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Buddhist and Tantric Perspectives On Causality and Society

Chris Kang^{*}

Abstract

This paper examines the articulation of causality from Buddhist and Indian Tantric perspectives, offering a potentially fresh look at this topic using epistemologies and insights outside the dominant Western paradigm. Reclaiming non-Western voices that analyze and intuit causality rooted in multidimensional modes of knowing reveals new possibilities about the nature of reality and enables integral transformative actions for emancipating human suffering. In particular, I examine the genealogy of early Buddhist, Buddhist Tantric, Sāṃkhya, and Hindu Tantric perspectives, with reference to relevant internal philosophical debates, to explicate alternative viewpoints on causality and their implications for society.

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Dominant Perspectives

Aristotle is justifiably the single greatest contributor to the theory of causality in Western philosophy. His articulation of the four types of causes—material, efficient, formal and final—forms the foundation of modern conceptions of causality (Olen 18). For Aristotle, the material cause is the substance or material that makes up a thing, as in the wood that makes up a wooden chair. The efficient cause is that which initiates change in a thing, as in the carpenter that cuts and carves the wood into a chair. The formal cause is the shape or defining characteristic that a thing takes when it changes, as in a chair of such and such a shape that has come about as a result of the carpenter shaping the wood. And the final cause is the goal or purpose of the change of a thing, as in the purpose of the carpenter that drives him/her to shape the wood the way he/she did.

Modern Western philosophy shows a multivalent attitude to causality. Bertrand Russell famously denied that there is such a thing as causation due to its perceived incoherence, Rudolf Carnap noted the imprecision of concepts of cause and effect due to their occurrence within a perceptual world, whereas others such as David Hume, John Stuart Mill and John L. Mackie posited variants of what has come to be called the Regularity View of Causation (RVC) (Koons 19-21; Pruss 36-37; Psillos 3-4). Simply stated, the RVC assumes that there are no necessary connections in nature that make an effect inescapably follow a cause. Rather, the ontological conditions for causation lie in non-causal spatiotemporal relations and actual regularities between events. In other words, for the Humean RVC thesis, there is no intrinsic cause-effect relation between events in the natural world that operates independently of the mind. Whether couched in terms of Hume's contiguity, priority, and constant conjunction, or in terms of Mackie's INUS (insufficient but necessary part of an unnecessary but sufficient) conditions, or of Lewis's counter-

factual conditionals, Humean analyses of causation generally involve the need for regularities, direct or indirect (Pruss 31-37; Psillos 19-52). In contrast, non-Humeans argue that causation is "...essentially singular: a matter of this causing that" (Koons 21; Psillos 5). Examples of this would be Ducasse's single-difference account and Salmon's mechanistic approach, where the relation between two events A and B are actual rather than conceptual, and that there exists either a direct causal link between A and B with no other intervening changes as in Ducasse's case, or a causal mechanism made up of a continuity of real processes with causal effect rather than a direct link between discrete events A and B as in Salmon's case (Psillos 66-71; 110-120).

Perhaps the single dominant discourse on causality of the modern (and postmodern, for that matter) times is that of the scientific deductive-nomological (DN) explanation, and its close cousin, the statistical explanation (Psillos 215-262). The DN explanation of causation derives from the modern empiricist tradition following Hume's reductive account of the relation between cause and effect. Carnap describes the DN explanation within science as a theory in which "causality means nothing but a functional dependency of a certain sort" (264). What this implies is that although the actual essence of necessary relations between two events cannot be found, the regular and uniform correlation between two states of a system existing in temporal proximity, with one state preceding the other in time, can be regarded nevertheless as a causal relationship. On the other hand, if these two events are correlated only occasionally, this relationship can be considered one of mere chance. The strength of the correlation is judged by means of a statistical calculation that aims at testing the probabilistic significance of one event causing another. Such probabilistic calculations underpin the logic of statistical explanation to differentiate what is "causal" from what is "chance." Within the scientific paradigm, there can be causal relationships between a single causal factor and a single effect factor (the cause

is termed the “independent variable” and the effect termed the “dependent variable”), between one independent variable and two or more dependent variables, between two or more independent variables and one dependent variable, between multiple independent variables and multiple dependent variables. Depending on the number and permutations of independent and dependent variables, the statistical analytical methods used can include univariate, bivariate and multivariate statistics. In short, the dominant scientific model of causality is an analytical explanation that leaves aside the ontological question of whether such causal relations between events exist essentially in the real world, whatever that may be.

I will now outline the genealogy of Buddhist and Tantric perspectives on causality, correlating their key insights with their potential for social emancipation.

Buddhist Perspectives

The Buddha

When the historical Buddha attained enlightenment (*sambodhi*) under the fig tree more than two thousand five hundred years ago, it was said that he uttered a paean of joy describing his core discovery in a pithy statement: “This being, that is; from the arising of this, that arises ... This not being, that is not; from the cessation of this, that ceases” (Ireland 11-12). This is often described as the key formula of the Buddha’s doctrine of dependent arising (*pratītya-samutpāda*) which states that all phenomena arise and cease dependent on other phenomena; that reality is fundamentally conditioned, dynamic, non-isolated and dependently-related. This principle applies not only to everything within the phenomenal world but also to what some would call “ultimate reality” or the “noumenon”—the supposed final substrate or truth of every existent.

From the Buddha's perspective, there is no unchanging final reality that stands apart from, within, or together with, all that can be experienced by mind or consciousness. Even consciousness itself is in the final analysis dependently-arisen and therefore empty of inherent self.

