anything being denied does not exist, I do not deny anything’; so it is wrong to say that self-existence is denied. Nagarjuna says that his negation is like one ‘magically formed phantom’ denying another such phantom, which would not be a very apt description of his method if it was instead one of using valid theses to deny invalid ones.

**Eastern and Western Interpretations of Madhyamika**

Now, Madhyamika thought has been interpreted in many different ways in the East and also (more recently) in the West. Hence, I shall now summarize some of the more important interpretations, biases, and lenses through which Madhyamika have been perceived. Probably no philosophy has been interpreted in so many conflicting ways than that of the Madhyamika. According to David Seyfort Ruegg, modern Madhyamika scholars have at one time or another described the school in terms of nihilism, monism, irrationalism, agnosticism, scepticism, criticism, dialectic, mysticism, acosmism, absolutism, relativism, nominalism, and linguistic analysis.

40 MK 27.30, in Garfield, Fundamental Wisdom, 83.

41 MK 13.8, in Streng, Emptiness, 198.

42 Nagarjuna, Vīrohavyāvartati, 29, 63, in Streng, Emptiness, 224, 227. Such a negation is sometimes called an ‘illocutionary negation’, which signifies a negation that is not itself a proposition or locution’ (that is, nothing is said).

43 Nagarjuna, Vīrohavyāvartati, 23, in ibid., 224.

44 Perhaps this protean quality of Madhyamika is an ironic necessary consequence of its teaching that nothing has an absolute character!
with therapeutic value’.\textsuperscript{45} No doubt this is partly because the text upon which these interpretations are largely based – Nagarjuna’s MK – is a very condensed work that was originally intended for students who had already had some acquaintance with the ideas contained therein and also had the advantage of personal contact and oral instruction with Nagarjuna or his followers. Of course Western scholars can avail themselves of these advantages by visiting the places where Madhyamika philosophy is still taught (such as the Tibetan Buddhist monasteries in India); nevertheless, there is still the problem of taking with them their own particular Western philosophies that might act as distorting spectacles – which is also no doubt what must have occurred when the Madhyamika was originally transported from India to Tibet. Hence, one can only agree with Herbert Guenther’s observation that the ‘use of Western categories in connection with Eastern patterns of thought is extremely misleading and in most cases reveals a considerable lack of understanding on the part of him [sic] who uses these categories’.\textsuperscript{46} Andrew Tuck, in his major study of Western interpretations of Nagarjuna, argues that we cannot avoid misreading and that ‘isogesis is inevitable in all readings of texts’.\textsuperscript{47} This is because ‘knowledge can be expressed and understood only in specific, culturally embedded forms. There are no non-culture-specific languages in which to write, or unconditioned perspectives from which to view, another age or culture’.\textsuperscript{48} The greatest danger, he says, is when scholars point out that others’ interpretations unconsciously presuppose their own cultural and philosophical background, without realizing that they themselves are not exempt from this charge.\textsuperscript{49} Richard Hayes has responded to Tuck by pointing out that he has been very selective and gives far more attention to Stcherbatsky and Murti, whose work serves better to illustrate his thesis, than to scholars such as Schayer, in whose work the phenomenon of isogesis is somewhat less in evidence. Tuck gives no mention at all to the important contributions of Ruegg, Lindtner and Bhattacharya, who appear to come very close to the ideal of detached and scientific objectivity in

\textsuperscript{45} D. Seyfort Ruegg, \textit{The Literature of the Madhyamika School of Philosophy in India} (Harrassowitz: Wiesbaden, 1981), 2.

\textsuperscript{46} Herbert V. Guenther, \textit{Tibetan Buddhism in Western Perspective} (Berkeley, California: Dharma Publishing, 1989), 163.

\textsuperscript{47} Andrew P. Tuck, \textit{Comparative Philosophy and the Philosophy of Scholarship: On the Western Interpretation of Nagarjuna} (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1990), 10.

\textsuperscript{48} Ibid., 13.

\textsuperscript{49} Ibid., 97.
Hayes believes that more objectivity is possible as we move from comparing Nagarjuna with nineteenth and twentieth century Western thought to comparing him with Western thought closer to his time (such as the Skeptics and Zeno), culminating in the greatest objectivity when we study him in terms of the Eastern thought of his time.

Although there is much truth in what Hayes has to say about degrees of exegesis and isogesis, this does not necessarily mean that distance is inversely proportional to understanding – sometimes distance can even be conducive to greater understanding as this allows us to put what we are interpreting against a wider background. Indeed, it is one of the insights of modern hermeneuticists that the interpreter’s own context not only cannot, but must not, be removed as it is the condition for the possibility of understanding. This is in fact the point Tuck is trying to make when he speaks of the inevitability of isogesis in positive terms. Tuck uses Gadamer’s observation that ‘understanding is not merely a reproductive, but always a productive attitude as well’, 51 to argue that isogesis as ‘creative hermeneutics’ is ‘not a failure of understanding but the evidence of it’, 52 for what is understanding if not the repeating of something in another context? Tuck is also aware of Gadamer’s belief that the ‘fusion of horizons’ – that is, the interrelatedness of the interpreter’s contextual horizon with that of the interpreted – brings greater understanding:

The most lasting truths are found in the least reductive configurations of the largest possible number of conflicting interpretations. In other words, the most useful interpretation may well be one that takes into account as many previous interpretations as possible and attempts to disclose the ways in which these earlier readings made sense, both to the interpretive scholar and to his or her readers. 53

In light of these words, I will now briefly survey the major interpretations of Madhyamika thought, East and West.

52 Tuck, Comparative Philosophy, 10.
53 Ibid., vi.
Internal Interpretations

Tibetan interpreters of Madhyamika originally split into the Svetantrika (or Dogmatists) who used their own arguments (often in the form of syllogisms), and Prasangika (or Consequentialists) who instead used others’ arguments in order to point out the paradoxical consequences involved in adhering to them. This is how the difference is often described, at least by the Prasangika (like the Geluk) themselves. It is more likely that the real difference between the two rival schools is that the Svetantrika believed that there is self-existence at the conventional level, whereas the Prasangika denied self-existence even conventionally. The Svetantrika argued that the Prasangika came dangerously close to absolutism by arguing that even the conventional lacks self-existence, for how then does one distinguish between the two truths without making the ultimate truth into a new kind of self-existent absolute? For the Svetantrika, the ultimate truth is merely the interdependence, or lack of self-existence, of things; whereas the conventional truth is their self-existence. Or, as Ives Waldo puts it, ‘[w]here the Prasangikas emphasized ultimate truth, dharmakaya, as the formless ground of illusory experience, the Svetantrikas wanted to say something about the interdependent structure of relative existence.’ He believes the Svetantrika emphasis on interdependence – the dharmadhatu rather than the dharmakaya – influenced later Buddhist schools, such as the Hua-yen, Soto Zen, Kagyu, and Nyingma.

Candrakirti’s interpretation of Nagarjuna has become very highly regarded within the Madhyamika school since the time of the initial split between Svetantrika and Prasangika, to the point that his commentary on Nagarjuna’s Mulamadhyamakakarika was often read in conjunction with this root text. Although

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54 For the claim that the Svetantrika-Prasangika division is a Tibetan invention, see Donald S., Jr. Lopez, Prisoners of Shangri-la: Tibetan Buddhism and the West (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1998), 265.

55 See Mark Siderits, ‘Matilal on Nagarjuna’, in P. Bilimoria and J. N. Mohanty, eds., Relativism, Suffering and Beyond: Essays in Memory of Bimal K. Matilal (Delhi: Oxford Univ. Press, 1997), 86: ‘The Svetantrika line on the ultimate truth may be put as: the ultimate truth is that there is no ultimate truth’. He also argues that the Svetantrika use syllogisms only as conventional truths and that this allows them to have a common ground with those whose views they wish to undermine, which is more likely to be successful than the Prasangika approach that limits itself only to reductio arguments (ibid., 84–5).


57 Ibid., 287.
Candrakirti was firmly opposed to the Svanatnika, his approach can be compared to theirs in the sense that he also used syllogistic arguments. As Fenner has argued, Candrakirti’s ‘characterized Madhyamika’ uses a ‘partisan application’ of consequences that is selective in its negations, using self-styled arguments, analogies, and arguments based on the common views of ordinary people, unlike Nagarjuna’s ‘uncharacterized Madhyamika’. Like Svanatnika, Candrakirti introduced a division of the conventional into true and false such that he considered the postulation of self-existent things to be false conventionally, whereas he considered conventional truths to be those that postulate things that are empty of self-existence. This division of the conventional realm was important to Candrakirti as he was concerned ‘not [to] reject outright actions and their moral consequences, the distinction between right and wrong, and so on’. One of Candrakirti’s major contributions to the development of Madhyamika philosophy was his analysis of the self, known as the ‘seven section analysis’ in which he argued that the relation between the self and the psychophysical organism (that is, the five skandha) cannot be described in terms of identity, difference, possession, inclusion, collection, or shape. Candrakirti’s analysis of self and Nagarjuna’s tetralemma on causation have become the two principal examples that are used by Madhyamika to meditate on emptiness.

Madhyamika philosophy no longer exists as a school of Buddhism in its own right, although it is considered by many schools of Tibetan Buddhism as their most important component. I will consider the interpretation of the Geluk school, whose main exponent is Tsong Khapa, as they constitute a majority not only of the schools of Tibet, but also of Western Madhyamika scholars, and thus highly influential in the academy. Nevertheless, it is important to keep in mind that theirs is just one interpretation among many. The most important elements in the Geluk version of Madhyamika are: their distinction between inherent existence and conventional existence; their further assertion based on this distinction that emptiness is only the

58 Fenner, Ontology, 18.

59 Candrakirti, Prasannapada, 495, in Sprung, Lucid Exposition, 232.


emptiness of inherent existence, and their belief in the objective existence of emptiness (and thus that the two truths are concerned with two different objects). Elizabeth Napper's characterization of Tsong Khapa as taking a middle path between too much and too little negation nicely sums up the Geluk approach. To over-negate is, she says, to negate all concepts, conventionalities, views, and theses instead of only 'bad' ones – namely those that have inherent existence. On the other hand, to under-negate is to negate only others' systems, reason, or language – which is to overlook the facts that Madhyamika is also a self-therapy, that there are no paradoxes, and that the disease of perceiving in terms of inherent existence is not limited to those who have language but extends to other life-forms as well.\(^6^3\)

Non-Madhyamika Interpretations of Madhyamika in the East

A significant non-Buddhist interpreter of Nagarjuna was Sankara, the founder of Advaita Vedanta. His critiques of others' philosophical systems were so similar to Nagarjuna's that many of his opponents called him a 'crypto-Buddhist'. Sankara used a negative dialectics and bi-negation to argue that Brahman is beyond all conceptual opposites, such as one and many. Although Sankara's interpretation of Madhyamika is virtually identical to that of modern absolutists in the West (such as Murti's), it differs from all other interpretations. The major difference is his unquestioning belief in the 'Atman is Brahman' doctrine, which is of course a doctrine Buddhists -- including Madhyamika -- reject. Hence, Sankara follows the pattern of so many who use a negative dialectics but do not apply it consistently, in particular by failing to apply it to his own beliefs, the validity of which is established by other means such as scripture, faith, authority, etc. For example, Sankara is no doubt correct when he asks 'what is the self?' and answers that it cannot be anything that can be objectively apprehended -- such as one's body, thoughts, feelings, etc. But he is wrong to conclude that the 'true self' is the Witness, the pure subject that observes objects but cannot itself be objectified, for where is the evidence for this Witness? If it cannot be objectified, then it cannot be empirically known. Sankara should have taken his analysis one step further and concluded, with the Buddhists, that there is neither self nor no-self -- neither atman nor anatman.

\(^6^3\) See Napper, *Dependent-Arising and Emptiness*, 74–116.
A non-Madhyamika Buddhist interpretation of Nagarjuna is that of the Theravada Buddhists, who stress the continuity between the Buddha’s anatman doctrine and emptiness. For example, Kalupahana argues that unlike the (in his words) ‘Vedantism’ and ‘rationalism’ of Candrakirti, Nagarjuna was an empiricist who did not reject the Abhidharma philosophy – only its Sautrantrika interpreters. Kalupahana argues that Nagarjuna distinguished between two kinds of existence (bhava) – being and becoming – rejecting only the reality of the former (the reality of the latter being necessary for the reality of the life-death process of samsara). He also argues that Nagarjuna’s two truths are really two kinds of moral truths: conventional morality and the ‘highest fruit’. Most Western Madhyamika scholars doubt that Madhyamika can be characterized as empiricist in either of the ordinary Western, or the radical Jamesian, senses as Kalupahana believes; for Nagarjuna appealed as much to reason as he did to experience, but also criticized over-zealous trust in either reason or experience (as both are plagued by the disease of reification).

Another Buddhist interpretation of Madhyamika is that of Ch’ an/ Zen. Being aware of the Chinese Madhyamika extension of the tetralemma into a hexalemma, or two truths on three levels, Ch’ an/ Zen Buddhists did not focus on the tetralemma so much as on the bi-negation – in the form of a paradoxical juxtaposition of opposing ideas (the koan). As Shōhei Ichimura has shown, the only real difference between the Madhyamika negative dialectics and the Ch’ an/ Zen koan is cultural-linguistic – what can be expressed in Sanskrit in the form of reductio ad absurdum can only be rendered into Chinese/ Japanese in the form of paradoxical assertion and negation. Nevertheless, I agree with Magliola’s assessment that Ch’ an/ Zen contains both ‘holistic’ (Yogacara) and ‘differential’ (Madhyamika) strains. For example, the version of Zen espoused by the modern Kyoto school tends to be holistic in its approach (whereas the form of Zen practiced by Dōgen is differential). Masao Abe,

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65 Ibid., 32. As I have chosen not to include diacritics in this thesis, I will have to explain. Kalupahana says that when Nagarjuna uses ‘bhava’ with a diacritic bar over the first ‘a’, he refers to metaphysical existence or ‘being’; whereas when he uses ‘bhava’ without the diacritic, he means ‘becoming’.

66 Ibid., 331–2.

67 Shōhei Ichimura, ‘The Dialectic of Sunyata As the Trans-cultural Basis of Cultures’ (paper presented at the First International Conference on Buddhism and National Cultures, New Delhi, 10–15 October 1984).

one of its representative thinkers, is too much under the influence of Heidegger’s ‘destruction’ which, unlike Derrida’s deconstruction, seeks to uncover the ‘absolute presence’ of ‘true Sunyata’ – which is a coincidence of both Sunyata and non-Sunyata and thus unlike Nagarjuna’s bi-negation.

Modern Western Interpretations

From the mid-nineteenth to the early twentieth centuries Western Madhyamika scholars – such as Eugene Bernouf and Louis de La Valée Poussin – believed the Madhyamika to be nihilists who sought to show that the world as it appears to us is non-existent or illusory and that there is no ultimate reality beyond the world of appearance. They tended to translate sunyata as ‘absolute nothingness’. However, this view was opposed in the early twentieth century by Fyodor Stechertsky and Stanislaw Schayer, who interpreted the Madhyamika to be absolutists like Kant and Hegel. They agreed with the nihilist interpretation that the Madhyamika believed the apparent world to be unreal, but unlike the nihilists, they saw the true reality as absolute – either a Hegelian All-inclusive absolute which grounds the universal relativity or a Kantian noumenon beyond illusory phenomena. This meant, they thought, that there was really only one truth (rather than two) held by the Madhyamika, although they disagreed over whether this should be understood as a Hegelian ‘absolute relativity’ or a Kantian absolute beyond relativity. Either way, it is important to note that absolutism is not a denial of nihilism per se, but its supplement – i.e., all absolutism implies nihilism (with regard to the phenomenal world), although nihilism does not imply absolutism. Both are nihilistic with regard to the conventional, thus denying the Madhyamika belief that there is conventional truth as well as ultimate truth. (Indeed, one could even argue with Nietzsche that all absolutisms are the true nihilisms because they deny change and consequently destroy any chance of liberation.) The absolutist reading was dominant till the sixties, when the new ‘post-Wittgensteinian’ paradigm, as Tuck calls it, began to take over.69 The last of the great absolutists were T.R.V. Murti and Mervyn Sprung.

After the attempts to compare Madhyamika philosophy with German Idealism had played themselves out, scholars began shifting their hermeneutical paradigm towards analytic philosophy – first (briefly) Logical Positivism and then
Wittgenstein. Richard Robinson thinks that the Madhyamika are like the Logical Positivists, who believe all metaphysics to be nonsense that appears to make sense but turns out to be gibberish when analyzed closely. He insists that the Madhyamika’s most important tool for this purpose is to show that all metaphysical systems postulate some kind of svabhava or self-existence which renders them self-contradictory. However, Robinson believes that this strategy is ultimately unsuccessful as not all systems are based on a svabhava as Nagarjuna defines it.\footnote{69} Robinson would be right if his characterization of the Madhyamika as seekers-and-destroyers (he liked to use military metaphors) of svabhava and all metaphysical systems were correct, but many scholars disagree with this characterization (Geluk with the latter and non-Geluk with the former). Robinson began the trend of using rigorous logical methods – tables, formulas, symbols, calculus – in order to analyze the arguments used by Madhyamika. Other scholars have even tried to show that Nagarjuna was somehow aware of complex non-propositional logical calculuses which have only been developed recently in the West.\footnote{71}

However, the analytic philosophy of Ludwig Wittgenstein has been much more popular among Madhyamika scholars since the sixties. Comparisons between Wittgenstein and Nagarjuna have been made by Frederick Streng, Chris Gudmunsen, Nathan Katz, Robert Thurman, Jay Garfield, and others.\footnote{72} Whereas the absolutists’ keywords were sunyata and nirvana, and Robinson’s was svabhava, the Wittgensteinians focused on pratitya-samutpada. ‘The new obsession’, says Tuck, ‘was with interdependence and in socially grounded criteria for meaning – an interweaving of pratityasamutpada and “meaning as use”.’\footnote{73} Although some are Geluk – mostly adhering to the early Wittgenstein, who shows the unsayable by defining the limits of the sayable – most of these Wittgensteinians are anti-Geluk in their

\footnote{69} Tuck, Comparative Philosophy, 89.


\footnote{73} Tuck, Comparative Philosophy, 79.
insistence that all theses and views are empty, which is to say, dependently originated; and that the two truths are two different perspectives (or ‘language games’) of the one reality, rather than having two objects (as the Geluk believe). We could say that the Wittgensteinians agree with the nihilists that there is no absolute beyond the world, but disagree with them over the charge that this implies nihilism, for a groundless but interdependent world does not have to be meaningless and illusory. The question arises as to whether these Wittgensteinians believe that only philosophers need salvation whereas those who have ‘common sense’ and use ‘ordinary language’ are already liberated, or whether they think that, in the words of Jay Garfield, ‘Nagarjuna replaces the view shared by the metaphysician and the person in the street, a view that presents itself as common sense, but is in fact deeply metaphysical, with an apparently paradoxical, thoroughly empty, but in the end commonsense view not only of causation, but of the entire phenomenal world’?74

Another question: doesn’t an overzealous adherence to ‘interdependence’ lead to the setting up of another absolute – not the ‘hyper-absolutism’ of Stcherbatsky and Murti, but a kind of ‘inter-absolutism’?75

Recently, some comparisons have been made between Nagarjuna and Derrida – e.g., by Ian Mabbett, Robert Magliola, and David Loy – indicating a possible new paradigm shift to a post-structuralist interpretation of Madhyamika (which is not to be confused with postmodernism). Also, the work of Kenneth Inada, Nolan P. Jacobson, and David Kalupahana indicate the possibility of the emergence of a process-neopragmatist interpretation of Madhyamika. I believe both these approaches are closely related and complementary deconstructive and reconstructive aspects of a single hermeneutic. Mark Siderits remarks that “textual evidence can be cited in support of [both the absolutist and Wittgensteinian interpretations] ... And it may well be that there is nothing in the Madhyamika corpus that will by itself settle the issue.”76 Might this not be because both interpretations are one-sided and that only their combination can do justice to the Madhyamika’s intentions? This is in fact the opinion of David Loy, who says that the absolutist and Wittgensteinian

74 Garfield, *Fundamental Wisdom*, 123.

75 We can call this latter view ‘post-Wittgensteinian’, for it also shares the worldview of postmodernists such as Richard Rorty, a philosopher who is compared with Candrakirti by C. W. Huntington, Jr., *The Emptiness of Emptiness: An Introduction to Early Indian Madhyamika* (Honolulu: Univ. of Hawaii Press, 1989), 8–10, 28, 133–8.

76 Mark Siderits, “Nagarjuna as Anti-Realist”, *Journal of Indian Philosophy* 16 (1988): 324.
misinterpretations are not historical accidents but are natural and
countervailing tendencies, diametrically and dialectically opposed, for each
emphasizes one of the two main aspects of the Madhyamika ‘system’ at the
expense of the other. Therefore, each is a salutary corrective to the other, and
Madhyamika consists in an unavoidable tension between these two poles. 

This might be the only way of avoiding both the hyper- and inter-absolutisms
mentioned above, as their mutual dependence would remove their status of being
independent and absolute. (Hence, such a combination would not be a simple
conjunctive synthesis or both/and.) The essence of this new interpretation is based on
the recognition of the mutual implication between conceptual opposites, which is
nevertheless asymmetrically open, creative, and thus liberating. On this
interpretation, ‘co-dependent genesis’ is a ‘creative synthesis’ which unites the two
truths of relativity and openness, thus avoiding their bifurcation into two mutually
exclusive absolutes. The merit of this interpretation is that it does justice to both
truths, neither subordinating one to the other nor synthesizing them into one truth nor
bifurcating them into two truths about two different realities.

Some Comparisons of Madhyamika with Western Philosophies

Although my thesis is primarily concerned with the comparison of Process and
Madhyamika philosophies with a view to their integration into an all-encompassing
system, it would be a good idea to place Madhyamika philosophy against the
backdrop of influential Western philosophies so as to make this task easier. After all,
Process philosophy has emerged from the milieu of Western philosophy and thus
defines itself in relation to it; so by placing Madhyamika philosophy in this same
environment, we can compare the two systems with reference to a common
background.

77 David Loy, ‘How Not To Criticize Nagarjuna: A Response to L. Stafford Betty’, Philosophy East
Pyrrhonism, Platonism, Neoplatonism, and Pseudo-Dionysius

The remarkable parallels between Madhyamika and Pyrrhonean skepticism (not to be confused with academic skepticism) have been discussed by several commentators. Thomas McEvilley shows that these skeptics shared with Madhyamika the teaching on conventional truth, the tetralemma, the bi-negation, and deconstruction of cause-and-effect. He quotes Pyrrho, for example, saying that ‘[n]othing really exists [= has a definite nature], but human life is governed by mere convention’, and his disciple Timon as saying that ‘[w]e should say of each thing that it no more is than is not, than both is and is not, than neither is nor is not.’ The Madhyamika were more speculative territory by contending that the Madhyamika were directly influenced by Pyrrhonean skepticism when Greek thought came to India following Alexander the Great’s conquest of parts of the latter. Whether there was influence (in one direction or the other) or not between the two philosophies, we can agree with Garfield that Pyrrhonism and Madhyamika are Western and Eastern manifestations of a skeptical philosophical tendency that seeks a middle path between extremes of dogmatism and nihilism. Their common goal is ‘to understand the conventional as conventional, and as empty of any reality or foundation beyond convention’. Both the Madhyamika and the Pyrrhonists thus reject those skeptics, both in the West and in the East, who argue dogmatically (as did the academic skeptics) that ‘nothing is true’. For neither doubted the reality of what is immediately evident – all that they doubted were the unfalsifiable non-empirical theories that attempt to ground what is experienced in a reality beyond experience.

There are also some remarkable parallels between Plato and Madhyamika. For example, in the Republic, there is an obvious use of the tetralemma. Speaking of the many objects of conventional discourse, Plato has Socrates say: “The individual objects of which I am speaking are also a riddle, and have a double sense: nor can you fix them in your mind, either as being or not-being, or both, or neither”, and goes

79 Ibid., 26–31.
81 Ibid., 294.
on to conclude that they are somewhere ‘between being and not-being’. But Plato’s motives for saying this are not the same as Nagarjuna’s, for the former is interested in contrasting these objects of opinion (becomings, which both are and are not) with the beings (or forms) that are objects of true knowledge, whereas the latter is interested in showing that the emptiness of things is not grounded in any kind of being beyond or in phenomena. Plato elsewhere states that things lack self-existence:

And from all these considerations, as I said at first, there arises a general reflection, that there is no one self-existent thing, but everything is becoming and in relation; and being must be altogether abolished, although from habit and ignorance we are compelled even in this discussion to retain the use of the term.\(^3^2\)

There is even the hint at the end of this passage of two levels of truth: ultimate (there is no ‘self-existent thing’, only relational becoming) and conventional (being is retained by ‘habit and ignorance’). However, there is no scholarly consensus over whether Plato is, in this passage, agreeing with this theory of becoming, or merely setting it up as a possible alternative to his theory of Forms that he develops elsewhere.\(^3^4\)

The Madhyamika’s two truths as applied to the interpretation of scriptures – whereby scriptures are classed as either definitive (\textit{mitartha}) or interpretable (\textit{neyartha}) – is very similar to the middle Platonist Philo’s allegorical method for interpreting the Bible – whereby all descriptions of God that seem to conflict with transcendence are deemed not to be literal – which became the method throughout the Middle Ages for interpreting the book of nature as well as the Bible, philosophy as well as theology. But the major difference between Philo’s method and that of the Madhyamika is that the latter call definitive those texts which speak of the emptiness of transcendence (or independent self-existence), whereas it is the interpretable texts which posit some kind of a transcendence – a complete reversal of the Philoenean allegorical hermeneutics.

In the Neoplatonist writings of Plotinus we can also find statements that resemble Madhyamika philosophy, at least the Absolutist interpretation. He describes


\(^{3^3}\) Plato, \textit{Theaetetus}, 157b, in ibid., 520.

his teaching as being beyond speech and writing: "Not to be told, not to be written": in our writing and telling we are but urging towards it ... to those desiring to see we point the path." In his writings, Plotinus is interested in pointing to the One that is beyond one and many, and indeed beyond every pair of conceptual opposites.

'Generative of all, the Unity is none of all; neither thing nor quantity nor quality nor intellect nor soul; not in motion, not at rest, not in place, not in time'. This is similar to the *via negativa* of the Christian mystics, which were greatly influenced by Pseudo-Dionysius, who was in turn influenced by Plotinus.

Pseudo-Dionysius believed that Plotinus's One, which is beyond one and many, is the very God of Christianity, who is beyond all conceptual predication. Hence, he says that the divine Unity is 'before all distinctions of One and Many, Part and Whole, Definiteness and Indefiniteness, Finitude and Infinitude'. The similarity between the mystical *via negativa* and the neither/nor dialectic of Madhyamika is only apparent because - quite apart from its being similar to the now-defunct absolutist interpretation of Madhyamika - the object of the mystical *via negativa* is God, whereas for the Madhyamika (who are atheists), the object is reality. And even if 'God' was just another name for 'Ultimate Reality', there would still be the difference that the mystics presuppose this Reality at the beginning, whereas the Madhyamika only arrive at it at the conclusion of their negative dialectic. Throughout the Middle Ages, most forms of Christian mysticism followed this Pseudo-Dionysian pattern, although, as Derrida has recently shown, there have been exceptions (such as Angelus Silesius) whose negative dialectics does not posit a 'beyond' that transcends conceptual opposites, but a double-bind or oscillation between them.

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86 Ibid., 6.9.3.


Kant, Hegel, and Kierkegaard

Absolutist interpretations of Madhyamika—such as those of Stecheratsky and Murti—have of course made much of the similarity between Kant’s phenomenon-noumenon distinction and Nagarjuna’s two truths. However, there are other aspects of Kantian philosophy, particularly those which still animate contemporary discussions in critical theory and poststructuralism, which bear a more profound similarity to Madhyamika. For example, there is the notion of transcendental categories which condition the possibility and impossibility of phenomena. In a modified form—dropping the ahistorical and a priori nature of these categories, as most contemporary neo-Kantians do—these resemble very much the terms that Nagarjuna uses to describe the ultimate truth, such as dependent origination, emptiness, nirvana, Tathagata, and the like (or at least conventional conceptualizations of these terms). Secondly, there are the prasanga-like ‘antinomies of pure reason’ in which contradictions are pointed out in both thesis and antithesis with regard to certain metaphysical questions, such as: whether the world has a beginning or not; whether or not it is infinite and infinitely divisible; whether of not it has a first cause; and whether or not there is free will—which resemble the questions the Buddha refused to answer, a refusal which the Madhyamika regard as the earliest use of the Madhyamika method. The difference between Kant and Madhyamika, however, lies in the fact that only Kant resolves these antinomies—in some cases by way of negating both thesis and antithesis, and in other cases by a synthesis in which both are shown to be true, but at different levels.

Kant’s synthetic way of resolving antinomies was taken up by Hegel and generalized into a methodology applicable to all theses. He believed that all philosophical views and theses could be shown to be incapable of standing alone, and are instead dependent on one another. According to Walter Kaufmann, the heart of Hegel’s much misunderstood dialectic is the demonstration that all conceptual pairs, such as being and nothing, finite and infinite, etc., are ‘one-sided abstractions from a concreteness of which they are merely partial aspects’.89 Hegel’s dialectical process—which moves from thesis to antithesis to synthesis to new thesis and so on—is thus an ongoing process of conceptualizing the Absolute (Hegel’s term for Reality, or all that is) in the most concrete and all-inclusive way possible. Hence he
moves from the thesis that the Absolute is X to the antithesis that the Absolute is not-X, and then to the synthesis (which is also a new thesis) that the Absolute is both X and not-X, which is in turn followed by the antithesis that the Absolute is neither X nor not-X, and then the synthesis of the both and neither positions, and so on. This appears to be the exact reverse of the Madhyamika’s tetralemma (and the hexalemma of the Chinese Madhyamika), since they negate, rather than affirm, each of these positions. However, Hegel is very ambiguous in the use of this method, sometimes suggesting that he is using an undistributed both and in the synthesis (which is equivalent to the conjunction of a distributed ‘both’ with a distributed ‘neither’), while his denial of the laws of excluded middle and noncontradiction suggest that he uses his synthesis in the distributed sense. But either way he affirms each successively evolved position (that synthesizes lesser positions), and it is here that his difference from Madhyamika can be seen.\footnote{Walter Kaufmann, Hegel: Reinterpretation, Texts, and Commentary (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1966), 194.} However, F. H. Bradley’s neo-Hegelian reading of Hegel is much closer to Madhyamika in that he denies the possibility of both internal and external relations between opposing terms, instead arguing that they subsist conventionally in the all-inclusive Absolute.

Soren Kierkegaard’s objections to systems like Hegel’s are very similar to those of the Madhyamika. He argues that the attempt to synthesize many one-sided abstractions into a ‘concrete universal’ by way of a conceptual thought process is flawed due to the fact that thought is itself one-sided. He argued that ‘consciousness is contradiction. The moment I make a statement about reality, contradiction is present’.\footnote{Although, it is possible to interpret Hegel’s method as being both deconstructive (using the negative tetralemma) and reconstructive (using the positive tetralemma).} For Kierkegaard, duality and doubt go together, indeed they have a common etymology. ‘In reality by itself there is no possibility of doubt; when I express it in language, contradiction is present, since I do not express it but produce something else.’\footnote{Soren Kierkegaard, Philosophical Fragments and Johannes Climacus. Kierkegaard’s Writings, vol. 7, ed. and trans. H. V. Hong and E. H. Hong (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton Univ. Press, 1987), 168.} As for the method of synthesis (or mediation), Kierkegaard believes that it is legitimate when used to mediate between different schools of thought, such as monism and pluralism, or permanence and impermanence, but it does not work in the case of the opposite of Hegel’s system – the antithesis to
Hegel's entire system and method taken as a thesis itself: 'If there is to be mediation here (and mediation is indeed speculation's idea), this means that speculation judges between itself and the opposite of itself and consequently is itself party and judge'.

For Kierkegaard, the contradiction inherent in all thought is the paradox which points beyond the world to God, who incarnates in the world as paradox (God-in-flesh). This is where Kierkegaard differs from Madhyamika; but they both share in this belief that we can only go beyond logic by the use of logic.

Wittgenstein and Analytic Philosophy

As we have already seen, Bertrand Russell's acknowledgement of statements that have an indeterminate truth value (neither true nor false nor any middle value) because of their non-referentiality -- such as 'Is the present king of France bald?' -- are similar to the Madhyamika assertion that statements about reality are empty because their object cannot be found. Also in the spirit of Madhyamika is Russell's belief that '[t]he conception of "substance," like that of "essence," is a transference to metaphysics of what is only a linguistic convenience', which is representative of analytic philosophy's general mistrust of substance metaphysics, beginning with Frege's formulation of quantification theory, through the logical positivists' relegation of metaphysics to nonsense, to Wittgenstein's understanding of philosophy as a therapy that dissolves metaphysical 'hang-ups'. Indeed, it is in Wittgenstein that we find the most remarkable parallels with Madhyamika philosophy. For example, he says that

Most of the propositions and questions to be found in philosophical works are not false but nonsensical. Consequently we cannot give any answer to questions of this kind, but can only point out that they are nonsensical. Most of the propositions and questions of philosophers arise from our failure to understand the logic of our language.

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92 Ibid.


According to Garfield, Wittgenstein, like Nagarjuna, exercises a ‘dynamic philosophical tension’ between the ‘account of the limits of what can be coherently said and its analytical ostension of what can’t be said without paradox but must be understood ... a logical tightrope act at the very limits of language and metaphysics’. This can be seen in the *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, where Wittgenstein says that philosophy must set limits to what can and cannot be said, and that what cannot be said can only be shown by presenting clearly what can be said. For Wittgenstein, words play the same role as they do for Nagarjuna – as tools to be used to get us to the ultimate truth and then thrown away: ‘My propositions are elucidatory in this way: he who understands me finally recognizes them as senseless, when he has climbed out through them, on them, over them. (He must so to speak throw away the ladder, after he has climbed up on it.)’ Later on, in his *Philosophical Investigations*, Wittgenstein becomes even more Madhyamika-like. E.g., his principle of contrast – ‘The feeling is as if the negation of a proposition had to make it true in a certain sense, in order to negate it’ – sounds like the Madhyamika principle of the bi-conditionality of opposites. The following two quotes also have a Madhyamika ring to them: ‘A main cause of philosophic disease – a one-sided diet: one nourishes one’s thinking with only one kind of example.’ ‘My aim is: to teach you to pass from a piece of disguised nonsense to something that is patent nonsense’.

Adorno, Derrida, and Poststructuralism

Opposed to Plato’s and Hegel’s positive dialectics, the critical theorist Theodor Adorno used what he called a ‘negative dialectics’ which dissolves all reified forms,

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98 Ibid., 6.54.


100 Ibid., para. 593.

101 Ibid., para. 464.
concepts, and identities in order to uncover the ‘non-identity’ which the positive dialecticians constantly suppress.\textsuperscript{102} Disbelieving Hegel’s faith that reason and reality coincide, Adorno replaced the Hegelian synthesis with the antithesis. However, this did not mean that he had any thesis of his own; rather, he used the \textit{reductio} in order to juxta- pose contradictory concepts, thus putting them into an irresolvable tension or double-bind. Adorno’s negative dialectics takes any given thesis (e.g. relativism) and negates it, and then negates its negation (e.g. absolutism) – ‘but it does not seek a middle ground between the two; it opposes them through the extremes themselves, convicts them of untruth by their own ideas’,\textsuperscript{103} thus creating a second order antithesis. Hence, according to Adorno, ‘Dialectics can break the spell of identification without dogmatically, from without, contrasting it with an allegedly realistic thesis’.\textsuperscript{104} This aversion to setting up dogmatic counter-theses even led Adorno to turn his own method against itself: ‘Negative philosophy, dissolving everything, dissolves even the solvent’\textsuperscript{105} – which is very reminiscent of the Madhyamika ‘emptiness of emptiness’.

Similar to Adorno’s negative dialectics is Derrida’s deconstruction, which takes the form of a bi-negation -- Derrida calls it a ‘denegation’ of contrasting concepts that avoids setting up a hyperessential ‘beyond’ (as in the case of the distributed neither/nor of negative theology), and instead creating a double-bind or oscillation between two self-contradictory extremes – a ‘neither/nor’, says Derrida, which is ‘\textit{simultaneously either/or}’ (i.e., undistributed).\textsuperscript{106} Ian Mabbett has identified eight similarities between Derrida’s thought and Madhyamika -- both: avoid claims about a determinate reality; identify their teaching with what is actually the case; show that things are not intrinsically real but exist only in relation to other things; criticize the logic of binary opposites; celebrate emptiness or absence (of svabhava or presence); use four-cornered logic; dismantle the concept of the self; and recognize

\textsuperscript{102} Adorno’s theory of ‘negative dialectics’ was most likely the source for Streng’s usage of the term to describe the Madhyamika methodology.


\textsuperscript{104} Ibid., 172.


both a conventional and a higher truth. Derrida has likened his deconstructive method to the introduction of a virus – which is neither dead nor alive, but indeterminate – into texts in order to destabilize them. Actually, there is no need to introduce it, for it is already there in the form of an indeterminacy which renders the text either inconsistent or incomplete, but never both consistent and complete – which is similar to Gödel’s famous ‘incompleteness theorem’: all formal mathematical and logical systems can be shown to contain a statement whose truth value is indeterminate within the system, thus rendering it either inconsistent or incomplete. In fact, Derrida’s method can be considered to be an extension of Gödel’s theorem to literary texts, including philosophical texts (which can be anything from a statement to a book). The upshot of this is that no text can be considered to be self-contained or self-existent, but rather is dependent on other texts (which are in turn dependent on other texts) for their meaning. Hence, their meaning is constantly spatially differed and temporally deferred – a différence which is the transcendental condition for both their meaningfulness (as dependent) and their meaninglessness (as independent). The similarity between this notion of the différence of texts and Nagarjuna’s notion of the emptiness of theses is remarkable. Also remarkable, is the similarity between Nagarjuna’s ‘emptiness of emptiness’ and Derrida’s observation that even différence needs to be deconstructed (including deconstruction itself). Also similarity to emptiness is Derrida’s recent reading of Plato’s ‘khora’ (sometimes ‘chora’), which is described as a formless matrix that cannot be characterized in terms of any pair of co-exhaustive concepts, but is known by a ‘via negativa’ that is quite different from the negative theology of subsequent neo-Platonism.


Other poststructuralists may also be compared to Madhyamika. For example, Georges Bataille, who can be called a ‘postmodern mystic’, speaks of the need to use reason to deconstruct reason’s delusive constructions: ‘Inner experience is led by discursive reason. Reason alone has the power to undo its work, to hurl down what it has built up. . . . Without the support of reason, we don’t reach “dark incandescence”. ’¹¹¹ The problem with reason, says Bataille, is that it has a blindspot, comparable to the structure of the eye which requires a blindspot where the nerve connects to the retina, without which there can be no vision, but with which vision is incomplete (which is also similar to Gödel’s theorem).¹¹² Similarly, there is an unreason which makes reason possible, although this can only be known through the use of reason – just as only vision can reveal the blindspot (by moving the eye in such a way as to make something in the field of vision disappear). Emmanuel Levinas also speaks of the need to use reason to transcend reason, so that the Other of reason – which is usually suppressed by reason’s tendency to reduce difference to sameness and existence to essence – can be revealed as the ground of an ethic of ‘dis-interestedness’. His method is to set up an ‘alternating rhythm of the said and the unsaid, and the unsaid being unsaid in its turn’.¹¹³

**Conclusion**

Madhyamika philosophy is a skeptical and deconstructive tendency of thought manifesting in many times and places, but developed in its most systematic and consistent form by Nagarjuna. Its method is to take a middle path between extreme dogmatic views by means of a negative dialectic that negates both a position and its opposite position without settling in a new position, whether this be expressed as a conjunction of the two positions or a conjunction of their negation. That is, it proceeds by way of a bi-negation of positions, which is not to be confused with the position known as the ‘fourth lemma’ (i.e., ‘neither X nor non-X’). Thus, when analyzing any view of reality, the Madhyamika negative dialectic concludes that the view in question is empty of existence and non-existence and thus has conventional


¹¹² Ibid., 110.
existence only. The Madhyamika deconstruction of relations thus results in a
deconstruction of both mutual internal relatedness (interdependence or identity) and
mutual external relatedness (independence or difference) as both are ultimately
absurd, even though they have validity as useful conventional abstractions. Thus,
there are two truths: the conventional truth of intersubjectively existent things and
selves (which can be graded in terms of a hierarchy of more and less degrees of
truth), and the ultimate truth of reality as seen directly to be empty even of
conventional truths. As Madhyamika is a positionless philosophy, it has a protean
ability to be anything the interpreter wants it to be – as the number of interpretations
and comparisons discussed above reveal. It is hoped that by summarizing these
various interpretations and comparisons, the desire for further comparison of
Madhyamika with, and interpretation in the light of, process thought (important
though it is) will give way to a focus on the more interesting task of discovering the
mutual complementarity of Madhyamika and process thought for the purposes of
their integration. Also, it is hoped that these interpretations and comparisons can
serve as a background against which the two philosophies can be placed so as to
make this task easier.

CHAPTER 5

THE PROCESS CRITIQUE OF MADHYAMIKA

The aim of this thesis is to show that process philosophy and Madhyamika Buddhism are complementary. However, in order to show this it is necessary to examine areas where these two systems appear to conflict with one another, and to see whether these conflicts can be resolved. That is the purpose of this chapter and the next. In this chapter I will address the critique of Madhyamika from the process perspective, whereas in the next chapter I will look at the critique of process philosophy from a Madhyamika point of view.

Non-Process Critiques of Madhyamika

Before examining the critiques of Madhyamika from a process perspective, I will briefly look at some of the more important non-process critiques of Madhyamika given by contemporary scholars, particularly those that are similar to those coming from process philosophers.

The eminent Buddhologist Herbert Guenther argues that Madhyamika is a kind of reductionism, similar to logical positivism and analytic philosophy, and thus one-sided. He accuses Nagarjuna of thinking in static terms according to a ‘blinded logical exclusivism’, which he calls a ‘fossilized sterility of logical reductionism’.¹ He also argues that the Prasangika are literalists, unable to grasp the metaphorical function of language.² By reductionism, Guenther presumably means to imply that Madhyamika arguments take the form ‘X cannot be found (under analysis), hence it does not exist’ instead of ‘X cannot be found, therefore it does not exist in a reified way, but may exist in a non-reified way’. But this is based on a nihilist interpretation of Madhyamika – other interpretations, such as those of the Geluk and others, would favor an interpretation closer to the second statement. Furthermore, Guenther’s charge that Madhyamika is a form of positivist or analytic philosophy is based on a

² Ibid., 130.
now defunct interpretation (that of Karl Potter) which has been superceded by post-Wittgensteinian and deconstructive interpretations. Finally, the alleged static nature of Nagarjuna’s thought is not born out by fact that the Madhyamika favor becoming over being (svabhava). Madhyamika, according to Streng, is a philosophy of ‘radical becoming’ which ‘involves a different kind of ontological quality than one based on a relationship between being and becoming’. Rather, being is a special case of becoming. This way, both process philosophy and Madhyamika can avoid the paradoxes of rest and motion (like Zeno’s) that arise from philosophies based on the primacy of being, or on the duality of being and becoming.

David Kalupahana takes another approach. He criticizes the prevalent scholarly reading of Nagarjuna as a Mahayanist and argues that he is instead closer to a Theravadin. He also charges that Candrakirti was a crypto-Vedantist, and that his interpretation of Nagarjuna has misled many Madhyamika scholars. However, the consensus among Madhyamika scholars is that Kalupahana’s arguments are unconvincing. Nevertheless, I think that his argument that Nagarjuna was a philosopher of becoming – an argument which, I believe, is not necessarily dependent on Kalupahana’s Theravadin bias – is convincing, and is consonant with Streng’s statement quoted earlier.

Claus Oetke has published an invaluable classification of antinomies inherent in Nagarjuna’s system of thought: (1) the denial of causality versus affirmation of conditioned origination; (2) the use of reasoned arguments versus the denial of own-views; (3) the use of the bi-negation versus the denial of things like dharmas, etc.; (4) the doctrine of the emptiness of dharmas versus rejecting the consequences of this denial; (5) the apparent anti-commonsensical nature of his arguments versus his appeal to common sense; (6) the dualism of the two truths versus their identity.

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3 Frederick J. Streng, Emptiness: A Study in Religious Meaning (Nashville, Tennessee: Abingdon Press, 1967), 64. See also p. 81, where Streng argues that once we understand that reality is a ‘process of becoming’ which requires no static ontological substrate, ‘the question of whether there “is” or “is not” something remaining when there is no longer fabrication of existence does not apply’. The positive expression of the bi-negation of being and non-being is becoming; its negative expression is emptiness.


5 As mentioned in a note to chapter four, his argument is based on a distinction between two sense of ‘bhava’ – one with a disjunctive bar above the first ‘a’ and the other without it – meaning either ‘being’ or ‘becoming’, respectively. See David J. Kalupahana, Madmadvamakarika: The Philosophy of the Middle Way (Albany, New York: State Univ. of New York Press, 1986), 32.
(samsara = nirvana); (7) the apparent extremism versus claims to be a middle way between extremes. Some of these antinomies can be resolved by qualifying the senses of terms and others by distinguishing between two different types of discourse (two truths) – for the latter, Oetke proposes that we use the sentential operator ‘0’ (zero), meaning 'on the level of highest truth (it is the case that)', in order to distinguish between conventional and ultimate propositions.⁶

Some scholars have also taken issue with the logic of Nagarjuna’s arguments and his use of the notion of ‘svabhava’ (inherent existence, independent essence, etc.). Richard Robinson and Richard Hayes both argue that the notion of svabhava, as Nagarjuna uses it, is ambiguous in meaning – sometimes meaning ‘independence’ and at other times ‘identity’ – which ambiguity Nagarjuna allegedly exploits in order to defeat an opponent.⁷ Robinson argues that Nagarjuna has defined svabhava in such a way that it is self-contradictory and that his refutation of opponents hinges on this definition. But the question arises whether the opponents ‘really upheld the existence of a svabhava or svabhava as he defines the term’.⁸ Furthermore, it is possible that ‘Nagarjuna’s critique, when applied, would fail to damage certain modern metaphysical systems that dispense with the category of essence’.⁹ We cannot be sure whether or not Robinson had in mind process philosophy, but process philosophy would definitely fit into the category of non-essentialistic metaphysical systems. This issue of the nature and scope of svabhava is very important, so I will return to it later in this chapter. Robinson has also discovered a few places where Nagarjuna commits logical fallacies, such as denying the antecedent.¹⁰ Of course, no philosopher is perfect and makes the occasional mistake. However, we can ignore them in this case as they do not in any way affect Nagarjuna’s overall argument. Nevertheless, this raises an important point: a philosopher might sometimes make a mistake in applying a general principle in a particular situation. There might well be places where Nagarjuna errs in a specific use of his general deconstructive method.


⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid., 327.
A final critique of Nagarjuna worth examining is that his arguments fail as philosophical analyses, but succeed as mystical practices. For instance, L. Stafford Betty argues that Nagarjuna’s MK is not a philosophical treatise, but ‘a mystical manifesto in philosophical disguise’, which works (he does not deny that it works) in a non-philosophical, but psychological, manner – somewhat like a koan. The reason for this is that Nagarjuna lacks ‘something like Aquinas’ doctrine of analogy to bridge his two truths. Without it his Karikas fail as philosophy, for we are left with the puzzle of how illusion can lead to reality’. David Loy’s response to this argument is that it erroneously reduces the question of whether Nagarjuna was a philosopher or a mystic to an exclusivist either/or logic – a logic which Nagarjuna puts into question. Also, it seems to me that Betty has a too restricted understanding of what philosophy is – it is not limited to ‘something like Aquinas’ doctrine of analogy’. Such a limitation is precisely what has been put into question by Western deconstructionists, such as Derrida, who use arguments similar to Nagarjuna’s (namely, reductio ad absurdum) in order to deconstruct philosophy from within – that is, by the use of philosophical arguments against philosophy itself. (Can we be sure that a koan is not philosophical? Or if it is not, perhaps Madhyamika negative dialectic is a philosophical analogue of what on a lower, psychological level, is a koan.)

