

## BOOK REVIEWS

*THE DIVINE MATRIX: Creativity as Link between East and West.* By Joseph A. Bracken, S. J. Maryknoll, N. Y.: Orbis Books, 1995. pp. xii + 179.

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IN 1990, Abe Masao first published his now famous seminal essay, "Kenotic God and Dynamic Emptiness," in John B. Cobb, Jr. and Christopher Ives, *The Emptying God: A Buddhist-Jewish-Christian Conversation* (Maryknoll, N. Y.: Orbis Books). Abe introduced a dialogical methodology into the relatively new field of comparative theology: he not only presented a Buddhist notion of emptiness as Ultimate Reality, he developed that notion in dialogue with Christian theology. Abe thereby entered the Christian theological conversation concerning the nature of God and God's relationship to creation. With *The Divine Matrix: Creativity as Link between East and West*, Joseph A. Bracken, S. J., is now returning the favor. Following a similar methodology, Bracken presents a notion of creativity in process theology that he then uses to enter into philosophical/theological conversations with Hinduism, Buddhism and Taoism. In so doing, Bracken joins Abe as a pioneer in exploring common structures of intelligibility—with both their similarities and differences—through critical reflection and interfaith dialogue.

In pursuing this project, Bracken utilizes two of Alfred North Whitehead's philosophical concepts. First is the notion of creativity as a metaphysical category by which one can intellectually mediate Infinity with the constitution of determinate entities – even including God's trinitarian personhood. Second is Whitehead's concept of the "extensive continuum" which provides a relational matrix for the existence and activity of all entities. In Part One of his book, Bracken develops these ideas as interpretive tools to understand Infinity, God and world. Bracken builds his interpretive structure step by step through engaging the ideas of Aristotle, Aquinas, Eckhart, Schelling, Heidegger and, of course, Whitehead himself. Then in Part Two of the book, Bracken uses the structure of intelligibility he has carefully crafted from the Western tradition in order to explore how similar structures are at work in the philosophical and theological traditions of Vedanta, Mahayana Buddhism and classical Taoism.

In Chapter 1, Bracken points out that Aristotle sought "to explain motion in terms

of a series of 'movers' rather than the series of movers in terms of an underlying motion or process common to them all." Bracken examines Aristotle's view, and then offers an alternative view where motion is seen as not coming ultimately from particular entities but from an immanent principle of activity within all entities themselves—a principle that has as much metaphysical status as matter or form. In Chapter 2, Bracken examines Aquinas' theology in order to provide more theological content to this immanent principle of action. Bracken critically engages Aquinas in developing his view that the fundamental activity of existence is the very act of existing itself which is the underlying nature of God expressed both in the three divine persons and in creation. One problem with Bracken's project—a problem with much of process theology in general—is that he defines activity in terms of potentiality and actuality in such a way that if God's activity is God's nature, then God's omnipotence and omniscience are called into question.

In Chapter 3, Bracken explores the activity of being as the ground of divine and human subjectivity. Based on a certain interpretation of Eckhart, Bracken posits this divine grounding activity as accounting for mystical union with God, thus avoiding the problem of an identity of two substantial entities that are different in kind. However, Eckhart's problem is how to distinguish the Son of God from humans if both derive from the same divine activity. Turning to Friedrich Schelling, Bracken—in my mind—faces another problem, namely, where Schelling states that God's personhood is realized through creation. This goes against the Augustinian doctrine that God's personhood is established in the Trinity itself. Also by turning finally to Heidegger's later work on the question of being, Bracken shows how it is possible to disengage the grounding activity of being from God as a Supreme Being. Bracken's attempt to weave an intellectual model of being as act in terms of subjectivity from these Western ideas shows the difficulty of affirming God's divine identity in the face of reductionist factors in human experience. But in the end, the point that Bracken succeeds in making is that the Godhead is an activity that, as the nature of God, both grounds God's personhood and human subjectivity.

