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The Temporality of The Social
A Buddhist Middle Way Perspective

1. The Concept of Time in Middle Way Perspective

The Sanskrit word "*Madhyamika*" means "one who holds to the middle," it is thus translated as the "Middle Way" in English. The concept "Middle way" in Buddhism begins with the Buddha's description of his path to enlightenment as one which avoids the extremes of indulging in worldly pleasures, on the one hand, and engaging in severe ascetic practices on the other. Nagarjuna, then, extends this insight to all dimensions of the world's phenomena. Any conception, however subtle, affirms that a phenomenon either absolutely exists or absolutely does not exist is considered problematic in *Madhyamika* sense. The perspective of the middle way rejects both extremes of substantialism and nihilism, and espouses the middle way as the true attitude of practice and contemplation, which implies a balanced view and approach to life.

Nagarjuna's *Madhyamika* insight of the emptiness and non-substantial nature of the world explained that there is no eternal, or fixed "thing" behind the temporal flux of changing phenomena. In the *Mulamadhyamakakarikas* (Fundamentals of Middle Way), Nagarjuna used a critical dialectic of argument of *reductio ad absurdum* (*prasanga*)

to show how all viewpoints or concepts presumed to describe reality are really empty of any static self-sustaining substance and thus do not exist. The middle way perspective's *Prasanga* is also a method of deconstruction which can assist us (regarding the nature of time and the social) to deconstruct the a-temporal view of the social. In the verse 18 of Chapter XXV of the *karika*, Nagarjuna points out:

> Whatever is dependently co-arisen, that is explained to be emptiness. That, being a dependent designation, is itself the middle way. (pp. 69, 93, 304)[1]

According to Garfield's interpretation that emptiness, as dependently co-arisen, is termed a nominal designation. In other words, Nagarjuna asserts three fundamental characteristics in this passage, which are in harmony with one another and thereby inseparable: (1) emptiness, or the ultimate truth; (2) the dependently originated, that is, the phenomenal world; and (3) verbal convention, or dependent designation. (Pp. 93-94) Therefore, whatever is dependently co-arisen is nominally established and is empty. The social, in the same way, is dependently co-arisen and thus is empty. Nagarjuna explains emptiness as something that arises dependently. Emptiness lacks (is empty of) essence, or independent existence. And emptiness itself is also assumed to be a dependent

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[1] Garfield, Jay L. 1995. *The Fundamental Wisdom of the Middle Way: Nagarjuna's Mulamadhyamakakarika*. Oxford University Press.

designation and is thereby asserted to be merely nominal. Something that is empty depends upon verbal reference, or conventional characterization, for its existence. (Garfield, 1995: 305) Emptiness and the conventional world are, Nagarjuna suggests, two different interpretations of the same things; something from the conventional standpoint, and it is empty from the ultimate scrutiny. When we characterize a thing we give it conventional existence with verbal designation, but it retains its fundamental emptiness. Correspondingly, we can say that whatever social phenomena are conceived by social theorists, they are conventional existence designated with verbal construction, nevertheless it maintains its fundamental emptiness.

Nagarjuna devotes chapter XIX of *The Fundamental Wisdom of The Middle Way* (*Mulamadhyamakakarika*) specifically to time, as follows: (Garfield, 1995: 50-51)

1.   If the present and the future depend on the past, then the present and the future would have existed in the past.

2.   If the present and future did not exist there, how could the present and the future be dependent upon it?

3.   If they are not dependent upon the past, neither of the two would be established. Therefore neither the present nor the future would exist.

4.   By the same method, the other two divisions—past and future, upper, lower, middle, etc., unity, etc., should be understood.

5.   A nonstatic time is not grasped. Nothing one could grasp as stationary time exists. If time is not grasped, how is it known?

6.   If time depends on an entity, then without an entity how could time exist? There is no existence entity. So how can time exist?

In this very short but enormously important chapter, Nagarjuna devotes his effort to the examination of the issue of time. Based on the insight of emptiness and dependent co-arising, he attempts to show that time does not have its own-being. Furthermore, Nagarjuna's text reveals that it is incongruous to assume time as three isolated self-existent entities. The underlying assumption here of emptiness is confirmed by the phrase "there is no entity exists." The middle way perspective of Nagarjuna's criticizes the view of the substantial existence of things during the three periods. It was argued by the substantialists that since substance exists, time with which it is associated must also exist. It is this independent existence of time that Nagarjuna takes up for criticism. His criticism was based on the actuality that a thing (*bhava*) or its substance (*bhavasvabhava*) and time (*kala*) are empty and related to one another. In this chapter, he stresses the emptiness and dependent arising of time in terms of three arguments. In the first argument, Nagarjuna's method is to divide time into the past, the present, and the future. And argues that if any one of these time units has their own-being, then the conception of time would lose its coherence and becomes self-contradictory. In other words, none of these can be said to be inherently existent. He employs his dialectic to demonstrate the unreality of substantial time in any sense.

Nagarjuna's argument was based on the principle of dependent co-arising that two things cannot be related unless they are dependently co-arisen and have no own-being.

