

Nagarjuna: Memory, Thought, And Fact Of Having Gone (In The Past), Going (In The Present), And Going (In The Future) – One Space

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I hope to convey here a sense of how we view our minds – and how we can actually work with it. It focuses on a Buddhist idea that philosopher/meditator Nagarjuna introduces in his book “Fundamental Wisdom Of The Middle Way”, translated by Zen Master Nishijima. I actually have a different take on it than Nishijima, in part, even though his point is entirely relevant – I simply draw a different lesson.

Nagarjuna writes:

The memory of having gone in the past does not actually go, as much as the thought of going in the future never actually goes.

The memory of having gone in the past, the thought of going in the future, and even the fact of going at the present moment do not actually go.

– Fundamental Wisdom Of The Middle Way, by Nagarjuna, translated by Nishijima, ch 2 v 1.

The first part says, at least one thing it says, is that the mind (memory and thought) is just one unfolding space or place – and this never goes.

The second part says, at least one thing it says, is that the mind (memory and thought) is just one unfolding space or place, and that these (the memory of having gone in the past, the thought of going in the future, and even the fact of going at the present moment) never leave us, not even the fact of going in the present moment.

On this last point, Dogen had a similar idea in his essay “Uji” (“Being-Time”): after traveling across the mountain ridges to return to one’s apartment or home with jewels, where is the mountain?

We walk in this unfolding mental event space and place, and this is just what (unfolding, resultant, at-one) time is, an unfolding space and place of past, present, and future – this time in Nagarjuna’s verse set in relation to having gone in the past, not yet going in the future, and even the fact of going in the present moment – an expressive, definitive or ambiguous fact.

This is the dynamic space of Zen/Buddhism. It speaks to our experience, our minds (memory and thought), and our world-space.[1]

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Such fundamental philosophy is of paramount importance, and gives one (at least from the Zen Buddhist standpoint) something profound to work with. One doesn't have to be Zen Buddhist to pick this verse up: one can treat it as philosophy to apply and work with.

I wonder if the sense of this, and its reality, can be seen to be valuable to others, in and out of the psych system. This is a realization that must be had in mind, and really no-thing space, and cannot be found in the words themselves. It is perception and awareness, realization and visualization, mental space and physical space, interpenetrating.

Psych unit psychiatry really needs to work with things like this, and this would be one printout I'd suggest as part of philosophy, spirituality, psychology, speculation on how we think and why, and act, narrative, the dialogic, and so forth: philosophy.[2]

We walk around in a memory-and-thought realm, and Nagarjuna in the next verse points to the concrete, in a very stark, clarity, etched way, in talking about motion. Later in the book he says, "It is when we see the fusion of the abstract and the concrete that we see the real world, before us." But these are the fundamentals he lays down.

Note that he does not speak of 'time as a linear arrow' here, that we posit ourselves against; but indicates that we are this very memory-and-thought of going (in the future), having gone (in the past), and going (in the present) – at the present moment, unfolding, along with the concrete, the fusion of the abstract and the concrete.[3] In fact, later he says there is no such thing as serial time (I read this as an absolute vector – although as can be seen in physics, time as a vector can be useful in modeling the world). I see it also indicating unfolding space and place (as mentioned) as well as unfolding worlds, and it may be observed that these are interpenetrating. This, along with the external world, and the real space before us, dependent arising, is our world space, the present moment, so dynamic, and at other times quite still.

Footnotes

1. Nishijima says something equally compelling in his commentary, and some things the same; but I think he overlooks or doesn't have time to mention this, these comments of mine. However, his translation of the verse is stellar.
2. We tend sometimes to get caught up in a rote serial pattern of conscious stream that doesn't yield to much dimension. With this, and particularly combined with lots of givens that one hasn't ascertained and worked with in one's own system, it can be difficult to see the Way, or to realize dimension mind. The mind is, like space, numberless (my own experience, and see the Buddha in "The Lankavatara Sutra"). One can pick this up, and investigate this very world-space.
3. The concrete is the physical, material, concrete; the abstract is the idea, thought, abstract. Nagarjuna says that it is when we see the fusion of the abstract and the concrete that we see the real world, before us – and in my view this also can be a way to see the Way, and notice the unfolding relative (things are relative to each other, and this unfolds in a continual and infinitesimal way; and it includes both the

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integers and the real numbers – and this occurs in, defines the present moment). This is all very participant, whether the situation is difficult or not, but can point to a way out of dilemma.