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## The Jewel Net of Indra

*Francis H. Cook*

Western man may be on the brink of an entirely new understanding of the nature of existence. The work of classification and analysis which was born from the work of ancient Greek civilization has borne its fruit in the overwhelming success of Western man in manipulating the natural world, including himself. This conquest and manipulation has proceeded without pause, each success engendering new possibilities and successes, and there is reason to believe that this manipulation and exploitation will continue. However, some have begun to wonder if we have not had too much success; the very virtuosity with which we manipulate the natural world has brought us, according to some critics, to the thin line separating success from terrible disaster. Only very recently has the word "ecology" begun to appear in our discussion, reflecting the arising of a remarkable new consciousness of how all things live in interdependence. The traditional methods of analysis, classification, and isolation tended to erect boundaries around things, setting them apart in groups and thereby making easier their manipulation, whether intellectually or technologically. The ecological approach tends rather to stress the interrelatedness of these same things. While not naively obliterating distinctions of property and function, it still views existence as a vast web of interdependencies in which if one strand is disturbed, the whole web is shaken. The ecological viewpoint has not, that is, brought into question the ancient distinctions of property and function which lie behind a brilliant technology. Honey bees and apple blossoms remain what they have always been in our eyes, but added to this way of knowing is another, newer way—the knowledge that these entities need each other for survival itself. This understanding comes to us in the nature of a revelation; an eternally abiding truth has burst upon our consciousness, with an urgent message concerning our life. This new knowledge demands, in fact, a complete reassessment of the manner in which things exist. Perhaps this revelation is not yet closed, and in time we may come to perceive that this interdependency is not simply biological and economic, a matter of bees and blossoms, or plankton and oxygen, but a vastly more pervasive and complicated interdependency than we have so far imagined.

But this essay is not about ecology, at least not directly, and not at all in the sense in which we now use the word. It presents a view of man, nature,

and their relationship which might be called ecological in the more pervasive and complicated sense mentioned above, one which we might, in fact, call "cosmic ecology." It is a Buddhist system of philosophy which first appeared in a written, systematic form in China in the seventh century, and it was the characteristic teaching of what came to be known as the Hua-yen school of Buddhism. It is a view of existence which is for the most part alien to Western ways of looking at things, but it is a world view well worth consideration, not only as a beautiful artifact appealing to the esthetic sense, but perhaps as a viable basis for conduct, no less plausible than the traditional Western basis.

We may begin with an image which has always been the favorite Hua-yen method of exemplifying the manner in which things exist. Far away in the heavenly abode of the great god Indra, there is a wonderful net which has been hung by some cunning artificer in such a manner that it stretches out infinitely in all directions. In accordance with the extravagant tastes of deities, the artificer has hung a single glittering jewel in each "eye" of the net, and since the net itself is infinite in dimension, the jewels are infinite in number. There hang the jewels, glittering like stars of the first magnitude, a wonderful sight to behold. If we now arbitrarily select one of these jewels for inspection and look closely at it, we will discover that in its polished surface there are reflected *all* the other jewels in the net, infinite in number. Not only that, but each of the jewels reflected in this one jewel is also reflecting all the other jewels, so that there is an infinite reflecting process occurring. The Hua-yen school has been fond of this image, mentioned many times in its literature, because it symbolizes a cosmos in which there is an infinitely repeated interrelationship among all the members of the cosmos. This relationship is said to be one of simultaneous *mutual identity* and *mutual intercausality*.

If we take ten coins as symbolizing the totality of existence, and examine the relationship existing among them, then, according to Hua-yen teaching, coin one will be seen as being identical with the other nine coins. Simultaneously, coin two will be seen as being identical with the other nine coins, and so on throughout the collection of coins. Thus, despite the fact that the coins may be of different denominations, ages, metals, and so on, they are said to be completely identical. This is said to be the *static* relationship of the coins. If we take these same ten coins again and examine their *dynamic* relationship, then, according to the Hua-yen masters, they will be seen as being totally interdependent or intercausal (depending on point of view). Seen in this way, coin one is said to be the cause for the totality of coins which are considered as being dependent on the first coin for their being. Coin one, that is, is the support, while the total group is that which is supported. Since that particular totality couldn't exist without the support of

coin one, that coin is said to be the sole cause for the totality. However, if we shift our attention to coin two and now examine its relationship to the other nine coins, the same can now be said of this coin. It is the sole cause for the existence of the totality of ten coins. From the standpoint of *each* of the ten coins, it can be said that that coin is the sole cause for the whole. However, the cause-result relationship is even more fluid than this, for while each coin can, from the standpoint of the one coin, be said to act as sole cause of the whole, simultaneously the whole acts as cause for the one coin in question, for the coin only exists and has any function at all within the total environment. It can never be a question of the coin existing outside its environment, because since the ten coins symbolize the totality of being, a coin outside the context of the ten coins would be a nonentity. Thus each individual is at once the cause for the whole and is caused by the whole, and what is called existence is a vast body made up of an infinity of individuals all sustaining each other and defining each other. The cosmos is, in short, a self-creating, self-maintaining, and self-defining organism. Hua-yen calls such a universe the *dharmadhatu*, which we may translate as "cosmos" or "universe" if we wish, with the proviso that it is not the universe as commonly imagined, but rather the Hua-yen universe of identity and interdependence.