In the first two verses, Nagarjuna emphasizes the implicit dilemma: The present and the future either depend upon the past or they do not. If "the past" is considered the producer of "the present" and "the future," the latter two parts would be already "in" the past and "must somehow emerge from it as a basis." (Garfield, 1995: 254) In this case, they could not be properly said to have separate moments. However, if they did not, that is, the present and the future are separate from the past, their very separateness and disconnection will make them exist inherently and independently and have no connection to the past. In other words, their existences become uncaused, or unconditioned. But according to the nature of dependent co-arising, the very concepts of present and future involve a processual relation to the past, and thus an independent existence of any one of them is self-contradictory. If we considered their temporal relations in terms of causes and effects in the substantialist sense, then we would find two difficulties. As Garfield points out: (p.255)

> …we have two incoherent situations from the standpoint of anyone who considers the causal relation or its relata to be inherently existent. There must be a real relation between the cause and the effect in which the effect is contained potentially in the cause, and this would unfortunately entail the past existence of the present and the future. But second, there is a little regress to be developed. For

if the present and the future depend upon the past, they must succeed or be simultaneous with it. But they must succeed or be simultaneous with it in time. That requires a super-time in which the parts of time are related, and so on, ad infinitum.

Therefore, the present and the future do not inherently exist in the past, neither do they exist independently in themselves and disconnected from the past. Their inherent existence in the past implies that an identity with the past must exist. On the other hand, their independent existence in themselves implies an absolute difference from the past. However, according to middle way philosophy, neither identity nor difference is justifiable. Likewise, neither identity with nor difference from the past is sufficient to establish the existence of the present and future. In general, according to the middle way relational-processual perspective, the inherence and independence of any of the elements of time could be opposed on the basis of their dynamic relatedness and fundamental reference to each other. How can we, for instance, imagine an independence of the "past" without referring to the present and the future? Thus, Nagarjuna says: "if they are not dependent upon the past, neither of the two would be established. Therefore neither the present nor the future would exist."

The independency of the parts of time will make the ordering of moments and events untenable, by which the very definition of time as the relational ordering of events and moments will be crushed.

"The present is the present only because it is poised within the past and the future. If it were not, it would not be the present. So either the present is in the past, in which case it is nonexistent, or it is independent of the past and the future, in which case it is nonexistent." (Garfield, 1995: 256)

Another argument that Nagarjuna articulates in order to dispute the substantial separatedness of time is through epistemological means, as shown in verse 5. From a knower's point of view, if time exists as an entity in a stationary state, there is no possibility that the knower could establish a knower-knowing-known relation in order to grasp time and make it comprehensible. Therefore, Nagarjuna questions: "How, then can one perceive time if it is not 'grasped'?" In other words, if time is acknowledged to be continuously flowing, then there is no coherent conception of time as an intelligible entity. There are no absolute static components of time that can be perceived by our knowing mind. If we propose, as some social theorists (consciously or unconsciously) hold, that there could be a "static moment" of a thing and of time, then it would no longer count as a thing and time. Time, just like other things, in and of itself can never be grasped, and thereby will never be known. Actually, the knowing act is not instantaneous—it, too, is dependent upon temporality. The noticing of an object or social event is always temporally dissimilar from the perception of the thing, even by the minutest quantity. Perception is also distinct from the thing itself. Thus, the knower and that which he or she knows do not form a static and

unified whole. The middle way examination of time in turn indicates the temporal process by which our knowing of the world takes place. There is a to-be-known physical (conceptual) object, which is noticed by the knower. This noticing is then classified and made cognizable through the relatively separate processes of perception. This perception is schemed by dispositions, or habitus (in Bourdieu's term), and that affects the formation of the consciousness of the object. The thing which the knower becomes conscious of is thus always in the immediate past simply due to the temporal deferment. Although the time-consumption of this knowing process might not be as rapid as light travels, it is still quick enough to be undetectable by our ordinary mind. Hence, time cannot be observed directly in the process of knowing, but only extrapolated, that is, to use observable changing phenomena as the clue from which to draw implications or conclusions about the dependent co-arising of time.

Therefore, the middle way perspective shows that time cannot be considered as a self-existing thing that is independent of other conditional phenomena. As Nagarjuna has shown, there are no inherent and independent things in the world, nor could time be itself truly independent as long as it remained defined by its interdependency with other conditions. Hence, on the other hand, "we cannot suppose that time exists as one entity dependent on some other as its ground if we want time exist inherently." (Garfield, 1995: 257) This is because none of the things that exist in time are inherently and independent existent. So the ontological basis for an inherently and independently existent time is untenable. To place the argument in a more sociological way, time is not a self-existing

substratum or ground in which equally independent social phenomena endure or where independent social events occur, and vice versa. The middle way perspective explains that inherently and independently existent things or time would be immutable, since in their essence they are independent of other phenomena and so unaffected by any interactions. Conversely, independently existent things or time would also be unable to influence other phenomena, since they are self-contained. David Kalupahana summarizes Nagarjuna's view in the following remarks:

> Time denied by him is absolute time....This is a rejection not of temporal phenomena, but only of time and phenomena as well as their mutual dependence so long as they are perceived as independent entities. (Kaluphana, p. 279)[2]