By the time Bracken reaches Chapter 4, one can see clearly that the theological project of this book is not just descriptive but constructive. In Part One of the book, he is building a case for his own type of process theology. In Chapter 4, the final chapter of Part One, Bracken turns directly to Whitehead in order to present the categories that are foundational for the structure of intelligibility Bracken is constructing. These categories are "creativity" and the "extensive continuum." Bracken blends these Whiteheadian concepts within a trinitarian theology in a way that supports the notion of a "divine matrix" which, Bracken argues, provides a structure of intelligibility that can be used to understand Ultimate Reality in Christianity and other world religions. For Bracken, creativity is a divine metaphysical activity that only exists in actual entities as their ontological ground and vital source of existence. It is the ground of the life of the divine being and of the universe. God is not

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identified with creativity, but gives it its decisive pattern within the Trinity and the universe. This pattern, or relational matrix of God's creative activity, is understood as the extensive continuum—a creative continuum that grounds all divine or created entities. Bracken concludes this chapter by presenting a fascinating sketch of the communitarian nature of the inner-trinitarian life based on his matrix model, and relates it to the issues of Infinity, God, creation and subjectivity raised in his previous study of Aristotle, Aquinas, Eckhart, Schelling and Heidegger. I highly recommend this section as well as the concluding section of the book where Bracken takes up this topic again with great insight and clarity.

In Part Two of the book, Bracken explores how his matrix structure of intelligibility based on Whiteheadian concepts of creativity and the extensive continuum can be used to understand the notions of Infinity in Eastern philosophy and theology. In Chapter 5, Bracken explores Vedanta's philosophy of Atman-Brahman by looking at six of the Great Sayings from the Upanishads. Bracken proposes that Brahman can be interpreted as the pure act of being and consciousness, and that Atman can be interpreted as the ultimate subject of this act. One feels that in these interpretations, Bracken has contributed a possible reading of the Upanishads—one that certainly conflicts with Shankara's view, but may fit better with Ramanuja's position. For Shankara, change and therefore activity is a characteristic of maya, not of reality. In the rope-snake metaphor, the rope (reality) that is mistaken for a snake (illusion) does not change into a snake nor does it move at all. All such movement is attributed to the snake which is an illusion. On the other hand, Ramanuja uses the metaphor of milk and curds: milk (reality) truly does change into curds (selves and the world). Change is real, and the fluidity of the milk represents the dynamic and creative nature of Brahman. Unfortunately, Bracken does not mention this metaphor, but uses another that compares Brahman to the soul and the world to the body of God, which works against the very point that Bracken seeks to make. Finally, it is perhaps valuable to note that there is another system of Indian philosophy that does hold that Ultimate Reality is unceasing activity. Mimamsa argues that activity as process and force is Ultimate Reality, and that all we experience are forms constituted by that activity.

In Chapter 6, Bracken looks at the Mahayana doctrine of dependent origination. To be sure, dependent origination is a process of interdependence that does not exist apart from the forms that make up its matrix of dependent arising. Here we find a Buddhist correlate to Bracken's creative continuum that is the very activity of existence forming as beings. Also in both cases, we are looking at a pure activity that is prior to the experience of subjectivity and the objective world, and therefore provides a dynamic matrix of unity for self and world. Bracken wisely examines Nishida Kitaro's philosophy concerning this unifying power at the ground of thought and phenomena. Nishida calls this ultimate reality "absolute nothingness" because it is neither a relative thing nor no-thing, but is the absolute "place" of rel-

ative existence and non-existence. Further, to be absolute it must also empty itself of any duality, of any separation from the entities of the world. Thus, absolute nothingness is absolute self-negation, a fully kenotic reality as Abe Masao makes clear in his own work following Nishida in the Kyoto School. Bracken mentions my own critique of this position where it views the kenosis of God in creation as defining Godself as totally self-emptying—thus emptying out God's transcendence as Trinity. Fortunately, Bracken also constructs his own position in a way that also avoids this problem.

