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Yet would it not be somewhat naive to say baldly that Christians are united into a single cultural world by this imagery, forgetting the underlying ideas? Moreover, Collins' contentions regarding the "specificity" of Theravāda imagery might be considerably undermined by a wider review of Gospel imagery. It is well to remember that Christianity also refers to houses and homes, and in particular to fields, plants, seeds and fruits in order to clarify its doctrinal points.

To sum up, *Selfless Persons* is an interesting book incorporating several strands of argument, many of which are unusually thought provoking and sometimes controversial as well. Its findings on Theravāda positions on selfhood and personality might be sociologically illuminating, but doubts can be entertained as regards their philosophical, and in particular religious, acceptability. Collins' attempt to link the thoughts and images relating to these positions to their contextual social factors is a noteworthy effort. Still, it is possible to detect some shortcomings in the way he addresses himself to this very complex task. But even those who object to some of the book's conclusions will no doubt recognize that the investigation pursued here has many innovative features. The focus on Theravāda imagery is especially worthy of recall in this connection. This, to be sure, is something that could be extended and viewed on the basis of other, less "reductionist" perspectives. It must be reiterated that *Selfless Persons*, finally, is not likely to prove very attractive to admirers of Theravāda thought. But even this category of readers might be instructed in some ways by paying heed to the critical vistas it opens.

Vijitha Rajapakse

Self and Non-Self in Early Buddhism, by Joaquin Pérez-Remón. The Hague, Paris and New York: Mouton Publishers, 1980. xii + 421 pp.

Buddhism dispenses with the traditional notion of an abiding self, a position which appears to be somewhat paradoxical for a religious system. Still, certain Buddhist schools (like the Theravāda) did place great emphasis on this position, sometimes treating it as the focal point of Buddhist thinking as a whole.

Many modern exponents of early Buddhism have sought to follow their example, dwelling in turn on the negative implications of the Buddhist teachings on the self—the *anattā* doctrine—with a rigour which is almost scholastic. Pāli literature reveals, however, that even in ancient times new entrants to the Buddhist fold were not infrequently puzzled by these teachings. In any event, the latter do pose certain problems and difficulties. The discussions in this book tend to take into account two of them in particular, and they are, to be sure, noteworthy. For one thing, it might be asked whether the *anattā* doctrine can be strictly maintained within Buddhism's spiritually oriented framework where, among other things, the quest for salvation (and by implication a life beyond death) is seen as a reality. Then, on the other hand, the present-day inquirer has to contend with the fact that Pāli literary sources which proclaim *anattā* (non-self) are themselves not entirely free from occasional references to *attā* (self). Pérez-Remón endeavours in this study to go some way towards providing a reasoned solution to the former problem, and also account for the latter difficulty. Though his conclusions, as will be shown shortly, are not beyond challenge, *Self and Non-Self in Early Buddhism* is a well researched study, and hence merits serious notice. It addresses itself to a set of issues that have a great significance not only to Buddhist thought, but also to Pāli textual exegesis.

Pérez-Remón's book is analytical in nature, and its immediate aim is to provide an interpretative study of the *anattā* doctrine as it appears in the earlier parts of the Pāli canon, namely the Nikāya literature. He describes the religious views elaborated in these contexts as a soteriology, that is to say a system of moral training which considers salvation to be its prime goal. Buddhist writings on the self, he argues, are not as clear and unambiguous as is often supposed. He does not, in particular, believe that one could regard them in a purely negative light, after the manner of certain Theravāda exponents. The use and the import of "self" (*attā*) and "non-self" (*anattā*) are of course central to this study. In order to facilitate his inquiry into these key terms, he introduces some important distinctions which appear for the most part to be philosophical in nature. First, there is the distinction between the self in its existential and metaphysical signification; and second, between two senses of the term non-self, one qualified and the other absolute. Previous interpretations of the *anattā* doctrine have not revolved around distinctions of this kind. Pérez-Remón, however, is of the view that it is necessary to focus on

them in order to gain a true insight into early Buddhist thinking on the nature and existence of the self.

Since it provides the framework for the book's core discussions, the first of the above distinctions is especially noteworthy. Indeed, the discussions in question are arranged in two parts, under two heads, "The Existential Self" (Part I) and "The Metaphysical Self" (Part II). Pérez-Remón considers this division to be reflective of a pivotal fact gathered from textual analysis, namely, the existence of different usages (and hence different meanings) for the term "self" in early Buddhist writings. He insists, to be sure, that "whatever relations there may be between these two kinds of self, the existence of the texts that speak of them is a fact that no one can deny" (p. 7).

