

## An American Appropriation of Buddhism

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### *A. Setting the Scene*

It is rather difficult to get an accurate picture of the number of practising Buddhists in the United States. In 1975, Barrett<sup>1</sup> estimated 190,000 persons, or approximately 0.1% of the population and one would expect this figure to be mainly composed of descendants of Chinese and Japanese immigrants affiliated to the Jodo shinshu inspired Buddhist Churches of America with some Nichiren shoshu of America thrown in for good measure. Barrett goes on to predict an approximate 30% decrease within American Buddhism by 2000 presumably on the basis of assimilation to the dominant Christian atmosphere of the host culture.

Now, it is likely that these statistics significantly underestimate the true extent of Buddhist influence in the country today. Of course, Buddhist affiliation is notoriously difficult to determine for there is no easy answer to the question, “Who is a Buddhist?” Again, with the exception of death, life-cycle rites are studiously avoided by most traditional forms of Buddhism so that documentary information on adherents is necessarily sketchy and this situation is likely to be further complicated by the relative youth of recently engaged Buddhists, and their fellow-travellers in contemporary America. Anecdotal evidence does, however, suggest a fairly major explosion of interest within the last 25 years with successive waves of mainly Japanese and Tibetan teachers attracting and sustaining large, though fluctuating, numbers of followers.<sup>2</sup> It is no exaggeration to say that virtually all extant forms of Buddhism are now established and prospering in the United States, often in conditions far more

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<sup>1</sup> D.B. Barratt, ed., *World Christian Encyclopedia: A Comparative Survey of Churches and Religions in the Modern world AD 1900–2000*, Nairobi, OUP, 1982, 711.

<sup>2</sup> The triennial, New York based, magazine *Tricycle: The Buddhist Review* is a reasonable barometer of the present scene. With its high production values and sponsors, including Leonard Cohen, Richard Gere, Philip Glass and several Rockefellers, *Tricycle* represents a quantum leap away from the more sedate and academic popular Buddhist journals of Europe and Asia.

satisfactory than are possible within the old Asian homelands. A variety of reasons are given in the literature to account for this state of affairs ranging from a general decline in traditional religious beliefs to the apparent harmony that Buddhism shares with the antinomianism of the beat, hippie and new-age variants of the counter-culture. On a more specifically regional level, W.I. Thompson argues that the steady movement of European people's on their westward journey to America should not be seen simply in geographical terms, it is also a movement of the mind from the old certainties of occidental civilisation towards a fruitful encounter with the East. As such contemporary Californian society, the spatial and logical terminus of this movement, is experiencing the birthpangs of a new planetary culture which will be most appropriately supported by the purified world philosophy (Heidegger's *planetarische denken*) that Thompson terms "reformation Buddhism."<sup>3</sup> Thompson's millennialism, with California (the so-called 'edge of history') as the promised land, is shared by many within the new-age sub-culture, though this need not incline us to regard the growth of Buddhism as a purely West Coast phenomenon. The fact is that, alongside the traditional 'school-based' meditation and retreat houses, single issue Buddhist activist groups, gay and lesbian *sanghas*, Buddhist healing and therapy centres and the like are springing up throughout the length and breadth of the land.<sup>4</sup>

Superficially much here seems novel, but on closer examination the American transformation of Buddhism, which in some respects runs parallel to the Chinese reception of that religion at the beginning of the present epoch, has roots which extend well back into the nineteenth century. Thomas Tweed,<sup>5</sup> in a recent study of this formative period in American Buddhism, offers a useful three-fold typology of the forms into which Buddhism had crystallised by the end of the last century. His scheme encompasses firstly an occult or esoteric type strongly influenced by popular Neoplatonism, Swedenborgian ideas, Mesmerism, Spiritualism and Theosophy; secondly, a Rationalist or Scientific type arising from a Unitarian, free-thinking background, in which the influence of New England Transcendentalism can be clearly discerned, and finally a Romantic or Exotic type primarily associated with a small, though influential group of wealthy East Coast aesthetes and intellectuals, many of whom had first-hand

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<sup>3</sup> W.I. Thompson "Pacific Shift", in J.B. Callicott & R.T. Ames, eds., *Nature in Asian Traditions of Thought: Essays in Environmental Philosophy*, Albany, SUNY Press, 1989, 25. Cf. also W.I. Thompson, *At The Edge of History*, New York, Harper Colophon, 1971.

<sup>4</sup> Listings located at the back of Tricycle are particularly enlightening in this respect.

<sup>5</sup> T.A. Tweed, *The American Encounter with Buddhism 1844–1912: The Victorian Culture and the Limits of Dissent*, Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1992.

acquaintance with East Asian culture, mainly through their interests in fine art, ritual, drama, customs and the like.