Such a universe is not at all familiar to Western people. The Judeo-Christian religious tradition and the Greek philosophical tradition have bequeathed to their posterity a view of existence very much different from that conceived by the Chinese. It differs in several respects. First, it has been, and to some extent still is, a universe which must be explained in terms of a divine plan, with respect to both its beginning and its end. The Hua-yen world is completely nonteleological. There is no theory of a beginning time, no concept of a creator, no question of the purpose of it all. The universe is taken as a given, a vast fact which can be explained only in terms of its own inner dynamism, which is not at all unlike the view of twentieth-century physics. Moreover, our familiar world is one in which relationships are rather limited and special. We have blood relationships, marital relationships, relationships with a genus or species, relationships in terms of animate and inanimate, and the like, but it is hard for us to imagine how anything is related to everything else. How am I related to a star in Orion? How am I even related to an Eskimo in Alaska, except through the tenuous and really nonoperative relationship of species? I certainly do not feel related to these other things. In short, we find it much easier to think in terms of isolated *beings*, rather than one *Being*. Being is just that, a unity of existence in which numerically separate entities are all interrelated in a profound manner. Beings are thought of as autonomous, isolated within their own skins, each independent by and large from all the rest of the beings (both animate and

inanimate). The "mystic" who speaks of identity with such things as animals, plants, and inanimate objects, as well as other men, is an object of ridicule. The Hua-yen universe is essentially a universe of identity and total intercausality; what affects one item in the vast inventory of the cosmos affects every other individual therein, whether it is death, enlightenment, or sin. Finally, the Western view of existence is one of strict hierarchy, traditionally one in which the creator-god occupies the top rung in the ladder of being, man occupies the middle space, and other animals, plants, rocks, and so on occupy the bottom. Even with the steady erosion of religious interest in the West, where the top rung of the ladder has for many become empty, there still exists the tacit assumption that man is the measure of all things, that this is his universe, that somehow the incalculable history of the vast universe is essentially a human history. The Hua-yen universe, on the other hand, has no hierarchy. There is no center, or, perhaps if there is one, it is everywhere. Man certainly is not the center, nor is some god.

It must be admitted that the traditional anthropocentric universe has begun to fade under the careful scrutiny of people who are not sentimentalists or who do not childishly seek security in baseless assumptions. A physicist, or a philosopher such as Whitehead, would have to admit that comfortable old concepts such as the distinction of subject and object, or that of agent and act, metaphysical entities such as souls and selves, or even more fundamental notions such as the absoluteness of time and space, are untenable in the light of objective and serious inquiry. The Western world is alive with new ideas, but so far these ideas have not trickled down to the mass consciousness. Most people still have a deep faith in solid substances and believe that their feelings, ideas, and even their own bodies belong to, or inhere in, some mysterious but seemingly irrefutable substance called a self.

It has been said that you cannot kill an idea, but it is even more difficult to see a new idea get a hearing in the human community. Shrinking from a reality which we assume will demean us, we hang on to our old habits of thought, which are really prejudices, just as we cling to our security blankets in our cribs. The anthropocentric bias, particularly, has appeared in one form or another down through Western history. It is of course endemic in the Hebraic and Christian traditions, and it has also given rise to dreadful philosophy for a period of hundreds of years—in Cartesianism, with its affirmation of human consciousness and its view of dead nature; in the "Great Chain of Being" of the eighteenth-century philosophers; and even today among the positivists, in whom one may detect a positivism which shrinks from taking the ultimate step in its positivism. The most ingenious attempts of Western thinkers to erect a satisfying picture of existence has resulted, in short, in a not too surprising conclusion that while we are less than gods, we stand just below the angels, superior to and apart from all

other things. One may ask whether this conclusion has not risen out of a pathetic self-deception.