This principle of dependent arising expresses itself in five orders of causality: (1) physical laws (*utu niyama*); (2) biological laws (*bīja niyama*); (3) ethical laws (*karma niyama*); (4) psychological laws (*citta niyama*); and (5) natural laws of phenomena outside the realm of the first four laws, such as the advent of Buddhas in various world systems and the accompanying environmental signs and portents (*dharmā niyama*). These five orders represent the varied patterning of reality as experienced by consciousness and underscore the point that a self-regulating, self-evolving universe has no need for a transcendent "creator" apart from "creation." In fact, the Buddha would argue against the logical coherence and moral plausibility of such an idea as can be inferred from a number of discourses recorded in the Pāli canon.¹ Of particular interest is the ethical law of *karma* often translated as "moral cause and effect." Actually the term "*karma*" simply means "action" or as the Buddha defines it, *karma* is any intentional or volitional (*cetanā*) action of mind, speech and body. Simply put, the law of karma states that any volitional action rooted in non-greed, non-hatred and non-delusion (or in positive terms: generosity, love/compassion, and wisdom) gives rise to virtuous or positive imprints in the mind that would subsequently result in experiences of happiness and pleasure whereas any volitional action rooted in greed, hatred or delusion gives rise to their opposite non-virtuous/negative mental imprints that later result in experiences of suffering and displeasure. A behavioral guideline that emerges from such a view of ethical causality is that one ought to engage mindfully in positive *karma* rooted in positive volitions and abandon mindfully negative *karma* rooted in negative volitions; such a practice would minimize or stop harm and bring benefits to both oneself and others. For the Buddha, causality is

not reduced to a mere intellectual conundrum or mental entertainment, but is a living, breathing reality of ethical intelligence with far reaching implications personally and collectively.

Another key insight of the Buddha in relation to causality can be found in his articulation of the twelve links of origination and cessation of suffering. In applying the general principle of dependent arising to the genesis of suffering, the Buddha outlines how one link conditions and leads to the next link in the chain of cyclic suffering that all unenlightened beings experience. I will now explain the overall logic of the twelve links of dependent origination of suffering without going into detail for each of these links. For the Buddha, our suffering is rooted in fundamental ignorance of how things really exist. This ignorance is basically a misperception and misconception of the ontological status of phenomena and the self. It underpins volitional and emotional reactions that shape our consciousness. Within consciousness lies the potential for sensory and cognitive capacities that enable contact between consciousness and its corresponding sensorial (referring to tactile, visual, auditory, gustatory, and olfactory) and mental (referring to thoughts and ideas) objects. Such contact produces sensation or feeling—both physical and mental, which may be pleasant, unpleasant, or neutral—leading to craving, clinging, and other afflictive emotions that bring about suffering. This conditionally arisen process starting with ignorance and ending in suffering rests on a causal logic that is neither deterministic nor arbitrary. For the Buddha, it is not a case of causative determinism but more an expression of conditional concomitance. In other words, the early Buddhist causal logic can be illustrated as follows: when A is, B is and when A arises, B comes to be; when A is not, B is not and when A ceases, B ceases too. A is a necessary but insufficient condition for B.

This is neither the time nor space for me to explain the twelve-link formula in any detail, but suffice to say that for the Buddha, causali-

ty is (a) not strict determinism but a process of conditioned genesis (i.e., with x as condition, y comes to be); and (b) not an explanation of cosmic causation from the first cause of ignorance but of empirical conditionality of suffering in every moment of experience. In short, with sufficient clarity and insight, it is possible for any persons who observe their own experience to verify for themselves this process of conditionality from moment to moment. When insight-wisdom arises to replace the factor of ignorance, this whole chain of suffering deconstructs and a whole new process, the process of liberation from cyclic suffering, emerges: from the cessation of ignorance comes the cessation of all subsequent links in the twelvefold causal chain, culminating in the end of suffering.

Serious consideration of the Buddha's theory of causality as outlined above would, in my view, motivate us into a wiser relationship with ourselves and a more compassionate relationship with the world. We do this by paying wakeful attention to how we *mis*-perceive dynamic reality as static things, *mis*-conceive self or being as independent, solid and real, *mis*-react with afflictive emotions like craving and grasping, thus generating unnecessary suffering for oneself and others; we also see, through systematic training of attention, how it is possible to free ourselves from this vicious cycle and to selflessly benefit others through a "de-neuroticizing" of our own minds. The Buddha's view of dependent arising can be applied to the genesis of structural suffering in institutions, communities, societies and the world at large—identifying the causal roots of violence, war, social exploitation, ecological devastation as collective ignorance-craving-grasping, and guiding our transformative social action in terms of eradicating such causal ignorance-craving-grasping in the collective psyche.

Mahāyāna Buddhist views

Perhaps the single most prominent and outstanding contributor to the development of Mahāyāna Buddhist thinking is the 2nd century Indian philosopher and master Nāgārjuna. Without going into the evolution of Buddhist thought, it can be said that Nāgārjuna, through his profound works on Buddhist dialectical reasoning that pioneered the distinctive Middle-Way school of Buddhist tenets, brought about a deeper clearer appreciation of the Buddha's intent and view on the central doctrine of dependent arising. It can be argued that Nāgārjuna strove to steer the Buddha's teaching away from the extremes of eternalism on one hand and nihilism on the other by propounding a reinvigorated understanding of the middle way of dependent arising. Although early Buddhist Abhidharma philosophers managed to analyze and categorize all physical and mental phenomena down to their atomistic foundations, Nāgārjuna sought to highlight the logical inconsistency and mistaken assumptions inherent in regarding these phenomenal building bricks of existence (*dharmas*) as eternally existing quasi-entities. He argued that pluralistic reduction of reality into truly existent "atoms" of mind and matter fails in freezing what is fluid, contextual, interdependently emerging and dissolving into eternally existent entities—this, he argued, accords neither with the Buddha's original insight nor with reality correctly seen with wisdom. Instead, Nāgārjuna argues that although all mental and material processes are fundamentally empty of any inherent entitiness, they are dependently-co-arisen and therefore are functional and experienceable. He takes pain to emphasize that emptiness (*śūnyatā*) does not mean, contrary to unfair popular misconception, that nothing exists or that everything is really nothingness like a vacuum or void. What Nāgārjuna is saying is that to say that something either exists or not exist are merely two sides of the same coin of presupposed entitiness—in the first case, a real entity exists, i.e., a case of eternalism; in the second case, this real entity does not exist, i.e., a case of nihilism. Instead, a more accurate

view is that any “thing” exists only in dependence on other “things” and cannot be strictly speaking reduced to a “thing” at all. These other “things” that the first “thing” depends upon are in themselves dependent on other factors, what can be termed as causes and conditions. Thus, although nothing exists inherently on its own steam, everything appears and functions as dependently arisen facts of experience.

