

*Buddhism and Modernity:
An Ancient Tradition Faces the Twenty-first Century*

佛教與現代：
面對廿一世紀的古老傳統

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A lecture given by Douglas Powers on November 20, 1997, as part of the Institute for World Religions Fall Faculty Lecture Series.

編輯部 中譯 Translated into Chinese by Editorial Staff

As we begin a new millennium, our societies are entering into an unprecedented state of interconnectedness. Sometimes called the “globalization of the world,” this concept implies a closely interrelated society with no separate cultures, separate countries or separate peoples. Everything interlinks and in a sense homogenizes. While globalization has a good side—it instills a sense of shared humanity and helps to break down generations of prejudice and suspicion—it also has a rather frightening shadow side. The values, ideals and principles that drive this interconnected world are greed and desire. Selfishness and self-interest, the desire to acquire and have, are fast becoming universal norms. If, on the other hand, values of virtue and compassion become the central focus and organizing principles of societies worldwide, this too will exert a powerful influence of equal magnitude. I believe that most of the major problems we face worldwide are due to unrestrained greed and desire.

Buddhism, although an ancient spiritual teaching, offers systematic and viable answers to some of the most intractable problems we will address in this millennium: poverty, environmental degradation, overpopulation, economic maldistribution, civil wars, terrorism and technological power outstripping our ethical wisdom to control it. I wish to explore how Buddhist values intersect with four critical concepts of the world—individualism, science, freedom and morality—so that I can demonstrate how the Buddhist teachings can be central to solving our world’s core issues.

The value of individualism has been spreading throughout the world in the last thirty to forty years and is perhaps the single most influential concept today. In short, individualism defines every person as an autonomous entity operating automatically, as if everyone were a self-contained monad living in a social vacuum. We are located in our own universe, a world that each of us considers to be our own. Within that inviolable space, we make our own decisions based on self-centered criteria and believe that we each have an inalienable right to pursue and fulfill our own needs and desires. Greed is good, natural, even healthy from within this solipsistic perspective, since it advances the ambitions and cravings of the ego.

當新的另一千年開始時，我們的社會正進入一個前所未有的互聯狀態，有時被稱為「世界全球化」。這概念意味著一個緊密相關、沒有個別文化、個別國家，或個別人種的社會；一切相互相連，也可說是同化。雖然全球化有好的一面，那就是灌輸我們同體大悲的思想，以及協助解除世代間的偏見與懷疑；但也有個相當可怕的陰暗面，因為「貪婪」與「慾望」正是推動這互聯世界的觀念、理想和原則。自私自利、一股營求佔有的慾望，正迅速地成為世界共通的價值標準；另一方面，如果道德和慈悲的觀念能變成全球的焦點中心和組織原則，當然也會發出同等級的影響力。我相信現在整個世界所面對的重大問題，主要都是無節制的貪慾所引起的。

佛教雖然是種古老的精神教育，但是卻能為未來一千年內將面臨的棘手難題，帶來一個有系統且可行的方法。這些難題，包括貧窮、環境品質下降、人口過盛、經濟不均、內戰、恐怖主義，以及科技發展凌駕道德智慧之上。我希望藉由探討佛法與當今世界四個重要觀念——個人主義、科學、自由和道德之間的關係，來證明佛法如何是解決世界核心問題的最關鍵處。

個人主義的觀念，在過去三十至四十年間遍及整個世界，甚至可說是當今最具影響力的觀念。簡單地說，個人主義把「個人」定義成一個自動作業的自主體，就像是真空裏一個自給自足的分分子。人人都活在自己的宇宙裏，活在一個完全屬於自己的世界裏。在這不可侵犯的空間裏，任何決定所依據的都是以「自我」為中心，並且人人都有絕對的權利去追求和滿足自己的需要及欲望。在這唯我的觀點之下，貪婪是好的、天生的，甚至是健康的，因為它促

The idea of the individual has so captured the imagination and become enthroned in the body civic that it is nearly impossible for anyone to argue against it. We have taken the Renaissance concept of “man as the measure of all things” ad extremis, to an absurdity where it seems as though the individual has become the final arbiter of reality, and the final goal of existence is to have one’s own desires met. The logical outcome of a life founded on such a premise is precisely what we see before us: restless people frantically vying to accumulate wealth and distract themselves with entertainment.

More and more we find ourselves living, as one philosopher put it “. . . a particular contemporary nihilism: a dream of wanting where everything wanted is finally worthless.” If you view yourself as an isolated individual, operating autonomously, doing whatever you feel like doing, then it’s clear that you will feel alienated from other people. Moreover, you will feel alienated from nature, and ultimately even from yourself. Nihilism and hedonism thus come to define the contemporary landscape and delimit its possible lifestyles.