Despite Nagarjuna's deconstruction of the absolute existence of time and phenomena, his notion of dependent arising does not deny the fundamental non-dual mutuality in which time and things that change are basically related and inseparable. Hence, as Nagarjuna points out, where there is no thing to be temporally related, there is no time. Phenomena are always phenomena-in-flux and time is always involving with flux-in-phenomena. That is, "the only mode of existence that time has is as a set of relations among empirical phenomena. Apart from those

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[2] Kalupahana, David J. 1986. *Nagarjuna: The Philosophy of the Middle Way*. Albany: State University of New York Press.

phenomena and those relations, there is no time." (Garfield, 1995: 257) By the same token, the only mode of existence that phenomenon has is a set of relations that occurs in temporal process.

2. Time in Social Process

As the tempo of modern life has continued to accelerate, we have come to feel increasingly out of touch with the biological rhythms of the planet, unable to experience a close connection with the natural environment. The human time world is no longer joined to the incoming and outgoing tides, the rising and setting sun, and the changing seasons. Instead, humanity has created an artificial time environment punctuated by mechanical contrivances and electronic impulses: a time plane that is quantitative, fast-paced, efficient, and predictable.[3]

Time is an integral constitution of society, in the same way the social condition is the constitutive component of time. Social process has to do with synchronization, diachronization, ordering or timing, others with management or measurement, and still other with the temporal aspects of machines an artifact. In order words, time has a bearing on our social existence not as separate entities but as an interconnected condition. Sociologically speaking, there is neither "time" nor "social entity" can

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[3] Rifkin, J. 1987. *Time Wars. The Primary Conflict in Human History*. New York: Henry Holt.

persist permanently, but only a change of social phenomena over time and a flux of time through social phenomena. Human societies are thus fundamentally historical, they are conditioned and organized around values, goals, morals, ethics, and expectations, whilst simultaneously being influenced by tradition, habits, and legitimized meanings, which are always already occurring temporally. Present social phenomena flow quickly and do not abide. We can barely consider it as self-changing and self-ceasing. If inherent social change and inherent ceasing are at one time, then the two moments of self-changing and self-ceasing are both demolished. However, if changing and ceasing are at different times, then at the time of changing there is no ceasing and annihilation, then social phenomena do not have the three moments of time (past, present and future). If social phenomena do not have the three moments, then they are not dependently co-arisen. In contrast, if social phenomena have all three separate moments, then there is the fallacy of infinite regression. Therefore, three times (past, present and future) are non-existent.

In a way, the middle way perspective is profoundly historical: it sees temporality as the constitutive feature of conditional social existence and the formation of our knowledge. Thus, social reality and its knowledge can only be dependently arisen against that which was temporally before it, which itself had dependently arisen against that which came before that. According to the middle way perspective, the constitution of the self and the society are fundamentally spatio-temporal. It rejects both the methodological individualism's account of a given and independent quality of individual existence that discounts the contingency

of spatial-temporal social conditions. It also rejects the methodological collectivism's assertion of seeing society as a-temporal system with functional equilibrium, structure with inner contradiction, or universal binary opposition of sign system. The epistemological quest for certainty as performed in both positivism and intepretivism has also been reputed as ignoring the dynamic relational-processual conditions of space and time. The intellectual trend in the middle way perspective emphasis on a pervasive dynamic relational-processual condition of social reality, that is, to perceiving the self and society temporally in changing process and spatially in relational context. For sociology, it means that society should be conceived as a continuous, unending stream of events in relation to its interconnected spaces, or fields. Relationally and processually speaking, society (group, community, organization, nation-state) may be said to arise only if something relational and processual occurs within and without. Ontologically speaking, society as a steady state or as an independent entity cannot and does not exist in any way. Since all three periods of time (past, present and future) are dependent on each other, to consider any isolated social entity is an erroneous position. The interdependence of time periods leads to the idea that various aspects of society are empty of self-nature. Since time itself is the foundation of social change, the very non-substantiality of social reality is emerged as relational and processual. An ontological and necessary relation between emptiness, dependent co-arising and change is obvious. Thus, we should empty "the social" itself, not only of its existence, but its non-existence as well.

Basically, according to the middle way perspective of time, social process and the constitution of the self are like a historical stream of becoming rather than static being. However, some social realists tend to speak of a series of discrete moments, i.e. a relation of independent serial entities, such as the discrete periodization of traditional/modern/ postmodern, *Gemeinshaft-Gesellshaft*, mechanical/organic solidarity, developed/underdeveloped, and so on. Moreover, Whorf argues that "Standard Average European" languages thrust a certain reified conception of time on us. (1956: 57)[4] Whorf's main point is that European languages make us see time as an objective quantifiable kind of thing like space. Those languages reify time by quantifying time in precisely the same way that they quantify physical aggregates: "ten days" has exactly the same linguistic form as "ten miles." Most decisively, their tense/aspect system has a substantial tripartite distinction of past/present/future which encourages this discontinuous view of time. The conceptual distinction is thus reified in this case. As Whorf contends:

> all languages need to express durations, intensities, and tendencies. It is characteristic of SAE (Standard Average European) … to express them metaphorically. The metaphors are those of spatial extension, i.e. of size, number (plurality), position, shape, and motion. We express duration by 'long, short, great, much, quick,

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[4] Whorf, Benhamin Lee. 1956. *Language, Thought, and Reality*, ed. And intro. John B. Carroll. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press.

slow', etc.; intensity by 'large, great, much, heavy, light, high, low, sharp, faint', etc.; tendency by 'more, increase, grow …'; and so on through an almost inexhaustible list of metaphors that we hardly recognize as such, since they are virtually the only linguistic media available. It is clear how this condition "fits in". It is part of our whole scheme of objectifying – imaginatively spatializing qualities and potentials that are quite nonspatial … (1956: 145)

Derived from this, social processes are seen as being comprised of these serial, quantifiable and disconnected elements in a teleological and to some extent evolutionary framework. This kind of framework implies discrete substances of past, present and future in an orderly connection. Nagarjuna would, without a doubt, refute these notions of serial becoming. As discussed previously, it makes no sense to talk about the relation between absolutely separate moments, nor the possibility of the transition from one substantial moment to another. Because, in the substantialist sense, there can be no way to relate the arising of a historical moment or a period of time with its cessation. As examined by Nagarjuna in verse one of Chapter XXI:

Destruction does not occur without becoming. It does not occur together with it. Becoming does not occur without destruction. It does not occur together with it.

By examining the phenomenon of momentary impermanence, destruction and becoming are seen as mutually incompatible but still related. Supposing if they had both inherently and independently existed, they would contain contradictory properties. On the one hand, if arising and ceasing existed together, then a thing would be disappearing at the same time as it was appearing. On the other hand, if arising existed without ceasing, then things would move toward a one-directional eternity---they would arise, but never cease. Conversely, if ceasing exists without arising, then there would be the demise of a thing which never will arise. Nor can we say that, in order to transcend the antinomy, there is a "potential" of ceasing in a thing that is arising, but is not yet "actualized." This is similar to the fallacy that the present and the future already had existed in the past as a potential. This would attribute to a thing two oppositional and discrete natures, that of arising and that of ceasing, which becomes contradictory because the identity of one thing, in substantialist sense, is incompatible with other essentially different things, in this case, between potentiality and actuality.

Generally speaking, Nagarjuna shows that, as Garfield interprets: (1995: 269)

> Becoming and destruction are mutually contradictory. So they cannot be properties of the same thing at the same time. But everything that is coming into existence is at a stage in a process that culminates in its destruction. So everything that is becoming is at the same time being destroyed. Everything that is being

destroyed is in a later stage of a process that earlier resulted in its coming into existence and, indeed, is coming to exist in some other form. So everything that is being destroyed is also becoming. So becoming and destruction cannot coexist, but cannot exist apart. Hence they cannot exist independently at all.

In the same way, if we nominally divided socio-historical phenomena into transient moments, they are then constantly disappearing to be succeeded by later emerging moments of what are conventionally identified as the same socio-historical phenomena. So every socio-historical phenomenon that has ever existed is empty of a static nature and has thus constantly disappeared and arisen. In actuality, socio-historical phenomenon is a shifting set of co-dependent relations—impermanence and change are built into them at the most fundamental level. For as soon as they exist, they disappear because of the emptiness. But they do not disappear in eternal destruction due to dependent co-arising. Those phenomena co-arise in dependence upon causes and conditions, their dynamic mutual embeddedness. As Nagarjuna implies, emptiness precludes the inherent establishment of becoming on the one hand, but also rules out the inherent founding of destruction. That makes possible and sensible the socio-historical phenomena-in-flux and the understanding of "impermanence of all social facts." More importantly, the mutual embeddedness and co-dependencies of various socio-historical phenomena and their continuously shifting connections with each other secures that all objects and subjects are impermanent, ceaselessly arising,

becoming, maturing, and disappearing. In short, since impermanence is pervasive in the socio-historical phenomena, the transformation and change in the temporal process are built into the core of all existences, both subjectively and objectively. In this way, the socio-historical impermanence is a direct expression of emptiness and the dependent arising of time. In other words, our treatment of the meaning of socio-historical phenomena must enable us to show that one of the central problems of all ontology is rooted in the phenomenon of time. We can thus say that time itself is none other than socio-historical phenomena; and socio-historical phenomena is none other than time. According to the middle way, we can put out the social substantialism by deeply appreciating the doctrine of the emptiness, the lack of inherent existence in all socio-historical phenomena, in all subjects and objects.