However, if we look back half a century, to a time before the crystallisation of Tweed's three types, it would be unwise to underestimate the considerable influence of Henry David Thoreau of Walden Pond fame, who brought Buddhism to a popular audience by preparing and publishing the first American translation of a Buddhist text, a fragment of Burnouf's edition of the Lotus Sutra.<sup>6</sup> Thoreau clearly represents an important link in the chain that leads from the wilderness ideal of the early settlers, so well documented in Nash's classic study *Wilderness and the American Mind*,<sup>7</sup> to contemporary Eco-Buddhism, a movement to which this article is primarily intended to give prominence. That Thoreau was considered a guru-like figure in his lifetime, there can be little doubt. Here is his friend Moncure Conway eulogising his sojourn at Walden:

“Like the Yogi so long motionless whilst gazing on the sun that knotty plants encircled his neck... and the birds built nests on his shoulders, this poet and naturalist, by equal consecration, became part of field and forest.”<sup>8</sup>

Thoreau represents a figure, then, who popularly symbolises the initial encounter with Buddhism, still at this period insufficiently differentiated from its Hindu background side by side, or, more accurately in harmony with, the various benign powers of nature; a highly potent image and one that has continued to flourish up to the present day!

A preliminary survey of the forms of contemporary Buddhism in America suggests that Tweed's threefold typology will remain a useful explanatory tool, though more work clearly needs to be undertaken here with regard to movements of Buddhist fusion with New-Age thinking. Nevertheless, I hope that the following discussion will convincingly demonstrate that Eco-Buddhism, with its eclectic intellectual tastes and strong sense of identification with the natural world, may usefully be seen as a close amalgam of the rationalist and romantic encounter types. The writings surveyed in the body of the article certainly show a minimal inclination towards the esotericism characteristic of Tweed's first grouping.

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<sup>6</sup> Henry David Thoreau, “The Preaching of the Buddha”, *The Dial* 4, Jan. 1844, 391–401.

<sup>7</sup> R. Nash, *Wilderness and the American Mind*, 3rd edition, New Haven, Yale University Press, 1982.

<sup>8</sup> Quoted in R. Fields, *How the Swans Came to the Lake: A Narrative History of Buddhism in America*, 3rd edition, revised and updated. Boston & London, Shambala, 1992, 64.

## B. General Features of Eco-Buddhism

A recurring theme in writings concerning the Buddhist engagement with the natural world is the obstructive and destructive character of the dominant Western model of the self. Some authors attribute responsibility for this state of affairs to the general Judaeo-Christian character of our culture, others mention the Greeks, while others pointing an accusing finger at Descartes. However, a detailed critique of the self and its place in Western thought is not a major concern for Eco-Buddhism—it is bad and there is an end to the matter! The present condition of extreme individualism, conceived of as the final stage in the disease of the Western self, is a major occasioning factor behind the present eco-crisis. As such, this post-modern apocalypse can only be arrested by a kind of radical restructuring of the self to which Buddhism alone holds the key. Nolan P. Jacobson, for instance, holds that, only by relinquishing our barbaric and illusory sense of the self can we hope to establish a “future planetary civilisation”<sup>9</sup> of the sort prophesied by W.I. Thompson. Elsewhere, Joanna Macy, one of the more prolific of Eco-Buddhists, argues that below the level of our dysfunctional and pathologic empirical self, which she regards as the great “epistemological error of Occidental civilisation”,<sup>10</sup> lies a true or ecological self just waiting to germinate. The greening of this eco-self need not be sought through any specific process of mental and ethical cultivation. On the contrary, it rather curiously manifests itself through something “very close to the religious concept of grace.”<sup>11</sup> We shall return to Macy in more detail later but two points immediately spring to mind at this stage. In the first place, the views expressed above, with their dependence on a hierarchical stratification of the self, are at least superficially closer to *vedantic* notions, particularly those advanced in the *Visistadvaita* of Ramanuja, than to any known variety of Buddhism. Secondly, it is clear that the outlook owes as much to a longstanding American engagement with nature as it does to any Indian-based tradition of thought, be it orthodox or heterodox. As the philosopher George Santayana noted during an address to the University of California:

“things would have been different if [Western] philosophers had lived among your mountains... [which] suspend your forced sense of your own importance not merely as individuals, but even as men.”<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> N.P. Jacobson, “A Buddhist-Christian Probe of the Endangered Future”, *EB*, 15, 1982, 38–55. In particular *cf.* 41–3.

<sup>10</sup> J. Macy, “The Greening of the Self”, in A. Hunt-Badiner, ed., *Dharma Gaia: A Harvest of Essays in Buddhism and Ecology*, Berkeley, Parallax, 1990, 53–63; 53–7.

<sup>11</sup> *ibid.* 63.

<sup>12</sup> Quoted in W. Fox, *Toward a Transpersonal Ecology: Developing New Foundations for Environmentalism*, Boston, Shambala, 1990, 18.