Later Buddhist thinkers, inspired by Nāgārjuna’s example, drew forth further implications of Nāgārjuna’s thought by discussing dependent arising in terms of three levels of dependency. Thinkers such as Candrakīrti, Bhāvaviveka, and Buddhapālita contributed to the development of the Middle Way school in India, while in Tibet, one of the most prominent contributors is the 14th century scholar and yogi Tsong Khapa. Tsong Khapa advocates what is now known as the Middle Way Consequentialist (*prāsaṅgika-mādhyamaka*) school, a philosophical school Tibetans regard as having first been founded by Buddhapālita. Following his reading of Buddhapālita’s consequentialist logic, Tsong Khapa conceives of the causality of dependent arising as dependency in terms of (1) parts and wholes; (2) causes and conditions; and (3) mental imputation on a valid basis. Firstly, Tsong Khapa explains that everything that exists does so in dependence on the parts that comprise it, and so the whole makes no sense devoid of the parts and the parts make no sense apart from the whole. Secondly, all phenomena arise from multiple causes and conditions, which in turn derive from other causes and conditions. A cause can be a primary substantial cause or the material “stuff” that comprises any object (e.g., the apple seed is the primary substantial cause of the apple tree) or a secondary instrumental cause or the effective factor that makes something happen (e.g., the planting of the apple seed in good soil). Conditions are different from substantial causes because they provide the supportive context for the causes to bear fruit (e.g., fertile soil, adequate hydration, optimal sunshine). Thirdly, for anything to be what it is, it depends on the constructing capacity of the

mind by virtue of the process of mere labeling or mental imputation. This “mere labeling” or “mental imputation” is a cognitive-semantic-volitional-perceptual and possibly affective process of designation superimposed on what can be deemed to be a valid basis. For example, a “book” is an experienceable object with the label “book” imputed on the basis of (a) the front and back covers, spine, pages, print (which are the parts); (b) the publisher, printing equipment, workers, paper pulp, ink etc. (which are the causes and conditions); and (c) the perceiver’s mind with all its associated concepts, meanings, perceptual filters that does the imputation. Seen in this light of multi-factorial dependent arising, the book is not really a solid, substantial, inherently existing entity that exists from its own side, but a dependently arisen process empty of inherent self or existence. For Tsong Khapa and others in the Middle Way Consequentialist fraternity, dependent arising and emptiness are two aspects of one reality and thus inseparable:

Appearances—dependent arisings—are unfailing
 And emptiness is free of assertions.
 As long as these two seem to you disparate,
 You have not yet realized the intent of Shakyamuni.

At some point in time, suddenly, they cease to alternate
 And just by seeing that interdependence is unfailing
 A certainty that destroys all misapprehensions comes about.
 At that time your analysis of the view is complete. (Tsering 97)

One Mahāyāna text—the *Avataṃsaka Sūtra*—beautifully and poetically describes a Buddhist view of causality in terms of the analogy of Indra’s Net, a view associated with the Hua-yen school of Chinese Buddhism. In this analogy, reality is compared to a multi-dimensional net of jewels each connected to another in an infinite web wherein each jewel contains and reflects the others without end. In this infinite net, no

jewel is at the center and no jewel at the periphery; all are equally significant and luminous holons in a boundaryless holographic omniverse. Such a breathtaking view of causality can best be described as omnicausality—inconceivable lines, spirals, dimensions and spheres of cause and effect that elude conceptual demarcation and fabrication, and impervious to existential reification and grasping. In this view, we live in an inter-existing inter-penetrating cosmos where entire world systems can be found in a single mote of dust. Although it can be argued that such a vision of dependent arising extends far beyond what the Buddha portrays in the Pāli texts, it is not logically counter to or incommensurate with the early Buddhist theory of causality. It can in fact be seen as a natural logical development of early Buddhist conceptions of causality in the service of more engaged and benevolent praxes closer to the original compassionate spirit of Buddhism's founder. It is also questionable whether this Hua-yen view of causal interpenetration is compatible with the Middle Way Consequentialist view of Buddhapālita and Tsong Khapa. But in so far as multiple causes and conditions and multiple parts are seen as central to the construction of existent, both the Hua-yen and Consequentialist schools can agree on the deeply dependent nature of things and see eye to eye on the fundamental non-isolatedness of reality.

Vajrayāna Tantric views

Evolving from within the philosophical matrix of the Mahāyāna—an architectonic shift in Buddhist philosophical and pragmatic thinking away from the mentalistic solipsism and self-centric preoccupations of the early Buddhist schools towards an expansive soteriological ethic embracing all sentient beings—is what can be termed the Vajrayāna or Diamond Vehicle. Vajrayāna represents the tantric dimension of Buddhist praxis whose texts contain more in-depth explanations of cosmology, body-mind relationships, and sophisticated meditative technologies. It can be said that Buddhist Tantra is built upon the foundational ethical

and philosophical systems of Hīnayāna and Mahāyāna Buddhism, and upholds even more strongly the universally compassionate ethic of the Mahāyāna. In this sense, Vajrayāna is not so much a separate school of Buddhism as it is a complex sub-school within the Mahāyāna fold. Although scholars debate on the origins of Buddhist Tantra, the tradition maintains that the tantric texts, though not written down till the early-middle to late centuries of the first millennium, were originally spoken by the Buddha in the form of advanced teachings given to highly qualified students only. Vajrayāna Buddhism is currently preserved in the various practice lineages of Tibet—the four main ones being the Nyingma (rNying-ma), Kagyu (bKa-rgyud), Sakya (Sa-skya), and Gelug (dGe-lug)—whose meditative technologies are based on a number of key texts such as the *Guhyasamāja Tantra*, *Kālacakra Tantra*, the Mahāmudrā Dohas of Saraha, and the Dzogchen Tantras, to name a few.²

The *Guhyasamāja Tantra* is perhaps the singular most important tantric text in that its typology and pedagogy of tantric meditative practice forms the prototypical template upon which other tantras were modeled.³ In relation to causality, the *Guhyasamāja* offers a unique perspective in Buddhist philosophy in its articulation of the subtle interdependence of wind (Sanskrit *prāṇa* or Tibetan *lung*) and mind (Sanskrit *vijñāna* and Tibetan *rnam shes*). According to this perspective, wind and mind are two indivisible aspects of the same reality, with the wind—the dynamic activity of awareness—acting as the mount upon which rides the mind—the clear and knowing awareness itself. The *Guhyasamāja Tantra* conceives of the body and mind complex as existing on three levels of a “vertical” dependently-arisen continuum: gross, subtle and extremely subtle. At the gross level, mental conceptions and emotions are so deeply intertwined with the body that it is impossible to separate out the brain, for example, from the gross mind. The subtle mind consists of mental propensities and energies linked to the winds flowing in channels of the subtle body, whereas the extremely subtle or subtlest wind-mind are in-

divisibly one and localized at the center of the heart. At the time of death, this subtlest wind and mind manifests powerfully while at other times in the course of one's life (such as fainting, sneezing, deep sleep and sexual climax), brief similitudes of this same subtlest wind-mind may naturally occur.