It is a truism that a culture reveals its fundamental assumptions and presuppositions in its art forms, and it is partly for this reason that the study of art is so rewarding. In European art, at least up to the advent of the Romantic movement, a representative, and perhaps dominant, genre has been the portrait. To walk through the rooms of a large art museum is to receive an eloquent testimonial concerning the preoccupation of Western man for the last several hundred years. If we examine one of these paintings, we find that it will be dominated by a face or several faces. The artist has drawn upon every resource of his genius and materials to render the face realistic, lifelike. It is invariably grave and composed, befitting a person who had no doubts as to his worth in the general scheme of things. Are ye not of more worth than many sparrows? Yes, of course! Every quirk of personality is here, along with the warts, bumps, hollows, and spidery lines of much frowning and laughing. The clothes, too, are lovingly painted; we have, in gazing at the portrait, an almost tactile sense of the stiffness and roughness of lace, the suave, warm plushness of velvet, and rich, hard luxury of silk. Rings, brooches, and pendants garnish the figure, glinting weightily with gold and silver. The skillful use of *chiaroscuro* bestows on the figure the roundness and solidity of life. But there is something else too, though we are in danger of overlooking it in our justified concentration on the grand face and figure dominating the canvas. Over the shoulder of the subject we detect a tiny fragment of world, perhaps seen through the tiny window of the lord's palace. If we do not look sharply, it may not even register on our consciousness, but in its own way, it is an important part of the picture, for it tells us much. It occupies, in some paintings, only a hundredth part of the whole canvas, or, if it fills in the background, the coloring and style are such that the scene serves only as an unobtrusive backdrop for the real focal point of the picture. It is there for several reasons; it helps the painter avoid a dull and unimaginative background for the human foreground; it often contains symbols which help us "read" the meaning of the painting; or it defines and places in its correct context (seventeenth-century Florence, the world, etc.) the true subject. However, all these uses of the natural world add up to one: it serves as a backdrop for the human drama, which is not only what painting is about but what the universe is all about. We still dwell comfortably in the pre-Copernican universe, where the world is a stage created for the most important of dramas, the human one. Even in the nineteenth century, when painters turned their attention to natural scenes as intrinsically valuable, the romantics tended to invest their scenery with human emotions and values and to see the natural only in a human frame of reference. They betray, however subtly, what critics have called the "pathetic fallacy," the tendency to read

human values into nature and to sentimentalize it. Whatever Western painters have taken up the brush or chisel, they have revealed this abiding belief in a hierarchical existence in which the human ranks only slightly below the divine.

To see that this is not a universal penchant and to simultaneously see a portrait of the universe as experienced by another part of the human family, we might briefly turn to the Oriental wing of our art museum. In the art of the Far East we see few faces—an empress or two, a few high-ranking Buddhist monks, at most. We see mainly landscapes, done in black ink on silk or paper, for just as portraiture and human events are the dominant Western concern, the landscape is dominant in Oriental art. Yet humans are there in the landscapes, along with their homes, occupations, and diversions. But if one were to walk quickly past the scrolls, these figures would be almost, or completely, overlooked, for they do not stand out in the paintings. In fact, no one part of the scene dominates the others. The scene is one of mountains, trees, a stream or lake, perhaps a small hut barely visible in the trees, and a small human figure or two. The mountains recede into the hazy distance, suggesting great spaces, and while the scene is tranquil and serene, there is nevertheless the strong suggestion of a living vitality, a breathing life. The viewer is struck by a sense of continuity among the various elements of the scene, in which all are united in an organic whole. The humans in the picture, which are almost always there, have their rightful place in this scene, but only their rightful place as one part of the whole. Nature here is not a background for man; man and nature are blended together harmoniously. Even this way of analyzing the scene distorts the situation; we see only being itself in its totality, "man" being merely one isolatable element of no more or less prominence than a tree or a bird. Are ye not of more worth than many sparrows? No.

These two examples of art reveal, I suggest, two different ways of understanding not only man's place in the total scheme of things, but the basic structure of existence in general. The humanistic or anthropocentric orientation of the first painting is clearly in sharp contrast with the landscape, assuming the status of a self-evident presupposition. The humanistic bias of the former also reflects a tacit assumption that being is organized in a hierarchical manner, in which some parts of existence—notably, the divine and human—stand above other parts, with all the rights and privileges pertaining thereof. Historically there has been little doubt on the part of Western people that we do stand apart from, and superior to, all else. When we gaze out at the creation, we see a reality which is primarily broken and fragmented, with none of the continuity and interrelatedness observed in the Chinese landscape; and, of course, this discontinuity, or alienation, exists mainly for us and our confrontation with the other. This would be of merely

academic interest were it not for the fact that such a view is said to cause the individual to suffer greatly.