In a similar vein, Allan Hunt-Badiner, the editor of a recent collection of essays on Buddhist environmentalism,<sup>13</sup> stresses the essential harmony between autochthonous Native American traditions of respect for nature and those found in Buddhism, though he does little for his case by listing additional parallels with the Gaia hypothesis of scientist James Lovelock, Central Asian Shamanism, the economics of E.F. Schumacher, the Orphic and Dionysian mysteries, modern physics, eco-feminism, cybernetics, general systems theory and the Christian creation-centred spirituality of the renegade Dominican monk, Matthew Fox. This embarrassment of riches calls to mind Stcherbatsky's rather ambitious attempt in *Buddhist Logic* to show that every conceivable Western thinker from Parmenides to Hegel is either pre- or post-figured in the writings of Dignaga and Dharmakirti. The problem with this kind of approach is that it tends to deprive the subject under examination of any fundamental core. In our case, it deprives Buddhism of the freedom to exist 'in itself' and, as such, is reminiscent of the nineteenth-century liberal protestant reduction of Biblical tradition by the method of documentary source criticism, an activity which the celebrated rabbinic scholar, Solomon Schechter, regarded as the "higher anti-semitism".

In a parallel, which again is reminiscent of the much earlier Chinese transformation of Buddhism, many Eco-Buddhists have attempted a reformulation of basic terms and concepts. The nature of the *sangha* is a particularly good case in point. Thus, in a rather obscure passage, Macy talks of the ancient "sacramental life"<sup>14</sup> of *bhikkhus* and *bhikkhunis*, perhaps referring to their role as a conduit through which the benign powers of nature can flow to their lay supporters who by force of circumstance are necessarily alienated from, and fearful of, the natural world. This restructuring of terminology is made more explicit elsewhere. Hunt-Badiner, for example, takes the term *sangha* to apply, not to the traditional "community of monks and nuns... [but] more informally... to mean all practitioners [of Dharma-Gaia] and kindred spirits."<sup>15</sup> The most obvious source for this innovation within contemporary American Buddhism is Gary Snyder, in many respects the modern day incarnation of Thoreau. Perhaps best known as Japhy Ryder, the 'factional' hero of Kerouac's beatnik mountain-dwelling novel *The Dharma Bums*, Snyder is also a prolific poet and pamphleteer. In a short essay, first published in 1969, he maintains that the term *sangha* is, in fact, the proper designation for the totality of all beings.<sup>16</sup> In a romantic development of this idea, he goes on to argue that

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<sup>13</sup> A. Hunt-Badiner, ed., *op. cit.*

<sup>14</sup> J. Macy, *Mutual Causality in Buddhism and General Systems Theory: The Dharma of Natural Systems*, Albany, SUNY Press, 1991, 204.

<sup>15</sup> *op. cit.*, xviii.

<sup>16</sup> G. Snyder, "Buddhism and the Possibilities of a Planetary Culture", reprinted in B. Devall and G. Sessions, *Deep Ecology*, Layton, Utah, Gibbs M. Smith, 1985, 251-3.

traditional societies of the past, specifically those that dwelt harmoniously as part of this totality of beings, such as Native Americans and Australian Aborigines, may be said to have “accomplished a condition of *Sangha*.”<sup>17</sup> Being *sangha*, then, does not entail particular assent to the doctrine and practice of the Buddha as embodied in the Pali Canon, the Mahāyāna sutras or to any of the schools of northern and eastern Buddhism. On the contrary, what we have here is essentially an ethical orientation towards the natural world. One could easily dismiss this point of view as part and parcel of the paraphernalia of Beat Zen, an immature transitional movement, now moribund, on the way to a more informed instantiation of Buddhism in America, yet this does not seem to be supported by the evidence. The anti-traditional view is quite widespread and is perhaps given greater weight by figures like Thich Nhat Hanh, a reasonably traditional Vietnamese representative of the Lin-chi school of Ch’an, now active in America. The first precept of the Order of Interbeing, a movement based on Thich Nhat Hanh’s reformulation of Buddhism states that no-one is to be “bound to any doctrine, theory or ideology, even Buddhist ones.”<sup>18</sup>

In line with this reworking of Buddhist concepts it is perhaps unsurprising to discover that Eco-Buddhist literature has further redefined the nature of the Mahāyānist practitioner par excellence, the Bodhisattva. The Bodhisattva is now quite simply an ecologically active member of the great community of biospiritualists and other assorted eco-activists busy hugging trees<sup>19</sup> and practicing insight meditation outside nuclear power stations and waste dumps for the benefit of all sentient beings. Social activism is the order of the day, as it is throughout much of the traditional Asian heartlands with engaged environmentalism now very much part of the modern agenda of Protestant Buddhism, be it amongst Tibetan refugees in India, in rural Thailand or in northern California. Gary Snyder believes that this change in emphasis is a natural reaction to the reality of traditional Buddhism, bogged down as it has been in scholastic examination of recondite epistemological and psychological problems. Even in its Mahāyānist forms, and despite the altruistic rhetoric, meditational procedures have been employed “toward the end of liberating a few dedicated individuals.”<sup>20</sup> In short, institutionalised Buddhism has become dead to “any meaningful function of compassion.”<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> *ibid.*, 252.

<sup>18</sup> Quoted by Sulak Sivaraksa, “True Development”, page 177 in A. Hunt-Badiner, ed., *op. cit.*, 169–177.