From the *Guhyasamāja's* tantric perspective, the subtlest wind-mind is said to be the source of increasingly grosser expressions of mental and physical experience, and thus causally significant in the evolution of our experiential reality. Dependent on the activity of subtlest wind-mind processes obscured by fundamental ignorance, volitional activities come to be, which give rise to karmic imprints and subsequently material body, senses, afflictive emotions and the entire chain of suffering. At the time of death, this entire experiential content is said to dissolve in stages into the subtlest wind-mind where mental potentialities abide to later re-emerge in a new physical basis. Thus, it can be said that the totality of experience conditioned by ignorance and shot through with suffering, emerges from and dissolves into the fundamental wind-mind in a causally dependent arising fashion. An enlightened being experiences this process differently in that because his/her experience is no longer driven by ignorance and craving, the totality of phenomenal experience arises spontaneously from the fundamental wind-mind (here termed the subjective clear light) indivisible from the emptiness nature of all phenomena (here termed the objective clear light). The fundamental wind-mind in itself is also dependently-arisen and thus empty of inherent existence by virtue of its continuum of mutually dependently-arisen moments. Put simply, "wind" is merely a label imputed upon a continuum of dynamic activity of mind and "mind" is a label imputed upon a continuum of clarity and knowingness. Here, clarity means the reflective potential of what is called the mind to manifest as visual forms, sounds, smells, tastes, touch and ideas whereas knowingness means the capacity of mind to know, be cognizant of, what is happening

in each moment. Although personally significant and useful, the *Guhyasamāja* account of causality does not say much about the macrocosmic processes of evolution and dissolution except for the notion that “when a world system comes into being, we are witnessing the play of this energy and consciousness reality” (Gyatso *Universe* 118). For an account of macrocosmic causality, we need to turn to another key Buddhist tantric text, the *Kālacakra Tantra*.⁴

In the *Kālacakra*, the cosmos is said to emerge from a combination of elemental space, wind, fire, water and earth that have arisen one element dependent on the preceding element in conjunction with the collective karma of sentient beings ready to ripen. These elements are not static things but processes of varying levels of complexity and subtlety, with the earth being the grossest elemental process and space being the subtlest. Of particular interest is the space element, in that all the other elements are said to ultimately derive from the boundaryless field of “space particles” and that space itself remains present as the hollows and gaps within all phenomenal objects as well as the context in which all things exist and all events happen. The mindstreams of sentient beings propelled by collective karma ready to ripen instigate and co-participate in material evolution in a dependently co-arisen manner. Over time, larger bodies such as planets, suns, stars, galaxies, world systems come to be. Thus, mind and matter are not seen as dualistically separate but intimately interweaved in what can be considered a dual-aspect continuum of causal relatedness. In *Kālacakra* terms, causality on the macrocosmic scale is similarly reflected in causality on a microcosmic scale, with the ontogenesis of the individual recapitulating the cosmogenesis of the external world. Thus, there is intimate microcosmic-macrocosmic parallelism in the way individual bodies and minds operate and the way planets, stars, solar systems, galaxies, ecology and climate operate.

Taken together, the *Guhyasamāja* and *Kālacakra* viewpoints highlight a vision of causality that embraces consciousness, energy, person, environment, planet, solar system and the cosmos as a whole. This integral vision is pragmatically crystallized in the sophisticated meditational technologies of Tantra whose aim is to rebalance lost harmony within the body-mind, activate the subtlest and most powerful consciousness capacity—the subtlest clear light mind—to realize emptiness of inherent existence through an experience of bliss, and thus attain supreme awakening for the benefit of all sentient beings.

As a whole, the Buddhist views on causality are significant in at least three ways: (1) they inform and underpin practices that enable a profound inner transformation of consciousness away from destructive forces of greed, hatred, delusion towards beneficent forces of magnanimity, loving-compassion and wisdom; (2) they underscore the importance of taking into account multidimensional factors affecting any system—person, team, organization, community, and society—because the omni-causal nature of reality implies that short-term, reductionistic, tunneled-vision analyses and solutions to organizational or social problems can never be adequate or effective; and finally (3) they challenge us as a species to adopt an ethic of universal responsibility, caring for the needs of all sentient beings rooted in a radical deconstruction of the ego-centric self. Such delocalizing of self away from a commonly-assumed center within the body-mind complex towards a non-inherently existing awareness without center or circumference, without any reference point or objective support, not only liberates us from our self-created suffering but frees us to be consummately wise, compassionate and capable of benefiting others. In this connection Inayatullah's visionary proposal for businesses to embrace the quadruple bottom-line of economic profit, social benefit, ecological health, and spiritual fulfillment is not only progressive and exciting but essential to constructing a world, a future that works for the good of all (*Future* 134-142).⁵ The causal-layered analysis

(CLA) method of Inayatullah and integral futures approach of Slaughter are two further examples of multi-dimensional multi-causal thinking in action emerging from the futures studies field.⁶