Process Philosophy’s Response to Madhyamika

Although process philosophers who engage with Buddhist thought have tended so far to focus on Japanese forms of Buddhism – especially Zen and the Kyoto School – they have nevertheless not completely overlooked Madhyamika. In an important

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13 Ibid., 449.

early essay, David Ray Griffin (who there admits that he relies primarily on Edward Conze’s interpretation) critiques Madhyamika on three points: (1) the idea that every actuality or dharma is totally determined and dependent on conditions, or that it has no independent self-existence (svabhava), implies that every ‘new event has no iota of self-causation or self-determination’;\textsuperscript{16} (2) the refutation of causation – ‘[n]ot by itself, nor by another, nor by both, nor without cause, do positive existents arise in any way whatsoever’ – means that the process position of ‘by both itself and another’ is excluded;\textsuperscript{17} and (3) the denial of any characteristic or ‘mark’ other than emptiness in things implies ‘the absolute sameness of things’ and ‘the oneness of all reality’.\textsuperscript{18} It is this last point that Griffin attacks most strongly, so I will quote him at length. Basically, his argument is that the radically symmetrical interdependence of all things implies a monism in which all distinctions are lost. Or in Griffin’s words:

> With this mutual, eternal, internal relatedness obtaining among all events in reality, it is impossible that any uniqueness could be retained by any of them, since each one is eternally influenced by exactly the same factors. Any iota of individuality one might suppose to remain by virtue of the fact that each one could make a slightly different response to the totality is eliminated by remembering that the events have no power of self-determination at all (otherwise the past would not imply the present, and the future would not yet be completely decided, so it could not be constitutive of the present).\textsuperscript{19}

The point here is that the symmetrical relation between antecedent and subsequent events implies equivalence between events, and since equivalence is a transitive as well as a symmetrical relation, all events are equivalent to one another, which is tantamount to monism.\textsuperscript{20} It is this critique of symmetrical interdependence that is, I believe, one of the greatest obstacle to Madhyamika-process compatibility. The critique can be found in its most definitive form in the works of Charles Hartshorne, which we turn to now.

\textsuperscript{15} Also, one would think that if a form of inquiry reveals reality, then it is philosophical.


\textsuperscript{17} Ibid., 265.

\textsuperscript{18} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{19} Ibid., 266.

\textsuperscript{20} This is the point Hartshorne makes after reading Griffin’s paper, and he adds: ‘How characteristic of Nagarjuna!’ Charles Hartshorne, ‘Whitehead’s Differences From Buddhism’, \textit{Philosophy East and West} 25 (1975): 411.
Hartshorne on Madhyamika

Before surveying Hartshorne's critiques of Madhyamika, which are scattered throughout his extensive oeuvre, it must be pointed out that these come from a particular reading of Madhyamika that is, in Hartshorne's case, a little outdated. His understanding of Buddhism in general is based on Stcherbatsky's dichotomization of Buddhism into 'extreme pluralism' (Theravada) and an equally 'extreme monism' (Mahayana) – a typology that has since been criticized as having a Western bias.21

'In this splitting into two contrary extremes,' says Hartshorne, 'I see evidence that the famous "Middle Way" of Northern Buddhism was not quite what it claimed to be. The golden mean was not found.'22 Also, his reading of Madhyamika Buddhism is based on T. R. V. Mutri's interpretation,23 which has likewise been criticized and superceded by a post-Wittgensteinian approach. Although Hartshorne bases his reading of Madhyamika on works that are now outdated, I believe that his critique of this school is still very important and cannot be overlooked by scholars.

One of Hartshorne's earliest comments on Nagarjuna is that 'he refutes interdependence and mutual independence, but neglects oneway dependence. Again he considers four relations of similarity and dissimilarity between cause and effect, but all four, as he formulates them are symmetrical.'24 Hartshorne's concern here is that Nagarjuna's tetralemmas on dependence and causation have not exhausted all the possibilities, merely the symmetrical or two-way possibilities (interdependence, mutual independence, both, and neither; or, identity of cause and effect, difference of cause and effect, both, and neither), thus overlooking cases where A is dependent on B whereas B is independent of A, or where effect is inclusive of its cause whereas the cause is not inclusive of its effect, so that mere identity or difference are not exhaustive.25 Later, Hartshorne strengthens his contention that Nagarjuna's

21 E.g., see Andrew P. Tuck, Comparative Philosophy and the Philosophy of Scholarship: On the Western Interpretation of Nagarjuna (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1990), 37–47.


arguments are dependent on the assumption of symmetry that ignores ’the asymmetries which are the very means of distinguishing causes from effects, premises from conclusions, and anything from anything else’.

Hartshorne argues that ’divisions must be genuinely exhaustive’:

Take two things (or momentary actualities) A and B. They might be mutually interdependent, they might be mutually independent; but third, B might depend on A while A is independent of B. This non-symmetrical case is conspicuously absent from Nagarjuna’s discussion. That the relation RAB is internal to B does not entail that it is internal to A, just as (P entails Q) does not entail (Q entails P). Entailment is a kind of dependence, the truth of P upon that of Q.

Please note that, contrary to Griffin, the non-symmetrical case is not the same as the conjunction of the two kinds of symmetry. Nagarjuna is correct to say that this is absurd – for how can the relation between A and B be both mutually dependent and mutually independent? But the case of neither/nor would only be absurd – and still is in the sense that Nagarjuna understood it – if there were no asymmetrical alternative.

Hartshorne has continued to stress this point when discussing Madhyamika, often linking it with his critique of Bradley. In ’Toward a Buddhito-Christian Religion’, he argues against the Hua-yen tradition of China, which affirmed universal interdependence – a view which, according to Hartshorne, defies logic. Hartshorne says that Nagarjuna and Bradley rejected both interdependence and mutual independence (or two-way internal, and two-way external, relations), but their

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27 Ibid., 414–5. See also Raymond Panikkar, ’The “Crisis” of Madhyamika and Indian Philosophy Today’, Philosophy East and West 16 (1966): 118, where the exhaustiveness of the four lemmas is similarly questioned.


29 Steve Odin uses the Hartshornean argument against symmetry to show that the symmetrical ‘interpenetration’ of things in the Hua-yen is incompatible with the asymmetrical ‘cumulative penetration’ of process philosophy. See Steve Odin, Process Metaphysics and Hua-Yen Buddhism: A Critical Study of Cumulative Penetration vs. Interpenetration (Albany, New York: State Univ. of New York Press, 1982).
ignorance of asymmetrical in/dependence and relatedness led both to conclude that ‘the truth about relations transcends discursive thought and can only be possessed by those whose meditation or intuition carries them beyond the rationally storable’. In an article on ‘Sankara, Nagarjuna, and Fa Tsang’, Hartshorne repeats his observation that Nagarjuna and Bradley are both opposed to the universal internal relatedness of the Hua-yen philosopher Fa Tsang (a Western parallel being Josiah Royce) on the one hand, and the universal external relatedness of Abhidharma (and analytic philosophy in the West) on the other: ‘Bradley’s absolute seems to me scarcely distinguishable from the sunyata doctrine. For if there are no terms in relation, whether internal or external, in what sense can there be definiteness, real differentiation? I find Bradley more nearly consistent than Royce, and nearer to Buddhism.’

Hartshorne contends that one explanation for Nagarjuna’s unjustified assumption of symmetry – shared by those who take symmetrical positions as much as by those who reject them but see no asymmetrical alternative – is ‘the assumption that complexes are analyzable into equally simple ultimate constituents’ But ‘If B depends on A but not vice versa, then whatever the complexity or simplicity of A, B is one degree more complex, for in it is relation to A, whereas A lacks relation to it’. Logicians overlook this because they want to see things ‘from the standpoint of eternity’, a notion which ultimately makes no sense. But the very fact that the present is nothing if not constituted by its past, whereas the past would still be there if the present were different, indicates that ‘[t]he complex cannot be reduced to a bundle of simples’.

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30 Bradley’s argument against external relations is that a relation that is external to the terms it relates becomes an additional term that needs to be related to the original terms, which generates an infinite regress; and his argument against internal relations is that the terms become identical with one another, thus requiring no relation. This is virtually identical to Nagarjuna’s arguments against causality and other kinds of relations between opposing terms. See F. H. Bradley, Appearance and Reality (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1930), part 1.


33 Hartshorne, ‘“Emptiness” and Fullness’, 418.

34 Hartshorne, ‘Sankara, Nagarjuna, and Fa Tsang’, 105.
As mentioned above, Hartshorne's reading of Nagarjuna is based primarily on Murti's. In his work Murti characterizes both Yogacara Buddhism and Vedanta as philosophies that see the relation between phenomena and the Absolute as being asymmetrical.\textsuperscript{36} So Murti was aware of the asymmetrical alternative to the symmetrical tetralemma, but did not see the implications of this!\textsuperscript{37} Unfortunately, both schools get the direction of the asymmetry wrong, for (according to Murti) they both see the Absolute as internally related to phenomena that are externally related to it.\textsuperscript{38} This is the exact reverse of the process asymmetry where the relative phenomena are internally related to the Absolute (which means 'independent' or 'externally related' anyway).

\textit{Analysis and Response to These Critiques}

Undoubtedly the most serious critique outlined above is that Madhyamika have ignored the asymmetrical alternative(s) to the four symmetrical possibilities. Hence I will address this critique first. This will require an analysis of the concepts of symmetry, asymmetry, interdependence, and dependent origination, with a view to discovering whether these critiques can be answered in a way that shows Madhyamika and process to be compatible. After this I will discuss, in turn, the critiques of causality, relations, and reduction to simplicity.

Symmetry and Asymmetry

Hartshorne's arguments cannot be avoided by pointing out that his philosophy is not representative of all kinds of process philosophy, for even if it could be shown that other major forms of process philosophy, such as Whiteheadianism, affirm symmetrical interdependence (for example, Whitehead says that 'every actual entity

\textsuperscript{35} Ibid., 105-6.

\textsuperscript{36} Murti, \textit{Central Philosophy}, 324.

\textsuperscript{37} Although Murti was aware of asymmetry, he nevertheless often confounds the meanings of 'relativity' and 'dependence' with 'mutual relativity' and 'mutual dependence'. See ibid., 138-9, 244.

\textsuperscript{38} Ibid., 323-5.
is present in every other actual entity"), there still remains Hartshorne's charge that Nagarjuna has overlooked the asymmetrical alternatives and has merely argued against symmetry. Also, although Whitehead and other process philosophers make statements that seem to suggest their affirmation of symmetrical interdependence, other statements can be usually produced which show that this is not so; for example, Whitehead also says that contemporary actual occasions do not interact, and that an actual occasion is only inclusive of its 'actual world' or past. (There is also Whitehead's 'ontological principle', which holds that all explanation ultimately rests in actual occasions, not in eternal objects – an asymmetry between particulars and universals closely related to that between effect and cause, after and before, becoming and being, etc.)

Another approach is to apply a Madhyamika-like critique to the asymmetrical position. For example, Justus Buchler criticizes Whitehead's subordination of eternal objects (abstract universals) to actual occasions (concrete particulars) as having no justification within his system. Buchler argues that Whitehead's tendency to prioritize and hierarchize the categories of existence in terms of varying degrees of reality conflicts with his, at other times, 'descriptive' approach to the categories which sees them as equally real and interdependent. Buchler argues that it is arbitrary for Whitehead to assert that eternal objects cannot be understood in isolation from actual occasions without also admitting that, conversely, actual occasions cannot be understood in isolation from eternal objects. Adapting this argument to Hartshorne's theory of the asymmetrical relation between ultimate categorical contrasts, it could be argued that the derivation of absolutes from relatives (or \(a\)-terms from \(r\)-terms, to use the Hartshornean terminology introduced in chapter three) is impossible because no concept can exist in isolation from its opposing concept. According to Peter Fenner, it is a basic Madhyamika principle that logical opposites are interdependent: '\(A\) and \(-A\) are logically and reciprocally dependent on each other. Each is defined, and so comes into being, in mutual dependence ... on the

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other". Hence, a Madhyamika response to Hartshorne is that the asymmetrical alternative to the four symmetrical ones is also deemed to have absurd consequences. However, this argument is flawed as it is itself dependent on symmetrical assumptions. In his response to Buchler, Hartshorne argues that

[1] In general, polar contrasts, such as abstract/concrete, universal/particular, object/subjunct, are symmetrical correlatives only so long as we think simply of the categories themselves, as concepts, and not of what they may be used to refer to or describe. The moment we think of the latter, the symmetrical interdependence is replaced by a radical asymmetry.

For example, the concept ‘particularity’ is interdependent with the concept ‘universality’, but the non-conceptual particular instance of ‘particularity’ – the concrete event – includes the universal (and ‘particularity’), not vice versa. Hence the principle of contrast is not violated, for the particular includes the contrast between particular and universal. Or, as Hartshorne puts it, ‘it is the concrete that enjoys the contrast’. Contrary to Buchler, this approach is merely ‘descriptive’ and not arbitrary, for it is based on the observation that no more information is given when universals are added to particulars, whereas this is the case when particulars are added to universals.

Sometimes Nagarjuna does not realize the difference between concepts and reality in the way described above. For example, he argues that ‘fuel’ and ‘fire’ are interdependent (rather than the latter being dependent on the former) because the concept of ‘fuel’ makes no sense apart from the concept of ‘fire’: ‘If fire depends on fuel … the fuel could be fuel [w]ithout any fire’. But this does not affect in any way the fact that something which we now call ‘fuel’ had to come into existence.


44 Ibid., 983.

45 Another argument against the interdependence of opposites is that it leads, via the transitivity of equivalence, to the idea of symmetrical interdependence between particulars, which is the Hua-yen doctrine that the Madhyamika reject.

before the activity which we now call ‘fire’ could occur. Nagarjuna often argues that a pair of oppositional concepts are interdependent. For example, in the MK he speaks of the interdependence of agent and action, and of pleasant and unpleasant;\textsuperscript{47} in the \textit{Vigrahamavarttani} of the interdependence of father and son;\textsuperscript{48} and in the \textit{Rajaparikatha-ratnamala} of the interdependence of one and many and of subject and object.\textsuperscript{49}

Although these examples are in conformity with Hartshorne’s charge that Nagarjuna overlooks the asymmetrical alternative(s) to his tetralemma on causation, it could be argued that Nagarjuna is in fact cognizant of asymmetry after all. For immediately following his opening verse in which he states that

\begin{quote}
Neither from itself nor from another,
Nor from both,
Nor without a cause [\textit{hetu}],
Does anything whatever, anywhere arise.
\end{quote}

Nagarjuna affirms conditionality:

\begin{quote}
There are four conditions [\textit{pratyaya}]: efficient condition;
Percept-object condition; immediate condition;
Dominant condition, just so.
There is no fifth condition.\textsuperscript{50}
\end{quote}

As conditionality is a dependence on a condition that is not dependent on that which it conditions (as opposed to bi-conditionality), it is asymmetrical in form. To be conditioned by an other is not the same as to be caused by it because the latter implies that the effect pre-exists in its cause, whereas the former does not. It is this denial of determinism and the simultaneous affirmation of creative dependence on conditions on the part of Nagarjuna that leads N. P. Jacobson to conclude that it is ‘a mistake to understand Nagarjuna as committing the fallacy of misplaced symmetry

\textsuperscript{47} Nagarjuna, MK 8.9–10, 12, and 23.10–2.


\textsuperscript{50} Nagarjuna, MK, 1.1–2, in Garfield, \textit{Fundamental Wisdom}, 3.
(that is, embracing the fallacious belief that the past and future determine the present in equal degrees). 51

Furthermore, Nagarjuna also applies his deconstructive method to the concept of mutual dependence itself. 52 And Garfield, in his commentary on the MK, notes that words and concepts like ‘interdependence ... are conventional phenomena’. 53 This would suggest that C. W. Huntington, Jr. (among others) is wrong to say that the ultimate truth is inherent interdependence. 54 The question that naturally arises at this point is whether Nagarjuna himself equated ‘dependence’ and ‘conditionality’ with ‘mutual dependence’ (or ‘interdependence’) and ‘bi-conditionality’? When modern Madhyamika scholars such as Murti and Streng confuse these terms with one another it may or may not imply that Nagarjuna did too. And even if Nagarjuna really did have interdependence in mind, he may not have meant it in the symmetrical sense. If so, this would be paralleled by Whitehead’s use of the term. As we have seen, Whitehead often makes statements suggesting that every event is dependent on every other event. However, these statements need to be understood in the wider context of his philosophical system, and when so understood it turns out that he means that every event is dependent on every other event in some sense — specifically, an event is dependent on past events as particular actualities and on present and future events as generic potentialities. Hartshorne explains this qualification as follows:

If experience \( a \) is followed by experience \( b \), then \( b \) prehends and depends upon \( a \), but \( a \) does not prehend or depend upon \( b \). However, it is of the essence of \( a \) that it will be prehended by later experiences, some experiences or other. ... [Hence] the class of ‘subsequentprehenders of \( a \)’ cannot remain empty; though it is nothing to \( a \) just what members of the class actually occur. By contrast, \( b \) required not merely some predecessors or other as data for its prehensions, but it also required the very prior experiences which actually took place, including \( a \). If we abstract from this distinction between particular and generic

51 Nolan Pliny Jacobson, The Heart of Buddhist Philosophy (Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois Univ. Press, 1988), 77. As Hartshorne couples his critique of Nagarjuna with that of Bradley, it is interesting to note that Bradley can also be interpreted as being aware of an asymmetry beyond the symmetrical relations he deconstructs; however, he does not see it in terms of relation, but as an asymmetrical conditionality. See Bradley, Appearance and Reality, part 2; and F. H. Bradley, Writings on Logic and Metaphysics, J. W. Allard and G. Stock, eds. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), 79.

52 See Nagarjuna, Rajaparikatha-ratnamala, 88.

53 Garfield, Fundamental Wisdom, 299.

54 C. W. Huntington, Jr., The Emptiness of Emptiness: An Introduction to Early Indian Madhyamika (Honolulu: Univ. of Hawaii Press, 1989), 40.
requirement, then there is a partial symmetry even in Whitehead's view, so that the disagreement with Buddhism, so far as there is such, is partial only.\textsuperscript{35}

This two-way, yet asymmetrical dependence – let us call it ‘asymmetrical interdependence’ – follows from Hartshorne's logic of ultimate contrasts (which was discussed in chapter three). There is was stated that an \( r \)-term depends upon its particular contextual \( a \)-correlates, whereas an \( a \)-term depends upon only a class of \( r \)-correlates, but not the actual \( r \)-correlate that contingently arises. This is the same as the asymmetrical bi-conditionality inherent in a conditional in the sense that \( p \) is the sufficient condition of \( q \) and \( q \) is the necessary condition of \( p \). For example, the oak tree (\( p \) or \( r \)-term) depends on a particular acorn (\( q \) or \( a \)-term) as its necessary condition, while the acorn depends only on the class of possible oak trees that can arise from it as sufficient condition, but not on the actual oak tree that does (contingently) arise.\textsuperscript{36} Perhaps this is the real meaning of \textit{pratītya-samutpāda} as conditional arising. If so, it is fully compatible with the idea of asymmetrical interdependence and thus with process thought. It is up to Madhyamika scholars to determine whether there really is any compatibility here. To begin with, they would have to acknowledge that there is an enormous difference between ‘dependence’ and ‘interdependence’. There seems to be no such awareness in Murti, Streng, Huntington, and other Madhyamika scholars whose works I have read. Take Huntington, who says that for the Madhyamika there is a ‘reciprocal dependence’ between pairs of oppositional concepts, and adds that it is clear that the relationship between concept and percept is in some important sense reciprocal.\textsuperscript{37} There is nothing in these statements that contradicts the process principle of asymmetrical interdependence, but of course it depends on what Huntington means by ‘in some important sense’ – in the asymmetrical sense? He goes on to say that the ‘Madhyamika philosopher ... would maintain that the existence of any actual wheel is dependent on the concept “wheel.”’\textsuperscript{38} Unfortunately, Huntington does not say whether or not the concept ‘wheel’ is dependent on a particular wheel or only on the

\textsuperscript{35} Hartshorne, 'Whitehead's Differences', 407–8.

\textsuperscript{36} The very independence of the totality of entities is the dependence of their class on them; and the very independence of the class from an individual member entity is the dependence of that entity on its class. Hence, the interdependence is a higher level abstraction from the one-way asymmetrical relation of dependence/independence.

\textsuperscript{37} Huntington, \textit{Emptiness of Emptiness}, 49–50.

\textsuperscript{38} Ibid.
class of actual wheels. But he does quote Candrakirti saying that 'a house is
designated as dependent on its beams ... and a forest is similarly designated as
dependent on trees'.\textsuperscript{59} The problem here is that it is not specified whether the house
and forest are dependent on each of their constituent beams and trees individually or
taken together. This needs to be clarified. It is important to know whether the
'inherently interdependent nature' of things – which Candrakirti believes to be the
ultimate truth – is symmetrical or asymmetrical. For a process philosopher this would
be the difference between setting up either the closed coincidence of opposites or the
open process of events as the ultimate truth. For a purely symmetrical
interdependence is logically indistinguishable from the equivalence of bi-
conditionality, which is the logical form of the tautology (although in this case it
becomes a contradiction because two contradictory terms are being equated).

Huntington also uses Rorty's term 'intersubjectivity' as another word for
'interdependence' and as the English equivalent of samvriti, which is usually
translated as 'conventional'. But the problem here is that once we abandon the term
'objectivity', the terms 'subjectivity' and 'intersubjectivity' lose their meaning, for
all concepts depend on contrasting concepts to establish their meaning. A truly
'middle way' approach would be to preserve both subjectivity and objectivity by way
of the principle of asymmetrical interdependence: a subject is dependent on an
independent object even though the object is dependent on the class of subjects (that
is, the object is immanent to the intersubjective nexus).\textsuperscript{60} Ordinary (symmetrical)
interdependence between subject and object will not suffice as this results in the
contradictory identity of object and subject, which corresponds to the third lemma. I
believe it makes more sense to interpret samvriti as the immanence or embeddedness
(or 'inscription' to use Derrida's term) of objectivity within intersubjectivity, rather
than as mere intersubjectivity alone.

\textsuperscript{59} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{60} Note, by 'independent object', I do not mean transcendent – as explained in chapter three, objects
are independent of any particular subject, but dependent on (and thus immanent to) the class of
subjects from which they are abstractions.
Dependent Origination

Pratitya-samutpada, usually translated as ‘dependent origination’, ‘co-dependent arising’, ‘interdependent arising’, etc., is usually interpreted as meaning that everything is dependent on everything else, thus implying symmetrical interdependence. For example, G. M. Nagao says that ‘[i]nterdependent co-origination does not simply signify a causal chain of movement from a cause to an effect’, rather it ‘is a doctrine of mutual dependence and mutual cooperation’, whereby ‘everything is relative to every other thing’. However, Hartshorne interprets it asymmetrically as the origination of events in dependence on past events. This would make it compatible with the above defined principle of asymmetrical interdependence. In order to determine which interpretation is more likely, we will have to investigate the Buddhist doctrine of pratitya-samutpada in detail. A classic statement of the doctrine is as follows:

This being, that becomes; by the arising of this, that arises, namely:
Conditioned by ignorance, activities, conditioned by activities, consciousness;
conditioned by consciousness, mind and body; conditioned by mind and body,
the six sense-spheres; conditioned by the six sense-spheres, contact;
conditioned by contact, feeling; conditioned by feeling, craving; conditioned
by craving, grasping; conditioned by grasping, becoming; conditioned by
becoming, birth, conditioned by birth, old age and death, grief, lamentation,
suffering, sorrow and despair come into being. Thus is the arising of this mass
of Ill.

This is known as the twelve-spoked wheel of samsara. The passage goes on to reveal the solution as the cessation of ignorance leading to the cessation of each stage in the chain and culminating in the cessation of suffering. According to David Loy, the first


62 Hartshorne, ‘Whitehead’s Differences’, 407; Hartshorne, ‘“Emptiness” and Fullness’, 412. Cf. John B. Cobb, Jr., ‘Can a Christian Be a Buddhist, Too?’, Japanese Religions 10 (1978): 1–20, where dependent origination is likened to Whitehead’s notion of ‘concrescence’, his name for an actual occasion’s process of self-creation through its creative synthesis of past occasions. Also, see Nancy Frankenberry, Religion and Radical Empiricism (Albany, New York: State Univ. of New York Press, 1987), 166, where it is argued that since concrescence embodies the two basic principles of process philosophy – relativity and process, which correspond to pratitya and samutpada – it seems natural for the process philosopher to interpret dependent origination as concrescence.

two links in the chain — ignorance and activities — are causes from the past affecting the present, the next seven — consciousness, mind and body, six senses, contact, craving, and grasping — are causes and effects operating in the present; and the last three — becoming, birth, and old age, death, suffering — are future effects of present causes.\textsuperscript{64} However, ‘present’ only refers to the present life, ‘past’ to the past life, and ‘future’ to a future rebirth; so there is nothing in this chain indicating anything other than asymmetrical dependence of subsequent upon antecedent.

The twelve stages of dependent origination are often abbreviated and universalized into the formula:

\textbf{If this is, that comes to be; from the arising of this, that arises; if this is not, that does not come to be; from the stopping of this, that is stopped.}\textsuperscript{65}

This is often interpreted as bi-conditionality or equivalence (‘A iff B’) as opposed to conditionality (‘if A then B’), because otherwise it would be an example of the fallacy of affirming the consequent. But this is an incorrect interpretation. ‘If this is, then that comes to be’ does not take the logical form of ‘if this, then that’, but rather the logical form of ‘if that, then this’. The ‘this’ is after all a condition of the ‘that’ and a condition is a necessary, not a sufficient, condition, which takes the ‘B’ position in ‘If A, then B’. Hence, when it is further asserted that ‘if this is not, that does not come to be’ it is in keeping with the form of the Modus Tollens (If A, then B; no B, therefore no A). So I conclude that there is no difference between the doctrine of dependent origination as stated in the Pali canon and the process principle of asymmetrical interdependence (which, as shown above, also conforms to the if/then logic). The confusion between bi-conditional and conditional interpretations of dependent origination can be cleared up if we recognize that we can have both, provided that we understand symmetrical bi-conditionality as derivative from asymmetrical conditionality. This makes it possible to interpret dependent origination as asymmetrical interdependence — an idea that combines both the asymmetrical bias of process philosophy and the symmetrical bias of Buddhism into a complementary theory of dependent origination. In this way, we are able to interpret the Madhyamika version of dependent origination — that opposites mutually


implicate one another — as symmetrical interdependence when applied to opposites at the level of abstract \(a\)-terms (such as being and nonbeing) and as asymmetrical interdependence when applied to the ultimate contrast between \(a\)-terms and \(r\)-terms (such as being/nonbeing and becoming).^{66}

**Mutual Causality and Systems Theory**

The recent popularity of general systems theory has led some Buddhist scholars to use some of its themes to support the mutual dependence interpretation of dependent origination. Joanna Macy, in her work on Buddhism and general systems theory,^{67} argues that the Buddhist doctrine of dependent origination is scientifically verified by the ‘nonlinear’ (mutual) causality discovered by systems theorists such as Ervin Laszlo and Ludwig von Bertalanffy. Macy also believes that systems theory falsifies the predominantly Western paradigm of ‘linear’ or ‘unidirectional’ causality, in which category she includes the process thought of Whitehead and Hartshorne (e.g., asymmetrical relations). However, as Griffin has shown in his review of her book, things are not as simple as this. He points out that there are ‘at least six distinguishable meanings’ of the opposition between mutual (or nonlinear) causality and linear causality, and that ‘Macy never points out this fact, and shifts without warning from one meaning to another’, and never addresses the issue of whether ‘present events exert causal efficacy upon the past’.^{68} I shall now examine these six distinctions in turn. The first three are perfectly compatible with process thought. They are: (1) solely top-down causality (linear) versus top-down, bottom-up, and sideways causalities (nonlinear);^{69} (2) single, isolable cause (linear) versus multiple

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^{69} It should be noted that the ‘sideways’ causation that results from a combination of downward and upward types of causation (both of which are hierarchical) is asymmetrical because although the whole affects all of the parts and all parts together affect the whole, no individual part on its own
causality (nonlinear); (3) deterministic, necessary and sufficient condition (linear) versus necessary condition plus self-creativity (nonlinear). The next two can be compatible with process thought, but it depends on how they are interpreted. (4) Action of cause upon effect (linear) versus interaction between cause and effect (nonlinear). This raises the questions of whether the causality is between spatially or temporally separated momentary events and enduring individuals (which latter are invariant abstractions). However, Macy’s examples are limited to mutual causation between temporally separated enduring objects. Furthermore, she does not seem to believe in the possibility of interaction between momentary events other than the linear influence of past on present.\(^{70}\) Hence the disagreement with process thought seems to be merely verbal. (5) One-way action of world on perceivers (linear) versus mutual interaction of world and perceiver (nonlinear). If this form of nonlinearity is understood as merely the self-creative reaction of the percept-as-effect to the world-as-cause, then there is also no problem. This appears to be Macy’s intention provided we use her above-mentioned rejection of backward-causation as hermeneutical context for understanding her statement that the ‘past does not mold or predestine actions, because it functions in mutual interaction with the present’.\(^{71}\) The sixth distinction between linearity and nonlinearity that Macy uses it the most difficult to square with process thought: (6) asymmetrical internal-external relations (linear) versus symmetrical internal relations (nonlinear). Macy derives this view from Laszlo, who uses it to contrast his own position with Whitehead’s idea that eternal objects influence actual occasions unidirectionally, and Hartshorne’s less extreme view of the asymmetrical interdependence of \(r\)-terms and \(a\)-terms. But, asks Griffin, since the number two, say, is an eternal object or \(a\)-term, ‘do Laszlo and Macy really want to insist that the number two is affected by my thinking it?’\(^{72}\) However, both Macy and Laszlo believe that there are several invariances, and that interdependence is one of them. Now, since these invariances are understood as independent laws that are nevertheless immanent in all things, they are indistinguishable from the enduring objects and \(a\)-terms of process thought. (Hence, these invariances can also be called

\(^{70}\) See Macy, Mutual Causality, xii, 124, 147.

\(^{71}\) Ibid., 174.

\(^{72}\) Griffin, Review, 246.
‘immanent transcendentals’.) So, again, there appears to be no real conflict here with the asymmetry-in-interdependence of process thought that is other than purely semantic.

This asymmetry-in-interdependence is none other than the hierarchy-in-network that is a major theme in systems theory, such as in Arthur Koestler’s theory of holons and holarchies — a theme whose importance Macy largely ignores (especially the asymmetrical nature of a holarchy). But one of the main problems with general systems theory — a problem it shares with all the sciences — is that it abstracts away from time and spatializes all relations, with the consequence that it forgets that there is a time delay between causes and effects due to the speed of light limit.\(^7\) Even if this delay is not ultimate, as quantum nonlocality seems to indicate, it still applies to the macro-phenomena that systems theory limits itself to. However, if concrete reality is basically made up of relational processes that become in an all-or-nothing manner and are yet temporally atomic then — as Whitehead and Hartshorne argue — these actual occasions cannot influence one another until they have fully arisen, which effectively rules out the possibility of mutual simultaneous influences. A related problem is that the conclusions derived from the study of large-scale interactions between enduring aggregations of events are erroneously projected onto events themselves as the laws that determine their interactions. For example, in his essay ‘Mutual Causality in General Systems’, Magoroh Maruyama bases his argument for mutual causality solely upon feedback-loop interactions between and within companies, between population, disease, sanitation, etc.; and between organisms and species in natural selection.\(^7\) But all of these interactions are between enduring aggregates of events and depend on time-delays, which tell us nothing about the nature of interactions between the events themselves. The fact that systems theory abstracts away from time and events means that it is a subtle form of reductionism, despite its claims to be holistic in approach.

To what extent is the process interpretation of dependent origination as asymmetrical interdependence compatible with the Madhyamika interpretation? It is

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\(^7\) As noted earlier, the theory of relativity, while affirming causal succession and the difference between past and future, states that there can be no interaction between contemporaries or spatially-separated events due to the speed of light limit; hence, there can be no asymmetrical interdependence between contemporary events.

my contention that there is at least a negative compatibility in the sense that the
notion of symmetrical interdependence entails an independent self-nature (svabhava)
that is unacceptable to Madhyamika. For to say that the relation aRb is identical to
the relation bRa – as the notion of symmetrical interdependence implies – is to say
that there is an external and independent metron that makes it possible for us to
establish this identity. Furthermore, this very identity of opposing terms (whether
conceptual contraries or not) is a violation of the law of identity that says that A is A
and not non-A. Hence, it is an absurd notion that is undermined by consequential
analysis. However, the question remains as to whether the Madhyamika would agree
with the positive compatibility between asymmetrical interdependence and their
version of dependent origination. This question will be returned to in subsequent
chapters.

Causes and Conditions

In discussing the concept of causality, we must be especially careful as there are at
least a dozen different meanings of the term in the history of ideas.\textsuperscript{75} In his critique
of causation, Nagarjuna is specifically concerned with the type of causation known
as hetu, which usually means a general, root, or primary cause. Technically speaking,
a hetu is a necessary and sufficient cause that acts as a ‘power’ that deterministically
produces an effect. It is the ontological equivalent of the deductive conclusion that
follows logically from its premises (i.e., the syllogism). As we have seen, however,
Nagarjuna does not critique the ‘cause’ known as a pratayaya, which is really a
necessary but not sufficient condition, or sine qua non. The logical analogue of this
is conditionality – for example, ‘if this (effect) then that (cause)’. The pratayayas are
the conditions upon which events arise dependently, and can be classified into four
types: primary causal condition, supporting condition, contiguous condition, and
dominant condition. For convenience, I will refer to hetu as ‘cause’ and pratayaya as
‘condition’ from now on.

Nagarjuna’s denial of causality and his acceptance of conditionality,\textsuperscript{76} in
conjunction with his assertion that if the effect already preexisted in the combination

\textsuperscript{75} E.g., in W. L. Reese, Dictionary of Philosophy and Religion: Eastern and Western Thought (New
Jersey: Humanities Press, 1980), 84, sixteen different meanings are identified.

\textsuperscript{76} Nagarjuna, MK, 1.1–2.
of its conditions then it should be grasped in the combination, is similar to the process concept of ‘creative synthesis’.77 Indeed, Garfield, in his commentary on MK 1.3 — ‘The essence of entities is not present in the conditions’ — says that, ‘[t]o borrow a Kantian turn of phrase, phenomena are not analytically contained in their conditions; rather, a synthesis is required out of which a phenomenon not antecedently existent comes to be’.78 Garfield argues that Nagarjuna rejects causality in the ontological sense of a hidden ‘occult’ connection between phenomena of the kind that David Hume argues against. The same point is made by C.W. Huntington,79 who likens the Madhyamika position on causality to that of William James in the following quote:

The statement of fact is that the relations between things, conjunctive as well as disjunctive, are just as much matters of direct particular experience, neither more so nor less so, than the things themselves. The generalized conclusion is that therefore the parts of experience hold together from next to next by relations that are themselves parts of experience. The directly apprehended universe needs, in short, no extraneous trans-empirical connective support, but possesses in its own right a concatenated or continuous structure.80

This is consonant with Whitehead’s theory that all experience is experience of (previous) experiences, which are themselves experiences of experiences (he uses the more technical phrase ‘prehension of prehension’); and with Hartshorne’s theory that ‘subjects contain their own relations to objects, [sic] their refelings of the latter’s feelings. Subjects encompass objects. No more ultimate ground is needed’.81

In light of the above discussion I think that Griffin’s interpretation of Nagarjuna’s tetralemma on causation as being incompatible with process is mistaken. As noted earlier, he thinks that the third lemma — both self-cause and other-cause — is equivalent to the process position. But, as Buddhologists have shown, by self-cause, Nagarjuna means the deterministic Samkhya position that the effect already pre-exists in the cause (satkarya); and by other-cause, he means causation from external

77 Ibid., 20.3.

78 Garfield, Fundamental Wisdom, 110–11.

79 Huntington, Emptiness of Emptiness, 44.


self-causes (asatkarya) such as a creator being (isvara), destiny, time, nature, karma, etc. Hence, the conjunction of these two (satkaryasatkarya) is not the process position, but the idea (common to the Nyaya and the Vaisesika, and opposed to the Samkhya) that the effect pre-existed in the cause materially but not instrumentally.\(^\text{82}\)

However, the process position is not based on causality, but on conditionality (the existence of causes in effects, which Nagarjuna accepts).\(^\text{83}\) Griffin mistakes the process notion of self-determination with self-causation. But self-determination is part of the meaning of conditional determination properly understood. For conditionality is both other-determination as necessary condition and self-determination as sufficient condition. (So the effect only pre-exists in the cause as a vague potentiality — this is what is meant by saying that the cause is a necessary but not sufficient condition for the arising of the effect.)\(^\text{84}\) Thus, self-determination is not independence (svabhava), but part of the meaning of dependence — not dependence in the sense of parabhava, but in the sense of conditionality (pratyaya).\(^\text{85}\) We could call this ‘creative dependence’, which is equivalent to ‘dependent arising’.

Hartshorne is correct in his observation that Nagarjuna ‘showed the absurdities which result’ from the notion of causality as ‘necessary and sufficient condition’;\(^\text{86}\) a definition which Heidegger believes to be a characteristic feature of the Western metaphysics of ontotheology from Plato to Nietzsche — but I believe Hartshorne was incorrect in thinking that Nagarjuna saw no alternative, for conditionality (pratyaya)

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\(^{83}\) For evidence that Nagarjuna equated conditionality with the existence of causes in effects, see Kalupahana, Mulasadhyamakakarasika, 49, 69, 85.

\(^{84}\) Note that this partial pre-existence of the effect in the cause cannot be categorized in terms of the third lemma, or any other lemma, for the issue is not causation but conditionality. Hence Nagarjuna’s arguments (that pre-existence makes the effect happen twice and that non-pre-existence makes any event the effect of any cause) are irrelevant here, as even he would admit.

\(^{85}\) As Hartshorne (Creative Synthesis, 294) observes: ‘The real issue is within the causal idea, not between it and its negation.’ Parabhava is an absolute dependence on something absolutely independent (svabhava); but pratyaya is a relative dependence on something that is relatively independent (with respect to subsequent events) and relatively dependent (with respect to antecedent events). It is thus also a relative independence of subsequent events. Thus, it is like the post-structuralist notion of ‘simulacrum’, which is a copy without an original (i.e., a copy of a copy of a copy of ...).

\(^{86}\) Ibid., 52; Charles Hartshorne, The Zero Fallacy and Other Essays in Neoclassical Philosophy, ed. Mohammad Valady (Chicago: Open Court, 1997), 195. See the discussion on this issue in chapter three.
was in fact his alternative (at least as a conventional truth – an important qualification that will be discussed more fully later; but at least it’s a truth of some kind, as opposed to the untruth of causality). This interpretation is supported by Kalupahana, Garfield, and Candrakirti.87

Some Further Issues

Internal and External Relations. As we have seen, one of Hartshorne’s main critiques of Nagarjuna is that he, like Bradley, correctly argues against the possibility of two-way internal relations and two-way external relations, but is unaware of the asymmetrical relation that is internal in one direction and external in the other.88 Rather than being a ‘magician’s trick’ or ‘sleight of hand’, as Robinson argues, Nagarjuna’s (and Bradley’s) argument that there can be no relation between two identical terms (for there is no need to relate something to itself) nor between two different terms (for any relating of two different things immediately makes them non-different). But does Nagarjuna overlook the asymmetrical case in which one term is internally related to a second term that is externally related to the first? In this case there can be a relation, for identity and difference both exist but function in one direction only – consider a Russian doll: from the perspective of the included doll, the including doll is outside, but from the perspective of the including doll, the included doll is not outside. At first sight it would seem that Nagarjuna and other Madhyamika philosophers would reject the possibility of such an asymmetrical relation because all ‘containment’ relations can be reduced to ‘difference’ or ‘otherness’. This is the argument of Candrakirti, for example, when he analyzes the relation between the mind-body and the person.90 This is because the Madhyamika allegedly reduce all complexes and wholes to simples and parts; for which reason the

87 Kalupahana, Mulamadhyamakakarika, 28, 32, 116; Garfield, Fundamental Wisdom, 103–4, 222, 246–7; Candrakirti, Prasannapada, 55, in Mervyn Sprung, trans., Lucid Exposition of the Middle Way: The Essential Chapters from the Prasannapada of Candrakirti (Boulder: Prajna Press, 1979), 49.


90 Candrakirti, Madhyamakavatara, 6.142, in Fenner, Ontology, 261.
Madhyamika method is called ‘consequential analysis’ as opposed to ‘creative
synthesis’. If this were really the Madhyamika position though, it would be a one-
sidedness that is easily refuted by the twin-argument that (a) it performs a category
mistake by treating an internal relation (irreducible complexity) as if it were an
external relation (physical containment), and (b) it denies our immediate experience
as a synthesis of many phenomena united in one mental event (internal relatedness).
But it must not be forgotten that Madhyamika is not analytic in the ordinary sense of
the word, for unlike ordinary analysis or reduction, which results in the ‘finding’ of
simple parts, the Madhyamika ‘analysis’ finds nothing – at least nothing that could
exist independently (svabhava). The Madhyamika would not agree with Hume’s
reductionist notion that what is distinguishable in the mind is separable in reality.
What is found by Madhyamika ‘analysis’ is that every event is nothing without its
conditioning past, that is, that it comes along with its past – or, every event contains
its past. So, rather than favor simplicity over complexity, Madhyamika is a middle
path that is neither analytic nor synthetic. But then neither is process philosophy
analytic or synthetic in the ordinary sense of these words, for there really are no
irreducible wholes or irreducible parts in the process universe; rather, every event is
inclusive of antecedent events and included in subsequent events. Hence, ‘part’ and
‘whole’ only have a relative meaning. The process synthesis is a creative synthesis
which denies that the resultant synthesis pre-exists in the complex of conditions (as
both Hartshorne and Nagarjuna affirm).\(^1\) (As mentioned above, Garfield is
essentially in agreement with this notion of creative synthesis, which he likens to
Kantian synthetic judgments.) Therefore, I conclude that the forced choice between
relations of identity and relations of difference (that is, internal relations and external
relations) is only true if we confine ourselves to inherent existence (svabhava) – a
point recently made by the Geluk scholar Elizabeth Napper.\(^2\)

**Ultimate Svabhava.** The Madhyamika critique of any kind of independent
self-nature in things and selves is very much compatible with the process thinker’s
critique of philosophies of being and substance (which is usually defined as that
which requires nothing other than itself for its existence). For example, Whitehead

\(^1\) E.g., see Charles Hartshorne et al., ‘Symposium: Creativity as a Philosophical Category’, *Journal of

\(^2\) Elizabeth Napper, *Dependent-Arising and Emptiness: A Tibetan Buddhist Interpretation of
Madhyamika Philosophy Emphasizing the Compatibility of Emptiness and Conventional Phenomena*
argues that 'there is no self-contained abstraction' and no such thing as 'independent existence', for all is interwoven together.93 Any beings, substances, or essences that do exist are merely relatively permanent abstractions from becomings, processes, and events.94 However, process thinkers would become alarmed with certain Madhyamika statements that appear to re-introduce svabhava at the level of ultimate truth. (Which would sound to their ears very much like Heidegger's ontological difference between beings and Being-itself.) The Madhyamika often argue for the unreality of phenomena on the grounds that they are impermanent, which seems to imply that they equate reality with permanence. Candrakirti argues that nothing has self-nature other than the dharmata or 'quintessential nature' of things; but adds that '[s]elf-existence in this sense ... is non-self-existence in the ordinary sense'.95 And according to Mervyn Sprung, 'Only the real (tattva) which is paramarthasatya can be said to be svabhava, i.e. real in its own right. And yet paramartha has been expressly declared not to be real in the way in which named-things are wrongly taken to be real in the everyday, which is to say the svabhavic way'.96 It appears that the term 'svabhava' is being used, when referring to ultimate truth, in a way similar to the Aristotelian and Thomistic doctrines of analogy (which use categories as neither univocal nor equivocal signifiers of the trans-categorial). More recently Huntington has expressed a similar interpretation (of Candrakirti) when he writes of the 'intrinsic nature of all things, which is their "suchness" (tathata) or 'the inherently interdependent nature' of things.97 Whether the interpretation is the neo-Kantian 'hyper-absolutism' (of Murti and Sprung) or the post-Wittgensteinian 'inter-absolutism' (of Huntington and others), the common theme is the denial of phenomenal absolutes combined with the affirmation of an Absolute (in some


94 See Bhaswati Bhattacharyya (Chakrabarti), 'The Concept of Existence and Nagarjuna's Sunyata', *Journal of Indian Philosophy* 7 (1979): 341, where it is argued that the Madhyamika critique of svabhava misses the point as there can be non-eternal essences that are only relatively impermanent. But Bhattacharyya misunderstands the Madhyamika position here, which is only concerned with deconstructing the belief in concreta absolute essences (the fallacy of misplaced concreteness). The relatively impermanent 'essences' are compatible with Madhyamika because they are neither absolute beings nor absolute nonbeings.


analogous sense) at the level of ultimate truth. The process critique of Madhyamika absolutism is based on the assumption that those who have interpreted the Madhyamika in this way – whether neo-Kantian or post-Wittgensteinian – represent the correct reading of Madhyamika texts. But it is more likely the case, as David Loy, Robert Magliola, and others argue, that the Madhyamika steer a middle course between the two kinds of absolutism (namely the reification of the ‘beyond’ and the reification of interdependence), criticizing all forms of self-nature, even the ‘emptiness of emptiness’.

Science. As process thought is so closely allied to science – especially the ‘new physics’, which greatly influenced Whitehead – process thinkers cannot but question the apparent anti-scientific implications of the Madhyamika repudiation of all views and theories. Although writers such as Victor Mansfield argues for the compatibility of the new physics and Madhyamika, they do not deal with the basic issue: if all theories are ultimately absurd, what status does science have? Furthermore, could science have arisen in the presence of such a belief? It is true that for the Madhyamika, the ultimate absurdity of theories is compatible with their conventional validity. Nevertheless, the Madhyamika still have to explain how there can be degrees of conventional validity so as to make possible the gradual approximation to truth (or at least movement away from error, as Thomas Kuhn would prefer). They also have to spell out how there can be a difference of kind between views that affirm a self-nature (conventional error) and those that do not (conventional truth), in other words, between dogmatic views and scientific theories. If this could be done, it would go a long way toward demonstrating the compatibility of Madhyamika with science-based philosophies like process thought. (An interesting consequence is that the Madhyamika would have to accept the current scientific consensus that rules out the possibility of symmetrical

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97 Huntington, Emptiness of Emptiness, 40.

98 See Loy, ‘How Not To Criticize Nagarjuna’, 441; Tuck, Comparative Philosophy, 114.


100 I am thinking here of the exclusive disjunction between complete-and-incoherent and incomplete-and-coherent as implied by Gödel’s theorem. Just as the discovery of the incurably incomplete nature of mathematics did not result in its abandonment by mathematicians, so too the ultimate absurdity of science-based philosophies should not lead to their abandonment. Of course, the difference between conventional error and conventional truth is not one of kind, but of degree, just as the difference between science and non-science, is, as Rorty says, also one of degree (from complete consensus at the scientific end to complete ‘dissensus’ at the non-scientific end).
interdependence, and re-interpret dependent origination – at least in the conventional sense – accordingly.)

**Subject and Object.** As John Cobb argues, the Madhyamika analysis of subject and object makes perfect sense to a process philosopher. For the very fact that an experience is an experience of other experiences means that the concepts ‘subject’ and ‘object’ are not static ideas that ‘imply some kind of separate existence for objects and subjects’; rather, what we have ‘are objects becoming subjects which become objects constituting new subjects’. ‘Hence it is as true to say that there are nothing but objects as that there is nothing but the subject. It is as true to say that there are no objects as it is to say that there is no subject’. This is because the terms ‘subject’ and ‘object’ are relative, so that what is a subject from one point of view is an object from another and vice versa. Nevertheless, even though these terms, as concepts, are relative to one another and thus mutually dependent, the process philosopher would maintain that there is an asymmetry inherent in this interdependence, as is the case with any α- and β-term interrelation.

**Mind and Body.** For the process philosopher, the body is understood as an objective or external perspective and abstraction from a society of events, each of which has a mental aspect. Hence, the mind-body relation is really a mind-minds relation, which is a one-many relation – an important point to keep in mind. This is further complicated by the fact that all events – the events that make up the ‘mind’ and those that make up the body – do not endure, but perish and are succeeded by other events that are internally related to those past events. Because of the cumulative nature of this succession, it can be said that every event in the mind-body complex contains every other event, and thus in a sense is the mind-body. However, for most events this containment is partial and unconscious; it is only in the events that make up what is ordinarily called the ‘mind’ of the mind-body that there is any real conscious identification with most events in the mind-body. Hence, it is only in these mental events that there arises any sense of individuality and unity between mind and body. It is for this reason that the process philosopher would ascribe personality to the body-in-mind relation. Although there is much in the above

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101 The Dalai Lama has stated that Buddhism should change its doctrines if they are found to be scientifically unsound; but he has also refused to let go of the belief that there is an absolute space beyond relative space. See Tenzin Gyatso (14th Dalai Lama), *The Bodhgaya Interviews*, ed. Jose Ignacio Cabezon (Ithaca, New York: Snow Lion Publications, 1988), 17-20.

analysis that would be agreeable to the Madhyamika (especially the Svatantrika) — see for example Nagarjuna's statement that mind is that which wills and matter is the willed, and Candrakirti’s reference to the mind as creative and the body as non-creative — it becomes immediately obvious that they (especially the Prasangika) would reject the process understanding of personality. As Candrakirti argues, the person cannot be identified with the mind-body (nor any part thereof) nor can it be identified with anything outside of the mind-body; and furthermore, as noted earlier, he reduces the notion of 'containment' to an external relation (so that, for example, the containment of body in mind really becomes the non-identity of mind and body). As I have already discussed this issue above, I will only reiterate here that it is a fallacy to reduce complexity to simplicity and that a more consistent Madhyamika approach would be to relativize both complexity and simplicity (including analysis and synthesis). As a final point, it should be noted that personal unity in process philosophy is asymmetrical in that the person-now can only identify with its past, but not with its future, for it is only internally related to the past. So the Madhyamika dialectic of neither/nor is applicable here as there is neither a unified self nor a non-unified self in the absolute sense.