What Nagarjuna means by "time" is neither time objectively conceived nor time subjectively perceived. Thus, it shouldn't be reduced to the objectified or subjectivized status of a substantial entity. According to the middle way perspective, time means impermanence. Impermanence means continual flux of becoming and disappearing. This is to say, our socio-historical existence is temporal, and man and society, being temporal, is processual. Sociologically speaking, this fundamental processuality and temporality makes possible the socially constructed time, that is, the derivate time, institutional time, clock-time, bio-rhythm, mental-rhythm, and so forth. But this fundamental processuality and temporality does not have its own inherent and independent essence, it arises dependently upon the socially constructed time. However, in

modern mechanized time, the emptiness and dynamism of fundamental temporality has been objectified and reduced to mere derivate time or quantified time, conceived as a series of static now-points. The quantification of time into discrete time-units as a succession of substantial moments generates deluded preoccupation of the conceptions of eternalism, annihilation, historicism, evolutionism, teleology, or an ahistorical view of socio-historical phenomena. Nagarjuna points out that it is not possible to measure time substantially. He maintained that non-enduring or non-static time cannot be quantified, because it cannot be manipulated, and that an enduring or static time, although controllable, does not have substance. As I mentioned above, if social phenomena inherently existed, then they would of necessity be immutable and impotent, unable to act on us or we on them. Since, in truth, social phenomena are fundamentally a shifting set of dependency relations, impermanence and change are built into them at the most fundamental level.

In macrosociology, such as structural-functionalism, historical materialism, evolutionary theory, human ecology theory, and other theories, despite their significant differences in many aspects, there is one thing in common among them, that is, they share a concern for the "big picture" and are united in their pursuit for fine tune frameworks, or mono-causal explanation, that would encompass all "societies" across time and space. Their theoretical system implies a substantized view of time, or history, which is actually a-historical and a-temporal. According

to the middle way perspective, this view of social development is definitely unacceptable.

Substantialist macrosociology commonly presumes the distinctive, coherent, self-sustaining and teleological characteristics of societies, cultures, or great events. In their view, social entity not only exists but also possesses its own logics of development. They often assume theoretically or empirically identifiable states in stasis or in discrete sequences of time in their objects of study. In the meantime, sociologists divided up their own specialties mostly by structured phenomena –families, religions, industrialization, crime, culture, and so on –and drew their evidence chiefly from observation of the societies they currently lived in. Their developmental views divided between broad evolutionary and stage schemes, scattered cases demonstrating universal arguments, and vague overtures to studies of contemporary social phenomena. These approaches of sociology actually substantialize the derivate time implicated in their project as constant and real. After World War II, ideas of development and modernization followed the substantialized derivate time model and moved toward the study of processes within independent countries or regions of secularization, industrialization, revolution, democratization, and population growth. They tended to construct patterns of development to explain the social transformation and general sequences within those transformations within each independent social entity. Most sociologists in their research tried to align comparable cases in order to identify whether or where those cases could fit in the pattern. This kind of imputed patterning is in fact

a-historical and a-temporal, and in turn untenable to the middle way perspective. Even though their identified cases exist in history, their explanatory patterns remain quite a-historical due to their ignorance of the time-space contexts of the social processes under investigation. The fundamental temporality of socio-historical phenomena is misrepresented by considering time as additional variables rather than the condition of possibility of the constitution of socio-historical phenomena. As Nagarjuna points out, however, if time exists depending on a substantial structure or pattern, then it cannot be obtained without such a structure or pattern. But no substantial structure or pattern is to be found, for middle way has already refuted such a structure or pattern. Hence, according to Nagarjuna, time does not exist in an absolute sense. If a societal structure or pattern exists depending on time, then it cannot be obtained without temporality. But no substantial time is to be found, for he has already refuted such a time. Thus, according to him, the structure or pattern proposed by these social scientists does not exist in the absolute sense.

It is necessary to take into account the temporal dimension in every socio-historical phenomena as well as the constitution of the self. When we speak of the unfolding of socio-historical phenomena in operation, or the mobilization of individuals for action, the time dimension is definitely implicated. All these processes must occur in temporal process. However, in the social sciences, the temporal extension of processes was often treated as self-evident and taken for granted, and thereby as something additional and secondary in their studies. In this case, as Sztompka

(1991:105)[5] indicates: "It is limited to what may be called the 'internal time,' as opposed to 'external time,' the time of functioning as opposed to the time of transformation. The action of the agents, the operation of structures and their synthetic fusion in the praxis of the agency are not yet seen as producing any novelty, but rather as reproducing the same conditions." That is why most of the sociological studies of socio-historical phenomena or the self remain static in accordance with their pattern or developmental schemes. In that case, the external time frame was wrongly seen as something identifiable, and they should be sufficient to show that the future events in history can be predicted with absolute certainty. The dynamic changing process of the society and the self was taken as implicit within the substantialized entity (with independent essence along with clear and distinct boundary) rather than changing internally and externally in a relational-processual sense. In other words, while internal temporality was mysteriously implied, the external entity and development was to remain fixed or patterned. This is contradictory and unacceptable. The fundamental temporality of phenomena does not allow us to the assertion that there is any absolute and substantial time which is predictable.

One of the immediate results of the analysis of social development or its temporality into discrete units or patterns is the view that time is moving from the substantial past into the substantial present and from the substantial present into the substantial future. If not, the presumption

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[5] Sztompka, Piotr. 1991. *Society in Action –The Theory of Social Becoming*. The University of Chicago Press.

would be that there is a transcendental temporal substance, which remains unchanged and is external to and coercive of the succession of momentary events. The teleological view of socio-historical development in various forms, as mentioned earlier, is of this kind. The problem is that as a socio-historical phenomenon, two aspects will be contradictory: the characteristic which is temporal and the substance which is timeless or pre-designed.