<sup>19</sup> *cf.* J. Macy, “The Greening of the Self”, in A. Hunt-Badiner, ed., *Dharma Gaia: A Harvest of Essays in Buddhism and Ecology*, 54ff.

<sup>20</sup> Snyder, *op. cit.*, 251.

<sup>21</sup> *ibid.*

Beyond his emblematic presence within the counter-culture as guru and eco-activist, Gary Snyder is the one of the more significant post-modern poets of nature in America today. The growing number of doctoral theses on his work eloquently attest to this fact. I do not possess the critical apparatus to assess the quality of his work myself but two contrasting examples of informed criticism will give a flavour. For Charles Altieri, Snyder's rejection of the tragic/heroic convention of earlier American poetics, such as that found in Pound, successfully enables him to "put mind more directly into the impersonal processes of the world."<sup>22</sup> By evoking "a metaphysical state [earlier] described by Fenellosa (incidentally, Tweed's prime example of the nineteenth century Romantic/Exotic type of Buddhist) and Whitehead",<sup>23</sup> Snyder is able to articulate the "radiant nodes of the process"<sup>24</sup> that constitutes the world. In a less flattering light, the critic, Robert Boyers, regards Snyder simply as "the poetic Marlboro man."<sup>25</sup>

Snyder's short work, *Smokey the Bear Sutra* (1969), brings together the Buddhist and environmental concerns of the author quite neatly. As the poem unfolds, the Buddha predicts a future rebirth in the land of Walden Pond, the Grand Canyon and Big Sur. He will take the wrathful form of Smokey the Bear, clad in blue work overalls and a stetson hat. With a halo of smoke and fire produced by the man-made forest fires of *kali yuga* he will trample "underfoot wasteful freeways and needless suburbs; smashing the worms of capitalism and totalitarianism."<sup>26</sup> He will teach the great *mantra*: "Drown their butts, crush their butts. Drown their butts, crush their butts."<sup>27</sup> And with his *vajra*-shovel he will dig out and dump the enemies of nature. A millennial era of peace, free from the dangers of oil slicks, will ensue and all will win the highest perfect enlightenment.

Joanna Macy approaches the environmental question in a quite different way. She is convinced that the "political values... implicit... in early Buddhist teachings"<sup>28</sup> require an active engagement with the State understood in socio-political terms. Not only that, but at present this kind of engagement is of the utmost urgency. "The very viability of our societies and ecosystems necessitates

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<sup>22</sup> C. Altieri, *Enlarging the Temple: New Directions in American Poetry during the 1960s*, Lewisburg, Bucknell University Press, 1979, 144.

<sup>23</sup> *ibid.*, 136.

<sup>24</sup> *ibid.*, 147.

<sup>25</sup> R. Boyers, "A Mixed Bag", *Partisan Review*, 36, 1969, 313.

<sup>26</sup> G. Snyder, "Smokey the Bear Sutra", (1969), reprinted in Devall and Sessions, *op. cit.*, 25-7.

<sup>27</sup> *ibid.*, 26.

<sup>28</sup> *Mutual Causality in Buddhism and General Systems Theory: The Dharma of Natural Systems*, Albany, SUNY Press, 1991, 198.

it.<sup>29</sup> It is incumbent on responsibly committed Buddhist activists to be guided by the ideal of “reverence for natural systems”, an ideal she derives from both early Buddhism and from the work of the general systems theorist Ervin Laszlo. However, further investigation reveals another source for Macy’s message of redemptive work. At an earlier stage in her career, as a Peace Corps volunteer, she came in contact with the Sri Lankan, Buddhist-inspired Sarvodaya movement of A.T. Ariyaratne. This led to the publication of a book *Dharma and Development*<sup>30</sup> in 1981. Now Gombrich and Obeyesekere identify Sarvodaya as a prime example of a Protestant Buddhist movement. Its rise to prominence is closely associated with the injection of large sums of rural development money from foreign donor countries and though an example of “practical this-worldly asceticism of an altruistic”<sup>31</sup> kind, it is not at all clear that its basic orientation is uniquely Buddhist. In fact, there is reasonable evidence to suggest a strong Gandhian source for much of Ariyaratne’s thought. In a rather fulsome attack on the Buddhist authenticity of Sarvodaya, Gombrich and Obeyesekere claim that:

“Much of what has been written on Sarvodaya is by good-hearted but naive Western intellectuals who see the movement in terms of their own utopian fantasies of a benevolent social order.”<sup>32</sup>

Not that Ariyaratne is free from utopian and romantic fantasy himself. Critics have regarded the goals of the movement as both simplistic and unattainable, based as they are on a sentimental, bourgeoisie projection back into Sri Lanka’s Buddhist-inspired village past.