Now, while there seems to be a fundamental difference in the way Western and Eastern people regard experience, let it not be assumed that a Chinese or Japanese is born into the world with a vision of identity and interdependence. Buddhism was founded by an Indian, and the Hua-yen school was a product of Chinese experience; both were taught to help Oriental people, who suffer from the same existential plight that Western people do. Human beings are basically the same in the manner in which they organize experience through recurrent training, learning to make sense out of what William James spoke of as a "blossoming, buzzing confusion." However, Buddhism did arise in the East, indicating that there is a *tendency* to see things as described by Hua-yen. Conversely, the *tendency* in the West has been to analyze rather than unify, to discriminate rather than see all as one, to make distinctions rather than see all qualities within each datum of experience. But the truth of the matter is that the universe as described in Hua-yen documents is the world as seen by enlightened individuals, Buddhas, and not by ordinary folk of any race, time, or geographic area. Thus the Hua-yen vision is not at all self-evident, even to a Chinese philosopher. The message of Buddhism is claimed to be universal; since all people suffer in the same basic way, the cure is universally beneficial.

The Chinese landscapes described above can be thought of as plastic duplicates of Hua-yen philosophy, in the sense that both attempt to express a vision of the manner in which things exist. What is clear from both is that there is a great emphasis on the relatedness of things, and as was mentioned, this relationship is the dual one of identity and interdependence. This matter of relationship is extremely important, and perhaps the most important difference between the Hua-yen view of things and the ordinary view is that people ordinarily think and experience in terms of distinct, separate *entities*, while Hua-yen conceives of experience primarily in terms of the *relationships* between these same entities. It is simply a question of fundamental, basic reality; is it separate parcels of matter (or mental objects) or is it relationship? It is interesting in this regard to see that a great number of Western physicists have now drawn the conclusion, based on the implications of Einstein's theories, that relationship is the more fundamental. As one physicist has remarked, if all the matter in the universe less one bundle of matter ceased to exist, the mass of the remaining parcel of matter (and hence its existence) would be reduced to nothing—the implication being that mass is a function of total environment and dependent on it.<sup>1</sup> Nonetheless, in the seventh century, Fa-tsang and other Hua-yen masters taught that to exist in any sense at all means to exist in dependence on the

other, which is infinite in number. Nothing exists truly in and of itself, but requires everything to be what it is.

Previously, in examining the relationship existing among ten coins, it was said that any one coin is identical with all the other coins. The reader has undoubtedly heard of this business of identity before. Oh yes, the Mysterious East has this obsession with Identity. We smile to think of the yogi walking through the jungle meditating on the sameness of things and being pounced upon and eaten by a real, unmystical tiger. So much for identity, we say, in the belief that we have disposed of any nonsense about identity. Or, like the cynic in Orwell's *Animal Farm*, we may grant that things are all equal, but some things are more equal than others. Things seem to be very unequal, radically nonidentical. But the Hua-yen masters were not mystics, and while agreeing that there were men and tigers, eaters and eaten, they could insist on identity anyway. Let us turn to another example of identity in an attempt to see in what way things are just what they are and yet identical.

We might take the example of a human body as a kind of organic whole similar to the totality analyzed by Hua-yen. Here too we can agree that there are distinctions in form and function among the constituents of the whole body. My ears do not look like my toes, and I cannot see with my elbow. Ears detect sounds, my stomach digests food, my nose detects odors and helps me to breathe. We do not confuse the parts; we know where everything is and what it does. It is equally evident that what we call the body is an organism made up of all these parts, and normally the parts do not exist apart from the body. If we now look into the relationship between any one part of the body and the whole body, it will be obvious that we are really discussing the relationship between this one part and all other parts, whether considered individually or collectively.

Let us examine the place of the nose, being prominent and, therefore, seeming to offer itself for inspection. In what sense is it identical with my body or with any other part of the body? The Hua-yen argument is really very simple: what we call the whole is nothing apart from the individuals which make up that whole. Thus the nose, in being integrated perfectly into the configuration we call a body, not only acts as a condition without which there could be no body, but in fact becomes or is the body. I can therefore point to my nose and say, "This is my body," and there will be no disagreement, with the possible exception that someone might say, "It is only a part of your body." This is true; it is a part of my body, but at the same time it is my body. To insist that it is *only* a part is to fall into a fallacious view of the whole as an independent and subsisting entity to which parts belong. The bell tower on the Riverside campus of the University of California is not something which is added to an already existent campus. It is the campus.

Thus the part and the whole in this sense are one and the same thing, for what we identify as a part is merely an abstraction from a unitary whole.