Indian Tantric Perspectives

Sāṃkhya antecedents to Indian Tantra

Possibly the oldest among Indian systems, Sāṃkhyan ideas have been found in the cosmogonic hymns of the *Rig-Veda*, parts of the *Atharvaveda*, and in the *Upaniṣads*. The basic philosophy of Sāṃkhya has been classified as dualistic realism, positing two fundamental and irreducible realities that exist from the beginningless to endless time: *puruṣa* (the male principle identified as pure consciousness) and *prakṛti* (the female principle identified as material matrix of the universe). According to the *Sāṃkhya-Kārikā*, a primary text of Sāṃkhya philosophy, multiple *puruṣas* and a singular *prakṛti* exist separately in polarity prior to the creation of the universe. When *puruṣas* come into proximity with *prakṛti*, they mysteriously and mistakenly identify with the changes undergone by the three forces of *prakṛti*—*sattva* (lightness), *rajas* (passion), and *tamas* (darkness)—whereas primordial *prakṛti* herself is divided into the multiplicity out of which evolves the entire cosmos and all individual entities within it. The multiplicity of cosmic evolutes include the *mahat* or *buddhi* (intellect), the *ahaṃkāra* (ego principle), the *manas* (lower mind), the ten *indriyas* (five cognitive senses of sight, smell, taste, touch, and hearing and five conative senses of speech, prehension, movement, excretion, and reproduction), the five *tanmatras* (subtle essences) underlying the five sensory abilities, and the five *bhūtas* (gross material elements of earth, water, fire, air and space). These evolutes co-exist with an infinite number of transcendental consciousnesses (*puruṣa*). The whole thrust of Sāṃkhyan soteriology is to separate pure consciousness (*puruṣa*) from the material evolutes and principles (*prakṛti*) through discriminative

gnosis, a process that culminates at death when *prakṛti* ceases its activity and *puruṣa* gains *kaivalya*, “aloneness” or “perfect freedom.”

Sāṃkhya’s causation theory is technically called *satkāryavāda*, meaning that the effect (*kārya*) is pre-existent (*sat*) in its cause, and also *prakṛtipariṇāmavāda*, meaning that the effect is a real transformation (*pariṇāma*) of nature (*prakṛti*). The *Sāṃkhya-Kārikā* describes it thus:

The effect is ever existent, because that which is non-existent, can by no means be brought into existence; because effects take adequate material causes; because all things are not produced from all causes; because a competent cause can effect that only for which it is competent; and also because the effect possesses the nature of the cause. (Nandalal Sinha 8).

In terms of Sāṃkhyan causality, the multiplicity of the universe is in effect real transmutations of a singular material matrix and is pre-existent in that matrix right from the beginning. Such a causation theory becomes significant in later tantric conceptual innovations as we shall now see.

Kashmir Śaivism—classical tantric innovation

Northern or Kashmir Śaivism with its beginnings in the 7th century C.E. comprises four main interlinked systems of Krama and Trika systems, the Spanda or “Vibration” school, and the Pratyabhijñā or “Recognition” school. In Kashmir Śaivism and Hindu Tantrism in general, theoretical concepts of Sāṃkhya are incorporated into tantric cosmology by relegating them to a position inferior to ultimate consciousness (*paramaśiva*) and its powers (*śaktis*). I shall explore the causation theory espoused by Kashmir Śaivism’s major thinkers Abhinavagupta and his successor Kṣemarāja.

Scholars have argued that Abhinavagupta's causation theory is a particular brand of *satkāryavāda* termed technically as "highly qualified *pariṇāmavāda*" or "*ābhāsavāda*." This is the view that attempts to reconcile "the philosophical position that evolution of the universe is a real transformation of a single causal reality [that is Śiva or pure consciousness] and ... the position that this real process of transformation [from Śiva into the cosmos] represents a progressive decline in level of reality from the, as it were, most real to the least real" (Muller-Ortega 98). It has been suggested that Abhinavagupta was attempting to remain faithful to "the fluid and subtly shifting clarities of yogic perceptions and experiences, relating them to, but never attempting to straightjacket them, in the categories of technical philosophy" (Muller-Ortega 98). For Abhinavagupta, all the cosmic evolutes of Sāṃkhyan metaphysics are real transmuted effects of the ultimate causal reality of pure consciousness (*śiva*) but their degree of reality is progressively reduced the further they evolve from pure consciousness. The soteriological aim for a Kashmir Śaivite is thus to meditatively realize the singular truth of consciousness pervading all phenomena as their primordial source, final nature, and teleological goal, knowing the ultimately real and relatively real at one and the same time. At the pinnacle of attainment, one is said to abide in a state of embodied liberation, which involves a profound and permanent shift in one's identity from a limited being to the unbounded plenitude of Śiva, while simultaneously seeing all things as part of this plenitude. Thus, the causation theory of Abhinavagupta is intimately linked to his soteriology of human consciousness, forming the *raison d'être* of all pragmatic endeavors in the service of liberation.

Kṣemarāja highlights another important aspect of Kashmir Śaiva causation theory in his exposition of the *spanda* or vibrational theory of consciousness. The term *spanda* means a "throb" and refers to the creative yet motionless pulsation of absolute consciousness underlying all existence. The *spanda* theory affirms the nature of the self as not simply

a static witnessing consciousness but an endlessly pulsative field of cognition and activity. This can be likened to infinite waves pulsating so rapidly on the surface of a luminous great ocean that, when seen from afar, appears to be smooth and absolutely still. *Spanda* is not a movement in space and time but an instantaneous vibration in infinite consciousness:

Spanda, therefore, in the case of the Supreme, is neither physical motion, nor psychological activity like pain and pleasure, nor *pranic* activity like hunger and thirst. It is the throb of the ecstasy of the divine I-consciousness (*vimarsa*) ... *Spanda* is, therefore, spiritual dynamism without movement in itself but serving as the *causa sine qua non* of all movements ... The infinite perfect divine consciousness always has *vimarsa* or self-awareness. This self-awareness is a subtle activity, which is spiritual dynamism, not any physical, psychological, or *pranic* activity. (Singh xxix)

An analysis of “Kṣemarāja” *spanda* theory shows evidently a stance on causation identical to the one taken by Abhinavagupta—that all existents are ultimately traceable to the dynamic pulsative activity of pure consciousness, which though relatively grosser and less real than consciousness itself, are nevertheless actual movements on consciousness’s timeless ocean.