Sociologically speaking, the recognition of temporality should be done to make sociology "fundamentally historical." And the historicity must be empty of any inherent and independent existence. This means that sociological analysis must address long-term processes of dependent co-arising of the societal transformation and the constitution of the self. The linkage of the level of individualities and totalities is possible only if history is brought into the picture. (Sztompka, 1991: 105) Therefore, Giddens calls for the "incorporation of temporality into the understanding of human agency." (1979: 54) In this correlation he introduces his core concepts of "recursiveness", that is, "in and through their activities agents reproduce the conditions that make these activities possible." (1984: 2) And "structuration", that is, "the ways in which the social system, via the application of generative rules and resources, and in the context of unintended outcomes, it produces and reproduces in interaction." (1979: 66) Interrelatedness between agency and structure is therefore realized in this consideration of historicity: "with the recovery of temporality as integral to social theory history and sociology become methodologically indistinguishable." (p. 8) Here, "phenomena-in-flux" can be understood

as society-in-history. As claimed by Abrams: "the social world is essentially historical."(Abrams, 1982: 3)[6] Therefore, Abrams stresses for "the need to reconstitute the action and structure antinomy as a matter of process in time, to reorganise their investigations in terms of the dialectics of structuring." (1982: xvi) He even defines historical sociology as "the attempt to understand the relationship of personal activity and experience on the one hand and social organization on the other as something that is continuously constructed in time." (p. 16) Similarly, Lloyd states that: "human agency and social action relate dialectically to social structure over time." (Lloyd, 1988:11)[7] He proposes to "retain a temporal dimension as intrinsic to any study of society since structure, action, and behaviour are interrelated in a dynamic, transforming, manner." (p. 314) Therefore, it is important to take time, its fundamental processuality, into consideration in order to link structure and agency and to understand the dependent co-arising of socio-historical phenomena. Otherwise, "without the proper incorporation of time the problem of structure and agency can never be satisfactorily resolved." (Archer, 1988: 2)[8] Archer elaborates this notion: "structure and action operate over different time periods … structure logically predates the actions that transform it and structural elaboration logically post-dates those actions." (p. 22)

According to the middle way perspective, the three moments of time in the past, present and future, are conceptual components which do not have inherent existence, but still can be understood as an expedient means

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[6] Abrams, Philip. 1982. *Historical Sociology*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.
[7] Lloyd, Christopher. 1988 [1986]. *Explanation in Social History*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell.
[8] Archer, Margaret. 1988. *Culture and Agency*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

to explain the dependent arising of a relational-processual phenomena. In this sense, past, present and future are interrelated. Sociologically, we can thereby specify a sequence in which "structure, agency and behavirour are interrelated in a dynamic, transforming, manner." With the temporal perspective, Abrams claims that these three aspects of society can be imagined: "(1) Given circumstances, which are enabling and disabling of action, (2) Conscious action that is historically significant, (3) The intended and unintended consequences of action, which turn into objective and seemingly unalterable conditions of action and thought." (Abrams, 1982: 283)

3. The Concept of Time in Hermeneutics

In Gadamer, we can see that most of their conceptual components are implicated with temporality. Gadamer's version of hermeneutics is linked to an ontological-processual notion of historicality, and as relates particularly to the theory and practice of experience, consciousness, play, hermeneutical circle and the fusion of horizons. For Gadamer, our interpretative mode of being is related to history and tradition, which are fundamentally temporal. Inspired by Heidegger's ontologization of hermeneutics, Gadamer sees the relation between interpreters and interpreted as similar to the relation between *Dasein* and the world in process. With reference to the question of historicality, a comment from *Being and Time* may be constructive. Heidegger writes: "In analyzing the historicality of *Dasein* we shall try to show that this entity is not

"temporal" because it "stands in history", but that, on the contrary, it exists historically and can so exist only because it is temporal in the very basis of its Being." (428) In other words, historicality is not something additional to *Dasein* as property that belongs to it, or a contingent characteristic of it, but is a non-dual, non-differentiable, fundamental quality of its mode of existence.

Gadamer's notion of "effective-history" implies that the fundamental temporality as an existential quality is significantly relevant to the practice of hermeneutics. Tradition, or historicality, is not something like a fixed entity which we blindly follow without an interpretative recognition of the legitimacy of its content. From the middle way perspective, tradition and its historicality cannot be substantialized as some quantified or objectified entities, which are totally alien to us and exist out there. We are always standing within tradition and history. In the same way, we always stand within time. Gadamer's notion of the "horizon" is crucial to the condition of possibility of historical hermeneutics. Hermeneutical understanding requires a process of the fusion of horizons. Thus, the temporality of understanding makes the horizon remain open and is never completed. Since existing historically and temporally indicates the knowledge regarding oneself and others can never be given and completed, we must always open and engage ourselves to processes of dialogue and mutual embeddedness.