Bi-Negation. A number of issues can be raised concerning bi-negation, e.g., the nature of the relation of the Madhyamika bi-negation to others who use the bi-negation, such as negative theology, Vedanta, Hegel, etc.; and related issues such as the status of the laws of excluded middle, non-contradiction, and identity; types of negation; reductio-type arguments, etc. Process philosophers are highly critical of any kind of absolutism that establishes itself by way of a via negativa which ascribes ultimate reality to something beyond phenomena and change. The Madhyamika need

103 Nagarjuna, MK, 17.3, in Streng, Emptiness, 201: 'Thus, that action which is called "volition": that is considered [by tradition] as mental; / But that action which is a result of having willed: that is considered [by tradition] as physical or verbal.' Note: Streng adds 'by tradition', which means 'conventionally'.

104 Candrakirti, Madhyamakavatara, 6.90, in Fenner, Ontology, 247: 'There is, to be sure, a physical reality (rupa), but unlike the mind [it is not a principal factor in the construction of the life-world] for it does not have the creative capacity [that the mind has]. Thus, while denying that there is any other creator than the mind, we do not reject [the existence of] a physical reality.'

105 See Mark Siderits, 'Thinking on Empty: Madhyamika Anti-Realism and Canons of Rationality', in S. Biderman and B. Scharfstein, eds., Rationality in Question: On Eastern and Western Views of Rationality (New York: E. J. Brill, 1989), 241–2, where the point is made that the Svatantrika reject the Prasangika seven-section analysis of self, preferring instead the theory that the self is the mind (i.e., the mental dharmas-series) of the mind-body.

to show how their bi-negation differs from that of the negative theologians, the Advaita Vedantins, Hegel, and other absolutists. Madhyamika scholars have pointed out that their bi-negation does not set up an absolute by calling it a ‘non-affirming negation’, an ‘illocutionary negation’, a ‘reductio ad absurdum-like negation’, etc.\textsuperscript{107} In this way they avoid committing the fallacy of the excluded middle or moving beyond ordinary logic altogether (whether into an alternative logic or into the illogical). However, the process philosopher would respond by pointing out that the principle of excluded middle is only applicable to definite actualities, not to indefinite potentials, and thus it is possible to speak of potentials as being ‘neither p nor non-p’ (this is, for example, the correct way of speaking about future contingents, as Aristotle well understood). Similarly, process philosophers would point out that the affirmation of two contrary determinations of an entity (or two contrary predications of a subject) is not necessarily a violation of the principle of non-contradiction, provided that they are affirmed in two different senses. This is indeed perfectly orthodox, and was first stated by Aristotle: ‘the same attribute cannot at the same time belong and not belong to the same subject and in the same respect’.\textsuperscript{108} Unfortunately, I have not found any awareness of this principle on the part of any Madhyamika scholar.\textsuperscript{109} Also, we must be careful in saying that the denial of an enduring self or personal identity on the part of both process philosophers and Buddhists implies a denial of the law of identity, for it is in fact the notion of a personal identity that endures, despite undergoing change through time, which violates this law as it is a contradiction to say, for example, that John-sick-today is the same concrete person as John-healthy-yesterday (which is not to deny that the abstraction ‘John’ remains an invariant feature of this succession of concrete John-events). In light of this discussion of the laws of thought, the question arises whether the Madhyamika bi-negation opens up an insight into reality which process philosophers affirm as process-relational?

Extra-Linguistic Reality? Some recent Madhyamika scholars interpret the Madhyamika texts to be implying that there is no extra-linguistic reality à la

\textsuperscript{107} The problem with the \textit{reductio}, however, is that it originates from Euclidean geometry and is thus not applicable to alternative geometries.

Wittgenstein. Huntington, for example, uses Richard Rorty's idea that reality is 'social all the way down' and that there is no reality beyond intersubjectivity. Such a postmodern idealism would be criticized by process philosophers as being anthropocentric, but they would accept a modified form that applies to all events, human and non-human, namely that there is no extra-symbolic reality — providing that symbols are understood as events that respond to one another creatively (as Peirce believed). The philosophy of language needs to be seen as a subset of the philosophy of expression; the linguistic, as a subset of the intersubjective.\footnote{Incidentally, the 'duck-rabbit' figure is not a violation of the principle of non-contradiction, for the two animals can co-exist so long as they are of indefinite form; but as soon as definition is demanded (such as eyes, shading, etc.) the ambiguity collapses into either duck or rabbit, not both.} Of course, not all Madhyamika understand the conventional realm to be limited to human language and would be in agreement with the process view — namely, those (mentioned before) who avoid the extremes of absolutism (the neo-Kantians) and relativism (the post-Wittgensteinians), such as Loy and Magliola.

**No Views or No Bad Views.** Prima facie, process philosophers would disagree with those Madhyamika who say that there are no views whatsoever, and be in agreement with whose who say that there are no bad views, namely those that have a self-nature. Especially if the latter implies that a bad view is independent and self-contained whereas a good view is one that is incomplete and thus open to supplementation. But if incompleteness is a kind of invalidity, process philosophers could agree with the thesis that although conventionally incomplete views are relatively better than complete ones, ultimately all views are invalid. However, the stronger thesis that all views are empty because self-contradictory cannot be upheld because, as Robinson has pointed out, this cannot apply to tautologies such as mathematical truths ('1+1=2', etc.).\footnote{As noted by Judith A. Jones, Introduction to Alfred North Whitehead, *Religion in the Making* (New York: Fordham Univ. Press, 1996), xii, which lists Ernst Cassirer and C. S. Peirce as other representatives of the 'philosophy of expression'. Another would be the post-structuralist, Gilles Deleuze.} There may also be metaphysical truths that take the form of tautologies. One may be the truth that all views are incomplete or dependent on other views. This can be understood as a part of an ordinary view rather than as a meta-view, so it need not be self-contradictory. (It merely requires a
Nagel-like argument that shows that it is possible for a view to consist of the acknowledgement of its own incompleteness.\textsuperscript{112}

**Emptiness or Openness?** It is now agreed that the Hegel-influenced translation of *sunyata* as ‘nothingness’ is incorrect as its negativity implies an extreme position which Madhyamika seek to avoid. Unfortunately, its usage persists in the Kyoto school. Stcherbatsky translates it as ‘relativity’, but this is misleading as it sometimes implies relativism; however, even in the intended sense of the inter-relatedness of things, it is more appropriate within the Hua-yen context rather than Madhyamika. The Geluk translation of *sunyata* as ‘emptiness’ (of self-nature) has been the most popular. However, Herbert Guenther’s and Nancy McCagney’s more literal and sound translation of it as ‘openness’ (as in the openness of space) is interesting from the process perspective as it can be compared to the creative openness toward the future inherent in every event.\textsuperscript{113}

**Postmodern Interpretations.** I have already shown, in chapter four, that there are a number of Western-influenced interpretations of Madhyamika and that the most popular recent ones are the post-Wittgensteinian (by far the most popular in the post-Murtian period), postmodernist (such as Huntington’s Rortyian reading of Candrakirti), and deconstructive (such as Magliola’s Derrida-based reading of Nagarjuna). The Wittgensteinian reading, which only partly follows Wittgenstein’s philosophy, has much in common with the postmodernist reading as both reduce Madhyamika to what I call an ‘inter-absolutism’ or symmetrical interdependence (intersubjectivity). For what would now be obvious reasons, this is not compatible with the process worldview. However, the transcendentalism of the early and later Wittgenstein (absolutist only in its early form) tends to be ignored. Wittgenstein believes that aesthetics, ethics, and religion are not (or not ordinarily) sayable, but showable (or sayable in a non-ordinary way that lives on the borders between discourses, in the case of the later Wittgenstein). Wittgenstein’s later transcendentalism is very similar to the immanent transcendentalism of both process thought and Derrida’s deconstruction. Derrida believes that all logocentric (svabhavic?) views are abstractions inscribed within the inter-text (asymmetry?).

\textsuperscript{112} See Paul T. Sagar, ‘Nagarjuna’s *Paradox*, *American Philosophical Quarterly* 29 (1992): 81–3, who argues that the Madhyamika deconstruction applies to all metaphysical view, not to ordinary propositions, and is thus a three-valued logic.

However, Derrida further believes that this inscriptive grammatology is a conventional creation of a ‘khora’ or open space which can neither be said to exist nor not to exist. If Madhyamika is interpreted as a form of deconstruction, then it is very much compatible with process thought. (See my comments on the compatibility of process thought and deconstruction at the end of chapter three.)

**Conclusion**

As we have seen, the main process critique of Madhyamika has to do with the issue of symmetrical and asymmetrical relations, which is no surprise considering that the asymmetrical nature of all ultimate conceptual contrasts is the central idea of process philosophy without which it would collapse. In the course of the above discussion we have found that both philosophies are in agreement in their rejection of symmetrical relations (whether they be two-way internal relations or two-way external relations), but there is a question over whether the Madhyamika recognized the existence of asymmetrical relations. I have shown that it is likely that they did, but this depends on a particular interpretation of dependent origination and discriminating between causes (hetu) and conditions (pratyaya). I have also shown that it is possible to understand the asymmetry doctrine of process philosophy in terms of what I have called ‘asymmetrical interdependence’, a notion which I believe to be equivalent to the Madhyamika understanding of dependent origination. Most other issues of disagreement between process and Madhyamika philosophies are in some way connected to this issue of asymmetry (especially those concerning internal and external relations, subject and object, mind and body).

In the final analysis, I consider process and Madhyamika philosophies to be generally compatible despite the existence of disagreements of detail and judgment. For ultimately the process metaphysic of asymmetry can be interpreted as the best of all possible systems on the level of conventional truths. Although there may be some validity in the charge that the Madhyamika ‘fails to do justice to the categories of thought we commonly employ in thinking about the phenomenal realm’, I believe

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114 This is my own reading, which differs somewhat from Magliola’s as I believe the latter still adheres to a latent absolutism. For references to Derrida’s discussion of ‘khora’, see the note near the end of chapter four.

the Madhyamika philosophy is compatible with a process-like phenomenology (that is, a metaphysics of phenomena), while agreeing with the Madhyamika belief that 'attempts to develop a metaphysics of the ultimate are doomed'.¹¹⁶ What this means is that within the realm of conventional truths there can exist truths that I have elsewhere called 'immanent transcendentals' (conditioned necessities) – truths that condition all experience even though they arise from experience as the common (abstract) aspect of all experience (and thus unfalsifiable) as objectivity-within-intersubjectivity. (There is no circularity here, provided the immanent transcendental is conceived of in terms of asymmetrical interdependence). I contend that 'asymmetrical interdependence', 'dependent origination', 'creative synthesis', 'emptiness of self-nature' are examples of such transcendental truths.¹¹⁷ But can the process philosopher go that extra step with the Madhyamika philosopher and assert these truths' emptiness from the perspective of ultimate truth? Hence there needs to be give and take on the part of both process and Madhyamika philosophies. To conclude this discussion, I propose that Madhyamika scholars consider whether the Madhyamika dialectical method (which is provisional and situational anyway) takes a different form depending on whether it is analyzing non-ultimate conventional contrasts (which are symmetrically in/dependent), ultimate conventional contrasts (which are asymmetrically interdependent),¹¹⁸ or trans-conventional terms such as emptiness, nirvana, tathagata (which are bi-negated).¹¹⁹

¹¹⁶ Garfield, Fundamental Wisdom, 334.

¹¹⁷ In Ramakrishna Puliganda, 'Pratityasamutpada and Creativity', in R. Puligandla and D. L. Müller, eds., Buddhism and the Emerging World Civilization: Essays in Honor of Nolan Pliny Jacobson (Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois Univ. Press, 1996), 127–8, it is argued that dependent origination is neither empirical nor a priori. True, if a priori means transcendental, but his statements there indicate that it is a priori in the sense of being an immanent transcendental or abstract necessary condition of individual events that is itself conditioned by the totality of events.

¹¹⁸ These first two are similar to Ashok Gangadecan's distinction between restricted (contrariety) and unrestricted (logical complementarity) categorial analysis in Madhyamika. See Ashok K. Gangadecan, 'Formal Ontology and the Dialectical Transformation of Consciousness', Philosophy East and West 29 (1979): 28.

¹¹⁹ In deconstructive terms, the economy, the inscribed, and the 'chora' respectively (all results of deconstruction).
CHAPTER 6

THE MADHYAMIKA CRITIQUE OF PROCESS PHILOSOPHY

The process philosophical critique of Madhyamika given in the previous chapter will now be balanced with a Madhyamika critique of process philosophy. It is unavoidable that there will be some repetition of issues already dealt with in the previous chapter as there is a degree of overlap that arises whenever two philosophies engage in dialogue. However, I will try to keep such repetition to a minimum and will thus largely omit discussion of two issues that have already been discussed – namely, those concerned with symmetry/asymmetry and with internal/external relations. These issues have been adequately dealt with in the previous chapter.

Before beginning, it needs to be pointed out that there is a scarcity of direct engagement with process thought on the part of contemporary Madhyamika scholars. This is not surprising considering the fact that analytic and continental philosophy have been generally far more popular that process philosophy, so Madhyamika scholars have understandably been engaging with the former rather than the latter. And although process theology is fairly popular, Madhyamika scholars, being part of an atheistic tradition (Buddhism) have again understandably lacked interest. In light of this scarcity of direct critique of process views on the part of the Madhyamika, I will include Madhyamika critiques of philosophical systems that are similar to process thought as well as construct critiques of process thought based on my own understanding of Madhyamika.

Eternal Objects, Metaphysics, and God

Frederick Streng critiques Whitehead’s ‘eternal objects’ and metaphysics from a Madhyamika perspective. While agreeing that reality is a ‘mutually dependent process’, Streng argues that Whitehead’s ‘use of philosophic generalizations to seize those characteristics of “abiding importance” in existence’ is ‘a delusion since it
accepts social conventions of speech as the basic resource for knowing reality'.

Streng asks whether the eternal objects are external to the process (like Platonic Ideas) or themselves conditioned by the process and thus not eternal. He sides with Nagarjuna's argument that there are no eternal concepts nor eternal realities (not even nirvana). Streng sees 'the effort to conceptualize ultimate truth ... as a task at the beginning of an educational (and therapeutic) process, which will be transcended by the perfect realization of truth'.

However, for the person who wants to probe deeply the reality of existence, one of the first tasks is to realize that even profound notions and universal generalizations are conducive to self-perpetuating (but only conditionally real) patterns of imaginations and expectations.

Elsewhere, Streng elaborates on the Madhyamika understanding of universals such as 'egginess', stating that they are 'fictions; but they can be objects of propositions and can serve as subjects in order to function in popular, conventional communication', adding that, for Nagarjuna, 'not ... all conceptual formulations ... are equally good or bad'.

It has often been observed, by process philosophers and others, that Whitehead's greatest mistake was this doctrine of eternal objects, as it undermines the fundamental insight that reality is process. Increasing numbers of process philosophers have tended to deny this doctrine and have adopted a position similar to that of Hartshorne, who argues that universals are conditioned and created within the temporal process rather than eternally pre-existing, and that 'the necessary or eternal aspect of deity is the only eternal object'. However, as this last quote indicates, there is still room for disagreement. This requires a further discussion of the Madhyamika attitude to metaphysics and deity, which we turn to now.

As was seen in chapter three, the process understanding of metaphysics is that it consists of those aspects of reality that are common to all conceivable experience,

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2 Ibid., 434.

3 Ibid., 443.


and thus not falsifiable. But because this invariant aspect of reality is derivative form experience, it can be called an ‘immanent transcendental’ (or ‘historical a priori’) as it does not exist apart from the event-process. As Whitehead said: ‘There are no self-sustained facts, floating in nonentity’.\(^6\) According to Hartshorne, there is only one eternal object or immanent transcendental (or metaphysical principle), which is the necessary or objective aspect of God. However, the necessary aspect of God is an abstraction from the concrete and contingent aspect. So the question is whether Madhyamika can accept the nominal or abstract existence of such as eternal object. For as a historical a priori it is perfectly compatible with the fact that all categories are contingent, provided it is understood (as has been explained elsewhere) that the contingent contains the necessary within it, just as becoming contains being, and the particular (as whole, or ‘holon’) contains the universal (as part or aspect). John Cobb’s distinction between two ultimates may be helpful here.\(^7\) God may be the ultimate actuality on the level of conventional truths – a kind of Buddha-Bodhisattva – whereas the ultimate truth is the unfalsifiable sunyata or creativity that is conceptualized and embodied at the conventional level as God.\(^8\) God could then be understood as the eternal realization of the emptiness of Godself and others as well as the conceptualization (or thought) of this emptiness. God’s aim is thus to persuade every last ‘blade of grass’ to first conceptualize the emptiness of things as eternal object, and then to leave even this conceptualization behind so as to experience emptiness trans-conceptually. Hence Streng is right to say that eternal objects can be hindrances if seen as ends instead of as stepping-stones on the way.

However, the process idea of a bipolar God who is both absolute and relative, abstract and concrete, being and becoming, and so on, is itself open to Madhyamika critique in the sense that it appears to be a violation of the law of non-contradiction – how can pairs of contrary concepts be predicated of the one entity, in this case God? Consider the following passage from Whitehead:


\(^8\) If emptiness is not itself a view, then it has no counter-view and thus cannot be falsified (as both Nagarjuna and Candrakirti argue). Hence, it is an a priori truth, but one born of, rather than independent of, experience.
It is as true to say that God is permanent and the World fluent, as that the World is permanent and God is fluent.

It is as true to say that God is one and the World many, as that the World is one and God many.

It is as true to say that, in comparison with the World, God is actual eminently, as that, in comparison with God, the World is actual eminently.

It is as true to say that the World is immanent in God, as that God is immanent in the World.

It is as true to say that God transcends the World, as that the World transcends God.

It is as true to say that God creates the World, as that the World creates God.  

This passage, taken at face value, appears to be a direct contradiction of the logical law that A cannot be both P and non-P at the same time and in the same sense. However, such as passage should not be read in isolation from Whitehead’s other statements about God. Also, it is written in a poetic style, and as is well know, poetry is often profound but also often vague and ambiguous. Whitehead’s approach to theology is dialectical in nature (which is his approach to philosophy generally). There is no contradiction in his statements about God because, as Hartshorne and Reese put it, ‘there is no law of logic against attributing contrasting predicates to the same individual, provided they apply to diverse aspects of this individual. Thus a man [sic] may be “simple” in his fundamental intention but “complex” in the details of his actions and perceptions’. Or, a table may be one in its form and function but many in terms of its constituent parts (segments of wood, molecules, atoms). Of course the God of traditional Christianity does not have a diversity of aspects as ‘He’ is considered to be One and simple – so for such a God it would be a contradiction to attribute contrary predicates – but the God of process thought is internally related to the World and God’s own past states, so there is no contradiction. In the final analysis the most rigorous way of describing the God-world relation is in terms of asymmetrical interdependence: God-as-event is inclusive of World-as-structure, whereas World-as-multiplicity-of-events is inclusive of God-as-structure.

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9 Whitehead, Process and Reality, 348.

10 Charles Hartshorne and William L. Reese, Philosophers Speak of God (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1953), 14–5. See also Charles Hartshorne, Insights and Oversights of Great Thinkers (Albany, State Univ. of New York Press, 1983), 314–5: ‘[this passage] is not a definite formulation of a technical element in Whitehead’s philosophy. ... The conception of deity formulated in the rest of the chapter does not require these rhetorical flourishes.’

11 Masao Abe argues that the asymmetrical relation between God and World is an exception to the symmetry of the process system, but this is based on the mistaken assumption that process thought
Deconstruction of the Categories

The Madhyamika analysis of worldviews is remarkably similar to Gödel’s Incompleteness Theorems as it shows that all worldviews are either complete or coherent, but not both. Gödel’s First Incompleteness Theorem states that for any formal system of arithmetic (such as Boolean algebra) that is consistent – lets call it ‘S’ – there exists a proposition A which is not formally decidable within S; that is, neither A nor its negation are provable in S. For a system to be consistent, it must be internally coherent, containing no contradictions. If it does have contradictions, then it is inconsistent but complete. So a formal arithmetical system can be either complete or consistent, but never both. However, similar theorems have also been formulated to demonstrate the incompleteness of formal logical systems and algorithmic systems (the Church-Turing Theorem). Likewise, Derrida claims that his deconstructionism is an application of Gödel’s theorem to literary theory and philosophy. Following David King, we could call this general method ‘diagonalization’ (after Cantor’s ‘diagonal slash’ method to show the incompleteness of infinity). In a recent paper, King has shown how it is possible to diagonalize the laws of physics and even metaphysical systems, concluding that ‘whatever frame were erected to describe the universe, something would always escape that frame’. This means that given any worldview – lets call it ‘W’ – that is internally coherent, there exists a statement S which is not decidable within W, that is, neither S nor its negation are provable in W. This means that any worldview that claims to be complete (a closed system) can be shown to contain a contradiction that deconstructs or opens it up – a ‘navel’, as it were – and any worldview that claims to be coherent, affirms the symmetrical interdependence of events. See Masao Abe, ‘Mahayana Buddhism and Whitehead’, in Masao Abe, Zen, Buddhism, and Western Thought (Honolulu, Hawaii: Univ. of Hawaii Press, 1986), 152–70. See also the discussion on symmetry and asymmetry in the previous chapter.

12 Gödel’s Second Incompleteness Theorem states that a system’s consistency cannot be proven by means formalizable within the system. This means that we can only know that a system is coherent if we can come up with a statement that is not provable within that system. If we can, then it is coherent but incomplete; if we cannot, then it is complete but incoherent.

12 David King, ‘The Diagonalization of Metaphysics’, Philosophy Today 42 (1998): 339. Heisenberg’s Uncertainty Principle is another example of incompleteness in physics. There is also Hofstadter’s argument that it is impossible to make a perfect machine that does everything that it is supposed to do – for example, no record-player can play all records because it is possible to cut a record that plays music at a frequency that causes the record-player to vibrate and make the needle jump or even destroy the record-player. No doubt all structures are limited in similar ways – including the human
and is free of contradictions, can be shown to have a ‘blind-spot’ in its system which makes it incomplete or open.

If no worldview or philosophical system can be both consistent and complete, but has to be either one or the other, this must also be true of the process worldview. If so, it is possible to formulate a Madhyamika-like argument that demonstrates this. To begin with, let us assume that the categorial system of process thought (as outlined by Hartshorne) is consistent, having no internal contradictions. Is it complete? Consider the asymmetrical relation between $r$-terms and $a$-terms (subjects and objects, dependence and independence, internal and external, and so on). For Hartshorne, a subject depends upon and contains objects, whereas objects are independent of subjects. But a subject cannot become its own object and thus cannot know itself or be related to itself. (The eye cannot see itself, a sword cannot cut itself, the teeth cannot bite themselves.) However, this does not mean that a subject is independent of itself because only objects can be independent. (Objectivity and independence are correlative $a$-terms.) Hence a subject is neither dependent on, nor independent of, itself – its self-knowledge is only partial, based on extrapolation from its past. (It feels the past’s anticipations.) But even if complete self-knowledge were possible (we feel that it is), it cannot be understood in terms of the categories of process thought.

There is also the problem of contemporaries. Since, in process philosophy, a subject is an effect that comes after the object or cause, contemporary subjects are unable to interact. But present subjects have not yet become past objects, so how can they be independent of one another if only objects are independent? Hartshorne himself admits that the problem of mutual independence of contemporaries has troubled him for years: ‘Prehensive relations are one-way influences, while contemporaneity is defined as mutual lack of influence’.\(^{14}\) However, he believes this problem can be solved by admitting the existence of ‘certain very subtle influences, incapable of conveying messages’ between contemporary events.\(^{15}\) The existence of such an ‘acausal connection’ that is neither a relation nor a non-relation (and thus neither dependence nor independence) has been found to exist between ‘spatially

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separated" physical events, known as the 'EPR effect'.\(^{16}\) (Note that this subtle interaction is not the same as symmetrical interdependence, which is merely an interobjective relation between two abstractions; rather, it is, in Martin Buber's terms, an I-Thou relation that escapes the I-It level of subject-object and other categories.)\(^{17}\) Hence, the process worldview is incomplete and needs to be supplemented by the inclusion of a basic indeterminacy that cannot be specified within its system of categories. The conclusion is that reality cannot be completely captured in terms of a systems of conceptual categories. There is always 'something' that escapes the categories and thus cannot be specified in terms of the categories — so we cannot ask whether it is a being or becoming, self or other, one or many, etc.

The above discussion makes it possible to quickly deal with two critiques of process thought. Namely, that the concept of 'self-causation' does not make sense, and that any statement in the form 'is an a-in-r an r-term or an a-term?' (such as: 'is the body-in-mind the person') can be used to deconstruct process philosophy. First, it is true that the notion of self-causation is contradictory because, for something to cause itself, it must exist before it comes into existence. But when process philosophers use the term 'self-causation', they are referring to the fact that an event is only partially conditioned by its past and that therefore it partially creates itself in a 'creative synthesis' of its past.\(^{18}\) This self-creation can only be inferred from the indeterminacy inherent in the categories of the process system. (That is, from the fact that the past acts as a vague universal that does not specify how it is to be actualized in the present, only that it will.) But this indeterminacy does not justify the term 'self-creation'. Although Hartshorne might be right to say that self-causation is 'less a paradox' than other-causation,\(^{19}\) it is more accurate to say that there is neither self- nor other-creation and that an event's creativity is neither its own nor another's. In many ways, the process understanding of self-creation is similar to that of Sartre — his solution is to distinguish between self-as-existing-cause and self-as-essential-

\(^{16}\) See Roger Penrose, *The Large, the Small and the Human Mind*, ed. M. Longair (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1997), 66, where he describes this subtle connection as being 'somewhere between objects being separate and being in communication with each other', which has no analogue in classical physics.

\(^{17}\) Robert Neville speculates that the mutual penetration of Hua-yen is in fact operative on a different level from the categorial-phenomenal (cosmological), which he calls the ontological level (Heidegger's 'Being'). See Robert C. Neville, *The Tao and the Daimon: Segments of a Religious Inquiry* (Albany, New York: State Univ. of New York Press, 1982), 187–90.

\(^{18}\) See the discussion on the difference between causation and conditioning in the previous chapter.
effect. However, this bifurcation within the self leads to the paradox of two selves. This paradox arises because we see the self as a static continuum of being instead of as a dynamic unit of becoming which is a temporally atomic, yet internally complex, ‘holon’ that arises all-at-once as a process of creative synthesis that can be called ‘concrescence’ (or ‘growing together’) – only of this ‘self’ can we meaningfully speak of self-causation.20

Second, to say, as process philosophers do, that reality can be characterized as $r$-terms inclusive of $a$-terms (being-in-becoming, absolute-in-relative, necessary-in-contingent, etc.) means that it is impossible to ask whether this reality as a whole can be characterized in terms of $r$- or $a$-categories. (Just as Kant showed that the category of causation is not applicable to the entire network of causes-and-effects that is the world.) This would be an example of a category mistake (as discussed in chapter three). Hence, it makes perfect sense to say that the question ‘Is the mind-body the person or not?’ is unanswerable. This is because ‘person’ and ‘mind’ are, in terms of process categories, both correlative $r$-terms. In logical terms, it is the same as asking whether reality as inclusive contrast between $r$- and $a$-terms is itself categorizable in terms of one or the other of the two types of terms, which is based on the assumption that the statement ‘$(a \& r) \equiv (a \lor r)$’ is meaningful, which it obviously is not.21

But if all consistent worldviews are incurably incomplete or open (sunyata), as the Madhyamika argue, then it is impossible for there to be a ‘Speculative Philosophy’ as Whitehead defines it: ‘the endeavour to frame a coherent, logical, necessary system of general ideas in terms of which every element of our experience can be interpreted’.22 Nevertheless, Whitehead acknowledges the necessary incompleteness of philosophical systems, as the following quotes indicate: ‘The notion of nature as an organic extensive community omits the equally essential point of view that nature is never complete. It is always passing beyond itself. This is the


21 However, if a second order is introduced, this question does make sense and is useful in making distinctions between God and world (see chapter three); but this is not the issue here.

22 Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 3. See also p. 4, where he says that only ‘an asymptotic approach to a scheme of principles’ is possible.
creative advance of nature', 23 'We cannot produce that final adjustment of well-defined generalities which constitute a complete metaphysics', 24 and 'we know more than can be formulated in one finite systematized scheme of abstractions'. 25 Or, as William James put it: 'The negative, the alogical, is never wholly banished. Something – "call it fate, chance, freedom, spontaneity, the devil, what you will" – is still wrong and other and outside and uninclosed, from your point of view, even though you be the greatest of philosophers'. 26 Hence, Process philosophy is compatible with the view that reality can never be completely captured within our categorial system no matter how much we expand our present categories to include any new intuitions (contrary to Griffin). 27 As Kierkegaard argues, there can be no mediation between the system and its opposite (as there can be between opposites within the system). 28 But the incompleteness of the categories does not necessarily imply their contingency, non-universality, or conditionality, for even universals are incomplete – not in the sense of narrowness of scope, but of vagueness and of their inability to determine the details of the concrete particulars that they condition. (That is, they are not all-inclusive but need to be creatively supplemented by concrete events.) 29 It seems to me that process philosophy can deal with the unavoidable incompleteness of systems of thought similarly to the way mathematicians after Gödel dealt with the incompleteness of number theory. Just as the latter escaped

23 Ibid., 289.


25 Alfred North Whitehead, Religion in the Making (New York: Fordham Univ. Press, 1996), 143. See also Alfred North Whitehead, Modes of Thought (New York: The Free Press, 1968), 2–3, 6, 42–3, 52, 58, 82, where he says that understanding is always incomplete and calls his own philosophy an open 'assemblage' rather than a closed system.


27 See the debate between David Ray Griffin and Huston Smith, eds., Primordial Truth and Postmodern Theology (Albany, New York: State Univ. of New York Press, 1989), 103–5. Huston appeals to Gödel's Incompleteness Theorem to argue that not all of reality is captured in our categories, whereas Griffin responds that this just means we should expand our categories. But the point is that no matter how widely we cast our categorial net, we can never capture reality in its entirety.


29 See Ken Wilber, Sex, Ecology, Spirituality: The Spirit of Evolution (Boston and London: Shambhala, 1995), 504: reality is an alternation between synthesis and disemination, incompleteness and inconsistency, whole and part – or, as Whitehead (Process and Reality, 21) puts it: 'The many become one, and are increased by one'.
Gödel’s paradoxes by postulating ‘transfinite’ sets which expand forever (only asymptotically approaching completeness), so too process philosophers can say that their system is descriptive of the endless process of inclusive transcendence that arises when perspectival events realize their own incompleteness and inconsistency (depending on whether they are attached to completeness or consistency). The realization that all systems are incomplete allows process philosophers to avoid the ‘dis-ease’ that comes from the search for completeness and to instead focus on the endless process of inclusive transcendence.  

**Actual Occasions and Dharmas**

In the previous chapter I briefly discussed Justus Buchler’s critique of Whitehead’s system. In many ways, his critique is very much Madhyamika-like and could be adopted by Madhyamika scholars as a critique of process thought. Buchler argues that there are two irreconcilable trends in Whitehead’s system. In trend I he is allegedly merely interested in describing ‘types of entities’ (or types of ‘existence’), whereas in trend II he attempts to evaluate and order these types into ‘degrees of reality’. According to Buchler, the inconsistency arises when we consider that the descriptive classification of types of entity in trend I implies that ‘neither is more fundamental than the other’ and that all types ‘equally “are”’. But in trend II, on the other hand, there is an attempt to set up ‘the primacy or centrality of one type, in contrast with all the others’, namely events or actual occasions. Buchler believes that there is no answer in Whitehead’s system as to why such a prioritization exists.

If we ask why pure possibilities (eternal objects) should be secondary and actual entities [i.e., actual occasions] primary, when it is repeatedly stated that neither of these two kinds of being is conceivable apart from the other, what it means for one actuality to be ‘more’ concrete or ‘less’ concrete than another actuality; … why individuals are ‘more real’ than societies, why they ‘make up the sole reality of the universe’, when nonindividual actualities have been discriminated just as decisively; what it means to be a ‘completely real thing’ — we find no answers.  

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Other Madhyamika-like deconstructions of process thought can be directed towards Hartshorne’s table of possible God-world relations (discussed in chapter three), as well as towards the concept of creativity, which has an ambiguous place within (or without?) the process system.
Whitehead’s ‘ontological principle’ states that ‘in separation from actual entities there is nothing, merely nonentity’.\textsuperscript{32} But Buchler asserts that ‘the Whiteheadian scheme permits us to say with equal validity: in separation from eternal objects there is nothing, merely nonentity’.\textsuperscript{33} Buchler calls this the principle of ‘ontological parity’. A similar argument could be made with regard to the primacy of events over substances (which fall in the category of eternal objects, or at least ‘enduring objects’). Would the Madhyamika position, like Buchler’s, fall somewhere between these two positions? (E.g., like Davidson’s middle way between Strawson’s primacy of substance and process philosophy’s primacy of events.)

Although Buchler’s ontological parity has been praised for its ‘openness’, there are a number of flaws in the argument. When Whitehead says that there is nothing outside of actual occasions, he is not denying the reality of eternal objects (or universals), but merely stating that the kind of existence they have is that of existing \textit{in} actual occasions rather than outside of them. Neither is more real than the other, but only actual occasions are ‘concrete’ (or particular). Universals are ‘abstract’, but still real.\textsuperscript{34} In other words, both concrete particulars and abstract universals are ‘real’; but since particulars are inclusive of universals, it makes sense to say that there is nothing outside of particulars. (‘There is no self-contained abstraction’ with its own ‘independent existence’;\textsuperscript{35} for although abstractions are independent of individual concrete events, they nevertheless only exist \textit{in} those dependent events rather than outside of them.) This is a perfectly ‘descriptive’ approach. Furthermore, as Hartshorne has pointed out, the ontological principle is ‘a long way from a mere Whiteheadian eccentricity’ for ‘[n]ot only Aristotle but the entire nominalistic tradition is behind Whitehead in this’\textsuperscript{36}


\textsuperscript{32} Whitehead, \textit{Process and Reality}, 43.

\textsuperscript{33} Buchler, ‘Strain of Arbitrariness’, 596.

\textsuperscript{34} Thus, abstract universals are arbitrary and conventional constructs, whereas concrete events are not. This is because only concrete entities are creative, whereas abstractions are created. As we have seen, Candrakirti and Nagarjuna would agree with this as they say that body (\textit{rupa}) lacks the creative capacity that mind (\textit{nama}) possesses (see chapter five, footnotes three and four).


However, the Madhyamika would respond that they are also nominalists, but of a more radical kind, extending their nominalism to also include particulars. As Sprung argues: ‘the Madhyamika is a radical nominalist: he denies not only that universals are real; he denies that particular things and even simple qualities of particular things are real’.\footnote{Mervyn Sprung, ‘The Madhyamika Doctrine of Two Realities As a Metaphysics’, in Mervyn Sprung, ed., The Problem of Two Truths in Buddhism and Vedanta (Dordrecht, Holland: D. Reidel Publishing Co., 1973), 46.} Reality is, according to the Madhyamika, unable to be adequately explained in terms of concepts of any kind – whether universals or particulars. But I do not think that this is really in conflict with the process view, for process philosophy is also a radical nominalism in the sense that all concepts – universality and particularity – are abstractions and thus fall short of concrete reality. But the concrete events or particulars that are instantiations of the concept ‘particularity’ are themselves the concrete reality. If, as Paul Williams argues, all things exist ‘conceptually’ in the sense that they are dependently originated,\footnote{Paul Williams, ‘On the Interpretation of Madhyamika Thought’, Journal of Indian Philosophy 19 (1991): 206.} then process philosophers have no problem with claiming that actual occasions exist conceptually, or nominally. But this is to define the concept as Hegel defines it – as the sublation of abstract being within concrete becoming – which is what process philosophers call an actual occasion.

Nevertheless, a case can be made that process thought is similar to the Abhidharma system and that actual occasions are similar to dharmas.\footnote{See David Dilworth, ‘Whitehead’s Process Realism, the Abhidharma Dharma Theory, and the Mahayana Critique’, International Philosophical Quarterly 18 (1978): 151–169; and David Ray Griffin, ‘Buddhist Thought and Whitehead’s Philosophy’, International Philosophical Quarterly 14 (1974): 261–284. Both liken process thought to the Abhidharma system.} If this is true, then the Madhyamika critique of the Abhidharma can be adapted as a critique of process thought. The Abhidharma were interested in finding the ‘essences’ (svabhava) of all things, which are not able to be subjected to further analysis. These they called dharmas or ‘events’, which are independent and simple (indivisible) parts that have their own differentiating characteristics or ‘marks’, which they were said to possess eternally.\footnote{See Richard H. Robinson, Early Madhyamika in India and China (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1976), 48: ‘[t]he necessary properties of own-being are own-mark (intrinsic, individuating characteristic), independence (i.e., non-contingency), indivisibility (i.e., atomicity, necessary identity), and immutability’.} Hence, the Abhidharma saw the dharmas as substantially existent building-blocks from which everything else was made. (Although momentary, they
are ‘substances’ in the sense of not being dependent on anything else for their existence.) Only dharmas were said to truly exist, whereas everything else—whether enduring persons or aggregated objects—exist in name only. Although dharmas are interconnected with other dharmas, their fixed nature and atomic simplicity means that they are independent entities.

The Madhyamika critique of Abhidharma consists of bringing the very notion of dharmas into question. However, this does not mean that the Madhyamika deny the existence of dharmas altogether. Rather, they deny that dharmas have any kind of essences or characteristics that exist independently of the dependent origination of phenomena. Rather than being substantially existent, dharmas are, like everything else, dependently existent. Hence, they cannot be merely interconnected yet independent entities, but must be constituted by their very relations with one another. Garfield puts it this way: ‘So, Nagarjuna concludes, we cannot, upon analysis, resolve the domain of conventional phenomena into a series of constantly arising, constantly ceasing, yet individually inherently existent momentary phenomena, connected to one another and characterized by inherently real arising and ceasing’.  

Hence, ‘all of Nagarjuna’s polemics against the Abhidharmic views’, says Kenneth Inada, ‘are lodged not so much on the “elements” of existence (dharmas) per se as it is on the manner in which the dharmas are foisted into the dominant position in the experiential process (pratitya-samutpada).’  

That is, Nagarjuna is against the view that the elements come before the process—there are no self-existent dharmas that become; rather, the dharmas are themselves units of becoming. The reality of the dharmas is thus relative and phenomenal rather than absolute and unconditional. As Kalupahana points out, Nagarjuna is against the Sarvastivada interpretation of dharmas, not dharmas themselves.  

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So are the actual occasions of process thought comparable to Abhidharma dharmas? The answer must be no, for these dharmas are simple, independent, and atomic (having what Whitehead calls ‘simple location’). But actual occasions arise in dependence on other actual occasions and are internally constituted by their relations to other actual occasions (hence they are ‘holons’, or part-wholes). Abhidharma dharmas are simple subjects that then interact with each other. But actual occasions are complex ‘superjects’ that arise dependently. Abhidharma dharmas have fixed essences or ‘marks’ that enable them to be differentiated from one another. But actual occasions are only able to be discriminated by their ‘differential relations’ and constantly pass from being concrete events in the present to abstract ‘beings’ in the past, or from superjects to objects.\(^45\) As Robert Neville explains this last point:

At no time does an occasion possess ‘own being’. When it is coming into existence, it is ‘not yet’. When it has achieved existence, its own subjective immediacy – the only ‘subject’ that could possess ‘own being’ – has perished.\(^46\)

This fact that an actual occasion ‘never really is’\(^47\) indicates that it is empty. Also, the openness of the future in process thought means that no statements concerning events are timelessly true – as Aristotle says, ‘a sea-battle will take place tomorrow’ is today neither true nor false. Hence, they are not intrinsically identifiable (svatāksana) and therefore cannot be said to have a svabhava.\(^48\)

**The Two Becomings**

According to the Buddha all things are impermanent and constantly becoming; hence early Buddhism can be said to be a philosophy of becoming. But the Madhyamika,

\(^{45}\) In structuralist thought, ‘differential relations’ are relations between terms that have no meaning apart from their relations to other terms. The fact that actual occasions are nothing apart from their internal relations to other occasions means that they are differentially related to them.


\(^{47}\) Plato, *Timaeus*, 28a. This is discussed in Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 84.

\(^{48}\) Actual occasions are more comparable to the ‘open dharmas’ or tatiya referred to by Nancy McCagney, *Nagarjuna and the Philosophy of Openness* (Lanham, Maryland: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 1997), 114–15. However, she says they cannot be grasped in conceptual terms. (See the next section.)
pursuing the Buddha's dialectics of the middle way to its ultimate conclusion, argue that neither the concepts permanence nor impermanence, being nor becoming, can adequately characterize the true nature of reality. Provisionally, 'all is becoming' is better than 'all is being', they argue, but ultimately neither is true. According to Nagarjuna, nothing can begin to become because it can neither begin in something that is not yet becoming, nor in something that is already becoming, nor in what has already become.\textsuperscript{49} The same applies for the end of becoming and for the mid-point of becoming when becoming is supposed to be (for how can becoming be!). Also, he asks what it is that becomes – it cannot be the becoming itself, nor can it be different from the becoming.\textsuperscript{50} Enduring beings cannot become, for then they would not be beings; but momentary events or 'becomings' cannot become either, for they just succeed each other temporally.

It has often been remarked how closely Nagarjuna's arguments here resemble those of the Greek philosopher Zeno of Elea. (Of course, unlike Zeno, Nagarjuna also has arguments against being or rest.) Zeno argued that movement is impossible within the framework of a substance metaphysic (the so-called 'Parmenidean prohibition' that only self-identical being with its own nature is conceivable). His famous paradoxes fall into two groups: those which argue that continuous movement is impossible (Achilles and the Tortoise; The Dichotomy) and those which argue that discrete movement is impossible (The Arrow; The Stadium). The former show that we cannot divide the many of movement so as to arrive at the one that moves (so how can there be movement if there is no mover?), and the latter show that we cannot multiply the one that moves so as to arrive at the many of movement (a temporal series of stationary movers is not a movement, so how can they be movers?). We can never pass from a mover to a movement nor form a movement to a mover as long as we maintain a substance metaphysic.

As they stand, Zeno's paradoxes are irresolvable – one can escape from their sway only by rejecting the metaphysic of substance which sustains them. That is, by no longer thinking of the existent as being or essence, but as becoming. Hence, philosophers of becoming such as Hegel, Bergson, Whitehead, Hartshorne, etc., have nothing to fear from such paradoxes as they have passed beyond metaphysics of substance. As Alba Papa-Grimaldi puts it:

\textsuperscript{49} Nagarjuna, MK. 2.12.

\textsuperscript{50} Ibid., 2.18-20.
The only way to ‘conceptualize’ ... change and to conceive of the plurality as concrete rather than abstract, that is, as a pure sum of the unit, is the Hegelian synthesis or any other doctrine that privileges an experience of movement over an aseptic attempt to understand it. These doctrines do not, however, acknowledge the paradox as a ‘poorly posed problem’. They do not acknowledge it all.\textsuperscript{51}

The same can be said for Nagarjuna’s arguments. ‘[T]he gravamen of his thesis’, according to Ian Mabbett, is ‘the unintelligibility of ground and consequent, substance and attribute, subject and predicate’\textsuperscript{52} – all characteristics of the substance metaphysic. Nagarjuna’s arguments are not directed against becoming per se, rather they are directed against the intelligibility of the becoming of self-existent things (\textit{svabhavas}). His arguments do not affect systems like process thought that are not based upon a substance metaphysic (as Robinson correctly points out).\textsuperscript{53} As Garfield says: ‘To say that inherently existent phenomena cannot arise in any way, or that there can be no inherently existent production, is not thereby to say that there is no conventional dependency, or that there are no dependently arisen phenomena’.\textsuperscript{54} Madhyamika is therefore compatible with process thought because it too is a philosophy of what Streng calls ‘radical becoming’.\textsuperscript{55} He agrees that ‘there is no need for a static ontological substratum to undergird a “process of becoming”’,\textsuperscript{56} for it is the assumption of such a substratum which causes all the paradoxes of becoming and motion in the first place. He also points out that radical becoming is not the same as the becoming that has being as its opposite, for becoming is inclusive of being.\textsuperscript{57} Another Buddhologist who agrees that Madhyamika is a philosophy of becoming, David Kalupahana, argues that Nagarjuna’s polemics are directed at ‘metaphysical

\textsuperscript{51} Alba Papa-Grimaldi, ‘Why Mathematical Solutions of Zeno’s Paradoxes Miss the Point: Zeno’s One and Many Relation and Parmenides’ Prohibition’, \textit{The Review of Metaphysics} 50 (1996): 312. We have to remember also that process philosophers do not see becoming in terms of change or movement (which is compatible with a substance metaphysic), but as the process of coming-to-be. Hence, Nagarjuna’s second chapter in the MK does not affect process philosophy.


\textsuperscript{54} Garfield, \textit{Fundamental Wisdom}, 109, n. 23.


\textsuperscript{56} Ibid., 81.

\textsuperscript{57} Ibid., 64.
existence', not the empirical notion of becoming characterized by arising and cessation.\textsuperscript{58} Magliola's Derridean reading of Madhyamika confirms that although 'the Madhyamika deconstructs both “cessation” and “movement” as dialectical opposites' it nevertheless 'tends to take “movement-under-erasure” as its clue'.\textsuperscript{59} So it seems that for the Madhyamika, as for process thought, becoming is a second-order term over and above the becoming-being pair. Ultimately, though, Madhyamika affirms becoming for soteriological reasons – Nagarjuna argues again and again that systems (whether soteriological or metaphysical) affirming svabhava render impossible the process of becoming whereby one can move along the path towards liberation.\textsuperscript{60}

To say that Madhyamika and process thought are both philosophies of becoming does not mean that there will be no disagreements. For becoming can be understood in various ways, such as the succession of otherwise static momentary events (transition), a continuity of becoming (concrescence), or some combination of these (the becoming of becoming). Kalupahana, for example, argues against the Sarvastivada and Sautrantika notion of a ‘series of becoming’ (bhava-samta), preferring instead the early Buddhist ‘stream of becoming’ (bhava-sota).\textsuperscript{61} On the other hand, Magliola favors a ‘movement which, lacking substantial continuity, appears – at least amid deconstructive analysis – as discontinuous, erratic’.\textsuperscript{62} Process philosophers in the Whiteheadian tradition tend to combine both kinds of becoming because they see merit in both the individualist notion of events with their own creativity (pluralism) and the idea that such events must have their own internal process of becoming rather than being static point particles (with or without temporal ‘width’).\textsuperscript{63}

\textsuperscript{58} Kalupahana, \textit{Mulamadhyamakakarika}, 32. As mentioned in the previous chapter, Kalupahana distinguishes between bhava (with diacritic bar over the first 'a') and bhava (without diacritics), which signify being and becoming, respectively. See also McCagney, \textit{Philosophy of Openness}, 63, where a similar distinction is made.


\textsuperscript{60} See Nagarjuna, MK, chap. 24.

\textsuperscript{61} Kalupahana, \textit{Mulamadhyamakakarika}, 62.

\textsuperscript{62} Magliola, \textit{Deconstructing Life-Worlds}, 155.

\textsuperscript{63} The problem with the ‘continuum’ approach to becoming is that it is indistinguishable from the notion of an enduring substance that changes only in its accidents, like Leibniz’s monads; and the succession of static events is the ‘becoming of beings’, so it is no better. Thus the ‘becoming of
A more serious disagreement, however, is between those who think that one can conceptualize becoming (in terms of one of the above schema) and those who think that it is the essential nature of language that it cannot adequately describe or characterize becoming. Process philosophers such as Wilfrid Sellars contend that becoming can be a part of language, but only in the form of verbs and adverbs — not as nouns like 'entity' and 'event'. But what if all words, even verbs, are abstractions from the process of becoming? In the Republic Plato argues that things as they appear to us cannot be thought of 'either as being or as not-being, or as both, or as neither', but are instead in the process of becoming. Our views of this realm of becoming, he says, are 'conventional views' and are a matter 'of opinion and not of knowledge'. True knowledge, according to Plato could only be had of the realm of Being, of which the realm of Becoming is a mere reflection or copy. The Madhyamika argue similarly, but instead of affirming a realm of Being, they argue that the realm of becoming is a conventional truth, whereas the ultimate truth is the emptiness or openness of all conventions, including the concept/word 'becoming'. Hence, as Streng puts it, '[t]he ultimate truth which is beyond "being" and "becoming," beyond "emptiness" and "non-emptiness," is inexpressible'. This is the sense in which Madhyamika Buddhism is an improvement on early Buddhism; for whereas the latter say that all is becoming, the former point out that even the concept of 'becoming' is problematic. But this is not to deny becoming, only its conceptualizability. As Nancy McCagney argues, we have to understand that the argument is framed in terms of the 'two truths' teaching. There is neither existence nor non-existence, but becoming (pratitya samutpada) does occur. But '[h]ow can becoming, change, process, and evolution be described when words function as

becoming' approach (internal continuity, external discreteness) seems to be the best way of affirming radical becoming. Hartshorne's arguments against continuous becoming (such as C. S. Peirce's 'syneclassism') is that universals are vague and continuous, whereas particular events are discontinuous, discrete, and quantum-like. See Hartshorne, Creative Syntheses, 122. For a recent critique of Whitehead's and Hartshorne's atomic (or epochal) theory of becoming, see Nicholas Rescher, Process Metaphysics: An Introduction to Process Philosophy (Albany, New York: State Univ. of New York Press, 1990), 55, 89–90, 112.