But in what way can it be said that the nose is identical with my left elbow? We may understand that in a sense a part is identical with the whole as a whole, but identifying part with part raises difficulties, for the two parts look different, are spatially distinct, and perform different functions. The postulation of identity does not remove these distinctions, and Hua-yen insists that not only are things both identical *and* different, but, paradoxically, that they are identical *because* they are different. In other words, to have the body I now have, I need a nose which is between my eyes and has the office of detecting odors, an elbow which bends in a certain way, allowing me to write and throw, a heart in my chest which pumps blood, and so on. If everything was literally a nose, I would be just one immense nose; in fact, I would not be "me." Thus each individual is required in its own unique form, with its own unique function, to act as a condition for the whole in question. The identity of the nose and the left elbow consists in their identity as *conditions* for the whole. Therefore, while the two are different, they are the same; in fact, they are identical precisely because they are different. Seen in this light, then, when the nose is understood for what it is, the whole body is known; when we know the nature of the body, we know what the nose is. For this reason, Hua-yen can say that ten thousand Buddhas can be seen preaching on the tip of a single hair. In other words, the one truth which is common of all things (ten thousand Buddhas) is evident in the tip of the hair once we know its place in the whole.

The reader is bound, at this point, to interpose in exasperation, "Very well, they are all the same *as conditions*, but nevertheless, life and death don't appear to be the same to me!" Certainly they seem different. One moment the loved one is talking with us, cheeks pink with life, loving and caring, and the next moment he or she lies still, pale in death, never more to laugh, love, or care again. Is there no differences? Does nothing happen when the hard-headed, practical tiger eats the mystical yogi?

Yes, of course something happens, the Hua-yen Buddhist agrees that something does. The yogi really dies and becomes part of the tiger (although this is not the kind of identity insisted upon by Hua-yen). Now, we may go out and shoot the tiger so he will not eat any more people, but we are still left confronting the question of the place of tigers in the world, and our attitude here is going to determine whether our own private existence is going to be a success or a failure. It is the human habit to reject such things as hungry tigers, or their equivalents—cancer, bullets, or the slow, insidious, but equally effective tiger of old age. We would have nothing but sunshine, sweet wine, eternal youth, and endless satisfactory amours. Intellectually we know that tigers are real and do exist, but emotionally we reject them with

fear and loathing, and we would rather that they did not exist. They are somehow intruders in the sacred circle of life, foreign agents sent to subvert our happiness. They are antifee. It is the very picking and choosing which brings back upon ourselves anxiety, fear, and turmoil; for by dividing up the one unitary existence into two parts, the good and the bad, we distort the reality which is the one unitary existence. That is, we blind ourselves to the fact that existence in its totality is both life *and* death, success *and* failure, health *and* sickness. Tigers are not foreign intruders but facts of life.

Both life and death are part of the one everchanging process we call being (which is really a "becoming") and thus both are conditions for that being. To see things in a totalistic perspective means to transcend a small, pathetic subjectivity and to see all the pernicious, vexing contraries harmonized within the whole. As D.T. Suzuki said in his commentary on Bashō's *haiku*

Lice, fleas—  
The horse pissing  
Beside my pillow

the real world is a world of lice as well as butterflies, horse piss as well as vintage champagne, and to the person who has truly realized this, one is as good as the other.<sup>2</sup> To insist otherwise is to make an impious demand of existence which it is unwilling and unable to satisfy. The "ugly" things of life exist, and the only question is how we are to confront them. The romantic hero smashing himself to pieces against the stone wall of necessity has never found favor in Asian literature.

This matter of identity can be explored in more depth if we turn to the matter of interdependence again, for the two relationships are so inextricably related themselves that one cannot be understood without the other. In returning to the nose, let us examine it in its dynamic relationship with the body-totally. Now, this humble organ is, according to Hua-yen, the total cause for the rest of the body. Since, as was pointed out, the "rest" is an assemblage of parts, this means that the nose causes my right elbow, my left knee, and so on. This is, admittedly, a highly unusual way of looking at a nose, and it is true that if in this analysis of cause and result we stopped completely with the assertion that the nose causes the body, this would be a very questionable assertion indeed. Moving from this example to the Hua-yen cosmos, this would be tantamount to saying that a drop of water in the Nile River is the cause for the whole universe. Mysticism indeed! But the issue of one sole causal agent is not being discussed here, and, in fact, part of the function of Hua-yen thought is to destroy the fiction of a sole causal agent. The apparent absurdity of arguing that the nose causes the rest of my

body arises from the sheer necessity of examining the relationship of *each* part of the whole to the whole in a linear manner, one part at a time in sequence. If we move to another part of the body, the left index finger, let us say, we can now assert that the finger is the cause for the body. This does not cancel out the causal function of the nose; the reality of the situation is that any part can be said to assume the role of total cause when the relationship is examined purely from the point of view of the one part being examined. At this point, it might be assumed that the Hua-yen masters are making a rather commonplace observance, that a whole is the result of the collaboration of many individual parts each exerting its own partial causal power. However, this is not the case, and Fa-tsang, in his *Hua-yen i-ch'eng chiao i fen-ch'i chang*, says that if this were the case,

there would be the errors of annihilationism and eternalism. If [each part] does not wholly cause [the whole] to be made and only exerts partial power, then each condition would only have partial power. They would consist only of many individual partial powers and would not make one whole, which is annihilationism. . . . also, if [the part] does not wholly create [the whole], then when one [part] is removed, the [whole] should remain. However, since the whole is not formed, then you should understand that the [whole] is not formed by the partial power [of a condition] but by its total power.<sup>3</sup>

Thus according to the Hua-yen school, the part exerts *total power* in the formation of a particular whole.