“Ariyaratne’s disembodied village has little recognition of social conflict, of the vice and folly that constitute part of our humanity and were clearly recognised by the great religious teachers of history, including the Buddha.”<sup>33</sup>

Further scrutiny reveals a number of parallels between the Sarvodaya movement and Eco-Buddhism. In the first place, the need for “a clear beautiful environment”,<sup>34</sup> the first of ten basic village needs according to the teachings of Ariyaratne, meshes nicely with the environmental concerns of contemporary American Buddhist activists. From another perspective, both Ariyaratne and Macy make determined efforts to establish the validity of their positions, by a romantic appeal to antiquity. In Ariyaratne’s case, this relates to the concept

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<sup>29</sup> *ibid.*, 195.

<sup>30</sup> J. Macy, *Dharma and Development: Religion as a Resource in the Sarvodaya Self-Help Movement*, West Hartford, Conn., Kumarian Press, 1983.

<sup>31</sup> R. Gombrich & G. Obeyesekere, *Buddhism Transformed: Religious Change in Sri Lanka*, Dehli, Motilal Banarsidass, 1990, 245.

<sup>32</sup> *ibid.*, 243.

<sup>33</sup> *ibid.*, 251.

<sup>34</sup> *ibid.*, 248.

(borrowed from Gandhi) of selfless labour (*sramadana*). This may be all very well in the Sri Lankan context where Singer's "symbolic traditionalization"<sup>35</sup> appears necessary for new ideas and practices to become established, but why Macy feels the need for this procedure remains a bit of a mystery, especially when set against the wider background of innovative activism of the Snyder variety. Nevertheless, Macy and Snyder are often of one mind. The former writer regards Sarvodaya and Eco-Buddhism as both providing contexts for the positive evolution of the role of the traditional monk, who by leaving his solitude and becoming part of the wider community of eco-activists, is transformed into the altruistic Bodhisattva of the Mahāyāna. This is the sort of confusion of traditions relished by both authors. Snyder on his side derives a similar conclusion from his contact with Chinese and Japanese sources. Quoting the Ch'an maxim, "a day without work, a day without food",<sup>36</sup> he concludes that Buddhism in the present epoch implies "real work", i.e. meaningful, environmentally positive work, not the foppish or artificial work predicated by a decadent, late capitalist economy. The message of redemptive work is never far from the surface here.

A final factor, though rarely made explicit, in the composition of Eco-Buddhism is Spinozism, or more specifically a variant on Spinoza's philosophy developed in recent decades by Arne Naess and presented under the title 'Deep Ecology' Naess, Norway's first academic professor of philosophy, and a noted mountaineer, having conquered peaks in the Hindu Kush and the Himalayas, has a massive bibliography under his belt, concentrating since the 50's on the application of Spinoza to environmental problematics. While recognising that an ecological interpretation of Spinoza's logical monism cannot, of itself, be fully justified, Naess has worked hard to tease out potentially useful elements in Spinoza so that they may be blended with other thought patterns, the most notable being Buddhism and the teachings of Gandhi, though in practice, Naess sees little difference between the two holding, as did Gandhi, that Buddhism is a reformed version of Hinduism.<sup>37</sup> Rather surprisingly, a number of other important, mainly Scandinavian, Spinoza scholars also see substantial parallels between Spinoza and Buddhism. Jon Wetlesen, for instance, in a highly detailed treatment of the ethics of freedom, notes significant points of contact between

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<sup>35</sup> discussed at *ibid.*, 251.

<sup>36</sup> G. Snyder, *The Real Work: Interviews and Talks 1964–1979*, New York, New Directions, 1980, 104.

<sup>37</sup> A. Naess, "Through Spinoza to Mahayana Buddhism or Through Mahayana Buddhism to Spinoza?", in J. Wetlesen, ed., *Spinoza's Philosophy of Man: Proceedings of the Scandinavian Spinoza Symposium 1977*, Oslo, University of Oslo Press, 1978, 136-158. In particular pages 138 & 141.

the Four Noble Truths and Spinoza's treatment of liberation and bondage.<sup>38</sup> Again, Paul Wienpahl, author of *The Radical Spinoza*<sup>39</sup> and advocate of an egoless, mystic intuition as the highest level of knowledge for Spinoza, a kind of "seeing things as they are",<sup>40</sup> came to his studies after a clearly influential spell in a Japanese Zen monastery in the late 1950's.

Wetlesen, though a self-proclaimed eco-catastrophist and admirer of Schumacher's 'Buddhist economics',<sup>41</sup> holds that the teachings of the Buddha and Spinoza share a certain otherworldliness. This makes it difficult for either system of thought to provide a satisfactory foundation for any meaningful environmental activity. However, Naess disagrees with this, preferring instead to align himself with the fashionable trend, recently identified by Lambert Schmithausen,<sup>42</sup> which aims to reject the traditional view of Buddhism as escapist. This makes it a rather more straightforward matter for Naess to erect an ecological ethic upon quasi-Buddhist foundations than it would be for Wetlesen. In its developed form, Naess's deep ecology maintains that God or Nature (Spinoza's *Deus sive Natura*) is perfect in itself.<sup>43</sup> All things are said to be possessed of intrinsic value and the "richness and diversity of life forms contribute to the realization of these values."<sup>44</sup> Similarly, all things are interconnected. "There is a network of cause-effect relations connecting everything with everything"<sup>45</sup> yet all things strive towards higher and higher levels of self-realisation, not in a narrow, atomic manner but in the sense that one comes to see that which is real as that which binds us to the whole. This is Spinoza's *conatus*, a drawing near to the "realisation of union with the whole of nature",<sup>46</sup> an understanding love of nature which aims at the most extensive vision of things possible. In a sense then, the goal of deep ecology is a this-