66 Ibid., 479d, 7.373.

67 Streng, Emptiness, 86.
fixers, determiners (nimittkrit) and events are animitta (not fixed)? McCagney concludes that

It would not be accurate in interpreting Nagarjuna to say that dharmas (events) are empty. They are empty of ultimately true descriptions because they are empty of existence per se (asti), but they they [sic] are not empty of becoming but, indeed, are becoming (pratitya samutpada). However, any description of becoming (arising and ceasing) taken literally is incoherent, but can be loosely described as an open-ended process.

Of course, Whitehead often warns us against thinking that our language will ever be adequate to describe reality (the fallacy of the perfect dictionary). Coupled with my earlier discussion of the necessarily incomplete nature of philosophical systems (including process philosophy), process philosophers should have no problem agreeing with the Madhyamika understanding of becoming, as they distinguish between individual becomings (actual occasions) and the general becoming or creativity of which all individual becomings are expressions. Nor should the Madhyamika have a problem with becoming as understood by process philosophers, as they similarly distinguish between conventional becoming (open-endedness or dependent origination) and ultimate becoming (openness or emptiness). (Creativity and the two truths will be discussed in depth in subsequent chapters.)

A final issue concerning actual occasions is that they are conceived of as creative syntheses in which the whole that results is more than the sum of its constituent parts. (‘The many become one any are increased by one.’) But the Madhyamika are said to be reductionist and opposed to holism. I have already dealt with this issue in the previous chapter, so I will briefly summarize what was said there. The Madhyamika are not reductionist or analytic in the ordinary sense because the Madhyamika analysis does not discover any simple parts that cannot be further divided. This is similar to the understanding of actual occasions as ‘holons’ that are

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68 McCagney, Philosophy of Openness, 80.
69 Ibid., 117.
70 Whitehead, Adventures of Ideas, 226–7; Whitehead, Process and Reality, 4.
71 Whitehead, Process and Reality, 21.
both parts of greater wholes and wholes containing smaller parts. There are no absolute parts, nor are there any absolute wholes. But the division and multiplication are not in the present – the notion of "simultaneity" being philosophically, psychologically, and scientifically meaningless – but an infinite regress into the past and future, respectively. However, the very idea of an infinite series of sublations of part-in-whole leads to a one-way incommensurability and discontinuity that makes it impossible to fully predict the next level, which implies that each synthesis is creative, for there is nothing in the parts which dictates how they will be combined into a whole (for the effect does not pre-exist in the cause). Finally, process philosophers can agree with the Madhyamika when they say that there is no whole over-and-above an aggregate of parts (e.g., a chariot), because the ontological principle states that apart from actual occasions there is nothing. (An abstraction like 'chariot' only exists in actual occasions, not outside of them.)

Some Remaining Issues

In many ways the Geluk interpretation of Madhyamika is very similar to that of process thought, especially the distinction between good (conventional existent) and bad (inherently existent) views. The intra-Madhyamika critique of the Geluk could thus also be used against process philosophy. It could be argued that, like the Geluk, process philosophy is too much caught up with conventional truth (becoming) and does not recognize the higher truth that is beyond concepts and words (such as 'becoming'). Or, if it recognizes this higher truth, it tends to reify and objectify it. (E.g. Cobb's two ultimates.) But there are only two truths from the perspective of conventional truth – ultimately there is neither one truth nor two. As this issue is complex and is connected with the issue of how process and Madhyamika can be integrated or mutually transformed, I will be returning to it later in the thesis.

It has been said that the Madhyamika philosophy is 'not working towards some ontological or logical third value between contradictions any more than he [sic] is seeking a dialectical synthesis … on which conceptual thinking could base

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itself and cling', as this would merely perpetuate delusory views. The neo-Hegelian nature of process philosophy, with its creative synthesis and process of inclusive transcendence (sublation), appears to be open to such a charge. However, the matter is not as simple as it seems. The purpose of the process of inclusive transcendence is to escape one-sided views that are falsely independent of one another and to integrate them in a series of views that are progressively more true according to the principle of 'dependent validity'. Hence, there is a progressive purification or purgation of views that are based on independent essences, substances, reifications, etc. Questions still arise as to whether this process comes to an end or continues indefinitely, and if the former, whether the end can be reached suddenly – in one 'leap' – or gradually; but these questions are also much debated amongst the Madhyamika (and Buddhists generally). Even if the process is endless, there may be a sudden realization of relative liberation at every point in the process when it is realized that no view can be complete and that incompleteness is a necessary feature of views.

Conclusion

There is no doubt that many aspects of process philosophy need to be deconstructed, such as eternal objects, the categorial scheme, and self-causation. However, it has the merit of being self-critical and aware of the inevitability of the incompleteness of all systems of thought, including its own. This inevitability is due to the incompleteness of a reality which is neither existent nor non-existent, but in a continuous process of becoming. Thus, process philosophy is in a sense nothing but the coherent description of reality as process. Because process philosophy avoids the extremes of being and non-being – both of which are based on the impossible position of simultaneous coherence and completeness – it can avoid many of the Madhyamika critiques which are directed towards philosophies based on being and non-being. However, although both Madhyamika and process philosophy are philosophies of becoming, we have seen that there are differences over the correct understanding of becoming. Can it be described in words and concepts, as process philosophers believe when they theorize about actual occasions and the like – or not, as the Madhyamika argue when they criticize the Abhidharma theories of dharmas? Of

course, it is all a matter of interpretation – there are different forms and interpretations of process philosophy and of Madhyamika – some being more compatible than others. However, these different understandings of becoming need not be seen as being incompatible because they can be understood as two complementary aspects, which the Madhyamika understand as the two truths. Process philosophy emphasizes the conventional truth of becoming, whereas Madhyamika emphasizes the ultimate truth of becoming; what is needed is for both to integrate and emphasize both aspects in a theory of ‘two becomings’. 
CHAPTER 7

CREATIVE EMPTINESS AND THE EMPTY GOD

In this chapter I will be comparing the notions of sunyata in Madhyamika and creativity in process philosophy, a task which inevitably leads to the questions of the relation these notions have to theism – especially process panentheism – and whether or not Madhyamika is compatible with process panentheism. Although a comparison between different worldviews looks for similarities and differences, it is not necessarily the case that a difference will always be a disagreement, for it is possible that some worldviews may have features that can complement (or even supplement) other worldviews.\(^1\) Likewise, it is not necessarily the case that a similarity will always be an agreement, for sometimes small differences are enough to make the two worldviews incompatible. Or, some of these differences may not equate to disagreements, but may be seen to be complementary (or supplementary). The task of comparison is often hampered by the fact that different worldviews are like different languages and, as Quine has shown in the case of languages, it often happens that it is not in all cases possible to adequately translate some words as there is not always a one-to-one correspondence of words between two languages. Such untranslatability may also make it impossible to adequately translate concepts from one worldview to another – a fact that must be acknowledged by all comparativists. But it is false to conclude that this renders comparison impossible, as those who argue for radical ‘incommensurability’ often suggest. For although comparison depends on interpretation (that is, understanding), interpretation itself does not depend on translation. If understanding required translation, it would be difficult to see how translation could ever take place, for before we can translate we have to be able to understand the words we are translating. Also, the learning of a second language does not require that we translate each word into our first language in order to understand it, for it is quite possible to learn a second language in the same way we learned the first – otherwise, it would be difficult to see how we could learn a

\(^1\) The difference here is that A *complements* B if B contains A in an indistinct or embryonic form, whereas A *supplements* B if B does not contain A in any form.
first language in the first place. Now, if understanding is not dependent on translation, it is fairly likely that comparison is not dependent on translation either. All that is required is that one has an adequate understanding of the languages or worldviews one wants to compare.

Before comparing creativity and sunyata, it will first be necessary to gain an understanding of each term in the context of its respective worldview. I will begin with creativity.

**Creativity in Process Philosophy**

‘Creativity’ is an ambiguous word that can mean ‘novelty’, ‘innovation’, ‘discovery’, ‘self-actualization’, ‘imagination’, ‘fantasy’. It is used in discourses as diverse as science, literature, psychology, business, and philosophy. Contemporary process thinkers’ use of the term did not originate in a void; rather, belief in some kind of formless creative energy principle is basic to the Western spiritual tradition. As Arran Gare has shown, the belief in ‘creative process’, as an ‘active matter’ alternative to the Aristotelian-Thomist ‘passive matter’, has characterized a radical Neoplatonist opposition in the history of ideas. Plato (the ‘khora’), John Scotus Eriugena (fourth category of ‘neither creator nor creature’), the Heretics of the Free Spirit, Meister Eckhart (Godhead), Joachim de Fiore (Spirit), Nicholas of Cusa, the Renaissance Hermeticists, Pico della Mirandola (humanity as self-creative), Marsilio Ficino, Giordano Bruno (active matter), Jacob Boehme, Freemasons, Rosicrucians, Spinoza (natura naturans), Herder (self-creative peoples), Rousseau (general will), Schopenhauer (will to live), Hegel (Spirit as ‘negative activity’), Schelling (aesthetic activity and will), Marx (labour as creative materialism), Nietzsche (will to power), Peirce (‘firstness’), Berdyaev (creative spirit), Bergson (creativity), Whitehead, Deleuze (plane of immanence, constructivism, eternal return of difference), Derrida (the difference that makes a difference) — all of these (and many others) believed, in

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one form or another, that, contrary to Aristotelianism, ‘formless matter’ is a creative process within which arise the dualistic and conventional forms of being and non-being. Creativity is often conceived of by these thinkers as being neither existent nor non-existent and uncharacterizable in terms of any pair of conceptual opposites. Also, from Plato’s constant revisioning of the *khora* as alternately ‘space’, ‘receptacle’, ‘matter’, etc., to Derrida’s constant slipping and sliding from ‘differance’ to ‘supplement’ to ‘pharmakon’, etc., philosophers of creativity have constantly shown that since creativity is universal, ‘the philosopher has to invent not an ideal language but a perpetually new and changing language, a poetic language, to capture the evolving patterns of reality’. This creativity tradition has usually been suppressed in the West by the dominant conservative ideological worldviews, which preferred being to becoming and passivity to activity. Aristotle, Philo, Plotinus, Augustine, Aquinas, and Kant are the major representatives of this dominant worldview. Their common policy has been to separate the world and creativity, locating the latter in a hyperessentialistic Absolute – a Being above beings – beyond the world (or denying it altogether). This effectively turns the self-creative world into a dualistic reality consisting of an other-creating God on the one hand and a passive world-as-creature on the other.

The notion of creativity has become very popular in recent times. This is no doubt a result of the rise of evolutionary and developmental modes of thought and the corresponding decline of belief in a First Cause and Platonic Forms or ‘cosmic blueprints’. Humans no longer see themselves as passive creatures, but as active creators of the world around them. The notion of creativity has appeared in a number of forms in the contemporary landscape. Some of the major ones are: philosophy of life (Bergson’s *élan vital*), existentialism (‘existence precedes essence’ and self-creation), the radical Neoplatonist wing of Marxism and other leftist movements (labour and creative materialism), post-structuralism (Derrida and Deleuze), creation spirituality (Matthew Fox and Thomas Berry), (post-)structuralist linguistics (Noam

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6 Of course each of these philosophers did this in their own way. Aristotle contrasted passive matter with the actual and active forms, ultimately the Unmoved Mover; Philo subordinated the ‘book’ of nature to the Transcendent; Plotinus subordinated the many actual things to the active One; Aquinas subordinated the many actual essences to the One actual and active existence; and Kant located God, freedom, and Being in a Reality-itself beyond the reach of determined and passive phenomena. None of them could see that individual forms could be materially self-creative, or that an individual essence’s existence is to be self-activating.
Chomsky and Paul Ricoeur), philosophy of mind (Roger Penrose and Gödel’s theorem), and of course process thought. Some process philosophers believe that Heidegger’s ‘Being’ is also a kind of creativity. However, this is disputable and thus requires further discussion. (As it has a bearing on the comparison of creativity with emptiness – since the latter is also sometimes identified with Heidegger’s Being – I will discuss this issue later in this chapter.)

Whitehead’s use of the word ‘creativity’ has a history of development within his writings. At first he did not even use the word, but spoke of ‘an underlying activity – a substantial activity – expressing itself in individual embodiments’ or ‘attributes’.⁷ Thereafter, however, he stopped using words like ‘substantial’ and ‘underlying’ to qualify creativity as they implied that there was some kind of greater reality standing behind nature – a notion he considered to be irrational.⁸ Instead, Whitehead began to speak of creativity as one of the three formative elements of actual occasions (the other two being God and ideal forms). Creativity, he says, is that ‘whereby the actual world has its character of temporal passage to novelty’.⁹ The world and occasions in it are actual and temporal, whereas creativity is non-actual and temporal; also, God is actual and non-temporal, whereas the forms (i.e., eternal objects) are neither actual nor temporal. Whitehead stresses that creativity’s ‘protean character … forbids us from conceiving it as an actual entity [i.e., actual occasion]’ and that it ‘is not separable from its creatures’,¹⁰ for ‘there are not two actual entities, the creativity and the creature. There is only one entity which is the self-creating creature’.¹¹ But Whitehead further refined creativity in Process and Reality, no longer contrasting it with actual occasions, God, and forms in terms of the categories of temporality and actuality as discussed above. He calls it the ‘category of the ultimate’,¹² but stresses that it is neither an ‘eminent’ reality (or Absolute) nor God –


⁸ Ibid., 92.

⁹ Alfred North Whitehead, Religion in the Making (New York: Fordham Univ. Press, 1996), 90. These formative elements can also be called transcendental.

¹⁰ Ibid., 92.

¹¹ Ibid., 102.

¹² The category of the ultimate is that of which the other categories are the what (categories of existence), the how (categories of explanation), and the why (categorial obligations). Actual occasions, eternal objects, prehensions, nexus, etc., belong to the categories of existence (but they all reduce non-eliminatively to actual occasions). Alfred North Whitehead, Process and Reality: An Essay in
rather, God is creativity’s ‘primordial, non-temporal accident’; thus aligning himself more with Eastern than Western thought in this regard.\(^\text{13}\) Creativity is ‘the universal of universals’, the ‘principle of novelty’ which ‘replaces Aristotle’s category of “primary substance”’—in a nutshell, creativity is the principle that ‘[t]he many become one, and are increased by one’.\(^\text{14}\) This is not an affirmation of holism, but of the principle that all events are creative syntheses. As Hartshorne explains:

> In every moment each of us accomplishes a remarkable creative act. What do we create? Our own experience at that moment. But, you may say, this experience is not of our own making, since it is produced in us by various causes. But, please note, they are many causes, not one. This is enough to show that the cause alone cannot fully determine the result. For the experience is one, not many. What causal law could prescribe in advance just how the many factors are to fuse together into a new single entity, an experience?\(^\text{15}\)

Hence, creativity is that which explains the emergence of novelty as the concrete actualization of the abstract potentiality represented by the many antecedent conditions. However, ‘[c]reativity is without a character of its own … because all characters are more special than itself. But creativity is always found under conditions, and described as conditioned’.\(^\text{16}\) Hence, creativity cannot be characterized as either being or becoming, universal or particular, cause or effect, etc. However, ‘creativity is not an external agency with its own ulterior purposes\(^\text{17}\)—even God is a characterization of creativity, its ‘eternal primordial character’\(^\text{18}\). Whitehead often underlines the fact that both God and the world are creatures of creativity,\(^\text{19}\) which does not imply that creativity is a ‘God above God’, for it is the ‘Immanent Creativity’ or ‘Self-Creativity’ of the creatures themselves (creative

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\(^\text{13}\) Ibid., 7.

\(^\text{14}\) Ibid., 21.


\(^\text{16}\) Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 31. It is a poor choice of words to say creativity is ‘found under conditions’, for I do not think he is saying that creativity is something that underlies conditions.

\(^\text{17}\) Ibid., 222.

\(^\text{18}\) Ibid., 225.

\(^\text{19}\) Ibid., 349.
synthesis) rather than a transcendent creator.\textsuperscript{20} Creativity is neither a subject (creator) nor object (creature), but that which enables both to exist. (Hence, it is non-intentional.) In subsequent works Whitehead likens creativity to Plato’s terms ‘Eros’ – which is ‘the soul in the enjoyment of its creative function’\textsuperscript{21} – and the ‘Receptacle’\textsuperscript{22} (which Plato refers to as the ‘Foster-mother of all becoming’) – the ‘community of the world, which is the matrix for all begetting’, itself ‘devoid of all forms’ and thus ‘seems to be a somewhat more subtle notion than Aristotle’s “matter”’\textsuperscript{23} – more like the space-time of modern physics. (This identification of creativity with universal solidarity or community and the space-time matrix indicates that Whitehead tended to see creativity and the extensive continuum to be closely related; nevertheless, they are not exactly identical.)\textsuperscript{24} And in his final work, Whitehead speaks of a ‘creative activity’ without which process is unintelligible as there could be no ‘transformation of the potential into the actual’.\textsuperscript{25} According to Michel Weber, the final form of Whitehead’s theory of creativity, can be described in terms of both the ‘dipneumonousness’ (having the ‘two lungs’ of God and world) and the ‘bifunctionality’ (being an ‘overlying actualization principle’ and a reticulated ‘underlying activity’) of creativity.\textsuperscript{26}

Hartshorne’s understanding of creativity was partly influenced by Whitehead, but also by Nicholas Berdyaev and C. S. Peirce. Berdyaev’s ethical imperative was

\textsuperscript{20} Alfred North Whitehead, Adventures of Ideas (New York: Macmillan, 1967), 236. As noted in the previous chapter, ‘self-creativity’ makes more sense than ‘other-creativity’, but it too is problematic as creativity is neither self nor other.

\textsuperscript{21} Ibid., 148.

\textsuperscript{22} Hartshorne does not believe that Plato conceived of the Receptacle as creative. See Charles Hartshorne, Insights and Oversights of Great Thinkers (Albany, New York: State Univ. of New York Press, 1983), 27.

\textsuperscript{23} Whitehead, Adventures of Ideas, 150.

\textsuperscript{24} As discussed in the previous chapter, symmetrical interdependence may make sense, provided it is interpreted as a trans-phenomenal subtle (non-)connection. Perhaps this is what Whitehead has in mind here. See Jorge Luis Nobo, Whitehead’s Metaphysics of Extension and Solidarity (Albany, New York: State Univ. of New York Press, 1986), where it is argued that creativity and the extensive continuum – united under the proper name ‘Receptacle’ – are in fact the twin aspects (distinguishable but not separable) of the one ultimate. Whitehead refers to the extensive continuum as the “non-social nexus” or chaos (Process and Reality, 72).


‘[b]e creative, and foster creativity in others’. Influenced by Heidegger, he called creative freedom ‘nothing’ in the sense that, as Hartshorne explains, ‘[i]t is not anything definite and actual but rather the process of actualizing, rendering the determinable determinate’. Berdiaev distinguishes between ‘nature’, which is dualistic (e.g. subject-object, one-many, mind-body), and ‘spirit’, which is a ‘creative becoming’ that is beyond conceptual antitheses. He also follows Nietzsche in calling these Apollonian and Dionysian, respectively. But he stresses that the creative spirit is not God (creator-creature is also, for him, a natural antithesis) and that humans are not limited to nature, but are also rooted in spirit. Thus he writes that ‘[i]n every creative intention there is an element of man’s [sic] primary freedom, undetermined by anything other, bottomless, freedom which does not proceed out of God, but which proceeds to Him. The call of God is addressed to this abyss and out of it the answer is awaited.’

Peirce believed in three kinds of relations that exist in reality: ‘firstness’ or ‘feeling qualities’, which do not refer to anything beyond themselves; ‘secondness’ or ‘actual facts’, which refer or ‘point’ to firsts; and ‘thirdness’ or ‘laws’, which connect firsts with seconds. Firstness is the original creative source of the other two. Peirce describes firstness as ‘present and immediate, ... fresh and new, ... initiative, original, spontaneous, and free, ... vivid and conscious ... It precedes all synthesis and all differentiation, it has no unity and no parts. It cannot be articulately thought ... Stop to think of it, and it has flown! ... every description of it must be false to it’.


28 Hartshorne, Insights and Oversights, 329.


32 Charles Sanders Peirce, Collected Papers of Charles Sanders Peirce, vols. 1–6, ed. Charles Hartshorne and Paul Weiss (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, 1931–5), vol. 1, para. 357. Peirce also speaks of a relation of ‘zersoness’, which also resembles creativity (ibid., vol. 6, para. 217–9). Within Hartshorne’s system of categories, firstness represents α-terms, which raises the question of whether Hartshorne saw creativity as the abstract universal of universals (a transcendental?), which is the abstract pole of God. If this is the case, then his understanding of creativity is not quite the same as Whitehead’s, which is not characterizable in terms of ρ- or α-terms. (See Hartshorne, Insights and
‘To be is to create’. 33 This, says Hartshorne, is the essence of the teaching of process philosophers like Whitehead, Bergson, and Berdyaev. All events are creative; but ‘creativity’, as a universal, is a mere abstraction. Hartshorne again:

It contains no definite things but only the undifferentiated potentiality for things. It is everything in potency and nothing in act. The best name for it is *creativity*, abstracted from any actual product or *creatures*. It is the *Tao* that is nameless, the formless source of all forms. But it is only an abstraction. 34

Because creativity is universal and thus found in all things, divine and non-divine – Hartshorne distinguishes between supreme and lesser forms of creativity – it can be likened analogically to the Scholastic or Aristotelian ‘being’ (*esse*): ‘Thus creativity-as-such is no more a God beyond God in this system than being-as-such is in Thomism. The difference is mainly in the shift from mere being to process – as the ultimate analogical universal or form of forms’. 35 Hence, creativity is a ‘new transcendent’, replacing the Scholastic transcendentals such as being, unity, goodness, truth, beauty, and love. After all, the Scholastics defined the transcendentals as being applicable to both God and creatures, whereas a category was applicable to creatures only. 36 The argument for creativity as a new transcendent has recently been bolstered by Reto L. Fetz, who echoes Hartshorne’s claim that ‘being’ means ‘creative-being’, which is similar to Aquinas’s *esse* (*existence*) as opposed to essence. 37 But creativity is neither a transcendent subject (Kant) nor a transcendent signified (Derrida) – it is more like the ‘will to power’ with which Nietzsche proposes to replace the old transcendentals. For Nietzsche, the will to power is neither being nor non-being, one nor many, good nor evil, beauty nor


36 See Hartshorne, *Insights and Oversights*, 78, 90–1, 184. Hartshorne’s understanding of creativity as a transcendent again raises the question of whether he is, unlike Whitehead, confusing creativity with God’s abstract or primordial nature.

ugliness, love nor hate. Nevertheless, it is immanent rather than transcendent – that is, it is an ‘immanent transcendent’. Thus it is like creativity both in the sense that it is not characterizable in terms of pairs of conceptual opposites and in the sense that it is not an unconditioned reality beyond the knowable. 38

Intra-Process Debates on Creativity

The contemporary debate amongst process philosophers on creativity has focused on its ultimacy, its place in the history of philosophy, its systematicity, whether it is one or many, and its relation to God. We shall look at these issues now.

Examples of historical comparisons of creativity are those of David Schindler and Almer Mandt. Schindler compares Whitehead’s creativity with Aristotle’s primary matter and Aquinas’s esse. Most insightful is his argument that Aristotle was unable to see the difference between actuality and activity, which led to his categorization of matter as pure potentiality and form as act(ual). However, says Schindler, Aquinas does see the difference – as can be seen is his understanding of individual essences as being actual, but not active – but he believes esse to be both active and actual (in the case of God’s existence), which amounts to its reification. According to Schindler, Whitehead was able to combine the insights of both philosophers in a synthesis that differentiated between non-actual creative activity on the one hand and non-active actual occasions on the other. 39 But I do not think that Schindler is correct in his subsequent assessment that Whitehead should have learnt from Aquinas and affirmed creativity’s full actuality, for this requires a dualistic separation between actual occasions and transcendent creativity, rather than an understanding of actual occasions as self-creative. (Also, it requires a form of Aquinas’s theory of analogy.) Mandt adds Hegel to the equation, believing that the latter’s notion of ‘negative activity’ is an improvement on Whitehead, who limits creativity to concrescence (the many becoming one), whereas Hegel extends it to transition (the process of differentiation whereby the many that become one are increased by one). 40 William Garland similarly argues that creativity is behind both


concrescence and transition, for it is behind all processes in the universe. But we can question whether this is an improvement on Whitehead, as he also seems to define creativity as both concrescence (whereby ‘the many become one’) and transition (whereby the many ‘increase by one’).

The debate on creativity’s systematicity was initiated by William Christian, who believes that Whitehead’s use of ‘creativity’ was pre-systematic and thus its meaning can be reduced to other systematic terms in Whitehead’s philosophy. According to Christian, Whitehead’s ontological principle – that all reasons and explanations must finally be traced back to one or more actual occasions – ‘clearly rules out creativity as an ontological ground’. Christian thus attempts to translate Whitehead’s ‘primitive notions’ into systematic ones – in the case of creativity, he says it is ‘superceded by the account of how actual entities come into existence by concrescence’, and concludes that ‘all that can be said about creativity can be put into systematic statements about the concrescences of actual entities’. One response to Christian is that of Schindler, who argues that Christian makes the same mistake that Aristotle does of not distinguishing between actuality and activity. Christian is right to say that creativity is not a thing within Whitehead’s system; but Whitehead never claims that creativity is a thing, only that it is an activity which all actual occasions exemplify. As Schindler puts it: ‘The distinction most emphatically is not between two things. Only actual entities ... are “things” – are fully real (actual)’.

Creativity is pure process or activity, becoming actual only as it is actualized in actual occasions. Hence, in one sense Christian is right in saying that creativity adds ‘no-thing’ to the system of actual occasions; but in another sense he is wrong, because it adds ‘every-thing’, because without it there would be no actual occasions. Creativity is the principle of becoming that explains that things become,

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44 Schindler, ‘Creativity as Ultimate’, 165.

rather than explaining (as the ontological principle does) what things become. Another response — Garland’s — is that the ontological principle only covers specific and generic types of explanation (non-divine and divine, respectively), but not ‘ultimate explanation’, which explains why there is something rather than nothing — or better, why actual occasions become and pass away in an ongoing process. This is in keeping with Whitehead’s remarks that creativity is the ‘reason’ for the temporal character of reality and the ‘reason’ for the concrescence and transition of entities. The ontological principle is thus not a principle of sufficient reason, but a principle of necessary reason, which requires supplementation by creativity in order for there to be a sufficient explanation of all that becomes. In a sense, the non-systematic nature of creativity is a reminder that all systems are open or incomplete — a fact that the process system acknowledges.

But this raises another series of questions. Is creativity an ontological ground or underlying activity, as the early Whitehead believed? No process philosopher would deny that creativity is a non-actual activity, but some do seem to see it as some kind of underlying ground of actuality. Garland, as we have seen, speaks of creativity as an ultimate ‘reason’ behind the universal process of becoming, and therefore constantly refers to it as ‘the ultimate metaphysical ground’, ‘ontological ground’, or ‘underlying activity’, and likens it to Spinoza’s infinite substance. He also says that the ‘dynamic creative activity’ stands ‘[o]ver and against all entities’. Joseph Bracken also argues that creativity is an ‘underlying ontological activity’ and even compares it to the Hindu Brahman. He sees creativity as entities’ self-ground, rather than their self-cause, which is similar to Heidegger’s argument that the Being of beings is their own immanent ground. Others have also tried to show that

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46 John Cobb is no doubt right in denying that creativity explains that things are; but as David Hall points out, this is to be biased toward being. It is still possible, he says, to see creativity as explaining that things become. John B. Cobb, Jr., A Christian Natural Theology, Based on the Thought of Alfred North Whitehead (London: Lutterworth Press, 1966), 206–11; David L. Hall, The Civilization of Experience: A Whiteheadian Theory of Culture (New York: Fordham Univ. Press, 1973), 26–7.


50 Ibid., 232.

creativity is to process philosophy what Being is to Heidegger. However, whatever Heidegger meant by ‘Being’, the use of ontological concepts to define creativity is in my opinion a betrayal of the basic insight of process philosophy – namely, that becoming is more basic than being. For this is the same as saying that Being is the ground of becoming-and-being, with the result that being is subordinated at one level, but made supreme at another, higher, level. It would be more consistent to say, with David Hall, that just as actual occasions explain what becomes, creativity is that which becomes.\(^52\)

A related issue has to do with whether creativity can be conceived in terms of monism or pluralism. Most process philosophers have interpreted creativity in a pluralist manner, arguing that every actual occasion has its own creativity and that, insofar as we can speak of ‘creativity’ in the singular, it is only as an abstraction from the creativity immanent in each entity – there is no transcendent creativity. But some, such as John Wilcox, have criticized the predominant pluralistic reading of creativity, for this does not ‘explain how a creativity that is conceived strongly enough to explain on-goingness is at the same time found actualized only through the plurality of actual entities’.\(^53\) Wilcox, however, goes on to argue that creativity is monistic – although not in the sense of an underlying substantial activity, which Whitehead rejected due to its subject-predicate form; rather, Wilcox interprets creativity to be a ‘single ultimate verb’, in which case actual occasions would be different ‘adverbial modifiers of the one verbal activity’.\(^54\) Wilcox has in mind the verb ‘to become’ as a process alternative to Heidegger’s ‘to be’ that the latter believes underlies all beings. However, it is likely that Whitehead himself believed creativity to be neither monistic nor pluralistic. For as I mentioned above, Whitehead says that creativity is without a character of its own and thus cannot be characterized in terms of conceptual contrasts, including those of ‘one’ and ‘many’.\(^55\) So although Wilcox was right to question the pluralistic orthodoxy, I think he is incorrect in interpreting the trans-categorial creativity in terms of the category of oneness. Still, even though creativity is not ‘one’ as contrasted with ‘many’, it might be thought of

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\(^{52}\) Hall, *Civilization of Experience*, 26–7.


\(^{54}\) Ibid., 168.

as ‘one’ as contrasted with ‘two’ or duality; but the term ‘nonduality’ would be more appropriate here as it more adequately captures the ‘neither one nor many’ which can be said of creativity.

Another debate has been over whether or not creativity and God are the same reality. Henry Nelson Wieman, who founded the empiricist school of process theology (as opposed to Hartshorne’s rationalist school), does not believe in Whitehead’s panentheistic God; instead, he thinks that creativity is the divine reality. However, some process philosophers who do not believe in the panentheistic God choose not to call creativity ‘God’. Robert C. Neville believes that creativity is God, but this is not the same creativity as found in process philosophy. He distinguishes between cosmological creativity (corresponding to the creativity of process thought) and ontological creativity (the First Cause). In his view, God-as-ontological-creativity created the world, together with its cosmological creativity, *ex nihilo*.

Before moving on to a discussion of emptiness, I will briefly state the results of the above analysis. Creativity is a transcendent or ultimate category that refers to a process in the universe that cannot be adequately defined in terms of ultimate conceptual contrasts. It is not a transcendent reality or substantial ground, but the creative aspect of the functioning of experiential entities as they create themselves by synthesizing their internal relations to past entities (via ‘prehension’, which is the other aspect). Creativity is thus an immanent transcendental which enables the process of inclusive transcendence or deconstruction-reconstruction. It is thus like Derrida’s *differance*, ‘which produces different things’ and acts as ‘an undecidable resource that sets the system in motion’; ‘[I]t[he activity or productivity connoted by the *a* of *differance* refers to the generative movement in the play of differences’.

*Emptiness in Madhyamika*

In Madhyamika scholarship, past and present, there exist a number of different interpretations of sunyata. Each of these interpretations begins with the three basic concepts of Madhyamika philosophy: emptiness (*sunyata*), dependent co-arising (*pratitya-samutpada*), and lack of self-nature (*niḥsvabhava*). The relations between these concepts can be stated as follows: things and persons *dependently co-arise*, therefore they are *empty of self-nature*. The realization of this is brought about by the
use of the negative dialectical method (that is, the bi-negation or tetralemma). But how are we to understand sunyata in relation to these other two terms? Is sunyata a proper name of some ultimate reality, or not? Is sunyata a universal attribute of all things and views about things, or are some things and/or views non-empty? Hence, there have arisen a number of different interpretations of Madhyamika emptiness. The more important ones can be classified as follows:

**Nihilism.** Sunyata in this interpretation entails that nothing exists – no universe, no things, no propositions. Sunyata itself becomes synonymous with ‘Nothingness’. Many Westerners have interpreted Madhyamika in this way because they tend to identify inherent existence with existence per se. This inability to conceive of any other kind of existence beyond substantial existence is probably due to the powerful influence of Greek philosophy – with its essentialistic bias – upon Westerners for over two thousand years. Also, Yogacara philosophers sometimes criticize Madhyamika as being a form of nihilism. The use of the term ‘Absolute Nothingness’ as a translation of sunyata is an aberration introduced by German mystics and has now become popular in some inter-faith dialogue circles, especially with the Kyoto school of Japanese Buddhism, which has been influenced by Heidegger as much as by Buddhism.

**Absolutism.** A common interpretation of sunyata is that it points to an absolute reality beyond words and concepts, unable to be captured in propositions. T. R. V. Murti argues that sunyata is the ultimate reality or Absolute beyond the unreal world of mutually relative phenomena, which is similar to Kantian transcendental idealism. But strictly speaking, there can be two kinds of absolutism: the ‘Kantian’ kind which sees an absolute beyond the phenomenal world, and the ‘Hegelian’ kind which equates the (inter-) relative (or dependent origination) with the absolute (presumably because, as Bradley argues, things that are interrelated are abstract aspects of a non-dual and concrete Absolute which contains them). The problem with absolutism is that it suffers from the contradiction of denying absolutes and inherent existences (existence-in-itself) at the phenomenal level and reaffirming them at a noumenal level. I shall call these two forms of absolutism ‘hyper-absolutism’ and ‘inter-absolutism’. The difference between them is as follows: On the one hand, Hyper-absolutism takes the form of an affirmation of bi-negation which uses a neither/nor logic to affirm a reality beyond that which can be conceived of in terms

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of conceptual contrasts. Sunyata is reified into an ultimate reality beyond the
dependent origination of phenomena. An example of hyper-absolutism is Yogacara
Buddhism, with its stress on the positive nature of emptiness as a non-empty and
inherently existent ‘remainder’ that survives deconstruction. Inter-absolutism, on
the other hand, uses a both/and logic to affirm the interdependence of opposing
concepts, thus equating emptiness with dependent origination as itself non-empty.
Masao Abe, influenced as he is by Heidegger’s philosophy, is an example of an
inter-absolutist in this sense. The post-Wittgensteinian (or postmodernist)
interpretation of Madhyamika – which reduces the ultimate truth to a paradoxical
statement that there is no ultimate truth, only relative or conventional truths – is also
a form of inter-absolutism. Garfield is probably correct in his observation that
nihilism and absolutism are two sides of the same coin, for reification often goes
hand in hand with the denial of the possibility of non-reified forms of existence.
Furthermore, both nihilism and absolutism are based on the mistaken notion that the
‘lack of an absolute basis is no basis at all’ – the only difference between the two is
that nihilism alone denies the existence of such an absolute basis. Both have failed to
take account of Nagarjuna’s theory of conventional or relative truth.

No-views. Sometimes sunyata is taken to mean that all propositions, theories,
or views are meaningless or false. This raises the question of the meaning or truth of
sunyata itself, which is solved by positing that the insight into propositionlessness is
not brought about by propositions but by pointing out the contradictions in other
propositions which render them false or meaningless. Guy Bugault, for example,
argues that Nagarjuna uses a meta-language to critique all propositions about reality.

57 For example, see G. M. Nagao, “‘What Remains’ in Sunyata: A Yogacara Interpretation of
Emptiness”, in Minoru Kiyota, ed., Mahayana Buddhist Meditation: Theory and Practice (Honolulu,
58 Jay L. Garfield, The Fundamental Wisdom of the Middle Way: Nagarjuna’s ‘Mula-madhyamaka-
is similar; he argues that the real nihilists are those who take an empty abstraction to have more reality
than concrete events. See Friedrich Nietzsche, Twilight of the Idols or How to Philosophize With a
59 Robert A. F. Thurman, ‘Philosophical Nongocentrizm in Wittgenstein and Candrakirti In Their
60 Hyper-absolutism – called ‘absolutism’ in the literature – is now largely defunct as an interpretation
of sunyata amongst Madhyamika scholars. For examples of the current rejection of Murti’s absolutism
see Frederick J. Streng, Emptiness: A Study in Religious Meaning (Nashville, Tennessee: Abingdon
Press, 1967), 139, 146; Herbert V. Guenther, Tibetan Buddhism in Western Perspective (Berkeley,
California: Dharma Publishing, 1989), 91; Guy Newland, The Two Truths in the Madhyamika
reducing them to having a truth status similar to ‘Is the present king of France bald?’ (which Bertrand Russell contends is meaningless, and so without a truth status, and yet it does not violate the law of excluded middle). If all propositions are like this, he says, then any question of whether they are true or false is meaningless and misses the point.\(^{61}\) No-views theorists side with Wittgenstein in his belief that ‘philosophical problems arise when language goes on holiday’, and forgets that it is purely conventional and nothing more.\(^{62}\) They share his aim of unraveling philosophical propositions by pointing to their meaninglessness by non-propositional means.\(^{63}\)

**Anti-essentialism.** In this interpretation, sunyata refers to the emptiness of essence or inherent existence—things exist, but only as dependently co-arising, without their own self-nature. Thus, there can still be true and meaningful propositions, provided that they are not propositions about essences, as these do not exist and thus statements about them are meaningless. True, all propositions lack inherent existence, but this ‘does not mean that they are incapable of carrying out the function of asserting the content of propositions’,\(^{64}\) or of deconstructing false propositions. They can do this, says Nagarjuna, ‘[j]ust as a magically formed phantom could deny a phantom created by its own magic’.\(^{65}\) Thus on this view, there are both things and propositions, but the only real things are those lacking independent existence and thus involved or interrelated with all other things, and the only valid propositions are those that refer to them (as opposed to things that have inherent existence) – which is not to deny that there can be invalid propositions referring to them. This theory that only inherently existent views (or views affirming inherent existence) are false is common amongst scholars influenced by the Geluk school of Tibetan Buddhism.\(^{66}\) However, as I argued in the chapter on Madhyamika,

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these scholars’ understanding of sunyata remains on the level of conventional truth, where it is valid to make such distinctions between views — but the ultimate truth is ‘the relinquishing of all views’. \(^67\) Both the no-views theorists and the no-inherent-views theorists seem to have forgotten the two truths teaching that there are conventional and ultimate truths, and that both are true.

**Universal Attribute.** Sometimes, sunyata is interpreted as an attribute or essence that all things have in common. Nagarjuna is quoted as saying that just as sugar’s nature is sweetness, and fire’s nature is hotness, so the nature of all things is emptiness. \(^68\) Is this the same as saying that sunyata is the only svabhava? Not if an essence is understood as merely a useful abstraction or name (as in nominalism) — which escapes Candrakirti’s critique of those who regard emptiness as a thing that can be bought and sold. Nevertheless, the notion of a universal essence is problematic in the sense that, unlike ordinary essences such as sweetness and hotness, it does not have a conceivable negation — there are non-sweet and non-hot things, but what is non-empty? Can a concept exist without its opposite? Hence, Garfield is more correct to call sunyata the ‘essenceless essence’ of conventional phenomena, which would make it into a kind of trans-categorical transcendental which cannot be characterized in terms of conceptual contrasts. Garfield uses Wittgenstein’s distinction between asserting and ostending to indicate the difference here between saying that all phenomena have a common property or essence and showing the unsayable transcendental experienced in all phenomena. \(^69\) (We could say, to use Scholastic terminology, that sunyata is more like the existence of things rather than their essence.)

**Openness.** It was probably Herbert Guenther who first introduced the translation of sunyata as ‘openness’ – which was probably influenced by Heidegger’s ‘open region’. More recently, Nancy McCagney has argued that openness is indeed a far better translation than emptiness, and has backed this up with impressive evidence. She contends that Nagarjuna’s usage of the word ‘sunyata’ was inspired by the Prajnaparamita literature’s imagery of infinite space (akṣaśa), which is an open-

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\(^{67}\) Nagarjuna, MK, 27.30, in Garfield, *Fundamental Wisdom*, 83.

\(^{68}\) See Newland, *Two Truths*, 73–4.
ended ether that is both existent and non-existent. Although Nagarjuna reinterpreted this as being neither existent nor non-existent, it is still more appropriate, argues McCagney to translate sanyata as ‘openness’ than as ‘emptiness’, as the latter implies negativity and non-existence rather than bi-negation, whereas the former better describes the result of bi-negational analysis as being an open-ended process that does not settle down (anataya) or grasp anything (anagraha), which better indicates how sanyata is related to pratitya-samutpada. Perhaps it was their knowledge of Nagarjuna’s allusion to open space in his usage of sanyata that led the Chinese Madhyamika to translate sanyata as ‘ku’, which means opening, sky, horizon, space, heavens, vacuum, etc.

Two Emptinesses. Sunyata is seen by some to have a different meaning depending on whether it is used at the level of conventional truth or at the level of ultimate truth — in the former it is an anti-essentialism that is equivalent to dependent co-arising, whereas in the latter it refers to a non-absolute and uncharacterizable open region beyond the dependently co-arising totality. Frederick Streng argues that the interpretation of sanyata as ‘relativity’ is only true at the mundane level, as there is also sanyata at the level of ultimate truth, as an ultimate reality that is interdependent with the mundane rather than an unconditioned and self-existent Absolute. Sunyata, says Streng, ‘is both relatedness and emptiness; it stands “between” the absolute and the conditioned phenomena. Just as much as sanyata is not an eternal unconditioned sphere of being, so it is not simply the conditioned constructs of existence.’ At the mundane level, sanyata can be characterized as dependent co-arising; but at the level of ultimate truth, it is empty of characterization, unable to be defined in terms of conceptual opposites (hence, it is neither conditioned nor unconditioned, eternal nor temporal, monistic nor pluralistic, etc.). That Streng’s interpretation of sanyata can be placed between the hyper-absolutism of the neo-Kantians and the inter-absolutism of the post-Wittgensteinians can be seen in the juxtaposition of Murti’s statement


that he is ‘unable to accept Dr. Streng’s interpretation that Nagarjuna does not
accept, even by implication, any ultimate Reality and that there is no Absolute in his
system’, 23 with Streng’s statement that Huntington’s postmodernist interpretation
‘confuses the highest meaning of truth in Madhyamika with conventional truth’. 24
The two emptinesses view as a middle way between the hyper- and the inter-
absolutist positions is affirmed by David Loy, who believes that ‘these two
misinterpretations are not historical accidents but are natural and countervailing
tendencies, diametrically and dialectically opposed … Therefore, each is a salutary
corrective to the other, and Madhyamika consists in an unavoidable tension between
these two poles’. 25 (Unfortunately, Loy mistakenly groups Streng with the
Wittgensteinians.) Hence, it is no wonder that, as scholars such as Sideris and Oetke
have expressed, there is an ambiguity in Nagarjuna’s texts that makes it impossible
for us to be sure which interpretation of sunyata is correct.26 In fact, both are in a
sense correct and in another sense false — for they are mutually transformed and lose
their absoluteness when brought together in heterogeneous synthesis. N. R. Glass has
proposed a ‘third reading’ of emptiness based on the tathagatagarbha philosophy
which is ambiguous but seems to be itself a form of absolutism. 27 The non-absolutist
form of the two emptinesses interpretation arises from Nagarjuna’s statement that
samsara is nirvana and nirvana is samsara. Nagarjuna sets up a ‘sunyatological
difference’ between the emptiness of samsaric phenomena (which are conventionally

The Problem of Two Truths in Buddhism and Vedanta (Dordrecht, Holland: D. Reidel Publishing Co.,
1973), 22. Sprung has a similar complaint against Streng, who, he says, draws ‘the higher truth down
into the ceaseless flux of existence’. Mervyn Sprung, Lucid Exposition of the Middle Way: The
Essential Chapters from the ‘Prasannapada’ of Candrakirti (Boulder: Prajna Press, 1979), 22.
Sprung’s point is that dependent origination is also empty (otherwise it becomes an inter-absolute);
but I think Streng is not unaware of this danger (as the next quote above shows) and thus seeks a
middle path between both kinds of absolute.

24 Frederick J. Streng, Review of The Emptiness of Emptiness, C. W. Huntington, Philosophy East and


26 Mark Sideris, ‘Nagarjuna as Anti-Realist’, Journal of Indian Philosophy 16 (1988): 324; Claus
Oetke, ‘Remarks On the Interpretation of Nagarjuna’s Philosophy’, Journal of Indian Philosophy 19

27 Newman Robert Glass, Working Emptiness: Toward a Third Reading of Emptiness in Buddhism
and Postmodern Thought (Atlanta, Georgia: Scholars Press, 1995), 63, 76–7, 98. For an important
critical review of this work, see Jay L. Garfield, Review of Working Emptiness: Toward a Third
Reading of Emptiness in Buddhism and Postmodern Thought, Newman Robert Glass, Sophia 36
existential) and the emptiness of nirvana (which is neither existent nor non-existent nor conventionally existent), only to collapse it in a formal identification of samsara and nirvana (for both are empty). However, as their emptiness is not the same — because nirvana’s emptiness does not imply it is conventionally existent — there is neither identity nor difference. Hence there are only two emptinesses from the perspective of conventional truth; ultimately there is neither two nor one.

Of the above interpretations, the theory of two emptinesses has the merit of comprehensiveness in the sense that it includes the other theories, either in modified or non-modified form. The two kinds of Absolutism have been shown to be one-sided views that make sense only if relativized via mutual dependence (which removes their nihilistic implications as well as their absoluteness). Their validity lies in each being seen as one of the two truths. Likewise for the no-views and anti-essentialist theories. Also, the universal ‘essence’ theory makes sense provided that it is understood as an ‘essenceless essence’ or immanent transcendent. Finally, there is merit in interpreting sunyata as openness as it (1) removes the negative bias in words like ‘emptiness’ and ‘void’; (2) shows how pratitya-samutpada (as the open-endedness of dependent phenomena) is the same as sunyata (as the openness of space); and this in turn (3) shows how the ‘two opennesses’ theory is compatible with the two emptinesses theory.

A Theory of Creative Emptiness

Is the function of creativity in process philosophy the same as the function of emptiness in Madhyamika Buddhism? Do ‘creativity’ and ‘emptiness’ both refer to the same reality, different aspects of the same reality, or different realities? It is my contention that creativity and emptiness are two different but interdependent aspects of the same ultimate reality. However, as there is no dualistic difference between the ultimate reality and the conventional reality, creativity can also be identified with dependent origination, and the process of becoming with emptiness. However, there are a large number of objections that could be made to this hypothesis. (1) It is often said that a process of self-emptying is necessary as a prelude to creativity. Or, as Matthew Fox, puts it, the via negativa comes before, and is thus distinct from, the via

78 Nagarjuna, MK, 25.9.
creativa. Hence, it could be argued that emptiness and creativity do not refer to the same reality. (2) The word 'creativity' arises from a theistic milieu in which it makes sense to speak of creativity because there is a creator and creatures; but in Buddhism, where there is no God, there is no word nor concept corresponding to 'creativity'. (3) Madhyamika Buddhists reject any kind of svabhava, and as this is sometimes translated as 'self-caused thing' (causa sui), it is incompatible with the self-creativity of process thought. (Guenther calls the Madhyamika 'reductionists' because in his view they reject autopoiésis or self-creation.) (4) Creativity implies fabrication, the perpetuation of illusory forms, desire, craving, and grasping; whereas emptiness implies the letting-go of such things. (5) Creativity resembles the 'womb of potentiality' or tathagatagarbha, the alaya-vijnana of Yogacara Buddhists, and the lila ('divine play') or sakti ('creative energy') of Hinduism – all notions which the Madhyamika reject. (6) Sometimes, creativity is likened to Heidegger's Being and Aquinas's existence (esse) as opposed to beings or essences. But emptiness is neither being nor non-being, neither existence nor non-existence. (7) Creativity is often likened to dependent origination rather than emptiness (unless both are equated). (8) Process philosophers say that only events are creative, whereas the Madhyamika say that events and structures are both empty. (9) If emptiness is the negative aspect of dependent origination then, as this is (allegedly) the same as the symmetrical interdependence of things, it implies determinism rather than creativity. I will show below that these objections to the correlativity of emptiness

79 Matthew Fox, Original Blessing: A Primer on Creation Spirituality (Santa Fe: Bear and Company, 1983).


81 See Candrakirti, 263, in Sprung, Lucid Exposition, 154.

82 Herbert V. Guenther, From Reductionism to Creativity: rDzogs-chen and the New Sciences of Mind (Boston: Shambhala, 1989), 7, 70.


and creativity are mistaken. But first I will need to survey the existing discussions of the relation between these two terms.