Interpretation for Gadamer is not a reproduction of the past, a point he argued as impossible. Rather, every interpretation, according to Gadamer, was a fusion of the present horizon and the past. None of them,

the present and the past, can be substantive. Hence, assertion of a meaning coming objectively and unchanged from the past is untenable. Therefore, historical hermeneutics consists in the 'fusion' of historical horizons with that of the present, which is incomplete and remain processual. In addition, every human being finds him/herself to be a spatially and temporally situated subject. That is to say, one finds oneself already thrown into a tradition at a certain time and space, and one finds oneself always already involved with a past that simply cannot be suspended, since it provides the basis for one's projection into the future. For Gadamer there is no final arrival at a hermeneutic whole that is considered conclusive. Gadamer's hermeneutic inquiry places the researcher in a process of temporality, or historicality, in which past and present are fused. Past fore-structure and present interpretative understanding are inextricably related and embedded. The hermeneutic circle then describes the temporal relation and process of the movement of tradition and the movement of the interpreter, which remains open to the future and the other.

Sociologically speaking, the hermeneutic fusion of horizons involves the relational process that entails a dialogue between people in the past, present and future, that is, between predecessors, contemporaries and successors. According to the middle way perspective, the emptiness and dependent co-arising of time is the condition of possibility of hermeneutic understanding and the fusion of horizons. It makes possible the ongoing process of interpretation whereby the true meaning of a social event, a text, a work of art, or an historical occurrence is never complete.

The object of socio-historical research is not fixed. The emptiness, its lack of inherent existence and relativity of the three temporal moments helps us to appreciate the interrelation of different horizons in time. "Time is thus merely a dependent set of relations, not an entity in its own right, and certainly not the inherently existent vessel of existence it might appear to be." (Garfield, 1995: 257)[9] We can also state that tradition is merely a dependent set of relations, not an entity in its own right, and certainly not the inherently existent vessel of existence it might appear to be.

4. The Constitution of Social Self in Time

The temporal structure of human existence, according to Mead, can be portrayed in terms of the concepts of emergence, sociality and freedom. The basis of the temporality of human experience, for Mead, is demonstrated with the dependent arising of "emergent" events in experience. The emergent events arise dependently in the present and set up a tentative disruption of the continual flux and institute a hurdle between the present and the future. Since this hurdle is a problem that disturbs the continuity of individual or collective motion, we must activate ourselves in order to overcome such a temporal break. Without this intervention of emergent event in between the continuity of present and future, our initial temporal structure of human time-consciousness can hardly arise. For Mead, it is our practical coping with the emergent

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[9] Garfield, Jay, *The Fundamental Wisdom of the Middle Way*, Oxford University Press, New York, 1995, p. 257.

problem in our present situation and looking to the future as the ground of prospective resolution of disturbance that makes us active and temporal. In other words, the future is a temporally distant realm to be reached through practical action. Human action, in turn, is action-in-time. Mead contends that, without dealing with the emergence of disturbing events, there can be no action and experience at all. Without its breaking effect, there can be no experience of time. Without emergent events, the future will be a total reproduction of the present, and must already exist in the present which is self-contradictory according to Nagarjuna. In this case, change will be untenable. As Mead points out, without disruption "there would be merely the passage of events" and mere passage does not constitute change. (Mead, 1938: 346)[10] Passage is pure continuity that presupposes the identity between past, present and future without interruption. If the past, present and future are the same, how can we then differentiate them and recognize the difference between them? According to the middle way perspective, this is definitely absurd and unacceptable. We cannot imagine a continual flux, or passage independent of the phenomena of human action while dealing with emergent events. Otherwise, we will presuppose an inherent and independent existence of time without relating to any phenomena, which is a substantialist view of time, and therefore untenable.

The fundamental processuality is made possible because of the tentative and relative disruption of continuity. However, it does not mean that a changing process involves the eternal disappearance of

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[10] *The Philosophy of the Act*, ed. C.W. Morris *et al.* (University of Chicago 1938). P. 346.

continuity –there must be a "persisting non-passing content" against which an emergent event is experienced as change. (Mead, 1938: 330-331) Only if we can recognize the relativity and dependent co-arising of continuity and change, we can then understand the constitution of mind, self and society.

As one of the initiators of American pragmatism, Mead stresses that problem-solving as the fundamental condition of our experience formation. Thus, we can hardly experience anything in continual flux unless there is an interruption. In other words, time is not an object of perception unless something becomes problematic. This problematic situation is known as a result of the emergence of disrupting events. Therefore, again, continuity and change are not contradictories, but interrelated moments co-arisen dependently that shape our experience. "The now is contrasted with a then and implies that a background which is irrelevant to the difference between them has been secured within which the now and the then may appear. There must be banks within which the stream of time may flow." (Mead, 1938: 161) According to the middle way perspective, the metaphorical term, "bank," of Mead's is exactly the manifestation of emptiness and dependent co-arising. The dependent co-arising of emergence, then, is a fundamental condition of possibility of our experience formation that could not be imagined if emergence were not to be temporal. Action in coping with the emergent events must occur in time. Likewise, time must also occur in events.