In summary, the Kashmir Śaiva view of causality differs from the Buddhist ones in that although it acknowledges the multiplicity of cause and effect in the phenomenal universe, it presupposes and argues for a trans-causal substratum underpinning all causal activity. This trans-causal substratum or entity is described as a witnessing consciousness that is simultaneously creative and pulsative, ceaselessly aware of itself and constantly transmuting itself into the multiplicity of the universe. Such a view of causation enables the construction of a devotional ethic and praxis that seeks to move the human heart towards self-surrender through perception of the real and through love. By positing a trans-

causal consciousness that is ultimately real and effectual behind the conventional world of change and multiplicity, it paves the way for personalizing and anthropomorphizing this ultimate reality into some kind of deity or superhuman *guru* figure that can serve as focal point for the outpouring of devotional sentiment and engagement in devotional praxis.

This is not to suggest that devotional vision and expression is absent in Buddhist praxis. Quite the contrary, from the Buddha's own time right through to classical and contemporary Buddhist Tantra, the quality of devotion as combination of trust and admiration for the excellence of the teacher (the Buddha himself as well as one's root teacher) is alive and well, forming the life-stream and vital current of any sincere practitioner's journey. This devotional flow can be seen in Mahāyāna Buddhism's concept of the *trikāya*, or three bodies of the Buddha: the *dharmakāya* as the omniscient wisdom mind of great bliss of all Buddhas that inseparably realizes emptiness; the *sambhogakāya* as the body of bliss/joy manifested from the *dharmakāya* and perceivable only by highly realized practitioners; and the *nirmāṇakāya* as physical embodiments of Buddha wisdom and compassion manifested for the benefit of sentient beings. True to the spirit of dependent origination, these aspects of enlightened manifestations do not inherently exist but are dependently-arisen emanations or sport of indivisible bliss and emptiness—the subtlest clear light mind of enlightenment that is blissfully one with the facticity of emptiness.

Buddhist and Tantric Critiques of Causality and Society

The question remains as to what kind of society we can expect from a valorization of South Asian and Tibetan views on causality, in terms of concrete policies and outcomes that can be directly observed and experienced. This is an issue to which I shall now turn.

Although it is not always explicitly stated, the ontological basis for much if not all of modern scientific thinking is that of philosophical materialism in one variant or another (Wallace 10-20; Wallace and Hodel 21-26), and this is true for the dominant scientific deductive-nomological and statistical explanation of causality. This has social implications. First, social policy development informed by the scientific DN and statistical view is sensitized to empirical data that either do or do not match the criteria of what constitutes evidence, judged from the vantage point of philosophical materialism. This implies that data derived from methods situated in ontologies outside the materialist ontology, and in epistemologies outside the statistical inferential and experimental group design, will be deemed to have weaker epistemic status compared to methods located within materialist paradigms. The limitations of such an approach becomes evident when hypotheses based on alternative epistemologies and ontologies are neglected by researchers seeking to study social issues and effects of social policies, and by policymakers seeking to formulate good, effective, and cost-beneficial social policy. Certain kinds of research risk becoming excluded from serious consideration and funding support by default, not because they lack academic merit but because they derive from alternate worldviews subordinate to the dominant paradigm of what constitutes “truth” and in consequence what constitutes “good” research.⁷ As a result, potentially useful insights into and beneficial policies on a wide range of social issues including personal and community health, climate change, international peace and conflict, national security, communal harmony and social cohesion, and sustainable economic growth could be missed. As a case in point, systems of thought and praxis from cultures where the scientific empirical view is not the only one widely accepted contain vast amounts of information and indeed wisdom accumulated over hundreds if not thousands of years, which, if studied seriously and applied on a social or global scale, might contribute innovative solutions to entrenched or emerging problems faced by contemporary society. There is in the collective world in-

tellectual heritage much that remains unvalorized and uninvestigated and whose resources—intellectual, ethical, psychological, therapeutic, social, political, and transcendental—remain under-excavated and under-utilized. These are resources that can potentially enrich, embolden and deepen current discourse and be applied to challenges to human society such as the global economic meltdown, war on “terror,” dangerous climate change, inequity of global distribution of wealth, third world poverty, starvation and disease, increasing prevalence of “influenza,”⁸ growing incidences of mental illnesses such as depression and anxiety,⁹ and more.

As an example, let us take the current global financial crisis (GFC). Most analysts and world leaders would now agree that at the root of this GFC is the greed and unscrupulousness of the powerful few engaged in risky financial behaviors and the collective failure of governments to regulate such behaviors. The standard response to this crisis has been the so-called social democratic move towards increased global regulation, massive stimulus spending packages at the expense of spiraling national governmental debt, and the rising rhetoric of an increasingly interventionist government (Rudd 25-28). Arguably, these responses are based on the same old techno-rational calculus of capitalism (albeit tempered by social considerations), and view the GFC as primarily a failure of capitalist regulation. The hidden and underlying assumptions of capitalism remain unquestioned, the deep psychological roots of desire, fear and hatred remain unexamined, the socio-economic inequities and inequalities between rich and poor nations remain secondary, and the organic embedding of economy within society within ecology in the planetary life-system of Gaia remains conveniently denied (Lovelock 105-122).

Drawing on the Buddhist omni-causality and Tantric trans-causality models, it is possible to construct an alternative approach to

the analysis and solution of the GFC. In particular, the causal-layered analysis or CLA (Inayatullah *Questioning* 23-48 and Inayatullah *Futures* 8-13) methodology exemplifies such an alternative. In his questioning of the futures of the world economy, Inayatullah bases his analysis on a non-dominant, indigenous Indian model of the mind called the *kośa* or layered-mind model. The CLA methodology comprises four epistemic vantage points that mirror the gross, subtle, and causal or subtlest layers of consciousness in the *kośa* theory. Echoing the models of Kashmir Śaivism and Sarkarian Tantra,¹⁰ where these layers of consciousness are essentially pulsative condensations of pure awareness into the mental structures we use to perceive and comprehend the world, the CLA method seeks to harness the potential of the full spectrum of our intellect and intuition, found in progressively subtler and deeper layers of the mind, to solve human problems. The CLA epistemic vantage points are the “litany,” “social causes,” “worldview,” and “metaphor” levels of analysis. At the litany level, surface narrative of events, quantitative trends, and problems, often used for political ends and usually presented by media and publications are analyzed. At the social cause level, interpretive analysis of possible social, economic, cultural, historical causes and conditions constructing the theory in question become central. At the worldview level, paradigms or worldviews supporting and legitimating the theory are critiqued. At the myth/metaphor level, deeper symbolic, mythical representation and collective archetypes often constituting the emotive dimensions of theory are subject to enquiry (Inayatullah *Questioning* 30-33).