Sometimes process philosophers liken creativity to emptiness, other times to dependent origination. Examples of the former are as follows. Hartshorne speaks of the "emptiness of creativity" in the sense that "today's world is empty of, does not fully determine, tomorrow's world".\textsuperscript{86} John Cobb argues that "Heidegger's being and Whitehead's creativity correspond remarkably with Buddhist Emptiness".\textsuperscript{87} And Steve Odin contends that creativity and emptiness are alike in that "neither creativity nor sunyata are reified as having any independent reality of their own but become actual only by virtue of their embodiments in particular momentary events".\textsuperscript{88} Likewise, according to Nolan P. Jacobson, "[in the Buddhist perspective, the source of everything is no determinate actuality but a creativity infinitely productive of actualities. The world is forever issuing from this fullness of existence, sometimes called Sunyata ("the Void"), which is the eminent society in which the many – the universe viewed disjunctively – become one – the universe viewed conjunctively – in that creative advance whereby the eminent member continuously becomes the new interrelatedness of things".\textsuperscript{89} He also believes that (the process philosopher) '[Henry] Wieman's concept of creative interchange is the closest American philosophers have come to the Buddhist concept of Sunyata'.\textsuperscript{90} Also following Wieman is David Miller, who writes that "Sunyata is the living void, the passing concreteness of experience, the creativity that continually opens and integrates our individual selves with the encircling realities beyond our distinct selves".\textsuperscript{91} For him, "the fullness of creativity is the utter emptiness of established actualities".\textsuperscript{92} Sometimes, however, creativity is likened to nothingness or the void, but without any direct reference to Buddhism or

\textsuperscript{86} Hartshorne, "Emptiness" and Fullness", 417–18.


\textsuperscript{89} Nolan Pliny Jacobson, Buddhism and the Contemporary World: Change and Self-Correction (Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois Univ. Press, 1983), 8, 155.

\textsuperscript{90} Nolan Pliny Jacobson, Understanding Buddhism (Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois Univ. Press, 1986), 123.

\textsuperscript{91} David Lee Miller, Philosophy of Creativity (New York: Peter Lang, 1988), 20.

\textsuperscript{92} Ibid., 104.
sūnyata. Berdyaev, for example, says that creativity is nothingness—a notion which he inherits from Heidegger rather than from Buddhism.

Examples of process philosophers likening creativity to dependent origination are as follows. (As will be seen, many of these also liken creativity to emptiness.) Hartshorne believes that the qualifier ‘origination’ in ‘dependent origination’ indicates an element of creativity, although he is not sure that Buddhists would admit this. Griffin does not think they would, although he thinks that ‘conditioned co-production’ is otherwise similar to Whitehead’s ‘category of the ultimate’ (i.e., creativity, whereby the many become one and are increased by one). And Cobb believes that Whitehead’s ‘account of creativity—the many coalescing into a new one which is then a part of the many which coalesce again—is remarkably similar to some formulations of pratītya-samutpada. (Cobb also often likens dependent origination to Whitehead’s concept of ‘concrescence’, which is the process of many objects creatively coalescing into one subject.) Likewise, Paul Ingram believes that ‘creativity is much like the Buddhist notion of “dependent co-origination”’. Jacobson, in his many books on Buddhism, has consistently compared creativity with dependent origination: ‘It is commonly agreed … 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.”’ Jacobson believes that ‘The Central Conception of Buddhism’ is in fact the intuition that ‘creative coorigination’ or ‘creative experience’ is all there is, which is the direct


opposite of non-creative and independent substance. A final example is Bracken, who argues that 'implicit in the formula for dependent co-arising ... is the notion of unceasing activity [creativity] as the experiential ground or objective reason why individual beings continue to arise and cease to be in dependence on one another'. (See also my discussion in chapter five, where dependent origination is shown to be asymmetrical and thus creative.)

Buddhist scholars have also likened creativity to emptiness and dependent origination. Before surveying these comparisons, I need to show that the charge (number two above) that the concept of creativity does not exist in Buddhism is false. Jacobson has accumulated much evidence to demonstrate that creativity is central to Buddhism. He says that '[t]he whole of Buddhist philosophy in all its branches is permeated with this perspective on the creativity incarnate in the momentariness of life'.

Guy Welbon, in his study of Western interpretations of Nirvana, contends 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 the most important difference between Buddhism and Hinduism. The eminent Buddhistist, Fyodor Stecherbatsky, believed that '[a] plurality of subtle, ultimate elements, technically called dharmas, creatively synthesize the past into the novel present, making the past an ingredient in the process of "relational origination" forevermore'. And the great Japanese philosopher, Nishida Kitaro, writes that 'the merely conceptual is not the real; the world of actuality is the world of self-creation, a creative world which goes on forming itself: we are all creative elements of a creative world'. Finally, Herbert Guenther – Buddhistist and translator of Tibetan philosopher Longchenpa – in summing up what is real from the Buddhist


100 Bracken, Divine Matrix, 94.


103 Fyodor Stecherbatsky, The Conception of Buddhist Nirvana (Leningrad: Publishing Office of the Academy of Science, USSR, 1927), 54. This shows that Griffin ("Buddhist Thought", 264) is wrong to think that Stecherbatsky interpreted dependent origination deterministically.
perspective, says that ‘[c]reative forces are all that exist’.\textsuperscript{105} He translates the Tibetan word ‘
gdungs’ – one of the words used to describe sunyata (\textit{stong-pa-nyid}) – as ‘incessant creativity’.\textsuperscript{106} In English translations (by Guenther and others) of Longchenpa, creativity appears often as one of the words for sunyata. In one such translation, for example, Longchenpa says that the ‘supreme universal creativity’, which is ‘not biased toward being or nonbeing’, is ‘the majestic creativity which fashions everything’.\textsuperscript{107} The translators explain that this is not a dualistic creativity that presupposes a creative ‘agency, will, design, external intelligence, or law’; rather, it is more akin to the ‘self-organizing, self-regulating systems, which have no need of an external agent, will, design, or law’.\textsuperscript{108}

Many contemporary Buddhist scholars describe emptiness as creativity, although they do not necessarily have process philosophy in mind when they do so. For example, D. T. Suzuki says that ‘Sunyata is formless, but it is the fountainhead of all possibilities; to turn what is possible into an actuality is an act of creativity’.\textsuperscript{109} Also Lama Anagarika Govinda avers that emptiness is not negative, but a state of freedom or ‘spontaneous receptivity’ (‘creative synthesis’?).\textsuperscript{110} And Nagarjuna is adamant that ‘the profound, enlightenment in practice, is emptiness creative as compassion’.\textsuperscript{111} But it is in the Kyoto school of Buddhism that we find emptiness-as-creativity referred to most often. Both Nishida Kitaro and Nishitani Keiji describe emptiness as ‘creative nothingness’. Hosaku Matsuo interprets emptiness as the primordial source of creative potentiality rather than mere non-being. According to


\textsuperscript{106} Guenther, \textit{Tibetan Buddhism}, 41, 56–8, 67–70, 73–5, 88–9, 247.


\textsuperscript{108} ibid., 74.


\textsuperscript{110} L\textit{ama Anagarika Govinda, Creative Meditation and Multi-Dimensional Consciousness} (London: Allen and Unwin, 1977), 10–11.

Masao Abe, emptiness is a dynamic movement of emptying rather than a static state of emptiness.\textsuperscript{112} And Ryusei Takeda believes that 'the same ontological situation Nagarjuna describes as emptiness Whitehead calls the creative advance into novelty'.\textsuperscript{113}

Other Buddhist scholars describe dependent origination as creativity, but again, they do not necessarily refer to process philosophy when doing so. Kenneth Inada, for example, thinks that the 'process of relational origination ... is nearly identical to the Whiteheadian concept of creativity', as 'creativity is the way all experiences arise in a novel sense'.\textsuperscript{114} Streng affirms 'the interdependent co-arising of existence as a continuing creation'.\textsuperscript{115} Alex Wayman, in discussing Nagarjuna's tetralemma on causation, concludes that 'there is no denial of arising \textit{per se}, but the alternatives are meant to deny the arising falsely ascribed to certain agencies, to wit, itself, another, both itself and another, or by chance'.\textsuperscript{116} A final example is from Garfield, who, as we have already seen, explains Nagarjuna's denial of effects already contained in their causes in Kantian terms as follows: 'phenomena are not analytically contained in their conditions; rather, a synthesis is required out of which a phenomenon not antecedently existent comes to be'\textsuperscript{117} - which means that the new phenomenon is the result of a \textit{creative} synthesis whereby the many become one and increase by one.

The above survey gives the impression that both process philosophers and Buddhists cannot decide whether emptiness or dependent origination are to be identified with creativity. It is more likely, however, that both interpretations are correct - as many of the above scholars acknowledge. This makes sense if we


\textsuperscript{114} Kenneth K. Inada, 'The Metaphysics of Buddhist Experience and the Whiteheadian Encounter', \textit{Philosophy East and West} 25 (1975): 481.


\textsuperscript{116} Alex Wayman, 'Who Understands the Four Alternatives of the Buddhist Texts?', in Nathan Katz, ed., \textit{Buddhist and Western Philosophy} (New Delhi: Sterling Publishers, 1981), 460. I include this example because creativity is an arising that is neither subject nor object, neither self- nor other-caused.
remember that dependent origination and emptiness are very closely correlated and that in fact the former is a special case of the latter. (Nagarjuna’s identification of nirvana with samsara, or emptiness with dependent origination, is not monistic; rather, as Streng argues, there is a ‘negative identity’ only.) The two emptinesses theory discussed earlier states that there is the emptiness of phenomena (both things and selves) — which is the same as saying that all phenomena originate in dependence on other phenomena — and the emptiness of nirvana (and of emptiness itself).

Emptiness in the first sense is equivalent to dependent origination (conventional existent), whereas emptiness in the second sense is neither dependent origination nor non-dependent non-origination. But creativity is likewise understood in two senses: first, as the creative synthesis of phenomena whereby many-become-one creatively (concrescence), and second, as the creativity that cannot be characterized in terms of conceptual contrasts. In the first case creativity is positively defined as the becoming that is neither being nor non-being; whereas in the second case creativity is beyond all definition — whether it be being, non-being, or even becoming. Hence, it is my contention that creativity and emptiness are correlative and that likewise dependent origination and creative synthesis are correlative. But just as creativity is inclusive of creative synthesis and emptiness is inclusive of dependent origination, so we can say that ‘creative emptiness’ includes ‘creative dependence’ or ‘synthetic origination’. Thus the identification of creativity with emptiness implies the identification of creative synthesis with dependent origination.

The above is complicated by the work of Madhyamika scholar, Nancy McCagney, and process philosopher, Jorge Luis Nobo, which indicates that emptiness/openness and creativity are distinguishable but interdependent aspects of the one ultimate reality. As we have seen, McCagney prefers to translate sunyata as ‘openness’ as this is closer to Nagarjuna’s usage of sunyata as being like infinite space. Sunyata as openness is thus similar to what Whitehead calls the ‘extensive continuum’ — a term often ignored by process philosophers. Nobo has shown that Whitehead sometimes contrasts creativity with the extensive continuum, seeing both as two inseparable yet distinct aspects of the category of the ultimate, which he


118 Streng, *Emptiness*, 75.

119 This asymmetrical inclusiveness explains how the identity of samsara and nirvana can be understood even though they are non-identical from the point of view of samsara.
sometimes calls the ‘Receptacle’ (after Plato) and at other times ‘creativity’ (used in a more inclusive sense to encompass both creativity and the extensive continuum). Nobo contends that both concepts are needed for ultimate explanation as creativity only explains the becoming of entities, not their solidarity. He concludes that

Creativity is the dynamic principle on which the essential genetic development of the universe is grounded; extension is the static principle on which the essential solidarity of the universe is grounded. But the two principles condition one another. In their unity they constitute an extenso-creative matrix which is at once the whereby of all becoming and the wherein of all interconnected existence.¹²⁰

This ‘extenso-creative matrix’ is able to explain not only the processes of concrescence (many-in-one) and transition (one-in-many), but also the solidarity of intersubjective co-arising of entities, which (as we have seen in chapter six) resists being described in terms of symmetrical interdependence. (For example, it explains phenomena such as quantum nonlocality.) Remarkably, Derrida has recently used Plato’s notion of the ‘khora’ – which he also calls the ‘Receptacle’ – to differentiate between his ‘denegation’ and the via negativa of negative theology; for his analysis can be used to show the close correlation between Whitehead’s extenso-creative matrix and Nagarjuna’s sunyata. Derrida argues that Plato’s thought gave rise to two different traditions of via negativa – the mainstream Neoplatonists, who latched onto his ‘good beyond being’ (epekeina tes onsias) or ‘hyperessence’, and the minority radical Neoplatonists, who preferred the non-hyperessential neither/nor logic of the khora or Receptacle. Whereas the former tradition argued for a Being above and beyond being and non-being, the latter wanted to ‘avoid speaking of khora as of “something” that is or is not, that could be present or absent, intelligible, sensible, or both at once, active or passive, the Good or the Evil, God or man, the living or the nonliving’.¹²¹ (Interestingly, this latter tradition also inverted Aristotle’s passive matter/active form dichotomy, believing that formless matter was active and creative of form.) This use of Derrida as a link between sunyata and the extenso-creative matrix is made more convincing when we take into account the fact that Derrida’s


deconstructionism has often been likened to Madhyamika. I conclude then that
sunnyata and creativity are two complementary aspects of the ultimate truth. Although
process philosophy and Madhyamika are probably each aware of both aspects,
process philosophy tends to put the stress on creativity, whereas Madhyamika
ignores the creative aspect of sunnyata.

Although process philosophy has both aspects of the extenso-creative matrix,
it is not immediately evident that the Madhyamika sunnyata includes the creative
aspect. A powerful case could be made by the Madhyamika that creativity belongs to
the samsaric level of existence and that therefore, as Nagarjuna puts it, ‘the ignorant
create while the wise, seeing reality, do not’. Doesn’t creativity give rise to
deceptive constructions (mosa-dharma) and the perpetuation of illusions? Or, if we
equate creativity with the ‘will to live’ (to use Schopenhauer’s term), doesn’t this
lead to craving, which is the cause of suffering? The response here is that creativity
is ‘beyond good and evil’ in the (nondual) sense that it can give rise to both negative
desire (craving or clinging) and positive desire (compassion). The latter is a non-
egocentric form of desire that leads to enlightenment. Now, while the early
Buddhists saw all desire (tsrana) as negative and as something to be avoided,
Mahayana Buddhists saw it as negative only if combined with an ego-self (taman),
but otherwise as compassion (karuna). Hence the realization of the emptiness of
ego-selves (anatman) transforms craving into compassion. Creativity is thus
compatible with the Madhyamika sunnyata, but creativity can be liberating only when
we do not cling to our creations – i.e., it must be disinterested. Nagarjuna’s

Univ. Press, 1995).

122 E.g., see Robert Magliola, Derrida on the Mend (West Lafayette, Indiana: Purdue Univ. Press,
1984); and Ian W. Mabett, ‘Nagarjuna and Deconstruction’, Philosophy East and West 45 (1995):
203–225.

123 Perhaps, as Masao Abe says, we cannot say that creativity and emptiness are same or different,
only that they are nondual. See Masao Abe, ‘“There is No Common Denominator for World
Religions”: The Positive Meaning of this Negative Statement’, Journal of Ecumenical Studies 26

124 Nagarjuna, MK, 26.10, in McCagney, Philosophy of Openness, 212.

125 This distinction is also made in Glass, Working Emptiness, 83–6.

126 This argument is based on Magliola, Derrida on the Mend, 215, n. 134.

127 That is, freedom from attachments (interests) is a freedom to be creative. A very good paper on the
interdependence of Zorba-like creative engagement and Buddhist detached disengagement is Jay
realization that samsara and nirvana have ‘negative identity’ is probably connected to his understanding of the nonduality of desire as the same force that is at one level responsible for ignorant craving and at another level gives rise to enlightened compassion. It is this realization that paved the way for the Mahayana Buddhist idea of the bodhisattva who ‘works in the everyday world but, unlike the untrained person, he [sic] does not create fiction’. This is why Streng speaks of ‘affirming the importance of the quality of creating form -- in distinction to the common stress on formless awareness’, for this is required by the ethico-political dimension of Buddhism as found in the bodhisattva ideal. Finally, it can be argued that suffering cannot be overcome without creativity. As the psychologist Otto Rank says, only the creative are fully healthy. Doctors have discovered that many, if not most, illnesses are psychosomatic – which means that one can be sick even though there appears to be nothing physically wrong. Could it be that although there is nothing wrong with the body, these patients’ creativity has been impaired? If so, then Jacobson may well be correct in saying that in Buddhism, the opposite of creativity is suffering.

However, there still remains the fear that if creativity is described as a matrix, ground, or source, it comes dangerously close to an absolutism that has more in common with either Yogacara or tathagatagarbha. Similar conclusions follow if creativity is described as an existential Being underlying essential beings (Heidegger), as some process philosophers do. The danger of creativity being treated as a non-empty ultimate (as is the case with the Yogacara understanding of sunyata) does arise if, as we have seen, creativity is understood as a monistic ground or underlying substantial activity; but the more orthodox understanding of creativity is that it is not able to stand on its own as a reality over and above actual occasions, but is dependent on their existence. If, as Whitehead says, ‘creativity is not an external

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128 McCagney, Philosophy of Openness, 29.


130 For evidence in favor of the affirmative, see Jacobson, ‘Central Conception’, 58.

131 Ibid., 45. Of course, Schopenhauer would have disagreed here, as he saw the affirmation of the will (to live) as the chief cause of suffering. However, creativity is not the same as this will or motive to live, which is based on self-centredness. Creativity is more like Nietzsche’s will to power, which Nietzsche consciously opposes to Schopenhauer’s will to live. The will to power is a return to the understanding of will by Duns Scotus, Fichte, and others. See Michael Allen Gillespie, Nihilism Before Nietzsche (Chicago: The Univ. of Chicago Press, 1994), passim.
agency with its own ulterior purposes' and 'there is no meaning to "creativity" apart from its "creatures,"'\(^{132}\) then there is no possibility of creativity being seen as non-empty. But what about the tathagatagarbha-like imagery that is sometimes used to describe creativity? (For sometimes creativity is described as a matrix or creative womb that 'births' entities within itself.) But again, this only presents a problem if creativity is seen as a 'remainder' that is non-empty\(^{133}\) – as tathagatagarbha philosophers indeed do. As long as it is understood that this imagery is merely metaphorical and used to describe an immanent and dependent creativity, it is perfectly compatible with Madhyamika emptiness. This compatibility is made more plausible by the fact that even Madhyamika scholars sometimes refer to emptiness as a creative source of phenomena. Even the present Dalai Lama says that 'Madhyamaka philosophy also speaks of emptiness as the origin of all conventional phenomena. Emptiness is, in some sense, like a creator since all phenomena can be seen as different manifestations of this underlying ultimate nature'.\(^{134}\) And although Streng rejects the intuitive mode of thought that describes emptiness as a 'womb of potentiality' or ground of all things,\(^{135}\) he nevertheless describes his own negative dialectical understanding of emptiness as 'the root source for both subjective and objective experience', although he stresses that '[t]here is no reality outside the language system that correlates with the notion of emptiness'.\(^{136}\) Hence, emptiness is a 'source', but it is a deconstructed source. Not a 'sourceless source' or 'unmoved mover', but a 'non-source source' in the sense of a source that is empty of independent existence (swabhava). There is no transcendent source of the immanent self-creativity. The apparent incompatibility arises from the anti-hyper-absolutism currently popular amongst Madhyamika scholars (to the point of affirming the opposite extreme of inter-absolutism) – the fact is that both philosophies reject

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\(^{133}\) See Nagao, ""What Remains" in Sunyata".


\(^{135}\) Streng, *Emptiness*, 156.

hyper-absolutism (e.g., Yogacara and tathagatagarbha) and inter-absolutism (e.g., Hua-yen). (No doubt three decades ago, when the hyper-absolutist reading of Madhyamika was dominant, creativity would have been seen to be a form of inter-absolutism!) However, Critical Buddhists such as Hakamaya Noriaki and Matsumoto Shiro think that the notion of creativity is a form of ‘topological philosophy’ akin to Yogacara and tathagatagarbha, for according to Noriaki, Giambattista Vico – the alleged founder of topological philosophy – said that creativity or invention precedes critical deduction.\(^{137}\) The response to this is that deduction is dependent on symmetrical interdependence, which is a spatial form of interdependence that Critical Buddhists reject in favor of temporal interdependence.\(^{138}\) But is this not the same as asymmetrical interdependence? Also, as we have seen, we must distinguish between a creativity that is immanent and a transcendent absolute. Even the Critical Buddhists distinguish between a tathagatagarbha that is immanent and one that is a transcendent source.\(^{139}\) Hence, there are good and bad forms of both critical and topological philosophies.

Another problem arises when creativity is described by some process philosophers as akin to the Scholastic existence (esse) as opposed to essence – a distinction that Heidegger adopted in his theory of ‘ontological difference’ between Being (existence, or non-being) and being (essence). Being is not a being – hence, it is non-being or ‘nothingness’; and existence is not an actual essence or substance – hence, it is non-essential. Being is described by Heidegger as the verb ‘to be’ underlying all nouns (beings); scholastics describe existence as the activity which actualizes actual essences. So it is very easy to interpret creativity and emptiness in terms of Being and existence. The process philosopher Fetz, for example, sees creativity as a new transcendental identical with Aquinas’s esse.\(^{140}\) And Buddhist scholars have sometimes compared emptiness with Heidegger’s Being. Cobb sees Heidegger’s Being and the Scholastics’ existence as a bridge between creativity and emptiness. He argues that just as the existence of, say, a chair (as opposed to the


\(^{138}\) Matsumoto Shiro, ‘The Doctrine of Tathagata-garbha Is Not Buddhist’, in Hubbard and Swanson, Pruning the Bodhi Tree, 165.

\(^{139}\) Matsumoto Shiro, ‘Comments on Critical Buddhism’, in Hubbard and Swanson, Pruning the Bodhi Tree, 162.
The concept of a non-existent chair) is not one essence among the aggregate of essences or qualities that make up the chair (for they are abstract universals, whereas the existence of the chair is something concrete), so too creativity and emptiness are not abstract essences that all things have in common, but the concrete ‘ultimate reality’ itself. But there are problems with this approach. Both process philosophy and Madhyamika deny that reality can be characterized in terms of being and non-being, existence and non-existence – so reality cannot be referred to as ‘Being’ or ‘existence’. Why refer to that which is neither a being nor a non-being as ‘Being’, or to that which is neither existent nor non-existent as ‘existence’? It would be far better to use terms like ‘creative emptiness’ and ‘dependent becoming’. The danger with terms like ‘Being’ and ‘existence’ is that they can easily be misused for theistic purposes, as in fact happened in both cases (e.g., although both Aristotle and Heidegger did not equate God with existence and Being, Aquinas and Tillich, respectively, did); in which case these terms become referents to a hyperessential (or hyper-absolutist) reality above the mundane. Both process philosophy and Madhyamika deny a dualistic ‘ontological difference’ between existential Being and essential beings; instead, there is a nondual (‘neither one nor two’) relation between creative emptiness and dependent becoming. Rather than ontology (whether ‘fundamental’ or not), process philosophy and Madhyamika have a cosmology of becoming and a ‘sunnyatology’ of openness, between which there is, as we have seen, a ‘negative identity’ – that is, strictly speaking, neither identity nor non-identity. Hence creative emptiness is what can be called an ‘immanent transcendental’.

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142 The later Heidegger did revise his ontological difference – he no longer saw Being as an absolute upon which beings depended asymmetrically, but as standing in an interdependent relation with them (cf. the original 1943 postscript to ‘What is Metaphysics?’ with its 1949 revision). Heidegger, Martin, Pathmarks, ed. William McNeill (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1998), 233, n. 4–5. Here we see that ‘being presumably prevails in its essence without beings, [but] a being never, however, is without being’ becomes ‘being never prevails in its essence without beings, [and] a being never is without being’. This change marks the ‘turn’ in Heidegger’s thought.

143 See David L. Hall, ‘Buddhism, Taoism, and the Question of Ontological Difference’, in R. Puligundla and D. L. Miller, eds., Buddhism and the Emerging World Civilization: Essays in Honor of Nolan Pliny Jacobson (Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois Univ. Press, 1996), 84–5; and Robert C. Neville, Creativity and God: A Challenge to Process Theology (New York: The Seabury Press, 1980), 36, both of whom argue that process philosophy denies the ontological difference between cosmological wholeness and ontological thatness. Neville believes that, as well as Whitehead’s cosmological creativity, there must also be an ontological creativity, which Neville calls God (ibid., 8) – another example of the danger of theistic ‘capture’ inherent in the ontological
Huntington (following Rorty) is right when he says that there is no reality ‘beyond the sociolinguistic matrix of everyday experience’, but this does not rule out the existence of a trans-sociolinguistic reality (ultimate truth) inscribed within the sociolinguistic (conventional truth). Or, as Derrida puts it, there is nothing outside the text not because the text has no other, but because this other (silence as opposed to language) is inscribed within the text. This is because the ultimate truth (creative emptiness) can only be attained by the means of conventional truth (dependent becoming, language, social interaction, etc.).

**God and Creative Emptiness: Same or Different?**

Now that I have established that creativity and emptiness are two aspects of the same ultimate truth, the question arises as to whether this ultimate truth is God. This question is important, for it is common amongst commentators on process philosophy and Madhyamika Buddhism to refer to creativity or emptiness as God. Some examples of both are in order. First, the equation of creativity and God. Robert Neville, as we have seen, argues that grounding the cosmological creativity of the world is an ontological creativity that creates the world *ex nihilo*, and that such ontological creativity can be called ‘God’. This is, he argues, a far more orthodox position, as far as traditional theism is concerned, than the heterodox separation of God and creativity in process thought. Another process philosopher, Lewis S. Ford, argues that God should not be seen as an entity in the present, but as the very creativity that is the future-as-potentiality. Another example is that of John Keenan, who argues that the early Christians saw the holy spirit as the ‘creative activity’ of God in our lives.

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We now come to examples of the equation of emptiness and God. We have already seen the Dalai Lama’s assertion that emptiness is a bit like a creator (although by this he might mean that things are self-creating). Another example is John Hick, who says that the Buddhist emptiness and the Christian God are who different phenomenal aspects of the same noumenal Reality. A third example is the very popular kenoticism movement that is based on the Biblical passage where God is said to have emptied (kenosis) Godself on the cross — an idea that underlies the Christian understanding of creation (as divine decretion), incarnation (descent into relative non-being), and salvation (God dies so that we may live). If the self-emptying of God is the same process as the deification of emptiness, wonder the kenoticiasts, perhaps the God of theism is the same as the emptiness of Buddhism. Some Buddhists have also latched onto this idea. For example, Masao Abe argues that ‘the notion of the kenotic God opens up for Christianity a common ground with Buddhism by overcoming Christianity’s monotheistic character, the absolute oneness of God, and by sharing with Buddhism the realization of absolute nothingness as the essential basis for the ultimate’.

Kenotic emptying is usually linked together with the notion of pleroma or fullness, which is often used in the Bible to refer to the process of perfection whereby God becomes ‘all in all’ and all things and persons interpenetrate (panentheism and interdependence) – which can be compared with the Buddhist idea (found in the Heart Sutra) that ‘emptiness is form and form is emptiness’.

There are a number of problems with the identification of emptiness with kenosis, however. Although such identification would probably work in a Yogacara Buddhist context, it does not seem likely to be successful in the Madhyamika context, for here ‘the emptiness of Sunyata is not to be taken as one member of the Emptiness-Fullness, non-being-being dichotomy. It is not over against anything else at all in opposition to it’.

For the Madhyamika, emptiness is itself empty, rather than full. The Biblical emptiness-fullness pair (or kenosis-plerosis) refer to what Steve Odin describes as ‘a forward-moving and eschatological process of kenotic


148 Philippians 2.6–11.

149 Cobb and Ives, Emptying God, 39–40.
metamorphosis that culminates in the fullness of the Kingdom of God.\textsuperscript{151} the Madhyamika emptiness, on the other hand, is the very timeless emptiness of this temporal emptiness-fullness process. That is, kenosis and plerōsis are the processes of self-emptying and becoming full of others, respectively; whereas sunyata is the fact that everything is always already empty of self and full of others. The panentheistic God of process theology is one participant in this temporal process of continuous self-emptying and thus not to be identified with the emptiness of the process itself. The kenoticist movement seems to be a narcissistic dialogue between theists whose God is a hyperessential absolute arrived at by the via negativa of negative theology and ‘centric’ Buddhists (such as Yogacara and some forms of Zen) who see emptiness as non-empty. Each merely sees itself in the reflection of the other, instead of being mutually enriched by the other.

Although process philosophers sometimes identify creativity with God, as the above examples indicate, most process philosophers do in fact keep them separate. According to Whitehead, God is creativity’s primordial accident – the ‘first’ (in the logical, non-temporal sense) to arise from creativity, just as Zeus was said to have been the first to arise from Chaos. Berdyaev calls this process by which God arose from the Ungrund (Boehme: ‘non-ground’) the ‘theogonic process’.\textsuperscript{152} (This is also similar to Derrida’s proto-trace or différence originale, which precedes God.) The main reason for this difference between God and creativity is that God is not the only creative entity; rather, there are degrees of creativity in all individual entities. Hence, Hartshorne speaks of supreme and lesser forms of creativity.\textsuperscript{153} Creativity is thus a transcendental in the scholastic sense of something that both God and the world have in common. The problem with the Scholastic notion of the transcendental is that that which God has in common with the world – being – is not univocal in meaning. Rather, the world’s being-as-effect is only analogically comparable to God’s being-


as-cause. This has the effect of denying real creativity to creatures as they effectively have the status of a character in a play written by God. By grounding the activity of the world in an actuality whose essence is existence, the Scholastics end up reifying and deifying transcendental being. In process terms, they identify creativity with God. Hence, any creative act performed by a creature is in their eyes really an ‘act of God’.

It could be argued that it is merely a matter of definition – why could we not call creativity or emptiness ‘God’ if we wanted to? Of course, we could call anything ‘God’ if we wanted to, but either this word has a conventionally accepted meaning or it does not. If it does not, then it is meaningless, and is merely being used as a proper name like ‘Luke’ or ‘Santideva’. In the West, the word ‘God’ is usually understood to refer to a supreme being that is wholly good and worthy of worship. But creative emptiness is neither existent nor non-existent, neither supreme nor non-supreme, neither good nor evil – hence, it lacks the actuality, supremacy, and goodness that would allow it to be worshipped. We could call it ‘Godhead’ to distinguish it from ‘God’ – as Meister Eckhart and others in the Christian mystical tradition do – but we should not thereby confuse it with God. To do so would be to confuse the supreme actuality (God) with the activity (creativity) in all things – a confusion which we could call, following Heidegger, ‘onto-theology’; or even better, ‘sunya-theology’. The actuality and supremacy of God are dependent on God’s goodness. If God is good and not evil, then God has a character and is thus limited. ‘The limitation of God is his [sic] goodness’, says Whitehead. To be limited is to have a form and to be actual; hence, God is actual rather than an activity. Furthermore, the actuality that is wholly good is superior to other actualities (because it is all-inclusive). So it is goodness that really defines God. But to deify creative emptiness is the same as deifying both good and evil, for all that happens, whether good or evil, comes from creative emptiness. Now, since God is defined as good and since this implies a character, which in turn implies a form, God must also be empty like all forms. But to say that God is empty is not the same as saying that emptiness is God.

154 Creative emptiness is neither cause nor effect, nor is it a First Cause underlying the cause-effect sequences of the world. It cannot be characterized in terms of any conceptual contrast. Hence, it cannot be understood in terms of the via analógia. (Candrakirti, or at least some of his interpreters, seems to think it can – he says that the ultimate truth is a svabhava, but not in the ordinary sense of the term.) The divine existence is also supposed to be essenceless, so how are the Scholastics justified in ascribing to it causality by analogy with conventional causality?

Via Negativa and Via Analogia

The Madhyamika philosopher’s emptiness and the process philosopher’s creativity are revealed by means of a *via negativa* that is quite different from the *via negativa* of negative theology, despite their *prima facie* similarity. As we have seen, this difference has been pointed out by Derrida in his study of the two different strands of *via negativa* that arose from the thought of Plato. The theological strand finds its *locus classicus* in the *Republic*, where Plato speaks of the Good that is ‘beyond being’, an idea which subsequently led to the Neoplatonic hyperessentialist mysticism that referred to God as the One beyond one and many, the Being beyond being and non-being, even the God above ‘God’ (e.g., Plotinus and Pseudo-Dionysius). The ‘beyond’ is interchangeable with ‘above’, which indicates a movement of spiritualization. This idea has obvious parallels in the East — such as Sankara’s use of a negative dialectic similar to Nagarjuna’s to conclude that Brahman is the One beyond duality (*advaita*); and the tendency in some forms of Mahayana Buddhism to use a logic of the form: ‘X is non-X, therefore it is truly X’.

The a/theological strand, on the other hand, derives from the *Timaeus*, where Plato introduces a ‘third kind’ into his cosmology that is neither Being nor Becoming, neither intelligible nor sensible, neither *logos* nor *mythos*. Yet it is not an absolute that is beyond or above these opposites and it does not take its name from either of them. Rather, it is a kind of space or receptacle that is neutral and arrived at by a kind of ‘bastard reasoning’ (having no proper father/Being/logos) or negative dialectics. (‘One cannot even say of it that it is *neither this nor* that or that it is *both this and that*.’) It arrives on the scene in the middle of the *Timaeus* because it is itself a middle way that cuts the book in half and undermines its system by pointing out that the attempt to ground a philosophy in a duality of father/son (Being/Becoming) without a mother (space/khora) is impossible because self-contradictory – i.e., it is bad biology! This form of *via negativa* influenced the radical stream of Neoplatonism and those mystics who distinguished between God and a ‘Godhead’ that is neither creator nor creature, but creativity (e.g., Eckhart and Boehme). I have already shown how this type of *via negativa* is similar to that of the Madhyamika, as

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both speak of an openness that is like space (*khoralsunyata*). Magliola has also shown how Derrida's non-hyperessentialistic *via negativa* is similar to that of the Madhyamika.\(^{159}\)

I have been discussing two forms of *via negativa*. But to be more accurate, only the latter is *via negativa* strictly speaking. Hyperessentialist *via negativa* is in fact *via analogia* masquerading as *via negativa*. This point is nicely put by Hartshorne and Reese:

(negative) [t]heologians and philosophers did not say simply and baldly: 'Of such pairs of contrasting ideas as actual-potential, simple-compound, and the rest, the first in each pair is to be accepted and the other rejected, with reference to deity.' Rather, it was commonly held that no human concept whatever applies literally or 'univocally' to God but at most analogically. Thus the doctrine was as follows. God is neither one nor many, actual nor potential, in any sense which we can positively conceive and understand or illustrate from our experience of things. But there is in him something 'more simple than the one', more unitary than unity in the ordinary sense, and more actual than actuality as men know actuality, some mysterious transcendent analogue to these.\(^{160}\)

According to process theology, the panentheistic God is known by a purely positive theology that sees God as being predicated by both one and many, actual and potential, being and becoming – but in an eminent and non-relative manner vis-à-vis the way these terms qualify the world. As we have seen, Hartshorne calls this 'dual transcendence'. (Which is also a 'dual immanence' as God is in the world and the world is in God.)\(^{161}\) But these terms are used with reference to God in a univocal sense in relation to how they are used with reference to the world. The difference is merely an intra-univocal difference of degree, like the difference between better and best (the latter being merely the upper limit). We could say that better is *analogous* to best, but the word 'analogous' is here used in the non-specialist ordinary sense of

\(^{158}\) Derrida, "Denials", 89.

\(^{159}\) An interesting case study could be made of these two different kinds of *via negativa* as they exist in Philo's hermeneutics, which divides texts into those that speak literally of the transcendent and those that are merely metaphorical, and the Madhyamika distinction between texts that are about emptiness and those that are not (*nitartha* and *neyartha*) – a perfect illustration of the difference between the two.


\(^{161}\) Every non-divine being is partially in the world and the world is partially in every non-divine being – only God is wholly in the world and wholly contains the world. The divine dual transcendence is thus derivative from the divine dual immanence.
differences of degree, not of kind. But when it comes to using language that is 
ordinarily used to describe the world and God in order to talk about creativity, we 
find that their meaning becomes equivocal – to say that creativity is Being (as 
Heidegger does) is to use the word ‘Being’ in a sense that is as different from our 
ordinary usage of ‘being’ as a dog is different from the Dog Star (to use Spinoza’s 
excellent example). The attempt to use the contradictory notion of analogy to act as a 
bridge between the univocal and the equivocal results in a conflation of God and 
creativity. In chapter three I discussed the process categories in relation to those of 
Aristotle and Kant. But, unlike these other categories, which are always based on a 
division of being into different but analogous senses, the process categories are really 
univocally correlated and asymmetrically related such that becoming, contingency, 
relativity, etc., are inclusive of their contrasting terms: being, necessity, absoluteness, 
etc. The latter terms (a-terms) are merely special limiting cases of the former (r-
terms) – hence, these categories are not dualistic divisions of different senses of 
creativity, unlike the Aristotelian division of being into analogous substance and 
accident. Process categories are thus existential rather than essential, and follow in 
the tradition of Spinoza and Nietzsche, who see reality in terms of different degrees 
of power, rather than kinds of being.162

Madhyamika philosophy is similarly based on a repudiation of the via 
analogia, as pointed out by L. Stafford Betty.163 But Betty is mistaken in thinking 
that the Madhyamika negative dialectics are not philosophical simply because they 
do not use the via analogia. I cannot understand the logic in such an assertion. All 
that is needed to philosophize is the use of distinctions of degree (which are intra-
univocal ‘analogyes’) rather than distinctions of kind (which alone require a via 
analogia). Betty seems to be saying that Nagarjuna is not a philosopher because he is 
not a ‘Philosopher’ with a capital ‘P’ – a device which Richard Rorty uses to refer to 
the extremist Philosophers who make dualistic distinctions of kinds (whether 
Platonist or Positivist).164 There is no reason why we cannot philosophize without

162 This argument is forcefully put in Gilles Deleuze, Difference and Repetition, trans. Paul Patton 

163 L. Stafford Betty, ‘Nagarjuna’s Masterpiece - Logical, Mystical, Both, Or Neither?’, Philosophy 

164 Richard Rorty, Introduction to Consequences of Pragmatism (Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota 
Press, 1982). The reduction of differences of kind to differences of degree is characteristic of recent 
analytic philosophy (e.g., Quine on analytic and synthetic propositions).
Philosophizing — Rorty refers to pragmatism as an example (we could add process thought and prasangika-madhyamika). Be that as it may, a possible response to Betty is that terms like ‘creativity’ and ‘emptiness’ are being used analogically, because they are conventional words used to refer to an ultimate truth, and are thus used differently from their ordinary usage. (Recall also McCagney’s two senses of becoming discussed earlier.) But creativity is not something that is observable scientifically and it does not arise conventionally. Ordinarily, we observe chance and necessity, indeterminacy and determinacy — creativity is only something we experience directly (that is, non-cognitively) within ourselves, as that which gives rise to both deterministic and indeterministic behavior, depending on whether events choose to follow laws or not. The same applies for nature — the laws of nature are really habits of nature as the laws are interpreted statistically in the sense that quantum events choose to follow or not to follow previously established habits. There is more of a problem with emptiness, as the word does have a conventional usage as the opposite of non-empty, whereas the Madhyamika usage goes beyond both ordinary emptiness and non-emptiness and thus seems to be used analogically. However, Nagarjuna points out in his *Vigrahavyavartani* that he does not use *sunyata* in a propositional sense as a view (*drsti*), but as a non-cognitive and direct observation (*darsana*) of reality. The usage is thus equivocal rather than analogical — but equivocal in the sense of neither identity nor difference, rather than just difference, for there is no proposition (affirmative or negative) being made here.

### The Status of God

Now that I have argued against the identification of creative emptiness with God, I will look at the status of God — in the panentheistic sense of process theism — within Madhyamika Buddhism. As we have seen, process philosophers (with a few exceptions) tend to see God as a primordial accident (or creature) of (self-) creativity, rather than identifying God with creativity. This is primarily due to the fact that God is seen as good and thus limited to an objective form with a subjective perspective like all other individuals. I will briefly summarize the concept of panentheism as

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165 This interpretation is made in Jay L. Garfield, ‘Emptiness and Positionlessness: Do the Madhyamika Relinquish all Views?’, *Journal of Indian Philosophy of Religion* 1 (1996): 1–34.
understood by process theists (using Hartshorne as a model). Like all individuals — whether they be atoms, cells, animals, etc. — God has an absolute aspect (character, stable form) and a relative aspect (change, responsiveness to environment). But, unlike other individuals, which have these aspects in a non-absolute sense (since their character does change over time and their responsiveness has its limits), God has these aspects in an absolute sense (since God’s character is unchanging goodness and God is responsive to, and thus modified by, all things). This is what Hartshorne means when he says that God’s transcendence is a ‘dual transcendence’ — for God is both more absolute and more relative than any other creature of (self-) creativity.

God is wholly good in the sense that God’s absoluteness is a perfect moral independence of others, and God’s relativity is a perfect responsive dependence on others. Non-divine creatures are not wholly good because they are sometimes morally dependent on others and are not always responsively dependent. It is obvious therefore that God can be known by an entirely positive theology, whereas the world can only be known by what could be called a ‘negative cosmology’; that is, God’s attributes are known a priori, whereas a non-divine individuals’ attributes must be discovered empirically. (Of course, this only applies to God’s absolute and relative aspects taken as abstractions — God’s relative aspect as concrete is only knowable empirically.) The fact that God’s absolute aspect is absolutely unchanging means that God is necessary and cannot not be. Hence, being necessarily existent, God’s existence is not able to be discovered empirically because only contingent existence is in principle falsifiable by some conceivable experience. Hence, both empirical theism and empirical atheism — that is, belief in God’s existence or non-existence based on empirical arguments — are impossible. The only alternatives are either arguments based on the meaningfulness or meaninglessness of the word ‘God’ within one’s worldview. The modal/pragmatic argument (mis-named the ontological argument) for God’s existence ‘is just that every view which tries to deny [God] ... also denies ... some practically indispensable belief’. The denial of a necessarily existent is at the same time the denial (by Wittgenstein’s principle of contrast) of contingent existence, and thus also a denial of free will, moral choice, etc.

Is Madhyamika Buddhism compatible with process theism as above defined?

In order to answer this question, I will first survey some of the more common theistic

166 See also the discussion of panentheism in chapter three.
views of the status of theism in Buddhism. I will then survey Buddhist views of
theism. Finally, I will argue for the mutual compatibility of process theism and
Madhyamika Buddhism.

Theists on Buddhism

Among Western theists (especially Christians) the response to Buddhism
predominantly takes two forms: either Sunyata is equated with God (or the Godhead)
or Buddhism is deemed to be atheistic and thus incompatible with their faith in God.
Western theologians and philosophers of religion who seek to engage in Buddhist-
Christian dialogue tend to be of the former persuasion; the latter tend not to be
interested in such a dialogue. Those who equate sunyata (or suchness) with God
divide into a number of camps: there are the traditionalists whose understanding of
God follows that of Philo, Augustine and Aquinas (which can be called ‘classical
theism’); there are the mystics who see Buddhism as a kind of negative theology; and
there are the atheologists who argue that God is dead. This last group, which is
popular in postmodern theology circles, itself takes many forms: those who think that
a certain idea of God – namely, that of classical theism – has perished as a live
option for us today; those who believe that all ideas of God – all theisms – are idols
that have no life in them; those who say that God has created the world by
‘decreating’ Godself (kenosis) and becoming absent from the world; and those
calling themselves ‘atheists’, who use the Madhyamika dialectic (or equivalent) to
argue that there neither is nor is not a God.

An example of this last approach can be found in the writings of Mark C.
Taylor. For example, he argues that

The divine milieu is neither fully present nor absent but is present only to the
extent that it is at the same time absent. It neither is nor is not; it is insofar as it
is not and is not insofar as it is. It is not totally positive or completely negative
but affirms in negating and negates in affirming.\textsuperscript{166}

He calls the thought of this divine milieu an ‘erroneous thought’ which is ‘neither
properly theological nor nontheological, theistic nor atheistic, religious nor secular,

\textsuperscript{167} Charles Hartshorne, \textit{Beyond Humanism: Essays in the Philosophy of Nature} (Lincoln: Univ. of
Nebraska Press, 1969), 164.
believing nor nonbelieving. The question that arises at this point is whether Taylor’s non/God is a noumenal thing-in-itself beyond phenomenal characterizations such as personal and impersonal (as John Hick believes), or in Eastern terms, whether it is the Brahman or One that is beyond samsaric one and many. If this is the case, then such a repackaging of monothemism is essentially incompatible with Buddhism; for even if the latter is also atheistic, it does not make sunyata into some kind of transcendent ‘God beyond God’ (to use Tillich’s pregnant phrase) or ‘Wholly Other’. Buddhists are not like Christian negative theologians who one-sidedly deny that God can be positively characterized in terms of everyday notions such as ‘relative’, ‘mutable’, ‘finite’, while affirming only negative characterization such as ‘non-relative’ (or ‘absolute’), ‘immutable’, and ‘infinite’. Buddhists would deny both positive and negative language and – to offset any attempts to formulate a binegative theology – would then ask whether there can be any thing (God or whatever) that could be arrived at in this way.

Buddhists on Theism

The Buddhist response to Western theism comes in many forms, depending on whether we are speaking about Theravada, Zen, Madhyamika, or some other variety of Buddhism. However, all forms of Buddhism have in common the critique of Brahmanism, as mentioned above. Unfortunately, this fact is often overlooked due to the predominance in the West of Zen Buddhism, which has often been accused by other Buddhists of coming dangerously close to Brahmanism itself.

Theravada Buddhism is the most unambiguously atheistic form of Buddhism, which explains this vehicle’s general indifference and even hostility to Western theism. Gunapala Dharmasiri’s widely ranging and well-argued critique of classical theism is a masterful example of the Theravada position on monotheism based on the Buddhist disbelief in any kind of Absolute that grounds and creates the world. (However, I believe his criticism of the process theism of Cobb and Hartshorne as

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169 Ibid., 12.

being a veiled attempt to dress the old Absolute in new garb is based on a misunderstanding of the process understanding of ‘absolute’ and its place in their system.) Thus there can be no disagreeing with Ninian Smart when he says that Theravada Buddhism will remain the exception which challenges the various (Western and Eastern) attempts to discover the essence common to all religions.\(^{171}\)

However, the position of the various Mahayana Buddhism vis-à-vis theism is complicated by the fact that many of them believe in various gods and bodhisattvas, as well as believing in an absolute Sunyata (sometimes called Suchness or tathagatagarbha), which has been interpreted by many Western scholars to be equivalent to some form of theism (whether classical or not). Another possible interpretation is that Buddhism is both polytheistic (from the samsara perspective) and pantheistic (from the point of view of Sunyata, which some Tibetan scholars have likened to a goddess or cosmic womb), which is similar to Greek mythology. In a Tibetan Buddhist text, the Uttaratantra of Maitreya, the tathagatagarbha or ‘Germ of Buddhahood’ is described poetically in this way:

The Body of the Supreme Buddha is all-pervading,
The Absolute is (one) undifferentiated (Whole)
And the Germ (of Buddhahood) exists (in every living being)
Therefore, for ever and anon, all that lives
Is endowed with the Essence of the Buddha.\(^{172}\)

The Madhyamika hold, however, that there are no essences, not even a Buddh-essence – even emptiness is empty. Also, they say that the various gods, buddhas, bodhisattvas, etc., are conventionally existent but ultimately non-existent, for all things are empty without exception. In the MK, Nagarjuna deconstructs the Tathagata along with everything else.\(^{173}\)

Although some forms of Buddhism could be called ‘theistic’, they are always immanentist forms of theism that are compatible with the central belief of all forms of Buddhism that nothing escapes the relational network of dependent origination. That all forms of Buddhism are united in denying the existence of a First Cause that is transcendent and not dependently originated can be seen in Dharmakirti’s anti-


\(^{173}\) Nagarjuna, MK, chap. 22.
theistic arguments, as these are non-sectarian and based on views held in common by all Buddhists. 174

Panentheism and Madhyamika

If it is correct to say that Buddhists only reject a God who is transcendent, but not one who is dependently originated, then it would seem that Buddhism is compatible with the God of process theism. For the latter is, as we have seen, a creature of creative becoming (i.e., dependent origination). As Daniel Arnold shows, process theism can escape the Buddhist critique of theism (as systematized by Dharmakirti) because the panentheistic God of process theism does not transcend the world, but rather originates in dependence on the world. 175 However, there are still a number of criticisms that can be made of this kind of God from a Madhyamika perspective. The first is that it is a contradiction to speak of a God that is both absolute and relative, necessary and contingent, immutable and mutable. The second is that only the relative, contingent, mutable aspect of God is dependently originated, whereas the absolute, necessary, immutable aspect seems to be transcendent and unoriginated. And the third is that such a God is empty like anything else.

I have already answered the first criticism elsewhere. To summarize: the principle of non-contradiction states that one cannot predicate of the same subject two contraries in the same sense. But God’s absoluteness is not predicated in the same sense as God’s relativity – one is abstract whereas the other is concrete. Just as we can say that an organism has one (relatively stable) form but many (constantly changing) parts, so too can we say that God has both absolute and relative aspects. In neither case is there contradiction. (The God of process theism is not simple, but complex; if it were simple, then of course there would be a contradiction.)