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<sup>38</sup> J. Wetlesen, *The Stage and the Way: Spinoza's Ethics of Freedom*, Assen, van Gorcum, 1973, 13f. See also J. Wetlesen, "Body Awareness as a Gateway to Eternity: a Note on the Mysticism of Spinoza and its Affinity to Buddhist Meditation", in S. Hessig, ed., *Speculum Spinozanum 1677-1977*, London, RKP, 1977, 479-494 on the relations between Spinoza and Buddhist insight meditation (*vipassanā*).

<sup>39</sup> P. Wienpahl, *The Radical Spinoza*, New York, 1979.

<sup>40</sup> cf. P. Wienpahl, "Spinoza and Mysticism", in J. Wetlesen ed., *op. cit.* 211-224.

<sup>41</sup> Wetlesen, *op. cit.*, 405-6.

<sup>42</sup> Noted by L. Schmithausen, *Buddhism and Nature: The Lecture Delivered on the Occasion of the EXPO 1990*, An Enlarged Version with Notes, *Studia Philologica Buddhica*, Occasional Paper Series VII, Tokyo, The International Institute for Buddhist Studies, 1991, 12, paragraph 18.1.

<sup>43</sup> A. Naess, "Spinoza and Ecology", in S. Hessig, ed., *op. cit.*, 418-425. In particular 419ff.

<sup>44</sup> Fox, *op. cit.*, 115ff.

<sup>45</sup> Naess, *op. cit.*, 420.

<sup>46</sup> *ibid.*, 421.

worldly inflation of the self such that it may eventually become co-terminate with the boundary of the known. The process shows a marked similarity to Macy's greening of the eco-self. Now this looks all very well from a Gandhian perspective, in fact Naess admits to such an influence,<sup>47</sup> but it seems a little curious from the Buddhist point of view. In other words, what is specifically Buddhist about deep ecology?

Although I have seen no specific reference to Far Eastern forms of Buddhism in any of the writings I have consulted by Naess, Hua-Yen teachings appear to be the nearest equivalent to the position outlined above, particularly if we disregard the apparent theism of Spinozism. This connection is explicitly, though more regularly implicitly, endorsed by Eco-Buddhists. Snyder, for instance, mentions the Hua-Yen vision of "the world as a vast interrelated network in which all objects and creatures are necessary and illuminated"<sup>48</sup> in the context of a powerful antidote to the scholasticism of the early schools. In other words, its doctrine of interdependence acts as a welcomed balance to the infuriatingly intellectual felicities of mainstream Buddhist debate. Similarly, by rejecting the Abhidharmic linear understanding of the causal process (*pratītyasamutpāda*) and insisting that the position of archaic Buddhism is one of mutual interdependence or reciprocal causality,<sup>49</sup> Macy moves rather close to a position that unites Hua-Yen teachings on identity and total intercausality with the original teachings of the Buddha.

Superficially, then, Hua-Yen appears to be the ideal Buddhist support for an ecological ethic maintaining, as it does, the interpenetration of all things. However, there is a problem, for in the *dharmadhātu*, the non-obstructed 'dharma-field' of suchness (*tathatā*), past, present and future are said to be harmonised within a single moment. Quoting from the Ocean Seal of Uisang (625–702):

"One is identical to all and all is identical with one... The incalculably long aeons we identified to a single thought-instant... All epochs are mutually identical... *Samsara* and *Nirvana* are always harmonized together. Particular and Universal are completely merged together without distinction."<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> A. Naess, *Freedom, Emotion and Self-Subsistence: The Structure of a Central Part of Spinoza's Ethics*, Oslo, University of Oslo Press, 1975, 98. The ramifications of this are also discussed in Fox, *op. cit.*, 107ff.

<sup>48</sup> G. Snyder, in Devall and Sessions, *op. cit.*, 252.

<sup>49</sup> Macy, *Mutual Causality in Buddhism and General Systems Theory: The Dharma of Natural Systems*, 59–62.

<sup>50</sup> Quoted in S. Odin, "A Metaphysics of Cumulative Penetration: Process Theory and Hua Yen Buddhism", *Process Studies*, 11.2, 1981, 658–2: 66.

