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II. BOOK REVIEWS

Buddhist and Western Philosophy, edited by Nathan Katz. Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press, 1981.

As the title indicates, most of the essays in this volume attempt one or another variety of an enormously difficult task. As comparison of various books on Buddhism makes abundantly clear, even if one limits one's attention to *good* books on Buddhism, the task of making clear what a particular school or text teaches is not an easy matter. Not every good book on the subject can have gotten everything right, or there would not be so many divergent interpretations. Similarly, it is not a piece of cake to get, say, Wittgenstein or Heidegger, or Aristotle or Frege, right. Most of the essays in this book are attempts to correctly exegete, and comparatively comment on, one or more Buddhist texts, themes, or concerns, and a somehow comparable (by similarity, or by contrast) non-Buddhist text, theme, or concern. Consequently, each such author has three chances to go astray: in interpreting a Buddhist view, in interpreting a non-Buddhist view, and in comparing the one to the other. On the other hand, however difficult it is to make apt comparisons and contrasts, such comparisons and contrasts, when they are well made, are enormously helpful to one who wishes to understand how rather different views are related; if the explanations are especially clear, one need not even already have one of the terms of the comparison or contrast firmly in mind from the outset. One can be instructed as to the content of both terms (both the Buddhist, and the non-Buddhist, views) by an apt and articulate discussion of them together.

There are twenty essays. Not all of them are explicitly comparative. One, by Alex Wayman, discusses the "Four Alternatives." Another, by D. Seyfort Ruegg, discusses briefly the question as to whether Buddhism is a religion (concluding that it is) and asking about the role of any concept of the "supermundane" or "divine" in Buddhism. Ninian Smart's brief essay asks about the applicability of such terms as "polytheism" and "monotheism" to Buddhism and concludes that "if one *must* categorize it by relation to the traditional concerns of such classifictions, it is a trans-polytheistic, non-theistic religion of contemplation." Braj M. Sinha considers temporality and consciousness

in Abhidharmika Buddhism by using "a phenomenological approach"; what this means in the context, apparently, is that it is assumed that "temporality is a feature of existence as a structure of world involvement" (i.e., roughly, if no minds, then no time) and the question remains as to the proper account of temporality, construed as subjective. This does not strike me as an actual use of phenomenological method (nor does what follows in the essay, namely an abstract account of various analyses of subjective temporality, and a discussion of various Buddhist views on this topic), but the essay is nonetheless highly interesting. Richard J. Demartino's essay on "The Zen Understanding of the Initial Nature" is more comparative than its title suggests, for it compares Zen Buddhist views with non-Zen Buddhist. There is also a comparative component (particularly with process thought) in Kenneth K. Inada's "Problematics of the Buddhist Nature of Self."

The other essays are explicitly comparative, in title and content, and in a brief review one cannot do more than note their comprehensive scope. Besides the topics or philosophers mentioned already, Nāgārjuna, Buber, Cusanus, Nietzsche, tautology, formal logic, the nature of thought, analytic philosophy, existentialism, Marxism, nirvāṇa, nothingness, oriental religions, Logical Positivism, verification, the self, and nihilism come up for discussion. Not surprisingly, some essays are stronger, and some essays are weaker, but it would be unfair to try to identify which are which without a detail of argument incompatible with a review.

The editor, in a short Preface, considers four objections to the sort of comparative enterprise the book involves: that there is no Buddhist philosophy, that the linguistic and cultural tasks involved in gaining an understanding of one tradition require a lifetime and so are incompatible with trying to understand a second tradition, that non-Buddhist (at least, Western non-Buddhist) philosophy is too materialistic to be worth worrying about, and that comparative philosophy is all eisegesis and no exegesis. Without denying that behind each overemphasis lies a defensible concern, Katz nicely defends the legitimacy of his enterprise. Both the letter and the spirit of this Preface serve the book, and comparative studies, well.