The second criticism can be answered by similarly pointing out the abstract nature of God’s absolute aspect. The two aspects are asymmetrically related in the sense that the absolute is abstracted from the relative just as an organism’s form is abstracted from its parts, which are inclusive of the whole. Perhaps the concern here


175 Ibid., 12–28.
is that there is a difference between a relatively invariant form such as that of a contingent organism, and an absolutely invariant aspect of the whole of reality – the former is obviously immanent, but the latter seems to be a fixed and unoriginated feature of reality. But, as I have argued elsewhere, Buddhism also has universal invariances, one example being dependent origination, which is an invariant feature of reality. No doubt there is a difference between a universal invariance and an invariant aspect of a particular individual in the universe. But if this individual is also all-inclusive (because responsive to all), then it contains the universe and thus also the universe’s invariances.

The last criticism is answered by the acknowledgement that God is indeed empty like everything else, but something’s emptiness is not its non-existence. If to be empty is to be neither existent nor non-existent but conventionally existent, then God too is empty in this sense. God is not emptiness, but God is empty of inherent existence. Although the Madhyamika, like other Buddhists, are atheists in relation to a transcendent God, they have no grounds for being atheists in relation to an empty God – agnosticism is an option, but not atheism. So it is possible for the Madhyamika to accept the conventional existence of an empty God just as they accept the conventional existence of other actualities that they have deconstructed. I think that the Madhyamika are ready for this acceptance, especially now that there is a growing dissatisfaction with the rebirth doctrine among many Buddhists. Can the belief in buddhas and bodhisattvas be maintained despite the abandonment of the rebirth doctrine? It is my contention that it can, but only with the transformation of the buddhas and bodhisattvas into various personifications of an everlasting deity who is immanent to the universe and helps all creatures to attain enlightenment by persuading them to realize their own emptiness. On this interpretation, the buddha Amida and the bodhisattva Avalokitesvara among others, would be seen as mythical figures that symbolize the panentheistic and empty God.

The identification of a panentheistic God of this sort with the cosmic buddhas and bodhisattvas is fairly common. For example, John Cobb interprets the dharma kaya of the trikaya doctrine as creativity and the nirmanakaya and sambhogakaya as the two poles of God.176 Interestingly, the Madhyamika scholar Peter Fenner has a similar interpretation, although he sees the dharma kaya as resembling Whitehead’s and Hartshorne’s necessary or primordial nature of God,

and the nirmanakaya-sambhogakaya pair as corresponding to God’s relative pole.\textsuperscript{177} Also, David Ray Griffin wonders whether the dipolar conception of God ‘could be regarded as an explication of the insights behind the notions of the Buddha’s Dharma-body, on the one hand, and the celestial Bodhisattvas, on the other’.\textsuperscript{178} Kenneth Inada concurs: ‘the buddha(s) or tathagata(s) represents the primordial nature, and the bodhisattva(s) represents the consequent nature’.\textsuperscript{179} In a paper titled ‘On the Supramundane and the Divine in Buddhism’, D. Seyfort Ruegg has some interesting things to say in this connection. He says that although ‘[i]n Buddhism there is no supernatural and supreme God who creates the world and beings and no God who presides over or modifies Karma in favour of beings’, there are nevertheless mundane (minor deities, genii, local gods) and supramundane gods (beings greatly advanced on the path and protectors of Dharma). ‘For the meditating practiser, the Sadhaka, a tutelary divinity, emerging from Ultimate Reality designated as Emptiness (sunyata), is a kind of exemplar or model of the supramundane level of spiritual perfection’. Ruegg goes on to say that this supramundane or divine exemplar is dipolar – consisting of compassionate means (karuna and upaya) and discriminative understanding (prajna), symbolized as having a male-female form in a ‘syzygy of (‘male’) compassionate means and (‘female’) prajna (sophia)’. But Ruegg reminds readers that transcending such binary polarities and dichotomies is perfect awakening and insight into emptiness (nirvana). Such a ‘protector of Dharma’ promotes the realization of emptiness in all creatures so that all beings ‘down to the last blade of grass’ can enter nirvana (to use the wording of the Bodhisattva Vow).\textsuperscript{180} But this is not done by any coercive means; rather, God uses persuasive means (upaya). As Lama Govinda puts it:

\begin{quote}
The help of a bodhisattva is not something that comes from outside or is pressed upon those who are helped, but is the awakening of a force which dwells in the innermost nature of every being, a force which, awakened by the
\end{quote}


\textsuperscript{179} Inada, ‘Metaphysics of Buddhist Experience’, 484.

spiritual influence or example of a bodhisattva, enables us to meet fearlessly every situation . . . . 181

This is remarkably similar to Whitehead’s theory that God acts on the world by persuasive rather than by unilateral or coercive means. 182

So, to conclude this section, I contend that it is not too difficult for Madhyamika Buddhists – or any Buddhists for that matter – to believe in the existence of a God, provided it is an empty God immanent to the network of dependent origination like any other organism, but with the one difference that it is everlasting and all-inclusive, having the entire universe as its body, and promoting gradual universal enlightenment by persuasive and skilful means. Of course, the Buddha’s advice of testing every claim by experience still applies, so Buddhists must see whether there is anything in their experience that confirms the existence of such a God. Perhaps in this case we require the use of that sixth sensory organ known as the brain which, unlike other senses, can ‘see’ its objects from any perspective – like the truths of mathematics and logic. 183 The usefulness of God is, as we have seen, to promote the good. Whether the good (or the Dharma) is seen to be embodied in the universe or as a free-floating Platonic Idea transcending the universe is a matter of choice. But without one or the other, there is the danger of awakening to the neutrality of creative emptiness without ethical guidance. This is why ethical cultivation is always given as the first step on the path in many contemplative traditions. 184

Conclusion

In this chapter I have argued: (1) that emptiness and creativity are complementary aspects of the ultimate reality; (2) that this ‘creative emptiness’ is not an absolute or God; and (3) that the panentheistic God of process theology is neither creativity nor emptiness, but an empty co-creator (similar to the cosmic buddha-bodhisattva).


These results illustrate the idea that it is more important to compare worldviews with the aim of discovering how they can learn from one another in a complementary manner rather than with the aim of merely uncovering similarities and differences. Comparative philosophy can be more fruitful and contribute more to interreligious dialogue and world harmony by seeking a mutually enriching transformation of religions than by searching for a common ground — a ‘lowest common denominator’ — which may or may not be there. The former has the merit of respecting the individuality and integrity of worldviews, whereas the latter seeks for an impossible synthesis. So what can Madhyamika and process thought learn from one another?

Although process thought includes an understanding of creative emptiness, it is limited by being indirectly grasped via conceptual means, much could be learned here from the Madhyamika techniques of meditation, which enable a direct insight into creative emptiness. And although Madhyamika Buddhists believe in empty gods — in the form of *buddhas* and *bodhisattvas* — they could learn from process theologians that it makes more sense to merge these gods into a bipolar ‘Empty God’ who persuades all things towards enlightenment. This mutual learning will not be easy, for Buddhists continue to resist any idea of ‘God’ and process thinkers still tend to subordinate creative emptiness to the God-and-World order. What is needed is a more detailed study of the two worldview with the purpose of identifying how each needs to be extended in order to accommodate the other. It may also help to situate these two worldviews against the background of a wider discourse which they both share in order to establish external reference points that can be used by those unfamiliar with the other worldview. These external worldviews can then act as mediators that can help in achieving the integration of the process and Madhyamika worldviews. These two tasks — both of which require the construction of a hermeneutical framework for the comparison and integration of the two systems — will be undertaken in the following chapter.

184 It has been said that the reason why Heidegger became a Nazi was that he did not have an ethics, and without an ethics authentic Being can manifest as evil instead of as good.
CHAPTER 8

INTEGRATING MADHYAMIKA AND PROCESS THOUGHT

The theories of creative emptiness and the empty God developed in the previous chapter need to be consolidated within a hermeneutical framework that can be accessed from within either philosophy in order to facilitate their mutual transformation and integration. In this chapter I attempt to develop such a conceptual scheme, which will require: (1) a survey of the various attempts that have already been conducted in this direction (such as Cobb’s ‘two ultimates’ theory), including an evaluation of their usefulness in this regard; (2) an exploration of existing conceptual schemes within both philosophies which can be re-tooled for this purpose (such as the ‘two truths’ theory); and (3) some proposals for using resources from other philosophies (such as post-structuralism) which can also help in the development of such a hermeneutical framework. If the final result is a plurality of interpretative frameworks, then so be it – it is better to build many small bridges between the two philosophies than one big one, especially if the latter is found to be structurally unsound.

The Two Ultimates and the Two Truths

In the previous chapter it was shown that creative emptiness and the empty God are two different and irreducible concepts found to some extent in both Madhyamika and process thought, although Madhyamika tends to stress the former and process thought puts its emphasis on the latter. A consequence of this bias is that there tends to be a subordination, if not outright reduction, of one to the other. In process thought, the emphasis is placed on the panentheistic relation between God and world, whereas creativity is regarded as an abstraction that is only real in its plurality of creative syntheses that constitute both the world and God. And in Madhyamika thought, the two truths theory is used to show that the cosmic buddha-bodhisattva is a mere conventional truth and that the ultimate truth is the emptiness of all such conventional truths. However, I will argue here that creative emptiness and the empty divinity are two ultimates that should not be subordinated one to the other, and
that the two truths theory can be interpreted as an expression of this fact. I will first look at the two ultimates theory, then at the two truths doctrine, and conclude with an inquiry into the relationship between them.

The Two Ultimates

The recognition that there is an ultimate reality—sometimes called the ‘Godhead’—beyond God has a rich tradition in Western mystical circles. It can be found in the Kabbalah of Judaism, the Sufism of Islam, and the Gnostic elements within Christian mysticism, of which Meister Eckhart is a chief example. Eckhart’s Godhead is often compared with Buddhist emptiness, whereas his God is compared with Amida Buddha—each being based on two different, but complementary dialectics: nonduality and identity-in-difference.¹ These traditions influenced Berdyaev to distinguish between the realms of spirit and nature, and to speak of the divine nothingness from which arises creature-and-creator or ‘nature’.² Also, borrowing from Nietzsche, he calls these the Dionysian and Apollonian principles respectively, and argues that they are interdependent and cannot be subordinated to one another.³

Thus, Whitehead is in good company when he says that neither God nor the world are ultimate, for both are in the grip of ‘the ultimate metaphysical ground, the creative advance into novelty’.⁴ The latter he calls the ‘World of Activity’, which refers to the creative activity of both the world and God, and the former the ‘World of Value’, of which God is the axiological ultimate, the actuality that has the greatest intrinsic value.⁵ Thus, we must distinguish between the ultimate activity (or ultimate reality) and the ultimate actuality. It is this distinction between two ultimates that

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³ Ibid., 227–8.


⁵ Alfred North Whitehead, Essays in Science and Philosophy (New York: Greenwood Press, 1974), 79. Intrinsic value, for Whitehead, is based on inclusiveness—the more inclusive or internally related an occasion is, the more intrinsic value it has.
inspired John Cobb to develop a hermeneutical framework for demonstrating the complementarity between Buddhism and Christianity. In a paper entitled ‘Buddhist Emptiness and the Christian God’, Cobb says that although he originally tended to subordinate creativity to God, his dialogue with Buddhism – which he says tends to subordinate God to emptiness – led him to rethink this subordination and put forward his idea of the two ultimates, based on Whitehead’s notion of two worlds. He argues that ‘[I]t is meaningless to speak of Emptiness as superior to God or of God as superior to Emptiness’ as ‘[T]hey as incommensurable’. To confuse the two is to make Heidegger’s onto-theological mistake of conflating the Being of beings, the supreme being, and the ground of being. It is thus necessary to ‘distinguish the Emptiness of God from the Emptiness which is the Godhead’. He concludes the paper by arguing that Buddhists can approach God through meditation on emptiness, thus opening themselves up to the divine persuasion, and that Christians can have insight into emptiness by opening themselves to the empty God, who persuades others to see their own emptiness.

In ‘Buddhism and Christianity as Complementary’, Cobb explores these issues further, arguing that Christianity should be acceptable to Buddhists, provided that the Christian God is understood as neither transcending relations and relativity nor as identified with them. The Biblical God of history is, says Cobb, historically immanent and only transcendent in the sense of a ‘vast qualitative superiority’ – ‘most Buddhists recognize this in Guatama and other Buddhas when these are compared with themselves’ – which is neither the radically transcendent God of the philosophers nor the ‘Divine Emptiness’ of the mystics. Thus,

... we Christians are forced to rethink our theological habits. If ultimate reality is Emptiness, and if Emptiness is not the Biblical God, then does the Biblical God have no reality at all? Or is it possible that the Bible does not present God as ultimate reality in the metaphysical sense? If we look openmindedly for the Biblical idea of the metaphysical ultimate, might we not find it in the chaos or nothingness from which God created the world? Was, perhaps, the theological identification of God with ultimate reality or Being Itself a mistake?

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7 Ibid., 24.

8 Ibid., 25.


10 Ibid., 23.
Cobb later synthesized these speculations into a fully worked-out theory of the two ultimates, arguing that God as the supreme being — the ultimate \textit{actuality} — must not be confused with \textit{Being} Itself — the ultimate \textit{reality} — which Heidegger calls Nothingness, as it is no-thing, non-being, non-actuality (that is, neither ultimate actuality nor non-ultimate actuality). Cobb believes this ontological distinction that Heidegger draws between \textit{Being} and beings can act as a bridge between Christianity and Buddhism that allows the two traditions to go beyond dialogue towards mutual transformation and mutual enrichment. Of course, he also thinks that Whitehead's contrast between God and creativity would have the same effect. He concludes with some comparisons between \textit{Dharmakaya} and creativity/Being, and between \textit{Sambhogakaya}/Amida and God.

Is Cobb's theory of the two ultimates the hermeneutical framework we are looking for? There are several drawbacks. First, his use of the terms 'ultimate \textit{reality}' and 'Being' would be more compatible with Yogacara (and some Madhyamika) interpretations of emptiness which deny the emptiness of emptiness and are thus hyper-essentialist in nature. But the Madhyamika ultimate truth is that there is no ultimate reality in the sense of a reality transcending ordinary reality — emptiness is neither a Being nor a Nothingness. Nor, as we have seen, is it an underlying substantial (ultimate) activity. Rather, it is an immanent activity that is neither actual nor non-actual. Second, Cobb's two ultimates are concerned only with \textit{ultimate} actuality (God) and ultimate reality — there is no reference to the non-ultimate actualities. What is the relation between the world of non-divine actualities and emptiness? This is a question that must also be addressed, as the aim of this thesis is to integrate the worldview that all is process with the worldview that all is empty. Hence, the hermeneutical framework must show how we can say that reality is both in process and empty. Thus, I think that Whitehead's distinction between the world of activity and the world of value (which includes all degrees of actualized value, not only the ultimate value-actuality) should supplement a deconstructed version of Cobb's theory. Third, he does not show how the two ultimates correlate with the two truths. Is the ultimate actuality a conventional truth? Or are the two ultimates two types of ultimate truth? If, as seems likely, it is the former, then we need to look at the theory of two truths in order to determine whether Cobb's theory is viable from the Madhyamika perspective. The same can be said for Whitehead's more inclusive theory of two worlds.
The Two Truths

The Madhyamika teaching of the two truths is based on three key verses in Nagarjuna, where it is said that the two truths are samvrtisatyata, or common sense truths about the world, and paramartha satya, or truth in the highest sense – often abbreviated to ‘conventional truth’ and ‘ultimate truth’, respectively. Furthermore, these verses reveal that the relation between these truths is such that the conventional truth is a means to the ultimate truth – that is, that the latter cannot be obtained without a firm grounding in the former. The conventional truth is often correlated with samsara and dependent origination, and the ultimate truth with nirvana and emptiness. According to G. M. Nagao, samvrti has a number of different meanings, such as: covering, concealing, dissimulation, obstruction, choice, ejection, come into being, produced, to be, exist. He says that Candrakirti, who is responsible for the full systematic development of Nagarjuna’s few statements on the two truths, defines samvrti as: (1) to cover, conceal; (2) dependent origination; and (3) conventional symbols. Thus samvrti refers to the intersubjective process that tends to conceal the ultimate truth behind a web of deception. Then in what sense can samvrti be a truth? It is truth in the sense of relative degrees of partial truth, for in samvrti there can be different degrees of the concealment of ultimate truth. This is why conventional truth can be used as a stepping-stone to ultimate truth. Hence, the Madhyamika use the positive form of the tetralemma as a graded teaching that leads progressively to the ultimate truth.

What then is the ultimate truth? Paramartha simply means ‘highest sense’, which implies the existence of lower senses of the truth in a gradation of truth. Thus, the ultimate truth is an asymptotic limit of conventional truth – the point at which the Dharma-raft of conventional truth takes one to the shore of nirvana. I say ‘asymptotic’ because the ultimate truth cannot be reached in a finite number of steps as there can always be a conventional truth that is relatively more true than other conventional truths due to its inclusion or sublation of them. The ultimate truth must

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11 Nagarjuna, MK, 24.8–10.


therefore come in a sudden realization that does not chronologically follow, and thus leave behind, conventional truth. Hence, the ultimate truth is simply the realization that conventional truths are just that – conventional – and thus lack ultimate truth, which is not to deny that some may have more truth than others.

The non-chronological relation between the two truths just mentioned is an important fact about the relation between the two truths, for it must not be forgotten that they are, after all, both truths. It would thus be a mistake to think that the conventional truth is false from the viewpoint of the ultimate truth. According to Garfield, the temptation to ‘disparage the former in contrast to the latter, developing a sort of theory of one truth and one falsehood’ is a result of the reification of ultimate truths such as emptiness.\textsuperscript{14} The Madhyamika teaching of two truths is thus an attempt to avoid the extremes of ‘an in vacuo emptiness’ and appearances alone (unaccompanied by a cognition of their emptiness).\textsuperscript{15}

Although some Geluks interpret the two truths ontologically such that each truth has its own object, this is generally denied by other Madhyamika, who see the relation between the two truths as an epistemological distinction of two different perspectives. Lindtner, for example, writes that ‘[t]he two truths cannot be claimed to express different levels of objective reality since all things always equally lack svabhava. They are merely two ways of looking (darsana) at things, a provisional and a definite’.\textsuperscript{16} And Garfield likewise says that

\begin{quote}

it is a mistake to distinguish conventional from ultimate reality – the dependently arisen from emptiness – at an ontological level. Emptiness just is the emptiness of conventional phenomena. To perceive conventional phenomena as empty is just to see them as conventional and as dependently arisen. The difference – such as it is – between the conventional and the ultimate is a difference in the way phenomena are conceived/perceived.\textsuperscript{17}
\end{quote}

However, this ‘two aspect’ theory needs some clarification if it is to make sense, for ordinarily, an aspect or perspective is a phenomenal appearance and thus the theory is too close for comfort to Hick’s theory of many different phenomenal perspectives.


of one noumenal Reality. Such a confusion arises from the lack, in English, of the Sanskrit distinction between two different ways of seeing, namely, drsti and darsana, both of which have the common root ‘drs’, ‘to see’. Of the two, it is only drsti that has the meaning of ‘seeing as phenomenon’, which is a cognitive and indirect form of seeing. Darsana, on the other hand, is a non-cognitive and direct form of awareness that is non-mediated.\(^{18}\) It is in this sense that we can say that the two truths are two different ways of seeing – the conventional truth by means of drsti and the ultimate truth by means of darsana.\(^{19}\)

That the relation between conventional phenomena and ultimate truth is a ‘leap’ between mediated foreground and immediate background – rather than a gestalt switch between two ways of organizing phenomena, as in Hick’s case – has been noted often. For example, Guenther says that ordinary perception is the attention to ‘the delimited forms of objects’ which

... are perceived within a field. Attention can be directed either to the concrete, limited forms or to the field in which these forms are situated. In the shunyata [sic] experience, the attention is on the field rather than on its contents.\(^{20}\)

The leap between perspectives here is nicely illustrated by Heidegger’s meditation on the proposition: ‘Nothing is without ground’. Ordinarily, we see it as saying that not a single thing can be without a ground – all things are conditioned. But we can also see it as saying that Nothing itself is without a ground as it is the ground of things. Hence, Nothing, as the ground of things, is itself groundless or unconditioned. Thus, the proposition states two truths about all things.\(^{21}\) Similarly, in the Madhyamika two truths doctrine, the conventional and ultimate truths are not two different propositions or views about reality, but are rather two ways of understanding propositions about reality. That is, as well as what can be said (conventional truth), there is also what can only be shown (ultimate truth) – as well as drsti, there is also darsana.

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\(^{19}\) This is similar to Wittgenstein’s distinction between saying and showing.


The fact that the ultimate truth cannot be known apart from conventional truth implies the dependence of ultimate truth on conventional truth (hence the emptiness of emptiness). However, conventional truth is also dependent on ultimate truth in the sense that, as Nagarjuna often argues in response to his critics, without the ultimate truth of emptiness, there could not be a process of liberation as the non-emptiness of things renders all action unintelligible (since fixed essences cannot change). Thus the two truths are interdependent. However, this interdependence is asymmetrical, as the two dependencies are applied in different senses. Thus, the relation between the two truths takes the form of dependent origination, which we have found to mean ‘asymmetrical interdependence’. The interdependence of the two truths means that they cannot be ‘two’; whereas the asymmetry means that they cannot be ‘one’. How is this to be understood? The duality is only true from the side of conventional truth, whereas from the side of ultimate truth there are neither two truths nor one truth. This is because the ultimate is inclusive of the conventional the way whole includes part. There is no need to bring in a third truth that synthesizes the two truths, as is found in certain Chinese forms of Madhyamika, for emptiness is the real nature of both truths, so it is emptiness – which is the ultimate truth – that unites both truths. This asymmetrical inclusiveness of the conventional within the ultimate explains how we can have both duality and nonduality of truth without contradiction. From the point of view of the conventional truth, there is a barrier between the two truths that must be crossed, but once we cross this barrier we find that there is no barrier, that the conventional and the ultimate are one – samsara is nirvana and nirvana is samsara. This is the meaning of Zen’s ‘gateless gate’ or ‘barrierless barrier’ (mumonkan). Masao Abe, in his dialogue with process thought, makes a similar point, arguing that whereas process is inclusive of substance, emptiness is inclusive of process. However, Abe’s understanding of emptiness is non-Madhyamika and one suspects that he understands inclusiveness in terms of absoluteness. But the all-inclusiveness of emptiness does not mean that it is an

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22 E.g., see Nagarjuna, MK, chap. 24.

23 See Frederick J. Streng, 'The Significance of Pratityasamutpada for Understanding the Relationship Between Samvriti and Paramarthasatya in Nagarjuna', in M. Sprung, ed., The Two Truths in Buddhism and Vedanta (Dordrecht-Holland: D. Reidel Publishing Co., 1973), 29: 'It is important that we distinguish these two [truths] without appealing to an eternal self-established reality (svabhava) as something 'more real' than dependent co-origination'. Hence, 'both samvrti and paramartha participate in dependent co-origination' (ibid., 36).

absolute that transcends process. Rather, as we have seen, emptiness is immanent within process. Its inclusiveness of process can be characterized as neither abstract membership nor concrete feeling, which are the two kinds of inclusive dependence that constitute the asymmetrically interdependent nature of dependent becoming. Or, to put it differently, emptiness is inclusive of being-in-becoming because both of these are forms of emptiness: being is empty because it is abstract and becoming is empty because it is internally related to previous becomings which are themselves without foundation (because they are dependent in the same way). Hence, emptiness is a transcendental that the ultimate contrast between \( \tau \)-terms and \( \alpha \)-terms has in common. Creative emptiness is the ‘ultimate metaphysical ground’ that both God and the World ‘are in the grip of’, as Whitehead puts it.\(^{25}\) But God-World and creative emptiness are not two separate realities. There is only the one reality, which is the ‘creative synthesis’ or ‘open system’ – a system of cumulative syntheses from the conventional perspective, and a creative openness from the ultimate perspective.

Nonduality, Non-Prioritization, and Metaphysics

This relation between the two truths can be called ‘nondual’, provided that we understand this term in the right way. Nonduality simply means the absence of duality, which is not the same as monism. The misidentification of nonduality with monism is, as Thurman says, ‘a mistake mystics and scholars often make ... [even though] it is clearly said by all nondualists that nonduality is neither unity nor multiplicity (anekārtham ananarthatam). One has meaning only in relation to many.’\(^{26}\) A consistent nondualist must, after all, also negate the duality between dualism and monism. Nonduality is thus equivalent to bi-negation – it is the negation of all pairs of conceptual opposites, such as being and non-being, permanence and impermanence, subject and object, etc. And even of duality and nonduality? Yes, if nonduality becomes reified into a proposition; no, if it is being used as a skilful means to deconstruct – it is in this latter sense that nonduality operates as the nonduality of duality and (reified) nonduality. Thus, when Nagarjuna says that ‘there


is no duality at all between samsara and nirvana\textsuperscript{27}, he does not mean that they are one, but rather that they are neither one nor two. For, as Kalupahana asks, how can Nagarjuna be saying that the relation between these two is one of identity if he explicitly deconstructs the metaphysical doctrines of identity and difference?\textsuperscript{28} In so far as there is an identity between them, it cannot be a logical identity, but rather a nondual identity in which they are neither same nor different.\textsuperscript{29} This makes sense if the conventional truth is asymmetrically included within the ultimate truth, as has been discussed above. Such nonduality makes it possible for us to see how the theory that the two truths are two ways of perceiving the one reality needs to be understood not as two phenomenal views (duality) of Reality (monism), but as the mediate cognition (drsti) and immediate intuition (darsana) of nondual reality. These two are not a duality for the simple reason that the latter is inclusive of the former, just as in process thought mediate cognition is derivative from, and included in, directprehension. Nevertheless, the second-order nonduality – neither duality nor nonduality (or the emptiness of emptiness) – indicates that both ways of seeing reality are necessary if we are to have the whole truth. This is why the two truths are both truths. The ultimate truth, then, includes rather than excludes conventional truth.\textsuperscript{30}

This means that it would be a mistake to subordinate one of the truths to the other, as their interdependence and nonduality precludes this. In the West the tendency has been to subordinate the formless to form – with the result that form is seen as active and the formless as passive matter – and to either subordinate the metaphysical ultimate to the ultimate actuality (as tends to occur in process thought) or to merge them into one God (as can be found in Aquinas and many Western mystics). In the East, however, there has been the opposite tendency to subordinate form to the formless – with form becoming passive and the formless becoming either the active Brahman or emptiness – and to subordinate the ultimate actuality (such as Isvara or Sambhogakaya) to the ultimate actuality (Brahman or Dharma-kaya). But

\textsuperscript{27} Nagarjuna, MK, 25.19 (my translation).


\textsuperscript{29} Or ‘negative identity’, as it is called in Frederick J. Streng, Emptiness: A Study in Religious Meaning (Nashville, Tennessee: Abingdon Press, 1967), 75.

\textsuperscript{30} A detailed and useful study of the different kinds of nonduality can be found in David Loy, Nonduality: A Study in Comparative Philosophy (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1988).
the above interpretation of the two truths does not allow such subordination (or synthesis). The nonduality of form and emptiness, samsara and nirvana, conventional and ultimate, means that we cannot characterize one as passive and the other as active. Hierarchical subordination is only possible within the dualistic realm of conventional truths, where it is perfectly legitimate to have degrees of relative truth, such as the positive form of the tetralemma in Madhyamika or the order of inclusive transcendence in process thought. But to say that the conventional is ‘less true’ than the ultimate would be to make the mistake of applying intra-conventional categories to the interface between the conventional and the ultimate. This is the mistake of all metaphysical systems that seek to cross this gap by means of a via analogia. But, as Garfield correctly observes, ‘attempts to develop a metaphysics of the ultimate are doomed’.32

However, it is perfectly legitimate to develop a conventional metaphysics, or ‘phenomenology’ – in the widest sense of this term, indicating what is common to Hegel, Husserl, Peirce (he called it ‘phaneroscopy’) and Hartshorne (who also used the term in this widest sense) – such as the process metaphysics that recognizes ultimate contrasts (namely, r- and a-terms) that are immanent transcendentals. This contrast can be found in Madhyamika. Recall that Candrakirti says that ‘[t]here is ... a physical reality (rupa), but unlike mind ... it does not have the creative capacity [that the mind has]’; nevertheless, ‘while denying that there is any other creator than the mind, we do not reject [the existence of] a physical reality’.33 This is compatible with process thought if by mind (nama) is meant feeling or subjectivity (r-terms) and physical reality (rupa) refers to the abstract forms (a-terms) that are derivative from, and immanent to, minds. (Candrakirti’s rejection of inclusion notwithstanding.) Thus, the conventional world contains both concrete events and abstract things, and although both are empty, the events are ‘more real’ than the things in the sense that propositions about the world as being made up of events are ‘more true’ than propositions about the world as consisting of things. (This is a form of non-


eliminative reductionism, as Siderits correctly observes.) For the Madhyamika, as for Buddhism in general, it is more correct to describe the world in the language of becoming and impermanence than in the language of being and permanence. Of course, ultimately neither will do, for, as McCagney says, that which is neither becoming nor being is a kind of second order becoming that cannot be described by means of static words and concepts. Thus the two becoming – open-ended process and the creative openness – are the conventional and ultimate truths, respectively.

The notion of a conventional metaphysics requires that there be a distinction between direct and indirect experience even within the order of conventional truth. This is because the ultimate contrasts are unrestricted categories that are universal in their application and thus conventionally unconstructed. But is it not a contradiction to assert that there are non-conventional or non-constructed universals within the conventional or constructed? In chapter seven it was shown that it is not a contradiction to believe in a universal and unchanging aspect of the world-organism (the panentheistic God or Cosmic Buddha-Bodhisattva) provided that it is seen as an immanent transcendental, which is a factor in all actual and potential experience. Thus, apart from ordinary sense experience of forms and things, which is cognitive and mediate (drṣṭr), and ultimate experience of creative emptiness (darsana), there is the direct and unmediated experience of events, which is the 'radical experience' (William James) in which experiential events directly feel other experiential events. Since events contain both forms and creativity (for, as Whitehead says, we cannot separate creativity from events), radical experience can be understood as the nondual experience of both truths – conventional and ultimate – discussed earlier. (Inada makes a similar point when he says that the two truths, as Being and Emptiness, are

53 Chandrakirti, Madhyamakavatara, 6.90, in Fenner, Ontology, 247.


55 Nancy McCagney, Nagarjuna and the Philosophy of Openness (Lanham, Maryland: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 1997), 117.


57 It is direct because nothing stands between the events that experience and the events that are experienced. However, the experienced events come with their own mediating 'subjective forms' or interpretations that are 'inherited' by the experiencing events, which must also creatively interpret the events being synthetically experienced. But the experience of the very creativity by which this is done is itself unmediated – hence, there is non-creative, as well as creative, experience.
two aspects of Becoming.)\(^{38}\) Now, because God is one event-series in the world, experience of the divine events is a form of experience which we can call ‘deep experience’ (coined by David Griffin).\(^{39}\) Such an experience differs from ordinary radical experience in that it is an experience of the universal aspects of the world that form the universal organism’s invariant aspect, and are the external manifestation of the metaphysical principles.\(^{40}\)

**The Trinity and Beyond**

Thus far the focus have been on dualist comparative categories. But it was found that conventional actualities can be divided into different categories. There is the contrast between ultimate and non-ultimate actualities (God and world, respectively); and there is the contrast between actual events and abstract forms/things (r-terms and a-terms, respectively). It might be a good idea therefore to see if the comparative hermeneutical framework can be further refined by means of the various ‘trinities’ and ‘tetrinities’ that can be found in process thought, Buddhism, and other philosophies. I will focus on those of Whitehead (actual occasion, eternal object, creativity, and God), Peirce (three kinds of relation), Madhyamika (things, dharmas, dependent origination, and emptiness), the Mahayana Buddhist Trikaya, and the Christian Trinity (especially as interpreted by Magliola).

Whitehead’s systematic cosmology consists of four types of categories. (1) the category of the ultimate, which consists of creativity, unity, and plurality – ‘the many become one, and are increased by one’ – and thus refers to the immanent activity and potentiality in the world; (2) the categories of existence, such as actual occasions, eternal objects, prehensions, etc., which answer *what* questions; (3) categories of explanation, which discuss the relations between the categories of existence, and thus deal with *how* questions; (4) categorial obligations, which are


concerned with why questions, the answers to which refer to the processes internal to an act of creative synthesis (in other words, the relation between the category of the ultimate on the one hand, and the categories of existence and the categories of obligation, on the other). However, Whitehead often focuses on creativity (from the first category), actual occasions, eternal objects (both from the second category), and God (which he neglected to include in the second category), treating these four as if they were the four most important elements of his system. After all, the last two categories are concerned merely with the relation between these four.

Peirce believes that the world consists of nothing but three kinds of relation: (1) firstness, which is a mere quality that has the potential to be felt, not so much a relation but the content or object of an asymmetrical relation, and thus independent; (2) secondness, which is an actual feeling of, reaction and opposition to, firstness, at the same time dependent effect and creative response; (3) thirddness, which is the mediation between firstness and secondness, asymmetrical interdependence, the inclusiveness of firstness within secondness as seen from a thirddness that includes both in a nested hierarchy that becomes an infinitely recursive process of inclusiveness. However, Peirce also hints at the possibility of what could be called a 'zeroness', a (non)relation of pure nothing, which

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\text{... is not the nothing of negation. For not means other than, and other is merely a synonym of the ordinal numeral second. As such it implies a first; while the present pure zero is prior to every first ... It is the germinal nothing, in which the whole universe is involved or foreshadowed. As such it is absolutely undefined and unlimited possibility \text{– boundless possibility. There is no compulsion and no law. It is ... the Nothing of boundless freedom}}.\]

Now, this zeroness corresponds to Whitehead’s category of the ultimate, creativity; whereas firstness, secondness, and thirddness correspond respectively to eternal

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objects (α-terms), actual occasions (r-terms) – both belonging to the categories of existence – and the asymmetrical relation of inclusiveness between the first two (and thus itself an r-term, as Hartshorne has pointed out), which is elaborated in the categories of explanation.

As we have seen, the Madhyamika categorize reality into a variety of ways, the primary one being that between the conventional and ultimate truths. For purposes of deconstruction, Nagarjuna divides his system up into things, selves, dependent origination, and emptiness.⁴⁴ There is also Candrakirti’s above-mentioned division of conventional reality into creative mental dharmas and abstract physical bodies. Whereas Nagarjuna’s things and selves are both types of abstract forms (α-terms), Candrakirti’s two categories correspond to the process distinction between actual occasions (secondness, r-terms) and eternal objects (firstness, α-terms). Dependent origination would then be the relation between them (Peirce’s thirdness, which is a process of ‘infinite semiosis’), and emptiness would be the pure zero (śunya).

The Trikaya of Mahayana Buddhism (especially Yogacara) refers to the three bodies of the Buddha: (1) Nirmanakaya, or ‘appearance body’ or ‘creation body’ in which the Buddha-nature manifests itself in the world; (2) Sambhogakaya, or ‘enjoyment body’, which appears to the bodhisattvas in the celestial realm; (3) Dharmakaya, or ‘truth body’, the absolute Buddha-nature itself, which is beyond all dualities and conceptions. However, in Tibetan Buddhism there is a fourth: the nontual Svabhavikakaya, which is the ‘essence body’ that includes and transcends the other three. I have already discussed the Trikaya in the chapter on the empty God and above when discussing the theory of the two ultimates.

Finally, one may wonder what part the Christian Trinity can play in this wider integration, considering that it is not just a theological doctrine, but is also a form of supernatural theology, postulating a God that radically transcends the process of dependent becoming, unlike the panentheism discussed in the previous chapter. Nevertheless, I think that the conceptual system Christianity developed to understand the Trinity can be used as a tool to help conceptualize and systematize the relation between process thought and Madhyamika. The classical form of the Trinity doctrine states that the ‘persons’ (in the sense of ‘persona’ rather than conscious persons) within the Trinity ‘are not distinguished by any nature’, in the words of
Aquinas, ‘but only by reciprocally opposed relationships’. 45 This ‘relationis oppositio’ doctrine, as it is called, is remarkably similar to the Madhyamika teaching that things are not differentiated on the basis of essences, inherent natures, or characteristic marks, but on the basis of interrelated becoming—a similarity that Magliola points out, while also noting that this is similar to the ‘differential relations’ of post-structuralism. I would also add that it resembles the idea in process philosophy that events have no nature other than that which they derive from their internal relations with other events. However, the Christian theologians say that mere symmetrical interrelations cannot establish the differences between the three persons—there must be asymmetrical relations within the mutual penetration (perichoresis) of the three persons. Hence, they establish the differences on the basis of (1) the asymmetrical generation of the Son by the Father (which is likened to the coming forth of a thought, or a conception); and (2) a symmetrical procession of the Spirit from the ‘one principle’, the Father-and-Son (likened to a voluntaristic breathing forth, or spiration). However, this ‘one principle’ (the Active Spiration) is not a fourth person, rather it is the mutual knowledge and love between the Father and the Son. Hence, it is in a sense neither one nor two, but nondual. The fact that there are two principles (Father and nondual Godhead) means that there is no ‘mon-archy’ in the Trinity that can be used to establish a relation of primacy between one person and the others or between God and Godhead. 46

Now, I am not sure whether Magliola believes that the Trinity is a supernatural God that transcends the world. Leaving this question aside as irrelevant, I think that the relations between the ‘persons’ of the Trinity and the Godhead can be used to formulate the relations between the conventional world (which includes the process categories—events and forms—whether in the world or God) and the


ultimate (creative emptiness). The non-priority of the two principles (non-archy) can be used to show how we cannot understand the asymmetrical interdependence without creative emptiness and how we cannot have creative emptiness if we do not first have the asymmetrical interdependence between entities.

*Deconstruction and Diagonalization*

In previous chapters I have argued that both process and Madhyamika philosophies can be characterized as deconstructive philosophies, as both seek to deconstruct closed systems that reify abstraction such as being and non-being while simultaneously reconstructing open systems which ground both being and non-being in the process of becoming. I will now argue that this commonality between the two philosophies can be exploited to help in developing the comparative hermeneutical framework.

It has been observed that Derrida’s deconstructive strategy with regard to texts is similar to that of Kurt Gödel with regard to first-order number theory: ‘any metaphysical reading of a text will generate at least one element which cannot be decided within metaphysics’.

Gödel’s Incompleteness Theorem, which is a mathematical version of the ‘Liar’s Paradox’, proves that if a first-order theorem in number theory is consistent and strong enough to allow addition and multiplication, then there are some well-formed formulae which are true, but cannot be proved formally within the theory. (Gödel also showed that first-order predicate calculus and set theory are complete.) However, Alan Turing and Alonzo Church have shown that Gödel’s Theorem also applies to algorithms. Similarly, Georg Cantor has shown, by means of his ‘diagonal slash’ method that any set of infinite numbers is incomplete. All of these results can be considered to be extensions of Gödel’s Incompleteness Theorem. It is to this wider sense of the Incompleteness Theorem that Derrida refers when he compares it to his own theorem of textual incompleteness.


It is not only Derrida who has applied Gödel’s theorem to spheres outside of mathematics. For example, Roger Penrose has argued that Turing’s form of the theorem shows that it is impossible for humans to ever create an artificial intelligence that is based solely on algorithmic programs running on computers.\(^{50}\) Related to this is Hofstadter’s paraphrase of the theorem: ‘For each record player there is a record which it cannot play’ (because it generates vibrations that interfere with the record player’s structure so as to cause its destruction).\(^{51}\) This can be extended to show that there are structural limitations on human knowledge, for the very structure of the human brain that makes possible some kinds of knowledge simultaneously precludes other kinds of knowledge, just as a fish’s structure allows it to swim but not to fly and a bird’s structure allows it to fly but not to swim.\(^{52}\) Also, John Barrow and Karl Svozil argue that Gödel’s theorem means that any final physical ‘Theory of Everything’ must necessarily be incomplete.\(^{53}\) And in a paper entitled ‘The Diagonalization of Metaphysics’, philosopher David King argues that Cantor’s ‘diagonal slash’ can be applied not only to physical theories of everything, but also to philosophical ones, for ‘the diagonal argument will always permit the generation of relationships not already accounted for’.\(^{54}\) Finally, Thomas Nagel argues that all (consistent) views must be incomplete because there is always a blindspot in any attempt to have a universal view of reality that includes the viewer, so that ‘[A]ny


\(^{52}\) See Colin McGinn, *Problems in Philosophy: The Limits of Inquiry* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1993), which argues for the thesis of ‘transcendental naturalism’: the problems of consciousness, free will, self, mind-body, meaning, a priori, and knowledge cannot be solved because our epistemic faculties are structurally limited to understanding by means of Combinatorial Atomism with Law-like Mappings (‘CALM’).


\(^{54}\) David King, ‘The Diagonalization of Metaphysics’, *Philosophy Today* 42 (1998): 340. An example of the diagonal slash: take the infinite set of numbers between zero and one, expressed in decimal with an infinite string of digits after the decimal point, and generate a new number so that the nth digit of the new number is a ‘0’ if the nth digit of the nth number of the set is not a ‘0’, otherwise it is a ‘1’. This will generate a new number between zero and one that is not in the original set. It can be added to the set and the set again ‘diagonally slashed’ to produce a new number that is not in the set, and so on.
conception of the world must include some acknowledgement of its own incompleteness".  

The notion that all views are either consistent or complete, but never both, and thus paradoxical in either case, forms the basis of Madhyamika consequential analysis. The point of Madhyamika is to analyze views in order to uncover paradox, whether in the form of self-reference (inconsistency) or infinite regress (incompleteness). These also appear at a higher level, when opposing views are either conjoined (inconsistency) or bi-negated (incompleteness). All views that purport to be self-contained (closed, independent, ‘svabhav-ic’) are deconstructed by pointing out an internal inconsistency. They can only be made to be consistent by becoming dependent on other views, in which case they are incomplete and only relatively true. However, to give up views simply because they are incomplete would be like giving up first-order number theory because it is incomplete – which neither Gödel nor any other mathematician does. The ultimate truth is that there is no absolute truth, only conventional truth. And there can be many degrees of conventional truth/falseness – that is, degrees of incompleteness due to different degrees of inclusiveness or dependence. (Inconsistency, on the other hand, is neither true nor false – it is meaningless.)

In his career as a mathematician, Whitehead attempted, with Bertrand Russell, to develop a first-order number theory that was both consistent and complete. Gödel’s proof that such a project is doomed to failure had a profound effect on Whitehead’s thinking and led to his development of a philosophical system that grounds this incompleteness in a metaphysics of process. Hence, he writes that no ‘scheme of philosophic categories’ is absolutely true. ‘The scheme is true with unformulated qualifications, exceptions, limitations, and new interpretations in terms of more general notions’. And this is because ‘nature is never complete. It is always passing beyond itself. This is the creative advance of nature’. Nature is a process of events, each of which is a creative synthesis of events in its past. Thus, there is an alternating process of consistent (or synthetic) incompleteness (because the synthesis is itself a new entity that itself needs to be synthesized) and inconsistent

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57 Ibid., 289. See also Alfred North Whitehead, *Modes of Thought* (New York: The Free Press, 1968), 2–3, 6, 82, where, referring indirectly to Gödel’s incompleteness theorem, he says that it is necessary to realize that all systems are incomplete or open.
completeness (for if we include the as-yet unsynthesized in the picture, we have completeness but lack synthetic consistency). As Whitehead says: "The many become one, and are increased by one." Hence, Whitehead avoids paradox in the same way mathematicians do—by means of a 'transfinite' or never-ending series of nested sets, which for him is equivalent to the creative advance of immanent transcendence (or asymmetrical inclusiveness). There is thus an endless movement of escape from one paradox and into another, which means that the temporal process is itself a function of this incompleteness inherent in nature itself: the creative striving on the part of entities for both completeness and consistency leads to the never-satisfied procession of perspectives that transcend and include all previous perspectives.

As the above discussion shows, Madhyamika and process philosophy are both deconstructive philosophies which deconstruct views by showing either their inconsistency or their incompleteness. However, they both acknowledge that incompleteness is preferable to inconsistency and see in this fact the possibility of reconstructing closed views into open ones. Deconstruction, as Derrida notes, is not opposed to reconstruction, for as soon it is realized that deconstruction is a process that goes on everywhere without which nothing could happen, a philosophy is already being reconstructed—namely, a philosophy of process, which sees reality as the procession of creative and empty events, alternating between consistency and completeness. This alternation, which we have found in Whitehead, is also identified by Magliola in the undistributed bi-negation of Madhyamika (as opposed to the distributed hyper-essentialism of neither/nor-as-view).

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58 Ibid., 21. This is interpreted in terms of reversion or self-reflexivity by Hiroshi Endo, 'Hartshorne's Concept of God Examined in the Light of Phenomenology and Buddhism', in Santiago Sia, ed., Charles Hartshorne's Concept of God: Philosophical and Theological Responses (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1989), 147: "Many become one and are increased by one" is, to speak strictly, "Many become one and are increased by one, and the many increased by one are again a new many, so they become one again and are increased by one again and - ". Thus creativity is proven by a Gödel-like incompleteness argument (just as Penrose demonstrates human free will by means of a similar argument). This is another proof that creativity and emptiness are two aspects of the same reality, as was argued in the previous chapter. See also Matthew Rampley, 'Creativity', The British Journal of Aesthetics 38 (1998): 265–278, where it is argued that creativity occurs when rules break down due to their being followed to their limits (rather than in their deliberate transgression).

59 This is based on Ken Wilber, Sex, Ecology, Spirituality: The Spirit of Evolution (Boston and London: Shambhala, 1995), 503–5.

The Two Immanent Transcendentals

The transcendentalists of Aristotle and Aquinas on the one hand, and of Kantianism on the other, are two quite different kinds of transcendental; nevertheless, they both share the characteristic of constituting a transcendent ground for categories and phenomena, respectively. However, ever since — and as a direct consequence of — the 'intersubjective turn' (of which the 'linguistic turn' is merely a part) these transcendentalists have been transformed into immanent transcendentals that do not act as grounds but as 'conditioned conditions', involved as they are in a dialectic of interdependence (albeit asymmetrical) with the conditioned. I suggest that the two immanent transcendentals that are emerging can be used as a powerful hermeneutical tool for comparing and integrating process thought and Madhyamika in particular, but also for worldview analysis and universal integration in general.

The Greek philosophers and the Scholastics — especially Aristotle and Aquinas — understood by 'transcendentals' concepts which transcend the categories. Whereas the categories are concepts applicable to every being except God (or 'Being'), the transcendentalists are concepts applicable to every being including God (or 'Being'). The transcendentalists, according to Aristotle, are what all the categories (ultimate genera) have in common, such as 'being', 'unity', 'truth', and 'good', of which being is understood to be the principle transcendental with which the others are co-extensive (i.e., interpenetrative). However, the transcendentalists are said of each category in an analogical rather than in a univocal sense — for example, the being of substance (or essence, the first category) is different from the being of its attributes (the other nine categories). Aquinas agrees with this schema, although he extends it by adding to the list of transcendentals those of 'thing' and 'difference', and by distinguishing between created being (ens) and the divine Being (Esse), with the latter becoming the antecedent condition of the former. Thus for Aquinas, God's

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61 Magliola, On Deconstructing Life-Worlds, 165. See Charles Hartshorne, The Zero Fallacy and Other Essays in Neoclassical Philosophy, ed. Mohammad Valady (Chicago: Open Court, 1997), 17: we need both constructive philosophies (like Whitehead's) and skeptical meta-philosophies (like Wittgenstein's); Frederick J. Strong, 'The Transcendental in a Comparative Context', in E. Deutsch, ed., Culture and Modernity: East-West Philosophic Perspectives (Honolulu: Univ. of Hawaii Press, 1991), 380–1: we need both deconstruction and creative reconstruction; David Loy, Lack and Transcendence: The Problem of Death and Life in Psychotherapy, Existentialism, and Buddhism (New Jersey: Humanities Press, 1995), 113: argues for the complementarity of Nietzschean perspectivism and the Madhyamika critique of perspectives/views. Also worth noting is what David Ray Griffin said at a conference I attended, namely, that he should have referred to process thought as 'reconstructive postmodernism' instead of 'constructive postmodernism' in the title of his book, Founders of Constructive Postmodern Philosophy, as it is in his view compatible with deconstruction.
existence is the ultimate transcendental and is understood to be a transcendent
ground of creatures, whose existence is only analogical to God’s (for God’s being is
‘doer-being’ and the world’s is ‘done-being’, to use McDermott’s useful
terminology). Thus, God is the existence of the world, whose essence, when
combined with active existence, results in the actual world. As we have seen
elsewhere, Aquinas actualizes (that is, reifies) the divine activity (Esse), thus making
it into a transcendent absolute, whose essence is above ordinary worldly essences
(hyperessentialism).