In CLA’s terms, the dominant analysis of the GFC as a combination of mortgage and banking crises caused in part by greed and regulatory failure portrays (a) a litany of “stock prices in decline” urgently needing “Government intervention”; (b) a systemic view advocating “new banking rules, purchase of toxic assets, and a new international banking structure”; (c) a worldview that promotes the shift from “un-

tamed globalization to mature globalization”; and a (d) a myth and metaphor of restoring “trust and faith in the system” as first priority (Inayatullah *Futures* 2-4). In interrogating the GFC from progressively deeper epistemic vantage points, Inayatullah seeks to uncover the fundamental mythic narratives driven from emotional and instinctual needs embedded in the collective human psyche. When such agendas are revealed and deconstructed, it becomes possible to decolonize and reclaim other possible futures for the world economy. Rather than mere quiescence to the dominant myths driven by dominant emotions of fear and attachment to the status quo, CLA offers a spiritually-inspired, consciousness-based, poly-epistemic approach to the creation of alternative futures.

Inayatullah proposes an analysis of the GFC that sees it as a window of opportunity for an eco-social-spiritual transformation, signaling a new era for humanity. This eco-social-spiritual vision portrays (a) a litany of mutual valorization of “individual and society”; (b) a systemic agenda of “new currency, new global trading rules, economic democracy, cooperative economics, triple bottom line, green technologies” (Inayatullah *Futures* 9); (c) a worldview based on Progressive Utilization Theory (PROUT)¹¹ and glocal-ism (the meshing of both global economic exchange and local cooperative enterprise); and (d) the metaphor is

... that of the great transition to another type of world economic system ... [where] there has been five hundred years of capitalism ... the system has spread all over the world, led to incredible innovation but not solved the challenges of nature and equity ... a more democratic economic system is needed.... fortunately technologies like the web enable peer to peer networks, allowing the possibility for a new world. (*Futures* 9)

According to Inayatullah, the crises we face are “multiple and overwhelming” requiring nothing less than “foundational changes.” He argues,

Climate change, the global financial crisis, the global security/terrorist challenge ... coupled with profound changes in new digital technologies (creating flatter peer to peer networks), genomics (creating aged societies as humans live even longer), revolutions in our understanding of the brain (leading to dramatically increased use of technologies such as meditation) ... change the entire game. (*Futures* 13)

As possible solutions, he proposes that wealth should be invested in peace initiatives including teaching of meditation in schools and peace-building projects with an inner dimension. On the business front, companies should move towards greater energy efficiency governed by a global set of rules, and financial speculation should be reduced or at least taxed. In his view, the 3 trillion dollars of daily currency trading could be minimally taxed and still be sufficient for meeting global millennial development goals. Also, Inayatullah suggests a new world currency is required as are new global governance rules, and where “new measures are used to account for progress, not just gross domestic product but the triple bottom line measurement that take into account prosperity plus social inclusion (all important for health and wealth generation) and nature (the base of the economy)” (*Futures* 9). He suggests that over time, a fourth bottom line of spirituality—pertaining to the dimension of personal and community meaning, purpose, wellness, and happiness—can be included in the suite of progress indicators.

On a global level, Inayatullah proposes “... a real global governance system ... that creates simultaneous global policy” and local coordinated actions “ ... sensitive to local conditions” (*Futures* 13). In the same vein, a “United Nations Security Insurance Plan” can be introduced to

reduce the amount of money small countries spend on weapons and military hardware. With greater educational and promotional efforts on a global scale, it is possible to envisage a real quantum leap for humanity as it looks less on the divides of the past and more on the kind of planet it aspires to live in. Through the reduction or even elimination of inner afflictions of greed, ill will, and ignorance, and all the secondary defilements of mind (such as jealousy, pride, deluded doubt, confusion), through a global upsurge in authenticated, evidence-based, efficacious meditative training, a healthier, wiser, more compassionate and unbiased planetary consciousness can result. This can have implications for greater “gender partnership with real inclusion of women and their ways of knowing” and a “far more sustainable planet where green technologies including vegetarianism become the norm” (*Futures* 13). Finally, we may see “glo-cal economies with global rules and movement of capital and labour” where “global corporatism” has shifted to “cooperative global localism” (*Futures* 13). In this respect, it can be said that humanity as a whole begins to realize that reality is not so much given by history as it is constructed by the intentions, emotions, images, communication, and actions of human co-participants of the global collective. Does this vision not reflect the fundamental Hua-yen Buddhist insight of interpenetration? Thich Nhat Hanh, renowned modern master of Zen and peace activism, eloquently described this vision and praxis of interpenetration as “interbeing,” a notion that has inspired an entire Order of Interbeing comprising monastics and lay practitioners engaged in the creative act of self and societal transformation (3-6, 26-35, 39-49).

Returning to Buddhist and Tantric critiques on mainstream ideas of causality that inform our mode of social organization, the dominant DN explanation underpinned by Humean and Kantian philosophical views on causality provides strong justification for the incremental and often reductionist approach of experimental science. This methodological reductionism is triggered in part by the need to maintain certainty

and control over experimental conditions and in part by regarding only sensory perception and logical inference as reliable modes of knowing. Whether we speak of qualitative or quantitative research grounded in positivist, interpretivist, critical, feminist, or poststructuralist paradigms (Neuman 79-108), knowledge remains epistemologically limited—firstly, to perception of an empirically factual or socially constructed world through the five physical senses, and secondly, to the subsequent cognitive and logical analysis of sensory data. Alternative and valid ways of knowing embedded within other cultures and epistemic spaces can potentially add to humanity's quest to understand, explain, and ameliorate both personal and social worlds.