The Introduction to the volume, by John Blofeld, serves the book, and the area, rather less well. If various earlier efforts compare Buddhism and Christianity to the former's disadvantage, Blofeld seems determined to balance the scale by reversing the direction of what one might politely call "aspersive dis-

course." While the Introduction contains more examples of this than one might have thought possible within its scope (pages xix through xxviii), a couple of examples will sufficiently illustrate both tone and type of content: "Whereas a Christian philosopher cannot (unless at the cost of ceasing to be accepted as a Christian) argue from premises that do not accord with the notion of a creator God as the First Cause, and must reject—as he will very likely do with horror—conclusions that tend to impugn the validity of that notion, a Buddhist thinker is tied by no such restrictions, since the Buddha himself encouraged his followers to test his teachings in the light of their own experience and not to accept them on account of unwavering faith in the Teacher they venerated so highly" (p. xx). A later sentence refers to "certain ancient cosmological beliefs (perhaps of pre-Buddhist origin) such as the notion that the universe consists of an incalculably tall mountain, surrounded by four continents, the southernmost of which contains our own world system—a belief which has more in common with the speculations of the author of Genesis than with those of philosophers whose works command respect in this scientific age" (pp. xx,xxi). Then we are treated to a commendation of transmigration, even though it would seem a poor candidate for belief if we are to take our norms from "philosophers whose works command respect in this scientific age," one feature of which is the suggestion that transmigration seems implausible only because of the influence of Christianity.

It seems to me that this is exactly the sort of thing that the editor's Preface so nicely avoids. Such paragraphs as Blofeld's are easy to produce. Consider what a Christian, or a materialist, writing at about the same level of fairness as Blofeld, might write. "Whereas a Buddhist philosopher, cannot (unless at the cost of ceasing to be accepted as a Buddhist) argue from premises that do not accord with the notion of reincarnation and karma, the desirability of escape from the Wheel, and the goal of attaining nirvāṇa, and must reject—as he will do very likely with horror—the notion of a Creator and Lord whose grace is necessary for salvation, or any other notions which tend to impugn the validity of his basic Buddhist notions, a Christian is tied to no such restrictions, since Christians are exhorted to "test the spirits" and "give no heed to fables" and "love God with their minds" rather than to have unwavering faith in the sayings of some alleged Guru or in abstruse meditations which are judged reliable only if they yield the predetermined results." Or: "Whereas a Buddhist philosopher cannot (unless, etc.) argue from prem-

ises that do not accord with there being nothing but physical particles, and their properties and relations, and must reject—as he will very likely do with horror—conclusions that reject the notion of reincarnation and nirvana as either absurdly false or else totally meaningless, the materialist is tied by no such restrictions, since the scientific method frees one from appealing to the teachings of supposed Holy Men."

These hypothetical comments play about as fairly with Buddhism as do Blofeld's with Christianity (and, by implication, any monotheistic tradition). In fact, within Christendom (as within "Buddhadom," if one may use this term to refer to that rich mixture of cultures and traditions in which Buddhist thought plays a significant role) one can find various degrees of sensitivity to evidence, willingness to listen to alternatives and to weigh arguments, and the like. Christianity, Buddhism, and indeed any tradition, includes beliefs; not all such beliefs can be true. The Preface favors one perspective toward this fact; the Introduction illustrates another. The Preface, I hope, resembles the future; the Introduction, I fear, resembles the past (and that part of the past which this sort of book is an effort to overcome).

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A Meditator's Diary, by Jane Hamilton-Merritt. Harmondsworth: Penguin Books Ltd., 1979. pp. 156 Price: £1.00 (U.K.)

Contemplative habits and mental discipline are valued in all schools of Buddhism. Yet the stress laid on them is strongest in the Theravāda form of this religion; for here, the supreme goal of emancipation itself is represented as a prize to be won through a process of self-culture which entails in a central way the disciplining of one's faculties. Buddhist works of Theravāda inspiration therefore contain some of the best theoretical elaborations on meditation. And, equally significant, monastic communities that belong to this tradition have tended to preserve among themselves the esoteric techniques that relate to tlre actual practice of meditation. Jane Hamilton-Merritt's *A Meditator's Diary* offers an intimate and eminently readable account of an encounter with meditation in one such Theravāda environment, namely, the *wats* of Thailand. Through an autobiographically oriented presentation, the author reaches a number of conclu-