With Duns Scotus’s re-interpretation of the transcendentals as univocal rather
than analogical in their cross-categorial and God-world application, and his
consequent understanding of existence as ‘haecceity’ (singular form) rather than as a
mystery beyond conceptual grasp, the scene was set for the Kantian transcendentals
as the ‘a priori conditions of the possibility of all experience’. Kant identified the
two forms of space and time, the twelve conceptual categories (causality being the
most important), and the three rational ideas (self, world, and God) as
transcendentals. Hence, unlike the Aristotelian-Thomist transcendentals, the Kantian
transcendentals are not trans-categorial, but in fact include the categories. Of course,
Aristotle’s categories are not the same as Kant’s as the former refer to predication
and the latter to the different forms of predications, and are thus supplementary. But
space (or place) and time are some of the attributes in Aristotle’s categories, and
substance (first category) is represented by Kant’s trans-phenomenal (noumenal)
ideas of I, world, and God (although these can also be interpreted as remnants of the
pre-Kantian transcendentals). What Kant’s transcendentals have in common with
those of Aristotle and Aquinas, however, is that they transcend experience and
therefore both of these two types of transcendentals postulate the existence of a
reality that is independent of the phenomenal world of experience.

The recent intersubjective turn in philosophy, with its movement beyond the
duality of subject-object and towards intersubjectivity, language, and convention, has
resulted in a loss of faith in all things that transcend social experience. But it has also
led to a neo-transcendentalism which re-interprets them in an immanentist sense that
is compatible with intersubjectivity and thus makes it possible to have a historicism
without resorting to epistemic relativism. The trans-categorial transcendental can be

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seen in the later Heidegger’s reformulation of his ‘ontological difference’ so as to stress the interdependence between Being (or Openness) and beings. It is also found in Nietzsche’s idea of the ‘eternal return’, interpreted by Deleuze as the eternal return of difference, which is a ‘groundlessness in which original Nature resides in its chaos, beyond the jurisdictions and laws which constitute only second nature’. The immanence to experience of this transcendental means that it is possible to have a ‘transcendental empiricism’: ‘Empiricism truly becomes transcendental, and aesthetics an apodictic discipline, only when we apprehend directly in the sensible that which can only be sensed, the very being of the sensible: difference, potential difference and difference in intensity as the reason behind qualitative diversity’. Another example is Derrida, who has worked out this idea in greatest detail in his discussion of the difference in Plato between a hyperessential transcendental (negative theology) and the immanent ‘khora’ that is the ‘object’ of an a/theological via negativa, which I have already discussed elsewhere.

This trans-categorial form of the immanent transcendental is the same as creativity in process philosophy. This point has been made by several process philosophers. Hartshorne, for example, says that ‘[a]ccording to process philosophy, the transcendental is creativity, or experience as creative’. The context indicates that by ‘transcendental’ he has in mind the Scholastic distinction between ‘categories,” applicable to all created things, and the “transcendentals,” applicable to creatures and creator’, and goes on to say that ‘Deity is the unsurpassable form ... of creativity, the creatures are instances of surpassable forms of creativity’. Likewise, R. L. Fetz argues that ‘the category of the ultimate [creativity] occupies in Whitehead’s categorial scheme the same position vis-à-vis the rest of the categorial groups as the transcendentals do with respect to the ten Aristotelian categories’, and

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64 Martin Heidegger, Pathmarks, ed. William McNeill (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1998), 233. Heidegger did not realize that by this revision he effectively transmuted the ontological difference into a ‘cosmological difference’.


66 Ibid., 56–7.


68 Ibid.
that ‘Whitehead’s notion of creativity is nothing but an intensified formulation of the Aristotelian conception of being as *energia*, as the act of being, or of the scholastic conception of *actus essendi*’.\(^6^9\) (Thus, strictly speaking, Whitehead is mistaken in calling creativity a ‘category’.)

In Buddhism, the trans-categorial immanent transcendental has been identified with emptiness. Some Madhyamika scholars have likened emptiness to a universal quality or property.\(^7^0\) But others have noted that to treat emptiness as an essential property is problematic – Garfield, for example, refers to Candrakirti’s comment that this would be equivalent ‘to one who, upon entering a shop and learning that there are no wares for sale, asks the shopkeeper to sell him the “no wares”.’\(^7^1\) For, as Garfield observes, the ‘property’ of emptiness is not like other properties, for ‘[i]t is not that some things are empty and some are nonempty, or that all things happen to be empty although they might have been otherwise’.\(^7^1\) But this necessity of universal emptiness is exactly what is meant by a transcendental! The difference between categories and transcendentals is in fact the difference between ordinary properties and universal ‘properties’.\(^7^2\) Hence, Michael Barnhart is correct when he says that

the truth of *sunyata* is simply not optional. It is a kind of transcendental precondition to all action and discourse. *But*, and this is the twist, *sunyata* itself is meaningless outside conventional living. ‘Without relying on convention, the ultimate fruit is not taught’.\(^7^3\)

It is for this reason that we would be justified in calling emptiness an immanent transcendental. Its immanence is evident in Nagarjuna’s teaching on the ‘emptiness of emptiness’, which means that even though it is a transcendental, emptiness is itself a truth that originates dependently.

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\(^7^0\) E.g., see Guy Newland, *The Two Truths in the Madhyamika Philosophy of the Ge-luk-ba Order of Tibetan Buddhism* (Ithaca, New York: Snow Lion Publications, 1992), 73.

\(^7^1\) Garfield, *Fundamental Wisdom*, 213–14, 211


So much for the trans-categorial immanent transcendental. The categorial, or post-Kantian, transcendental has also been recast in an immanentist form ever since the intersubjective turn. Examples abound in the literature. For example, Derrida speaks of what he calls the ‘quasi-transcendentals’ that emerge from the immanent critique of texts – ‘deconstruction from within’ – and which therefore do not exist outside the text, taking the form instead of ‘supplementary inscriptions’. Thus, Derrida speaks of the necessity of ‘inscribing within the text that which attempted to govern it from without’.74 The immanent transcendentals in Derrida’s texts – trace, différencé, archi-écriture and the like – are, as Kevin Hart puts it, ‘words which name a mode of difference which is transcendental yet incapable of forming a firm ground’.75 This is because the phenomenal (or categorial) and the transcendental are interdependent: ‘The transcendental is implied by the phenomenal, and the phenomenal turns out to be conditioned by the transcendental’.76 Another example is Deleuze, who refers to the immanence of the transcendental within phenomenal experience, so that ‘[t]ranscendence is always a product of immanence’ and ‘transcendent models’ (trees) always arise from the ‘immanent process’ (rhizomes).77 Again, the immanent transcendental re-appears in Foucault as the ‘historical a priori’: ‘rules are not imposed from the outside on the elements that they relate together, they are caught up in the very things that they connect’.78 And in Habermas, where it is called ‘transcendental pragmatics’: ‘My reflections point towards the thesis that the unity of reason only remains perceptible in the plurality of its voices’.79 One final example comes from Wittgenstein, whose later thought corrects the transcendent transcendentalism of the Tractatus. He says that language games contain certain ‘fundamental propositions’ which cannot be questioned as


76 Hart, Trespass, 187.


they are the very pattern that holds the language game together; but ‘one might almost say that these foundation-walls are carried by the whole house’.

Do such categorial immanent transcendental exist in Buddhism, especially Madhyamika? Peter Della Santina thinks so:

So what of a priori propositions? For Buddhists, they are a priori in the sense that they are not derived from the experience of this life alone; in other words, they are with one at birth. Nonetheless, they are not a priori in the sense that they are not the result of what has been called rational insight, but are rather ultimately the outcome of accumulated experience over innumerable existences. Nor are they necessary.

Also, we have already seen that Garfield admits the possibility of a phenomenal metaphysics, or phenomenology.

As we have seen in chapter three, the categorial immanent transcendental is a basic concept in process thought without which there could be no process thought. Whitehead refers to it poetically as ‘eternal greatness incarnate in the passage of temporal fact’. And Hartshorne formulates it as the inclusiveness of α-terms (product) in r-terms (process) – i.e., the immanent transcendental are a-historical products of historical processes. These a-historical products are constants, such as ‘all is process’ and ‘all products are immanent to process’ – in other words, the three categories (namely, α-, r- and α-in-r-categories) are each transcendental as they are universal categories. That the two forms of the immanent transcendental – trans-categorial and categorial – are both found in process thought is attested to by James Bradley, who says that Whitehead shares with contemporary neo-transcendentalism a radically immanent transcendentalism which does not refer objective experience

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82 On page 191.

away from itself to something else as its ground. He identifies the two immanent transcendents in Whitehead’s category of the ultimate and categories of existence, respectively:

The difference between creativity and the other categories is primarily that creativity, like the transcendental predicates of medieval philosophers, applies to all entities ... In contrast, the categories of existence ... are the transcendental conditions of specific features of the empirical realm – individuals, universals, relations, and so on.

The two immanent transcendents are the two factors common to all phenomenal experience. The formless aspect of all experience – the experience that all experience is creative synthetic – is the immanent transcendental of creative emptiness. And the formal (categorial) aspect of all experience is the immanent transcendental of universal invariance, which is the primordial nature (or abstract pole) of the panentheistic God (because God alone is all-inclusive and included by all). The fact that these two transcendents are immanent means that a via analogia is no longer necessary to relate transcendental with categories. This was only necessary when the trans-categorial transcendental was reified into a transcendent God who was supposed to be actual and personal. It was then necessary to find a way of saying that creatures had something in common with God even though God was ultimately beyond comparison with creatures – an impossible task, brought about by this con-fusion of the two transcendental with one another. But once they are kept distinct and seen to be immanent to the intersubjective phenomenal world, the relation between them becomes equivocal. There is no way of mediating between the categorial and the trans-categorial; instead, the movement from one to the other is, as we saw earlier, a gestalt-like ‘leap’. Also, as was argued in the previous chapter, the relation between God and creatures is a univocal relation – God is merely the most eminent actuality on a sliding ‘analogue’ scale of actualities. (Recall, the philosophical notion of analogy has to do with differences of kind, and the analogue with differences of degree.)

It should now be evident that the two immanent transcendents are a powerful tool not only for providing a hermeneutical framework for process-Madhyamika integration, but also for worldview integration in general. This is evident from the

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fact that the notion of the transcendental has such a diverse history in various world
philosophies, and can thus be used as a common background against which
worldviews can be compared, evaluated, enter into dialogue with one another, and be
mutually transformed. It is, I think, superior to John Hick’s interpretive scheme
whereby the two transcendentalss are seen as two different phenomenal aspects of the
one transcendent Reality, which is based on the mistaken assumption that there can
be an ultimate reality that transcends all possible experience. Hick makes the
classical mistake of reifying and fusing the transcendentalss into a single absolute and
transcendent ultimate reality and interpreting religious conceptions of the ultimate –
such as God and Emptiness – as different phenomenal aspects of this ultimate reality.
This hardly does justice to these worldviews – such as Buddhism and process
thought, among others – which altogether deny the existence of a transcendent reality
of this kind. But the above theory of immanent transcendentalss not only does them
justice, it can also explain how worldviews of a transcendent reality can arise
(namely, via reification, synthesis, or hierarchization).

A Logical Framework Integrating Process Semantics and Negative
Dialectics

In this section I will briefly outline a logical system that shows how process thought
and Madhyamika can be integrated into a coherent system. Such a logical system is
necessary if the hermeneutical framework being developed here is to succeed and be
taken seriously.

Process philosophy is in many ways a return to the richer Aristotelian logic,
which allows for the possibility of future contingents, represented as a third term –
‘undetermined’ – alongside the two terms – ‘true’ and ‘false’ – of ordinary tenseless
logic. This is the logical correlate of the ontological ‘becoming’ that is a middle
between ‘being’ and ‘nonbeing’. As mentioned earlier, Whitehead formulated
process philosophy in the wake of the Gödelian revolution, which re-introduced the

85 Ibid., 175.

86 See John Hick, An Interpretation of Religion: Human Responses to the Transcendent (London:
World’s Beliefs (London: Fontana Press, 1977), 174, which presents a two-pole theory of religious
types that is closer to my thesis than Hick’s. However, mine distinguishes between immanent
(cosmological) and transcendent (ontological) forms of the two poles, whereas Smart’s does not.
notion of indeterminacy into logic and mathematics. Intuitionism is an example of an alternative logic that has arisen in response to this revolution. Intuitionists deny the validity of the reductio ad absurdum in arguments of the form: 'the postulation of X's non-existence leads to a contradiction; therefore X exists.' (However they do not deny the opposite of this: 'the postulation of X's existence leads to a contradiction, therefore X does not exist', which is the form the incompleteness theorem takes.) This led to their denial of the law of excluded middle and consequently to their affirmation of undecidability as a third logical 'state' (which is not strictly a 'position').

The incompleteness theorem means that any representation of reality that is mathematical and algorithmic in nature will be incomplete – it thus needs to be supplemented by a non-deductive logic, such as the process logic which admits future contingents (where the past does not deductively determine the present, but merely conditions its possibilities). Such a process logic, or 'process semantics', has been proposed by Nicholas Rescher. The predicates and relations of ordinary logic are replaced with verbs and adverbs, so that 'Quine is a philosopher' becomes 'some philosophizings are (parts or aspects of) quinings', which can be represented formally as:

$$(\exists \theta)(it\ \text{philosophizes}\ \text{at}\ \theta\ \&\ \text{it}\ \text{quinizes}\ \text{at}\ \theta\ \&\ (it\ \text{philosophizes}\ \text{at}\ \theta\ \&\ \text{it}\ \text{quinizes}\ \text{at}\ \theta))$$

(Here, $\theta$ is a spatiotemporal location where the event occurs and $\&$ represents inclusion or containment.) Thus, process logic is much richer and inclusive of formal logic (just as process includes abstract things and ideas). The inclusion of processes within other processes makes possible the representation of the third term of indeterminacy.

But it is important to note that the 'neither true nor false' of indeterminacy embodied in process logic is not the same as the Madhyamika bi-negation, which is not itself a proposition. For as D. Seyfort Ruegg argues, it is necessary

To distinguish clearly between (a) a 'neither ... nor' sentence expressing the last position of the catuskoti by which some entity would be postulated as indeterminate, and (b) a 'neither ... nor' sentence where not even an indeterminate entity is posited and which serves simply to exclude, by the

prasaṣṭva type of negation, all positions resulting from dichotomizing conceptualization...

He proposes that what is needed here is a ‘zerology’, similar to that of the French philosopher, Julia Kristeva. This has been provided by Claus Oetke, who proposes that the symbol ‘Ø’ be used at the beginning of negative general existential propositions as a sentential operator like ‘on the level of highest truth (it is the case that)’: ‘Ø (∃x) ... x ...’, which would be dropped for propositions that are at the level of conventional truth. In this way it is possible to have a logic that integrates both the conventional level of process semantics and the ultimate level of Madhyamika negative dialectics.

Conclusion: Results and Discussion

The purpose of this thesis, as stated in the introduction, is to show that Madhyamika Buddhism and process thought are mutually compatible, and to develop a hermeneutical framework for their integration and mutual transformation. In pursuing this end I began with a discussion of the various critiques that either system has or could direct at the other. It was discovered that the two systems are in many ways complementary once certain issues are clarified, such as the compatibility between asymmetry and interdependence (‘asymmetrical interdependence’), the difference between causes and conditions, the correct interpretation of pratitya-samutpada, the nature of becoming, and the status of eternal objects, metaphysics, and God. It was found that the two systems are compatible if both: accept asymmetrical interdependence, accept conditionality while rejecting causality, distinguish between two kinds of becoming, reject eternal objects, and restrict metaphysics and God to conventional/phenomenal existence. This was followed by an inquiry into the mutual transformation of the two systems, resulting in the two different concepts of ‘creative emptiness’ and the ‘empty God’, which, it was contended, should be acceptable within both systems. In developing a hermeneutical

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89 Ibid., 53–4.
framework for integrating the two systems, it was found that we need both the process theory of two ultimates and the Madhyamika theory of two truths, which in combination allow us to understand the relation between empty world (non-ultimate actuality), empty God (ultimate actuality), and creative emptiness (ultimate activity). I have also argued against both the process tendency to subordinate activity (creativity) to actuality (God-world) and the opposing Madhyamika tendency to subordinate actuality (conventional truth) to activity (ultimate truth), arguing instead in favor of their status as two compatible principles equally irreducible to one another – an idea that can be found analytically developed in the Christian trinity doctrine of generation and procession (which I apply to reality in its entirety instead of merely to the intra-divine economy). Another useful interpretative framework within which the integration of the two systems can be carried out was also discussed – namely, by means of a revised immanentist form of the two different but related Scholastic and Kantian forms of the transcendental, whereby the process metaphysics (as embodied in God) is an immanent alternative to the Kantian categorial transcendental and the Madhyamika emptiness is an immanent alternative to the Scholastic trans-categorial transcendental. Thus the categorial immanent transcendental avoids the extremes of symmetrical independence and symmetrical dependence by way of asymmetrical interdependence (and inclusive transcendence), while the trans-categorial immanent transcendental avoids the extremes of interessentialism and hyperessentialism. The presence of both immanent transcendentals in Derrida’s deconstructionism makes his philosophy useful in constructing a framework for the mutual interpretation and integration of Madhyamika and process thought.

The fact that these two principles – actuality (both ultimate and non-ultimate) and activity – are irreducible to one another means that the relation between them will remain indeterminable. For if we describe the relation in terms of nonduality, as neither a relation nor a non-relation, we are illegitimately using a method – negative dialectics – which is valid within one sphere – activity – to mediate between two autonomous spheres that use different methods. And if we describe the relation in terms of asymmetrical interdependence or inclusive transcendence, such as that activity includes actuality, we again use a method – this time creative synthesis – from one sphere – actuality – to mediate between the two spheres. In both cases, we would be reducing and subordinating one sphere to the other. But their irreducibility
does not imply that the two are incommensurable, as this would again reduce their relation to the neither/nor template of negative dialectics. Furthermore, to know that they are incommensurable implies a vantage-point that transcends and includes both. In fact, even the attempt to continue with this discussion of the relation between the two principles plays into the hands of the method of inclusiveness, whereas breaking it off at this point of indeterminacy plays into the hands of the negative dialectics. All I can do is say that these are two complementary and mutually irreducible ways of experiencing reality – the way of mediation (inclusive transcendence, sublation, asymmetrical process, etc.) and the way of immediacy (bi-negation, deconstruction, openness, etc.) – and leave it at that. For these two principles represent the two sides of reality – deconstruction and (re)construction, no-system and (anti)system, athesis and thesis-antithesis-synthesis.
CHAPTER 9

PRACTICAL APPLICATIONS: DIALOGUE AND WORLDVIEWS

Before concluding this thesis I will inquire into the practical applications of the integration of process thought and Madhyamika Buddhism (which I will call ‘Process Buddhism’ for short). This chapter will discuss the contribution of Process Buddhism to interreligious dialogue and worldview analysis, and the next chapter will consider Process Buddhism’s contribution to ethics and social engagement.


The dialogue between process thought and Buddhism has to date been restricted to a dialogue between Christian process theology and the Kyoto school of Japanese Mahayana Buddhism, especially between process theologian John Cobb and Masao Abe of the Kyoto school. But the Madhyamika-process dialogue is virtually non-existent. Of course, process thinkers such as Hartshorne, Cobb, and Jacobson have written about Madhyamika, and Madhyamika thinkers such as Streng, McCagney, and Kalupahana have either written about or have been influenced by process thought. But there has not been much in the way of sustained dialogue between the two systems. It is hoped that the present work will rectify this situation by showing how the Madhyamika-process dialogue can result in a mutual transformation of the two systems, as well as in a general theory of dialogue between worldviews. I have already shown how the process critique of Madhyamika (as found in Hartshorne and others) and the Madhyamika critique of process (such as that of Streng as well as the critical issues I have raised) can be answered by way of a theory of asymmetrical interdependence and a conventional metaphysic. I have also shown how the two ultimates theory – which was one of the fruits of the Abe-Cobb dialogue – needs to be critically recast if it is to be compatible with the Madhyamika form of the two truths theory, so that we can adequately understand the relation between the empty God-world and creative emptiness. Consequently, in this section I will further explore a potential outcome of the Madhyamika-process dialogue: a general theory of dialogue between worldviews based on Madhyamika and process philosophies.
Ever since the revolution in philosophy known as the ‘linguistic turn’ (or better, the ‘intersubjective turn’) – which has brought about what developmental psychologists call a ‘post-conventional’ (Kohlberg) mode of consciousness – we have been living in what has been called an ‘age of dialogue’\(^1\). This revolution has resulted in an ‘epistemology of dialogue’\(^2\) in which knowledge is seen as something that results from dialogue with others (even with nature, as the new physics tells us). In other words, truth is no longer seen as an object of observation, but as the product of a process of intersubjective participation – hence, we could call this the ‘democratic theory of knowledge’. Due to a number of developments in different fields of inquiry, truth is now understood as dynamic, relational, historical, social, cultural, linguistic (or symbolic), and perspectival – in short, dialogical. Such an understanding of truth has enabled the increasing abandonment of a substance ontology in favor of a process cosmology (rather than ontology, the study of being), which sees reality as consisting of dialogical processes rather than as monological things. To understand reality in terms of dialogue is to understand it as a ‘middle logic’ (dia-logos), that is, as neither pluralistic nor monistic, but as a ‘unitive pluralism’\(^3\) in which events are in a constant process of mutual creative transformation – which is a ‘disjunctive synthesis’, rather than the ‘conjunctive synthesis’ of the Hegelian dialectic.\(^4\) Also, understanding reality as dialogical through and through means that even the individual is not unitary but an intersubjective society of self-events in constant dialogue with one another. Thought itself is thus understood as an inner conversation, so that what a person is ‘saying to herself’ is really what she is ‘saying to that other self that is just coming into life in the flow of time’,\(^5\) as Peirce eloquently puts it. The self is thus really a temporally-ordered society (Whitehead), or what Mead calls a ‘social self’, where the socially conditioned ‘me’ (past) is different from the self-creative ‘I’ (present).\(^6\) Thus, strictly


speaking, there really is no such thing as a monologue. The notion of an inner
dialogue has, of course, been around for a long time—it can be found, for example,
in both Socrates and the Buddha. But it is only now, with the growth in popularity of
process thought (as a movement, not just as a school) that it has been given a
coherent philosophical form.

All of this indicates that process thought is eminently suited to the
formulation of a general theory of inter-worldview dialogue. But what about
Madhyamika? It seems that whereas the purpose of dialogue in process thought is the
constructive mutual transformation of worldviews, the Madhyamika would instead
see dialogue as primarily serving the purpose of an immanent deconstruction of
worldviews. This would indicate that the Madhyamika response to the process theory
of dialogue would probably be similar to Derrida’s response to Gadamer’s
hermeneutical theory of dialogue.7 Gadamer believes that for dialogue to be possible
there must be a common language and a fusion of horizons or contexts. Derrida
interprets Gadamer to imply that dialogical understanding depends on the attainment
of a Hegelian-like final synthesis in which a total transparency of meaning is
achieved. But, as Derrida has shown in a number of places, interpretation of an
other’s meaning can never be mastered as every text is embedded within a context,
and every context within a wider context ad infinitum, so that the meaning
interpreted will always be different and deferred (différance). In fact, this inability to
master a text’s meaning applies as much to one’s own texts as it does to those of
others, as the self is social in nature and thus self-understanding takes the form of an
internal dialogue. This inability to master or totalize a text means that it will always
contain elements (words, concepts, statements, views, etc.) that are indeterminate in
meaning and consequently paradoxical. All of this indicates that dialogue with others
cannot lead to consensual agreement on meaning as there will always be elements
that cannot be compared between the two systems because of the indeterminacy in
any translation of meanings between them.

I do not think that this implies that the process and Madhyamika theories of
dialogue are incompatible. For the deconstructive critique of dialogue only applies to
dialogue between worldviews that are closed and static systems—which

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become reified, self-contained, and independent. Deconstructive critique is thus a useful first step that makes dialogue possible by opening up worldviews that have closed themselves off. The ‘hermeneutics of suspicion’ is thus an important supplement to ordinary hermeneutics, as it undermines closed ideologies that suppress (and thus oppress) aspects of reality that they ignore. Only when closed and incoherent worldviews have been opened and made incomplete can they mutually transform one another through dialogue. As long as they remain closed by asserting their own completeness, they cannot dialogue because they assume that nothing can be learned from other worldviews—hence, their only means of communication is translation. But the deconstructive critique shows that this will not work as the undecidability of meaning-translation leads to incommensurability. But once they are shown to be incomplete (and only then coherent), worldviews are able to learn the languages of other worldviews in the same way that people can learn other languages. Just as it is possible to learn a language without translation—namely, in the same way we learn our first language—and thus compare words between the two languages without translation, so too it is possible to learn other worldviews and compare them with our own without translation. Hence, it is by means of the synthetic enrichment of our worldviews that we can have true face-to-face dialogue (unmediated by translation or a common essence—or inter-est, as Levinas calls it). Deconstructive dialogue is thus the enabling condition of reconstructive and mutually transformative dialogue.⁸

That dialogue is dependent on face-to-face experience unmediated by abstract essences, interpretative translation, and ideology has been made evident by Paul Knitter’s interesting argument—inspired by liberation theology—that the experience of the suffering of the oppressed precedes dialogue as suffering is the common context that all religions share, being as they are all different means to liberation from suffering. It is this common context—which is outside, rather than a common essence within, all religions—that is alone able to break through the barriers to

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understanding that each religion’s doctrines, ideologies, and theories set up. For, as Knitter says, ‘if there is any experience where the gap between the experience and the interpretation is narrow, it is suffering.’ It seems that Knitter and liberation theology are expressing the same truth in concrete that process thought generalizes into the idea that process precedes thing, or that becoming precedes being, and that therefore it is necessary to liberate processes, events, and becomings from their oppression by and reification into things, substances, and beings. Similarly, I suggest that Madhyamika Buddhism’s concern with liberation from conceptual opposites such as being and non-being, which have served to obscure (or oppress) the direct realization of reality as creative emptiness, is a more abstract expression of the Buddhist desire for liberation from suffering in all its forms – a truth which is now being realized by the socially-engaged Buddhism movement. Hence, I propose that process thought and Madhyamika Buddhism can provide the theoretical grounding – both deconstructive and reconstructive – for the various liberative worldviews (of which liberation theology and engaged Buddhism are examples) in their dialogical attempt to learn from one another’s means of liberation from suffering so as to work together to find global solutions to global suffering (which takes many forms, such as economic, political, ecological, etc.).

This means that it is only after the ideological barriers to dialogue have been removed and the conditions for dialogue have been set up by removing oppressive biases, becoming aware of the universality of suffering, and allowing the voices of those who suffer to be heard, that worldviews can mutually transform one another by learning from each other the unique means each has developed to liberate themselves and others from suffering. The process-Buddhist dialogue shows that such mutual transformation is possible because their different liberative methods are complementary, rather than contradictory, as one seeks liberation from suffering through deconstructive meditation on emptiness (ultimate reality) and the other seeks liberation from suffering through belief in (and guidance from) a panentheistic God (ultimate actuality). As we have seen, these two ultimates are compatible and their integration into both systems can only result in their mutual enrichment and thus both can become more effective in their common goal of liberation from suffering (as the combination of meditative insight into emptiness and prayerful tuning into the divine persuasion can have better results that either on its own). And the fact that process

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thought and Madhyamika are exceptions to the pluralist thesis that religions are different phenomena of ultimate reality – as the two ultimates are directly-experienced immanent transcendental means that they are perfect candidates upon which can be based a general theory of dialogue that has mutual transformation as a goal. For pluralist theories alone cannot allow such mutual transformation insofar as they see the various religious doctrines as incommensurable phenomena of the transcendent ultimate reality.

A General Theory of Worldviews Based on Process Buddhism

In the previous section it was argued that worldviews cannot be compared by translation between their different conceptual schemes, but that it is possible to compare them in a dialogical context of mutual learning. This means that the disciplines of comparative philosophy and comparative religion – which, following Ninian Smart, I prefer to merge into the discipline of worldview analysis\(^\text{10}\) – will only succeed if grounded in a dialogical approach that avoids taking a standpoint outside and above worldviews. In this section I will explore the possibility of using Madhyamika and process thought to develop a general theory of worldviews that is based on the deconstructive critique of closed worldviews and the reconstructive mutual transformation of open worldviews, thus making possible inter-worldview evaluation.

But how is an evaluative analysis of worldviews possible? Pluralists argue that the different ways that in which worldviews see the world are equally valid, as worldviews are underdetermined by the data (as in the gestalt switch, such as the duck-rabbit figure). They say that worldviews are thus different paradigms, language-games, or conceptual schemes, and cannot be comparatively evaluated. However, as we have already seen, this incommensurability thesis only applies to translation and closed worldviews. It does not apply to the mutual transformation of open worldviews in which two worldviews become parts of a new worldview, or where a worldview is sublated as part within a more inclusive worldview. As much is admitted by those thinkers who are alleged to have put forward the

incommensurability thesis. Wittgenstein says, for example, that language-games are
not closed and private systems; rather, they can overlap and contain or be contained
by other more- or less-inclusive language-games (such as the way cities contain
suburbs), which makes it possible to compare our system with another that is partial
and included by ours and judge that ‘theirs is evidently the poorer one by far’.11
Another example, is Kuhn, whose argument that scientific paradigms are
incommensurable has often been misunderstood to apply symmetrically between a
new paradigm and the one it has superseded. In fact, he sees the incommensurability
as being asymmetrical in the sense that there is a discontinuous break when moving
from old paradigm to new, but continuity when moving in the opposite direction.
Kuhn does not deny that the superseding paradigm is an improvement on the one
being superseded;12 he merely denies that the superseded paradigm is included in the
new paradigm in the same form that it took when it was dominant13— which is in
agreement with the ideas of creative synthesis and inclusive transcendence in process
thought (and in Hegel), where the included is negated as whole and preserved as part.
Thus the asymmetry of included-including makes it possible to evaluate other
worldviews without resort to absolute criteria transcending all theories and
standpoints. All that is needed is a worldview that is inclusive of the worldviews that
are to be analyzed and compared, for such a worldview is not just inclusive of these
other worldviews, but also includes the asymmetrical relations of inclusiveness that
they have to one another. And the evaluation need not be merely diachronic, for
worldviews that are at the same level can be synchronically evaluated by comparing
their attitudes towards worldviews at higher levels (to which they may be open or
closed) and lower levels (of which they may be either inclusive or repressive).

This theory of worldviews is similar to that of Ken Wilber, who has
synthesized the developmental worldview theories of Piaget, Habermas, Kohlberg,
and others. But I think that Wilber’s theory leans to the absolutist side and needs to


12 Thomas S. Kuhn, The Structure of Scientific Revolutions, 2nd ed. (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press,

13 Ibid., 149: ‘Since new paradigms are born from old ones, they ordinarily incorporate much of the
vocabulary and apparatus, both conceptual and manipulative, that the traditional paradigm had
previously employed. But they seldom employ these borrowed elements in quite the traditional way.
With the new paradigm, old terms, concepts, and experiments fall into new relationships one with the
other.’ Which is exactly what happens (according to process philosophy) when an old paradigm
becomes negated as whole but is restored as a part of a greater whole.
be corrected by means of Madhyamika and process thought. Wilber conceptualizes reality as a developmental unfolding of levels such that each subsequent level includes and transcends antecedent levels. At each level there are four quadrants: (1) individual-interior (intentional); (2) individual-exterior (behavioral); (3) collective-interior (cultural); and (4) collective-exterior (social) – all of which are symmetrically interdependent, none taking precedence. The first quadrant thus corresponds to an individual’s worldview and the third to the worldview of a collective. Transcending the entire nested series of quadrants and levels, however, is the formless ‘Spirit’, ‘Emptiness’, or ‘Creativity’, which is at the same time included-by-all (Alpha), all-inclusive (Omega), and all-pervasive (the formless element in all forms). Both the forms (quadrants and levels) and the formless are transcendent transcendentals, conditioning but not conditioned by contingent and concrete history. But in Madhyamika and process thought, these transcendentals are not transcendent, but immanent and conditioned by the creative process which they condition. Hence, worldviews can be either ‘ontological’ (based on being and transcendence) or ‘cosmological’ (based on becoming and immanence) – two tendencies that cut across all actual and possible worldviews synchronically (that is, timelessly).  

Another complication of the above picture is the theistic question. For Wilber, the Eastern conception of God is formless Spirit, whereas the Western God is an archetype that occurs at a transpersonal level he calls ‘subtle’, which is inclusively transcended by the ‘causal’ level of formlessness. But in process thought, God is a consciousness in the world which is felt as an influence at all levels of cosmic evolution (as is the Cosmic Buddha-Bodhisattva). I have discussed elsewhere in this thesis Hartshorne’s exhaustive table of sixteen possible worldviews of the God-world relation (based on whether they accept contingency and/or necessity with respect to God and/or the world). The situation would become much more complex if we were also to distinguish between worldviews that equate God with creative emptiness and those which differentiate them, and even more complex again if we were to distinguish between ontological and cosmological worldviews. The number of possible permutations would grow considerably.

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The general theory of worldviews based on Madhyamika and process thought will therefore require an adequate typology that is multi-dimensional. At a minimum, it will have to distinguish between diachronic categories – which divide worldviews into those that either sublimate or oppress less inclusive (past) worldviews and those that are either closed or open to more inclusive (future) worldviews – and synchronic categories – which divide worldviews into ontological worldviews (having interessentialist or hyperessentialist forms) and cosmological worldviews (which further divide into asymmetrically interdependent process and creative emptiness) – all of which needs to be plotted against the different types of God-world relation that are possible within worldviews. The complexity of such a theory (which is a worldview of worldviews) is a function of its high level of inclusiveness of other worldviews, and is thus well-suited to order worldviews evaluatively into relative degrees of more and less comparative validity. This is not the place to develop such a theory in detail. Hence, I will merely enumerate a number of criteria for worldview evaluation that derive from this thesis. It is no doubt incomplete and has to be further developed in future.\(^{13}\)

Some criteria for worldview evaluation: (1) transposition (or misplacement) and/or (2) hierarchization (or subordination) between (a) category and category (r-term and a-term), (b) sub-category and category, (c) sub-category and transcendental, and (d) category and transcendental (two types of conventional error and two types of ultimate error); (3) interessentialism and hyperessentialism; (4) symmetrical dependence and symmetrical independence as relation between categorial opposites; (5) analogy (which should only apply between a-terms and between sub-categories); (6) conjunction (synthesis) and disjunction (dualism) between categorial opposites; (7) methodological misapplication (creative synthesis applies only to the intra-categorial and negative dialectics applies only to the trans-categorial).

\(^{13}\) An attempt along these lines is made in my forthcoming paper, "A General Theory of Worldviews Based on Madhyamika and Process Philosophies", Philosophy East and West 52, no. 2 (2002).
CHAPTER 10

PRACTICAL APPLICATIONS: ETHICS AND SOCIAL ENGAGEMENT

Liberating Praxis or Ideology?

The relevance of the integration of Madhyamika Buddhism and process thought can ultimately be demonstrated pragmatically by its ethical and socio-political consequences. This will also show to what extent Process Buddhism is more successful ethically and socio-politically than process thought and Madhyamika Buddhism taken separately. However, it is not simply a matter of dertwing practice from theory, for this begs the question of Process Buddhism’s ideological status. For Marxists and liberation theologians must be taken seriously when they say that theory arises from social practice as an ideological justification of that practice. If social relations to some extent determine the conceptual and theoretical superstructure, then before inquiring into the practical applications of Process Buddhism we need to first determine whether it is a liberating praxis or an ideology that unwittingly supports existing forms of domination. According to Randall Morris, the process thought of Whitehead and Hartshorne can be interpreted as ‘one more metaphysical theory by which a modern liberal political theory has been legitimised’, and asks whether the fact that both thinkers derived a modern liberal politics from their respective metaphysics indicates that these were conditioned by their modern liberal pre-convictions.1 Similar critiques could be made of Madhyamika Buddhism, for example by questioning the role it played in the politics of Tibet via the ruling Geluk order. Also, its similarity to post-structuralist deconstruction could involve it in critiques similar to those leveled against Derrida and others that deconstruction is apolitical because if all views are ‘equally false’ then nothing is better than the status quo, which makes it a liberal ideology by default.

Marx says that ideologies are idealist in form, as they assume that mind has efficient causal primacy over matter. But, says Marx, consciousness does not determine life, rather it is life that determines consciousness. This is the basic insight that leads to his formulation of the base-superstructure theory. Process Buddhism can easily be interpreted as a form of idealism, for process philosophy’s primacy of creative events over substances is often seen as the primacy of mental over material; also, although it is only Yogacara Buddhism that is characterized as a form of idealism, nevertheless the pan-Buddhist idea that society is transformed via meditative self-transformation obviously has an idealist ring to it.

It is nevertheless incorrect to interpret Process Buddhism as an idealism. It is more accurate to say that it is neither an idealism nor a materialism, for a reality that is an open-ended process of dependent becoming cannot be characterized in terms of static concepts like ‘matter’ and ‘idea’. The dependently becoming events or dharmas are psychophysical, as the words ‘subject’ and ‘object’ are relative designators that depend on whether we are talking about the interior or exterior perspective. And the relatively stable abstractions from these psychophysical processes can likewise be divided into interior and exterior types – thus, there are ‘ideas’, ‘concepts’, and ‘theories’, but also ‘forms’, ‘bodies’, and ‘structures’. Interestingly, even Marx’s ‘dialectical materialism’ is a middle way between both idealism and ‘mechanistic materialism’ – both of which can function as ideologies. In his Theses on Feuerbach, Marx says that the matter of dialectical materialism is creative and subjective. Thus, there is no real difference here between the psychophysical events of Process Buddhism and Marx’s ‘dialectical materialism’, which could just as easily (and arbitrarily) have been called ‘dialectical idealism’. (The primacy of processes over things is a primacy of psychophysical events over ignorance of the socio-economic basis of the concepts they criticize often leads to their endorsement of liberal capitalism.


4 Marx and Engels, German Ideology, 569–70.

5 See Nicholas Berdyaev, The End of Our Time (London: Sheed and Ward, 1933), 222, 225, 238–9: dialectical materialism is really neither mechanistic materialism nor idealism, but a ‘creative materialism’, however, it is really a ‘psycho-physical parallelism’. There is even such a thing as ‘mechanistic idealism’ – see George Berkeley, A Treatise Concerning the Principles of Human Knowledge, para. 65, in The Empiricists (New York: Anchor Press, 1974), 177.
mechanistic materialism and essentialist idealism.) Indeed, according to Arran Gare, the main ideology of liberal capitalism is not idealism as such but mechanistic materialism; idealism only becomes an adjunct ideology when any power it has to effect change – for instance, in the manner that Process Buddhists propose (namely, changing society via meditative thought) – has been neutralized and rendered compatible with the mechanistic materialist worldview (an example being Kant's heroic moralism, which is relegated to a noumenal realm so that it cannot interfere with the deterministic phenomenal realm).  

Thus it is more accurate to say that Process Buddhism seeks to transform both society (exterior) and culture (interior) by means of meditative thought, which is a direct psychophysical experience of reality. This is what Robert Thurman calls a 'cool revolution', which 'transforms the outlook and behavior of many individuals and thereby slowly transforms a society'. But this is not a solipsistic 'inner revolution' for there are no such things as atomic individuals; rather, reality is 'social all the way down' (Rorty) in the sense that every 'self' is a network of dependently becoming events that are asymmetrically interdependent. The point of deconstructive meditative thought is to realize this fact that there is no absolute self transcending this empirical 'social self', and thus that the future-self is the present self's other. Hence, self-interest is grounded in a disinterested altruism or other-interest. This disinterestedness makes it possible for us to transcend the social constructivism that gives rise to ideologies. Process Buddhism thus makes possible the direct insight into reality as open-ended dependent becoming, which has become obscured 'beneath the almost impenetrable layers of personal defilement and the tenacious superstructures of conventional belief with which human communities are always seeking to control behavior'.

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‘philosophers have only interpreted (drsti) the world, in various ways; the point is to experience it directly (darsena)’.

Rather than being completely at variance with Marxist thought, Process Buddhism agrees with several of its ideas. Nolan Pliny Jacobson argues that Marx was anticipated by Buddhism, which also sought to ‘return humankind from overarching cultural superstructures into the dynamic matrix of world-transforming human labor’, which is a ‘practical-critical activity’ (i.e., creative emptiness). Thus Process Buddhism is in agreement with Marx’s theory that creative labor is basic to understanding society as it underlies all historical phases and thus conditions human existence. There is also agreement with Marx’s theory that each historical phase can give rise to emergent processes (such as the market) that are contingent in their evolution and thus unpredictable and nonlinear. Unfortunately, Marx went on to formulate a theory of socio-economic primacy (the influential base-superstructure model) based on a technological determinism that contradicts his other two theories. This third theory, grounded as it is in mechanistic materialism, ‘is inconsistent with the conception of humans as creative social beings which underlies Marx’s critique of capitalism’.

Process Buddhism is thus more at home with post-Marxist attempts to replace the simplistic base-superstructure determinism with an understanding of social relations based on systems theory. In systems theory, society is a multi-level system where each level is at the same time a part of a larger whole and a whole made up of smaller parts. No whole is completely reducible to its parts as each level emerges creatively from lower levels. Thus there are top-down as well as bottom-up influences. Within this system of processes there may emerge relatively stable systems protected by negative feedback loops which dampen any instabilities that threaten the system. Hence, ideologies or worldviews can be understood as negative feedback systems that arise from society in order to preserve and reproduce certain

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12 Gare, *Nihilism Inc.*, 365–6.
dominant and stable configurations in that society. What this means is that any new social practices that arise from the grassroots and challenge the dominant practices will often be hindered and neutralized by the ideological system. Their success in replacing the dominant practices is thus dependent on top-down influences which critique the dominant ideology. This asymmetrical interdependence of bottom-up power and top-down information corroborates the Process Buddhist belief that society is changed by changing the way people think.\(^\text{13}\)

Process Buddhism thus avoids being a liberal ideology. Instead, it is a liberating praxis which combines meditation and philosophy in a psychophysical direct experience of reality. This makes possible both a deconstruction of worldviews that reify abstractions (misplaced concreteness) and a reconstruction of a world-narrative that stresses the openness of dependent becoming. In order to achieve both these tasks, Process Buddhism needs to place itself within a historical narrative that shows how it is more inclusive than other major political, philosophical, religious, and scientific worldviews that have been socially influential. As Alasdair MacIntyre puts it:

> It is more rational to accept one theory of paradigm and to reject its predecessor when the later theory or paradigm provides the stand-point from which the acceptance, the life-story, and the rejection of the previous theory or paradigm can be recounted in more intelligible historical narrative than previously.\(^\text{14}\)

In this way we can avoid the impossible attempt to use 'objective' criteria that transcend all worldviews and standpoints. The use of such historical narratives to grade rival schools is of course a commonplace in Buddhist traditions. The fact that even the Madhyamika, who have no view of their own, engage in this practice shows that the deconstructive and reconstructive projects are very much compatible with one another. Such a historical narrative will obviously include a hierarchical gradation of rival worldviews' ethical and political theories.

\(^\text{13}\) Ernst Bloch, who was both a Marxist and a process thinker, similarly argues that the creative emergence of the ideological superstructure from the economic base results in the transcendence of social conditions on the part of some superstructural elements, which can lead to the emergence of new factors that are not conditioned by the base. See Wayne Hudson, *The Marxist Philosophy of Ernst Bloch* (London: Macmillan, 1983), 195–6.
A Process Buddhist Ethics

What kind of ethical theory can we derive from the integration of process thought and Madhyamika Buddhism? Will it be superior to the ethical theories of either philosophy prior to integration? I have argued that the mutual enrichment of both philosophies results in each gaining from the other a more rigorous development of aspects of their systems that have been undeveloped. Specifically, process thought needs a more analytic and meditative approach towards creative emptiness, and Madhyamika needs to take conventional truth more seriously and acknowledge that there is an ultimate actuality as well as an ultimate reality. The ethical implications of this theory of two ultimates is that there are two sources of compassion. First, there is the ‘emptiness that is compassion’, as Nagarjuna puts it, which results from the deconstruction of conceptual reifications that obscure the inter-related nature of things. And second, there is the empty God who is, in Whitehead’s words, ‘the fellow-sufferer who understands’, whose nature consists in a gradation of values. In this section I will try to show how the combination of both themes can result in a Process Buddhist ethics that is in many ways more adequate than the ethics of either philosophy taken separately.

Disinterested Compassion

The basic ethical theme of both philosophies is compassion. In process thought, reality is ultimately made up of nothing but sympathetic feeling-relations or prehensions; whereas the Madhyamika teaching of the emptiness or openness of all phenomena means that there is ultimately nothing that is self-contained or selfish, rather everything is opened up and involved with everything else, thus making compassion possible. There are remarkable similarities between Santideva’s and


16 Whitehead, Process and Reality, 351.
Hartshorne’s arguments that self-interest is in fact a special case of other-interest.

Consider these excerpts from Santideva:

What is so special about me?
Why do I protect myself and not others?

– But why should I protect them
If their suffering does not cause me any harm? –
Then why protect myself against future suffering
If it causes me no harm now?

– Surely whenever there is suffering
The (sufferer) must protect himself from it –
But the suffering of the foot is not that of the hand,
Why then does it protect it?

Being no (inherent) owner of suffering,
There can be no distinction at all between (that of myself and others).17

Compare this with the following from Hartshorne:

All interest in the future is in a basic generalized sense altruistic, the concern of an actual reality for other and potential realities whose coming to be it is in a position to influence It is a secondary question in what event-sequence these entities will fall We can love the other as ourselves because even the self as future is also another. ... It is obvious that if rationality implies an interest in future consequences, and if the present self cannot benefit from any future good (since it is already all it ever can be), then a rational momentary self must in a generalized sense be unselfish. It must aim at a future good, although its own good is already complete. ... If the present self must transcend its own good, why should it tie itself down to consideration only of future good for members of its own personal sequence?18

Both philosophers argue that there are no enduring selves that are ‘owners’ of suffering, only suffering-events that arise in dependence; so there can be no absolute distinction between self and other. But the relation between the self and the other (regardless of which event-sequence this other is a part of) cannot be established in terms of either identity or difference, which are symmetrical relations. For if self and other are identical (symmetrical dependence), the two become one and thus there is no relation; and if self and other are different (symmetrical independence), no


relation can be established that does not itself require a relation and so on, in an infinite regress (à la Bradley). Only an asymmetrical relation of identity-difference between the two can make sense: the self is in the future other whereas the future other is not in the self, except as a potentiality (hence there is an asymmetrical form of interdependence), which Levinas calls a ‘trace’ or ‘face’ of the other which presents itself in a manner ‘exceeding the idea of the other in me’.¹⁹ For Levinas, the relation to the other is an asymmetrical relation of infinite responsibility that is not based on a common essence or ‘inter-est’, but on a ‘dis-inter-estedness’ which is very different from the disinterestedness of Kantian deontological ethics. For Levinas understands disinterestedness as ‘a suspension of essence’, especially the common essence sought by those who seek to ground ethics in self-interest (or, as Levinas likes to put it, ‘inter-est’, which is to say, ‘inter-esse’). On the contrary, for Levinas, ethics is grounded in the ‘for others’, which has primacy over the ‘for itself’.²⁰ Since Levinas was influenced by the process philosopher Henri Bergson, and in turn influenced the deconstructive post-structuralism of Derrida, there is much in his ethical theory that can be used to develop a Process Buddhist ethics that is both deconstructive and reconstructive. For Process Buddhist ethics can be understood as a disinterestedness which deconstructs all relations to others based on essence (interest), such as an enduring self or a group entity, and reconstructs relations with others based on compassion.²¹


²¹ A serious objection to the above argument can be found in Paul Williams, ‘A Response to John Pettit’, Journal of Buddhist Ethics 6 (1999): 144–52. He argues that Santideva’s move from anatman to compassion only works if it applies to the conventional self, for it is obvious that there are selfish people even though there is no ultimate metaphysical self. But this runs into problems too, as the denial of a conventional self renders pain-statements problematic. However, this argument entirely misses the point. The lack of a metaphysical self means that any conventional self is ultimately an abstraction that has evolved. Santideva is pointing out that since the conventional self – the only self there is – is ultimately a conventional abstraction, then a new convention could just as easily arise in which the conventional self is expanded to include others. Of course the lack of a metaphysical self is compatible with selfishness, but that is because people have habitually taken their conventional selves for metaphysical selves and have thus arbitrarily divided one set of others, which they call the self, from another set of others, which they alone call others. Santideva is trying this change this way of thinking by pointing to the inconsistencies that it involves.
An Ethic of the Middle Way

Process Buddhist ethics is thus an ethics of the middle way, as it is a middle between ethics based on self-interest and group-interest, mutual dependence and mutual independence, deontology and teleology, etc. Like Aristotle, process philosophers and Madhyamika Buddhists realize that every good is a middle between two evils. On the one hand, we must avoid the violence of reducing the other to the same (identity), which is to value the other only as something in me (the common essence) and not as other; and on the other hand, we have to avoid the violence of treating the other as something alien (difference), and thus not human (lacking a common essence). If Process Buddhism smashes the idols of morality and thus goes ‘beyond good and evil’, this does not mean that it cannot reconstruct an ethics (as opposed to a morality) that is not based on idols. Nietzsche said that we must avoid both the morality of those who think in terms of good-and-evil and the morality of those who think in terms of good-and-bad. For the former believe that humanity is to be perfected through ‘taming’, not realizing that it is better for people to master themselves and become super-humans than to have their evil nature removed and thus become sub-human (for capacity for evil and capacity for good are interdependent). And the latter believe in the perfection of humanity via aristocratic ‘breeding’, which leads to an in-bred and thus diminished humanity instead of a humanity that has been ‘overcome’ by inclusiveness (encompassion).\(^{22}\) Thus, to focus merely on the abstract essence of humanity (identity) or the irreducibility between peoples (difference) leads only to the devolution of humanity. We must therefore pass beyond the dualistic moralism that takes up a pair of conceptual contrasts and labels one ‘good’ and the other ‘evil’ or ‘bad’, and replace it with the nonduality of middle way ethics. This is not done by way of conjunction (both) or bi-negation (neither), but by the asymmetrical synthesis such that one term (becoming) is inclusive of the other (being). Of course, we could call the synthesis ‘good’ and non-synthesis else ‘evil’ or ‘bad’, but the ‘duality’ here is between inclusive nonduality and exclusive dualism. Nevertheless, we have an ethical choice here between dualism and the middle way.\(^{21}\)

Deontological ‘taming’ of humanity in light of objective moral laws (right) and teleological ‘breeding’ towards a superior humanity (good) are inclusively transcended by realizing the asymmetrical interdependence between them in the sense that right is independent of any particular good and is yet an abstraction from the common good in the most general sense; likewise, particular goods are dependent on rights, but the common good is not. The result is an ethics of responsibility based on the concept of the ‘fitting’. Whereas deontology asks ‘What is my duty?’ and teleology asks ‘What is my end?’, the ethic of responsibility asks ‘What is going on?’ H. Richard Niebuhr, whose ideas on responsibility I am closely following here, says:

If we use value terms then the differences among the three approaches may be indicated by the terms, the good, the right, and the fitting; for teleology is concerned always with the highest good to which it subordinates the rights; consistent deontology is concerned with the right, no matter what may happen to our goods; but for the ethics of responsibility the fitting action, the one that fits into a total interaction as response and as anticipation of further response, is alone conducive to the good and alone is right.24

Interestingly, Thurman is inspired by Niebuhr’s ethics of responsibility in his development of a Buddhist ethic.25 The notion of the ‘fitting’ has an obvious parallel in the Buddhist term upaya, ‘skilful means’. Ultimately, this compassionate responsibility for others arises, as I argue above, from the disinterested transcendence of both individuality and sociality. Compassion thus arises from a realization of the emptiness of all attempts to ground ethics in either subject (teleology) or object (deontology) instead of intersubjectivity (responsibility). Whitehead argues for a dipolar ethics of duty (‘order’ and ‘harmony’) and pragmatic value (‘love’ and ‘individual’).26 However, there is no mere symmetrical conjunction here; rather, the relationship must be understood in terms of asymmetrical interdependence.