When we move to every part of the body, to every organ, limb, cell, or subcellular particle, and in each case analyze the relationship of that part to the whole body, it can be said that that part of the whole is *the* sole cause for the whole. When referring to causality, Hua-yen is not making the naive assertion that first there is, let us say, a nose, and then later the rest of the body comes into existence as a result of the prior condition of the nose. Time is not involved, nor is there a question of production of a result from a cause in a progressive series of events. The real question concerns the relationship existing between simultaneously existing individuals. Whether a totality is composed of two parts, a million parts, or an infinity of parts, causality in the sense meant by Hua-yen refers to a relationship among present entities.

The totality we have been looking at is nothing more than a number of simultaneously existing individuals, and since the relationship of support and supported always exists between any one individual and all other individuals, or the whole, it would seem clear that not only does the individual support the whole but, upon a more complete investigation, what is a cause or support from one point of view is result or the supported from another. The categories of support and supported, or cause and result, are completely fluid

and interchangeable, becoming either as the point of view shifts. It is the necessity of point of view which in fact obscures the real status of the individuals which compose the whole. They are all simultaneously cause and result, or support and supported, for this is precisely the picture of existence which Hua-yen hopes to describe: a universe which is nothing but the complete mutual cooperation of the entities which make it up.

It may be well to try to clarify the sense in which Hua-yen uses the term "cause" at this point. The description of the intercausal or interdependent nature of the parts of the body illustrates the magnitude of the relationships as well as the nature of that relationship, but the meanings of "cause," "condition," "support," and other terms have not been discussed at much length. As has already been mentioned, "cause" is not used here in the popularly understood sense of a temporal sequence of events in which if an antecedent event is present, a subsequent event will occur. Perhaps the Hua-yen use of the term will become clearer if we resort to a model of an even simpler kind. Let us take a tripod. If we bind three poles together near one end and then stand the three poles up on outspread legs, the tripod will remain standing. Here the tripod is a whole, which is of course composed of parts. If now, one of the poles is removed, the other two poles will topple over. This toppling action is not meant, however, to show what happens to the whole when a part is removed, but rather shows that in order to be *that* whole it needs this one pole. Obviously the universe does not collapse when one individual member dies, but it is no longer *that* particular whole it was when the individual survived. Now, if we label the three poles *a*, *b*, and *c*, and remove pole *a*, the falling of the remaining two poles shows that from the point of view of *a*, it has complete power to form the tripod. However, if we turn our attention to pole *b*, now that pole, from the new point of view, is said to be completely responsible for the whole tripod. What has happened to *a*? Seen from the point of view of pole *b*, it is result, or that which is supported. Since a tripod is three interdependent poles, each of the three parts is simultaneously acting as cause or support for the whole tripod and yet is indubitably part of a whole which is being supported.

It is to be admitted that the term "cause" is being used in an unusual manner in these examples, since what is evident is that these are all examples of what might better be called interdependency or mutual conditionedness. Yet, Fa-tsang and other Hua-yen masters do use the word "cause," and the Hua-yen universe is a universe of self-causation. The traditional term to describe such a situation is *ja-chai yüan-ch'i*, which seems to be a translation of the Sanskrit *dharmadhānu prāṭhya-samutpāda*, translated either as the "interdependent arising of the universe" or, perhaps better, the "interdependent arising which is the universe," since all that exists is part of the one great scheme of interdependency. Bertrand Russell said that the only

reasonable definition of cause would be the sum total of all existent conditions, in the sense that any event will occur unless any one of the available conditions fails. It is in this sense that we should understand the Hua-yen use of the word, for in the Hua-yen universe, the individual will be, and will perform its function, unless some other individual withdraws its support.

One of the most important implications of such a view is that every single thing in the universe comes to have an important place in the scheme of things. In the "Great Barn," every rafter, shingle, and nail is important, for where can we find a barn apart from these things? This apparently insignificant shingle I see there in the building is a necessary condition for the barn, and in fact, it is the barn. Yet, what do we mean by "shingle"? It is not a shingle outside the context of the barn of which it is a part, for "shingle" only has meaning in its proper context. It is true that there is no building without this little shingle, but it is equally evident that "shingle" has neither existence nor meaning outside the barn of which it is a part. They make and define each other.

