

1. In the Hua-Yen tradition of Mahayana Buddhism, and specifically in the thought of Fa Tsang, the cosmology developed holds that all things interpenetrate and each thing influences every other. Thus all things are interdependent, each thing implicating the entire cosmic system even while being nothing—sunyata, emptiness—in itself. Because each thing is every other thing, each thing, from one point of view, is nonbeing, from another point of view, all being. But since, then, all is one, no matter what happens, we achieve serenity—only, self-contradictorily, the achievement of serenity can be no more, even if it is no less, important than anything else, including the failure to achieve serenity.

2. In my view, by contrast, there is no such assertion of universal, or symmetrical, interdependence, for two reasons: we depend only on our predecessors, not our successors; and we depend for our very existence on God, who could have existed without us and, therefore, is independent of us.

3. Whereas the Buddhist tries to will directly the good of all, I as a theist will above all the good of the Eminent One, by whom all are cherished. Thus I, too, will the good of all, but in such fashion that the inclusive whole of reality, which is an ever-growing unity, is taken to be the inclusive object as well as the inclusive subject of love.

4. The Buddhist "no soul, no substance" doctrine is a distinct metaphysical alternative to the common sense form of pluralistic realism, according to which the world is a collection of individual things and persons, each simply identical with itself through time and simply nonidentical with its neighbors in space. Of course, the Buddhist pluralism of momentary and spatially atomized realities, each of which becomes or is created, rather than endures through changing, is not the whole truth. Our ordinary talk about genetically identical things and persons is entirely reasonable and must somehow be taken into account both religiously and philosophically (or metaphysically). But the way to do this is to take seriously the

Buddhist insight according to which the substantial identity of a person or thing is one very important form or strand of causality or causal dependence. The one basic problem is "dependent origination," and the universal principle that solves this problem is causality or one-way dependence (of successors on predecessors). The existing person or thing as of any moment does depend on its past states, and how it depends on them moment by moment is its identity through time.

5. The difficulty, however, is in conceiving such causality or dependent origination. For Buddhists generally, overcoming such theoretical difficulties is vastly less important than transcending the practical difficulties created by the egoistic restlessness that leads to conflict with others and frustration. But this is done through the means of meditation and right living, rather than through metaphysical theorizing. Theravada Buddhism in particular is austere practical in its concerns, even as the Buddha himself seems to have been. But even in Mahayana Buddhism, where there were more clearly theoretical concerns as well, the difficulty of correctly conceiving dependent origination was not surmounted—primarily because the formal analysis of the range of relevant options was determined by the prejudice of symmetry. Thus in the case of Nagarjuna, e.g., the options are all symmetrical—whether extreme pluralism (mutual independence of all things) or extreme monism (mutual interdependence of all things)—and the conclusion, not surprisingly, is to abandon all hope of an adequate theoretical solution in favor of the practical solution offered by meditation and right living.

6. In the case of Chinese successors of Nagarjuna, however, this negative conclusion was unsatisfactory. Thus in the Hua Yen school, as represented by Fa Tsang, there developed a more definite theory of dependent origination, or causal relations, according to which causality is a tissue of strictly necessary connections in both temporal directions and in all spatial directions. Thus it is the view that all relations are internal or constitutive, which seems only verbally

distinguishable from the view that there are no relations because there are no differentiated terms between which they could obtain but only the undifferentiated Reality, of which diversity is mere appearance. If everything is in everything, then all distinction between things is distortion, "appearance." Each thing has the same content as every other thing, namely, the totality of reality. But, then, in one sense each thing is unreal, empty, for it is nothing simply in itself; hence emptiness or sunyata. In another sense, however, each thing is quite real, because it is all other things, the very fullness of reality.

7. The merit of this doctrine, it is claimed, is that it supports the search for peace or serenity and for universal good will. For if each of us is identical with the whole and so with one another, what need is there to be in conflict? But the great weakness of the doctrine, as of Vedantism, is that it refuses to submit thought to logical discipline. Logic and life alike assume a real plurality of terms and relations, and involve distinguishing situations and possible actions as really and significantly different from one another. Thus the sunyata doctrine, though offered as a theory, is really a nontheory (because it makes the requirement of noncontradiction meaningless).