If this is so, if the future inheres in the past and vice versa, then the Hua-Yen position on causality is one of rigid determination, for if:

“...each *dharma* is simply an ‘effect’ reducible to its manifold of ‘causes’: there is no creativity, novelty, or freedom of decision.... There is complete mutual penetration and mutual identification between all dharmas of the universe.”<sup>51</sup>

The Hua-Yen realm of total togetherness then is completely devoid of a *telos*. It is going nowhere! Now, I would argue that this is probably the position of early Buddhism, but we must remember that this way of presenting Buddhist thought has been chosen by proponents of Eco-Buddhism specifically because it avoids the constraints of other options, ie. the strict determinism and non-teleological flavour of Spinoza for Naess, the simplistic linearity of the Abhidharma for Macy and the arid scholasticism of early Buddhism for Snyder. Such a formulation is supposed to open up the possibility of a better ordering of man’s relations with the natural world in its infinite diversity and complexity, yet as Odin rightly notes:

“Hua-yen Buddhism is deficient in categorial equipment or adequate conceptual apparatus to argue both for the retention of a single determinate form by each dharma, as well as the ‘total fusion of all that is.’ For if any actuality is to possess definiteness of structural pattern or uniqueness and singularity of form, there must be some theoretical mechanism in the Hua-Yen system for the ‘gradation, selection and elimination’ of alternative patterns; but then one cannot argue for the ‘total fusion of all that is’.”<sup>52</sup>

In a highly stimulating article, Robert C. Neville shows that a two level<sup>53</sup> interpretation of Hua-Yen causality, such that total mutual penetration is only understood to be true from the ultimate perspective, is in harmony with the tradition itself. On the conventional level, indeterminacy with regard to the causal realm of process may continue to be retained. But as Schmithausen has so clearly pointed out,<sup>54</sup> this solution, one which is also maintained within the Japanese Tendai school, fails to address the problems of the environment. If we accept indeterminacy within the mundane realm, we must, willy nilly, also accept that ordinary unenlightened beings are unlikely to be aware of the true nature of things. This will inevitably incline them to be out of harmony with the total togetherness of nature. If, on the other hand, one sees things from the

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<sup>51</sup> *ibid.*, 71.

<sup>52</sup> *ibid.*, 76.

<sup>53</sup> R. C. Neville, “Buddhism and Process Philosophy”, in K. K. Inada & N. P. Jacobson, eds., *Buddhism and American Thinkers*, Albany, SUNY Press, 1984, 121–142; 137.

<sup>54</sup> *op. cit.*, 24–5, paragraph 31.

ultimate perspective, with the fully deterministic consequences that this implies, one must accept the full perfection of nature. This is clearly a recipe for inaction and equanimity, for:

“If Buddha-Nature, being identical with the true essence of all entities, pervades everything, it follows that not only natural beings but also products of civilisation possess Buddha-Nature, and not only walls and tiles, as some texts actually state, but even cars, highways, dumping places, toxic waste, nuclear bombs, etc.”<sup>55</sup>

The Eco-Buddhist is in a bit of a double bind here and I have the strong feeling that this is realised by some authors, though never explicitly stated. Now, American Buddhist studies are littered with scholars who at some stage in their career have been strongly influenced by Christian process theology of the Harshornian kind. It is also fairly well known that process theologians like John B. Cobb<sup>56</sup> and David Griffin<sup>57</sup> led the way in developing a coherent Christian response to the present environmental crisis. A number of authors under discussion in this paper actually owe more than a passing allegiance to process thought; Nolan P. Jacobson<sup>58</sup> even going to the extent of dedicating his book on contemporary Buddhism to Charles Hartshorne himself. In an earlier article, the same author, paraphrasing Hartshorne, reports that:

“In both Christian and Buddhist thought, the art of loving involves the penetration of all ego-centred compulsive drives and delusions that prevent men and women from participating in the fullness of experience and *taking responsibility for preserving the endangered future* (my italics).”<sup>59</sup>

This certainly harmonises with the evolutionary cosmic purpose ethics of a Christian like John Cobb who holds to the Whiteheadian doctrine that “God’s persuasive power lures all aspects of the universe toward the realisation of instances of ever greater richness of experience or intensity of feeling”,<sup>60</sup> but how close is it to the traditional Buddhist position? To my mind, it is not very close, but this turns out to be a positive advantage to the Eco-Buddhist, for the idea of creative novelty, of a *telos*, really needs to be injected into traditional

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<sup>55</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>56</sup> *cf.* C. Birch & J. B. Cobb Jr., *The Liberation of Life: From the Cell to the Community*, Cambridge, CUP, 1981.

<sup>57</sup> *cf.* D. Griffin, “Contributions to a Theology of Nature”, *Buckwell Review*, 20, 1972, 3–24.

<sup>58</sup> N. P. Jackson, *Buddhism and the Contemporary World: Change and Self-Correction*, Carbondale, S. Illinois University Press, 1983.

<sup>59</sup> N. P. Jacobson, “A Buddhist-Christian Probe of the Endangered Future”, *EB*, 15, 1982, 54–5.

<sup>60</sup> *cf.* Fox, *op. cit.*, 181.