For example, from the epistemic and cultural space of Indo-Tibetan Buddhism comes a systematic and rigorous program of introspective technology that has been tested and honed over thousands of years. This technology has only recently been brought to the attention of scholars and scientists in the West, largely as a consequence of the Tibetan diaspora and in particular the person of the 14th Dalai Lama (Gyatso *Gentle Bridges* 1-5). Greater valorization of and subsequent exploration of this introspective technology can yield potentially useful insights into the consciousness, its potential and purpose, and its relation with physical health, mental wellbeing, and social and ecological *utopia*. If the claims of such introspective technology are true—that human consciousness can indeed gain direct knowledge of itself and of the world through the “inner” epistemologies of *samatha* (concentrative calm abiding) and *vipasyana* (analytical insight)—then it would imply that, for want of a better word, intuition (systematically and rigorously developed) would stand alongside sensory perception and logical inference as an epistemological avenue of at least equal validity and reliability. Such an implication can open up new vistas of research focused on how individual and collective consciousness are causally linked to personal, social and planetary suffering, and how through dismantling the archaeology

of suffering in personal minds, interpersonal relations, physical environment, and social structures, humanity can advance towards a more peaceful and meaningful future. I base this claim on the integral and integrative approach of Indo-Tibetan Buddhist epistemology (and much of Indian Buddhist and Hindu epistemologies), where its cognitive interest is emancipatory in both personal and social senses, and which does not isolate interior mind states and actions as a realm totally divorced from exterior structures. This, according to Indo-Tibetan Buddhism, is a fact that can be realized with a highly stabilized, focused, and clear mind free from all cognitive and emotional bias, a product of long-term systematic mind training (Wallace 135-148).

Conclusion

In this article, I have described key aspects of the concept of causality propounded by the Buddha, Mahāyāna and Vajrayāna Buddhism, Sāṃkhya philosophy, and Kashmir Śaivism. Taken together, these concepts of causality reflect what I term “omni-causality” in the Buddhist examples, overlaid with the notion of transcendent superagency in the Sāṃkhya and Kashmir Śaiva examples—a theory that I call “trans-causality.” These theories of omni- and trans-causality contrast with dominant causal theories in the Anglosphere not only in terms of their philosophical architecture but also in the way these paradigms are expressed in social organization. In short, the contrasting features of Buddhist and Tantric causal perspectives on the one hand and Anglospheric perspectives on the other can be summarized as follows:

- Buddhist and Tantric notions of a continuum of causally efficacious mental processes ranging from gross to subtle to subtlest levels highlight the importance of recruiting multiple vantage points in analyzing and constructing social realities. Old, dysfunctional structures of society can be more thoroughly decon-

structed and new, utopic visions better constructed by taking into account the mind's ability to analyze phenomena on progressively subtler and deeper levels.

- While dominant causal theories promote social analysis and problem solving by relying on sensory perception and inferential reasoning alone, Buddhist and Tantric perspectives acknowledge and would utilize, in addition to perception and inference, direct intuitive insight developed on the basis of rigorous attentional training. By its very nature, such insight enables holistic understanding of the totality of any situation in question, and gives rise to a universal ethic of “interbeing” inclusive of all life forms as opposed to an isolationist ethos of “every man for himself” seeking a selfish “survival of the fittest.”
- Buddhist and Tantric approaches to social amelioration and well-being would espouse the mass utilization of contemplative technologies such as meditation and yoga in all sectors of society across the planet. Such global initiatives would be rooted in profound insights into the interdependency of mental, physical, social, and cosmological realities, as opposed to current fragmentary, materialist, and reductionist analyses of societal issues in isolation from the very consciousness that engages in such analyses.

The collage of viewpoints offered in this article serves to illuminate the diversity, richness and depth of Indian and Indo-Tibetan thinking on causality, a thinking that not only seeks to describe reality as it is but strives to free human consciousness from the confines of its conditioning, destructive tendencies, and ingrained ignorance. More than that, these causal theories are a resource for collective emancipation in the way they suggest lines of being, knowing, thinking, feeling, and

doing that calls for nothing less than universal responsibility. By allowing our epistemic and methodological perspectives to be bolstered by non-dominant, soteriological, and holistic views on causality, we enable a fuller actualization of our potentials through inner technologies and outer action, and give hope and space for others to do the same. In this collective movement towards better futures for our children, our planet, all sentient beings, and ourselves might be located our most profound challenge and most brilliant destiny.

Notes

¹ See e.g., Brahmajāla Sutta and Aḡaṅṅa Sutta (Walshe 67-90, 407-415).

²The Dalai Lama (Gyatso 77-123) discusses some aspects of the *Guhyasamāja* and *Kālacakra* views of reality.

³ Cozort (12) dates the *Guhyasamāja Tantra* to approximately 6th century C.E.

⁴ Feuerstein (232) dates the *Kālacakra Tantra* to approximately 10th century C.E.

⁵ It is noteworthy that Satish Kumar, leading sustainability leader and editor of *International Resurgence* magazine, also speaks of the quadruple bottom-line in his lectures, advancing the holistic change agenda of benefit for “soil, soul and society.”

⁶ For rich and diverse coverage of CLA in action, see Inayatullah’s *The Causal Layered Analysis Reader: Theory and Case Studies of an Integrative and Transformative Methodology*. See also Slaughter.

⁷ I do not wish to repeat here the critiques of postmodernists, critical theorists, feminists and others, who have rigorously argued each in their own way the socially constructed, historically fluid, ruptured, unreifiable, power-structured, and gender-biased nature of knowledge production, dissemination, and consumption.

⁸ For a succinct introduction to the social phenomenon of “affluenza,” see Clive Hamilton and Richard Denniss, *Affluenza: When Too Much is Never Enough* (Crows Nest: Allen and Unwin, 2005), pp. 1-18.

⁹ See World Health Organization. *Mental Health*. Online. Available http://www.who.int/mental_health/en accessed 27 October 2008.

¹⁰ Prabhāt Rañjan Sarkar is a neo-Tantric master whose spiritual and social theory synthesizes many elements of the Indian religious landscape, in particular Śaiva, Śakta, Vaiṣṇava soteriologies with Sāṃkhyan building blocks and Vedanta overlay. Inayatullah, a student of Sarkar, bases his CLA directly on Sarkar’s reading of the traditional *kośa* theory in concert with his own reading of Foucauldian poststructuralism.

¹¹ Progressive Utilization Theory is an encompassing socio-economic theory based on a spiritually-centered vision of the world, its resources, and the place of conscious beings in an evolving universe. Deeply rooted in the South Asian Tantric episteme, it offers a universal and inclusive perspective on the links between personal awareness, social wellbeing, global emancipation, and universal transcendence.

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