According to Whitehead, the antithesis between these two types of morality is solved

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23 The category good-evil is not an ultimate contrast because it is not found in all things – only humans are capable of doing evil (God’s character is goodness and sub-human animals have no ethical sense). Unless, of course, by evil we mean ‘suffering’ – this is universal.


by grading types of order according to their success in promoting depth of individual experience, and grading individuals according to their success in promoting both depth of individual experience and higher grades of order.\footnote{Whitehead, \textit{Adventures of Ideas}, 292.} Which brings us to our next topic.

The Need for a Gradation of Value

However, although emptiness makes compassion possible, is it accurate to say that emptiness \textit{is} compassion? For as we have seen in chapter seven, creative emptiness cannot be characterized as either good or evil/bad, but gives occasion to either of these. It makes more sense to say that God or the universal Buddha-Bodhisattva is compassion(ate), but not creative emptiness. Creative emptiness can at best give rise to a Heideggerian aesthetic of authenticity in which it is better to be creative is some way – whether good or evil/bad – than to be uncreatively mediocre. But, as Hartshorne says, Heidegger was a ‘mystic without an ethics’.\footnote{Charles Hartshorne, \textit{Insights and Oversights of Great Thinkers} (Albany, New York: State Univ. of New York Press, 1983), 239.} Of course most mystical-meditative traditions – Buddhism included – do have an ethics and always warn novices that a mystical-meditative practice without ethical cultivation is highly dangerous. But an ethics requires a gradation of values that can guide creativity in the fitting direction, the direction that is conducive to both good and right actions. Such a hierarchy of values cannot transcend the universe since nothing escapes dependent becoming. Therefore it must be immanent, embodied in an everlasting psychophysical event-sequence which is all-inclusive and thus alone has the capacity to prehend the value hierarchy fully and exhaustively. Nevertheless, there is a sense in which creativity can be considered to be \textit{in} God, for being all-inclusive, God ‘contains his [sic] own divine decisions as making them and nondivine ones as suffering them’;\footnote{Alfred North Whitehead, \textit{Adventures of Ideas} (New York: Macmillan, 1967), 292. See also James R. Gray, \textit{Process Ethics} (London: University Press, 1983), passim.} so emptiness is compassion since God is compassion and includes creative emptiness. Also, since evil exists in non-creative structures, forms, and ideas, whereas all creative events act for their future and are thus compassionate to
some extent, it makes sense to say that creative emptiness is compassion. As the mystic poet, Kahlil Gibran says:

You are good when you walk to your goal firmly and with bold steps.
Yet you are not evil when you go thither limping.
Even those who limp go not backwards.\(^{30}\)

Evil arises from the clash of good with good (as Berdyaev says),\(^{31}\) or from an intention to do good that is ignorant of consequences. Compassion must therefore be supplemented with wisdom, which guides it in the fitting direction.

Such a gradation of value is compatible with Madhyamika as insight into the ultimate truth can only be obtained by means of the hierarchies of conventional truth. The wise yogi, argues Candrakirti, ‘does not reject (na badhate) the personal everyday world ... outright, and so he does not reject outright actions and their moral consequences, the distinction between right and wrong, and so on’.\(^{32}\) As Guy Newland says of the conventional elements of the path, such as karma, ethics, and compassion: ‘They exist only conventionally, but to exist conventionally is to exist’.\(^{33}\) Newland argues that certain critics of Madhyamika who say that it cannot draw distinctions between conventionalities and non-existent (such as a ‘hare’s horn’) are mistaken, for at least in the Geluk interpretation there is a difference between the two – a difference which is vital for the grounding of ethical distinctions.\(^{34}\) The emptiness of views means that they are relative or conditioned, which is not the same as saying that they are all ‘equally false’. All it means is that there are no views that are absolutely true outside of context, which is not to deny that some views can be more true than others and can thus be organized into a hierarchy of relative truths. It is the same with ethical values. Thurman has shown that an ethical hierarchy exists in Madhyamika Buddhism, where different levels of

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34 Ibid., 134–5.
spiritual development demand different kinds of behavior. At the lowest level one
must ‘refrain from evil’, after which comes ‘do good’, ‘rely on dualism’, ‘rely on
nondualism’, and finally ‘profound’. 35

The gradation of value that I have been discussing refers primarily to the
making of ethical decisions, but it can also be used to grade life-forms’ relative
importance. It is at this point that controversy arises and a major difference between
process thought and Buddhism emerges. Process philosophers tend to say that
humans have more intrinsic value, and thus more rights, than sub-human animals,
and that a similar value distinction can be drawn between higher and lower animals,
between animals and plants, etc. This is based on the differences of complexity and
depth of experience that exist among species. Thus, for example, John Cobb argues
that humans are more important than mice because ‘humans experience more of their
world in greater richness of detail. They also have much more awareness of what is
possible in contrast to what is actual. Thus the content of their experience is far
greater’. 36 These differences in complexity and depth of experience result from the
cumulative effects of evolution such that life forms include and transcend the past.
Thus Hartshorne says that ‘[s]ince man has the typical animal capacities – sensory,
emotional, practical – plus an enormous addition of reflective consciousness and
technical power, it seems reasonable to assign him a far higher value than the other
terrestrial creatures’. 37 He generalizes this into the axiom that ‘if A has value V and
B has value V’ as well as V, then A’s is the greater value’. 38

But Buddhists tend to see animals and humans as being equal in value. Sallie
B. King sums up the basic Buddhist attitude as follows:

The Buddhist approach to this issue is to determine the ethics of human
behavior with respect to animals in terms of the capacity of the latter to suffer.
They do not perceive any clear, intrinsic difference between the suffering of a
human being in a given degree of pain and the suffering of an animal in a
similar degree of pain. In accordance with the principle of ahimsa, they

35 Thurman, ‘Emptiness that is Compassion’, 28; he here synthesizes the different Buddhist traditions’
ethical hierarchies.

142.


38 Charles Hartshorne, ‘A Reply To My Critics’, in Lewis Edwin Hahn, ed., The Philosophy of
1991), 625.
therefore refuse to sanction any acts which cause pain or suffering to other life forms, human or nonhuman. Being free of an ontological hierarchy which measures value in terms of other criteria, their position is as simple as that.\textsuperscript{39}

Also, Buddhists argue that the fact that everything is interdependent means that there are no dependence-independence relations which could justify an inequality of degrees of importance. This has led many Buddhists to ally themselves with the deep ecology movement, which claims that value lies in the total ecosystem rather than in individuals in it as they cannot exist apart from it. In Madhyamika Buddhism the argument for the equality of all life forms is based on the fact that all forms are equally empty. Since all things arise from self-creative emptiness, all are equal in infinite potentiality. However, the fact that all things are equal in potentiality does not mean that they are equal in actuality, which is on the level of conventional truth where there are degrees of actuality, so there is no real contradiction here.

King’s claim that Buddhists treat animals and humans equally is demonstrated by the prevalence of vegetarianism amongst Buddhists. But they continue to eat vegetables, which are life forms made of cells, each of which have some degree of feeling, however slight. There is therefore a gradation of value here—it is better to eat vegetables than meat because, as Alan Watts says somewhere, ‘cows scream louder than carrots’. Equality is not found anywhere in nature; rather, inequality is the basic rule. When it is said that all humans are equal, this is not a description, but a prescription for how to treat other humans. But, as Peter Singer says, ‘[t]he basic principle of equality does not require equal or identical \textit{treatment}; it requires equal consideration. Equal consideration for different beings may lead to different treatment and different rights’.\textsuperscript{40} Thus if humans, because of their greater capacities, have greater needs than other animals, then to treat both humans and animals equally may result in more rights for humans and a gradation of values. (An example: the basic survival-needs of an ant are far less than that of a human, so to treat both equally is in fact to give more to the human than to the ant.)

The argument for the equality of all phenomena due to their interdependence needs to be criticized in light of the Process Buddhist concept of ‘asymmetrical interdependence’. As I have argued in previous chapters, symmetrical interdependence only applies between abstractions (α-terms), whereas the relation

\textsuperscript{39} Sallie B. King, ‘Buddhism and Hartshorne’, in ibid., 248.

\textsuperscript{40} Peter Singer, \textit{Animal Liberation}, 2nd ed. (London: Pimlico, 1995), 2.
between abstract and concrete (r-terms), as well as between concrete and concrete, takes the form of asymmetrical independence-dependence. Nevertheless, it was also argued that there is a kind of asymmetrical interdependence here too, for actual entities are inclusive of a potential future and of an actual past. This also means that abstractions such as bodies, structures, societies, etc., which condition subsequent concrete events and thus also condition the emergent forms that will serve as abstract conditions in their turn, include their future in the form of a vague potentiality; they are, in other words, the sine qua non of the more complex forms which they condition. This means that the more complex forms have a duty to preserve the existence of the total environment or ecosystem of simpler forms that condition their very existence. Herein lies the truth in the deep ecology approach which says that we, as parts of the ecosystem, have a duty to preserve it and that, since the more complex forms of life are dependent on the ecosystem of simpler forms whereas they are not dependent on the more complex, the more complex have less value than the ecosystem itself. This extreme form of instrumental value, with its reverse hierarchy, needs to be combined with the equally extreme form of intrinsic value discussed above, via the concept of asymmetrical interdependence. Ken Wilber argues that it is necessary to see an interplay between intrinsic and extrinsic (or instrumental) values in this way, but he has not explicitly shown that they are asymmetrically interdependent, thus giving the impression that it is symmetrical. 41 Frederick Ferré argues for a value ethic that combines subjective intrinsic value, intersubjectivity, and instrumental value. In this case there is an implied asymmetrical interdependence, for he argues that although ‘duties to instrumental values are derivative from and therefore not of the same order as duties to centers of intrinsic value …’ nevertheless, ‘something of great, enduring instrumental … value may well outweigh a flock of minor, transient intrinsic goods’. 42 But in order to fully integrate the two kinds of value, we need to understand that intrinsic value is derivative from its intersubjective relations, rather than inhering (svabhava-like) in separate and solipsistic subjects. 43 Hence, inherent value can be measured by the extent to which an entity is internally related to other entities. The human mind-brain has been said to

41 Ken Wilber, Sex. Ecology. Spirituality: The Spirit of Evolution (Boston and London: Shambhala, 1995), 517–20. A third value, which he calls ‘ground value’, refers to the fact that all holons are potentially equal in value as all are creatively empty.


43 Ibid., 425.
be the most complex and unified structure so far known to scientists (perhaps excluding the Universe itself). This is because they are dependent on, and inclusive of, a much wider environment than, say, an ameba. Because ecosystems and even human societies are less complex than, and lack the unity of, a single human, we must supplement intrinsic value with instrumental value if we are to acknowledge the enormous duty we humans have towards preserving and promoting simpler life forms and ecosystems that are the very conditions of our existence.

A Socially Engaged Process Buddhism

We come now to a consideration of the social and political applications of Process Buddhism. I will begin with a discussion of the respective socio-political theories of Madhyamika and process thought. I will then show how these can be integrated in light of the Process Buddhist themes of asymmetrical interdependence and the two ultimates, as well as how post-structuralism – which was used in integrating the two philosophies – can indicate ways of putting Process Buddhism into practice. I will then discuss how Process Buddhism can contribute to the liberal-communitarian debate and a theory of nonviolence.

Madhyamika Buddhism and Social Engagement

Social engagement is a relatively recent concern on the part of Buddhists. For most of Buddhist history, Buddhists (with a few notable exceptions) have tended to be concerned more with individual enlightenment and have not been interested in directly changing society – only indirectly via self-transformation.\(^\text{44}\) Now that Buddhism has come into contact with the Western Enlightenment's ideals of social revolution, it has begun to become interested in social enlightenment. This does not mean that social engagement was foreign to Buddhism and had to be imported from the West. Rather, as Kenneth Kraft puts it, ‘[q]ualities that were inhibited in pre-modern Asian settings ... can now be actualized through Buddhism’s exposure to the West, where ethical sensitivity, social activism, and egalitarianism are
The fact that these inhibited qualities were always implicit in Buddhism can be seen in their occasional blossoming-forth in history, a prime example being the third century B.C.E. Buddhist emperor Aśoka’s rock edicts, which set forth a ‘Buddhist politics’ summarized by Thurman in five basic principles: transcendent individualism, nonviolence, educational evolutionism, social altruism, and universal democratism. These principles later formed the basis of Nagarjuna’s advice to king Satavahana. Thurman believes that since most of this text has to do with ‘transcendent selflessness’, it is clear that ‘the heart of Buddhist social activism is individualistic transcendentalism’, which is ‘most clearly expressed in the shocking advice Nagarjuna gives the King that it might be best for him to resign’ and become a monk.

Robert Thurman, building on Nagarjuna’s socio-political ideas, has been at the forefront of developing a socially engaged Madhyamika Buddhism, which he believes has much affinities with the Jeffersonian ideals of American liberalism. His ‘politics of enlightenment’ calls for an ‘inner revolution’ – he also calls it a ‘cool revolution’ – which transforms society by the transformation of the individual (via transcendence of the self). He sees this as a confirmation of liberal individualism and says that he affirms ‘the priority of the individual over the community in all areas’ and that society’s ‘highest collective interest is none other than the self-fulfillment of its individuals’. He also sees the need for a strong and centralized executive leadership, a decentralized legislature in the form of electronic direct democracy, and the virtue of wealth accumulation by the virtuous and industrious so that it can be

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45 An exception to this is documented in Sungaek Cho, ‘Selflessness: Toward a Buddhist Vision of Social Justice’, *Journal of Buddhist Ethics* 7 (2000): 76–85, which shows that the bodhisattva Vimalakirti taught that we cure ourselves by curing others.


47 These can be found in N. A. Nikam and R. McKeon, eds. and trans., *The Edicts of Aśoka* (Chicago: The Univ. of Chicago Press, 1966).


given away to the poor.\textsuperscript{52} However, none of these ideas derive directly from Madhyamika, and as I will be arguing shortly, Process Buddhist socio-political ideas have more in common with communitarianism than with liberalism.

Process Philosophy and Social Engagement

Whitehead and Hartshorne have very little to say on the socio-political applications of process philosophy. Nevertheless, they both believe that the fact that events are more basic than individuals and collectives, and that they are creative syntheses of their pasts, means that we should steer a middle way between order and chaos, conservatism and revolution, right and left, liberal individualism and socialist collectivism. Thus Whitehead writes that ‘[i]he art of progress is to preserve order amid change, and to preserve change amid order’.\textsuperscript{53} Also, '[t]hose societies which cannot combine reverence to their symbols with freedom of revision, must ultimately decay either from anarchy, or from the slow atrophy of a life stifled by useless shadows’.\textsuperscript{54} Whitehead’s political ideas were highly influenced by the ‘modern liberalism’ of T. H. Green and L. T. Hobhouse, who tried to reform liberalism by merging it with socialism and thus introduced notions such as the ‘common good’ and the ‘social self’ into liberal discourse. (He voted, in Britain, for the centrist Liberal party before it collapsed, and for the Labour party thereafter.) Hartshorne, who justifies his lack of political theorization by saying that it is an extremely difficult topic and that ‘[m]ost metaphysical puzzles seem to me easy by comparison’, occasionally also speaks of the need for a middle way between liberal capitalism and state socialism, but has more recently favored some kind of ‘non-state socialism’.\textsuperscript{55}

For some time Whitehead- and Hartshorne-influenced process philosophers tended to follow the political thought of Reinhold Niebuhr (who advised the Kennedy administration) rather than develop their own political theory. However, in more recent times process philosophers have tried to link process thought with a

\textsuperscript{52} Ibid., 319–20, 321, 322.


number of different political ideas, such as: Marxism (noting the similarities between creativity and labor), liberation theology (panentheism and the God of the poor), communitarianism (internal relations and the socially-encumbered individual or 'social self'), and even anarchism (priority of events inverts hierarchies;acentric nature of event-pluralism). 56 Another recent development is the construction of a theory of nonviolence based on the process theological understanding of God as influencing the world by means of persuasion rather than coercion. For until recently, process philosophers have tended to follow Whitehead's and Hartshorne's affirmation of the use of violence by humans as a necessary evil, as pure nonviolence (they argue) is appropriate only to God. However, the recent growth of nonviolence movements is leading process philosophers to revise these earlier beliefs. 57

One last issue has to do with the political implications of the process philosopher’s understanding of animal organisms and 'compound individuals' as consisting of a group or system of events ordered or governed by a dominant event-sequence. For example, Whitehead says that whereas '[a] vegetable is a democracy ... an animal body ... is more analogous to a feudal society, with its one overlord'. 58 This has influenced Hartshorne and many of his followers to conclude that the human body politic should be modeled after the more 'advanced' animal organism and that thus there must be a strong executive leader of some kind even in a democracy. Hartshorne often argues that just as the universe would collapse into chaos if there were no divine 'chairperson' in charge, so too would human societies collapse without a single leader at the top. But I think that Hartshorne is forgetting here that God does not issue coercive orders but persuades events to develop in directions where they will be able to increase their creativity via more complex forms


of self-organization. God’s top-down influence is persuasive-informational, not coercive-energetic. Top-down and bottom-up hierarchies exist in all forms of organization (even in plants), so the real question should be whether it is better for information to flow upwards so that the ‘top’ can make a more informed executive decision, or for it to flow downward from the more informed (because inclusive) so that the ‘bottom’ can exercise democratic self-organizing power in a more informed manner. It seems that the latter is a better description of the usual interaction between brain and body in animals. That this is so can be seen in the way we think the thoughts and give general directions/persuasions, whereas the body carries out the functions. In conversations, for example, most of what we say is not consciously planned – it just comes out that way. The only hierarchies we should avoid are dominator-hierarchies in which top-down flows coincide with authoritarian/coercive power. Bottom-up democratic power only becomes ‘anarchic’ in the absence of top-down persuasion/information.\(^{59}\) Whitehead says that the middle way between order and chaos is best. Then should we not try to steer clear of the extremes of monarchical organism and inorganic aggregates as well as between extremes of order and chaos?\(^{60}\) And what is this middle if not ‘rhizomatic’ democracy? Jesus thus has a point when he says ‘I am the vine, you are the branches’.\(^{61}\)

Socio-Political Applications of Asymmetrical Interdependence

I have already discussed the ethical applications of the Process Buddhist concept of asymmetrical interdependence. The concept’s socio-political applications can be discerned from a consideration of the relationship between individual and society. Both the individual and society are abstractions from actual events which contain these abstractions as whole contains part. However, an individual has a dominant event-series – the mind – which provides a unity that is not present in a society. Thus, because the individual’s mind is inclusive of its body, we can also speak of the event-series as the individual, in which case we can say that the individual is inclusive of society. Of course, the society includes its individuals, but this is an

\(^{59}\) See Wilber, Sex, Ecology, Spirituality, 22–5.

external relation and thus unlike the internal relation whereby the individual contains society. Thus there is an asymmetrical relation of inclusion, and since inclusion is a kind of dependence (the whole depends on its parts), we have an asymmetrical interdependence. Another reason why it is an asymmetrical relation is that it is not a one-to-one relation, but a one-to-many relation. Every individual in a society is dependent on society because its internal relation to society means that it would no longer be the same individual if removed from its society. But the society is independent of every individual in it because the removal of any one individual does not change the society – its form remains the same despite the presence of small fluctuations in its members. In this sense, society is like a ‘dissipative system’ or negative feedback loop. However, there is a sense in which the roles are reversed when we consider the individuals taken together rather than separately. For the society is dependent on the totality of individuals and the latter are independent of society. This is because the society is not a transcendent thing over-and-above the individuals, but is immanent to them and thus reducible to the individuals. But this is not the same as the libertarian doctrine that ‘there is no such thing as society, only individuals’ – as Margaret Thatcher once said, echoing Robert Nozick – because this is based on atomic individualism which sees individuals as if they were billiard balls without internal relations. But the fact that individuals are ‘social selves’ that are internally related to society means that society does exist, its just that its mode of existence is one of immanence to the totality of individuals rather than something that transcends them. Thus, although society is independent of any given dependently becoming (internally related) individual, it too arises in dependence on the totality of individuals. Hence there is an asymmetrical interdependence between individual and society. In terms of the distinction that was made above between intrinsic and instrumental values, we can say that individuals have intrinsic value (deriving from their internal relatedness, not from any inherent nature) and society has instrumental value (which can sometimes override a small flock of intrinsic values, as Ferré says above).

This dialectic of asymmetrical interdependence between individual and society is similar to Hegel’s master-slave dialectic. However, Hegel’s failure to notice the relation as being one-to-many rather than one-to-one led him to think the interdependence in symmetrical terms. The more adequate Process Buddhist dialectic

61 John 15.5 (NRSV).
can allow us to recognize when an analysis must be asymmetrical (namely, between r-term and a-term) and when symmetrical (namely, between a-terms that are at the same level). Thus, asymmetrical relations obtain between individual and society, labor and capital, people and profits, concrete and abstract; whereas relations between man and woman, humans and nature, rich and poor, powerful and powerless, etc., are symmetrical relations.

Process Buddhism and the Liberal-Communitarian Debate

The debate between liberalism and communitarianism can be resolved by the asymmetrical interdependence between individual and society. Process Buddhism’s social understanding of the self has much affinities with communitarianism, which is based on the view that individuals are socially encumbered or embodied in their communities. This social embededness or ‘internal relatedness’ of individuals is contrasted with the atomic individualism or ‘external relatedness’ of liberalism. The debate has existed in one form or another for quite some time, an important early example being the debate between followers of the political philosophies of Locke and Rousseau. Another major example of this growing debate is the late 19th and early 20th century communitarian-like reaction of the so-called ‘modern liberals’ (such as the above mentioned Green and Hobhouse) to the atomic individualism of classical liberalism. In the 1970s and 1980s, Alasdair MacIntyre, Charles Taylor, Michael Walzer, and others, defended a communitarian position against Rawls’s liberalism. And in the 1990s there arose a populist communitarian movement led by Amitai Etzioni which has had a strong influence on recent policies of Western governments (policies such as the ‘third way’ and ‘mutual obligation’ for example). But communitarianism has tended to manifests itself in two quite different forms: one which subordinates individuals to groups (corporatism) and another which subordinates ‘groupness’ and ‘individuality’ (as abstract concepts) to the social self. I contend that Process Buddhism is a form of the latter kind of communitarianism.

The concept of the ‘social self’, which was fully worked out in the West by the sociologist and process philosopher, G. H. Mead, has been described as a ‘new model of the person as a bipolar social self arising through communicative
interaction between individuality and sociality’. The social self’s ‘I’ pole is a process which acts in the present and responds creatively to the socially determined ‘Me’ pole which is given by the past. Thus, the social self is a process which includes both individuality and sociality as abstract aspects. But Mead’s social self was anticipated by Buddhist philosophers, who developed the idea that the self is a combination of impermanent mental events (nama) and relatively stable form (rupa), both of which are socially conditioned (pratitya-samutpada). The reduction of the self to a spatio-temporal network of relational processes means that there is no simple self which has a fixed identity or essence; hence, ultimately there is no-self (anatman), only a social self (which is a node of inter-relations).

Process Buddhism’s understanding of society and the individual’s relation to it is thus superior to that of liberalism, which reduces individuals to externally related ‘atoms’ and society to an aggregation of atomic individuals. But the concept of the social self also avoids the holistic understanding of society as an entity transcending its individuals, as is proposed by corporatist communitarians, whose concept of society as a self – which originates in the neo-Hegelian thought of Weber, Durkheim, Bosanquet, and others – was behind the philosophies of Bolshevisim, fascism, and even post-classical liberalism. Classical liberals bitterly opposed the legal revolution of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries which recognized corporations as ‘legal entities’ with all the rights of persons (plus more, as they are ‘immortal persons’) – an illiberal move accepted by many (though not all) modern liberals, and now unquestioned by the so-called neoliberals. But once corporations, societies, states, etc., are thought of as persons alongside the human persons which they include, they become the sole all-inclusive reality, with more rights than the subordinated individuals they modally include. However, this is a misplaced

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64 This corporatist revolution can be traced to the US Supreme Court case of Santa Clara County v. Southern Pacific Railroad in 1886, wherein the court ruled that a corporation is a ‘person’ with the same rights as ordinary mortal persons to the protection of life, liberty, and property under the Fourteenth Amendment. Many nations have since made similar rulings, such as Salomon v. Salomon & Co. (1897) in Britain.

65 E.g., see L. T. Hobhouse, Liberalism (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1969), 24, 67–8. Although he was a modern liberal, he was opposed to the corporatism of other modern liberals, such as that of Bernard Bosanquet.
concreteness, for only events are synthetic and creative. Unlike general systems theorists, who hold that all systems are holistic units exercising agency, process philosophers believe that any agency that a system might have—as in the case of compound individuals—derives indirectly from the agency of 'regnant' actual events.66 (As Whitehead says: 'The composite group illustrates its qualities passively. The activity belongs to the individual actualities'.)67 Of course, one could still entertain the possibility that human societies are indeed such compound individuals. However, all the evidence indicates that they do not have this kind of unity and are reducible to the social selves that constitute them. Also, the non-absoluteness of creative emptiness and the non-creativeness of ω-terms preclude the possibility of corporatism.

Process Buddhism avoids the extremes of liberal mutual independence and corporatist mutual dependence, affirming instead an asymmetrical interdependence between individual rights and the common good. So in a certain sense it is a middle way between liberalism and communitarianism. Such a convergence is in fact occurring in the debate between these two positions. For example, Rawls says that liberals are only opposed to illiberal forms of community which endanger liberty, and Etzioni says that communitarians are not majoritarians but liberal democrats who respect the rights of responsible individuals and minorities as enshrined in constitutions placed beyond the reach of majoritarian interference. (They are opposed only to irresponsible individuals/minorities.)68 Thus, there is a growing recognition of the interdependence of these two positions. For without the protection of individual and group liberties, communitarianism can become a tyranny of the majority; and without communitarian democracy, liberalism is in danger of slipping into authoritarianism. (Hence the need for 'liberal democracy', or even better, 'libertarian communitarianism'.) But there is an asymmetry in this interdependence, for the liberal notion of universal rights is an abstraction from the intersubjectivity of social selves, which is the common good. True, these rights transcend, and are thus independent of, any given particular intersubjective community, but they are

66 Some general systems theorists may deny that they hold to the animistic theory that all systems—whether organic or inorganic—have agency. But then they must explain why some systems have agency while others do not. Process philosophy's explanation is that the systems that have agency are those with a presiding event-series. As far as I am aware, general systems theorists have not come up with an alternative to this.

67 Whitehead, Adventures of Ideas, 213.
abstracted from, and thus dependent on, the intersubjective universe of actual and possible communities. They are unconditioned with regard to particular communities, but nevertheless are conditioned by the universal community of events. Thus, these universal principles can be called ‘immanent transcendentals’. For objective rights are abstractions from the intersubjectivity of social selves which are sympathetically related to one another in a dialectic of mutual recognition. Constitutions are placed beyond the immediate reach of a community because they are conditioned by the wider community of human experience. This is why there is a separation of powers, rather than a separation of people power and principle (which is a powerless abstraction).

Now sympathy — the feeling of another’s feeling — only makes sense in terms of a philosophy which sees individuals as internally related social selves. As I have argued, altruistic regard for others arises from a disinterestedness in which the individual realizes that it is itself a construct of relational processes and thus intimately interconnected with others (including its own future, which is also other). This openness to others gives rise to sympathy. That rights are grounded in groundless compassion is an idea which has been put forward by a number of Buddhists. The Declaration, ‘Towards a Buddhist Culture of Non-Violence and Human Rights’, of The International Network of Engaged Buddhists, states that ‘[r]ights are skillful means designed to assist the implementation of ... ethics’, specifically the ethics of compassion and Universal Responsibility (Bodhicitta).69 And the Tibetan Buddhist scholar, Jay Garfield, similarly argues that rights (and thus also liberalism) are grounded within compassion. He says that ‘[t]he construction of an edifice of rights can ... be seen, as Hume saw it, as a device for extending the reach of natural compassion and for securing the goods that compassion enables to all persons in a society’.70 For although compassion is universal, it is not uniformly applied but functions like an ‘inverse square law’, as Hume puts it, such that it drops off as the distance between the self and others increases. Hence, he says, rights are useful mechanisms for the extension of compassion to all.71 The ideal of rights


allows the various activists who have compassion for different groups (such as the poor, the powerless, women, animals, etc.) to cooperate in solidarity with one another. ‘Intrinsic rights’ and ‘intrinsic values’ are thus useful abstractions (*upaya*), but they are grounded in the open field of sympathetic inter-relations.

Process Buddhist communitarianism is based on the asymmetrical interdependence between individual and society, which avoids the extremes of symmetrical independence (society as an aggregation of atomic individuals) and symmetrical interdependence (society as an organism with subordinated modal individuals). The asymmetrical nature of the interdependence of individual and social group allows us to avoid both extremes by seeing individuals as having intrinsic rights and social groups as being instrumental goods. This makes it possible to avoid both the reductionistic individualism that denies a social or common good and the holistic corporatism that sees groups as legal entities with the rights of persons. In this way Process Buddhism is able to avoid critiques (such as those of Morris) which claim that its denial of organic individuality to social groups means that it cannot properly formulate a theory of the common good. Such critiques are based on the mistaken assumption that the common good is only attainable by a corporatism that expands self-interest into group-interest. But as we have seen, the common good – in the form of sympathetic action-for-others – can be created by a disinterested dissolution of self-interested individuality into interrelated events or social selves.

The asymmetrical nature of the Process Buddhist concept of communitarianism outlined above leads to a form of liberal democracy which is different from the one popular in the West, where the liberal protection of individual and minority rights takes precedence over the democratic common good. For as we have seen, although rights transcend any given community, they are nevertheless immanent transcendental abstracted from the universal community of dependent becomings. Each individual’s freedom – which is its creative emptiness – is conventionally limited only by the freedom of others. Thus, freedom has primacy. The general will which Rousseau says should form the basis of democratic legislature needs to be limited by constitutional law which protects individuals and minorities from the whims of the majority. But the constitution is itself framed and modified by democratic consent; it is just that the constituency in this case

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approximates more closely to the ideal disinterested universal community than does the former. Thus, the Process Buddhist understanding of democracy is one that is inclusive rather than exclusive. For it includes the liberal concern with limits, but does not see them as limits; rather, rights make possible more freedom through the inclusion in the democratic process of all spheres of human life that are communal – local, national, global, political, social, cultural, religious, etc. For in the end rights come down to the protection of individuals from being hierarchically dominated along lines of class, gender, race, etc.

Inclusive democracy is not simply the practical consequence of Process Buddhist theory; rather the two – theory and practice – are united in Process Buddhist praxis, which uses democratic discourse (meditative thought) to awaken social insight into the nature of reality as an inclusive democracy of dependent becoming. This is why the Buddha modeled the Sangha on the ganasangha, which was a type of political and territorial clan existent in the north of India at the time that was based on collective decision-making and communal ownership of assets, in contrast to the janapadas of the laity, which were authoritarian and monarchical.

'When people have transformed their minds,' says Thurman,

they will naturally and coolly act to transform the society and eventually the polity. Shakyamuni turned politics on its head and proved that the best way to build a healthy society was from the bottom up – through the development of the individual – not from the top down.

However, such a transformation is not a solipsistic and private affair. For a self which becomes in dependence on other selves is always already a social self and thus can only transform itself in a social context. Hence, meditative thought must be seen in intersubjective rather than subjective terms, so it is thus really the same thing as democratic deliberation or ‘multilogue’. (For there is no independent self, only a social self, which is the true unit of meditation.) Democracy is not so much a casting

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73 This can be understood in terms of a multi-level bottom-up federalism, in which communities federate into wider communities, which in turn federate into even wider communities of communities, etc. Hence, a higher level can override a lower level’s majority rule by appeal to ‘universal rights’, even though these are really abstractions from the will of the wider community.

74 Uma Chakravarti, ‘Buddhism as a Discourse of Dissent?: Class and Gender’, *Pravada* 1, no. 5 (1992): 16.

75 Thurman, *Inner Revolution*, 95.
of votes as a collective discovery of truth.⁷⁶ As Habermas puts it: ‘the unity of reason only remains perceptible in the plurality of its voices’.⁷⁷ (That is why he calls it ‘communicative reason’.)⁷⁸

The ‘Dual Allegiance’ of Process Buddhism

The practical applications of Process Buddhism based on asymmetrical interdependence that I have been developing are in the realm of conventional truth. Thus, they are only provisional and cannot be taken as absolutes. From the ultimate perspective even communitarianism and inclusive democracy are false and in need of deconstruction. From this perspective, only something like anarchism – a non-dogmatic ‘an-archism’ or acentrism – is possible. Anarchists often put forward theories like participatory democracy and libertarian socialism, but are quick to point out that these fall short of true anarchism. How are we to reconcile these two different practical applications of Process Buddhism? We have seen how the two truths/ultimates can be interpreted in terms of Derrida’s post-structuralist ideas, so it would be useful to see how Derrida understands the practical implications of his method of double deconstruction.

The anti-hierarchic (an-arche) nature of deconstruction is often interpreted as being anti-political, or at best apolitical, because it negates all positions, including their negations. But Derrida says that his method is not one of ‘simply neutralizing the binary oppositions of metaphysics’, nor is it one of ‘simply residing within the closed field of these oppositions, thereby confirming it’.⁷⁹ Derrida says that we must not overlook the importance of the first phase of double deconstruction, which is a phenomenal overturning of the dominant hierarchy:

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⁷⁶ Despite what Thurman says, direct democracy is far more than saying ‘yes’ or ‘no’ to a referendum – rather it is primarily participation in the public discourse which frames the questions in the first place. But real direct democracy is only workable in small communities. Large democracies must therefore take the form of representative democracies. However, a degree of direct democracy can be preserved by organizing many direct democratic communities federally, from the bottom up. This makes much more sense than Thurman’s model of nation-wide ‘tele-democracy’, which uses no mediating hierarchies.


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To overlook this phase of overturning is to forget the conflictual and subordinating structure of opposition. Therefore one might proceed too quickly to a neutralization that in practice would leave the previous field untouched, leaving one no hold on the previous opposition, thereby preventing any means of intervening in the field effectively. We know what always have been the practical (particularly political) effects of immediately jumping beyond oppositions, and of protests in the simple form of neither this nor that. When I say that this phase is necessary, the word phase is perhaps not the most rigorous one. It is not a question of a chronological phase, a given moment, or a page that one day simply will be turned, in order to go on to other things.  

Thus, there is necessarily a ‘dual allegiance’ in which one simultaneously has a ‘suspicion with regard to the official political codes governing reality’ and is nevertheless ready ‘to intervene here and now in a practical and engagé manner whenever the necessity arises’. There is thus no subordination of the phenomenal phase to the transcendental as if there were one ultimate principle (mon-arche); rather, there is an an-archic interplay or complementary ‘separation of powers’ between them. This is why Derrida gives the name ‘différence’ to that which is neither identity nor difference, thus favoring one of the terms. Why? Because, as Kevin Hart observes, ‘it is plain that Derrida derives strategic benefit from giving the name of the phenomena which is devalued within metaphysics to the transcendental which conditions metaphysics’. Likewise in Process Buddhism: creativity is neither being nor becoming, but more like becoming than being; or: there is neither independence (svabhava) nor dependence (parabhava), and yet there is dependent becoming. (Which is similar to the postmodern idea of the ‘simulacrum’, which is neither original nor copy, but ‘copy without original’.) It is the same in politics as in ethics: there is a need to say ‘either/or’, to have a hierarchy of value, even though ultimately – simultaneously – we must say ‘neither/nor’, that in creative emptiness there are no absolute hierarchies, that there is no ‘top’ and no ‘bottom’. Hence, the need for a separation of powers between phenomenal and transcendental, conventional and ultimate, dependent becoming and creative emptiness, hierarchy and anarchy.

80 Ibid., 41–2.
Nonviolence and Divine Persuasion

In his response to Levinas’s argument against the violence of identity, which reduces the other to the same, Derrida points out that there is also a violence of difference, which treats the other as alien. But it can be argued that Levinas’s ethics of asymmetrical responsibility is a middle way between these symmetrical extremes which sees the other as neither identical to nor different from the self, but as a difference which contains identity (and thus like Derrida’s *différence*). Similarly, I think that a theory of nonviolent action cannot be developed in merely phenomenal terms, but is dependent on transcendental resources. I do not think that it is possible to derive a theory of nonviolent action from the standard process theology that sees God as always acting non-coercively and persuading the world with the divine vision of truth, beauty, and goodness.\(^3\) This ‘Platonic’ understanding of divine persuasion needs to be supplemented with a ‘Socratic’ persuasion by means of a questioning that undermines conceptual reifications that are the cause of suffering and violence, such as is found in Madhyamika philosophy. This is, I believe, the only way Process Buddhists can defend pacifism and nonviolence from critics who see them as self-refuting – especially those who use the ‘Prisoner’s Dilemma’ to argue that ‘turning the other cheek’ is not the best ‘strategy’ in inter-personal and social relations.

Recently, the Prisoner’s Dilemma (which originates from game theory) has become very influential in ethical and political theory. It is argued that it is actually in our (enlightened) self-interest to cooperate with others, but only so long as they cooperate with us.\(^4\) This is known as ‘tit for tat’, or doing good to those who do good to us, and harming those who harm us. In the words of Peter Singer, ‘[t]his result amounts to nothing less than an experimental refutation of Jesus’s celebrated teaching about turning the other cheek’.\(^5\) According to Singer, the only role of rational persuasion is to enlighten others to the realization that it is in their best

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\(^4\) As found in Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 346.


interest to practice tit for tat – that is, to use coercion (which can take violent and nonviolent forms) when necessary. This would apply to God just as much as anyone else – God should persuade others to use counter-coercion in response to others’ noncooperation (called ‘defection’ in the literature).

The Process Buddhist’s response to this argument is to point out that it is based on a form of instrumental rationality and enlightened self-interest, which presupposes a Hobbean state of nature as a war of all against all. It therefore does not take into account the possibility that people may act disinterestedly and persuade one another by critical reason and negative dialectics to also act disinterestedly instead of merely persuading one another via instrumental rationality to act from enlightened self-interest. It is no wonder that those who limit themselves to using words and concepts to represent, and thus do violence to, reality, conclude that violence is the only way of acting in the real world. Nevertheless, the fact that all conceptual superstructures that people use to delude themselves and others harbor internal inconsistencies (and injustices) means that they can be deconstructed by skillful use of persuasive means. Unlike the calculative thought of rational self-interest which follows rules and seeks the best, most efficient, means to a given end, the meditative thought of Process Buddhism (and of Socrates and others) acts like a gadfly or sting-ray – it confuses and paralyzes the mind and causes a split to appear within the self that opens up an internal dialogue (conscience) resulting in a disinterested self-transcendence (which Thurman calls ‘transcendental individualism’). The complementarity of phenomenal and transcendental becomes apparent therefore in the need to first become awakened to the fact that there is no simple enduring self before choosing to act for a better future. (The above response to critics of nonviolence also shows that it is possible to ‘speak truth to power’ after all, which answers the Marxist critique of Process Buddhism discussed at the beginning of this chapter.)

50 See Bendor, J. and R. M. Kramer, ‘When in Doubt ... Cooperation in a Noisy Prisoner’s Dilemma’, *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 35 (1991): 691-719, who show that when ‘noise’ (that is, randomness, which approximates more closely to the real world situation) is factored into Prisoner’s Dilemma tournaments, tit-for-tat loses its strategic dominance. Its also not very successful when degrees of transparency (that is, communication: knowledge of what others are going to do) are introduced.
Conclusion

In this and the previous chapter, I have been concerned with the practical applications of the integration of Madhyamika Buddhism and process philosophy. I have argued that the integration can contribute to (1) Madhyamika-process dialogue and interreligious dialogue in general; (2) evaluative worldview analysis and a general theory of worldviews; (3) ethical theory (disinterested compassion, middle way ethics, and gradation of value); and (4) socio-political theory (social engagement based on asymmetrical interdependence between individuals and society, the liberal-communitarian debate, and nonviolence). But this discussion of Process Buddhism’s practical applications is not merely intended to derive practice from theory, for these two are asymmetrically interdependent. The practical implications of the integration of these two systems – indeed of any systems – do not come after the integration, but are themselves a part of the praxis of integration. Thus, I have been concerned with the question of whether Process Buddhism is an ideology that is unwittingly the product of practices that it serves to preserve and reproduce. I have shown that this is not the case as Process Buddhism is a praxis that transcends individual and group interests by means of disinterested meditative thought which experiences reality directly as a creative emptiness in which knowing and acting are part of the same nondual process of creative synthesis, which is an experience that is always participatory and creative.
CHAPTER 11

CONCLUSION

As its title indicates, this thesis is not so much intended to be a final integration as a process of integrating Madhyamika Buddhism and process philosophy. Their integration cannot realistically be something that occurs in a work of this size, nor can it be adequately undertaken by one person. Rather, it requires a period of dialogue between followers of both philosophies. As it is still early days in the Madhyamika-process dialogue, this thesis can only be considered as one of the first steps in the process of integrating these two philosophies. Hence, the results should be seen as questions for further study rather than as definitive answers. I will now summarize these results.

I have taken as a starting-point Hartshorne’s argument that Nagarjuna’s tetralemma is non-exhaustive as it merely deconstructs symmetrical relations (such as two-way dependence and two-way independence) and ignores the asymmetrical ones (such as one-way dependence conjoined with independence in the opposite direction). We have seen that it is more likely that Nagarjuna was in fact aware of asymmetry, as can be found in his approval of conditionality as opposed to causality. It was then argued that dependent origination, interpreted in light of conditionality, can be understood as an ‘asymmetrical interdependence’. Likewise, I have re-interpreted Hartshorne’s categorial scheme as an asymmetrical interdependence between ultimate contrasts. The dialectic of asymmetrical interdependence is thus one of the bases upon which a Process Buddhism can be constructed. I believe that it is very important and needs to be further developed.

Several other critical issues were also discussed. These tended to focus around the apparent incompatibility with Madhyamika of process metaphysics – particularly, those aspects of the process system such as God, eternal objects, and actual occasions. These issues still have to be further debated, but it is not inconceivable that they can be overcome. I have argued that these difficulties can be overcome by: (1) dropping eternal objects (which Hartshorne does anyway); (2) limiting metaphysics to the conventional world so that metaphysical principles become abstract invariances or ‘immanent transcendentals’; (3) not too hastily equating actual occasions with dharmas (as Nagarjuna accepts conventional and
conditioned dharmas, while rejecting the atomic and substantial dharmas of the Abhidharma school); and (4) adopting a theory of ‘two becomeings’ – the becoming that can be grasped conventionally (in words and concepts) and the ultimate becoming that cannot be so grasped.

Any integration of Madhyamika and process thought must show the relationship between emptiness and process panentheism. In process thought, God is (usually) not equated with the ultimate reality (creativity). Hence, it was also important to look into the relationship between emptiness and creativity. It was found that there are many different ways of understanding the Madhyamika notion of emptiness. The older absolutist interpretation has given way to a relativist interpretation that equates emptiness with dependent origination. However, Nagarjuna argues that although emptiness is also empty (i.e., it is neither existent nor non-existent), it is not conventionally existent – which makes it equivalent to nirvana (freedom). Hence, it can be compared with creativity, which is also neither existent nor non-existent, but not wholly reducible to the plurality of creative becomings (for it is neither one nor many). However, emptiness is often compared to open space, whereas creativity has temporal connotations. Thus, emptiness and creativity are different yet complementary aspects of a reality that we can call ‘creative emptiness’.

But it would be a mistake to reify and deify creative emptiness, for ‘it’ is not a supreme being that is wholly good, nor is ‘it’ a hyperessential Being beyond being. Nor is creative emptiness a source of the world of events, for ‘it’ is not their other – rather, events are themselves empty and creative (i.e., they dependently become). The same applies to God, who is within the world of events and thus empty and creative like them – only eminently so, being absolutely relative (all-responsive concrete pole) and absolutely absolute (invariant abstract pole). Such an ‘empty God’ is compatible with Madhyamika and can be treated by them in the same way they treat the cosmic buddha-bodhisattva found in Mahayana Buddhism (i.e., as an empty and conventional entity that is immanent to the world of dependently becoming events). A question still remains as to whether the Madhyamika can accept God’s absolutely invariant aspect – an issue which requires further investigation.

But how do we understand the relationship between creative emptiness and the empty God-world? A number of hermeneutical frameworks were explored, such as: (1) the ‘two ultimates’ theory, whereby we can understand creative emptiness as the ultimate reality (or better, ultimate activity) and the empty God as the ultimate
actuality (and the empty world as non-ultimate actualities); (2) the 'two truths' theory, which can be used to enrich the two ultimates theory by classifying both the ultimate actuality (empty God) and non-ultimate actuality (world) as conventional truths; (3) the Trinity doctrine, insofar as the irreducibility between asymmetrical generation (of Son from Father) and symmetrical procession (of Spirit from Father and [through] Son, as if from one, which is nevertheless not a fourth person) can be used to understand the irreducibility relation between empty God-world and creative emptiness; (4) the post-structural method of deconstruction, which shows that all complete theories are inconsistent and all consistent theories are incomplete – an alternation between two emptinesses whose asymmetry (incompleteness is better than inconsistency) creates a spiraling process of deconstructive reconstruction whereby new theories arise that are more inclusive yet always incomplete; and (5) the two 'immanent transcendental' theory, which is a cosmological alternative to the two ontological 'transcendent transcendental' – the trans-categorial (creative emptiness as opposed to esse) and the categorial (process metaphysics embodied in God as opposed to a priori principles). An impasse was reached when trying to understand the relation between creative emptiness and the empty God-world alternately in terms of asymmetrical inclusiveness and nonduality, as this would be to reduce one system to the methodology of the other. However, we have found that there can be no hierarchization or prioritization between them, as this would compromise their integrity. But, as stated in the introduction, integration does not require synthesis.

Several practical applications of the integration were also discussed. It was shown that: (1) Process Buddhism can contribute to a theory of interreligious dialogue resolves the debate between supporters of dialogue (such as the hermeneuticists) and their opponents (such as the deconstructionists) by steering a middle path between commensurability and incommensurability (of course, there also needs to be more dialogue between Madhyamika and process thought); (2) a general theory of worldviews based on Process Buddhism can be formulated that allows all worldviews to be classified and graded (more work needs to be done on this). Also, the Process Buddhist dialectic of asymmetrical interdependence can be used to develop: (3) a Process Buddhist ethical theory of disinterested compassion and a gradation of values (intrinsic, instrumental, and potential); and (4) a Process Buddhist socio-political theory that takes a middle path between liberal
individualism and communitarianism. Also, it was necessary to answer the critique that Process Buddhism is an ideology that arises from certain socio-economic practices which then reappear as its practical applications. In response, it was argued that the relation between theory and practice is asymmetrically interdependent and that Process Buddhism is non-ideological in the derogatory sense, but similar (yet superior) to Marxist theory.
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