This deep-seated sense of alienation makes people feel bored, anxious and unhappy; it stirs all kinds of negative emotions: ennui, apathy, despondency, loathing, frustration always on the verge of anger and alternating mood swings between agitated highs and empty lows. A culture ripened by individualism leaves only one available antidote to the self-estrangement it generates: entertainment. As soon as we feel the slightest bit of boredom or anxiety, we turn something on. We turn on the television or the computer, hop into the car, or call somebody up on the telephone. We grope for some quick way to distract ourselves, to flood our gnawing “disease” in a shower of sensory data that overwhelm our other emotions of boredom and anxiety. In a very real way, seeking these external stimuli is an attempt to turn the self on—to catalyze a sense of spirit in what has become a hollow shell.

This unreflective way of being has increased to a kind of fevered pitch. The pace of life is so quickened and driven that we always feel behind, tired and yet strangely never satisfied. Relationships stagnate and eventually are replaced by technological substitutes: interactive television, websites, video games and soon the equivalent of George Orwell’s “feelies”—totally interactive fantasy media. In the next few years, most American living rooms will have a high-definition television with five hundred channels—since thirty six channels is already inadequate to meet our ever-escalating desires. If we stand back and view this phenomenon from a clinical perspective, the conclusion is unavoidable: we are witnessing all the symptoms of addiction. There are many different kinds of addiction: drugs, alcohol, gambling, sex and even entertainment. Albeit a legal and socially sanctioned addiction, entertainment works as all addictions do: one needs more of it to keep the “high” from slipping away, which it inexorably does. All addictions are basically deflections, avoidance, attempts to find pleasure by distracting the attention from

進了追求自我的野心和渴望。

這樣的「個人主義」擄獲了人們的幻想，穩坐於人類的思考體系，幾乎沒有人去反對它。文藝復興「人爲萬物的尺度(Man as the measure of all things)」這個概念被發展到極點，荒謬到彷彿人類就是真理的最後仲裁者；而吾人存在的最終目標，就是滿足自己的欲望。以這種觀念爲前提的生命，結局便是我們眼前所見的：人類焦躁不安，瘋狂地競爭財富和恣情縱欲。

人類越來越像一位哲學家所形容的，活在近代獨特的一種「虛無主義」之中——充滿渴望的夢想，但是所有渴望的最終都是毫無價值。如果說把自己視爲一個孤立的個體，自給自足，可以做任何喜歡做的事，那麼很明顯地，自己將會被隔離於人群之外，繼而被隔離於大自然之外，乃至最終被隔離於自己之外。因此「虛無主義」和「享樂主義」，界定了現代人的生活領域，也限制了人類可能的生活方式。

這種深度的隔離感令人感到沉悶、焦慮和不快樂，同時牽引出各種負面的情緒，例如倦怠、冷漠、沮喪、厭惡、徘徊憤怒邊緣的挫折感，以及情緒波動於激情與空虛之間。而個人主義造成的疏離感，在個人主義充斥的文化裏，只有一帖唯一的解藥，那就是「娛樂」。所以每當感到一點沉悶或是焦慮，我們就習慣地要開動一些東西：開電視或電腦、發動汽車，或撥電話給某人，總之找一些捷徑來分散自己的注意力，希望藉由驟雨般的感官刺激，壓倒鬱悶焦慮的情緒，驅走這些折磨人的「病」。這種向外找刺激的方式，目的是希望找到「我」的感覺——在空洞的軀殼裏，催化一點靈性的感覺。

像這樣缺乏內省的生活方式，已經發展到狂熱的地步。生活步調如此地急速，並且驅役著人們總覺得落後、疲倦，而且很奇怪地永遠覺得不滿足。人和人之間的互動停滯，甚至最後被科技產品替代，例如互動式電視、網站、視像遊戲，以及將和喬治·奧威爾(George Orwell)「feelies」一樣的完全交互式虛擬媒體。接下來的幾年，大部份美國人的客廳裏將有一部五百頻道的高畫質電視，因爲三十六頻道顯然不夠滿足我們不斷提昇的欲望。如果後退一步，用臨床的眼光去檢視這種現象，以下的結局是無可避免的：我們染上各種的癮，包括藥品、

what burdens or distresses. We want to avoid anxiety, avoid our fears, avoid responsibility. Yet, ironically, as long as the modern world keeps turning its senses outward in an attempt to deal with the basic issues of life, all prospects for relief only become more elusive. It is something of a contradiction that we hope to find ourselves by avoiding ourselves.