What is then the characteristic of the past in these temporal processes? For Mead, while the emergent event presents itself as

interruption of continuity, our coping experience, through its activity of retrospection in order to reconstruct the past, makes the conceptualized three moments of time continuous again in our mind. "The character of the past is that is connects what is unconnected in the merging of one present into another." (Mead, 1964: 351)[11]   The emergent event in our reconstructed past experience seems like a determined event that is constructed by our mind, but, on the other hand, the emergent event that causes problem, incurs our experience to deal with it and to reconstruct the past is more like a determining event. The dependent arising of a determining event and a determined event is another illustration of the temporality of human action and human experience. The emergent event, appearing to be discontinuous, is the condition of possibility of continuities within which event may be experienced as continuous. The reconstruction of the emergent in our experience as the past event also demonstrates Mead's unique revision of the idea of the irrevocability of the past. That past is thus both irrevocable and revocable. This notion indicates the non-substantiality of the past. In other words, there is no sense to assert an inherent and independent past, for the past is always devised in the context of the emerging present. Moreover, since emergence itself does not have its own inherent and independent property, it is necessary to constantly revise the past experience from the vantage point of newly emergent situations. The newness of emergence therefore makes our human condition always open to something novel and capricious. Even the past is always open to question and reinterpretation.

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[11] *Selected Writings,* ed. A.J. Reck (Bobbs-Merrill, Liberal Arts Press, 1964). P.

Every discovery, every new project, and the future-orientation of history, will revise our picture and meaning of the past. In this case, how can we assert that there is an unchanged past in the temporal process?

The human world is thus temporally constituted and the temporality of experience, Mead contends, is a flow in the present. The past constitutes and is constituted by our experience in the now, and, likewise, the projected future is also part of our experiences in the now. Since the now is a continual flux of the present moment, the new must exist relatively in relation to the past and the future. In this sense, the dependent arising of the now makes possible the temporality of our self-constitution and social constitution. Human existence is in this manner rooted in time, that is, in a living present with continual reference to the past (in the form of memory, history, tradition, etc.), and moving towards a future newness.

5. Concluding Remarks

In this article, the author tries to cope with the issue of emptiness and dependent co-arising of temporality and the social. I employ the Buddhist Middle Way philosophy to the analysis of the social reality in order to have a better understanding of the non-substantiality of time as well as the social, and thereby reconsider the dependent co-arising of both temporal process and social process. Through the articulation of the central notion of the middle way perspective, I reject both extremes of substantialism and nihilism in regard to time and the social, the middle

way insight of the processual and relational nature of the world explains that there is no inherent, independent, or fixed "social being" behind the temporal flux of changing phenomena. I subsequently analyze Nagarjuna's deconstruction of time in chapter XIX of *The Fundamental Wisdom of The Middle Way* (*Mulamadhyamakakarika*), which reveals that it is inappropriate to presuppose time as three isolated self-existent entities. And argues that if any one of these time units has their own-being, then the conception of time would lose its consistency and becomes self-contradictory. Next, I try to apply this insight to the understanding of the social constitution, in which, I claim that neither "time" nor "social entity" can persist permanently, but only a change of social phenomena over time and a flux of time through social phenomena. Then, I argue that according to the middle way perspective, the emptiness and dependent co-arising of time is the condition of possibility of hermeneutic understanding and the fusion of horizons. It makes possible the ongoing process of interpretation whereby the true meaning of a social event, a text, a work of art, or an historical occurrence is never complete. Finally, I try to discuss the temporal constitution of the self. I argue that only if we can recognize the relativity and dependent co-arising of temporal continuity and change, we can then understand the constitution of mind, self and society.

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The Temporality of The Social
A Buddhist Middle Way Perspective

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Abstract

How does the dimension of time contribute to the constitution of society? This is a significant issue in the realm of social ontology. In this paper, the author attempts to engage a dialogue between Buddhist Middle Way philosophy and sociological theory in order to have a better understanding of the emptiness of time as well as society, and thereby reconsider the dependent co-arising of both time and society. Through the articulation of the central notion of the middle way perspective, the author rejects both extremes of substantialism and nihilism in regard to time and the social. The middle way insight of the emptiness and non-substantial nature of the world explains that there is no eternal, or fixed "social being" behind the temporal flux of changing phenomena. I subsequently analyze Nagarjuna's deconstruction of time in chapter XIX of *The Fundamental Wisdom of The Middle Way* (*Mulamadhyamakakarika*), which reveals that it is incongruous to assume time as three isolated self-existent entities. And argues that if any one of these time units has their own-being, then the conception of time would lose its coherence and becomes self-contradictory. Next, I try to apply this insight to the understanding of the constitution social process, in which, I claim that neither "time" nor "social entity" can persist permanently, but only a

change of social phenomena over time and a flux of time through social phenomena. Then, I would argue, that according to the middle way perspective, the emptiness and dependent co-arising of time is the condition of possibility of hermeneutic understanding and the fusion of horizons. It makes possible the ongoing process of interpretation whereby the true meaning of a social event, a text, a work of art, or an historical occurrence is never complete. Finally, I try to discuss the temporal constitution of the self. I argue that only if we can recognize the relativity and dependent co-arising of temporal continuity and change, we can then understand the constitution of mind, self and society.