Finally, Chapter 7 takes up the notion of the Tao in the classical philosophies of Lao Tzu and Chuang Tzu. Here, Bracken examines the early Taoist texts that posit the spontaneous creativity of the Tao. In so doing, he mentions the metaphor of running water and notes that it implies a primordial activity that produces "crystallized forms of one and the same underlying activity." Since Bracken mentions the well-known metaphor of the golden lion for Buddhist emptiness, if he had also mentioned Ramanuja's milk-curd metaphor, all three comparative links would have been connected by similar metaphors. On the other hand, the one problem that Bracken has with the Taoist position is with their claim that the Tao existed prior to creation (heaven and earth). This position contradicts Bracken's view that the pure activity of being cannot exist except in its instantiations. Bracken goes so far as to refer in this regard to Chuang Tzu's "apparent confusion" about temporal and logical priority. But, Taoism uses the Chinese character *kung* to refer to the Tao. *Kung*, meaning "void," is constructed with strokes indicating a cave with a roof over it. It implies that the Tao is a special emptiness out of which comes the world. Therefore, it seems that Bracken's claim that the Tao is pure activity only captures part of what Taoists are saying about the Tao. For example, Chang Chung-yuan, whom Bracken quotes, refers to the "constant Tao" as "the all-changing changeless." Chang is here claiming that while there is change in the dynamic Tao, it takes place within the stillness of the ultimate mystery of the Tao that in turn accounts for the profound nature of all changing things.

Here we see the same methodological limitation that can be found in Abe Masao's work mentioned earlier. Namely, by exploring another religious tradition through a lens or logic that provides a structure of intelligibility in one's own tradition, there is always the danger of filtering out something of value in that other tradition. On the other hand in his conclusion, Bracken admits this limitation but also implies—and I would agree with him—that this very limitation becomes a basis for further discussion that will advance the common search for a more adequate philosophical structure of intelligibility. Comparative philosophical theology does not go ahead from just one side of the dialogue, but requires the collaboration of all traditions involved in the conversation. This possibility for shared interfaith reflection is what makes this new field so exciting and promising. Bracken's voice in the conversation has added a valuable and challenging topic for future comparative discussion.

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In his conclusion, Bracken states that his intent in this book has been to focus on the ways in which religious traditions have made intelligible the relationship between the Infinite and the finite, as well as how the Infinite has been revealed in and through the finite. He then addresses a number of counterarguments from traditional Christian theology where the nature of God is fully actual and determinate, as well as from the Eastern traditions he had explored in the previous three chapters. As he argues for his theistic trinitarian process model, it becomes clear that Bracken sees this model as having—like any intellectual model—certain strengths and weaknesses for wrestling with vexing philosophical and theological questions concerning Ultimate Reality and the world of our experience. Bracken's book is an outstanding contribution to fostering comparative theological reflection and conversation about this central issue of religious thought East and West. It certainly deserves to be read and discussed widely by scholars from all religious traditions who are interested in comparing the presuppositions we use in trying to understand Ultimate Reality and its relationship with our world.

*BUDDHIST WOMEN ACROSS CULTURES: Realizations.* Edited by Karma Lekshe Tsomo. State University of New York Press, 1999. pp. viii + 326. ISBN: 0 7914 4138 5.

SHOBHA RANI DASH

KARMA LEKSHE TSOMO began her activities with and for Buddhist women through Sakyadhita ("Daughters of the Buddha"), an international association of Buddhist women founded in 1987. As a result of her efforts, this anthology is now in our hands. Each of the fifteen contributors reflects on women and Buddhism in doctrinal, philosophical or social terms.

The essays are divided into two sections: Buddhist Women in Asian Traditions and Contemporary Buddhist Women. The first part, as the title indicates, deals with Buddhist women in India, Sri Lanka, China, Japan and Tibet. The essays in the second part are varied, including a biography of Aung San Suu Kyi, a comparison of Christian and Buddhist women, Buddhist women in the West, and the question of conception and the entry of consciousness.

The introductory chapter starts with the legacy of Mahāprajāpatī Gautamī, the founder of the order of nuns (*bhikṣuṇī saṅgha*). Her story is well-known, but Karma Lekshe Tsomo retells it with many provocative suggestions. Especially noteworthy is Karma Lekshe Tsomo's effort to date the history of women in Buddhism prior to the Buddha's Enlightenment. She presents some interesting theories about the