Buddhism deals with this issue in a way quite different from most other approaches. It “returns the light to illumine within.” In other words, we use the mind to look back into its source rather than out through the senses for distractions and entertainment. Buddhism does teach a kind of individualism. But Buddhist individualism differs in important ways from the individualism of the market. It is an individualism of responsibility, not desire. Buddhist individualism is based on the principle that only you can work out your own karma—that each of us has a unique history that we alone created and that we alone are responsible for.

The karmic patterns of our existence, though they touch and interact with the larger web of life, are radically our own; society as a whole isn't responsible for them. The patterns that lie before us, the conditions that most fundamentally shape us—including the suffering that we experience—all reflect the entirety of our own causes and effects and result from our own decisions. Buddhist individualism is rooted in the Buddha's teaching that if we all look deeply enough into our own true nature, we'll find the Buddha nature. In other words, in the deepest, essential sense, all of us are Buddhas.

Ultimately, we share the same substance. Because I have a certain history, I manifest differently from you. Any appearance of difference or uniqueness is simply due to the variations in karma we create. It is intriguing that part of Buddhism's current popularity stems from its emphasis on the individual working out his or her own liberation. Yet, this focus on the individual doesn't leave a person isolated and alone in an artificial self—which, in the modern world, is where everyone stops. If you think the artificial self is all there is, then of course you're going to feel lonely, bored, alienated and empty. It is interesting to note that it was just this confused belief in the artificial self that Buddha referred to as the source of suffering (*dukkha*).

In the Mahayana sutras, like the *Avatamsaka*, the Buddha describes a universe that is karmically interconnected, like a vast net of inter reflecting jewels. When we act in a compassionate way, that compassion vibrates throughout the entire universe. When we mindfully connect to Guanyin Bodhisattva (the enlightened being of great compassion), we connect to and interact with a universal vibration of compassion. Conversely, when we commit an act of killing, the killing vibrates throughout and affects the entire universe. ☸ To be continued

酒精、賭博、性愛，甚至娛樂等等各種不同類型的癮。儘管「娛樂」是法律和社會所許可的，但它和所有癮類有著相同的性質，那就是——需要量越來越多，才能維持「高潮」不讓它溜走，但最終是無法保持住的。基本上，所有的癮都是不肯面對、逃避事實，想從壓力苦惱中分散注意力，尋找快樂。人人都希望避免焦慮、避免恐懼、避免責任，但諷刺的是，人類不停止地向外尋找解決人生問題的方式，只會使得解脫的機會變得更為渺茫。因此，希望用逃避自己來發現自我，這是有點兒矛盾的。

佛教處理這問題的方式，和大多數人所採用的很不相同，因為它教我們要「迴光返照」。換句話說，向內心裏去尋找問題的根源，而不是向外找樂子，藉助感官刺激去分散注意力。佛陀也教導「個人主義」，但是這種「個人主義」和吾人熟悉的個人主義有著重要的區別——它是「負責任」的個人主義，而不是「欲望」。佛教的「個人主義」以這個原則為基礎，就是「只有你能決定自己的業」——自作，就要自受。

造成我們存在的業果，雖然與更大的生命網絡有所接觸及互動，但仍然是屬於我們自己的，整體社會對它們不需要負責。我們現在所面對及身處的一切——包括所受的折磨——完完全全反映自己的因果，以及所做決定的後果。佛教的個人主義是根源於佛陀所教導的：「如果我們對自性認識得夠深入，我們將找到佛性。」換言之，就最精深的意義來說，一切眾生都是佛。

因此，最終極處我們是同體的。但因為個人的不同背景，所以表現出不同的樣子；而任何表現出的不同或特異處，純粹是由個人所造的業不同而引起的。有趣的是，佛教目前受歡迎的其中一個原因，在於它強調個人可以開創自我的解脫；而這裏所提的「個人」，並不是將人隔離獨處在「假我」之內，那個多數現代人所停滯的地方。如果你認為假我便是一切，那麼勢必會覺得孤單、無聊、疏離和空虛；而對假我的迷信，正是佛陀所說的——苦的根源。

在如《華嚴經》的大乘經典裏，佛陀描述宇宙是由業力交織而成，猶如一幅網羅，網孔內的明珠光光相照。當我們用慈悲做事，這個慈悲心會震盪在宇宙之間；當我們一心祈求觀世音菩薩（大悲心的覺者），也同時是與宇宙間的慈悲心互相接應、交集。反之當我們殺生時，這股殺氣也是充遍影響著整個宇宙。

☸待續