To make one more analogy in a rather long series of analogies, existence is something like an old-fashioned American square dance. In the square dance, what I am and what I do are completely defined by my inclusion in the square dance, for obviously I am nothing apart from it. My being, and my office, can be seen as being nothing but functions of the dance in which I exist. However, where is the square dance without me, and "I" am every member of the dance? I am the square dance. Thus we have a profound, crucial relationship here; that I am, and that I am defined in a certain way, is completely dependent on the *other* individuals who compose the dance, but this dance itself has no existence apart from the dancer. The Buddhist, in viewing things as being interdependent in this manner, comes to have, ideally, a profound feeling of gratitude and respect for things, however humble they may appear to people who do not share his understanding, for in some manner that eludes the rest of us, he is aware that what he is depends utterly upon them.

Having taken this brief look at the doctrine of interdependence, we may now return to the matter of identity, as perhaps more problematic than the matter of interdependence. Yet, there is finally no real problem, because "identity" is only another way of saying "interdependent"; they are one and the same. The point to the doctrine of interdependence is that things exist *only* in interdependence, for things do not exist in their own right. In Buddhism, this manner of existence is called "emptiness" (Sanskrit *śūnyatā*). Buddhism says that things are empty in the sense that they are absolutely lacking in a self-essence (*svabhāva*) by virtue of which things would have an independent existence. In reality, their existence derives



strictly from interdependence. If things possessed essences or substance of a metaphysical nature, then there truly would be real, ultimate differences between things. However, if each experiential datum, whether material or mental, derives its existence and meaning purely through its dependence on everything else, then it is not ultimately unique at all, but must be seen as identical with everything else in its emptiness. Thus to be identical with everything else means to share in the universal interdependence, or intercausality, of all that exists. If one objects that one still perceives a vast difference between good and evil, or Buddhas and ordinary folk, or life and death, one need not be surprised, for to be human means to perceive these differences. However, the Buddha insisted that to be attached to these meanings in such a manner brought disaster to the individual. It is the perennial teaching of Buddhism that such attachment will fill his heart with desire and loathing, make his life a ceaseless hell of turmoil (*dukkha*), madden him, and finally send him to his grave confused, bitter, and afraid.

Identity can be thought of as the static relationship among things, while interdependence is the dynamic relationship; they are two sides of the same coin, and both are alternate ways of saying that all is empty (*śarvam śūnyam*). It is on the basis of this doctrine of emptiness that Hua-yen insists on a totalistic view of things. Totalism has two meanings. First, it means that all things are contained in each individual. The nose, in its identity and interdependence with the rest of the body, takes in the whole body, for whatever is true in the ultimate sense concerning the nose is also true of the whole body. If we know reality in the form of one phenomenon, then we know all of reality. It is for this reason that Hua-yen can make the seemingly outrageous claim that the whole universe is contained in a grain of sand. However, not only does the one contain the all, but at the same time, the all contains the one, for the individual is completely integrated into its environment.

Second, totalism refers to a manner of experiencing events in which room is allowed for all kinds of events, and in which nothing is excluded as alien or "bad," as was discussed earlier. This is difficult to accept for the person unaccustomed to Eastern thought, for it demands that one make room not grudgingly or fatalistically, but joyously and with profound gratitude, for the horse urine and lice that do in fact coexist with fine champagne and beautiful butterflies. The totalistic view sees these as no less real, and no less wonderful, once we have transcended a petty, partial view of existence in which our comfort and unslakable thirst determine what has and has not a right to exist. In the totalistic universe, which is one organic body of interacting parts, it is an act of self-defeating madness to insist on a never-ending diet of vintage champagne, sunshine, and laughter, and to insist vehemently and with no small amount of hubris that urine, darkness, and

tears be banished forever. In every contest, there has to be of necessity both a winner and a loser (granting an occasional draw), and all that Hua-yen asks is that we realize, and appreciate, the fact that we cannot ever have one without the other. The partial view would have only one or the other; the totalistic view sees that the two always go together.

The totalistic world as described by Hua-yen is a living body in which each cell derives its life from the other cells, and in return gives life to those many others. Like the human body, the Hua-yen universe is ever changing, for in it there is not one thing which is static and unchanging, unless it is the law of perpetual change itself. It is an incredible stream of activity wherein when one circumstance alters, everything alters with it. "Do I dare to eat a peach?" asks one of T. S. Eliot's characters, and the question of action becomes an extremely delicate one to the individual who sees the fantastic interaction of things. Thus in a universe which is pure fluidity, or process, no act can but have an effect on the whole, just as a pebble tossed into a pool sends waves out to the farthest shore and stirs the very bottom. This is hard to see. We can comprehend how a modification in one small part of our body can affect the total organism, but we find it hard to believe that the enlightenment of one monk under a tree in India somehow enlightens us all, or, conversely, that my own intransigent ignorance is a universal ignorance. However, if we can comprehend that the greater whole of which the body is a part is no less organic, and no less interrelated, such an idea is not so unlikely. At that point, the moral life as conceived by Buddhism becomes possible.