Buddhism so that it may fully open itself to ecological concerns. Process thought can do this job admirably, for it shows a marked congruence with Hua-Yen yet lacks the negative consequences described above. Not only that, process thinkers and Buddhist academics have been in dialogue for a considerable time making borrowings on both sides commonplace. Whitehead is often said to have had a view of things: "... uniquely available and publicly penetrable through the language and imagery of Buddhism."<sup>61</sup>

Nevertheless, and despite obvious similarities, recent work in dialogue between the two camps has identified a significant difference between Buddhism and Whitehead over the nature of causation. As we have already seen, Buddhism, in its Hua-Yen form, cannot account for change. Hartshorne<sup>62</sup> tries to show, though I do not entirely follow the argument, that a similar charge may be laid against the door of Nagarjuna, but even if we accept that Nagarjuna is an authentic representative of mainstream Buddhism, hardly a controversial suggestion, we are, it seems to me, led to accept that the realm of causal relations works in a non-teleologic or, in process jargon, in a symmetric manner. There can be no emergent novelty, no creative freedom and "no cumulative or incremental change in the structure of reality."<sup>63</sup> Whitehead and his followers, on the other hand, hold to an asymmetric causal process in which past events are creatively synthesised at each node of the process such that the many become one and are increased by one.<sup>64</sup> This emergent togetherness, a creative advance into novelty, is at odds with the cosmic togetherness of Buddhist symmetrical arrangements. Cobb's Christian environmental ethic is clearly built on this principle.

Neville<sup>65</sup> has argued that Buddhists would do well to take the principle of asymmetry on board. Of course, this would supply a much needed teleological element, not the straightforward pre-existing or supratemporal *telos* of traditional Christianity but, nevertheless, an idea of emergent purpose. Not unsurprisingly, in that it solves a substantial dilemma, Macy argues that this is the position of archaic Buddhism, though in the discussion leading up to this point she admits her debt to both process thought<sup>66</sup> and to general systems theory.<sup>67</sup> Perhaps,

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<sup>61</sup> Neville, *op. cit.*, 133, quoting from T.J.J. Altizer, "The Buddhist Ground of the Whiteheadian God", *Process Studies*, 5.4, 1975, 227–236.

<sup>62</sup> C. Hartshorne, "Whitehead's Differences from Buddhism", in *PEW*, 25.4, 1975, 407–413. Also *cf.* C. Hartshorne "Toward a Buddhistic-Christian Religion", in K. K. Inada & N. P. Jacobson, eds., *Buddhism and American Thinkers*, Albany, 1984, p. 2–13.

<sup>63</sup> Odin, *op. cit.*, 70-1.

<sup>64</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>65</sup> *op. cit.*, 123.

<sup>66</sup> Macy, *Mutual Causality in Buddhism and General Systems Theory: The Dharma of Natural Systems*, 177.

<sup>67</sup> *ibid.*, 208–9.

knowing full well the difficulties of imposing a full teleology on Buddhism, she uses the term “telenomic or telic”<sup>68</sup> to define the principle.

In conclusion then, Eco-Buddhism, in its most developed form to date (i.e. in the work of Macy *et als*) is informed by a variety of extraneous factors. On the Buddhist side, it accepts *pratītyasamutpāda* as the central element of the Buddha’s teaching though in a symmetric i.e. non-linear form not characteristic of the ancient sources. Then, in order to protect the activist message of engaged Buddhism, a telenomic principle of emergent purpose is introduced, probably from the direction of process theology. This is quite an intriguing procedure, and represents an attempt, though not a fully successful attempt, to steer a middle path between the two extremes of monism and complete pluralism, which is after all the Pali canonical position on causality.<sup>69</sup> Ecologic activity is seen as a function of ‘seeing things as they are’, i.e. as interdependent, yet Macy and her co-workers fail to offer, and in fact seem often to reject, any special soteriological method that might be used to achieve this vision despite the fact that this was, for the Buddha himself, an arduous and lengthy process.<sup>70</sup> The only necessary requirement in order to receive a vision of the world *sub specie aeternitatis* is something “very close to the religious concept of grace.”<sup>71</sup> The parallels with Spinoza are very clear here. The final debt of Eco-Buddhism is to deep ecology, particularly to its reformulation of the Spinozan *conatus*, yet Arne Naess’ concept of self-realisation as expansion to the furthest limits of the cosmos certainly appears rather too *vedantic* to fit our Buddhist context.

Despite the problems, which I hope that I have successfully indicated, the generality of Eco-Buddhist views have received significant endorsement from a variety of influential directions, not least from H. H. The Dalai Lama<sup>72</sup> himself. As such they represent an important and perhaps seminal American appropriation of Buddhism and clearly require further examination.

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<sup>68</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>69</sup> S, II, 77; *cf.* also Y. Karunadasa, *Buddhist Analysis of Matter*, Columbo, Department of Cultural Affairs, 1967, 175–6.

<sup>70</sup> On the necessity for training to ‘see’ *pratītyasamutpāda* *cf.* S, II, 131–2.

<sup>71</sup> Macy, in A. Hunt-Badiner, ed., *Dharma Gaia: A Harvest of Essays in Buddhism and Ecology*, Berkeley, 1990, 63.

<sup>72</sup> H.H. Dalai Lama “Forward”, dated 9 February 1990, to A. Hunt-Badiner, *op. cit.*