Part I of this book (which focuses on what Pérez-Remón calls the "existential self") serves in the main to draw attention to the Nikāya sources where the self is represented in action, especially in the moral and soteriological spheres. Not "one-sided insistence on cessation" but rather, the "positive dwelling on inner development" are the motifs that are held to dominate the exposition in these contexts (p. 119). It is also emphasized that the self as referred to here often stands for nothing less than man's "existential core" as distinguished from the "peripheral samsaric adjuncts" (p. 150). The drift of these findings tends to be complemented or reinforced in the course of the examination of texts that the author considers to highlight Buddhist positions on the self's very nature in Part II (presented under the caption, "The Metaphysical Self"). He argues here that a higher, undefinable reality is always posited even amidst the reductive analyses that one encounters in classic accounts of the *anattā* doctrine. What tends to be denied, he maintains, is the existence of a self identifiable with the human psycho-physical complex, (the *khandhas*). Accordingly, *anattā* as taught in early Buddhism is held to be relative, not absolute. He also expresses the opinion that the texts that allude to the liberated sage "implicitly accept that there is *someone* who is beyond description or beyond our present categories of thought" (p. 285). Further, we are reminded that the middle point between the extremes of eternalism and annihilationism (which Buddhism always avoided) can hardly be *anattā* as interpreted in an absolute sense. This middle point, in the view of the author, has to be the absolute metaphysical transcendence of the self. But in keeping with its soteriological orientation, Nikāya literature, he adds, never sought to delineate its final character or basis, for in these writings, "the true self is the

subject of emancipation, never the object of speculation or philosophical discussion" (p. 299).

It should be remembered that these conclusions (and for that matter much of the argumentation behind the book as a whole) tend to counter what is designated as the "persistent negativism" of extreme interpretations which "anattavadins" are said to uphold on the question of the self. Pérez-Remón's efforts in *Self and Non-Self in Early Buddhism* are interesting, and some might even contend that they have a definite relevance in that they throw some new light on a vexed question in Buddhist thought. Indeed, he might not be entirely wrong when he observes that the absolutist positions taken on the self's non-existence in certain Theravāda circles can assume the form of an obsessive view (*ditṭhi*) which is at odds with the true spirit of Buddhism. On the other hand, there is also room to ask whether the author himself does not veer towards indulging in discursive thinking and speculation on an ultimate issue in a way that is not quite consonant with the outlook of the Nikāya literature. Anyone pursuing this line of criticism might even say that he eschews one extreme position (namely absolute *anattā*) only finally to embrace another, (though at a different level), for somewhat paradoxically, relative *anattā* eventually comes to be equated with the absolute metaphysical transcendence of the self (p. 286). And, what is more, this poses a problem to the historian of religion: if a reality over and above the *khandhas* is admitted, then early Buddhism would to all intents and purposes lose its distinctiveness *vis à vis* the *ātman* doctrine of Upanishadic Hinduism.

On the other hand, those who adopt classic Theravāda approaches might not only insist that there are no explicit contexts in Nikāya literature where a reality of the above kind is admitted, but also maintain that many of Pérez-Remón's affirmations on this score are more often than not questionable inferences. In this connection, it is possible to argue that the statements concerning the indescribability of the liberated sage's destiny, for example, hardly afford sufficient ground for reaching conclusions about the self's transcendence (cf. p. 280 ff.). In any event, it would be well to point out that since Buddhism frowns upon intellectualizing, even designations with positive connotations (like "transcendent") can in the last analysis acquire a speculative significance, and hence prove to be soteriologically stultifying in the eyes of the believer. The preferred position of the Nikāyas on ultimate matters is no more than silence; this is a mode esoteric

systems typically employ in order to point to what might be taken as a dimension of inner meaning that stands beyond conceptual thought altogether. Besides, it would be somewhat unwise to read too much into the use of the term "self" (*attā*) in moral contexts and make this latter fact one of the grounds for arguing that early Buddhism accepts the existence of a self in a higher sense. It should be remembered that systems that reject the notion of a self at the epistemological and metaphysical levels are often forced to retain it in moral discussion. The writings of the British philosopher David Hume sometimes bear witness to this circumstance in a notable way. What it highlights, however, is a logical feature about language structure and discourse: in talking about the facts of individual existence one is necessarily led to use terms such as "self" and "person" because in the last analysis grammar demands it. In view of these considerations in particular, it appears that the quality of Pérez-Remón's exposition would have been notably enhanced if some of the categories and ideas found in Western philosophical inquiries relating to the self had been brought to bear upon his discussions. The subjects he deals with are complex, and the interpretation of their finer points indeed requires considerable conceptual sophistication. Still, the book as it is has some undeniable merits. The connected view it presents of the thinking in the Nikāya tradition on "self" and "non-self" is both interesting and illuminating from the standpoint of textual analysis; it can be also said to provide a good basis for a more consciously philosophical study of these key terms.

Vijitha Rajapakse

The World of Buddhism, edited by Heinz Bechert and Richard Gombrich. New York: Facts on File Publications, 1984. 308 p., 297 illustrations (82 color), 215 photographs, drawings and maps. Glossary, Select Bibliography, Index. \$49.95.

This may be the most beautiful book on Buddhism ever produced, but it is devoutly to be wished that it will serve more than just to accumulate onion-dip and wine-glass stains on suburban coffee tables, for its text, to which have contributed the likes of Étienne Lamotte, Lal Mani Joshi and Erik Zürcher, is as fine a social history of Buddhism as we have.