University students today do not find the Buddhist concepts of emptiness and interdependent existence (which are the same thing) difficult to understand, as they might have been a generation ago and more. Much more conversant, if even in an elementary way, with scientific and philosophical trends, they can see fairly easily that the very old Western assumptions about substances, selves, agents, and the like, are no longer tenable, or are at least open to serious doubt. Their intellectual world is a different one from that of even the previous generation. They feel much more at home with such startling concepts as the unified field and the ecosphere. They have begun to appreciate, however dimly, that in some real sense, everything is alive and exerting its influence on everything else, that even dead things are alive.

Faraday, over a hundred years ago, made the startling remark that an electric charge must be considered to exist everywhere, and Alfred North Whitehead, commenting on this statement, paraphrased it by saying that "the modification of the electromagnetic field at every point of space at each instant owing to the past history of each electron is another way of stating the same fact."<sup>4</sup> Faraday, Whitehead, and the Buddhists of the Hua-yen are all, in

their own way, making the observation that nature is not at all dead, but rather is most vital. It is certainly not a case of animism or spiritism, but, whatever may be the basis, a realization that even things commonly thought to be dead or inanimate exert a continual, crucial influence on each other.

The work of earlier physicists such as Faraday and Maxwell, and later men such as Einstein, as well as Whitehead with his process philosophy, and others, have all laid the groundwork for an entirely new understanding of the nature of existence, and this understanding is gradually beginning to filter down to the layperson. Thus, as I remarked earlier, the intellectual grasp of such Buddhist concepts as emptiness and interdependence has become much easier and much more prevalent, so that the university student is not absolutely baffled by these ideas. So much that is in the air in Western thought coincides in general outline with Hua-yen cosmology that what might have once passed for bad thinking by Oriental "mystics" can now be discussed seriously.

My concluding point is that intellectual grasp is not enough, according to all that the old Buddhist thinkers have had to say. They did not intend their treatises to be mere theoretical exercises, to be read, understood, and filed away in the great dust bins of the mind. The Hua-yen vision was first of all meant to tantalize the reader and lure him to *realize* (i.e., to *make real* in his everyday experience) what had been only theory. To realize the Hua-yen universe means to go beyond an intellectual grasp of the system to a *lived experience* of things existing in this manner, for the Hua-yen world view is nothing if not a lived reality. To live this reality in turn means to alter drastically one's moral and ethical stance as they relate to the infinite other. Here, in conclusion, a story told by a Buddhist priest may give some idea of what it means to live the Hua-yen vision.

That I have been able to establish myself as well as I have has been totally because of my teacher's guidance. It was customary for him to visit the shrines of various guardians, placed around the grounds of the temple, every day after the morning service. One morning while he was making his rounds, he discovered a single chopstick in a drain. He brought it back, called me to his room, held out the chopstick to me and asked, "What is this?" I replied, "It is a chopstick." "Yes, this is a chopstick. Is it unusable?" he asked further. "No," I said. "It is still usable." "Quite so," he said. "And yet I found it in a drain with other scraps. That is to say, you have taken the life of this chopstick. You may know the proverb, 'He who kills another digs two graves.'" Since you have killed this chopstick, you will be killed by it." Spending four or five hours on this incident he told me how I should practice. At that time I was seven or eight years old. His guidance at that time really soaked in. From that time on, I became very careful and meticulous about everything.<sup>5</sup>

In the Hua-yen universe, where everything interpenetrates in identity and interdependence, where everything needs everything else, what is there which is not valuable? To throw away even a single chopstick as worthless is to set up a hierarchy of values which in the end will kill us in a way in which no bullet can. In the Hua-yen universe, everything counts.

Someone once made the observation that one's skin is not necessarily a boundary marking off the self from the not-self but rather that which brings one into contact with the other. Like Faraday's electric charge which must be conceived as being everywhere, I am in some sense boundless, my being encompassing the farthest limits of the universe, touching and moving every atom in existence. The same is true of everything else. The interfusion, the sharing of destiny, is as infinite in scope as the reflections in the jewels of Indra's net. When in a rare moment I manage painfully to rise above a petty individualism by knowing my true nature, I perceive that I dwell in the wondrous net of Indra, and in this incredible network of interdependence, the career of the Bodhisattva must begin. It is not just that "we are all in it" together. We all *are* it, rising or falling as one living body.